

# FIGHTING CORRUPTION IN MEXICO: SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT IN PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

## COMBATIENDO LA CORRUPCION EN MÉXICO: LAS REDES SOCIALES Y SU IMPACTO EN LA RENDICIÓN DE CUENTAS

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**Abstract:** Since 2011 several corruption cases involving public employers have been uncovered using social media (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter) in Mexico. In all those events there was a penalization, almost in every case the functionary was removed from his employment. The following research focuses on how the use of social networks in Mexican society has empowered people and increased the uncovering and punishment of corruption incidents committed by politicians and bureaucrats. Data reveals that while there are governmental and traditional media channels for denouncing corruption, using networks like YouTube or Facebook has shown to be a more effective way to spread information and finally penalize the behavior.

**Keywords:** Social media, corruption, accountability, Mexico, Internet.

**Resumen:** Desde 2011 muchos casos de corrupción relacionados con empleados públicos han sido denunciados usando redes sociales (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter) en México. Todos esos eventos derivaron en una sanción, en casi todos, el funcionario público fue relevado de su empleo. La siguiente investigación se centra en cómo el uso de redes sociales en la sociedad mexicana ha empoderado a los ciudadanos e incrementado la denuncia y castigo de actos de corrupción cometidos por políticos y burócratas. Los datos obtenidos revelan que si bien existen canales tradicionales de comunicación para denunciar los actos de corrupción, el uso de redes sociales como YouTube o Facebook ha mostrado ser un medio más efectivo para difundir la acto y penalizar la conducta.

**Palabras Clave:** Redes sociales, corrupción, rendición de cuentas, México, internet.

### Introduction

In only few decades, Internet has change social life so dramatically that many people cannot imagine life without being interconnected to the Net (Kaur, 2014). The arrive of Internet into the social sphere has provided a vast number of possibilities for political parties, small organizations, social movements and civic activists around the

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world (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). This technology has helped those groups to spread their political and social discourse to a wider audience (Marmura, 2008), and to rise economical resources for their political agenda (Stiver, Barroca, Minocha, Richards, & Roberts, 2015). However, this increase of civic participation has generated a dialectical conflict between access and control, acceptance and rejection. Diverse factual and legal organizations fight in cyberspace to control networks and content. Consequently, there is an important conflict between dominators and insubordinates to censor or to spread information on the Web (Castells, 2009) (Fuchs, 2014). At a regional level, Latin America it is not an exception, by now there is an open conflict between traditional media and alternative spaces for controlling information, in this context, social media has become an important asset to fight for.

Actually, in Latin America, there has been an important movement of social media adoption. Expending time on Facebook or YouTube has become a very important activity for Internet users in the region. Even though, most of the time, users expend much time chatting or playing online, many of them has become more active in actions related with social and political participation (Behrens & Lohmann, 2012). Many party-political and activist profiles report an important increase in their followers; when a controversial public or communal topic is published on social media it is more difficult to censure it, and it turn out to be a trend on Internet, spreading itself around the world through the social media.

Internet, without doubts, is a very important tool not only for commerce or socializes but as a tool for dissidents and resistance against governments (Adamopoulos & Todri, 2015). By now the guerrilla war are not only performance with guns but with digital propaganda (Ziccardi, 2013) Information technologies have played a huge role enabling people new tools for developing content and to socialize it online, this has increased civic participation online, giving citizens the power to criticize public functionaries and to be more participative in public agenda (Patrut, 2014).

In the field of public administration, many policies have been undertaken in order to, not only improve community services, but to decrease poverty and marginality, especially in development countries (Nicholson, 2013) (Mollah, Islam, & Islam, 2012). But along with this tendency, there is an important problem, especially in Latin America, which has been confronted using information and communication technology (ICT): the problem of combating governmental corruption.

