This is a repository copy of *Social Media and Virality in the 2014 Student Protests in Venezuela: Rethinking Engagement and Dialogue In Times of Imitation*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/88913/

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Social Media and Virality in the Students' Protests in Venezuela in 2014: Rethinking Engagement and Dialogue In Times of Imitation

JAIRO LUGO-OCANDO
University of Leeds, UK

ALEXANDER HERNANDEZ
Universidad del Zulia, Venezuela

MONICA MARCHESI
Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Catalonia, Spain

Jairo Lugo-Ocando: J.Lugo-Ocando@leeds.ac.uk
Alexander Hernández: alexher202@hotmail.com
Monica Marchesi: monicamarchesi@hotmail.com

This article examines the relationship between social media, political mobilization and civic engagement in the context of the students' protests in Venezuela of 2014. The authors ask whether these technologies were used by participants as catalytic element to trigger the protests and amplify them across the country or if they were instead a galvanizing factor among more general conditions. The analysis uses "cultural chaos" and "virality/contagion" as theoretical approaches to discuss these events in order to provoke discussion around the relationship between protests and social media. However, as the authors clarify, far from a techno-deterministic assumption that sees social media has somehow having agency in itself, their argumentative provocation highlights its role as a platform for political engagement through "imitation" and emotions while rejecting false dichotomies of rationality/irrationality among the "crowd."

Introduction

After the death of President Hugo Chávez in 2013, Nicolás Maduro, was elected president of Venezuela by a slim majority in a contested election (Sagarzazu, 2014). He inherited a fragile economy in which deteriorating public finances met with widespread shortages of basic goods, high inflation, general power cuts and growing violent crime rates (Kurmanaev & Russo, 2014; Pons, 2014). The situation finally made catharsis in 2014 when students and other segments of society took to the streets to protest against the government (Chinea & Ore, 2014; Robertson, 2014); a situation which was referred to by government officials as *guarimbas* (Vargas, 2015).

This article examines the relationship between social media, political mobilization and civic engagement in the context of the students' protests in Venezuela of 2014. The authors ask whether these technologies were used by leaders and participants as a catalytic element to trigger the protests and amplify them across the country or if they were instead a galvanizing factor among more general conditions. Following similar research which claims that viral media have played a key role in Spain's *indignados* movement (Postill, 2014), we use virality/contagion (Sampson, 2012) and cultural chaos (McNair, 2006) as theoretical approaches to analyze these events, while examining their limitations and shortcomings in the context of the Venezuelan society.

We start by contesting techno-deterministic claims that see the use of these technologies as pivotal in instigating these protests. Alternatively, our findings suggests that if well they were used to coordinate protest efforts by some of the student leaders, their most important role was nevertheless to facilitate a "mimetic effect" among the many, one that it is refer to in cultural studies as "contagion" (Sampson, 2012, p. 159) and which happened in the context of a "cultural chaos" (McNair, 2006) fostered by a

new "media ecology" (Strate, 2006). The concept of media/information ecologies has been used as a theoretical explanatory frameworks by some authors (Dahlberg-Grundberg, 2015; Rinke & Röder, 2011; Trereì, 2012) to study protests and student movements/collective. In his work, Emiliano Trereì, for example, highlight the co-evolutionary nature of these ecologies in which actors learn and adapt as a group (2012) while Michael Dahlberg-Grundberg on the Arab Spring underlines from his own data how some modern social movements and their technological keystones may work according to hybrid logics in the context of these ecologies (2015).

Following these works, we also conceptualize the phenomenon of reproduction and rapid dissemination of the protests in Venezuela in terms of co-evolution and hybridity. Our thesis is that this "learning and adaptation" happened in parallel to different logics. We think, however, that learning and adaptation of protesters occurred as a process of imitation. In order to investigate this thesis, our own research utilized a mix method approach, which included triangulating semi-structured interviews and content analysis of the media. The findings suggest that social media did not trigger these events, although the data does underline that they were used to orchestrate protests and as channels of communication among protesters. These findings also indicate that social media was used as a collective non-geographical space for imitation.

