Master Thesis

The role of social media in the rise of the social movement #Yosoy132

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1. Introduction

All over the world new social movements are emerging in countries like Mexico (Yosoy132), Spain (15M), the US (Occupy Wall Street) and Egypt (The Egyptian Uprising of 2011). They are all sharing discourses, strategies and a new global culture of mobilization.

The purpose of this thesis is to carry out an analysis of the role of social media in the Mexican student movement #Yosoy132. For the analysis I will first present the theories of technological optimism, technological pessimism and the public sphere, then I will discuss the validness of each of these theories applied the #Yosoy132 movement. The analysis will be based on books, articles and interviews with some of the members of the movement. I also want to discuss how the related ideals of de centralization and horizontalism affected the movement.

1.1. #Yo Soy 132

On the 11th of May 2012 the Mexican politician Enrique Peña Nieto visited the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. The visit was a part of his campaign as he was running for presidency for his party, the PRI, in the election that was to be held on the 2nd of July. The candidate probably expected an easy day at work giving a speech in front of a group of middle class students not known for being particularly rebellious. But if that was the case, he was terribly wrong. The event ended in disaster as the candidate ended up hiding in the bathroom trying to escape from the furious crowd of students. The background for the anger was the so called Atenco Incident, in which then-governor of the State of Mexico, the
candidate, called in the state police to break up a protest by local residents. Among the consequences of this incident was the death of three civilians, 200 people were arrested and 26 women reported being sexually abused [16].

The discontent of the students was not diminished by the comment by Pedro Coldwell, the president of PRI, that the students had acted without any respect and that some of the rebels probably had been paid to initiate the chaos. In addition the students could with disbelief see that some media reported that the visit had been a success for the candidate. As a reaction to the accusations from PRI, one hundred and thirty-one students made a video appearing with their students ID’s assuring that they had been a part of the protest at the university and that they had not been paid by anybody. The video was published on Youtube. In order to show support to the group in the video people started tweeting “Yo soy 132”, “I am number 132”. A movement was born.

For many years the youth of Mexico has stayed quiet and seemed indifferent to the political system. With the creation the #Yosoy132 movement the youth has shown that they are awake and that they are willing to fight for a better democracy. It has also given an important identity and perhaps a greater perception of unity to the young generation. For example it managed to break down the barrier between public and private universities. To a great extent the movement succeeded in achieving one of its main goals, namely to put focus on the democratization of the media. An example worth mentioning was the second presidential debate before the elections. The dominating TV companies, Televisa and TV Azteca were originally planning to broadcast the debate on minor channels with less than national coverage. In the end, however, they agreed to publish it on their main channels after being challenged by the movement to do so.

1.2. Justification and Relevance of the Thesis

I have interest for the topic because I can identify myself with the participants of the movement. The movement was formed by university students, in the area of communication science, the same as I am studying. And also, for me it is exciting to see
that these students are interested in and worried about the situation in my country, both in the politics and in the media.

To justify the necessity and relevance for this project, it might be said that the protest movements nowadays are utilizing social media technology like never before. At the same time this technology is given a lot of credit and hyped as promoting political change. To be able to understand the contemporary movements it is important to investigate how social media may change their structure and how they are organized.

1.3. Research Questions

1) What were the key factors in the success of the movement?
2) What was the role of communication technology?
3) How did the use of social media affect the movement?
4) What was the role of traditional media?

Finally I will compare this movement with some other groups, which are also using social media like M15 in Spain which I believe is the most similar movement to #Yosoy132.

1.4. Definitions

Our study of movement dynamics has led us to identify five key factors which are operationally significant and which we believe must be present and interacting before a collectivity of whatever size becomes a true movement. These five key factors are:

1. A segmented, usually polycephalous, cellular organization composed of units reticulated by various personal, structural, and ideological ties.

2. Face-to-face recruitment by committed individuals using their own pre-existing, significant social relationships.
3. Personal commitment generated by an actor or an experience which separates a convert in some significant way from the established order (or his previous place in it), identifies him with a new set of values, and commits him to changed patterns of behavior.

