

#Yosoy132: Hypervisuality And Social Networks In Mexico

ANNA LEE MRAZ-BARTRA
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

Abstract

This work is an attempt to describe and analyze specific elements of #YoSoy132 as part of a social struggle in the technological and hypervisual world to which we belong, and whose networks of significance are woven by modern and technical media. Hence, social movements should be studied within the framework of this hypervisuality, as well as the cultural redefinition that emerged from the technological information and communication (TIC) that modify collective action and the organization of social movements. Such network-based protests appeal to the emotions of the population with the use of socially-engaged documentary images. People communicate, organize and build social capital through them, using images as tools for social criticism to disclose what would otherwise be left in the dark, rather than as simple illustrative elements.

The movement of #YoSoy132 arose during the spring of 2012 in Mexico, as a reaction against the misinformation provided by the television duopoly (Televisa and TVAzteca); protesters used the hypervisual context to their advantage. However fleeting the movement was, it managed to break the information blockade that largely determines the political, economic and social life in Mexico. But how did they do it? What characterizes this movement in particular? Did it lay the foundation for movements in the future?

Keywords: Hypervisuality, social movement, #YoSoy132, social network, media, collective action, Mexico, social capital.

Resumen

Este trabajo es un intento por describir y analizar elementos específicos del movimiento #YoSoy132 como parte de una lucha social en el mundo tecnológico e hipervisual al que pertenecemos y cuyas redes de significación están tejidas por medios modernos y técnicos. Los movimientos sociales deben ser estudiados en el marco de esta hipervisualidad, así como la redefinición cultural que surgió de la información y comunicación tecnológica que modifican la acción colectiva y la organización de los movimientos sociales. Tales protestas basadas en redes apelan a las emociones de la población con el uso de imágenes documentales socialmente comprometidas. Las personas se comunican, organizan y construyen capital social a través de ellas,

utilizando las imágenes como herramientas para la crítica social para revelar lo que de otro modo quedaría en la oscuridad, más que como simples elementos ilustrativos.

El #YoSoy132 surgió durante la primavera de 2012 en México, como una reacción contra la desinformación proporcionada por el duopolio de televisión (Televisa y TVAzteca). Los manifestantes usaron el contexto hipervisual para su beneficio. Por muy fugaz que fuese el movimiento, logró romper el sesgo de información que determina en gran medida la vida política, económica y social en México. Pero, ¿cómo lo hicieron? ¿Qué caracteriza este movimiento en particular? ¿Estableció las bases para los movimientos en el futuro?

“Seeing comes before words.
The child looks and recognizes before it can speak”

John Berger (1972:7)

Stories, the marrowbone of human experience, are social constructs that inspire and give identity to humans. Whatever means through which they are communicated, they create bonds of solidarity, denote subjective facts of humankind, connecting and motivating people to action. The richness of these experiences comes in many versions. Images are one of them.

Images have long been produced by humans. In recent years, the debate about the origin and function of images seems to be booming. Researchers from various disciplines have intensified their research in the ontological and epistemological aspect of images (Favero, 2014: 166).

The present work aims to observe the changes in social and collective political practices in the movement #YoSoy132, which used technological and information communications (TIC), as well as audiovisual language in its counter-hegemonic struggle. Concerned photography will be analyzed as well as documentary and audiovisual representations of social reality; visual sociology theories will be utilized to assess and develop the use of such images in the # YoSoy132 in Mexico. I will first discuss the notion of hypervisuality. The phenomenon of excessive imagery can be observed since the beginning of the century, and bears many names. Some thinkers, such as Vilém Flusser, use the term “telematic societies” (2011: 11). Manuel Castells describes them as “informational societies” (2011:46). Rubén Gubern, meanwhile, sometimes employs the concept “informative hyperinflation” (2007), while Dênis de Moraes speaks of “audiovisual hyperinflation” (2007: 13). For the purpose of this article, I will call it “hypervisuality”. I will then link this phenomenon to the development of visual sociology, after which I will address the Mexican context in order to develop an analysis of the #Yosoy132 movement, and the importance of visual aspects within it.

The vast majority of social movements throughout history have made extensive use of images, with the constant appearance of paintings, posters, and photographs, usually taken by professional photographers. In this sense, one can say that, in most cases, social movements have had a significant visual component. However, since the advent of digital photography, with the dSLR¹ cameras now on all mobile devices, and

¹ Digital single-lens reflex camera.

the ability to virally spread the information via any website, some movements have to be analyzed within this hypervisual context.