For a long time, corruption has been considered as a crucial problem inside governmental administrations around the world. Corruption is a considerable source of organizational malfunctioning and economic decreasing; it discourages national and foreign investment and stops economic growth (Mauro, 1995). Under certain circumstances corruption indicates the degree in which business transactions involves questionable payments. But in others, it reflexes illegal ways of establishing relations between citizens and bureaucracy. As a matter of fact, corruption refers to multiples acts that have relevant consideration by the public in different degrees according to the context. So, in some countries bribery could be, by far, a terrible illegality but in some others, nepotism has a further significant impact in community perception about the problem. In terms of this paper, corruption will advocate a wide meaning: the use of public office for private gains (Bardhan, 1997). Usually in corruption cases appears three players: One of them called “the agent”, the persons who abuses of his authority; “the client”, who attempts to obtain an advantage through the illegal act, and finally; “the principal”, who gives power and resources to the agent (Graeff, 2005).

Until just some years ago, corruption was considered as a problem from developing countries, without incidence in countries like United States of America or states members of European Union. But aMer the world economic

crisis in 2008, several cases involving illegal acts, bribery and nepotism have been uncovered particularly in Europe. Corruption acts not only appears in specific contexts of poverty and exclusion (Bull & Newell, 2003). It emerges in several and different settings no matter the country or the public agency; whenever there is a person holding a public office where it is possible to use resources in order to get private profits, corruption is likely to occur. Sometimes, it is not just a matter of money or materials benefits but opportunities and social privileges as well.

As a matter of fact, there is a strong lacking of accountability in Latin American democracies. Taking apart the legal aspects, cause some times there is enough legal framework but there is no efficient mechanisms to force public servers to pay for unlawful misconducts (Mainwaring, 2003). Most of the time, the public servers commit the act, but nothing happen to them, just in very few cases bad officials go to jail, but almost never illegal money and profits are turning back.

Corruption is an endemic phenomenon in Mexico, it is so deep inside Mexican mindset that it is difficult to find a certain grade of progress in public's perception about this problem. Corruption is in every social space inside Mexican society, politicians and public functionaries are, according to general perceptions, the most important source of corruption (Morris & Klesner, 2010). Corruption has a long and renowned history in Mexico. But it was just in recently that it was a national topic in policy agenda, especially when it became measured by international organizations and more data about the topic was available. Some years ago, corruption was one of the most important subjects in media in Mexico, but narcotrafic violence in some parts of the country has taken the highest attention. However, corruption and drugs have a strong connection, mainly in areas where dishonesty has been established has a "way of living".

Though the important of considering corruption as bribery, specially as a methodological concept, this word cannot enclose others ways of corruption as nepotism (Johnston, 2001). In Mexican society a common way of associating corruption is within the action of taking advantage of a public position o parental relation, it does not mean necessary a pecuniary matter, it could be just a small social advantage, like entering first to a restaurant when not having reservation, or getting first a public service. Many benefits derived from corruption are social ones. Sometimes giving money to a public authority represents the opportunity to skip a lane in a public office when handling an official document or to avoid paying a traffic ticket.

This paper subjects about applying ICT for reducing corruption in public administration. Corruption, as an essential topic, has taken an important impulse in the last decade thanks to worldwide organizations like Transparency International. Corruption index has become a relevant topic for governments around the world. It has consolidated as an important indicator to take on account when an enterprise wants to invest in a specific country. States and organizations have established imperative actions to decrease corruption through ICT (Arjun Neupane, Jeffrey Soar, Kishor Vaidya, & Jianming Yong, 2014), like creating virtual portals for showing information about public expenses or electronic sites for denouncing bribery and nepotism acts. But along the time, these actions are kind of limited, cause usually people do not trust government authorities and they do not consult frequently this spaces.

### **Corruption and ICT**

Using ICT in public administration has a long history. Since eighties public officials around the world have been working in order to improve bureaucracy and management using computers and Internet. These actions have been effective for decreasing time and reducing expenditures. However, they have had little impact in creating interaction channels between citizen and government.