This "contagion" effect, in our view, has been very powerful in orchestrating mobilization as protesters came out not necessarily to engage with the political agenda of the leaders promoting the protests but also because they mimic the behavior of others. To be sure, protests in Venezuela have been happening all the time—although not as widespread—even among Hugo Chávez's supporters when he was still in power and the country's public finances were far from struggling as nowadays. Therefore, these types of protests cannot be narrowly seen in binary terms of government versus opposition nor in terms of traditional political rationality but need to be appreciated as a social practice that can be linked to the category of freedom of expression (Gargarella, 2008). To be sure, protests in Venezuela have been traditionally used to highlight issues that liberal

institutions have not addressed. The fact that people protest does not mean that they are not supportive of the government or that they have engaged somehow with the political agenda of the opposition (Cañizález, 2013) but simply that they are trying to become visible to and connect with those in power.

The Protests and the Students

There is little that indicates the existence of a structured student movement capable of mobilizing large segments of the population in Venezuela. Moreover, some of these students' movements are appendixes of the political parties in opposition (Sosa, 2014). Indeed, most of the students' protests came from both the national autonomous - not managed by the central government- and private universities, both with very little *Chavista* support inside them given the social background of students. The suggestion is that there is a class element in the interplay as the protests were led by middle and upper class individuals who have seen a deterioration in their life standards and traditional entitlements (VenEconomia, 2005) and who have been at the core of the opposition to the government (Ito Cerón, 2014).

However, we also question the government's conspiracy narrative that they were "just" orchestrated efforts by the right to overthrow the government (TeleSur, 2014), even though there is clear evidence of past involvement of the opposition to do that in 2002 (Hernández, 2004; Lugo-Ocando & Romero, 2002). However, there is no hard evidence that these protests were part of a wider plan against Nicolás Maduro, neither the large extents of these protests make it likely that they were somehow part of a coordinated effort funded by foreign powers (Nikandrov, 2014; AVN, 2014b) as it is unlikely that these forces had that capacity to mobilize people in such extent.

On the contrary, participation in these protests was mostly spontaneous. As such they became spaces in which discontent converged but in ways that reflected not only frustrations towards the curtailing of middle class liberal aspirations but also expressed

the type of struggles for social rights that we saw in the past from workers unions. The students were able to galvanize the discontent regarding shortages of food in the supermarkets, limitations in housing provisions, crime, inflation and job prospects, while also reflecting the anger against diminishing liberal entitlements that the middle class had.

Overall, "protests" have often been defined as "sites of contestations in which bodies, symbols, identities, practices and discourses are used to pursue or prevent changes in institutionalized power relations" (Taylor, V., & van Dyke, N., 2004, p. 268). As such, they are spaces of temporary convergence of resistance, discontent and overall power in which the individual become part of what historically has been called the "crowd" (Canetti, 1962; Gasset, 1930; Le Bon, 1895). This crowd can exercise collectively power in ways in which the individual cannot.

We also identify with the concept of protests through John Dewey's (1927) notion of "the public," which comes into existence by its association with a particular set of issues. Accordingly, protests happen as a consequence of inadequate institutional channels to either address the issue or hear the voices of discontent. The weaker the institutional channels are the more likelihood of protests taking place in a liberal democracy. Therefore, the lack of credibility and trust in the liberal institutions is a powerful encouragement for protests to happen (Levi & Stoker, 2000).

In the case of Latin America there have been some important studies about the protests (López Maya, 1999; Machado, Scartascini, & Tommasi, 2011; Yashar, 2005). Most of these works have focused on how protests have affected politics and how they link with transnational resistance movements against the power of the elites and the imposition of neo-liberal policy. Other studies have looked at how these resistance movements articulated the power base for today's left-wing governments in that continent (Arditi, 2009). However, as Susan Eckstein (1989) pointed, "neither political science paradigms of regime types nor theories of social movement have been able to adequately

explain why segments of the population at times go out and protests while other stay at home" (1989, p. 1). It is a conundrum to which Antonio Gramsci (1950) dedicated many pages in his own work.

To problematize this further, students' protests present a series of elements that fall out of the class-assumptions. To start with, most students in the higher education come either from the upper or middle classes (Leher, 2010). Despite this, most studies on students' protests have highlighted the "vanguard" status that these movements enjoy within the public imaginary in terms of both resistance and contesting to power. The overall role played by students protests have been studied in the past. From the seminal work of Jürgen Habermas (1968) to more recent works on China (Calhoun, 1997), passing by Singer's examination of the French May of 1968 (1970). In all these studies, students' protests have been presented as an element that challenges those in power.