4. An ideology which codifies values and goals, provides a conceptual framework by which all experiences or events relative to these goals may be interpreted, motivates and provides rationale for envisioned changes, defines the opposition, and forms the basis for conceptual unification of a segmented network of groups.

5. Real or perceived opposition from a society at large or from that segment of the established order within which the movement has arisen.

Social Movement

Social movement is defined as a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities. According to Melucci Collective identity is the share definition of a group that derives from member’s common interest, experiences and solidarity (Melucci).

Social Media

Anja Bechman and Stine Lomborg who define social media highlight three characteristics. First the ability each user has to make, contribute, filter and share content means “communication is de-institutionalized”. Second the user is seen as producer and participant. Third, “interaction and networked” describe the communication between users and their shifting roles (Gun Enli).

1.5. Theoretical Framework
1.5.1. Public Sphere Theory

The German philosopher and sociologist Jurgen Habermas is known as the father of the public sphere theory. Among his most famous works is “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere”. This book describes the development of bourgeois public sphere in Western Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to Habermas the development of the public sphere was driven by the growing bourgeois class’ need of laws and predictability to protect their interests. Habermas was also one of the most important contributors to the perspective of the deliberative democracy which settled that conversation and communication are essential in a functional democracy.

The Swedish Professor of Media and Communication, Peter Dahlgren defines a functioning public sphere as “a constellation of communicative spaces in society that permit the circulation of information, ideas, debates and also the formation of political will (i.e., public opinion)” (Dahlgren, 2005). For his analysis, Dahlgren settled that the public sphere consist of three constitutive dimensions: structures, representation and interaction. The structural dimension includes economy, ownership, control, regulation and legal framework. Applied to internet this dimension regards to how the communicative spaces relevant for democracy are accessible for civic use. Factors influencing the accessibility include legal, social, economic, cultural and technical features. There are, for example, many less developed countries with low internet penetration rate. There are also countries where certain social media are illegal.

The representational dimension refers to the output of the media and includes fairness, accuracy, completeness, pluralism of views, agenda setting, ideological tendencies etc. On internet, basically everybody with a computer and connection can publish their opinions. As Shirky puts it: “Everyone is a media outlet” (Shirky, 2008). It is therefore obvious that internet allows for greater pluralism of views than traditional media. In the same manner it also allows for opinions representing all kinds of ideologies.
The interactional dimension consists of two aspects. First it is about how the citizens interprets and uses the output of the media. The second is the interaction between the citizens themselves. This can be anything from two person conversation to large meetings (Dahlgren, 2005). Regarding interaction the internet allows for a new type of communication: many to many.

For a democracy to be functional, the interactional dimension, i.e. civic discussion is of prime importance. The theory of deliberative democracy presents an ideal as to how such a discussion should be carried out. The main idea is to have open discussion aimed at achieving rationally motivated consensus (Dahlgren, 2005). Not surprisingly, recent research has shown that online discussions do not always follow the high ideals set for deliberative democracy (Dahlgren, 2005). Speech is not always so rational, tolerance toward those who hold opposing views is at times wanting, and the forms of interaction are not always so civil (Wilhelm, 2000). Often people express their opinions without supporting arguments.

The Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells is another important contributor to social science. He has written many books about information society, communication and globalization, and he is the most cited academic in works regarding information and communication technology. According to Castells, ”it is the interaction between citizens, civil society and the state, communicating through the public sphere, which ensures that the balance between stability and social change is maintained in the conduct of public affairs. If citizens, civil society, or the state fail to fulfill the demands of this interaction, or if the channels of communication between two or more of the key components of the process are blocked, the whole system of representation and decision making comes to a stalemate. A crisis of legitimacy follows because citizens do not recognize themselves in the institutions of society.” (Castells, The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance, 2008)

Castells calls Mass Self-Communication “the diffusion of internet, mobile communication, digital media, and a variety of tools of social software has prompted the development of
horizontal networks of interactive communication that connect local and global in chosen
time” (Castells, 2009). He further explains that this new form of socialized communication
is symbolized by the capacity of sending messages from many to many. The messages are
self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception.