We live in a hypervisual world, whose networks of significance are spun by modern technical means, created by the technological revolution (Buxó, 1999: 1). Currently, social movements should be discussed within the framework of this hypervisuality and cultural redefinition that emerged from the TIC (Castells, 2012), woven by social capital (Ahn & Ostrom, 2003) and collective action (Bray, 2008) as well as the organization within the social movements. It is important to understand that social movements with hypervisual features appeal to the senses and the intellect of the population through the use of images, share certain characteristics, but in addition, are based on TIC (Castells, 2012).

To pave the way towards the notion of hypervisuality, one must begin with the visual; an issue that must be examined so to reveal various aspects of social life today. In several studies (2003, 2004, 2015), Beau Lotto refuted that optical illusions are proof of how fragile human senses are. Lotto denies this claim, insisting that human senses are not fragile; if they were, we would not be here. In one of his presentations, he displays the following images, telling the audience to look for the animal that's about to jump at them in the black and white photo. Then, he explains that color tells us something: that the brain did not evolve to see the world as it. Instead, the brain evolved to see the world in a way that was useful for our species in the past. While the panther cannot be seen in the black and white picture on the left, it is very visible in the color photo on the right:

Image A



Image B



Neuro-physicists have discovered that we perceive color first, then shape and finally movement of objects, within intervals of between 0.5 and 80 milliseconds. “This temporal hierarchy of visual attributes suggests different information significance and relevance to the survival of the individual” (Zeki, 1999: 66). According to Gubern (2007: Loc 152 [versión kindle]), “The human is a visual animal. Ninety percent of the information we receive in everyday life comes from the visual channel”.²

The way in which an individual perceives the outside world depends not only on evolutionary characteristics, but also largely upon the cultural context. In visual thinking, memory influences perception. Our memory images are used to identify, interpret and contribute to seeing. Images cannot be conceived as free from cultural or

² Gubern says he obtained the data from his many readings, including many books on biology and optics, as he was preparing an earlier book *La mirada opulenta* (1987).

contextual links. As explained by John Berger:

The act of looking establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain the world with words, but words do not annul the reality around us. An image is a view that has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance, or set of appearances, which were separated from the place and the moment that first emerged to preserve it for a few moments or centuries. Every image embodies a way of seeing (Berger, 1972: 9).

For José Luis Brea, “There are no events, objects or phenomena, not even pure visual media, but acts of seeing that are extremely complex and result from the cristalization and amalgamation of thickly-braided operators and a no less thick braid representations in which interests are in contest: interests of race, gender, class, cultural difference, groups of beliefs or affinities, and so on. All seeing is, then, a result of a cultural construction and for that reason, a complex hybrid being.” (Brea, 2005:8-9)³. Immanuel Kant noted as early as 1783 that perception is structured by one’s culture, explaining that we either see things according to our laws or we do not see them:

The mere universal form of intuition, called space, must therefore be the substratum of all intuitions determinable to particular objects; and in it, of course, the condition of the possibility and of the variety of these intuitions lies. But the unity of the objects is entirely determined by the understanding and on conditions which lie in its own nature; in that it comprehends all appearances under its own laws and thereby produces in an *a priori* manner, experience, by means of which whatever is to be known only by experience is necessarily subjected to its laws (Kant, 1950:69).

The real core of the technological revolution in the twentieth century followed World War II, when the first computer was invented. The Internet was created in the sixties by the U.S. military’s technological department: *Advanced Research Projects Service of the Department of Defense*. Personal computers spread through the market and soon were accessible to most people. This is one of the factors that led to hypervisuality. Today, the popularity of new technologies, with the entry of the Internet, has led to social, economic and technological changes. These changes are occurring at a rapid pace and demand that society adapts quickly to new needs arising from the use of TIC. One of the changes related to the integration of TIC is the emergence of a new visuality.

As described by Vilem Flusser (2011: 11), the universe of technical images “consists of photos, movies, videos and computers, which have assumed the main role of managing that which had once been managed by linear text” According to him, technical images are now the main vehicle of information; vital for society and individuals. For him, people interact through images, what he calls *telematic societies*.