In the case of Venezuela there is also a history of students' protests against power. This includes the 1928 student movement against the dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez (Arellano, 1988; Figueroa, 2008), the incorporation of students into the guerrilla warfare of the 1960s (Denova, Tarver, & Rivas, 2004) and the students protests against the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s (Pérez-Liñán, 2008). Precisely because the role of students against the dictatorship, the Constitution of 1961 awarded most national universities "autonomy" from central government, which in addition prohibited police and military forces from going into their grounds (AVNc, 2014). Indeed, the history of students' protests in Venezuela has been mainly associated to and constrain within these university spaces.

This conceptualization of students' protests as spatial realities -in which discontent is able to converge and express itself as radical contestation of power- is pivotal in understanding why and how social media has been incorporated into these protests. This notion suggests that the use of social media allowed the projection of influence and power beyond the physical boundaries of university autonomic spaces. It

also indicates that it was technology that allowed these protests to spread across the country.

Contagion Effect

Although only 40% of the population in Venezuela has permanent access to the Internet (Tendencias, 2015), students were able to project their message of discontent widely as they had the resources and knowledge to access social media (Sádaba, Bringué, & Calderín, 2011) in a scenario in which mobile devices had become the main communication platforms for access (Bonina & Illa, 2008) and despite traditional "mainstream news media being now overwhelmingly controlled by or extremely susceptible to government power" (Cañizález, 2014, p. 160). Students using social media acted as "opinion leaders" (Schramm, 1955) allowing different elements to converge and to produce unexpected outcomes; in other words, a media ecology that unleashed the destabilizing impact of digital communication technologies (McNair, 2006).

Paradoxically, it was under Hugo Chávez that Venezuela increased its access to the Internet and made a priority the use of social media (EFE, 2011; Martínez & Rico Díaz, 2104). Politically speaking, this was done to offer other alternative spaces beyond the traditional mainstream media which at the time was mostly controlled by the opposition and economic elites (Lugo-Ocando & Romero, 2003). The strategy was directed at increasing public presence of pro-government voices, social organisations and citizens in the public sphere to counterbalance the then hegemony of the privately-owned media. It was under Chávez that the political struggles were taken to the virtual space, "especially after the coup in April 2002" (Lozada, 2004, p. 170), which highlighted how vulnerable the government was in relation to connecting and mobilizing with its supporters.

Due to these sets of policies, the novelty of these technologies and a marked increase in the average income of the population, Venezuela saw an exponential growth

of almost 300% in the number of Internet users (AVN, 2014a). "One of the most avid groups in adopting these technologies were the Non-Government Organisations and other groups often associated with the so-called civil society" (Urribarrí, 2011, p. 48). Nevertheless, according Raisa Urribarrí, a researcher in the area, there were already important indications of the intention of the government to control these spaces and other problems derived from the expansion of the user base,

> If well between the years 2000 and 2011 the State in Venezuela developed a set of programs and public policies directed at increasing the access to the Web -going from a penetration of 3.38% to 36,57%— it is also important to highlight that the government's own communication conglomerate, CANTV, literally monopolizes the Internet provision by controlling over 90% of the market with an average speed of less than a megabyte per second (1Mbps). The tragic paradox is that while the number of people connected grow, the quality of the Internet connection has deteriorate. All this, while the government increases its grip of the net. (Urribarrí, 2011, p. 50)

During this time, pro-government voices also started to talk about the need for "a new media hegemony" (Cañizález, 2013b, p. 30) that could counterbalance what they saw as counter-revolutionary movements orchestrated by the right-wing sectors. These pro-government voices specifically refer to the articulation of a general communication strategy that would use social media in order to create alternative spaces of communication and propaganda (VTV, 2013). By the time the protests broke out, the media ecology was highly densified with new voices and channels.

