THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON FOREIGN POLICY

A STUDY CASE OF THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN RELATION IN THE TRUMP ERA

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I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has proven to be one of the most interesting technological advancements in the last two decades. It has facilitated human communication, as well as provided another channel for human interactions, which can ultimately bring social change.

We can cite many examples as proof of the indisputable place that social networks have gained in the 21st century’s society, some of these examples are the Arab Spring, Brexit and the US 2016 elections. All these phenomena have shown that, even when social networks were considered merely as a cultural and technological by-product, they could bring substantive change in public policy, however, their potential and the extent of their impact in international relations cannot yet be adequately interpreted.

Many academics have tried to place social media in the realm of public policy. Rossini, et al., (2018), for example, did an extensive work on the use of persuasive messages during the US 2016 elections through social media. On the same page, Prier (2017) analyzes social media as a tool for information warfare between state and non-state actors, while Mergel, (2013) and Picazo-Vela, et al. (2012) provide extensive frameworks to interpret social media interactions in the public sector.

Nevertheless, most of these works have mainly focused on the role of social media in domestic politics, except for Prier (2017) who discussed it from a security policy perspective. This, however, does not provide a broad picture on how social media has affected diplomacy, and how heads of State or governments are influenced by it.

Considering the increasing amount of the use of Social Media by not only the public, but also by important figures of the international scene, we can assume that its impact has a significant role in today’s international politics. In this matter, Prier points out that social media channels can be exploited as discursive tools to effectively influence public opinion (2017, p. 51). However, the extent on how this public opinion imprinted in social media outlets affects foreign policy can be difficult to determine, even considering its increased usage by the main international actors.

As a starting point, Ceron (2017) provides a good analysis of Social Networking Sites (SNS) as influential agents in public policy, focusing mainly on the affects of this channels in internal affairs. As he points out: “(...) even in democratic political systems,
politicians have blamed SNS for allowing citizens to hamper decisions made by political institutions, thereby thwarting governance in the democratic polity” (Ceron, 2017, p. 3). Based on this assumption, we can deduct that this same effect could occur in international politics, stressing the increased participation of civil society through social media outlets. Taking this into consideration, that same influence could happen in the opposite direction, with state agents influencing or even legitimizing their decisions by using social media.

The purpose of this paper is to determine to which extent these influences take place when it comes to foreign policy. For this, this paper will focus mainly on the relation between Mexico and the United States in the time period from Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, up until the inauguration of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s, which also includes the signature of the USMCA treaty, which effectively replaces NAFTA.

The choice of this paper’s objective follows different reasons: firstly, it analyses the foreign policy of the United States of America, a country whose main actor of international politics has a widespread use of social media outlets; secondly, it acknowledges the fact that Donald Trump has maintained an antagonistic rhetoric towards Mexico, making it a fundamental part of his campaign; thirdly, it comprises the renegotiation of a crucial international agreement for both countries, which counted with the support of both parties for its modernization. Moreover, due to the extensive use of social media by the American government, the Mexican government has also interacted with their northern neighbours through such channels. This gives a good opportunity to compare both countries’ social media interactions with actual changes in their policies. This period also comprises a change of government in Mexico, which can also help to show whether there are any changes in the approach to handle the relation with US. However, it is important to note that even though the USMCA treaty was a trilateral agreement, for the purposes of this paper, Canada will be excluded.

To better analyse this phenomenon, the first part of this paper will identify the elements that have shaped both countries’ bilateral foreign policies using dependency theory and constructivism. This will give us a better understanding on the previously existing approaches for both countries’ foreign policies.

Here, the main hypothesis is that an international actor can make use of social media to legitimate their actions using previously created discourses, which can
ultimately influence public opinion and thus, the outcome of a given policy. In this specific case, it is assumed that president Donald Trump tried to use the same social media strategy that he used to secure his election and his actions in the US domestic policy in the international scene, while both Mexican presidents approached the US president in social media differently: Enrique Peña Nieto was influenced by his perception of the public opinion to guide his actions, while Andrés Manuel López Obrador tried to legitimize such actions through social media.

To put this in contrast and to determine if the previous hypothesis is true, the second part of this paper will analyse social media channels using Wodak’s discourse-historical approach of critical discourse analysis (Wodak, 2001) in combination with sentiment analysis, a technique that Ceron proposes to “extract attitudes and tastes of the public opinion on a variety of topics” (Ceron, 2017, p. 10). For this paper, both public opinion’s and Heads of State’s social media posts will be analysed in crucial milestones for the development of the USMCA, as well as the relevant episodes of the bilateral relation that could affect the signature of the new treaty.

For the purpose of this paper, topics as migration or multilateral treaties will be excluded, since these have other implications in the bilateral relation. It is important to notice, however, that these topics may overlap with the process of signature of the USMCA treaty. In such cases, these topics will be included. Similarly, this paper will refer to “Heads of State” as to the main figures of decision-making during the process of negotiation and signature of the USMCA treaty, mainly focusing on the 46th President of the United States of America, Donald Trump, and the 64th and 65th Presidents of the United Mexican States, Enrique Peña Nieto (EPN) and Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) respectively.