Digital strategies involving ICT for enhancing e-government services have raised certain optimism concerning the

role of technology in the improvement of public administration and the diminishing corruption and bribery in Latin America. Along the time, it has been efforts to establish policies for open communication, allowing citizens to express more openly about corruption problems. In recent years, for example, special digital portals and electronic addresses have been disposed in order to help people to denounce illegal acts from government (Matheus & Ribeiro, 2009) (Matheus, Ribeiro, Vaz, & de Souza, 2012).

In Mexico, since 2002, several federal and local regulations have been approved to give citizens some rights when requiring public information. Along with regulations, public administrations have developed electronic portals allowing tracking government expenses (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010). However, these actions have had little response and impact, cause so few consult them. Social Networks are more effective than institutional portals because they spread information faster; people consult them constantly, not just by computer but through mobile devices.

Information plays a crucial role on decision making, not just on Mexico but also everywhere. Decades ago, it was a kind of tricky to choose between services and goods available on market because there was not enough information accessible about the companies or merchandises offered. Today when using Internet, it is common and ordinary to search for reviews about almost everything. Concerning public politics, they are under a more civic scrutiny than in the past. An illegal act can be noticed and denounced by thousand in a matter of few minutes. It is in that way that free access to public information could be useful to increase transparency and accountability (Andersen, 2009).

Citizens can examine evidence about public budget and expends in a manner that would be just unimaginable in the past. By now, people and journalist can collect and reproduce news and data about misconduct, nepotism, bribery and corruption acts in general. Thanks to social networks, free flows of information have served to treat these felonies and, in many cases, the government employer has paid for his fault. Under these premises, Internet has a direct influence in dismissing corruption specially when some acts are exposed on Facebook or YouTube. If we think about an illegal act uncovered in the middle of a political campaign, or in a video depicting a bribery posted on YouTube and shared by thousands in Facebook, those scenarios scare politicians and force them to be more cautious about their behavior (Garcia-Murillo, 2010).

There is an strong relation between ICT and public accountability, so the greater availability of public information, especially economical: employers salary or expends, the lesser cases involving corruption (DiRienzo, Das, Cort, & Burbridge, 2007). This assumption gets stronger if we consider the increasing levels of connectivity, mainly the mobile one around the world. More people can access to social networks and others digital spaces. But not just public information can be under scrutiny in virtual social media. In Mexico, it is becoming more common to share in Facebook or Twitter information about particular cases of corruption, many of them about nepotism. Social networks give an alternative voice for citizens. Under this context, traditional media is compelling for improving its methods of working and to offer a better service to society (Arpit, 2012).

Virtual social networks like Facebook or Twitter have become a useful tool not only for expanding sociability but also to promoting commerce, political participation and government accountability. These sites replace traditional forms of government and citizen communication. Sometimes, they can even replace them totally. When a politician established a Facebook profile that space turns itself into an open window not only for promoting him, but also, in many occasions, for denouncing or arguing with him. In recent years, many local and federal public servers have lost their employ thanks to illegal acts, or immoral behavior denounced through social media.

The purpose of this research is to explore the power of ICT in decreasing corruption in Mexico. Special attention will be paid to the role of social networks or social media in helping citizens to censure corruption acts. For methodological reasons some considerations were taken on account for selecting the cases. The first one was that only were selected incidents published anonymously on social media, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and so on. There are many similar cases depicting government mal behavior that were first made public on traditional media and then went online. However, this paper centers its aim in showing how social media could be a better instrument for promoting accountability because it does not require the involvement of traditional media like television or radio. The next consideration stands on the fact that the whole chosen cases involved the unrecognizability and privacy of the original publisher, this circumstance is extremely important because anonymity protects citizen from a reprisal for his action, so the possibility of being protected by not revealing their identity encourages people to denounce.

