The #YoSoy132 movement and the struggle for media democratization in Mexico

Rodrigo Gómez

Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Cuajimalpa, Mexico

Emiliano Treré

Autonomous University of Querétaro, Mexico[i]

Abstract

In this article, we analyze through a political economy of communication lens the historical and political contexts in which the #YoSoy132 movement emerged, the Mexican media concentration system, and the possibilities offered by social media to young people, situating the issue of media democratization at the centre of the #YoSoy132 struggle. Drawing on two group and four individual interviews, we also focus on the dimension of students'

communication practices in order to provide a more nuanced evaluation of the role played by digital media inside the movement. By blending a political economy analysis with an exploration of media practices, we offer an in-depth understanding of how communication technologies were used and appropriated in order to democratize mainstream media, foster pluralism, and trigger important processes related to political culture within the Mexican context. We conclude by assessing the achievements as well as the challenges of #YoSoy132.

Keywords: #YoSoy132, social movements, Mexican media, media democratization, social media, media practices, political economy of communication

Combining media practices with a political economy perspective: framework, methods and overview

The social movement #YoSoy132 emerged as a strong social actor in 2012 during the Mexican presidential electoral campaign. Its relevance within the Mexican context has still to be properly assessed, but we can affirm that it has represented one of the most important movements of the last decades, at least in Latin America, for various reasons: it was able to profoundly impact the electoral process in a really short amount of time; it demonstrated that Mexican young people were not passive actors far from politics but were capable of producing

their own visions on democracy and pluralism; and it was able to impose discussion on media concentration and democratization within the institutions' agenda and the public sphere.

In the last ten years, we have witnessed a considerable proliferation of different approaches to digital activism, which have tried to make sense of the connections between new communication technologies and the uprising of mass mobilizations (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013; Candón Mena, 2013; Castells, 2012; Earl and Kimport 2011; Gerbaudo, 2012; Hands, 2011; Lievrouw, 2011; Juris, 2012). This article aims to contribute to this growing body of literature by applying an innovative approach (a combination of critical political economy of communication and an analysis of media practices) to an original case study (the understudied #YoSoy132 movement and their context). In order to offer a comprehensive view on the communication practices of the student movement and better understand its relevance inside the Mexican political, economical and socio-cultural dimensions, in this article we combine a critical political economy of communication analysis (Hesmondhalgh, 2013) of the Mexican media system with a bottom up exploration of #YoSoy132's media practices. The benefits of this combination have recently been pointed out in the literature (Barassi and Treré, 2012; Couldry, 2012). On one hand, political economy analysis investigates the macro dimension of social power relations and situates the emergence of this movement within broader political, economical and socio-cultural changes addressing

the processes of *structuration, commodification* and *spacialization* (Mosco, 2009). On the other hand, an approach that looks at the movements' media practices (Mattoni, 2012; McCurdy, 2011; Treré, 2012; Uldam and Askanius, 2013) is helpful to further articulate the role played by communication technologies from the points of view of the social actors involved in the protest. In order to gain an understanding of these media practices, two group interviews were carried out with activists from #YoSoy132 of Mexico City and with activists from Guadalajara.

Given the pivotal importance played by Mexico City in the development of the #YoSoy132 movement (and, in general, in some of the most important Mexican uprisings), we decided to carry out in the capital our first group interview that lasted approximately three hours. We interviewed nine students, most of them from the 'Media Democratization Taskforce' and included key informants, such as activists responsible for the management of social media platforms. The second group interview was carried out with seven #YoSoy132 activists from Guadalajara. We also included in the interviewee sample managers of social media platforms, and we also took into account alternative media creators that played an important role in the Guadalajara section of the movement. This second group interview lasted three and a half hours. We used the group interviews in order to see the movement's dynamics 'in action' as in the students' assemblies and meetings. We transcribed the interviews and

thematically analysed them (Flick, 2009). In order to deepen the understanding of important issues regarding the use of communication technologies that emerged from the interviews, we carried out individual interviews with three activists from Mexico City and one from Guadalajara. Moreover, the aim of the research and of the interviews in particular was to foster in activists a reflection on their own social practices in order to assess the pros and cons of their actions and improve the effectiveness of their activities in the future.

In the first section of this article, we analyse the Mexican political and media context where the movement arose; in the second section, we describe the emergence of the movement as a powerful social actor and agent in the context of the Mexican presidential elections; in the third section, we explore some of the ways through which #YoSoy132's activists used and appropriated communication technologies, in particular social media. In the final section, we assess the achievements as well as the challenges of this Mexican student movement.

The context: exploring the Mexican media and political system

The social movement #YoSoy132 came into sight in the Mexican political arena as a breath of fresh air in the context of the 2012 presidential electoral campaign, and, as we argue in this article, as a powerful social agent that enriched the political debate, not just during the presidential campaign, but in a wider sense the political culture and democracy trajectories of

Mexico. But before we evaluate #YoSoy132 as social agent and protest movement, it is important to explore briefly the socio-cultural, economic and political context in which it emerged.