The paper’s analysis focuses on Twitter, considering that it is the preferred media outlet for our main subjects of interest. To carry it out, this paper will cover only the Heads of State’s interactions published on their official social media outlets during specific periods of time relevant for the signature of the treaty. After that, the public opinion’s reactions will be comprised, analysed and compared to actual changes in the signature of the treaty.

For these purposes, I will refer as ‘public opinion’ to the resulting opinion of internet users regarding a specific Head of State. Taking that into account, traditional
media outlets will only be used as points of comparison, which will help to determine the relevancy of any social media interaction outside of the internet. It is important to notice that this is a limitation of the research, since public opinion cannot be fully extracted from social media interactions or traditional media outlets. However, considering the undeniable increase of social media usage in contemporary societies, the results of this paper might help as a starting point for future research on the topic.
II. FOREIGN POLICIES IN PERSPECTIVE: MEXICO VS. THE UNITED STATES.

To understand the relation between Mexico and the United States, it is necessary to recognize which are the elements that have shaped their foreign policies up until the election of Donald Trump; by being able to identify these underlying elements, it will be easier to understand the dynamics between the two countries, which will provide a better foundation for the social media interactions analysed in this research.

To compile this collection of elements, this paper will use both a deductive and a constructivist approach. The use of the latest might be helpful, since it analyses International Relations from the perspective of existing collective understandings that underly society, and thus generate elements that interact with each other (Adler, 1997, p. 321). Moreover, constructivism provides the best framework to interpret the results of the analysis conducted at a later stage of this paper. A good point of comparison of these existing underlying structures can be provided by certain scholars, such as Gomez-Robledo & Verduzco (2001) and Carlos (2014). However, some of these principles can also be found in government papers, and, in the case of Mexico, even on their Constitution.

To provide a wider picture of what the underlying principles of the Mexico-US relation are, this chapter will be divided in two parts: the first part will give a broader perspective on the elements that build Mexican foreign policy, especially regarding the United States; the second part, on the other hand, will analyse the perspective of the United States, aiming to identify the building blocks that based their foreign policy towards Mexico. At the end, both perspectives will be put together, so that the nature of this relation can be easily identifiable.

II.1 How does Mexico see the United States?

When interpreting the principles of Mexican foreign policy vis-à-vis the United States, it is crucial to consider the special relationship both countries have had since their independence. This relationship has had its high and low points, proved by various episodes, such as the military interventions directed by the US on Mexico during the XIX century, which ultimately led to the Mexican secession of California, Texas and New Mexico, or the Mexican support of the US in the international scene during WWII. This
special relationship is not only a result of their foreign policy, but also a consequence of many domestic ones, since between these two countries, domestic decisions can also have an effect on the bilateral relation, as proven by the War on Drugs (Chabat, 2002).

In order to start with this analysis, it is important to identify which are the directives that Mexico follows to conduct its foreign policy. In this case, understanding the power relations between them is crucial, since it explains the dynamics between these countries. To provide a wider picture, this paper uses Hey’s analysis on Latin American foreign policy as a starting point. It is important to notice that, while her theoretical framework is applied from the points of view of dependency theory and political realism, her work aims to identify the main building blocks of Latin American Foreign Policy based on the most dominant ideas present in scholarly literature. This is useful, since it serves as a guide to understand how Mexico constructs its relation towards the United States.

In her work, Hey compiles three main dichotomies that can be used to describe the construction of Latin America’s foreign policy: pro-core vs. anti-core; autonomous vs. dependant and economic vs. political-diplomatic. These three interactions rely heavily on Latin America’s relations with the United States, since as Hey herself points out, the USA directs diverse external pressures on Latin America due to their position as an hegemon of the region (1997, pp. 633, 652).

From these dynamics, perhaps the more appropriate to describe the current Mexican relation with the United States are both the autonomous-dependant and the economical-political, since they describe the changing nature of this relationship.

In the case of the first one, Hey argues: “An autonomous regime makes decisions according to perceived national, political, or personal interests, while a dependent one acts in accordance with the wishes of foreign interests” (1997, p. 641). Moreover, Hey adds that this autonomous-dependant relation with the USA is the result of many factors, which are defined mainly by power capabilities. In the case of Mexico, she points out that its power capabilities are determined by three factors: the amount of interest shown by the USA in the region; their proximity to the country and their strong tradition of self-determination. The combination of these factors can result in strong power capabilities, which ultimately lead to a pursue of an autonomous foreign policy, while on the other hand, weak power capabilities are translated into a more dependent foreign policy. Gomez-Robledo Verduzco supports Hey’s argument by arguing that, inside the Mexican
legal conception, the principle of “self-determination of the peoples” is not linked to the characteristics of a determined collective, but rather to the situation in which this collective is involved (2001, p. 204). This then means, that the “peoples” to which this specific directive refers to are by principle the ones conforming a State, which are (or could be) subjugated by foreign domain or exploitation.