The Spark

The first protests took place in the cities of Mérida and San Cristóbal in the south West of Venezuela (López Maya, 2014). However, it was after the assassination of the

students Bassil Alejandro Da Costa on February 12, 2014 that these protests spread to other cities. His death was recorded and uploaded to *YouTube* (Ramírez, 2014), becoming a viral phenomenon. Seeing this cold blood killing in an environment in which people were identified with the students lead to mass protests. What fallowed, in our view, reflects the phenomenon of "contagion by empathy" (Sampson, 2012, p. 155) in which there was not only empathy towards Da Costa and his family, but also deep resentment against the government. Regarding this, journalists and blogger Luis Carlos Díaz, comments,

> There was an emotional break between the government and large segments of the younger population who say on You Tube how presumably members of the secret service, Sebin, shot in cold blood that students. It was an emotional moment that I would personally best describe as the moment that young people in Venezuela, particularly in certain segments, loss their innocence. It was then and there that they realize that traditional channels would not work for them and that they were indeed facing a different type of regime. (Interview with Luis Carlos Díaz on November 11, 2014, Caracas, Venezuela)

According to some estimates, "over 800.000 people went to the streets" (Uzcategui, 2014, p. 153). This became one of the biggest student mobilization in Venezuela's recent history and according to most polls at the time, it had wide support from the general public who saw them as legitimate (IVAD, 2014). In the face of this, the government found it impossible to downplay them. Instead, they opted to disfranchise those participating in them by criminalizing the students and presenting the protests in the official narratives as *guarimbas* (VTV, 2014), a slogan that is often used for vandalism perpetrated by anarchistic groups. According to Amnesty International (2014) dozens of students were incarcerated and hundreds were injured in the crackdown that followed.

The government has repeatedly claimed that the student protests were orchestrated by the opposition with the support of the United States of America to overthrow Maduro (AVN, 2014b) and certainly there is evidence that some of the leaders of these protests were heavily involved with the party-politics of the opposition (Konducta, 2014). Nevertheless, the size and magnitude of these events leave no doubt that there were more complex factors in the interplay. Similar protests in the past were confined to the autonomic areas of the universities or their adjacencies but this was the first time that that such type of protests would spread so widely among so many different segments of society. It is this multiplying effect that calls for further analysis. Why where so many people drawn into these protests? Why where these protests able to transcend the small geographical autonomic areas of the universities for the first time? Moreover, given the limitations regarding the background of the participants and the nature of their overall political discourse, how were they able to reach out to so many people simultaneously?

Traditional literature has pointed out at austerity programs, decreasing living standards and police brutality as having a pivotal role in triggering these type of events (Newburn, 2011). For example, the United Kingdom saw similar protests in the past such as the ones that occurred in Bristol in 1980 and in Brixton (London) and Toxteth (Liverpool) in 1981. In all cases there were decreasing living standard, racial discrimination and also police brutality. However, none of these events transcended relatively small geographical areas in the UK. The difference between these previous events and the 2011 London riots—which spread simultaneously across many cities in the UK—was, according to some authors, the new media ecology. This allowed for protesters to connect with occurring events and with each other across the UK while bringing into play simultaneously a series of elements and events, "collective intelligence" (Lévy & Bonomo, 1999) and shared political imaginaries. This research has recognized the role that social media played in amplifying these types of events (Dant & Richards, 2011). Accordingly, the new media ecology became a medium in which a variety of elements galvanized to foster the imitating of political actions in terms of contagion/virality.

Scholars such as Henry Jenkins have nevertheless criticized the metaphor of "virality," suggesting to use instead "spreadability" because it recognizes human agency (Usher, 2010). Nonetheless, we continue to adopt the term "virality" in our own work because for us agency does not necessarily translates in control, not even individual control. Contrary to Jenkins, we see "virality" as an argumentative metaphor, which implies human agency/intervention although not necessarily the ability to control or set direction to protests as social practice. The use of "virality" as an argumentative provocation implies that the messages can take a life of its own with the sole purpose of surviving and thriving in the new media ecology, something that does not precludes human agency.

Spreading the Word

We find the logics of virality useful, particularly in relation to the formation of the "crowd" and in the context of contagion because,

> The chaotic rhythm of contagious encounter is indeed easy to observe but not so easy to control. Certainly, unlike the assumed substance of the memetic unit, the incorporeal material of affective contagion has a distinct ungraspability. (Sampson, 2012, p. 95)

Sampson and other scholars (Borch, 2006; Nye, 1973) have been clear in their own work about the tendency of early authors such as Gabriel Tarde (1843–1904), Gustave Le Bon (1841–1931) and José Ortega y Gasset, (1883–1955) to psychologize participative social movements. They also have remained us about the disdain toward the crowds that Tarde and Le Bon felt, who saw it as the "masses" of lower class urban dwellers with little rationality and acting on primal instincts. Moreover, generations of social movement scholars have produce a comprehensive critique against both Tarde and Le Bon and written extensively about alternative explanations.

