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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 concentration of Mexican media 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

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

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

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last decades, at least in Latin America, for various reasons: It was able to profoundly impact the electoral process in a very short space of time; it demonstrated that Mexican young people were not passive actors far from politics but were capable of producing their own visions for democracy and pluralism; and it was able to impose discussion on media concentration and democratization within the institutions' agendas and the public sphere.

In the last 10 years, we have witnessed a considerable proliferation of different approaches to digital activism, which has tried to make sense of the connections between new communication technologies and the uprising of mass mobilizations (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013; Cándon 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 its context). In order to offer a comprehensive view on the communication practices of the student movement and better understand its relevance within Mexican political, economic and sociocultural dimensions, 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 the one hand, political economy analysis investigates the macrodimension of social power relations and situates the emergence of this movement within broader political, economic and sociocultural changes addressing the processes of *structuration*, *commodification* and *spatialization* (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 in Mexico City and in Guadalajara.

Given the pivotal importance of 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 3 h. We interviewed nine students, most of them from the 'Media Democratization Taskforce', and they 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 took into account alternative media creators who played an important role in the Guadalajara section of the movement. This second group interview lasted 3.5 h. 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 emerged 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 the wider political culture and democracy trajectories of Mexico. But before we evaluate #YoSoy132 as a social agent and protest movement, it is important to explore briefly the sociocultural, 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 country's institutional democratic transition began in the late 1990s, it is one of the most organized cities in terms of political cultures, with significant presence and the work of many diverse non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the most plural media system in Mexico (in the context of a highly concentrated television (TV) 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 representing a wide range of ideologies. In terms of the representation of political parties – as the citizens of the DF have been able to elect their representatives (Government Chief, mayors, assembly members and 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,¹ has since then been a political minority.

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 surveys² and general opinion of the electoral process indicated that Enrique Peña Nieto, the PRI candidate, was the clear favourite – leading with at least 20% 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% point against the candidate of the conservative National Action Party (PAN) Felipe Calderón.³ Another issue to consider was that Obrador started the 2006 campaign with a 10% point advantage and he lost that advantage, little by little. Because of that and other reasons,⁴ those elections were some of the most controversial in Mexican history. With that context and Obrador running for the second time, many centre and left-wing political sectors were sceptical about taking Peña Nieto's 20-point advantage for granted. The other candidate, who was running with a chance for the presidency was Josefina Vazquez Mota of the PAN, the ruling government party from 2001 to 2012.

Another issue that was on the table relates to the construction of Peña Nieto's image as a leader. He not only had enjoyed a lot of support from several local and national media during his administration as governor of the State of Mexico (2007–2012) but was also presented in a favourable light – especially by the TV network with the majority audience share, the influential Televisa, that repeatedly gave him much air time and positive coverage during his 6-year

mandate. There was even journalistic evidence, presented by the British newspaper *The Guardian* that claimed that Televisa implemented a covert strategy to present Peña Nieto in their various TV news programs in a positive way and, at the same time, employed a more overt strategy against Obrador (Tuckman, 2012).

Although this issue was minimized by the mainstream media, especially TV, during the campaign, it nevertheless helps us establish an overview of the Mexican communication system and its concerns, especially in relation to that most influential of media, TV. In Mexico, the majority of the population gets its political information via TV – 76%, according to the national survey of political culture in Mexico (INEGI-SEGOB, 2012: 2). This industry is highly concentrated, dominated by two companies that command 99% of the audience share and advertising market: Televisa (69%) and TV Azteca (30%) (Huerta and Gómez, 2013). Furthermore, it should be noted that public service broadcasting has a very marginal market share and is not universally accessible across the country.⁵ The outcomes of this high TV market concentration are, first, a lack of pluralism in most of the TV news programmes and, second, enormous symbolic power in the hands of Televisa and TV Azteca over and above that 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).