Another interesting dichotomy described by Hey is the economical-political one. This dichotomy takes into account the changing nature of the Latin American economic policies vis-à-vis the United States: while during the 60’s and the 70’s there was a huge state interventionism in the region, from the 1980’s there was a shift towards more core-oriented economic policies as a result of the Latin-American debt crisis. According to Hey, this ultimately made Latin American countries weaker (and thus more susceptible) to the United States. This *economization* of foreign policy is further demonstrated by Chabat (1991), who argues that from the 1980’s and as a result of the economic policies pursued to appall the foreign debt debt crisis, Mexico found itself in an increasingly dependent position with the United States (pp. 3-5).

In an interesting manner, Hey describes political policies as rather uncommon to Latin America at the time of her study. However, she mentions that in Mexico, foreign policy towards the USA can be used to appease domestic critics who claim that the governing party has linked itself too closely with that country. Moreover, she also mentions that some of the US political goals can include economic incentives, such as cooperation on drug policy, like in Colombia or Argentina (p. 649).

This last element is especially relevant considering the current state of the bilateral relation between Mexico and the United States: on one hand, as product of a still high economic dependence (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2018), and on the other, as a result from the increased political interests of the United States in Mexico during the first two decades of the XXI century, namely migration and the War on Drugs. On this topic, Delgado-Ramos & Romano use the Mérida Initiative as a key example of U.S. interference in Latin America as a result of a political interest with important economic components. As they argue: “[this interference] leads to authoritarian systems with increasing military and paramilitary power, human rights violations, and increased U.S. interference under the guise of help, cooperation, or the defense of its interests and
investments in the region” (2011, p. 94). This could prove that any kind of foreign political interference has a negative impact on the Mexican public opinion.

Taking the above into consideration, one can identify which elements of both of Hey’s dychetomies are applied to the construction of the Mexican foreign policy towards the USA during the last decades.

It can be argued that, on one hand, Mexico is reactionary to the US attitudes towards their country, which is further amplified by their territorial proximity. This is especially important, since a hostile attitude from the United States supports the narrative of Mexico being a country susceptible to their subjugation. Considering that this is a crucial part of the Mexican conception of self-determination, this is an open challenge to their values, not only in traditional foreign policy, but also among the public opinion. On the other hand, as Delgado-Ramos & Romano pointed out, the US pursuit of mostly political interests causes a negative impact on the social fabric (2011, p. 94). This is maybe best exemplified by the Mérida Iniciative, which although also counted with an economic component, its ultimate goal was merely political. This social deterioration has a huge impact on the State, since it also affects negatively its image among the public opinion. Therefore, it can be argued that Mexico already sees itself as a victim of US policy, which could then be fueled by an openly-hostile attitude from the president Donald Trump and justified by the principle of self-determination. This gives a justification to pursue a more autonomous foreign policy to push the country outside the US scope, as well as to take a more defiant position towards them.

As an evidence of Hey’s argument, one can identify eight normative principles imprinted in the Mexican Constitution regarding international relations:

(…) In the conduction of foreign policy, the Head of the Executive branch shall observe the following normative principles: the self-determination of the peoples; the principle of non-intervention; the peaceful settlement of disputes; the prohibition of the threat or the use of force in international relations; the equality of States before the law; the principle of international cooperation for development; the respect, protection and promotion of Human Rights and the fight for international peace and security. (Art. 89, paragraph X.)
While reading these principles, it is noticeable how many of them are also regarded as essential directives for modern international relations. After all, many of these are also included in many international treaties ratified by Mexico. However, as Gomez-Robledo Verduzco points out, the inclusion of such principles in the Constitution does not only serve a merely enunciative purpose, but rather a more divulgative one, which should be taken into account when analysing it (2001, p. 199). This argument suggests that these constitutional directives do not only guide state actors on how to conduct foreign policy, but also take part of the Mexican self-conception, which could build a sense of tradition.

This paradigm is useful to place Mexican foreign policy in the international scene, since it suggests that Mexico limits its international acting mostly only when it perceives that any of these principles are violated abroad. It is important to point out that, while these essential principles can describe most of Mexican diplomacy, there are some exceptions to the rule, such as the positioning of Mexico in the Spanish Civil War or their intervention in the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, where the principle of self-determination in its strictest legal conception was not followed by favouring a sublevating faction in both States. *(Further reading on (Sánchez Nateras, 2018) & (Weld, 2017))*

In addition to the above, Gomez-Robledo Verduzco’s argument also presents a good image on how Mexico sees itself in the world; while a State would usually follow the foreign policy dictated by their context or their decision-making bodies, Mexico would primarily use these principles to defend its interests. This would explain why Mexico has followed -during most of its time- a homogeneous and coherent international policy, exemplified by their traditional stances on non-alignment during the Cold War, their diplomatic support to Cuba during Fidel Castro’s regime, or their stances on nuclear non-proliferation, among others.

Using all of the previous paradigms, and as a recapitulation of all the previous arguments it can be said that Mexico conceives itself in a position of *cooperative defensiveness*. This means that when the United States pursue a cooperative relation with Mexico, its government responds with reciprocity. However, when the case is the opposite, Mexico uses a defensive diplomacy. In addition to the above, when cooperation exists, it results in a more negative image of the government inside the Mexican public opinion, since some types of cooperation with the US tend to have negative consequences for the general public. On the other hand, the strongly-founded principle of self-
determination pushes Mexico to adopt an even more defensive policy whenever it feels threatened by the US, which can be even catalyzed if the US do not build a good-neighbourhood policy or, in a more radical way, if they develop a hostile attitude, which has been the case during the administration of president Donald Trump.

