CHAPTER 8

From #15M to *Podemos*: Updating the Propaganda Model for Explaining Political Change in Spain and the Role of Digital Media

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Every system has its own vulnerabilities.
Anonymous

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a contribution to the ongoing debates regarding the updating of the Propaganda Model for the twenty-first century. It will focus on the model's boundaries, those situations where it faces difficulties for apprehending some communication dynamics, like social media, countries with a particular political culture (like Spain) and contexts of crisis and instability (2008–2016).

These aspects have been noted as possible vulnerabilities of the model that require further exploration,[1] together with personal agency and strategies for social change, which I will also take into account. Herman and Chomsky

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observed that, 'it has to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis given the varying degrees and forms of penetration, and different cultural conditions.'[2] This chapter aims to open the debate on a meaningful case.

8.2 Discussing the Propaganda Model: Dead Ends and Hot Spots

Since the Propaganda Model (hereafter PM) was first formulated, media research has provided strong evidence of its validity[3] as a tool to explain the constrictions of news-making processes and the dominance of news framing that favour the interests of elites during periods of stability.

Most of the early criticism against the PM came from ideological positions which basically failed to acknowledge the importance of class division in the operation of the media system. The controversies between the PM's assumptions and the classical liberal view of the media (which conceptualises journalism as a 'free marketplace of information' or as a 'watchdog' that defends the interests of the people from power abuse by government and corporations) have already been thoroughly explored, and the arguments involved in such exchanges have been contested.[4]

Herman and Chomsky themselves have addressed in a satisfactory manner the main issues pointed by this kind of dismissive criticism.[5] They recognised that the PM is both simplistic and deterministic to some extent, as every model is. That's a common characteristic of clearly defined theoretical models in sociology and political science, because they need to remain applicable to a large range of different particular situations.[6] These arguments do not address the PM itself, but they pick on the use of simple theoretical models to schematise social interaction. Such discussions are doomed to a dead end as it happens in other fields, like economics or sociology. There aren't many reasons to expect any positive resolution for these debates, as the positions in dispute belong to different paradigms in the Kuhnian's sense.[7]

The second wave of criticism[8] was more fruitful. It accepted to engage with the fundamentals of the model, sharing a common ground that made fertile controversies possible. It produced the exchanges between Corner and Klaehn,[9] for example, or the stimulating criticism from Boyd-Barrett[10]–who suggested more emphasis on intentionality and a sixth filter regarding the direct buying-out of journalists – and Sparks[11] – who was interested in the application of the model in different international contexts, especially those involving difficulties for consensus between the elites. These exchanges helped to broaden the scope of the PM by pointing useful directions for future research.

The operation of the filters is considered contingent and variable within different contexts. The PM is an open prototypical clarification of media performance in modern capitalism, not a detailed, final or totalizing explanation of the process of news circulation:

> We don't claim that it explains everything and we are clear that *elite differences and local factors (including features of individual media institutions)*

> can influence media outcomes. We argue that the model works well in many important cases, and we await the offering of one that is superior. But we also acknowledge that there remains lots of room for media studies that do not rest on the PM. This same room opens the way to criticizing the model for its failure to pursue those tracks and fill those spaces.[12]

These claims set the goal of describing PM's vulnerabilities in different concrete contexts, as a way to improve the model. Joan Pedro-Carañana[13] has highlighted this need for updating and expanding the model:

> [The PM] could be enriched by relating it to an analysis of the specific logic of capital in the current socio historical process (…) by placing a greater focus on the specific social and market conditions and relations, on contradictions, on divisions and dysfunctions, on counter-forces, on moments of crisis, and on the gaps and the exceptions, all so as to better understand the existence of a real, if limited, plurality and dissent, and the possibility of change. (…) It is necessary to first consider the scope of the PM's applicability to the media of countries other than the United States (where Herman and Chomsky focused their analysis), to Internet media, and to media products other than news.[14]

Accepting these indications from Edward Herman and Pedro-Carañana, my framework focuses on *elite differences*, *local factors* and 'features of individual institutions', as aspects that explain interesting *exceptions* to the PM *on moments of crisis*, where 'counter-forces' take advantage of the *contradictions* of the media system to advance *the possibility of change*, specially through internet media and *products other than news*. We will consider those key aspects in a very different time-space context from the one where the PM was created: Spain, three decades later.