The core of this investigation stands in recollecting anonymous actions that have support the uncovering of corruption acts and its subsequent legal or moral punishment. Fieldwork data gives important evidences about how Internet and social networks are becoming as important as traditional media, like radio or TV, for politician's public image. Social media have arrived as a new and strong public field for denouncing and consequently dismiss corruption acts. One of the main goals of the article is to find a correlation between the growing use of social media (social networks) in Mexico and the rising number of corruption cases uncovered and penalized. In order to gather the data, a one-year fieldwork was conducted for obtaining evidence about corruption cases from radio news, newspapers, television and Internet. The social networks under scrutiny were Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. However, due to the mutating nature of social media one incident appeared simultaneously in more than one network. Even though, several cases were under review, just some of them were selected; the principal aim was to collect incidents that were broadcasted around Mexico, mainly well known cases. Another condition was that the incident must have been transmitted by more than one media enterprise, avoiding falling into an information slant.

About 17 cases were well documented, all of them concerning public functionaries or their relatives. Every case ends in a penalization; in most of them was the ending of employment relationship. Some others cases (*Ladies Polanco and Lady Chiles*), in spite of being famous, were not considered for this research because they have not relation with public administration. Anyway, they are interesting because they show how severely people can punish disclosed acts in social networks. All incidents occurred among 2011 and 2014, in plain progression of social media adoption in Mexico. The Internet users has grown so greatly in the country that in a matter of less than a decade, the percentage has spread from 20.2 to 51.2 millions of users (Asociación Mexicana de Internet, 2014). This means that almost 50% of the people in the country can access to the Net. The use of social networks has become in 2014 the main online activity by Internet users, 9 of 10 users share information using social media, surpassing the use of e-mail and instant messaging. Actually, there are about 23 million of Facebook accounts in Mexico.

The gathered information was allocated according to the kind of corruption case observed, and they were distributed under the following categories: immoral behavior, bribery and nepotism. In every category, the information was distributed according the following parameters: a) Employment, b) Sex, c) The kind of act committed, d) A brief description of the act, f) Date, g) Place, h) In which network was recorded the event, i) If there was a penalty and J) the kind of penalty suffered.

After information distribution was accomplished, the next step was disposing the data and explains the final results.

## Analysis and Results

From the 17 cases documented, 15 of them were related with immoral acts: from jokes and mocking behavior against citizens to sexual acts at office. Just one case was connected to bribery and the other one was concerning to nepotism. Seven cases were about sexual matter, from having sex to posting erotic photos in Facebook. It is interesting to note how grave is considered sexual misconduct in workplace as a cause for firing people. This gives us an indication about how this matter continues being a strong moral and taboo topic inside Mexican society; sometimes this behavior was punished the same way as bribery.

The rest of immoral cases (8) were linked with insults and jokes from public functionaries to citizens. It is not abnormal to discover that this misconduct is denounced constantly in Internet. People in Mexico have a deep feeling that public functionaries feel themselves untouchable and frequently act above the law. Citizens get angry when a politician or employer abused of his power, especially when they mock or insult them. One of the most notable cases collected is related with a commerce supervisor who was taped insulting and humiliating a young street hawker. Regarding the sex of public employers, there were 7 situations involving women and 8 concerning men. In cases related with sexuality and jokes/insults, females and males share almost the same amount, so there was no evidence that could lead to assert that there is a predisposition to commit a specific act depending of the gender.

The social network most used for uncovering cases was YouTube with 9 audio and video files shared; next one was Facebook with 6 and finally Twitter with 2. But sometimes one case was distributed in more that one network. The use of social media for sharing this kind of information has grown partly because people have adopted it massively and feels comfortable using it, and partly due to the fact that information spread faster and it is difficult to delete it after it was made public.

Considering the great number of incidents involving YouTube, many of them related with bureaucrats being recorded at office, this could indicate that in some cases the subjects were taped by their chiefs, coworkers or political adversaries, looking for taking advance in a political campaign and occasionally because a reprisal. Social media has proved to be an important way for maximizing political and social dishonors.