The hypervisual transformation must be understood in a political and economic context, but technological advances have been at its base. The first digital camera for commercial use was created in 1990, and today you can find phones that also take pictures, as well as very economical, lightweight, and small cameras. Although it had been invented a decade earlier, the company Canon released and popularized a dSLR camera called EOS 30D in 2000. It was much like the electronic analog camera models,

³ All quotes from Spanish have been translated by me.

but had a little screen and you could see the photo instantly. Even though they were expensive, the cameras quickly established a successful market because they could make digital photos professionally. Whereas all previous digital cameras were point-and-shoot, it was now possible to change lenses as well as manipulate aperture, speed and ISO, in the same way as with analog cameras. The camera 30D soon arrived in Mexico, where it also became popular. From 2003 on, the Canon dSLR was recognized by *Popular Photography* magazine as capable of producing images equivalent to 35mm, and soon almost all news agencies changed their team of photographers to similar cameras. “Even Sebastião Salgado, an icon of documentary photography, who was linked to analog Leica cameras, ended up changing them for the dSLR” (Ortiz, 2009). A frantic race began between companies in order to win the market in digital cameras with interchangeable lenses. With the emergence of these cameras, anyone could emulate a way of doing photography professionally, which contributed to an impressive increase of photographers in the United States and many other parts of the world.

Next came the development of smartphones and the creation of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and others, the foundation of these tools was primary for the creation of cyber networks used later on in social movements. The first smartphone was invented in the nineties, and the first attempt to carry out mass production took place in Japan in 1999; outside this island, smartphones were still rare until the mid 2000s. In 2006, the BlackBerry became so popular that it was, “frequently called CrackBerry, alluding to crack and comparing the phone with the addictive nature of the drug” (Wiley, 2006). In 2007, Apple released the iPhone; and that same year, other smartphones called Androids, with new platforms were distributed. Along with the technological advances of these recent years, Facebook and other social networks were developed and became popular. For example, Facebook was a highly visual network since its inception in 2003: “When it was still called Facemash, this network attracted 22,000 visitors, and 450 photos were viewed in its first four hours online by Harvard students” (Locke, 2007). In 2004, the network, now called Thefacebook, expanded to more U.S. colleges. In 2006, Facebook became a public social network, and by 2009 the company announced that Facebook had more than 500 million users. The first prototype of Twitter was built in 2006, based on the social network for photographers, Flickr, that started in 2004. Twitter was launched in 2007, and usage soon increased from 20,000 tweets per day to 60,000. Since 2010, Twitter includes images and videos.

With the 2008 economic crisis, and the development of social media, newspapers began to decline. Since early 2009, many recognized metropolitan newspapers had to shut down after no one offered to invest in them. Many more declared bankruptcy, and there were massive layoffs. Some others, the ones who found buyers, sold at depreciable prices; like the *Wall Street Journal* whose estimated value in 2004 was over \$ 1 trillion and was sold at 50 million. *The New York Times* had to sell shares to Mexican businessman Carlos Slim. “As newspapers went public and sold shares on Wall Street, they would lose retail and display advertising whenever there were busts in the economy. but increasingly more of the ad revenue was coming from classified. Some of us warned that newspapers were almost becoming addicted to classifieds, which are, of course, the most profitable advertising. At some papers, classified accounted for 50 or even 70 percent of total ad revenue [...] This is where the Internet comes in. Custom-made for classifieds. And Internet people - most famously Craig Newmark of Craigslist - were giving it away for free” (Fitzgerald, 2009). Internet changed not only the means but also the contents of information in the last decade. First called Web 1.0, it evolved to Web 2.0. This introduced contributors to elements of

interactivity such as photographs, hypertext, hypermedia, etc., all of which came together in a unique multimedia platform.

Franco and Garcia define the concept of interactivity based on the creation of sustained Internet (2009:107). Castells affirms that this has been the center of the emergence of a new economy, which he calls a network society (2011:9). This combination of factors, and especially the growing use of Internet (mainly through major search engines such as Google), has also changed reading habits. In the words of Franco and Garcia:

The multimedia platform and the use of the social Web 2.0 has the particular feature of hypervisibility [...] The hypervisibility of the new media and new citizen networks is accompanied by two interrelated concepts, convergence and digitization, which together create the primary concept behind which the social Web 2.0 is based: interactivity (Franco and Garcia, 2009: 107).

Castells (2004:2) defines the current situation as one in which a “linked network of interconnected nodes by which there are communication flows, always open, flexible and adaptable while respecting the communicative norms within the network itself”. For Castells, Internet has led toward a decentralized network. In addition, information and knowledge are seen as increasingly important as offering competitive advantages in the economy and in other areas. The same network gives way to a logic of social interaction through various social spheres which are part of that interaction. Abraham Moles describes our era as one of “visual affluence”, with an increasing development of audiovisual culture in all its forms, affirming that “It would be legitimate to ask the question of image density per square meter or per cubic meter, both in the overall space of the city and personally in our centripetal space of organization in the world around us” (Moles, 1975: 65). Gubern asserts that we live in “the society of the five hundred channels” (Gubern, 2000: 35).

