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PIXELS AND POLITICS:

A Comparative Study of Digital
Political Advertising in Latin
America and the UK

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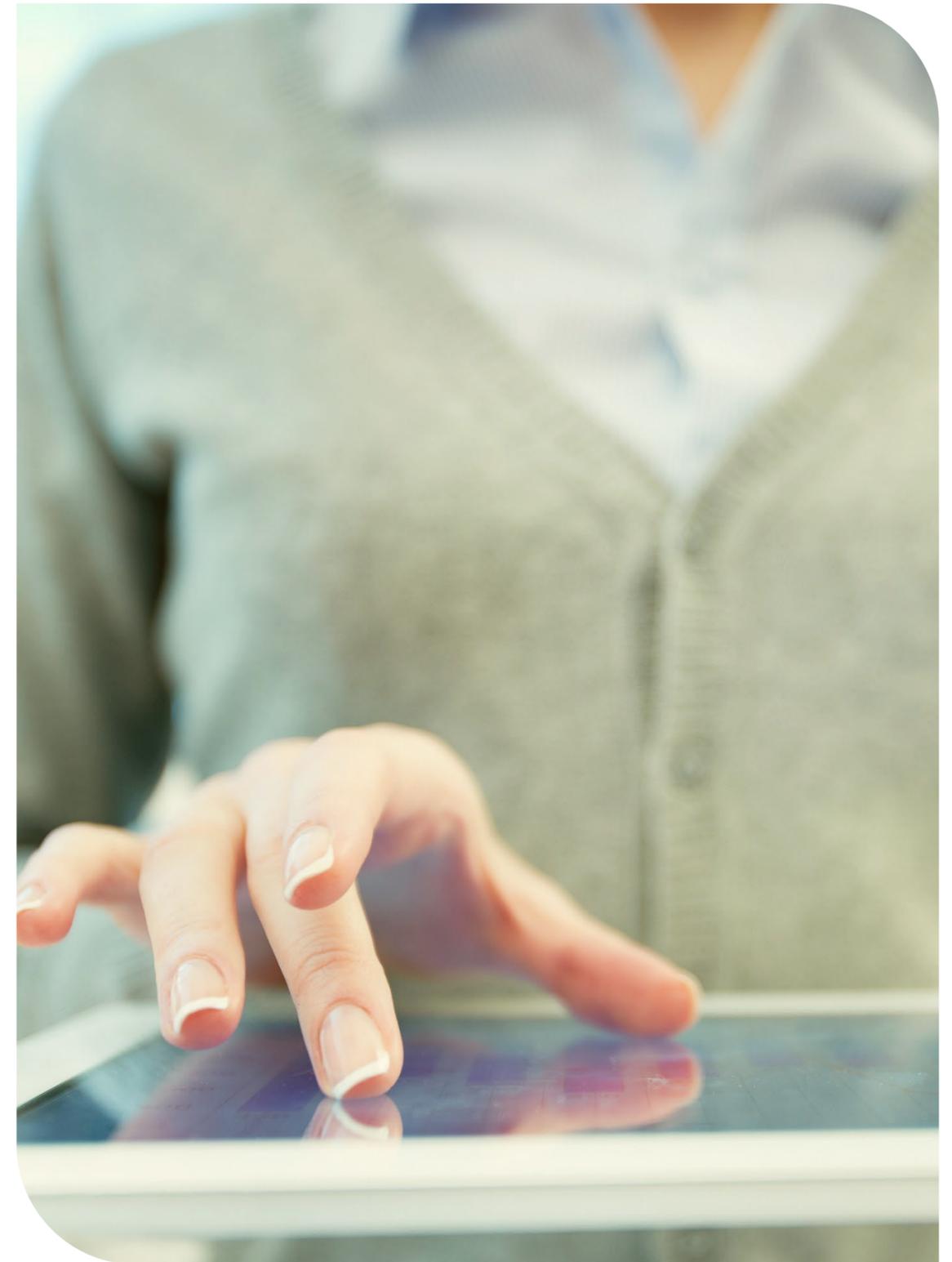
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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Digital political advertising has become a crucial aspect of modern elections, with candidates and parties relying heavily on it to reach voters. However, concerns about transparency, accuracy, and accountability have arisen.

This brief explores the current state of digital political advertising, focusing on the "ethics agreements" signed between platforms and electoral authorities in Latin America and the UK.

It also discusses the implications of these agreements for future political campaigns and the democratic process.



II. CONTEXT AND IMPORTANCE

The platformisation of the public sphere has led to digital platforms becoming mediators of conversation, access to information, and other forms of social interaction. This shift has significant implications for political campaigns and the democratic process.

The regulation of digital political advertising is critical to maintaining the integrity of these processes.

The rise of digital political advertising has been driven by the increasing digitisation of society and the growing influence of social media platforms.

These platforms have become central to the dissemination of political messages, the interaction between candidates and voters, and the channelling of campaign funds. However, the digital space is also fraught with challenges, including the spread of misinformation, the potential for foreign interference, and privacy and data security issues.