When focusing on date and place, data provides important information: All incidents happened between 2011-2014. But 11 of them occurred in 2014, this indicates that the tendency to uncover cases using social networks will increase in the next years. When locating incidents, it shows that all occurred in the South of Mexico, states of Veracruz, Campeche and Oaxaca; in the Occident, states of Jalisco and Nayarit and in Central region of Mexico, Queretaro, State of Mexico and Mexico D.F. There were no corruption cases registered in the North part of the country. This could have one plausible explanation: in the North of Mexico a great part of public agenda in media is about narcotrafic news. Besides Guerrero and Michoacán, many states on the north suffer deeply this problem, so when news about corruption appears it has only a little cover from media.

Finally, two important considerations from fieldwork have to be taken on account. 1) All acts derived in a penalization. In fact, social networks used for punishing misconducts resulted in a more efficient way for uncovering and reprimanding bad functionaries. And in spite of the fact that almost all cases were not related with bribery, the immoral nature was enough to punish the act with an equal sanction, mainly dismissing the employer. 2) “As a rotten fruit that must be cut”, virtually all employers were removed from their jobs. However, no matter how efficient are denouncing acts by Internet, we have to set the question that if posting sexual photos on Facebook has to be equally punished as bribery, using drugs at work or stealing?

## Discussion and conclusions

For many years, corruption has been partially hidden in Mexico by traditional media, television, radio and newspapers, sometimes those media give poor covering to corruption acts, occasionally distorting facts or in the worse cases, communicate false information. Traditional media enterprises constitute a “factual power” that can manipulate news according political and economical interests. This was the situation for decade a strong monopoly of communication media, where the State could censor the information that circulate and to construct a public agenda according its conveniences. But some thought-provoking changes have occurred in few years.

In 2004, a video depicting Rene Bejarano, a closed collaborator of Manuel López Obrador, a former candidate to Mexican presidency, receiving bribery from entrepreneur Carlos Ahumada, cost Obrador, who was leading the preferential voting, the victory. This occurred not just because the bribery by itself, corruption is so commune that it is so difficult to scandalize (Morris, 2008). This event had a strong impact in Mexico because reputation and respectability, even unrealistic, is an important asset in political profession. So the bribery hit strong not for being unethical, but to become uncovered to public opinion.

In recent years, there have been appearing more cases like Bejarano’s one, but they do not need to be in national television but to be shared by Facebook or Twitter. Sometimes replication was so quickly that it reached a huge public before television or radio. Reducing corruption, improving transparency and applying new ways of establishing accountability mechanism is determinant for creating an atmosphere of good government and to increase the quality of life of citizens. But Sometimes traditional media, institutions and endemic corruption practices limit the impact of policy actions. Internet has arisen as a possible alternative for reducing dishonesty acts. Social media provides a new form for engaging citizens, sharing information, promoting debates and denouncing illegal acts (Bonsón, Torres, Royo, & Flores, 2012).

Social media stands as a galore of online tools, which helps to collaborate, interacts, create and dialogue between users. These tools have proved to been so successful because they are almost free of cost, they are present in almost all countries, and they are no subject of particular censorship, except in some states with authoritarian governments, and they facilitate the fast replication of information between users (Bonsón et al., 2012). Using them can help to reduce corruption, allowing direct interactions between citizens and anticorruption government agencies, in certain contexts can be a safer channel for sending information about illegal acts and narcotrafic. The easier access to social networks facilitates the spread of citizen journalism, giving an alternative media space for denouncing acts, replacing corrupt or deficient local media (Bertot et al., 2010). As Mexican society has increased their independence from traditional media, people have had access to alternative media and discourse, so the huge increase of corruption cases in 2014 shows a tendency that will get stronger in the next years, however this trend can not be explained only in terms of technological change and the use of social media, it is mandatory to point that a strong and demanding civil society has emerged in the last decades, creating in between many associations, several of them have taken advance of the new technologies for spreading their agenda and organizing their actions. In this new strategy of public denunciation one the key factors are the facility to publish information anonymously and without the fear of being punished by doing so. Another one, it is related with the fact that use of mobile devices with recording camera protects people from the arbitrary use of public force. By now, there cheap and versatile devices to record immoral functionaries and preserve their acts as evidence for public and legal denunciation. By these days, politicians and public employers are aware that Internet is almost as important as television and radio, but it is more difficult to control and skip the final results of negative publicity on social media. What all cases depicted in this article show is that public employees must be aware that technologies like social media and mobile devices give citizen new