Photography and video are technological extensions that work together as cultural supports of memory, representation, ritual, and storytelling. But de Moraes sees a more pessimistic aspect of the visual phenomenon that we are currently experiencing:

The audiovisual hyperinflation shows an irresistible impulse to the expansion of global capitalism. High power flows intensify profits within and outside financial market speculation. The spiral of accumulation incorporates flashing signs: trademarks, icons, performances, shows, adventures, mysteries, and tragedies. And the immediacy of broadcasting information and the excessive concentration of wealth and power (de Moraes, 2007: 13).

Gubern (2000: 124) agrees with this view, and highlights the problems of imagistic hyperinflation: “The audiovisual excess, in addition to reporting, misleads the public, supports banality and stimulates a business strategy tabloid for the market”. However, there are scholars of the subject, such as Katz and Rice (2002), who argue that the pessimistic outlook is purely theoretical and ideological, whereas there is sufficient evidence to support the theory that the Internet and the world of images brings people closer together. One aspect of this is that the flow of concerned images works as counter-information to the mainstream media. The media decline and the trust bestowed in them was replaced by social networks, smartphones and instant images that have contributed to a way to organize and mediate social movements. In the words of Guiomar Rovira (2013:123):

Internet has brought a new era for what until now has been known as alternative communication. The distributed network architecture of Internet, favors the discursive activity of social movements, since they allow information to flow from the margins into the center, they put into circulation to cover large audiences. Internet is a platform that allows activists to leave the ghetto, both directly and indirectly, by influencing the media and thus affecting the transformation of common sense in a society (Rovira, 2013:123).

The technological revolution and mass marketing of smartphones with integrated cameras, as well as access to the Internet at anytime, have led to new forms of social interaction. One of the changes related to the integration of technologies of information and communication into everyday life and its virality is the emergence of a new visuality. It appears, that the first to use the term hypervisuality was M. J. Buxó in 1999:

Hypervisuality is linked to the development of photography, film, video, television and computers in the twentieth century, which are technology to capture and play back images extensions, but fundamentally, they constitute supports of memory and amplifiers of knowledge and imagination. On the one hand, these technologies contribute to changing cultural ways of perceiving reality and represent scientific knowledge and on the other, they create new strategies of expression and communication in all aspects of social, private and public life (Buxó, 1999: 1).

The Internet and social networks only accentuated what was already there, but two features are differences that make a difference: the ease with which image can be captured, since anyone with a smartphone or similar device can generate still images or video; and the possibility of sharing them in seconds on Internet, uploaded and spread through social networks. Castells (2011:29) refers to it as "a world of global flows of wealth, power and images".

Our world is now, more than ever, hypervisual; images are circulating everywhere. Scholars Fernando Aguayo and Lourdes Roca (2005) question that there is an imbalance between its leading role in society and how little attention it receives from social research. Rovira (2013: 125) brings to light several studies on new media; for her, "The spatiality of the Internet is a symbolic construction without physical reference, where #hashtags function as a kind of virtual and cultural plaza for cyber agglomeration". Randall Collins develops a similar idea, stating that "In recent decades a new era has emerged in which it is now possible to study violence that has been recorded on video by private security systems, police and journalists, as well as amateur or civil photographers and videographers" (Collins, 2008: 448 Loc [kindle version]).

Mirzoeff (1998:3) argues that we live in a visually saturated culture, and that late modernity has undergone a "visual turn" towards an increasingly "ocularcentric" culture. Instagram is a very interesting phenomenon, not only for its short and dizzying history, but for the fact that a total of 116, 500, 000 photographs are uploaded everyday. Nonetheless, it falls short against Twitter, where 600,000,000 tweets a day are generated; now many of the tweets are accompanied by images. Further, 6,900,000,000 videos are being watched every day on YouTube, and more than a billion users visit it every

month.⁴

Renobell (2005:6) affirms that, "We have reached hypervisuality, where an image is reproduced in a million different places at a time and where a social phenomenon is represented in many ways, through many social eyes and in very different ways". In this sense, hypervisuality is defined by the massive and constant circulation of digital images broadcast through network technologies that help change ways of perceiving reality, as well as creating new strategies of expression and communication in all areas of social life. This definition is the core that will guide the research that concerns us regarding the use of audiovisual social movements in Mexico in the XXI century. Social movements of this century are best understood by utilizing the concept of hypervisuality, and recognizing that one of their main features is their use of technical images (concerned photography and video) to communicate.