First of all, it is important to point out that #YoSoy132, even though it can be considered a national movement, emerged in the heart of the political centre of Mexico, Mexico City (Federal District – DF), where all the political powers of the nation are established; but, at the same time since the institutional democratic transition began in the late 1990s in the country, it is one of the most organized city's in terms of political cultures, with significant presence and the work of many diverse NGOs and the most plural media system in Mexico (in the context of a high concentrated television system). Moreover, Mexico City is the base of the three federal public Universities - that are very active in political terms – and all the major private universities in the country have a campus in the city. Furthermore, it has an influential critical mass of intellectuals of all kinds of ideologies. In terms of the representation of political parties – as the citizens of the Federal District could elect their representatives (Government Chief, mayors, assembly members, delegates) since 1997 – the main left party has won all the local elections. The actual ruling party at the federal level, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), an old hegemonic party,[ii] has been a political minority since then.

That is the wider context in which the #YoSoy132 emerged, and now the particular context for that emergence has to be established too. The 2012 presidential electoral campaign was underway, and until then the surveys[iii] and the general opinion of the electoral process was that Enrique Peña Nieto, the PRI candidate was the clear favourite—leading with at least 20 percentage points. Nevertheless, some sectors of the left and political analysts considered that those surveys did not reflect the real state of the electorate.

We have to recall that in the last presidential campaign in 2006 the former Government Chief (Jefe de Gobierno) of Mexico City, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the candidate of a coalition of the left-wing parties lost the election with less than 1 percentage point against the candidate of the conservative National Action Party (PAN) Felipe Calderón.[iv] Another issue to consider was that Andrés Manuel López Obrador started the 2006 campaign with a 10-percentage point advantage and he lost that advantage, little by little, until the end of the electoral day. Because of that and other reasons,[v] those elections were some of the most controversial elections in Mexican history. With that context and Andrés Manuel running for the second time, many political sectors of the centre-wing and the left-wing were sceptical about accepting Peña Nieto's 20-point advantage. The other candidate, who was running with a chance for the presidency was Josefina Vazquez Mota of the PAN, the ruling government Party until 2012 (from 2001 to 2012).

Another issue that was on the table was related to the construction of Peña Nieto's image as a leader, who had had a lot of support and a favourable image in several local and national media during his administration as governor of the State of Mexico (2007-2012), especially by the influential and audience leader TV network 'Televisa' that repeatedly gave him much air time and positive coverage during his six-year mandate. There was even journalism evidence, presented by the British newspaper *The Guardian* that claimed that Televisa designed an undercover strategy to present Peña Nieto in their various TV news programs in a positive way and, at the same time, built a cover strategy against Andrés Manuel López Obrador (Tuckman, 2012). This issue was minimized by the mainstream media, especially by television media, during the campaign.

This issue gives us a clue to establishing an overview about the Mexican communication system and its concerns, especially related to the most influential media, the television. In Mexico the majority of the population consumes political information from television; according to the national survey of political culture in México, 76% of the population acquires political information from television (INEGI-SEGOB, 2012: 2). This industry is highly concentrated and dominated by two companies that concentrate 99% of the audience and advertising market: Televisa (69%) and TV Azteca (30%) (Huerta and Gómez, 2013). Furthermore, it has to be noted that public service is marginal and is not universally

accessible in the nation[vi]. The outcomes of this high TV concentration are first of all the lack of pluralism in most of the TV news programmes and secondly enormous symbolic power in the hands of Televisa and TV Azteca above of political parties and governments. These issues have been characterized by scholars as one of the failures of Mexican democracy (Sánchez Ruiz, 2004; Trejo, 2004).

Besides this analogue form of media consumption, we have to point out that the young urban middle classes, especially university students, are using digital media and especially social media more and more. According to social media monitoring company *Socialbakers* in 2012 Mexico had 34 million Facebook accounts, 10 million YouTube users and 12 million Twitter accounts. The total Internet users in the country numbered 45.1 million that year.[vii] But in terms of Internet house lines, the numbers actually decreased, as just 3.5 of every 10 households has a computer and connection to the Internet (Gómez et al., 2011). However, an interesting figure is that 43% of the users are between 12 and 24 years old. Finally, the average time per day of Internet consumption according to AMIPCI is 5 hours and 1 minute per user (AMIPCI, 2013). Based on this data, we conclude that the increase in media consumption in the last two years has to be related to smart phones and bandwidth; nevertheless, Mexico just has 10.7 million subscribers in that segment (Sigler, 2013). However,

it is important to examine this data because these devices are the most effective for mobile and multi-stakeholder communication in a convergent way.

This panorama of media consumption and of the social communication system of Mexico allow us to argue that the majority of the Mexican population are still in the "analogue" sphere − Broadcast media − and at the same time a very active and influential minority is in the digital sphere. Therefore, we have to think of Mexico in terms of two overlapping public spheres that interact in complex ways as a reflexion of the inequalities in the country. After having looked at the wider context in which the #YoSoy132 movement arose, we will address its emergence in the next section.