II.2 The US Foreign Policy with towards Mexico.

Having analysed how Mexico conducts its policy towards the United States of America, it is also important to identify which elements construct US foreign policy when it comes to dealing with its southern neighbour. As in the Mexican case, a good starting point is to identify which principles or diplomatic traditions the United States hold to construct their foreign policy. In this case, such principles are not built into the Constitution, hence they do not direct the powers and limitations of the Executive branch, which ultimately provides more autonomy to the State. However, historically, the United States have developed a series of directives or “fundamental principles” that guide foreign policy (Perkins, 1941).

Well from the 1940s, Perkins made a good compilation of principles that have shaped the country’s diplomacy throughout its history. In his work, he identifies six elements which shape US foreign policy: unwillingness to assume binding political commitments; reluctance to keep long-term allies but not to arrange temporary ones, neutrality against European conflicts; freedom of the seas; The Monroe Doctrine (including the principle of No-Transfer); Pan-Americanism and the preservation of peace and democratic institutions (Perkins, 1941). It is important to notice that by then, the hegemony of the United States had not yet been consolidated to the level of a superpower, meaning that the validity of some of those principles can be questioned in the actual international context. It is important, nonetheless, to take a look at some of the principles presented by Perkins, especially regarding those connected to their foreign policy inside the American continent, namely the Monroe Doctrine and Pan-Americanism. It can be argued that these principles are a fundamental part of US foreign policy, especially considering that these can be traced back to the earliest years of its history (Perkins, 1941, pp. 15-17). Moreover, these two diplomatic doctrines have a direct effect on other countries of the continent, especially on Mexico. As evidences of this effect, Mexican
history has countless examples of interventions justified with both the Monroe Doctrine and the Pan-American principle, to name some, the Mexican-American War or the Embassy Pact, a secret US agreement which triggered a coup d’etat in Revolutionary Mexico during 1913. (Further reading on Blaisdell (1962))

However, Perkins’ perspective could look one-sided. To put it into contrast, Carlos (2014) makes an extensive review on discursive constructions in the United States about Mexico using both a constructivist and a post-colonial approach. In his work, he acknowledges, through the review of diverse scholarship, that different realities backed by meta-narratives and dominant discourses are used by Western powers to justify their imperialistic ambitions on other countries (2014, pp. 44-47). Taking Carlos’ arguments into account, it can be said that many of the US foreign policy principles serve as the basis of further meta-narratives used to exercise power on neighbouring countries like Mexico. This is especially important when considering both the Monroe Doctrine and Pan-Americanism, since these two give a strong justification to US interventionism in the American Continent under the excuse of protection against European powers. Furthermore, other principles identified by Perkins, such as the reluctance to assume politically binding commitments and maintain long-term alliances, add another rhetorical foundation to this interventionism, since they provide a good basis to build a tradition of an interest-driven foreign policy in the American continent.

Realists may argue that an interest-driven foreign policy is the basis for any power’s foreign political approach. In the case of the United States, however, this notion might be challenged, given that historically, the country has operated with the notion of a ‘higher moral ground’ within the international community, or ”American exceptionalism” (Carlos, 2014, p. 49). This hints that US foreign policy might not be solely driven by their interests, but also by the desire of supporting this self-conception, which could also bring together a sense of superiority in the American continent, explained by both the Monroe Doctrine and Pan-Americanism. This is important, especially considering that both concepts imply a de facto leadership of the United States inside America. This case is especially true in Mexico, since as seen in the previous chapter, its proximity to the US makes it especially vulnerable to negative depictions inside that country’s political and public realities. In this regard, Carlos gives several examples of these depictions, the ones being the most striking which associate Mexico with uncivility, crime, and interestingly, dirtiness. This last notion is exemplified with the depiction of the H1N1 outbreak on US
media, which was initially referred to as *swine flu* (2014, pp. 47-48). It can be argued that negative depictions about a country are mainly predominant in media outlets and have no direct effect on a country’s foreign policy. However, Carlos’ argument already implies that these negative media depictions have a direct effect on how politicians formulate their polity towards a country, given that one way or another, it provides a general notion on what a country ‘is’ inside their voters’ imaginarium, which they can use to create policies which later satisfy their interests.

To support Carlos’ arguments, it is useful to review different academic literature and compare it with actual US policies. Delgado-Ramos & Romano, for example, already state that the Mérida Initiative was used as a tool to protect the US economic and geopolitical interests in Latin America (2011, p. 94). This example would already imply that, taking into account the discourse of superiority that the US constructs with Mexico, the effective way to protect their interests is through intervention on Latin American countries. Following this same line and with a more current context, Shirk describes the 2016 Donald Trump’s presidential campaign as demeaning of Mexico and Mexican immigrants. Moreover, he adds that these actions could only be possible thanks to the assymetry that characterizes the relationship between both countries (2018, pp. 671, 673). This argument is especially important, since Delgado-Ramos & Romano (2011, pp. 98-99) and Carlos (p. 47) also argue that such an ‘assymetric relationship’ cannot be constructed solely by the United States, but also with the support of some Mexican politicians.