8.3 Contextual Limitations of the Model: Southern Europe, New Media and Situations of Crisis

Thirty years after the publication of *Manufacturing Consent,* some global dynamics of capitalism have changed, due to macroeconomic phenomena. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the neoliberal revolution pioneered by Thatcher and Reagan inaugurated a cycle of uni-polar geopolitics and global deregulation policies. The development of internet and low-cost computing fostered the financialization of the economy and the globalization of free-market ideology.

If anti-communism played a major role in the first PM, this fifth filter has had to be reformulated in the post-Cold War cycle, as 'convergence in the dominant ideology,'[15] the 'provision of a Face of Evil,'[16] 'pro-war dichotomies' against Islamic Fundamentalism[17] or the more abstract formulation 'Us/Them narratives.'[18] Today, we see how populism occasionally plays the role of the universal

enemy of democracy. In any case, this filter has been blurred and broadened after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

But the liveliest debates about the PM today are those regarding internet. The arrival of digital social media during the past decade, like Facebook (after 2006) or Twitter (after 2010), is having an undeniable impact in the structure of global communication fluxes. The obsolescence of traditional business models of the press and broadcasting has been accelerated, and different survival strategies regarding ownership structure and profit sources are being tested.[19]

A third hot area within PM discussions concerns its applicability under different geopolitical and cultural contexts. In our case, the political system and culture in Spain differ strongly from the US. In the first democratic elections, for example, after a four decades-long military dictatorship, in 1977, the Communist Party got 20 seats out of 350 (and has maintained representation in Parliament until today, directly or through coalitions). The *Spanish Socialist Workers' Party* (PSOE), whose official ideology at the time was Marxism, was second with 118 seats and 29% of the vote. Altogether, self-proclaimed socialist forces reached 45% of the vote. Five years later, PSOE wan the elections (already as a social-democratic party) and its leader, Felipe González, was President of Spain for 14 years.

Those were the times when the Propaganda Model was being elaborated in a strongly different *zeitgeist*. According to the *Values and Worldviews Report 2013*, elaborated by the BBVA bank, the Spanish are still the people of Europe that feel less identified with 'capitalism' and have the most negative view of corporations and free-market economy.[20] These brief remarks give an idea of how national 'common sense' (Gramsci) depends on the history and international position of each nation.

Spanish political culture demands an adaptation of the PM's filters as the conditions for hegemony change. While anti-communism was indeed promoted by right-wing fractions of Spanish elites, it always coexisted with strategies that advocated political openness and the assimilation of critical discourses as part of the 'legitimate diversity,' that were much more efficient in creating stability and articulating functional narratives. They became hegemonic. This illustrates what Sparks[21] and Pedro-Carañana have already pointed out, 'the strength of the filters is not as great in regions such as Europe', due to their 'more open cultural and ideological context […], strong critical currents, the presence of leftist political parties with representation in government, […] which permit a wider range of news content. In general, there is greater diversity in countries with a tradition of social democracy than that found in the United States.'[22]

The presence of a strong public broadcast system, with national, regional and local channels (television, radio, and now also internet services), has also functioned as a counterbalance to corporate discourses and as a decent standard of independency, diversity and political openness in key moments (thanks to the pressure from renowned professionals and unions, among other factors). This also indicates the necessity of adapting the PM, as its second hypothesis restricts its application to countries where the media is 'under corporate rather than state

control.'[23] But, the first private TV channels (Antena3, Canal+ and Tele5) arrived to Spain in 1989, after the publication of *Manufacturing Consent*. Until then, Spain only had public televisions, which is significant since 'the Propaganda Model is not applicable to public media outlets,'[24] or at least not entirely.