However, alongside this analogue form of media consumption, the young urban middle classes – especially university students – are increasingly using digital media and particularly social media. In 2012, according to social media monitoring company *Socialbakers*, Mexico had 34 million Facebook accounts, 12 million Twitter accounts and 10 million YouTube users, whilst Internet users in the country numbered 45.1 million.⁶ But in terms of Internet connections to domestic dwellings, the number actually decreased, with only 3.5 out of every 10 households having such a connection and a computer (Gómez et al., 2011). However, interestingly, 43% of Internet users are between 12 and 24 years old. Finally, the average amount of time users spend on the Internet is, according to Asociación Mexicana de Internet (AMIPCI), just over 5 h/day (AMIPCI, 2013). Based on these data, we conclude that the increase in media consumption in the last 2 years has to be related to smartphones and bandwidth; nevertheless, Mexico has just 10.7 million subscribers in that age group (Sigler, 2013). However, it is important to examine these data because these devices are the most effective for mobile and multi-stakeholder communication.

This overview of media consumption and the social communication system of Mexico allows us to argue that the majority of the Mexican population are still in the ‘analogue’ sphere of broadcast media, whilst at the same time a very active and influential minority is active in the digital sphere. Therefore, we have to think of Mexico in terms of two overlapping public spheres that interact in complex ways and reflect the inequalities evident in the country. Against this wider context, we will now address the emergence of the #YoSoy132 movement.

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 11 May 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 the protesting students were dismissed by the PRI as impostors from rival parties. Thus, the mainstream media and PRI leaders constructed them as a counter-public (Coleman and Ross, 2010). In response, 131 of the students created a YouTube video declaring themselves as genuine

students who were against mainstream media and the PRI that dismissed them (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7XbocXsFkI>). The video spread virally through social media platforms (mainly Facebook and Twitter) to 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, but then it became a powerful banner and name to one of the most powerful student movements around the country. In addition, whilst the movement has to be thought of as a national one, it has also been able to build transnational links with Mexican students abroad and gain the support of other international collectives, thanks to the possibilities offered by the process of *spatialization* (see <http://yoSoy132internacional.wikispaces.com/>).

It is important to note that the protest began in a private university, because until then private universities were considered, generally speaking, both 'uncritical' and 'allied to mainstream media' as a condition of their class alignment. The PRI and Televisa tried to persuade the protesting students that neither organization was as undemocratic as the students claimed, arguing that students from the public universities had taken control of the #YoSoy132 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 originated in a public university, mainstream media and the ruling political party might not have dedicated so much coverage and attention to it because public Mexican universities have been stereotyped as 'leftist radicals'.

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

In these circumstances, significant numbers of university students began to identify with the #YoSoy132 movement and started to address the lack of plurality in the dominant TV media as the big issue, organizing via inter-university assemblies which demanded the democratization of the Mexican media system in order to have real democratic and open elections (Sosa, 2012). According to the students, Mexico's TV coverage of the presidential election campaign was unfairly promoting the former ruling party and its candidate. Thus, from the outset, they challenged the TV duopoly, targeting especially Televisa and the PRI candidate. Three weeks after the 131 first came together, #YoSoy132 launched a YouTube video with their manifesto (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igxPudJF6nU>). They stated that (our translation from Spanish): 'One of the necessary conditions for correcting the current Mexican situation is the empowering of the citizen through information, because this allows better political, economical and social decisions to be taken'. They went on to state, 'For #YoSoy132 the right to communication and the right to freedom of expression are the most important demands'. In particular, 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 a constitutional right'.

It is important to recognize that the movement represented a powerful exercising of political communication (Wolton, 1998) by sharing, confronting and debating their ideas among heterogeneous groups. #YoSoy132 has posed a challenge in terms of generating interaction between the different political cultures and cultural practices of students in private and public universities in order to reach an understanding, consensus and initiate effective actions to communicate their demands. The effectiveness of #YoSoy132 in political terms is related to the political cultures of

the different universities that constituted the movement. These political cultures interacted with each other and generated interesting organizational structures, adopting the advantages and experience of many collectives that had developed expertise as activists – this kind of grass-roots political culture has circulated widely in Mexico since the emergence of the Zapatista movement (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) in 1994 – but at the same time they communicated with many who had no political or activist experience. These political cultures provided fertile ground in which #YoSoy132 could take root and develop a manifesto, whilst social media allowed the movement to easily disseminate and communicate its ideas.