Having the opinion of some academics and to support the analysis carried out in a later stage of this paper, it is relevant to also include any examples of US government’s publications that reflect these previously mentioned discursive constructions. Some government reports on Mexico, for example, already make special emphasis on 1) US economic interests and 2) the state of ingovernability well from the start of their texts (Congressional Research Service, 2018). Others, on the other hand, while presenting a better balanced approach of the objectives of the bilateral relation, still stress on issues like the economy, the diminishing on governability and the security challenges of the country (U.S. Department of State, 2018). Many can argue that these depictions merely present the most important issues on the US-Mexico agenda. However, taking a closer look to the reports from the point of view of critical discourse-analysis, the United States make especial emphasis on the virtually sole responsibility of the Mexican government.
for these situations, ignoring the possibility of their implications in these real challenges, and even downplaying the inflammatory rhetoric of the Trump administration, which is the case of the Congressional Research Service’s report. The depiction of Mexico as a State in these political reports goes in alignment with the previously presented narratives, since it assumes the role of the United States from the position of an enforcer, this without acknowledging any kind of responsibility. One might argue that the United States do not hold this assumption exclusively with their relationship with Mexico. However, as discussed previously in this chapter, both countries’ proximity, accompanied with diplomatic traditions focused on the American continent, makes Mexico an easier target for negative discoursive depictions and asymmetric conceptions of the bilateral relation.

To finalize this chapter, it can be assumed that the relationship between the two countries is ‘asymmetrical’. The United States, on one hand, uses Mexico as its closest object for foreign policy. This approach can result in a closer cooperation. However, due to the US diplomatic traditions, the relation tends to be self-centered, which creates an image of superiority inside the US imaginarium and an imperialistic foreign policy. Due to their proximity, Mexico easily becomes the first and closest target for this kind of policies, which is further reinforced by the previously created narratives. Mexico, on the other hand, performs a policy of cooperative defensiveness with the United States, which is also heavily encouraged by their diplomatic traditions and later reinforced by the narratives present in both countries.
III.  RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.

Since this paper aims to identify the connection between social media and international relations, the analysis is based on both Wodak’s discourse-historical approach of critical discourse analysis and Ceron’s framework to link social media to politics with the use of sentiment analysis, following the logic that these interactions could as well have an actual impact on international politics.

To confirm this paper’s hypothesis, the analysis will be carried out from the 1st of April, 2016 to the 30th of November, 2018. This time frame will be further divided into three stages. This division is aligned to the changes in the political life of both countries, which will help to identify which where the realities of each Head of State on Social media at their time and how their interactions had an impact on their policies.

Stage one will comprise the period of time between the 1st of April, 2016, and the 8th of November, 2016. This stage starts with Donald Trump as a presidential candidate for the Republican Party and finishes with his victory on the 2016 US elections. During this period a milestone which could be related to both the end of NAFTA and the birth of the USMCA treaty will be considered, namely Trump’s early visit to Mexico as a candidate and its outcome for president Enrique Peña Nieto.

Stage two will comprehend the time period between the 9th of November, 2016, and the 30th of June, 2018. This time frame focuses on the last months of Enrique Peña Nieto’s government before the new election and the first two years of the Trump presidency. This stage includes milestones such as the peso fluctuations prompted by Trump’s tweets, the announcement of a renegotiation of the previous North American Free Trade Agreement, and the preliminary agreement signed between Mexico and the United States, among others.

Stage three will comprise the time between the 1st of July, 2018, and the 30th of November, 2018. This period comprehends the transitional period, starting from the electoral victory of AMLO until the last day of EPN’s government, which also concurs with the signature of the new USMCA treaty between Mexico, the United States of America, and Canada at the 2018 G20 Summit in Buenos Aires. This stage is characterised by the already increasing influence of AMLO on the treaty’s developments,
as shown as the chosing of the Spanish version of its name, as well as a visible change of discourse towards the Mexican government by Donald Trump.

The analysis will be qualitative, as proposed by Ceron (2017) and Mergel (2013). The corpus used by this analysis will be a compilation of individual tweets made by each Head of State that could have an effect on the signature of the USMCA treaty during the above mentioned stages. However, tweets related to other topics of the bilateral relation such as migration will be excluded. Each of these tweets will be analysed using the discourse-historical approach of critical discourse analysis proposed by Wodak (2001). However, some elements from Khosravinik & Unger’s social media analysis will also be included. This, choice has two purposes: to see if there was any manifestation of the discursive constructions presented in chapter I of this paper, and to understand which was the motivation, context, and intention of every social media interaction. This corpus will be compared with a sentiment analysis carried out with a random Twitter sample, which will be selected based on keywords from each Head of State’s ‘brand’ (namely an acronym, last name or any other keyword used to refer to them). This, to see whether the popularity of their interactions was substantial for the development of the new USMCA treaty. This will be compared with a similar analysis on the treaty’s brand (USMCA, NAFTA, TLCAN, T-MEC), to extract the public opinion’s sentiment over the development of the treaty itself. In the case of Donald Trump’s brand, the analysis will be carried out in both English and Spanish, considering that he also had an impact on Mexican Social Media. It is important to notice that due to technicalities, the location of our random sample could not be determined, which is a limitation of this research. However, the correct combination of keywords and a further refining of the results can provide an approximate overview of the sentiment in both Mexico and the United States. At the end, a keyword cloud will give an overview of the most popular words used before and after each Head of State’s tweets, this will also help to determine whether the online conversation was affected by their interactions.