A final important divergence must be pointed out. Politics in Spain can, increasingly, be elucidated through postcolonial theoretical frames. During Franco's dictatorship, the cooperation of Eisenhower's government with the extreme-right regime was crucial for explaining its duration and the late subaltern integration of Spain in the European Union. Still today, the submission of domestic economic policies (even the Constitutional Reform) to the declared interests of the Paris-Berlin axis, corroborate Spain's vulnerability in the post-subprime crisis of economic reorganization.[25]

The relations of global powers with Spain have an increasingly colonialist profile, but PM does not work in the same way in the colony as in the metropole. There is a visible conflict of interests between global corporations and smaller national companies that still hold a great power of influence on domestic public opinion. This has an impact in the operation of the filters. While, in the case of the US, we can generally assume that the largest national corporations widely overlap with global ones and share common interests, this is not the case for Spain. Actually, in the south of Europe, though some corporations have also become transnational or are increasingly penetrated by foreign capitals, the strategy for many economic sectors and corporate associations, including cultural industries, relies on combining moderate internationalization with inland lobbying against their governments for protection. Lobbying here also means public criticism. They try to force the government to resist pressure from global digital giants such as telecommunication conglomerates or the so-called 'Over The Top' companies (like Netflix, Google, and Amazon) and favour domestic industries.

This dynamic led the Spanish right-wing neoliberal government of Mariano Rajoy, for example, to accept the requirements of the National Newspaper Editors Association (AEDE) and set a new toll for search engines that included their contents within search results. It was known as the 'Google Tax' (or 'AEDE canon'), and it made Google News abandon the country.[26] A similar phenomenon takes place when national private DTT broadcasts (cable and satellite TV have never been prominent in Spain) aggressively lobby on the ruling party so that it transfers or at least extends the specific taxes and obligations that affect them (to invest in Spanish films, co-fund state media, etc.) to their global competitors like YouTube, HBO or Netflix. Governments have to choose who to favour here, and whom dissatisfaction to bear with, but we cannot speak of elite consensus, in this case. This helps to explain the weak influence of some filters, and the hard criticism of some primetime TV shows against Government and transnationals. The impact of neocolonialist confrontation between elites and PM contextual validity deserves more attention.

Due to these conditions, along with the credibility crisis of Spanish journalism[27] and the mobilization of the so-called '*indignados*' or 15-M movement,

there are reasons to think that the first hypothesis of the PM does not fully apply to Spanish context. According to the remarks made by Klaehn and Mullen:

> The first hypothesis put forward by Herman and Chomsky is that, *where there is consensus amongst the corporate and political elite* on a particular issue, the media tend to reflect this. Herman asserts that 'where the elite are really concerned and unified, ***and/or where ordinary citizens are not aware of their own stake in an issue or are immobilized*** by effective propaganda, the media will serve elite interests uncompromisingly'. (…) 'Where the powerful are in disagreement, there will be a certain diversity of tactical judgements on how to attain generally shared aims, reflected in media debate' (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p.xii). (…) The PM acknowledges dissent and makes no predications regarding the effectiveness of hegemonic control. [28]

In terms of the political culture, the last decade in Spain has been characterised as an erosion (and even *rupture*) of the 'Transition Consensus,'[29] the name given to the cultural climate that gave birth to the agreements and implicit redlines that allowed for the stable equilibrium of forces (dictatorship's apparatus, peripheral independentism, the monarchy, recently legalised parties and unions, etc.) frequently called as the *Regime of the 78*.