Having said that, we still believe that the exponential growth of the students protest in Venezuela can still be examined using the laws of Repetition and Adaptation. We also think Le Bon's mental unity principal is still valid as a tool in scrutinize how the crowd "absorbs the individuals into the suggestibility of the many" (Sampson, 2012, p. 169). According to Le Bon's mental unity of the crowds' principle –or meme-,

> Under certain given circumstances, and only under those circumstances, an agglomeration of men presents new characteristics very different from those of the individuals composing it. The sentiments and ideas of all the persons in the gathering take one and the same direction, and their conscious personality vanishes. A collective mind is formed, doubtless transitory, but presenting very clearly defined characteristics. The gathering has thus become what, in the absence of a better expression, I will call an organized crowd, or, if the term is considered preferable, a psychological crowd. It forms a single being and is subject to the law of the mental unity of crowds. (Le Bon, 2003 [1895], p.46)

For Le Bon, who had witnessed the Paris Commune, the rise of Georges Ernest Boulanger, and the Dreyfus Affair, there were events able to galvanize a multiplicity of elements and which ultimately lead to the mobilization of large segments of the population. In this case, he suggested, people behave differently as individuals than when they are in a group.

Sampson (2012) points out that in an age of interactivity, this "meme" effect transcends the physical boundaries and can spread more widely and faster. Therefore, given the right conditions, a protest can become an epidemic in a matter of hours, taking a life of its own. This does not however precludes agency from the different participants: on the contrary, the virality metaphor suggests that the protests acquire its own agenda

and dynamics through imitation among individuals, which would explain why the protests in Venezuela grew so fast despite the leaders of the opposition lacking the political appeal to mobilize the protests (when the leaders of the opposition Leopoldo López and María Corina Machado initially called for people to protests in the streets, only few undertook their call).

Sampson argues that in certain cases empathy becomes a means of contagion, which indicates that "emotionality" can play a key role in protests.[1] Far from an indictment of lack of consciousness among students and members of the public when joining these protests, the metaphor of virality/contagion reminds us of the false dichotomy between rationality/irrationality and rationality/emotionality in relation to human political behavior. In this context, the students were seen as legitimate protesters and as acceptable role models (drawing parallels with those British youngsters joining ISIS nowadays). The fact that their words and actions spread through *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *You Tube* only added to that legitimacy of participating in these protests as there was no apparent mediation between them and the general public who could listen and see them directly.

Sampson (2012) also suggests that the process of contagion is temporary and that it declines and died as a virus does. This "temporality" means that the contagion effect somehow subsides over a relatively short period of time, something that would also explained why the students' protests decelerated its spread after some weeks and then declined until stalling. However, this is not an entirely satisfactory explanation as we recognize that heavy-handed police and military intervention to crack down the protesters, the imprisonment of key opposition leaders and a sustain campaign in the

---

[1]It is important to clarify that by using the notion of "contagion" Sampson is not passing judgment, despite the usual negative connotations of the word. He is just using it to metaphorically describe certain patterns of behaviour,

media criminalizing and de-legitimizing the students had perhaps a more crucial part in waning down the protests.

It is also possible, according to some journalists covering those events, that the prolonged perception of anarchy and disorder was in itself a driving force for the protesters losing legitimacy in the public eyes and a motive for many to withdraw from the protests. Rogelio Suárez, journalists and news editor of the *Radio Fe y Alegría* broadcast network in the West of Venezuela, points out,

> There was a sense after a while that it was too much, that the protests were going nowhere. That the "guarimbas" were only making things worst. After a while, the protests themselves became in the eyes of many people the problem. (Interview with Rogelio Suárez on November 10, 2014 in Maracaibo, Venezuela)

Here the metaphor of virus is also useful, as collective perceptions can also halt imitation once they reach a saturation level in which the host body is killed. The analogy here is clear, as the host body in this case is a public sphere that literally gets oversaturated with information overload, leading to disengagement of the individuals.