Lewis Hine, "Some boys and girls were so small they had to climb up on to the spinning frame to mend broken threads and to put back the empty bobbins" *Bibb Mill*, No. 1. Macon, Georgia.

The term concerned photography refers to a type of photography that emerged in the late nineteenth century based on the denunciation of social injustices such as child labor, the homeless, migration, and labor exploitation. This photography, based on progressive ideologies, has the clear intention to achieve a political ends and/or join the cause of social struggles. Jacob Riis and sociologist Lewis Hine are considered two important predecessors of concerned photography. A significant example of the importance of images as a tool for social change for visual sociology is the case of Lewis Wickes Hine (1874-1940), a sociologist born in Wisconsin. Hine's documentary photography denounced injustice and poverty, and his studies were accompanied by his photos. "His photos have an ethical basis: the work of a militant where the beauty of photography is subject to sociological analysis" (Jimenez, 2013: prologue). Lewis Hine proved that "Beautiful images of the ugliest conditions could move the nation and with hard work, eventually helped create child labor laws" (Light, 2000: 5).

Photography and sociology emerged almost at the same time, and have led parallel lives, but there has been an attempt to marginalize the use of images in social science. From its beginning, photography was a "screening tool of society" (Becker, 1974), and a critical input for sociology (Suarez, 2008: 1). According to Douglas Harper (2012: 3), "Sociology was an invitation to expose inequity and inspire social change, to engage in social movements [...] Many of us believed that doing sociology visually was

⁴ All data comes from www.internetlivestats.com, last viewed October 2015.

parallel to visualize social realities". This notion that has been present in visual sociology since its inception. In her study of the *American Journal of Sociology*, Clarice Stasz (1979:119) mentioned that from 1905 on photographs began to disappear from this journal; she relates this to an editorial change and finds a link between the disappearance of images and the fact that most of the photographers were women. The editor believed that women and photography contaminated the positivist vision of sociology, devaluating it as science and making it frivolous. Also, most of the photographs were used to denounce social inequalities. Despite these controversies, almost since its inception, photography and sociology have complemented each other in certain areas. Elke Köppen (2012) believes that visual messages cannot necessarily be translated into verbal codes. Words and images are different methods of constructing meaning and narrative versions of reality. Human experience can be passed on both textually and visually as separate forms. The construction of visual significance should be placed on complementarity with the written or the spoken.

The 2012 Mexican student revolt that shook the political class should be understood within these new social processes of communication. A new wave of anti-systemic struggle against neoliberalism and violations of human rights that we all face in Mexico and the world today seem to have emerged from the new media.

Spontaneous. Irreverent. Bold. Thus arose the movement #YoSoy132 [...] as a movement that appears on the scene of Mexican politics to dispute the authoritarian discourse of Enrique Peña Nieto, the PRI candidate then, and now president; it shook the country (Dresser, 2012).

Many described the student demonstrations of 2012 as the "Mexican Spring", that is, the Mexican equivalent of the Arab Spring, the Spanish Indignados and the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States. These movements are the reaction of the people, now aware of the crisis of the political system in many countries. A common ground between all of these movements is the assembly as a means of organization. Like many recent public protests, #YoSoy132 depends to a large extent on social networks to spread their message and seek support.

Social movements are complex constructions, hence it is important to base the analysis of this particular struggle in three main areas: first, the local and global context. Second, the concept of social capital comprising the theories of collective action. And finally, the characteristics of a movement in a hypervisual context, its implications and specificities. Social movements in a hypervisual context understand that in order to appeal to the senses and the intellect of the population it must be done through the use of images. It is not a new idea that images contribute to social change. "A transformation happens when you see something important that had been denied by those who had not or would not see it" (Light, 2000: 4).