Related to social movements, Castells settled that the mass self-communication offers “an
extraordinary medium to build their autonomy and confront the institutions of society in
their own terms and around their own projects. Naturally, social movements are not
originated by technology, they use technology. But technology is not a simple tool, it is a
medium, it is a social construction, with its own implications. Furthermore, the
development of the technology of self-communication is also the product of our culture, a
culture that emphasizes individual autonomy, and the self-construction of the project of the
social actor” (Castells, 2009).

He also argues that the same technology offers the global civil society the possibility to
exist independently from political institutions and from the mass media. However, the
capacity of social movements to change the public mind still depends, to a large extent, on
their ability to shape the debate in the public sphere (Castells, The New Public Sphere:
Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance, 2008).

1.5.2. Technological optimism

Technological optimism is the belief that technological development generally has
beneficial effects for the society and the human condition, “Technology is society, and
society cannot be understood or represented without its technological tools” (Castells,
1996).

Applied to social movements technological optimism, suggests that the movements are
created because of the existence of technology, in this case social media. One of the biggest
contributors to this view is NYU professor Clay Shirky. In one of his books called “Here
comes everybody: The power of organizing without organizations” he explains “what
happens when people are given the tools to do things together, without needing traditional organizational structures”.

This view has also been widely accepted by the media, maybe especially in the case of the uprisings in Egypt. From CNN to the BBC, “Facebook protest” or “Twitter protest” became obsessively repeated catch-phrases during the 18 day revolution that brought down Mubarak. After Mubarak fell, Egyptian bloggers and tweets like Gigi Ibrahim and Sandmonkey were instantly cast as the celebrities, or “micro-celebrities”, of an otherwise supposedly “leaderless” social movement, while new shows Al-Jazeera English’s The Stream where created to applaud the emancipator power of social media.

Manuel Castells’s network theory can be used to explain how the characteristics of social networks can be valuable for political activism, through the creation of weak ties, the anonymity provided by the Internet, and the egalitarian nature of online communication. “Weak ties are useful in providing information and opening up opportunities at a low cost. The advantage of the Net is that it allows the forging of weak ties with strangers, in an egalitarian pattern of interaction where social characteristics are less influential in framing, or even blocking communication” (Castells, 1996)

1.5.3. Technological pessimism

Technological pessimism is the belief that advances in science and technology do not lead to an improvement in the human condition. Applied to social movements, this theory suggests that the role of social media has been exaggerated and that its role in social movements is quite limited.

One of the main contributors to this view is the British-Canadian journalist Malcolm Gladwell. He argues that lack of communication seldom has limited the creation of movements. In an interview on CNN (CNN) he mentions the mobilization in East Berlin in 1989. Even though only 13% of the population had a telephone, millions of people gathered in the streets. In an article in The New Yorker (Gladwell, 2010) he mentions another
example from the Afro-American civil rights movement. In less than a month a protest that started with four students reached seventy thousand. He argues that these events happened without e-mail, texting, Facebook or Twitter. In a Canadian technology conference he asked the audience: “What would have happened to Castro if he had had Twitter and Facebook? Would he have gone to the trouble of putting together an extraordinary network that allowed him to defeat Batista?”

Another technological pessimist is the Belarusian writer and researcher Evgeny Morozov. In respect to the influence of internet on democracies he claims that the internet also has a “dark side”. He presents these views in a book called “The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom”. In this book he explains how authoritarian regimes use the internet actively to keep control and repress opposition.

In London the Prime Minister David Cameron announced "Everyone watching these horrific actions will be struck by how they were organized via social media. Free flow of information can be used for good. But it can also be used for ill" [25], said Cameron.

2. Method

For social research there are five major research designs (Bryman, 2012): experimental, cross-sectional, longitudinal, case study and comparative. In this work I will use the case study design. The reason for choosing this design is that I will focus on social media’s role in one specific social movement (#Yosoy132). The movement hence becomes an object of interest on its own. Generalizing a case study doesn’t consist in a “statistic generalization” as in the surveys or experiments, but it consists in an “analytic generalization” (using the case study to illustrate, represent or generalize a theory). A common concern related to the case study design is the external validity or generalizability of its results.