After one month of demonstrations, stunts, national inter-university assemblies, videos and debate around the media, the protesters had attracted a lot of attention and, as a group, became an important political actor and social agent during the presidential campaign. First, 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 agendas. Second, the agitators persuaded the two major TV networks to broadcast the second presidential candidates' debate nationally – Televisa and TV Azteca had broadcast the first one only via their minor affiliate networks, resulting in parts of the country not being able to see the debate. Finally, the protesters organized a third debate with the presidential candidates on 19 June – the first one organized by civil society and by any organization other than the Federal Electorate Institute. They named it 'Debate plus 131', and it was broadcast on YouTube, as well as by some public and university radio stations. According to the #YoSoy132 movement, 112,000 viewers watched it via YouTube streaming. However, Enrique Peña Nieto did not attend because, he argued, there were no neutral conditions in which to carry out the debate (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txWoCr1EXyE>).

Because they were able to have such an impact in just 1 month, it is possible to argue that the #YoSoy132 movement can be viewed as a social and political 'detonator' that changed the nature of the presidential campaign and was able to get the issue of the concentration and democratization of the media on the public agenda and in the public sphere. Furthermore, they attracted the attention of the ruling class and the mainstream media itself. This far-reaching impact was reflected in a national survey of political culture, conducted in August of the same year, where 44% clearly identified #YoSoy132 as a political actor (INEGI-SEGOB, 2012: 4). The candidate Peña Nieto still won, regaining power for the revamped PRI,⁷ but he did not obtain a majority in Congress. The resulting balance of political forces could, on some level, also be considered further evidence of the impact of or the result of the influence of #YoSoy132 in the senator and deputy elections.

After the presidential election, on 27 July, movement activists camped for 24 h outside Televisa's headquarters on Chapultepec Street in Mexico City. This symbolic event was the culmination of a march in which 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 of no political affiliation. Screaming 'Peña Nieto no ganó, Televisa lo eligió' (Peña Nieto did not win, Televisa chose him) and with posters and banners sporting slogans such as 'No aceptamos como futuro una sociedad dirigida por la television' (We do not accept as our future a society governed by TV), 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 6 years of Felipe Calderón's government in which activists noted that during the Calderón administration few steps had been taken regarding the media and communications industry, especially in relation to the possibility of a new Telecommunication Act.

In this connection, many civil society organizations and academics specializing in communication and information rights (especially Asociación Mexicana por el Derecho a la Información and the Citizen Coalition Democracy and Media) collaborated with the #YoSoy132 movement in the discussions and workshops on media democratization. At the same time, the movement created numerous documents (such as ‘reference terms’ and ‘proposal for constitutional amendments in communications rights’), whilst also organizing a forum in order to discuss the viability of communications 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 initiatives and the fight for media democratization. For many of the movement’s activists, #YoSoy132 represented a powerful way to communicate with their peers, share visions about the political and cultural reality of Mexico, confront their own concerns and dreams and feel that they were not alone. It was a way to build new ties and reinforce existing ones, whilst contributing to a strengthening of the Mexican social formation, undermined by years of bad politics, corruption, criminality and general contempt for young people, alongside the criminalization of social protest. The centrality of communication was also evident in the pivotal role played by media students, with the help of journalism and communication universities, 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 front line generating discussions about the role of media in Mexican society and explaining the link between media power and the political sphere. They raised awareness among other students who did not initially 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. At one level, they started to build a communicative citizenship (Rincón, 2008).

In this regard, it is possible to assert that these students’ media literacy (Costanza-Chock, 2012) is another important aspect of #YoSoy132, since their awareness of contemporary media could help them to empower their fellow citizens (Rincón, 2008). Thus, we argue that #YoSoy132 activists have reimaged 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 of the 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 used to utilizing these online technologies. Of course, these are precisely communication technologies. For most of this generation of young students such communication technologies are not something ‘new’, but perfectly ‘natural’, because the technologies are already embedded into their daily routine. At the same time, despite the importance of media literacy, the students argued the need for interdisciplinarity, because they were addressing complex issues that could not be solved by working groups of students from any single discipline.

The 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 or made distinctions between technologies. In the next section, therefore, we explore the movement’s uses of social media to provide some insights.

Exploring #YoSoy132 social media practices

In this section, we look to examine one aspect of the Mexican student movement's engagement with communication technologies, that is, its use of social media platforms. As highlighted in the previous section, social media played an important role inside the movement, even if – as we argue – the issue and importance of communication goes well beyond the adoption of these online platforms. Nevertheless, 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 platform activity in evidence during the protest. Then, we explore an aspect that has been neglected in literature on the movement to date: 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 vital to take into account, on the one hand, the affordances that a certain platform can offer and, on the other hand, the uses, appropriation or process of domestication that activists employ. 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 the given sociocultural, political and economic contexts according to their needs and aims but are also driven by their emotions and feelings.