Mexico has always had a strong tradition of social documentary photography, including figures such as Nacho Lopez, Tina Modotti, and Hector Garcia, among many, a legacy that has inspired young photographers to work in the tradition of social documentary (Iturbide, 2010: 122). Images (both photos and video, not just those made by professional photographers, but those taken from the smartphones and uploaded on the Internet in order to report on events instantly) have triggered and sustained social movements. This hypervisual context helps communities form a new social space where social relations can take different directions from the traditional vectors. The #YoSoy132 movement is the confrontation of a communication system with a traditional and nationalistic Mexico. The aim of current social movements such as #YoSoy132, is communication itself. The mere act of communicating necessarily implies a living movement. The #Yosoy132 addressed the media machine with

alternative information outside the traditional. The aesthetic-political discourse in various artistic productions were indispensable to the movement. Memes, videos, graphics, photos, poetry, songs, among others, contributed to a significant strengthening of the movement by educated middle-class youth.

Social movements influence one another (Chabanet and Giugni, 2010), and #YoSoy132 has important precursors. One is the legacy of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), an important factor in building social capital within Mexico. More recently, the collective memory of the 1968 student movement, the shadow of the neo-Zapatista struggle in Chiapas in the 1990s, and the cry of pain of victims of the war on drugs – which led to the Peace movement in 2011 – have all strongly influenced contemporary youth and their struggle. Further, the 2000 “transition to democracy” seemed to be a step forward when the PRI dictatorship ended with the election of the PAN candidate Vicente Fox Quesada. However, the 2006 electoral fraud made it evident that little had changed in the political system of Mexico. That same year, state repression and violations committed by the police in the community of San Salvador Atenco under the command of then Governor of the State of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto, left an indelible mark, though it did not cause mass protest. Another seed was sown with the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (MPJD) in May 2011. That movement unified the country from north to south, shaking up not only the youth but many very different people; one example of this was the 8 May march of more than 100,000 participants (Villamil, 2011), where relatives of the victims carried photographs of their loved ones.

Presidential campaigns were carried out normally and in the usual routine during the first months of 2012. As always, the poll results broadcast by radio, newspapers and, of course, television, indicated the candidate of their choice -Enrique Peña Nieto- was leading the presidential race with a supposed advantage of more than 20 points. The PRI, whose presidential rule had been secured for 71 years, was returning to power. Apathy and resignation reigned among the population. Even with the media “blunders” of Peña Nieto (such as the episode in the FIL Guadalajara 2011 and the reaction of his daughter on social networks), he was still presented positively by television cameras.

Hector de Mauleón (2012) has constructed a detailed chronology of the origin and development of the movement of #Yosoy132 through social networks, which began on May 1, 2012, when Televisa and TV Azteca announced that they would not transmit the first presidential debate. That night the first hashtag appeared on social networks: #MarchaAntiEPN, originated by a young woman who made a call to her 805 followers to attend a demonstration against the candidate Enrique Peña Nieto on Saturday, 19 May. The tweet spread like wildfire. On May 10, 2012, 195 000 new posts, including the hashtag #MarchaAntiEPN, were generated from a single user tweet in a single day. What happened on May 11 at the Universidad Iberoamericana (Ibero) would finally unleash the fury of Mexican youth. Peña Nieto attended this institution as part of his campaign, not expecting that students would explode with indignation his statements about the repression in Atenco, six years before. The students’ protest forced the PRI candidate to withdraw into a bathroom, and finally flee the university.

The response of of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) leaders and the media the next day led to the youth organization. Students from the Ibero filmed a video in which 131 students defended their right to protest, repudiated the information as well as the bias against them. Showing their student ids, they denied being paid by anyone to protest against Peña Nieto. This spread through social networks, converting it into a worldwide Trending Topic. The name #YoSoy132 refers mainly to self-affiliation and support of the virtual community in which each individual member of the

movement declares itself the 132nd member of that video. Virtual messages against Peña Nieto began to jump from one account to another, mainly on Twitter and Facebook. Young people sowed the seeds that turned into an emerging political force, causing more than 100,000 people to protest on the street, despite the constant efforts of the army of "virtual bots"⁵ recruited by political parties to counteract these facts.

The emergence of #YoSoy132 must be seen against the backdrop of the 1968 student movement, the neo-Zapatista uprising, and the continuing struggles for social justice and democracy that are part of the collective memory in Mexico. The student movement of '68 was an episode of democratic enthusiasm, as well as a painful struggle for civil rights. Nonetheless, #YoSoy132 was built not only in reference to the collective memory of social struggles in Mexico, but within the current worldwide context. The expulsion of dictators by the Arab revolutions were certainly a trigger for different movements in the United States, Europe, and finally in Latin America. What began in the spring of 2010 spread like wildfire, a phenomenon few times seen in the history of social movements. It would appear that neoliberal globalization has led to a globalization of resistance. The #YoSoy132 movement -- which originated from the weariness, frustration and historical memory of Mexican youth, as well as rooted in the virtual networks -- effectively and creatively struggled against information bias and political authoritarianism in the country, and was consolidated through social networking among the student community. Students joined nationally, regardless of their origin, all demanding truth in the media to awaken a critical consciousness.