The key questions ask for a deep analysis which requires a qualitative research strategy. The qualitative method is a method for generating knowledge where the researcher
investigates which meaning certain happenings and experiences has for the people experiencing them, and how this can be interpreted or understood by others. Opposite of the quantitative method, the qualitative method typically investigates a few occurrences instead of many, and it investigates why and how, not just what, where and when.

The purpose of the thesis will be to understand the role of social media in the case of #Yosoy132 movement having as a platform the techno-optimism, techno-pessimism theory and the public sphere theory. We are hence talking about understanding more about why and how the social media is used rather than where and when. I therefore believe that the qualitative method will be better to use than the quantitative method.

Interview Guide

According to Alan Bryman in a qualitative interviewing, there is much greater interest in the interviewee’s point of view; it tends to be flexible, responding to the direction in which interviewees take the interview and perhaps adjusting the emphases in the research as a result of significant issues that emerge in the course of interviews (Bryman, 2012). Also, in a qualitative interview the researcher wants longer and more detailed answers as opposed to a quantitative interview where the researcher often wants short answers that can be presented statistically.

The carrying out of interviews is an important element to recollect information and analyze the case. Realize interviews to the main spokesperson of the movement, academics, journalists and also students who were actively participating in the protest and who were most actively using the social media tools. It is important to know what they say and their experiences, attitudes, believes and reflections expressed by them.

I want to follow the semi-structured interview having a list of questions, but also having the option to create new questions in the course of the interview.

Possible questions:

1. - What were the key factors in the success of the movement?
   a) What are the requirements/fundamentals for social movements?
b) Which circumstances do you think triggered the creation of the movement?

c) What was the motivational force driving the people?

d) How were movements organized before internet?

e) What were the main achievements of the movement?

f) What were the main factors that contributed to the success of the movement?

g) The role of the spokespersons?

h) The role of political and social conditions that motivated the development of the movement?

2. – What was the role of communication technology?

   a) What kind of technology was used and how?

   b) What kind of social media was used and how?

   c) Which social media tools were seen as most effective in promoting this organization?

   d) How important was SM in creating participation?

   e) How important was SM in promoting awareness?

   f) How important was SM in promoting motivation amongst people?

3. - How did the use of social media affect the movement?

   a) How did the horizontal and decentralized structure affect the movement?

   b) Do you believe the movement would have been created without social media?

   c) What were the differences between yosoy132 and the 68 student movement regarding organization and structure?

   d) What has been the role of social media in other contemporary movements?

   e) What are the limitations of social media in the movements?

4. - What was the role of traditional media?

   a) How did the traditional media cover the movement?

   b) What was the perspective of the newspapers La Jornada and El Universal?
As a second methodological approach I will make an analysis of the perspectives two Mexican newspapers had on the movement. I have chosen La Jornada because it is left-wing and El Universal which is conservative/right-wing.

**Ethic**

I will try staying neutral and avoiding giving preference, rather I would try to be more neutral and respond base on the investigation.

All interview objects must agree that their answers can be used in the thesis. Respect wishes of anonymity.

### 3. Long background

**Media in Mexico**

In the last two decades, the media in Mexico has moved from an authoritarian institution to a hybrid system. Authoritarian institution that for several decades has had the next characteristics: media access inequality, concentration of ownership, market share and advertising and regulatory weakness. The hybrid system however shows market-driven, oligarchic, propagandistic, ideological, civic elements and diversity rather than uniformity in journalistic norm is relatively new [7].

In average 95% of the population in Mexico has television. The biggest private TV companies in Mexico are Televisa and TV Azteca; these are recognized by their soap operas and entertainment. The channels which are owned by the state are Channel 11 and Channel 22 which broadcast cultural programs. The newest private network in Mexico is Cadena 3 with some cultural programs, news and American series. All of these channels have national coverage. That said, Televisa and TV Azteca still control 95% of the frequencies and are hence called a duopoly.
The Mexican television is recognized for its large productions of entertainment. Its soap operas are popular in all Latin America and even in countries like Vietnam, Russia and other eastern European and Asian countries. The soap operas can actually be considered a quite important part of Mexican culture.