The 15-M movement exploded in 2011 and aggravated that erosion thanks to the combination of physical and digital mobilization. It soon reached a support of 81% of the population.[30] From the beginning, the internet was the second most-used source to get information about it (66.3%) after TV (77.58%), and it was first (82%) within young people under 24 years old. Preferred internet sources were the digital press (70.04%) and Facebook (51.45%). Twitter, which had just arrived in Spain, was the favourite source among youngest people.[31] It was in fact popularised by the social movement; they became attached to each other.

If we consider these data as indicators of 'ordinary citizens' being 'aware of their own stake' within the issue of the financial crisis, or at least 'not immobilized by propaganda,' then they demand a closer look at the PM in that context and after, how it worked differently (or possibly failed) as an explanation of media behaviour.

At the same time that the print press faced its reputation and profit crisis, new digital left-wing media were created reaching a considerable support and credibility (e.g. *eldiario.es*, *infoLibre*, *La Marea, Cuarto Poder* or *CTXT*, all of them created after 2011). Moreover, a new kind of high-impact progressive 'parajournalistic' TV magazines and talk-shows were breaking records of share on a daily basis, bringing pluralistic political debates to the primetime and late morning fringes.[32] That's the case with *El Intermedio, Salvados, La Sexta Noche, El Objetivo, Al Rojo Vivo, Las Mañanas de Cuatro*, all of them sharing some common characteristics: 1) they serve as a 'reserve' for moderators or guests with unprecedented critical opinions; 2) they use humour, political incorrectness, and other infotainment trends to get more audience; 3) they have created their own star-system of popular anchormen and anchorwomen that attract significant volumes of audience (and who have publicly resisted flak), which is

the case of Jordi Évole,[33] Gran Wyoming, Ana Pastor, Antonio Maestre, Jesús Cintora, Ignacio Escolar, Antonio Ferreras, Jesús Maraña, etc.

The fourth and fifth filters do not seem to be working here. These became most prominent voices also in the digital press and Twitter. Pablo Iglesias himself, the leader of *Podemos* party, is a product of such a new wave of pluralistic political TV shows, where his fame was produced before jumping to electoral competition.[34] The vital importance of Star-System agency within the PM is strategic and deserves also further attention.

8.4 Digital Social Media: A New Playground for Information

As I have mentioned, there is a lively discussion regarding the need to adapt the PM to the internet age, particularly to digital multimedia newspapers, where entrance-barrier costs have dramatically decreased, and to online social networks (hereinafter OSN), where content production is mainly assumed by users who interact through the networks (*prosumers*). The observation that prosumers represent both the unpaid digital labour-force and the commodification of audiences[35] is essential but does not answer the questions about diversity of discourses, agency amplification or cultural effects. Unpaid labour already existed in the pre-Twitter age, since analogical audiences completed the commodification cycle of information contributing to its production and consuming the advertisements that surround it. Audiences were considered a commodity to be produced and sold to advertisers in traditional media, as well.[36] These are not innovations of social media, though they have escalated. In the case of user-generated content platforms, the direct role of prosumers in achieving capital gains is clearer, but the dependency of benefits on the ability of each digital environment to attract users and keep them connected is strong, as well, and plays a role on the PM revision.

The propagation of mobile devices has also had enormous impact on the way information is sold and consumed. A well-established corporate press faces a significant business-model crisis today because it has to share the income from advertising they used to manage on a national scale with several kinds of new digital competitors on a global scale. Digitalization also reduced newspaper sales as the new generations got used to receiving information for free, directly on their mobile devices, selected and commented by equals through their digital communities. OSNs are the main source of visits for online news sites and are, thus, more important than Google or their own homepages.[37]

These reading practices threaten editorial agenda-setting and priming strategies, as they change selection criteria and foster ironic and critical comment of the news being shared. That means a significant loss of control for corporate media. At the same time, they deepen the fragmentation of the public sphere into isolated regions (the so-called 'filter bubble,'[38] which should probably be incorporated into a new more abstract filter of the PM in order to address

the impact of personal ecosystems within OSNs). Regardless of the questionable quality of the selection criteria on that news circulation processes, the result is a structural mutation on the information lifecycle, with consequences to be gradually revealed during the coming years.