It is important to notice that, as Khosravinik & Uger point out, the literary genre used to perform the social media analysis can be hard to determine (2016, p. 213). Taking this into account and considering theirs and Wodak’s frameworks, each interaction will be classified by interactivity (participatory/non-participatory) (Khosravinik & Unger, 2016, p. 213) and genre (propaganda/institutional) (Wodak, 2001, p. 80). These categorizations are specially important, considering that in presidential systems, the Head
of State is usually regarded as the main protagonist of the country’s political life (Linz, 1997, p. 449), which is the case in Mexico and the United States.

To carry out the sentiment analysis, an online tool will be used. It is important to notice that, as Ceron himself points out, the nuances of language cannot yet be fully interpreted with traditional techniques of sentiment analysis, since they rely on natural language processing by artificial intelligence (Ceron, 2017, pp. 39-40). This is why the preliminary scanning of the sentiment analysis’ corpus will be further revised tweet by tweet to ‘calibrate’ its result, by classifying each of them in one of the three existing categories used by our internet tool: positive, neutral or negative.

The tool used to carry out this analysis is SentiOne. SentiOne (www.sentione.com) is an international social listening and engagement, AI supported software, a content-based web analytics platform that covers and recognises more than 30 languages all across Europe. It gathers, indexes and analyses public online contents published anywhere on the web, including social media channels, blogs, forums, review pages and websites. The interactive platform is built upon user provided keywords and gathers mentions that either in themselves or within their context contain those pre-given phrases. The system collects data almost real-time and has a memory that goes back to 3 years. For quantitative analysis, data is structured by different focus points and research parameters (eg. gender, sentiment, topic influencers) and visualized on an interactive dashboard. The technology also supports qualitative and in-depth researches as it enables users to conduct thorough text analysis and categorization of all indexed web contents such as articles, posts, comments, tweets etc. However, for the purposes of this paper, only the sentiment value and the most popular words gathered in a keyword cloud will be collected.

III.1 Contextualization

Following Nowak’s and Khosravinik & Unger’s approaches, it is important to place our analysis in a historical and sociopolitical context. First of all and as stated previously, the period of time of our analysis comprises an era of important change, not only in Mexico and the United States individually, but also in their bilateral relation.

On one hand, the US 2016 election, overall considered one of the most decisive moments in that country’s history, brought the victory of Donald Trump, presidential
candidate for the Republican Party. During his campaign, he appealed to the US general public with a nationalistic rhetoric, which antagonized immigration, globalization and minority groups. Mexico was a special part of this rhetoric, since it simultaneously served three different purposes: being accountable for the immigration problem, for the changes in the economy and the labour market and the rise of criminality and drug use. Following this line, the United States had experienced a surge in illegal immigration during the early 2000’s and 2010’s (Pew Research Center, 2019), which further emphasized the rhetoric against Mexico.

Mexico, on the other hand, also experienced an important change in its political life. After a controversial victory in 2012, President Enrique Peña Nieto’s government represented the return of the Revolutionary Institutional Party, a party that had governed Mexico for nearly 80 consecutive years up until a brief 12-year opposition-lead hiatus. His government aimed towards bigger macroeconomic stability marked by crucial structural reforms. However, his scandalous victory against candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, plagued with many irregularities and claims of vote coercion, meant the start of one of the country’s most unpopular administrations. After many corruption scandals and an unprecedented rise in violent deaths (INEGI, 2019), his popularity and his party’s collapsed. In addition to that, his mismanagement of Donald Trump’s rise to the US presidency prompted an even further sentiment of dissatisfaction with his government, which later caused the rise of his former contender Andrés Manuel López Obrador as president in 2018, the first time a left-wing candidate wins in Mexico.

This is placed in a wider historical period: The War on Drugs. Though originally initiated by Nixon in the 1970’s, it spread further south with Mexican President Felipe Calderón’s 2006 war declaration, which effectively directed the use of public armed forces to counter illegal drug trafficking and organized crime. In Mexico, the conflict has caused an estimate of 252,538 registered deaths since its beginning (INEGI, 2019) and a yet undetermined a number of disappearances, which has also been accompanied by a surge in violent crime (Valle-Jones, 2019). These factors have damaged the bilateral relation, since the constant circulation of drugs and arms has worsened the conflict. (Further information can be found on Shirk (2018) and Schiavon & Figueroa (2018))
This contextualization aims to place our object of analysis in a wider geopolitical and historical context. This will help to understand the nature of the analysed Social Media interactions and the overall context of each Head of State.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

Each tweet under analysis was indexed and classified. Further information on the classification can be found on Appendix B.