Unlike the situation of the television market, the newspaper market more diversified both in quantity and political opinions. However for people with lower incomes and residence outside the major cities it is more difficult to obtain diverse view points and verified information. Access to diverse perspective in the media increases the ability to purchase the elite press, cable and internet in all parts of the country (IPSO-BIMSA 2005; Consejo de Investigación de Medios - Media Research Council 2006). While internet use has grown, its reach is still limited and new media development has been slower because of market concentration[7].

According to the Mexican Association of Internet (AMIPCI) there are currently almost 46 million users of internet in Mexico [9]. The most visited social media are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Google + and hi5. In Latin America, Mexico occupies the first place of users in Facebook and the fifth place in the world [12].

The I am #Yosoy132 movement

The “I am #132” movement was created by students of the Ibero-American University (UIA) in Mexico. The movement is centered around the democratization of the country and its media. It started as a protest when Enrique Peña Nieto visited their university the 11th of May 2012. The background for the protests was the Atenco Incident, in which then-governor of the State of Mexico, Peña Nieto, called in the state police to break up a protest by local residents. Among the consequences of this incident was the death of three civilians, 200 people were arrested and 26 women reported being sexually abused [16]. He insisted that he would do it again to defend the “rule of law”. The protests were so aggressive that the candidate had to leave the campus together with his bodyguards. The
students used their smart phones to film the incident and it was immediately published through social media.

The traditional media such as Televisa and TV Azteca did not dedicate much time to the incident. Some newspapers even published articles stating that Peña Nieto’s visit to the university had been a great success[14]. This regarded especially to the newspapers owned by Organizacion Editorial Mexicana (OEM), a private company that owns a news agency, 70 newspapers, 24 radio stations, one television channel and 44 internet pages [17]. They did, however, try to give the impression that the protest had been started by rebels and paid people. In addition the president of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) Pedro Joaquin Coldwell called the students political puppets and said they had been placed there to heckle Peña Nieto. As a reaction to these accusations some of the students maid a video where 131 students appear with their students ID’s assuring that their where a part of the protest at the university and that they were not paid by anybody. They then published the video in YouTube [15]. Six hours later have been seen by 21 747 viewers.

The first mass protests were held on the 19th of May and were against Televisa and Peña Nieto. They were organized by Twitter and Facebook and were held in at least 17 cities simultaneously led by students of different colleges. In Mexico City there were at least 46 000 protesters [15]. On the 23rd of May and the 10th of June there other protests, the first one against Televisa and the second one against Peña Nieto. In the beginning Televisa media did not give much coverage, but when they understood the magnitude of the movement they started to give coverage. The network even invited the spokesman of the movement to speak in one of the most popular news programs. Some of the protests were also covered by international newspapers and TV networks like The Washington Post, The Guardian, BBC and Al Jazeera.

The movement asked IFE to organize a third debate. When IFE declines the request, the movement decided to organize the debate themselves. The debate was held on the 19th of June with Vazquez Mota, Quadri and Lopez Obrador. Peña Nieto declined the invitation
saying that “the movement had adopted a political position against him and his policies” [22].

On May 23, 2012, the movement released its manifesto. An excerpt from it states: [16]

"First – we are a nonpartisan movement of citizens. As such, we do not express support of any candidate or political party, but rather respect the plurality and diversity of this movement's participants. Our wishes and demands are centered on the defense of Mexican’s freedom of expression and their right for information, in that these two elements are essential to forming an aware and participating citizenry. For the same reasons, we support informed and well-thought out voting. We believe that under the present political circumstances, abstaining or making a null vote is ineffective in promoting the edification of our democracy. We are a movement committed to the country's democratization, and as such, we hold that a necessary condition for this goal is the democratization of the media. This commitment derives from the current state of the national press and from the concentration of the media outlets in few hands".

"Second – YoSoy132 is an inclusive movement which does not represent one single university. Its representation depends only on the persons who join this cause and form connections among the university committees".

Objectives/ideology of the movement

1. Democratization and transformation of the communication media.
2. Change in the education system, science and technology.
3. Change in the neoliberal model.
4. Change in the national security model.
5. Transformation between the political entailment and social movements.
The movement seeks to prevent that a presidential candidate can be imposed by the country’s oligarchy and the powers of the government (Executive, Legislative and Judicial), and is organized in order to respond to a possible electoral fraud.