When the PM saw the light, such alterations were hardly predictable or properly evaluable. Even for some cultural industries like books or records, things happened so fast that adapting to the new habitat was not always possible. Instability led to important bankruptcies. Financialization and concentration processes after the subprime crisis have not made it easier to overcome new phenomena like massive online file sharing, decreasing ads revenue, pay-walls failure, the so-called click-bait tendency, citizen-journalism, automated content creation, peer-to-peer economy, open source movements and many other new challenges coming into scene year after year. In the case of Spain, the press audience fell from 42.1% in 2008 to 26.5% in 2016.[39] The main newspaper, *El País*, dropped from selling 440.226 copies in 2003, to 115.402 in 2015, a decline of 73.8%.

The notion of 'filter' needs to be adjusted in order to apprehend these vicissitudes. Social media's role in today's communications cannot be dismissed as 'secondary' or 'marginal.' Keeping the PM unaltered would lead to a quick obsolescence of a model that has nonetheless proved its prognosis strengths in pre-Twitter times. Additionally, the PM revitalization needs to deal with a wider question: to what extent is public opinion based on *news* and *information*? It seems to be increasingly influenced by other kinds of emotional and spectacular communication, so it would be a mistake to disregard OSN because most of its contents are 'not political,' nor informational. For good or bad, cultural hegemony disputes seem to have less to do with *truth*, *facts* and *objectivity*, and more with emotions, feelings, self-storytelling and desires, as professional politicians know very well.[40]

8.5 Twitter: A Newborn News Lifecycle

Facebook became open to every adult with a valid email address only in 2006. In 2009, Herman and Chomsky were asked if alternative sources of information provided by the internet could render the PM 'increasingly marginal in its applicability.' They predicted the opposite (as "old media" have a growing place and advertising has become steadily more important [on the Web]'), but they left an open door to that eventuality: 'It is possible that this might happen.'[41]

By that time, Facebook was not much more than a new trend, a very promising start-up. Smartphones were just starting to take over our pockets and permanent attention, and the modern networks that allow fluid mobile navigation were only a project. The iPhone was elected invention of the year by *Time* magazine at the end of 2007, but still didn't support 3G networks. After that, Twitter gradually came onto the scene: the 'Trending Topics' list didn't exist in 2009, and users couldn't see pictures without leaving the platform until 2010. It

did not reach its first hundred-million users until September 2011,[42] three years after Facebook.

In Spain, these developments arrived years later. The first Spanish version of Twitter came out in January 2010, one year after Facebook's Spanish version. It took a few years for OSNs to become mainstream and to be used by a substantial range of the population and deserve regular media attention. The first digitally-centred campaign was run by *Podemos* for European elections, in 2014, six years after Obama's first Big Data-driven campaign.

These remarks lead to a conclusion: the ongoing cultural and ideological impact of 'mass self-communication networks' (as Manuel Castells calls them) was impossible to estimate back in 1989 and hardly evaluable even in 2009. Even today, the long-term impact of social networking on information practices and consent-production is dubiously predictable. In an analysis devoted to 'rebooting' the PM for the new media, Goss concludes that the internet is being conscripted for authoritarian purposes.[43] This conclusion applies for the professional blogging activities he examines but specific analysis of OSN phenomena like the evolution of prosumers' informational practices remains pending.

While old media focused on content production, OSNs just needed to keep a growing number of users interacting and producing their own contents, instead. So, networks focused on carefully providing an addictive experience for prosumers, knowing that any false step (like excessive ads, or censorship, or too limited interactions) could mean an unexpected downfall (as happened to *Hi5, Tuenti, MySpace* or other big OSNs that did not survive). They do not create (nor fully control) contents, in any case, and this is a key difference.