The emergence of the #YoSoy132 movement

The movement emerged after the PRI candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto, visited the private University Iberoamericana in Mexico City on May 11, 2012, where students confronted him and contested his record as governor of Mexico State. However, the event was given scant attention by the media and students protesting were dismissed by the PRI as impostors from rival parties. In that way, the mainstream media and PRI leaders constructed them as a counterpublic (Coleman and Ross, 2010). In response, 131 of the students created a YouTube video declaring themselves indeed as students against mainstream media and the PRI that

disqualified them (see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7XbocXsFkI). The video spread vastly through social media platforms (mainly Facebook and Twitter) in the major cities of the country as well as abroad where many Mexican students live (Reguillo, 2012). People started to support these students by saying: 'I'm one more of you', 'I'm 132'; therefore everybody who joined the social media protest was symbolically number 132 and the name #YoSoy132 stuck. First it became a trending topic on Twitter and after it was a powerful banner and name to one of the most powerful student movements around the country. In addition, while the movement has to be thought of as national, it has also been able to build transnational linkages with Mexican students abroad and support of other international collectives, thanks to the possibilities offered by the process of *spatialization* (see http://yoSoy132internacional.wikispaces.com/).

It is important to remark that the protest began in a private university, because until then private universities were considered, generally speaking, 'uncritical' and 'allied to mainstream media' as a condition of class. Because of that, the PRI and Televisa tried to persuade the students that Televisa and PRI were not undemocratic as they claimed and tried to confront the role of private and public university students in the #YoSoy132 organisation arguing that the public universities have taken control of the movement by clearly supporting López Obrador (This interview is an example:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9ldm2akQR4). In other words, if the protest had been carried out in a public university, mainstream media and the ruling political class might not have dedicated so much coverage and attention to the discussion because the stereotype linked to public Mexican universities is that they are 'leftist radicals'.

When media is the message: building new forms of communicative citizenship

After these circumstances, numerous university students began to identify with them and addressed the lack of plurality in the dominant TV media as the big issue, and started to organise in inter-university assemblies demanding the democratization of the Mexican media system in order to have real democratic and open elections (Sosa, 2012). According to them, Mexico's television coverage of the presidential election campaign was unfairly boosting the former ruling party and his candidate. Thus, since the beginning they challenged the TV duopoly, going especially against Televisa and the PRI candidate. Three weeks after the 131, #YoSoy132 launched a YouTube video with their manifesto (see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igxPudJF6nU). The document stated that (our translation from Spanish): 'one of the necessary conditions to correct the current Mexican situation is by empowering the citizen through information, because this allows to take better political, economical and social decisions'. The document went on by stating, 'For #YoSoy132 the right to communication and the right to freedom of expression are the most important demands'. In

particular, it is said later in the text that the movement 'wants the democratization of the mass media, in order to guarantee transparent information, plural and impartial to foster critical consciousness and thought' and 'requires that access to the Internet is included as a constitutional right'.

It is important to remark that the movement represented a powerful exercise of political communication (Wolton, 1992) by sharing, confronting and debating their ideas among heterogeneous groups. We would like to emphasize that #YoSoy132 has supposed a challenge in terms of the interaction between different political cultures and cultural practices among students of private and public universities in order to reach an understanding, consensus and set effective actions to communicate their demands. The capacity of #YoSoy132 in political terms is related to the political cultures of the different universities that constituted the movement. These political cultures played and interacted with each other and generated an interesting institutional design of the organisation, adopted the advantage and experience of many collectives that had expertise as activists - Mexican political culture has widely circulated this kind of grassroots political culture since the emergence of the Zapatista movement (EZLN) in 1994 – but at the same time they communicate with many others without any political and activist experience. These political cultures were the fertile ground to

generate this organisation and the possibility to build a manifesto, and social media the fertilizer to disseminate and communicate their ideas.

After one month of demonstrations, stunts, national inter-university assemblies, videos and debate around the media, the protesters attracted a lot of attention and became an important political actor and a social agent during the presidential campaign that was able to change the logic of the elections. First of all, for the first time, the movement catapulted the issue of the democratization of the Mexican media system to the forefront of the public and political agenda. Secondly, the agitators persuaded the two major national networks to broadcast the second presidential candidates' debate, as the first one was broadcast partially in the country because the TV groups Televisa and TV Azteca decided to use just their minor affiliate networks. Finally, they organized a third debate with the presidential candidates on June 19th, and it was the first one organised by civil society or any other organisation than the Federal Electorate Institute (IFE). They named it 'Debate plus 131'. This debate was broadcast on YouTube and by some public and university radios. According to the movement they had 112,000 contacts on YouTube streaming; however, Enrique Peña Nieto did not attend because he argued that there were no neutral conditions to carry out a debate (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txWoCr1EXyE).

Because they were able to gain such an impact in just one month, we could think of the #YoSoy132 movement as a social and political detonator that changed the logic of the presidential campaign and was able to situate the issue of the concentration and democratization of the media in the public agenda and the public spheres. Furthermore, they attracted the attention of the ruling class and the mainstream media. This impact on the nation was reflected in the national survey of political culture where 44% clearly identified #YoSoy132 as a political actor in August of the same year (INEGI-SEGOG, 2012: 4). The candidate Enrique Peña Nieto won anyway, regaining power for the revamped PRI,[viii] but he did not obtain the majority in the Congress. In some way that balance of political forces could be considered another possible impact or influence of #YoSoy132 in the senators and deputies elections.