weapons for demanding better public services and proper behavior from public functionaries. Corruption acts like bribery, immoral acts and nepotism are more wide known and sever punished, by now, Mexican government has to deal with a less quiet and more exigent civil society.

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### Appendices. A. Table of Cases.

Employment	Sex	Kind of act	A brief description of the act	Date	Place	In which network was recorded the event	There was a penalty?	Kind of penalty
Bureaucrat	Man	Immoral	Using drugs in work place	2014	Veracruz	Video on YouTube	Yes	The person was fired
Two bureaucrats	Man and woman	Immoral	Having sex on work place.	2014	State of Mexico	Video on YouTube	Yes	The two people were fired
Bureaucrat	Man	Immoral	Posting sexual images on his Facebook wall	2014	Oaxaca	Facebook	Yes	The person was fired
Bureaucrat	Man and woman	Immoral	Having sex on workplace.	2014	Campeche	YouTube	Yes	The person was fired
Relative of bureaucrat	Man	Immoral	Driving under alcohol effects and trying scape from authorities	2014	Jalisco	YouTube	Yes	Temporal arrest for 36 hrs. / Public apologies

Politician	Man	Immoral	Writing racist insults against a black soccer player	2014	Queretaro	Twitter	Yes	Possible expulsion from political party/public apologies
Bureaucrat	Woman	Immoral	Making jokes about patients in a public hospital	2014	Nayarit	Facebook	Yes	The person was fired
Bureaucrat	Woman	Immoral	Posting sexual images of herself on Facebook	2014	Veracruz	Facebook	Yes	The person was fired
Bureaucrat	Woman	Bribery	Was Recorded on audio talking about bribery business about public cemeteries	2014	Jalisco	Audio posted on YouTube	Yes	The person was forced to present his renounce
Politicians	Men	Immoral	Several Politicians was recorded dancing with hookers on a party paid with public funds.	2014	Jalisco	YouTube	Yes	Public apologies
Politicians	Men	Immoral	Two Mexican politicians were arrested on Brazil during Soccer World Cup, accused of hitting a Brazilian citizen and sexual assault his wife.	2014	Pernambuco, Brazil	YouTube and Facebook	Yes	Actually they get fire of his employment in Mexico and they are now under penal process in Brazil.
Politician	Man	Immoral	Driving under alcohol effects	2013	Mexico, D.F.	YouTube	Yes	Temporal arrest for 36 hrs. / Public apologies
Bureaucrat	Man	Immoral	Humiliating a young hawker on street.	2013	Tabasco	YouTube	Yes	The person was fired
Relative of bureaucrat	Woman	Nepotism	Threat against a restaurant owner because he does not give her a table (there was not reservation)	2013	Mexico, D.F.	Twitter	Yes	The bureaucrat was force to renounced because his relative 'action/ Public apologies
Bureaucrat	Man and woman	Immoral	Having sex in work place.	2012	Nayarit	Facebook	Yes	The person was forced to present his renounce
Relative of bureaucrat	Woman	Immoral	Insulting citizens on Twitter	2011	Mexico, D.F.	Twitter	Yes	Public apologies