IV.1 Stage One

During this time-frame we can observe an important milestone for the development of the USMCA treaty before Donald Trump’s presidential victory: his visit to Mexico on September 1, 2016. During this first contact between Trump and EPN, we can see that before the visit, there was a predominance of neutral and negative interactions for both politicians, which was further negatively affected by the visit (See Figure 12, Figure 13 & Figure 14 in Appendix A), very similarly to the sentiment share on NAFTA (Figure 1)

![Mentions in time by sentiment](image)

*Figure 1. Stage One: NAFTA's sentiment share*

In social media, both parties used a mostly institutional, which was later changed to propagandistic, as seen in tweet D1. In tweets D1 and E1 we can see how Donald Trump uses the discourse of superiority over Mexico, which is later refuted by EPN in F1, with the use of ‘defense of the nation’ and ‘self-determination’. The relevancy of
these interactions can be seen in Figures 2 and 3, since some of the words that EPN used, such as *inicio* or *pagará* had a more positive outcome, while the username and name of Trump (realdonaldtrump) had a negative outcome, both in English and Spanish (Figures 2, 3 & 4). Nonetheless, this had no positive effect on EPN’s online popularity (Figure 12).

Interestingly, the relevancy of AMLO surged right after the visit (see Figure 15). This is interesting, since he did not make any statement connected to the event. However,
this relevancy could serve as a solid indicator of social media participation, which could have been taken as an advantage in further stages.

IV.2 Stage Two

During stage two we can observe a change in perception on NAFTA, which now counts with more neutral comments on social media. (Figure 16). On the other hand, we can observe an overall negative perception of both Donald Trump and EPN inside Mexican social media, while AMLO continues to gather more relevancy, perhaps due to his campaigning for president of Mexico. In this stage we can also observe a prevalence of propaganda (80%) over institutional (20%) communication on the Heads of State’s social media accounts. During this stage we can consider two main milestones: the cancelling of a Mexico-US summit on January, 2017, and EPN’s messages of April and May, 2018.

During the first milestone, it is possible to see how the Mexican government is willing to cooperate with its northern neighbour, while the US president uses an overall hostile tone (B2, D2). At the same time, we can see how EPN decides to cancel his meeting with president Trump, underscoring his interest in further cooperation. The cancelling of the summit could obey 1) the increasing pressure of the public opinion or 2) the economic burden that Trump exercised on the country, since according to the governor of the Mexican Central Bank, some of Trump’s tweets during that period prompted a change in their monetary policy (Reuters, 2017). The pressure from the public opinion can be seen with words such as humillado (humiliated) or EPN’s own name, which had negative depictions (Figures 5 and 6).

![Figure 5. Keyword cloud during the cancelling of the EPN-Trump summit (ES)](image-url)
During the second milestone, we can observe a change in EPN’s communication strategy with Donald Trump; after some attacks over the issue of immigration, on April 5, 2018, EPN posted a tweet and a video in both English and Spanish, in which he gives a message to the president of the United States. Even though the communication style was institutional, it had a strong communicative purpose; it referenced the principle of self-determination and used a rhetoric of ‘Defense of the nation’, which urged Trump to perform a more respectful kind of cooperation. This was also followed by a tweet (T2) addressed directly to Donald Trump with similar components. These two interactions had a very positive impact, although they did not improve Peña Nieto’s online overall sentiment. (Figure 6).

Interestingly, EPN’s interactions also brought unexpected results, such as a positive impact on AMLO [lopezobrador_] (Figure 7) and a negative impact on NAFTA (Figure 8), which could have also been prompted by Trump (U2).
After the victory of AMLO, we can observe a growing influence of the then president-elect on the renegotiation process of the new version of NAFTA, which started generating more positive sentiments during this period of time among internet users (Figure 9). This improvement reached a peak in October, when its signature was announced (Forbes, 2018). However, despite the good reception of this announcement, the online popularity of EPN did not improve. (*See Figure 19 in Appendix A*).
During this stage we can also observe a predominance of Institutional (75%) over propagandistic (25%) tweets. Interestingly, we can also observe the only example of a participatory tweet compiled during our analysis (F3). This is very important, since due to the lack of a name for the new USMCA treaty in Spanish, AMLO’s negotiating team was in charge of choosing one, which was ultimately decided by an interactive online survey (Figure 10). The results of this survey were later used as the new name of the Treaty: T-MEC or Tratado México, Estados Unidos, Canadá [México, United States, Canada Treaty].
This online interaction also was a reference to the discourse of ‘self-determination’, since the proposal originated from the idea of choosing a name for the treaty, rather than adapting one from the English version. Interestingly, during this period we can observe a change in Donald Trump’s social media interactions vis-à-vis the Mexican government, which also had a positive impact on AMLO’s sentiment share, as seen in Figure 11. This kind of impact might be a result of Trump’s change in his communications addressed to the new Mexican president, which passed from propagandistic to institutional (A3, B3, E3), just as with EPN when Trump had just taken office.

*Figure 11. Trump’s keyword cloud after AMLO’s presidential victory.*
V. CONCLUSIONS.

After observing the development of the US-Mexico relation on Social Media, it can be concluded that Social Media can indeed be used to influence a given foreign policy agenda, which confirms this paper’s hypothesis. However, this usage will depend mostly on the role that the participating international political actors attach to it, as seen by Trump’s and AMLO’s approaches in contrast to EPN’s.