Despite theoretical limitations, Sampsons' approach can help us understand better why the protests spread so fast and to so many places simultaneously. Meanwhile, McNair's assumption that in the age of cultural chaos the new media ecology can enhance distribution of content by brining complexity into the equation also help us understand why this contagion became possible in the first place in a country in which mainstream media spaces as institutional channels to express discontent were becoming increasingly curtailed by political polarization and government censorship.

Blackout and Beyond

Indeed, by 2014 the Venezuelan government exercised control over most of the mainstream media and it had a firm grip, particularly, on the broadcasting sector (Bisbal, 2011; Cañizález, 2010; RSF, 2010). It did so mostly by reformulating the legal framework that regulated media ownership and broadcast licenses (Ramírez Alvarado, 2007), "allocating almost discretionally government advertising" (Cañizález, 2010, p. 63) and access to hard currency to buy paper, equipment and spare parts (EFE, 2014). Where media control was not possible, the government used the judicial systems to prosecute media owners and journalists (FIP, 2009) while supporting and encouraging the buyout of oppositional media outlets by groups and individuals with close links to the government (El Nacional, 2014).

Our own data suggests that the mainstream media effectively tried to minimize the students' protests, as it is standard practice in most societies. A sample of stories published in the newspapers *El Nacional*, *Últimas Noticias* and el *Correo del Orinoco* during the months of the protests (February to April) show that they did not received ample coverage as one might expect. Even in *El Nacional*, the only of the three newspapers that identifies itself openly with the opposition, just 46% of the stories of the protests had a picture and only 36% made it to the front page. More important was the fact that all three newspapers articulated their stories using politicians and government officials as main sources instead of the students.

The broadcast media also downplayed the protests. Examining audio-visual archives from two key television channels, *Venevisión* and *Televen* during the month of March 2014, it is possible to see that the overall coverage of the protests was limited to the news segments and to brief sections of these. Although there are interviews with leaders of the opposition and human rights activists, students themselves are all but absent in these reports. Both *Venevisión* and *Televen* claim to be the "independent" channels and portray their reporting as unbiased. Nevertheless, our sample of the

coverage of these events suggest that the use of official sources and the invisibilization of the actual protests were characteristics of the news coverage in those days.

In terms of audience reach, the overall news media landscape failed to connect with the type of decentralized politics that are popular among younger people. Therefore, it is not surprising that both the students and important segments of the public relied more on social media to know what was really happening. Research carried out just after these events indicate that the use of social media provisions such as *Twitter* "increased significantly during the days of the protests" (Arenas, G. and Delgado, C., 2014, p. 70). This body of research suggests that the increased use of *Twitter* and *Facebook*, also saw a politicization in the nature of the message being exchanged. That meant that not only people were using more social media, but they were also using it to discuss and exchange political messages.

There is, in addition, evidence that social media was used to create a space of protection against police brutality in a similar manner in which in the past the universities' autonomic spaces offered refuge for the protesters. For Melanio Escobar, a *Twitter* user who became prominent during the students' protests as he gather and published the names, pictures and locations of people being detained by the police, the national guard and the intelligence services, the question was simple,

> I felt that unless we gathered and published the names of those being detained, something could happen to them. In South America we have a long tradition of disappearances, people who are arrested and then vanishes for ever. (Interview with Melanio Escobar on November 21st, 2014 in Caracas, Venezuela)

In fact, Escobar explains also that the use of *Twitter* and *Facebook* incremented in part because it also became a system of self-defense,

Those of us who were taking part of the protests notice from the start that it was in those marches and situations in which there were no journalists present in which most of the deaths in the hands of the police occurred. These deaths happened during protests in which there was no one reporting in social media. In fact, there is no traces of Daniel Tinoco's assassination nor of Robert Redman. There is no evidence or public register of the deaths of Génesis or Adriana Urquiola. We also notice that when people were filming or taking pictures, the police and the armed forces seemed to behave in a more constrained manner regarding the use of force. It then became obvious that we had to gathered and disseminate this information. That meant asking people in the marches to take pictures and record footage with their mobile devices and then upload them to the Internet using social media. Once that was there, we all started to Tweet so people could become aware of what was happening. (Interview with Melanio Escobar on November 21st, 2014 in Caracas, Venezuela)