The movement seeks, as one of its most important tasks, to democratize the media. That means to stop them from being used as instruments of alienation, manipulation and domination of the population and to serve as a space for social development, promote education, culture of high quality and the development of their contents. Promote the removal of television and radio concessions to companies that do not comply with the proper use of such concessions established by the law, and oppose against the use of contents of bad influence [19].

The main thrust of the yosoy132 movement was also not only against Peña Nieto but against a history of corruption and oppression associated with the PRI (from Tlatelolco 1968 to Atenco 2006) and against the monopoly of big companies over people’s lives that was best exemplified for many by the media duopoly of Aztec and Televisa.

4. Other movements

4.1. 15-M / Indignados

The movement 15-M

On the 15th of May 2011 demonstrations were held in 58 spanish cities and Spain hence became the first place in the western world to host protests inspired by the "Tahrir model". This country was one of the worst affected in Europe by the global economic crisis and the youth unemployment reached 43,5% by the end of March this year [wiki]. Since September 2010 there had been strikes and demonstrations all over Spain against various reforms launched by the government. During these months several smaller movements were created: Juventud Sin Futuro (Youth without Future), Estado de Malestar (Badfare State),
Plataforma de Afectados por Hipoteca (Platform for Mortgage Victims) and Democracia Real Ya (Real Democracy Now). While all these movements played a role in the preparation of the 15-M protests, the Democracia Real Ya (DRY) group was the most important and came to act as a focal point in the process of creating the 15-M movement. The DRY movement was established online as a reaction to the austerity and corruption. Claiming to be politically neutral, the purpose was to represent all those people who regardless of their political beliefs and lifestyles were affected by the economic crisis and the politics of austerity imposed by Zapatero's government.

The DRY movement was mainly initiated by two young activists, Fabio Gandara and Pablo Gallego. In October 2010 Gandara published a manifesto a Facebook group called "Yo soy un/a joven español/a que quiere luchar por su futuro" (I am a young Spaniard who wants to fight for his future). Unaware of Gandara's manifesto, in early 2011, Gallego published his own on his personal blog. Gandara came across Gallego's manifesto and together they decided to set up a new Facebook group called "Plataforma de coordinacion de grupos pro-movilizacion ciudadana" (platform for the coordination of groups for a civic mobilization). According to Gandara, the strategy agreed within the group was to "use the power of the internet and the structure of the web to organize ourselves at the state level and develop a civic mobilization for mass protest in the whole of Spain"[20].

The group was created in early March 2011. In the following months the group worked to attract people. They entered internet forums of social and political discussion, they added comments to Facebook groups and they sent e-mails to associations, NGOs and political groups telling them about the idea. They launched the 15th of May date for the first protest just a few days after creating the page. Little by little the groups popularity increased as they managed to transform individual sentiments of anger into a collective identity by a desire to take back the streets after years of demobilization.

In addition to the DRY page, there was a lot of activity on other Facebook pages, blogs and websites, that eageared people to participate. Twitter also played an important role getting attention to the movement and enabling communication activists, journalists, bloggers,
academics and sympathisers. The weeks before the 15th of Mai the hashtag #15M became trending topic several times on Spanish Twitter.

4.2. Egyptian Uprising

Comparisons between #Yosoy132 and other movements

Social movements such as #yosoy132 in Mexico and 15-M manifest concern for the democratization of the media to building a true democracy. Young starring familiar in the use of ICT, these movements reflect a generational and media conflict. The network culture, horizontal, participative and open spread their aspirations for “true” or "authentic" democracy facing hegemonic political culture of an authoritarian democracy based on a hierarchical and vertical media system.

The use of Facebook varies across the social movements. While the Website played a crucial role in the Egyptian uprising and the case of Spanish indignados, it has almost no role in the preparation phase of Occupy Wall Street.

5. Findings

6. Analysis

“The challenge of anyone analyzing how the Internet may affect the overall effectiveness of political activism, is first, to determine the kind of qualities and activities that are essential to the success of the democratic struggle in a particular country or context and second, to understand how a particular medium of campaigning or facilitating collective action affects those qualities and activities” (Morozov, 2011).
7. Conclusions

8. Literature

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