All social movements have common denominators: the community, the continuity and sustained action to achieve the objectives and generate action for change. The transformation is produced by a systemic breakdown in the normal functioning in society. For Alain Touraine (1992: 138), it is a "collective action that implements fundamental cultural values against the interests and influences of an enemy defined in terms of power relations". Manuel Castells (2012:9) defines this group of people as a "counter-power, which exercises collective action seeking the sovereignty of their own stories". What could be the common denominator that unites people through their experiences in social action, despite their difference in cultural, economic and institutional contexts? The answer: empowerment, according to Castells (2012:225). "This feeling stems from the aversion to governments and politicians, whether dictatorial or pseudo-democratic and motivates indignation because of the complicity between the financial elite and the political elite. With this, it is then possible to overcome fear through networks of solidarity built in cyberspace and in the communities of urban space" (Castells, 2012 b: 45).

The#Yosoy132 shares a number of common characteristics with other social movements of the last decade. The spontaneity of #YoSoy132, was one of these features. "I think the vast majority of students were there for personal initiative, it was something spontaneous" (Soto, interviewed in 2012). It is also characterized by the use of mobile communication networks and Internet which were essential for development.

Networking was multimodal: it included the social networking online and offline as well as networks created by the movement's actions. Such networks established connection with other movements in Mexico and around the world via the Internet. Technologies provide the platform on which networks evolve simultaneously with the movement. They also reduce their vulnerability to the threat of repression, as there are no specific subjects to

⁵ Virtual bots are a form of virtual robot soldiers whose main purpose it to generate tweets and distribute them massively.

attack in order to suppress the movement (Castells, 2012 (b): 234).

Those involved in #YoSoy132 used social networks in many different ways. Social protests in Internet become social movements as they occupy the urban space, whether it is a permanent occupation of public squares or persistent street protests. “The actual physical space allows interaction between flows of wireless communication and the Internet” (Castells, 2012 (b): 222). In the case of Mexico this took the form of protests against Peña Nieto in the Ibero, the symbolic taking of the Televisa facilities, the blocking of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), and the multiple manifestations of “#MarchaAntiEPN”.

This movement was viral and followed the logic of Internet networks, including the viral nature of broadcast messages themselves, the possibility of mobilizing the images, and the effect of the movements that are repeated in many places at once. “The virality means the message extends from one country to another. Seeing the different movements abroad, young people are inspired, mobilize and perform actions in the hope of the possibility of change” (Castells, 2012 (b): 223). The speed and efficiency with which #YoSoy132 happened was due to the same viral attribute.

The #YoSoy132 is essentially a cultural movement, according to Castells: “The concept of autonomy refers to the ability of an actor to turn a social problem into a project generated independently of the institutions of society, in accordance with the values and interests of the social actor. [...] Internet technology embodies freedom” (Castells, 2012 (b): 226). The movement spread their means of organization immediately via twitter, as well as through the use of images (still or moving) to convey their messages through social networks. Youtube was probably one of the most powerful tools for mobilizing youth, particularly significant images of the use of violence and repression by the police or thugs.

The mass media in Mexico has always maintained a relationship of “codependency” in relation to the government, and this was expressed in the avalanche of propaganda favorable to the regime of Enrique Peña Nieto. Aware of this, #YoSoy132 served as counter-power media form of aesthetic virtual communities created in order to use images in their favor. The Mexican government has always kept the television stations (and almost all other media) under a strict control. This has usually been effected through the “chains of gold” – government advertising, as well as bribes distributed at all levels, from the highest directors and the lowest photojournalists – but it is also important to recognize that the owners of these corporations and the politicians share class interests (Martínez de la Vega, 1953, 18).

Historian Alberto del Castillo (2012:332), argues that the movement of 1968 has features in common with #YoSoy132, specifically in relation to the use and manipulation of images that, according to him, are one of the most important examples of the country’s cultural imaginary. However, while the youth of 1968 did not have widespread access to photographic equipment, the generation is well armed in this aspect. Technology has allowed Mexico's youth to create their own visual statements.