Does this mean that Twitter or Facebook are committed to freedom of speech and ideological pluralism? Certainly not. The pluralism and diversity of the contents is just a side-effect of their business model. They are aware that repeated failures on interaction management, or simple lack of renewal, could mean quick obsolescence, an opportunity for rivals, or massive migrations to open-source rivals (as recently happened from *Whatsapp* to *Telegram* network). There are many social networks, some of them based on a peer-to-peer structure without central servers, which could profit from an eventual freezing of Facebook fever, like *N-1.cc*, *identi.ca*, *friendi.ca, OSSN*, *pump.io*, *Kune, GNU-Social*, *Diaspora**, *BuddyCloud*, etc.

The underlying question here is: why would big corporations like OSNs be helpful to grass-root criticism? As global warming and other environmental threats demonstrate (and history does, as well) global capitalism is not a perfectly stable system which is able to foresee and plan or carefully calculate and produce the conditions for its own sustainability. But, quite often, radical intellectuals depict it in that way, against the fundamentals of Critical Theory. Because of its subordination to the short-term logic of the competitiveness within unregulated markets, capitalism works much more like an out-of-control machine that can only focus on immediate maximization of profits and permanent competition regardless of distant-future consequences. It constantly digs its own grave in different ways.

Massive online social communication can also be regarded as an unexpected progressive externality of the evolution of digital capitalism (quite like the print was for pre-capitalist orders). From the Political Economy point of view, the outbreak of global real-time human cooperation, despite its contradictory procedures (or thanks to them), could also start to be regarded as a critical turning point. A milestone where 'the development of productive forces of society comes in conflict with the existing relations of production or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution.'[44]

8.6 Refining the PM: Beyond Cyber-pessimism and Cyber-euphoria

This last claim will of course be contested as unreasonably optimistic. But it can only be read as such if we consider *an epoch of revolution* as a necessarily positive event. It could also mean, as happened before in the history of capitalism after periods of economic instability, the advent of new kinds of war and authoritarian regimes. The current flourishing of xenophobic and chauvinistic populisms and new sorts of terrorism in western countries, the rise of 'governability issues' discourses and the escalation of military budgets worldwide do not seem to point in an optimistic direction. So, this perspective is not to be read as techno-euphoria, although it certainly diverges from the techno-pessimism that dominates debates about internet and the PM.

Against some predictions,[45] interactive media have served democratic ends, at least in Spain and other countries. Spontaneous coordination as seen in the 15-M Movement, the Arab Spring, the Kitchenware Revolution in Iceland, the Umbrella Revolution in China, or some left-wing electoral populist irruptions like those embodied by Pablo Iglesias, Jean Luc Mélenchon or Jeremy Corbyn, would have been categorically different without the existence of OSNs, if they had ever existed at all. They have made intense use of viralisation, crowdfunding, crowdsourcing, meme seeding and curation, gamification, online discussing and voting, mobile apps, etc.

There is growing evidence of massive interactive dynamics challenging mainstream framings, 'hacking' official agendas and conquering visibility for new subjects and issues that used to remain invisible, for example about the financial crisis and banking bailout in Spain.[46] Activists who moved from traditional to digital social media know this very well, as they are able to reach wider audiences. We observe that the internet is serving for social control in the long-term but also for democratic ends, occasionally, in the meantime. The internet opens a field for stable worldwide collaboration, as projects like Wikipedia, Linux,

Indymedia or eMule and Torrent networks have evidenced, among other experiences that do not fully meet commercial logics. Regarding the PM's filters, the fact that social media like Facebook or search engines like Google belong to huge private corporations with concentrated ownership must of course be acknowledged. They are totally dependent on ads revenue and operate through opaque algorithms that select what we read first and what appears in less visible positions or do not appears at all.[47] OSNs won't render the PM redundant, but they do need to satisfy new kind of requirements in order to maintain their dominant position.