First, there was YouTube and the power and immediacy of video messages by the counter-publics that it made available (Coleman and Ross, 2010). Videos have been at the centre of #YoSoy132's practices: the video in response to the discrediting of their protest by mainstream media, their 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 embraced by the movement. The first video message in which students displayed their university identity cards in order to identify themselves and prove that they were not mercenaries driven by external 'malevolent' forces (as they were depicted according to the PRI strategy), but Mexican students who were protesting injustice and media propaganda represent a masterpiece of social media savviness. Six hours after it had been posted on YouTube, the video had already garnered more than 20,000 views and was used by some mainstream media as a source of information. At the time of writing (May 2013), the number of views has risen to over 1.2 million. 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 exploited the viral possibilities of social media by circulating the videos through Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Hi5, blogs and websites.

Another key platform was Twitter. As in the case of the Occupy movement which is often referred to as '#Occupy' – that is, with the hashtag – so, according to our informant Julio, #YoSoy132 is also 'son of Twitter hashtag'. The fact of having the hashtag sign incorporated in the name of the movement itself testifies how much is identified with the use of this online platform. After the first video was posted on YouTube, the phrase '131 Alumnos de la Ibero' became a Twitter *trending topic* in Mexico and across the world. For five consecutive days, the #YoSoy132 hashtag was the leading hashtag in Mexico and one of the 10 most important

worldwide (ILLUMINATI LAB, 2012). Students see Twitter as the political platform *par excellence* and perceive 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 send information viral, knowing that their Twitter followers were more interested in politics than, for example, Facebook users. Twitter was also crucial 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 #YoSoy132 was doing.

Whilst Twitter was used mainly to circulate content and by the newspaper press in order to gain information on the movement's activities, 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. Whilst 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, its structure allows for the creation of closed groups that can exchange information among members; second, whilst it was also used to set up and share events, activists perceived its reach as 'not as powerful as Twitter' (Alexandria), and its audiences are seen by protesters as 'not so political as those of Twitter' (Aura), interested instead in entertainment and more 'futile' issues. That understanding or perception of Facebook did not stop students from performing multiple activities on the platform. First, 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'. Whilst the other 'hidden' section, constituted by the possibility of creating closed groups, was used in order to 'solve internal organizational issues and make important decisions' (Aura), which were later 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 such platforms and users' appropriation of them. 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' (Arelí). Therefore, the most important discussions took place via 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, 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 and texts on the protest ordered according to date and with a brief description and used by interested parties when they needed to recall a certain event or download a document. Second, at an external communication level, it served as an online space where journalists could acquire 'official' information without having to chase the news through multiple platforms. Journalists used the website to access additional information both when Twitter posts were insufficient and when they needed historical information as background for 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 relating to the use of social media have often been noted in recent literature on activism (Barassi and Treré, 2012; Costanza-Chock, 2008; Fuchs, 2013; Morozov, 2011; Treré, 2012) but rather neglected in the academic literature on #YoSoy132. It is necessary to remember that social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are platforms owned and controlled by US corporations – they do not represent media created autonomously by movement activists but are only platforms used and 'colonized' by them. Thus, exploring the ways users integrate the platforms into their own practice – and how they are 'resisted' by users – is key for a nuanced understanding of social media.

In the case of the Mexican movement, the issue of data exploitation by neo-liberal 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 was 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 become an accepted social norm. However, this does not mean that the students were not concerned about these issues. Whilst issues relating to data exploitation by corporations were not addressed, issues related to control and surveillance by the State were a cause of concern for activists. However, they did not deal with these issues rationally, expressing instead a general sense of paranoia around social media such as Facebook and their use of mobile phones. Students referred to their sense of being spied on and controlled by institutions as 'social media paranoia'. The development of this general sense of paranoia reveals the importance that emotional aspects played within the movement's activities. Whilst approaches such as resource mobilization theory see social movements as comprised of rational individuals whose choices around communication technologies are also rational and focused on 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 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. According to 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 1 December 2012 marked a decisive turning point. On that day (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 office, the Federal Public Security Secretariat, the Secretariat of Public Security of the DF and groups coordinated with the police forces. For almost 10 h, Mexico City centre was besieged by a wave of violence triggered by the police forces of federal and local government against demonstrations, and several