For some activists, the movement’s greatest success was the fact that it existed. It managed to emerge despite the fear generated by government forces, both official and unofficial, and in spite of the defeat that was inevitable. “I think of the # YoSoy132 movement as a successful movement” (Hirsch, interview, 2013). Thanks to it, young people in Mexico were able to raise the possibility of change. “I’m with the 132 because I’m a college student, I am an agent of change” (Rueda, interview, 2012). The “insuperable” candidate in the polls was about to lose the election, and polling results were very tight; this discredited and delegitimized Peña Nieto, a situation that continues

to exist.

The solidarity created by the movement still survives. It managed to create a completely horizontal movement in a country where there is little democracy. It broke down social barriers between public and private universities that had existed before. The name of the movement itself means "solidarity". The name is a hashtag. The hashtag is a number. This means that it has no content within itself, is not a concept, has no poetry in it, nor is it some heroic quest. It's just another number representing that, "I am one of the many". The subject is not the "I" but "all". One example of that was the use of audiovisual media as a basic tool among young people, who edited video to mount a single message with many different faces, not only assuring its horizontality, but making it essentially untouchable. This *modus operandi* was as innovative as it was intelligent.

The strength of this movement lay in the upper and middle class young people from Mexico City who had rarely protested in recent years. The movement demonstrated the potential of Mexican youth and, therefore, the capacity of future generations to change the country. The #YoSoy132 managed to attract the attention to the partiality of the media in a country where the media are co-opted. One slogan of #YoSoy132 was: "We do not want to change the world. Only the politics, economics, the monopolies, the media, the 'democratic' system, education, human rights, and impunity, as well as end the war on drugs." As Castells affirms:

Change, whether evolutionary or revolutionary, is the essence of life. It is a multidimensional phenomenon, subject to changing the mentality of both individuals and communities as a whole. Changes occurs gradually, and it impacts the institutions that structure social practices. However, these practices are rooted in power relations (Castells, 2009:299).

Despite censorship and repression spread throughout the Internet and in social networks through Twitter bots, #YoSoy132 found some allies in some newspapers such as *La Jornada* and the weekly magazine *Proceso*. This allowed the development of a symbiotic relationship between citizens (who with their smartphones uploaded images to YouTube) and oppositional journalists, who helped by disseminating the information to the general public. Twitter played an important role in the discussion of the events, and helped coordinate the movement. "The autonomy of the communication of the Internet has made possible the dissemination of videos, messages and images" (Castells, 2012 (b)).



Photography by Rodrigo Jardón (2012).

The movement #Yosoy132 is a social struggle that emerged from the discredit of Mexican official media in general. The result was a denunciation of political party fabrications in the media, and the media partiality as well. The images that activists themselves created were used as a platform from which the movement expanded in various ways. Before, journalists usually waited for the governmental press release and then based their coverage on it. Once it became clear that official news coverage followed certain political interests, people began to document and distribute on Internet what they themselves registered. What has to be noted is that, within a hypervisual context, people who didn't necessarily come from a professional background in photography or journalism; the social media allows them to create their own visual statements. In social movements of the last decade, activists professionalized their photos and videos, and at the same time created alternative media.

Today, it can be said that #YoSoy132 generated a creative movement rooted in virtual communities, using images as a primary tool. The original video through which the students protested proved it was possible to challenge policies in Mexico, and appears to have left a legacy for social movements still in gestation: "It is a new form of democracy, an old aspiration of humanity that has never been reached" (Castells, 2012: 246 (b)). Today, new technologies and the Internet allow anyone who has access to a camera or video camera to denounce human rights violations. Civil-photojournalism lets participants tell their story from the perspective they want with their own pictures, as well as explain their political reality in opposition to that imposed by television and the official media. Personal views today are offered greater access to public life, through multimedia with its own aesthetic appeal which seek to touch feelings and engage with a broader audience.

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Interviewed

- Federico Soto Rangel, student, Communication Studies, Universidad Iberoamericana, and part of the Commission of Audiovisuals of the segment of the movement called 131.
- Fernando Rueda Garduño, student, Law, UNAM.
- Miguel Hirsch, student, Anthropology, Universidad Iberoamericana.

ANNA LEE MRAZ-BARTRA got her Master degree from the Sorbonne Paris IV, and is currently doing her PHD at the UNAM; both in sociology. Her research areas include visual sociology, social movements, and socio-political environmental conflicts. She is a professor in sociology at the UNAM and a member of the Mexican Network of Visual Anthropology.

e-mail: <mailto:mrazbartra@gmail.com>