According to him, the use of social media was not only a matter of dissemination but also responded to the need to reduce uncertainty and anxiety among the families of the students who had been arrested or injured,

I personally visited Fuerte Tiuna[2]and other places. I managed to compile the names of nearly 3.000 people who had been detained. I published their names and in many cases their pictures thanks to amateur photographers in the place. Thanks to that families, relatives and friends of those under arrest were able to know where their loved ones were being held. I also know that other Twitter users did similar

---

[2] Fuerte Tiuna is the main headquarters for the armed forces, but also became a massive detention centre during the students protest.

things from the hospitals and even from the morgues. The whole point was to reduce uncertainty and anxiety among the public. Let's remember that there was literally a blackout of the mainstream media and social media was the only channel we had to communicate these things.

People also used social media "to set the record straight." José Leonardo León Avendaño, a broadcast journalist who is managing news director of the radio network *Circuito Radial de la Universidad de los Andes* and a part-time stringer for Thomson Reuters in the city of Mérida, where some of the biggest and more intense protests took place, explains what he saw those days,

People were using Twitter to disseminate the pictures of who were causing the vandalism and the destruction of property. It was not the students, but the pro-government groups called "colectivos." These quasi paramilitary groups, heavily armed and protected by the police itself, patrolled the city searching for protesters while vandalizing houses, buildings and offices. People wanted to show what was really happening as this was not being reported by the mainstream media. They felt perhaps that at least in that way they were showing the impunity with which these people were acting. (Interview with José Leonardo León Avendaño on November 21st, 2014 in the city of Mérida, Venezuela)

The universities themselves as institutions seemed to have played a role in disseminating the messages about the protests, although indirectly. As Rogelio Suárez, a radio journalist based in Maracaibo points out,

It was curious to notice, for example, that the three main universities in the state of Zulia, URBE, LUZ and UNICA were constantly updating information to their students and members of staff using their official

Twitter accounts. In these updates they informed people when they were open, when they were closed –one could assume because protests- or in which of their campuses there were particular problems. In so doing, they were practically mapping the geography of the protests, so if someone wanted to go, they knew exactly where to go. There is no doubt in my mind that the use of the institutional social media accounts by these universities gave indirectly information about the protests. There were also unofficial accounts of groups or individuals closely linked to these universities who not only provided similar information, but went beyond to give far more details. (Interview with Rogelio Suárez on November 10, 2014 in Maracaibo, Venezuela)

Having pointed this out, this increase in the use of the social media at the time does not explain in our view why the contagion effect happened so quickly. Why did it translate into political action among so many in such a short period of time? Iria Puyosa offers a possible interpretation for this, as "the propagation of political ideas happens only when a critical mass of nods gets connected" (2014, p. 42). In other words, the digital platforms provide an opportunity for the protesters to reach that critical mass, after which the protests just became viral (speed). Puyosa argues that thanks to this, political ideas can bypass the barriers created by polarization; which until then had prevented each side from reaching the other's constituencies.

Puyosa, nonetheless, also warns that in those protests it was not possible to identify a core leadership. Between February and April of 2014, as she points out, "when people took to the streets, the politicians and student leaders tried in vain to interpret the actions in a coherent manner" (2014, p. 45). Indeed, the movement failed to create or even to set the basis for a more collective identity that could respond to the discontent that lead to the protests in the first place. Because of the lack of cohesion -or centrality- the temporality of the movement was sealed. For Luis Carlos Díaz,

The use of social media during the students' protests amplified the scandal and stirred the anger and frustration against the government. But at the end it failed to articulate a civil agenda that somehow was able to synthesized people's aspirations and demands. (Interview with Luis Carlos Díaz on November 11, 2014 in Caracas, Venezuela)

Does this mean that without political rationality—following emotional contagion/virality—is not possible to achieve a more permanent change or long standing agenda? Well no, because participation by means of emotional imitation can also lead to rational innovation in politics. For, Sampson (2012), who is coming from a cultural studies perspective, is precisely imitation that allows society to create new things. By this he means that once contagion occurs and is replicated among many, there will be variance and it is from this variance that we can expect change and innovation.