8.7 'Old Media', Online Social Networks and the Propaganda Model

Opinion-driving campaigns on OSNs are being carried out by governments, but also by social organizations. At least in Spain, it is nowadays very strange not to have a critical political Trending Topic every day on Twitter. This is a situation which activists couldn't dream of in traditional media's landscape. Prosumers are not fired by the network due to advertisers or government's pressure as happened to journalists in traditional media. How could owners condition what I write on my Twitter account the way they did with my column on a newspaper or my local radio debate? Can they easily get my mouth shut, or could that generate what the net jargon calls a 'Streisand Effect' (increased circulation of the censored content) or 'Underdog Effect' (solidarity with the excessively punished or relegated)? It is clear that within OSNs the filters do not apply to content creation, but to content promotion. That is another key difference, as promotion also depends in prosumers' actions, not only opaque algorithms. Filters do not work like they did for professional journalism. They do not prevent mentions, answers, re-mediations and other exchanges between individuals, public institutions, journalists, corporate accounts, political parties, social movements, candidates, celebrities, well-known activists, scholars, advertisers, etc. This freedom of interaction creates possibilities that were unthinkable in traditional media's landscape.

Concluding that 'old media' have a growing place within OSNs would not be accurate. During the twentieth century, one-way media had almost total control on the visibility of their Star-System, including renowned anchormen. They also controlled the visibility of their audience's feedback. But in the OSNs they don't. Interaction between TV broadcasts and Twitter is constantly producing examples where an attempt at manipulation or a simple imprecision is immediately contested and generates a Trending Topic in seconds. Communication is not strictly unidirectional anymore. Moreover, Twitter produces its own Star-System: individuals that surpass the digital audience of news broadcasts and

governments, with infinitely more engaged followers. As Pedro-Carañana[48] has pointed out the, internet constitute[s] a media model quite different from that of radio, newspapers, or television. Indeed, the internet is the platform on which non-corporate, participatory media outlets with critical perspectives and support for social change have been able to develop and grow. In this respect, there are different dynamics intrinsic to the way the internet operates that the PM does not consider.

8.8 Flak Against Twitter Stars? A Brief Review of the Spanish Twittersphere

In his critical review of Twitter as a new public sphere, Christian Fuchs considers the asymmetrical power of the visibility of personal accounts[49] concluding that celebrities from the entertainment business, particularly pop stars, dominate attention measured by number of followers. Politics is much less represented (…) Alternative political figures, such as political documentary producer Michael Moore, have far fewer followers, which is an expression of the asymmetrical political attention economy of capitalism that discriminates critical voices.

Group	Twitter account	Social significance	.000 followers
Traditional newspapers	*El País*	Most important newspaper	6.1M (52% fake)
	El Mundo	Newspaper with most-visited digital edition.	2.84M
	20minutos	Most read cost-free newspaper.	1.28M
Politicians & political parties	Pablo Iglesias	Leader of *Podemos* (left-wing populist party)	2.01M
	Mariano Rajoy	President of Spain.	1.41M
	Alberto Garzón	Leader of *PCE* and the left coalition *IU*.	777K
	Partido Popular	Ruling party.	620K
Critical online newspapers & editors	*Publico.es*	Left-wing digital-only newspaper.	812K
	Nacho Escolar	Editor of eldiario.es.	724K
	Eldiario.es	Most read digital-only left wing newspaper	722K
	Jesús Maraña	Editor of infoLibre.es.	253K

Table 8.1: Some politically significant accounts on Twitter (29 June 2017).