After the election, on the 27th of July, movement activists camped for twenty-four hours outside Televisa's headquarters on Chapultepec Street in Mexico City. This symbolic event was the culmination of a march where different Mexican social actors converged with #YoSoy132, such as el Frente del Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra de San Salvador Atenco and the Mexican Electricians Union, along with individuals with no political affiliation. Screaming 'Peña Nieto no ganó, Televisa lo eligió' (Peña Nieto did not win, Televisa chose him) and with posters and with banners such as 'No aceptamos como futuro una sociedad

dirigida por la television' (We do not accept as our future a society governed by television), citizens expressed once again their grievances against the media and its power to directly influence political power. A few days later, the movement presented its 'contrainforme' (counter-report) on the six years of Felipe Calderón's government where activists noted that during the Calderón administration few steps had been made regarding media and communication, especially regarding the possibility of a new Telecommunication Act.

In this regard, many civil society organizations and academics specialized in communication and information rights (especially AMEDI and the Citizen Coalition Democracy and Media) collaborated with the movement in the discussions and workshops regarding media democratization and, at the same time, the movement created a vast amount of documents on this matter ('reference terms' and 'proposal for constitutional amendments in communications rights'), while organizing a forum in order to discuss the viability of communication reform with different key actors (senators, deputies, academics, journalists, social activists, NGOs and the president of the Federal Commission of Telecommunications - Cofetel).

But the importance of communication inside the movement went beyond these impressive demonstrations and the fight for media democratization. For many activists of the movement #YoSoy132 represented a powerful way to communicate with their peers, share

visions about the political and cultural reality of Mexico, confront themselves and feel that they were not alone in their worries and dreams. It was a way to build new ties and reinforce previous ones, contributing to the strengthening of the Mexican social formation, proven by years of bad politics, corruption, criminality, and general contempt for young people alongside the criminalization of social protest. The centrality of the communication dimension was also evident from the pivotal role played by students of media, journalism and communication universities often helped, supported and endorsed by professors and media scholars. Media scholars and students were able to bring the issue of media democratization and regulation to the fore, and media students were in the frontline generating discussions about the role of media in the Mexican society and explaining the link between media power and the political realm. They raised consciousness among other students who did not see the importance of the media and preferred to focus on other aspects of the protest. They provided courses, tutorship, and seminars in relation to communication and the media. In some way they started to build a communicative citizenship (Rincón, 2008).

In this regard, we think that these students' media literacy plus media cultures (Costanza-Chock, 2012) are another important claim of #YoSoy132, as they had the awareness that the surrounding media could help them to empower their citizenship (Rincón, 2008). Thus, we argue that #YoSoy132 activists have re-imagined through their practices new

forms of communicative citizenship. The lack of democracy within Latin American media systems has fostered the creation of these kinds of creative citizenships. Media students pointed out that the Mexican media anomaly, in democratic terms, is precisely the cause of many other problems the country is facing; Peña Nieto was the target not (only) because he came from the PRI party but mainly because he represented the perfect media-constructed candidate, nothing more than a puppet in the hands of the Televisa Network. Moreover, media students provided expertise in creating YouTube videos, managing Facebook groups and so on to other students who were not use to managing these online technologies. Then of course there were communication technologies. This generation of young students have integrated the use of these online platforms into their daily lives, and most of them consider these communication technologies not as something 'new', but as something natural, because these technologies are embedded into their daily routine (Nielsen, 2012). Therefore, we have also to recognize the banality of social media practices, and try to overcome the fascination that these 'new' technologies can have in the eye of the researcher. At the same time, they declared that the movement worked in interdisciplinary terms, because they addressed complex issues that needed to be solved by working groups with students of different disciplines.

Available literature on the #YoSoy132 movement has repeatedly stressed the importance of the use of social media platforms (Andión, 2013; Sosa, 2012) but few have

problematized this use and made distinctions among these technologies. In the next section, we dig into the movement's uses and appropriations of social media and provide some insights.

Exploring #YoSoy132 social media practices

In this section, we look closely at one aspect of the Mexican student movement's relation to communication technologies, i.e. its use of social media platforms. As we highlighted in the previous section, we think that social media played an important role inside the movement, even if we argue that the importance of the communication dimension goes well beyond the appropriation of these online platforms. Even so, they were certainly significant in contributing to strengthening the communicative citizenship of young Mexicans. In this section, we first shed light on the variety and richness of social media platforms involved during the protest. Then, we explore an aspect that has been neglected in the available literature on the movement: the problems that have arisen due to the adoption of these media.

Affordances and appropriations: harnessing the power of multiple social media platforms

Within the Mexican movement, communication technologies and social media in particular were used for multiple purposes and gave rise to several kinds of appropriation. In order to understand these practices, we think that it is pivotal to take into account on one hand the

affordances that a certain platform can offer and on the other hand the uses, appropriation, or process of domestication that activists deploy. Communication technologies function as affordances, providing spaces that enable and restrain certain practices, and social actors negotiate, make decisions about, adopt and subvert these affordances within given socio-cultural, political and economical contexts according to their needs and aims, but also driven by their emotions and by their feelings.