The above converges with two important concepts: Ceron’s conception of Social Media as an ‘activated public opinion’ (Ceron, 2017, p. 106) and Khosravinik & Unger’s understanding of Social Media, not in the terms of a ‘digital dualism’, but rather as part of an ‘offline reality’ (Khosravinik & Unger, 2016, p. 213) . Taking this into consideration, in International Relations, Social Media would rather serve as an ‘online stage’, where the already existing narratives that shape a country’s foreign policy are performed, interacting constantly with each other. This constant interaction can have two usages: either be used by an international political actor to increase its own state’s power capabilities, or rather, be used as a ‘thermometer’ to measure the sentiment among the public opinion regarding specific policies.

Donald Trump’s approach would be a suitable example for the first, given that his negative interactions did cause a change in Mexico’s monetary policy, as seen in Chapter IV. This could have served as leverage for future negotiations on the USMCA treaty. However, it is important to notice that such social media exchanges were followed by concrete actions, such as pushing car manufacturers to cancel their projects in Mexico (Reuters, 2017). It can then be assumed that when there is coherence in an international actor’s foreign policy, their online interactions can exert some pressure to a desired international goal.

In contrast, Peña Nieto’s actions during stage one and two of the analysis can prove the second kin of usage, since they were greatly influenced by the overall negative sentiment perceived in Social Media. This negative sentiments prompted his rather active approach in responding to Trump’s online statements, which indeed favoured his online perception, although temporarily.

Interestingly, AMLO’s approach was a combination of Trump’s and EPN’s: on one hand, he legitimized himself and his actions through social media, while on the other, he used his initially perceived popularity among internet users to improve his image well
before he was elected. This was later exemplified by the participatory survey on the USMCA treaty’s name (Milenio, 2018). Although minor, this worked as a good example on how the opinion of internet users can also be used in international decision-making, although the extent of their involvement was only determined by the existing relevant actors, in this case, AMLO.

Following this line, the role of any international actor in social media would be, as in the offline reality, to conduct foreign policy. However, it is important to notice that Social Media can serve not only as a tool for institutional communication but also as effective propaganda, as proven in the increasing use of a propagandistic genre on Chapter IV.2. This would further prove the relevancy of the style and language used in Social Media: a more propagandistic style would prompt a steady change in public opinion, while an institutional style would have a more immediate, drastic, yet short-lasting effect.

It is important to notice, that the effectiveness of social media messages goes in hand with the level of engagement that a politician has with their audience. This was shown by Trump’s and AMLO’s audiences, which were significantly larger than EPN’s or NAFTA’s. However, the analysis showed that interactivity with internet users must be maintained, since in the case of AMLO, when he did not have any social media interaction, his online sentiment share had a negative tendency.

In the case of the discourses, politicians tended to use them predominantly in propagandistic tweets, thus ‘performing’ these conceptions in social media. Overall, whenever any of such discourses was presented, audiences reacted as expected (the US audience reacted well against Mexico, while the Mexican public reacted negatively, and viceversa). However, these conceptions were predominant among international actors, since the keyword clouds showed that the public focused more in their reactions to the existing developments. Taking this into consideration, international actors can direct propaganda from their own social media channels, whose effectiveness will be determined by the reaction of the public. This can be repeated until successfully (Trump) or remain unsuccessful (EPN).

In conclusion, the results of this paper show a tendency towards a more integrated public opinion through Social Media, which can provide many advantages for international political actors, such as effectiveness, low cost, etc. However, relying purely
on social media can be counterproductive, since the lack of coherent policies can delegitimize their usage. More importantly, the extent to which the public opinion can participate in foreign political decisions will be determined by the relevant actors through the interactivity of their messages, which could serve both as a powerful institutional and propagandistic tool.

As for the analysis of social media interactions, Ceron’s approach is useful, however, it is highly advisable to combine it with Wodak’s and Khosravinik & Unger’s frameworks for critical discourse analysis, since they provide a wider picture of which elements participate in a country’s foreign policy and their relations to other powers. This could solve Picazo-Vela, et al.’s, lack of regulations, guidelines or institutional frameworks to approach the analysis of social media in the Mexican public sector (Picazo-Vela, et al., 2012, p. 510). To accomplish the above, the development of the proper technology is necessary, since many factors (such as geolocation, genre, semantic context, etc.) would be essential for a proper social media analysis, which could generate the relevant insights to build effective social media strategies.
APPENDIX A (FIGURES)

Figure 12. Stage One. EPN's Sentiment Share

Figure 13. Stage One. Trump's Sentiment Share in Spanish
Figure 14. Stage One. Trump’s sentiment share in English

Figure 15. Stage One. AMLO’s Sentiment Share

Figure 16. Stage Two. NAFTA Sentiment Share
Figure 17. Stage Two. AMLO’s Sentiment Share

Figure 18. Stage Two. Trump’s Sentiment Share in Spanish

Figure 19. Stage Four. EPN’s Sentiment Share
Figure 20. Stage four. AMLO’s sentiment share
## APPENDIX B. (TABLES)

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*Table 1 Stage One. Classification of tweets*

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Table 3 Stage Three. Classification of tweets
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