Group	Twitter account	Social significance	.000 followers
Private TV Channels and Broadcasts	Antena3	First private TV-channel created in Spain.	1.29M
	Antena3 Noticias	Third most-watched news broadcast.	1.58M
	La Sexta Noticias	Second most-watched news broadcast.	981K
	El Intermedio	Critical 'parajournalistic' daily magazine.	903K
	TeleCinco	Largest audience TV channel.	830K
	Salvados	Audience-leading political documentaries	696K
	Informativos T5	Most-watched news broadcast.	634K
Progressive TV star-system anchormen	Buenafuente	Critical ironical late-night show moderator.	3.42M
	Jordi Évole	Producer of *Salvados* (political documentaries).	3.02M
	Ana Pastor	Moderator of *El Objetivo* (critical journalism).	1.91M
Others	EFE	National state-owned news agency.	1.2M
	La SER	Audience-leader national radio station.	1.09M

Table 8.1: Continued.

He also notes that only 7% of the Trending Topics (TT) were 'political' in 2009, and politics has been even more marginal in the following years. This is not the case of Spanish TTs.[50] Accepting these quantitative criteria as an indicator of visibility, we can turn to Table 8.1 and check some Twitter audiences in Spain.

A Spanish alternative political documentary producer, Jordi Évole, who can undoubtedly claim the title *the Spanish Michael Moore*, amply surpasses the twitter-audience of every traditional media, politician, or TV broadcast.[51] The public face of the Communist Party, Alberto Garzón, has more followers than the ruling party and more than the most-watched TV news broadcast (*Informativos Telecinco*). The leader of the disrupting anti-liberal left-wing populist party, *Podemos*, who belongs to the Marxist school of thought as well,[52] surpasses the number of followers of most mainstream news media, parties, and politicians. If

we look at the progressive 'born-digital' press, the audience gap with traditional media has been shortened in social networks. They reach similar digital audiences as the most watched television channels and news-broadcasts.

In this sense, it wouldn't be accurate to say that 'old media' have a growing place within OSNs, or that technologies such as the internet have been colonised by established media outlets. Of course, personalist individualism is a controversial trend to be observed on the web, but the fact is that PM does not cope in detail with the structure-agency dialectics regarding individuals that enter a profitmaking Star-System. It mostly disregards the role of personal agency within cultural industries, which is absolutely key in advancing social change.[53] In Twitter, the formation of a local or sectorial Star-System is less dependent on structural factors than it was in television or press, more open to outsiders with appealing discourses, and this multiplies personal agency of individuals.

8.9 Conclusion

Before the commercial boom of OSNs, Herman and Chomsky acknowledged four factors protecting the hegemony of traditional media in the internet age: (1) they are still dominant news providers; (2) they have pre-existing audiences and resources; (3) Internet operators are also dependent on advertising revenue; and (4) new media is oriented toward facilitating social connections, with politics secondary at best, with limited resources and outreach, and specialise in critical analysis rather than news-making.[54]

As we have seen, these 'protecting factors' are increasingly uncertain, at least in some contexts. Pre-existing audiences are not directly transferable to the social media, where the resources needed to publish have dramatically decreased. This has reduced the gap between traditional and new alternative media or individuals as news providers in the OSNs (see Table 8.1). In times of political instability, Twitter becomes a privileged arena for real-time information, widely used by journalists, politicians and activists. The hegemony of Spanish traditional national media has entered an impasse, and it is at stake in front of new global actors (like Google, Twitter or Facebook themselves as news providers) and new alternative media and individuals that maintain large online audiences. This dynamic may help to explain the fall of the two-party system in Spain after 2011, and the decline of the opinion-industry that supported them.

Therefore, the arguments that recommend maintaining the PM mainly unchanged within new media because old media have quickly dominated the new scene must be re-examined in the light of new evidence from different countries and political circumstances. The growing power of Twitter and Facebook as the biggest real-time self-fed databases of human interaction is undeniable, and it is clear that they are becoming the means for new sorts of social control through Big Data exploitation. But at the same time, in a contradictory

manner as the very nature of capitalism, they only reach that power by maintaining an attractive arena for sufficiently free global real-time communication, which creates unpredictable externalities, interactional practices, and windows of opportunity for political change in episodes of instability, at least in peripheral countries.

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