First of all, there was YouTube and the power and immediacy of video messages by the counter publics (Coleman and Ross, 2010). Videos have been at the centre of #YoSoy132's practices: the video in response to the discrediting of protest by mainstream media, the manifesto, the online alternative debate and the thousands of videos documenting the actions, marches, rallies, occupations, and demonstrations all around the Mexican Republic. The power of audiovisual messages was understood and endorsed by the movement. The first message in which students displayed their university IDs in order to identify themselves and prove that they were not mercenaries driven by other external 'malevolent' forces (as they were depicted according to the PRI strategy), but Mexican students who were protesting injustice and media propaganda represents a masterpiece of social media savviness. Six hours after its publication, the video had already been seen more than 20,000 times and was used by some mainstream media as a source of information. As we write this article (May

2013) the video has received more than 1,212,265 views on YouTube. Young people's familiarity with the YouTube portal allowed them - as one interviewee reported - to 'fully understand the possibilities of the medium'. Besides the extraordinary symbolic power of video messages, students also harvested the viralization possibilities of social media by circulating the videos through Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Hi5, blogs and websites.

Another fundamental platform was Twitter. As in the case of the Occupy Movement which is often referred to as '#Occupy' with the hashtag, also #YoSoy132 is 'son of Twitter hashtag' as our informant Julio told us. The fact of having the hashtag sign incorporated in the name of the movement itself testifies how much it is identified with the use of this online platform. After the publication of the first video on YouTube, the phrase '131 Alumnos de la Ibero' became a Twitter *trending topic* in Mexico and in the world. The #YoSoy132 hashtag for five days remained the leading hashtag in Mexico and one of the ten most important worldwide (ILLUMINATI LAB, 2012). It is important to point out how Twitter is seen and perceived by activists. Students see Twitter as the political platform *per excellence* and conceived it as the main resource for disseminating political debate to audiences. #YoSoy132's protesters saw Twitter as the social media platform with 'more reach capabilities', 'a technology', as Julio puts it, 'with so many ways of reaching people that we are still not able to understand all its possibilities'. Thus the movement used Twitter to

disseminate and viralize information knowing that the audiences of the accounts were more interested in politics than, for example, the Facebook publics. Twitter was also fundamental because the posts generated on the platform 'were used and circulated by journalists and information professionals' (interview with Iván). It was the social media of choice among journalists in order to obtain 'fresh' information on what was going on with #YoSoy132.

While Twitter was used mainly to circulate content and by the newspaper press in order to gain information on the movement, it did not allow for a complex dialectic between external information dissemination and closed group discussions. Therefore, given its technological affordances, it was not the platform of choice for internal organization. While Twitter's reach is seen as 'operating on a more massive scale' (interview with Iván) and 'having more reach in terms of viralization' (Viridiana), it was Facebook that was used for internal organization for two main reasons: first of all, its structure allows for the creation of closed groups that can exchange information among them. Secondly, while it was also used to create and share events, activists perceived its reach as being 'not as powerful as Twitter' (Alexandria), and its audiences are seen by protesters as 'not so political as those of Twitter' (Aura) but interested in entertainment and more 'futile' issues. That understanding of Facebook did not stop students from performing multiple activities on the platform. First of all, it represented an effective way to 'create events, meetings, rallies and assemblies' (Aura), it

was 'the way the protest against Peña Nieto in the Universidad Iberoamericana was planned' (Miriam), a medium that 'allowed us to learn things that were going on' (Berenice), 'launch calls and campaigns' (Tlatoani), and a way 'to look for other affinity groups, organizations and collectives, to get in touch and bond with them' (Berenice). The most visible part of the platform was thus used to launch campaigns and calls for marches and demonstrations that everyone could see and 'like'. While the other 'hidden' section, which is constituted by the possibility of creating closed groups, was used in order to 'solve internal organizational issues and make important decisions' (Aura), which later were communicated using the more 'visible' part of the platform. Here we can see the importance of exploring the dialectical relation between the technological affordances of the platforms and the users' appropriation. Facebook groups represented the organizational backbone of the movement and worked as 'spaces of decision making, construction, planning, tasks distribution, and moreover they were our meeting points when we could not meet because we were in different universities' (Areli). Therefore, the most important discussions took place in the inner part of the platform, 'carried out mainly through the Facebook chat' (Tlatoani).

The website *yosoy132media* represented instead the 'institutional face of the movement' (Ivan) and was mainly used for two reasons. First of all, at a more internal level, it represented a repository of the movement's collective memory, where activists could access

the official documents and reflect on their own practices. It was an online space where activists could find videos, audio, texts on the protest ordered according to date and with a brief description, and used by actors when they needed to recall a certain event or download a document. Secondly, at an external communication level, it served as an online space where journalists could attend to acquire 'official' information without having to chase the news through multiple platforms. Journalists used the portal to gain more information when the posts generated in Twitter were not sufficient and also when they needed old content in order to write their articles.

Social media paranoia

In this section, we show that activists' adoption of social media inside the Mexican movement was not without frictions and problems. Issues of data exploitation, surveillance and threats to privacy related to the appropriation of social media have been often noted in recent literature on activism (Costanza-Chock, 2008; Morozov, 2011; Barassi and Treré, 2012; Fuchs, 2013; Treré, 2012), but rather neglected in the academic literature on #YoSoy132. We have to remember that social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are platforms owned and controlled by US corporations and therefore they do not represent media created autonomously by activists of the movement, but only platforms used and 'colonized' by them

for their activists' practices. Thus, exploring the ways they are integrated and 'resisted' is pivotal for a nuanced understanding of social media.