activists were wounded and held prisoners (Gilly, 2013). 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 as well as read encrypted files and emails. It was used extensively in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, and it was found on the servers of communication corporations Telmex and IUSAccl in Mexico. After strong political pressure from several online activists and human rights groups such as *Continente 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,⁸ 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 crucial to remember the means by which the PRI political party have for decades criminalized young people. According to the PRI, since the Tlatelolco massacre of 1968, young Mexican people have never had proper 'agency' but were always manipulated by some 'external entity', such as the Central Intelligence Agency (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 agency from the students was not successful due to many factors, including the fact that in the era of social media virtualization it is easier to generate national and global resonance around the activities of governments and institutions that are increasingly held accountable for their actions, for their lies and for their attempts to criminalize protest.

In this article, we have argued that the #YoSoy132 movement took place in an emerging democratic context, merging with the student struggles of the last century, and evidenced real possibilities of social agency for the students. This was why Mexican activists were able in a short period of time to influence the Mexican electoral process and to become an important agent that could *structure* the political and sociocultural dimensions. On the political side, in the short term, they (a) had an impact on the campaign and election results so that no political party was able to obtain a majority in Congress and (b) put the issue of media concentration and democratization on the public agenda and helped to foster the so-called Reform of Telecom proposal made by the three largest parties (PRI, PAN and PRD) and the new federal government, in the context of a wider '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 factors: On the one side, Peña Nieto saw this as an opportunity to legitimize his government, after the controversy and a proposal by the left party (PRD) and its candidate to nullify the election results; 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 with no prior history of being politically active joined the movement and started to develop a sense of collective identity.

In order to complete our critical analysis, it is important to point out what, in our opinion, could be considered two 'mistakes' made by the #YoSoy132 movement. On the one side, they underestimated (paradoxically) the power of the mainstream media, whilst also overestimating the power of social media in Mexico. When activists organized the third presidential debate, they did not allow mainstream media in to televise the debate, arguing that they were the Internet generation and they would only disseminate the debate online. But, as we demonstrated above, the majority of the Mexican population keep themselves politically informed via TV, so #YoSoy132 failed to disseminate their ideas to the majority of Mexicans. A second failure that could be attributed to the movement is that in the course of their protesting they tried to address too many issues and fight on too many fronts. As a result, they started to become less effective and lose the focus of their original demands for clean elections and the democratization of the media.

The change that the movement brought to the Mexican context was not only political, however, but also cultural. #YoSoy132 was able to alter the attitudes of young people who had not previously been interested in politics (Sosa, 2012) by creating new ways of participation and, as 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 a strong belief in their power to 'make a difference'. Social media played a pivotal role by providing online spaces for circulating information and organizing, by creating counter-hegemonic sites of struggles and by contributing to the awareness and strengthening of communicative citizenship. However, the appropriation of these online media by the movement also generated concerns, 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 student collectives and revitalize the existing ones who can together fight for better conditions inside educational institutions, whilst also extending the growing concern about and discussion of media power to the wider population in bars, restaurants and workplaces and in places where such discussion was previously almost completely absent. The future presents various challenges for the students who will have to keep their 'critical milieu' alive. During the 2012 elections, the movement worked effectively to change the balance of political power, a necessary condition for ensuring the social accountability of Mexican institutions. It will now have to prove that it can continue to be an agent of social change in the long term.

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Authors' Note

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Notes

1. 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’ organized by Televisa and the Mexican Nobel prize of literature Octavio Paz (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPsVVWg-E38>).
2. All the figures related to the Mexican 2012 presidential campaign surveys are available at: <http://www.adnpolitico.com/encuestas> (accessed 17 April 2013).
3. The official margin of difference between Calderón and López Obrador was 0.58%.
4. Those elections were characterized as overusing negative campaigns as strategy 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 resulting 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 ballots, 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).
5. 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).
6. According to a report of Asociación Mexicana de Internet, the Federal District (Distrito Federal) is the second state in terms of Internet users with 4.4 million.
7. 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%.
8. See <http://www.am.com.mx/leon/mexico/derrocha-la-pgr-en-equipo-espia-29702.html>

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