Therefore, regulating digital political advertising is not just about ensuring fair and transparent elections but also about protecting the democratic process itself. It is about ensuring that citizens have access to accurate information, that their data is protected, and that the integrity of the electoral process is upheld.

III. OBSERVATIONS

A. Latin America

Latin American countries have taken steps to regulate digital political advertising, including financial regulation of parties' digital campaigns and commitments to using social networks in campaigns.

Ethics agreements have been signed in Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru to mitigate the adverse effects of disseminating false content and disinformation tactics during the electoral process. These agreements represent a collaborative effort between the electoral authorities and digital platforms to promote transparency and truthfulness in disseminating information related to the elections.

The signing of these ethics agreements significantly develops the region's approach to regulating digital political advertising. **However, the effectiveness of these agreements in addressing the challenges posed by digital political advertising still needs to be seen.** There are also questions about the enforcement of these agreements and the extent to which they can hold platforms accountable.



In Argentina, the National Electoral Chamber (CNE) established agreements with various media entities and platforms to mitigate the adverse effects of disseminating false content and disinformation tactics during the electoral process.

The agreement was signed on May 30, 2019, and renewed on August 1, 2021. **Participants in the agreement include the CNE, political groupings, associations, and companies such as ALAI (Latin American Internet Association), Google, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok.** Under this agreement, the participating technology companies recognise the complexity and tension arising during electoral processes due to disseminating inaccurate information or fake news. **They agree to collaborate with the competent authorities, respecting democratic values and freedom of expression.** Through this commitment, they seek to promote transparency and truthfulness in disseminating information related to the elections, thus guaranteeing the integrity of the electoral process in Argentina (Pages 7).



In Colombia, the National Electoral Council (CNE) has signed an agreement with Twitter to promote an adequate flow of information between the electoral authorities and the platform. The agreement, signed on May 14, 2019, took place in the context of the 2019 Elections in Colombia. This agreement between the CNE and Twitter has several purposes. First, **it seeks to enable Twitter to be used as a medium to share timely and valuable information for users related to the elections.** In addition, CNE used the Twitter platform to raise public awareness about relevant information for citizens and parties involved in the electoral process. Also, it seeks to promote broader information for all stakeholders during the Elections, including media literacy initiatives.



Mexico is an interesting case. The National Electoral Institute (INE) clarified that collaboration with different platforms and companies does not involve sharing or using personal data held by any parties. In the 2018 elections, Meta provided training to national and state election authorities on best practices on the platform. Moreover, Meta amplified its independent fact-checker program by bringing Reuters to verify the electoral information circulating on Facebook and Instagram.



Finally, in Peru, the National Jury of Elections (JNE), the National Registry of Identification and Civil Status (Reniec), and the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE) have collaborated with Facebook, WhatsApp, and

Instagram, intending to promote citizen participation and protect the integrity of elections. The collaboration has been mainly with the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE) and has included various actions on Facebook platforms. However, it is essential to remember that the ONPE does not require political parties to report the money invested in platforms and digital political advertising in their reports. The training was held on February 19, 2021, in which ONPE and Meta (Facebook's parent company) representatives participated. During this training, topics related to using Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram platforms to promote citizen participation and ensure the integrity of elections in Peru were addressed

B. The United Kingdom

In contrast to Latin America, the UK has not signed any ethics agreements with platforms. Instead, the Electoral Commission and Parliament have changed their model for regulating digital political advertising.

The UK represents an extra-region case where the electoral authority has developed various strategies to overcome the challenges of outdated regulatory frameworks.

The UK's approach to regulating digital political advertising has been shaped by its unique political and legal context. The absence of ethics agreements does not necessarily mean that the UK is not taking action to address the challenges posed by digital political advertising. Instead, it suggests that the UK is pursuing a different approach, relying more on legislative measures and less on voluntary platform agreements.

IV.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS



Transparency

Any agreement between electoral authorities and platforms must uphold the highest standards of transparency. This transparency is crucial to protect the integrity of the election process when digital political advertising is the main product addressed by these agreements.



Regulation

Governments and electoral institutions must develop a regulatory framework that protects citizens from algorithmic data use while maintaining online freedom of expression. This framework should consider the unique challenges digital political advertising poses, including the role of algorithms and the potential for misinformation.



Collaboration

Platforms and electoral authorities should develop electoral products collaboratively. This collaboration can help address the problems generated by the presence of digital platforms in the online sphere. It can also ensure that established regulatory frameworks are adequate and relevant to the digital landscape.



Education

Promote digital education to help citizens understand the nature of online ads and the potential for misinformation. This education can help citizens make informed decisions during elections and reduce the impact of false content and disinformation tactics.



Research

Encourage further research into the impact of digital innovations on the size and quality of the public sphere and its dynamics. This research can provide valuable insights that can inform future policy decisions.

V. CONCLUSION

The regulation of digital political advertising is a complex issue requiring policymakers' careful consideration and action. By implementing these recommendations, policymakers can help ensure the integrity of the election process in the digital age.

The rise of digital political advertising presents challenges and opportunities, and policymakers must navigate this landscape with a commitment to transparency, accountability, and the protection of democratic processes.



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