In the case of the Mexican movement, the issue of data exploitation by neoliberal corporate platforms was never thoroughly discussed. The discussion developed by the 'Media Democratization Task Force' on media democratization, concentration and manipulation regarding Televisa and TV Azteca were thus not paired with reflections on the very nature of corporate social media platforms. This suggests, in line with recent studies (Young and Quan-Haase, 2013), that the use of personal data for targeted advertising has already been an accepted social norm. However, this does not mean that the students were not concerned at all about these issues. While issues in relation to data exploitation by corporations were not touched, issues related to control and surveillance by the state were a cause of concern for activists who dealt with these matters not rationally, but developing as a general sense of paranoia around social media such as Facebook and their use of mobile phones. Students referred to this undefined reaction to the sense of being spied on and controlled by institutions 'social media paranoia'. The development of this general sense of paranoia reveals the importance that the emotional aspects play within the activities of the movement. While approaches such as Resource Mobilization Theory see social movements as comprised of rational individuals whose choices around communication technologies are also rational and

aimed at concrete aims, we see here the importance played by the emotional aspects around media, because students rarely approached these issues in terms of rational choices based on understandings of how the platforms work; instead, they were worried about something that could be happening in 'unknown and mysterious ways' (Berenice).

Another important aspect to point out is the procedural nature of the development of this media paranoia. When the movement emerged there was a pressing need to communicate through social media and problems or implications related to the adoption of these communication technologies were not debated. In the words of Berenice, 'there was light social media paranoia on adopting Facebook that was almost immediately discarded'. As Tlatoani recalls:

'the work we needed to accomplish required us to reach an agreement on Facebook so we slowly decided to leave beside this paranoia that they could spy on us or get to know what we were doing... Because we were also aware that if the State want to spy on us, it is going to do it anyway...'

But December 1, 2012 marked a decisive turning point. On December 1st (known as #1Dmx) during the presidential inauguration of Enrique Peña Nieto, various demonstrations were suppressed by federal and local police operations. The operations involved the Presidential,

the Federal Public Security Secretariat, the Secretariat of Public Security of the Federal District and groups coordinated with the police forces. For almost 10 hours, Mexico City centre was besieged by a wave of violence triggered by the police forces of the federal government and the local government against demonstrations and several activists were wounded and held prisoners. After this date, paranoia in relation to social media increased, as it emerges from Alexandria's words:

'After #1Dmx we had to rethink our online behaviour on Facebook ... We had uploaded thousands of personal pictures and information since May and then we suddenly had to shut down various groups, take care regarding our posts and pictures ... It was a moment of crisis and danger where we realized that our security fence was not very real'.

A research brief published in March 2013 by the 'Citizen Lab', part of the Munk School of Global Affairs of the University of Toronto (Marquis-Boire et al., 2013), revealed that Mexico was among seven new countries where the *FinFisher* surveillance software was found, somehow 'confirming' students' paranoia. This software, developed and sold by *Gamma International*, is able to monitor people's activities on digital platforms and social media, read encrypted files and emails. It was used extensively in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, and it was found in the servers of communication corporations Telmex and IUSAcell in Mexico. After strong political pressure from several online activists and human

rights groups such as Contingente MX and Propuesta Cívica, it was revealed that the PGR, the Mexican General Attorney's Office (Procuraduría de la República Mexicana) acquired FinFisher/Finspy in 2012. According to the Reforma news agency,[ix] with this spyware the PGR is able to locate in real time everyone using a mobile phone within the Mexican borders (Agencia Reforma, 2013).

Conclusions: achievements and challenges of the movement

In order to understand the importance of the changes brought about by the #YoSoy132 movement as a powerful social and political actor, it is fundamental to remember the ways through which the PRI political party have always criminalized young people for decades. Since the Tlatelolco massacre of 1968 according to the PRI, young Mexican people have never had a proper 'agency', but they were always manipulated by some 'external entity', such as the CIA in the stone throwing at president Luis Echeverría Álvarez in 1975, or the Mexican Communist Party.

This time, the PRI's strategy to criminalize the protest and remove the agency of the students was not successful because of many factors, including the fact that in an era of social media viralization it is easier to generate national and global resonance around governments

and institutions that are more and more held accountable for their actions, for their lies, and for their attempts to criminalize protest.

In this article we have seen that the #YoSoy132 movement is set in a emerging democratic context that is a space in which the students struggles of the last century merge, and reflects the actual possibilities of social agency for the students. This was why Mexican activists were able in a short amount of time to influence the Mexican electoral process and to become an important agent that could *structurate* the political and socio-cultural dimensions. Regarding the first dimension, in the short term: a) they balanced the campaigns and elections results so that no political party was able to obtain the majority in the Congress; and b) they set the issue of the concentration and democratization of the media in the public agenda and helped to foster the proposal of the three majority parties (PRI, PAN and PRD) and the new federal government, in the so-called Reform of Telecom in the context of a wider agreement called 'Agreement for Mexico' (Pacto por México) that includes many other important reforms. We view this political move of the ruling party as being driven by two main motivations: on one side, Peña Nieto saw this as an opportunity to legitimise his government, after the controversy and the proposal of nullification of the electoral results by the left candidate and his party (PRD); on the other side, it was a subtle way to 'deactivate' the #YoSoy132 movement by letting protesters get 'what they wanted'. Thus, it marked a turning

point in Mexican politics, above all because many young people without previous political experiences joined the movement and started to express themselves and develop a sense of collectiveness.

In order to complete our critical analysis, it is important to point out what, in our opinion, could be considered two 'mistakes' of the #YoSoy132 movement. On one side, they underestimated (paradoxically) the power of mainstream media, and at the same time they overestimated the power of social media in Mexico. When activists organised the presidential debate, they did not allow mainstream media in to broadcast the debate, arguing that they were born on the Internet and they would only disseminate the debate online. As we demonstrated previously in the article, the majority of the Mexican population inform themselves by television, so #YoSoy132 could not disseminate their ideas to the largest part of the Mexican society. Another failure that could be attributed to the movement was that at some stage of the protest they opened too many issues and fronts to fight for, and started to lose weight and focus on their original demands of clean elections and the democratization of the media.

The change that the movement brought to the Mexican context was not only political, it was also cultural. #YoSoy132 was able to alter the general perception of young people that were not interested in politics (Sosa, 2012) by creating new ways of participation and, as we described above, by building new forms of communicative citizenship through meetings,

assemblies, seminars, discussions, marches, debates and occupations. The movement gave young people a sense of strength, and the strong belief in their power to 'make a difference'. Social media played a pivotal role by providing online spaces for information spreading and organization, creation of counter-hegemonic sites of struggles and by contributing to the awareness and the strengthening of their communicative citizenship. These online media also generated issues in relation to their appropriation within the movement, in particular in relation to matters of control and surveillance by the government, what activists referred to as 'social media paranoia'.

Finally, the movement was able to create new and revitalize previous student collectives that can fight for better conditions inside educational institutions, situating the growing concern about media power also inside bars, restaurants and workplaces and in places where before it was almost completely absent. The future presents various challenges for the students that will have to keep its 'critical milieu' alive. During the 2012 elections, the movement worked as a power balance, a necessary factor of social accountability for Mexican institutions. It will now have to prove that it can represent an agent of social change also in the long run.

We wish to thank the activists of the #YoSoy132 movement for their constant feedback and comments, in particular the 'Taskforce for Media Democratization'.

References

AMIPCI (2013) Estudio sobre los hábitos de los usuarios de internet en México 2013.

    Available at: http://www.amipci.org.mx/?P=esthabitos (accessed: June 2, 2013).

Agencia Reforma (2013) Derrocha la PGR en equipo espía, published on 06/07/2013.

    Available at: http://www.am.com.mx/leon/mexico/derrocha-la-pgr-en-equipo-espia-29702.html (accessed: August 5, 2013).

Andión M (2013) Las redes sociales virtuales como medios alternativos al poder de la

    telecracia en México. *Versión* 31: 42-55.

Barassi V and Treré E (2012) Does Web 3.0 come after Web 2.0? Deconstructing

    theoretical assumptions through practice. *New Media & Society* 14(8): 1269-1285.

Bennett W.L. and Segerberg A (2013) *The logic of connective action: Digital media and*

    the personalization of contentious politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Candón Mena J (2013) *Toma la calle, toma las redes: El movimiento 15M en internet*.

    Sevilla: Editorial Atrapasueños.

Castells M (2012) *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*.

    Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Coleman S and Ross K (2010) *The Media and the Public. "Them" and "Us" in Media*

    Discourse. Oxford: Willey-Blackwell.

Costanza-Chock S (2008) The immigrant rights movement on the net: Between "Web 2.0"

    and comunicación popular. *American Quarterly* 60(3): 851-864.

Costanza-Chock S (2012) Mic check! Media cultures and the Occupy Movement. *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest*. DOI:10.1080/14742837.2012.710746

Couldry N (2012) Media, society, world: Social theory and digital media practice. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Crespo JA (2008) *2006: Hablan las Actas. Las Debilidades de la Autoridad Electoral Mexicana.* México, D.F.: Debate.

Downing J (2001) *Radical Media*. London: Sage.

Earl J and Kimport K. (2011) *Digitally enabled social change: Activism in the internet age*. Cambridge, MA: Mit Press.

Flick U (2009). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Fuchs, Christian (2013) Social media and capitalism. In: T. Olsson (Ed.). *Producing the*

Internet. Critical perspectives of social media. Göteborg: Nordicom. 25-44.

Gerbaudo P (2012) *Tweets and the Streets*. London: Pluto Press.

Gilly A (2013) Operativo 1DMX: Provocación desde arriba. 24 de abril, Jornada, México.

Gómez R, Sosa G, Tellez P and Bravo J (2011) *Mapping Digital Media: México.* London:

   Open Society Foundations-Media Program. Available at:

   http://www.soros.org/initiatives/media/articles_publications/publications/mapping-

   digital-media-mexico-20110613

Hands J (2011) @ *is for Activism: Dissent, Resistance and Rebellion in a Digital Culture*.

   London: Pluto Press.

Hesmondhalgh D (2013) *Cultural Industries.* London: Sage.

Huerta-Wong E and Gómez R (2013) Concentración y diversidad de los medios de

   comunicación y las telecomunicaciones en México. *Comunicación y Sociedad* 19:

   113-152.

ILLUMINATI LAB (2012) "140 Trending Topics que hicieron historia". Social   Media

    Intelligence, México. Available at: http://goo.gl/TLA6Ej (accessed: July 14, 2013).

INEGI-SEGOB (2012) Encuesta Nacional Sobre Cultura Política y Practices Ciudadanas

    ENCUP 2012. México: Segob.

Juris J (2012) Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: Social media, public space, and

    emerging logics of aggregation, *American Ethnologist* 39(2): 259-279.

Lievrouw L (2011) *Alternative and Activist New Media*. Cambrdige: Polity.

Marques-Boire M, Marczak B, Guarnieri C and Scott-Railton J (2013) You only click

    twice: FinFisher's global proliferation. Available at:

    https://citizenlab.org/2013/03/you-only-click-twice-finfishers-global-proliferation-2/

    (accessed: March 13, 2013).

Mattoni A (2012) *Media Practices and Protest Politics: How Precarious Workers Mobilise*.

    Farnham, UK: Ashgate.

McCurdy P (2011) Theorizing activists' "lay theories of media": A case study of the

Dissent! network at the 2005 G8 Summit. *International Journal of Communication* 5: 619–638.

Morozov E (2011) *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. New York, NY: Public Affairs.

Mosco V (2009) *The Political Economy of Communication,* 2nd Edition. Washington, DC: Sage.

Reguillo R (2012) Reflexiones iniciales en torno a #YoSoy132. *Magis*, Guadalajara, 28 de Mayo 2012. Available at: http://www.magis.iteso.mx/redaccion/reflexiones-iniciales-en-torno-yosoy132 (accessed: 21 July, 2013).

Rincón O (2008) No más audiencias, todos devenimos productores. Comunicar, n° 30, v. XV, 2008, pp. 93-98.

Sánchez Ruiz E (2004) *Comunicación y Democracia.* México: IFE.

Sigler E (2013) Publicidad móvil apunta a las "tablets". CNNExpansión, 25 de enero, 2013.
Available at: http://www.cnnexpansion.com/negocios/2013/01/24/la-publicida-movil-apunta-a-las-tablets (accessed: 20 July, 2013).

Sosa G (2012) #YoSoy132: Jóvenes frente a las redes sociales y la democratización de los medios. In: Arango C, Bañuelos F, Quijano P and Sosa G (eds) *Esfera Pública y Tecnologías de la Información y Comunicación*. México: IEDF, pp.

Trejo R (2004) *Poderes Salvajes. Mediocracia sin Contrapesos*. México: Cal y Arena.

Treré E (2012) Social Movements as Information Ecologies: Exploring the Coevolution of Multiple Internet Technologies for Activism. *International Journal of Communication* 6: 2359-2377.

Tuckman J (2012) Mexican media scandal: secretive Televisa unit promoted PRI candidate. *The Guardian*, 26 June. Available at:

http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/26/mexican-media-scandal-televisa-pri-nieto

Wolton D (1992) La comunicación política: construcción de un modelo. In: Ferry JM and Wolton D (eds) *El Nuevo Espacio Público.* Barcelona: Gedisa.

Uldam J and Askanius T (2013) Online Civic Cultures: Debating Climate Change Activism on YouTube, *International Journal of Communication*, 7, 1185-1204.

Young, A.L. and Quan-Haase, A (2013) Privacy protection strategies on Facebook: The Internet privacy paradox revisited. *Information, Communication & Society*, 16(4): 479-500.

Notes

[i] While the authors are listed alphabetically, each contributed equally to this paper.

[ii] This party ruled Mexico for 70 years (1930-2000). The Peruvian Nobel prize of literature Mario Vargas Llosa in 1990 characterized this regime as 'the perfect dictatorship' in the context of 'Encuentro Vuleta' organised by Televisa and the Mexican Nobel prize of literature Octavio Paz (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPsVVWg-E38).

[iii] All the figures related to the Mexican 2012 presidential campaign surveys are available at: http://www.adnpolitico.com/encuestas (Accessed 17 April 2013).

[iv] The official margin of difference between Calderón and López Obrador was 0.58%.

[v] Those elections were characterized as overusing negative campaigns as strategy (Guerrero and Arellano, 2012) especially against López Obrador; at the same time the Fox administration used all the possibilities that it had to try to help his candidate Felipe Calderon to win the election, also López Obrador made many mistakes during the campaign resulted in the loss of his advantage. Nevertheless, there was still a lot of doubt about the final results because it was a small margin and during the day of the counting of ballets, many specialists in mathematics observed some data inconsistencies and, at the same time, many specialists observed a weak role of the electoral authority and massive irregularities (Crespo, 2008).

[vi] The most important public service network, Channel 11 covers only 47% of the Mexican Republic and it has an audience share of 3% at the national level. There are some Mexican states that just have two open signal television channels. For example, Zacatecas can only receive channel 2 (Televisa) and 13 (TV Azteca).

[vii] According to a report of AMIPCI the Federal District (Distrito Federal) is the second state in terms of Internet users with 4.4 million.

[viii] The final count had Peña Nieto with 38.21% support, leftist Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the Democratic Revolution party with 31.59%, and Josefina Vazquez Mota of the conservative National Action party with 25.41%. The small New Alliance Party got 2.29%.

[ix] See, http://www.am.com.mx/leon/mexico/derrocha-la-pgr-en-equipo-espia-29702.html