This variation, in the case of Venezuela, can mean new forms of doing politics and engaging with the public. Student participation, at least partially, did occur by imitation and it meant that thousands became also politicized in ways in which they were not previously. Because of it they are starting to discover new ways of political engagement. The question, however, is: What type of engagement are they learning under these circumstances? For Jesús Urbina, journalist, blogger and a professor of media studies at the Universidad del Zulia,

What the use of Twitter and Facebook showed during the protests is that their use reflected in many ways some of the worst aspects of our own political culture. If you think about it, they were not used to articulate spaces for democratic dialogue and cohabitation. Instead, they were used to designed bubbles of contestation, making it even more difficult to speak to each other, which is what democratic society ought to be doing; at least in those areas in which dialogue could bring some sort of shared view of the future. Instead, social media was used

in the same manner we tend to use television, newspapers and the rest of the traditional media, to further delimit our own spaces. (Interview with Jesús Urbina on November 10, 2014 in Maracaibo, Venezuela⁾

Indeed, if well social media has brought innovation in terms of political engagement, the key problem remains; the absence of spaces for dialogue in which people can exchange ideas, views and shared preoccupations.

Conclusions

At no point has been our intention to suggest that the students protest in Venezuela can be solely explained by psychology or techno-deterministic perspectives which remain the key characteristics of Virality and Cultural Chaos as theoretical approaches. On the contrary, we have tried to highlight their profound limitations as explanatory frameworks. Having said that, we did find them useful as instruments of argumentative provocation, which as Niklas Luhmann (1995) said, can be precious to opening new understandings. Neither are we saying that these technologies either hinder dialogue or foster a more inclusive public sphere per se. It has been instead users' practices and political culture, characterized by extreme polarization and violence, which has stopped political dialogue from happening among the different actors.

Our argumentative provocation have been carried out in order to explore the power of those using these technologies in fostering emotional links among participants and participation and civic engagements in ways that Venezuela had not seen for years. This is a process that Jeffrey S. Juris has called the "emerging logic of aggregation" which is able of assembling masses of individuals from diverse backgrounds within physical spaces (2012, p. 259). We have suggested that this logic of aggregation can happen also in meta-geographical terms. In light of this, we call for future research to explore how to make social media a space in which we all learn and innovate through the imitation of dialogue rather than as an extended trench for propaganda and polarization.

At this point, is worth revisiting the history of the first democratic spaces for dialogue that were created in Latin America, "when universities were awarded autonomy, free from central government intervention, this was done to give them the freedom to debate ideas" (Cordero, 1959, p. 8). Indeed, since the university reform in Cordoba (Argentina) of 1918, this autonomy was understood not only as geographical spaces protected from central power intervention but also as a meta-geographically encounter for dialogue, knowledge and political participation among individuals. In these spaces, academics were given autonomy to teach and research while students were encouraged to imitate that same contestation to power and advance democratic citizenship. It is perhaps time then that we learn from these lessons and use social media to develop spaces for autonomic dialogue in which people and governments can engage with ideas and views without feeling excluded or threaten and in which imitation truly translates into democratic innovation.

References

Amnesty International, (2014). *Venezuela: Los derechos humanos en riesgo en medio de protestas* [Venezuela: Human Rights at Risk in the middle of the protests]. London, UK: Amnesty International Publications.

Arditi, B., (2009). El giro a la izquierda en América Latina: ¿Una política post-liberal? [The left turn of Latin America: Is it post-liberal politics?]. *Ciências Sociais Unisinos*, *45*(3), pp. 232–246.

Arellano, H., (1988). *Los dos años más largos en la vida del joven Betancourt* [The two longest years of the young Betancourt's life]. Caracas, Venezuela: Ediciones del Congreso de la República.

Arenas, G., & Delgado, C., (2014). XX12F Rebelión digital. Comunicación [XX12F Digital revolt. Communication]. *Estudios Venezolanos de Comunicación. Centro Gumilla*, *166,* 70–76.

AVN, (2014a). Sector telecomunicaciones en Venezuela se mantiene estable y en crecimiento [The telecommunication sector in Venezuela remains stable and growing]. *MINCI* [Online]. Retrieved from http://www.minci.gob.ve/2014/12/sector-telecomunicaciones-en-venezuela-se-mantiene-estable-y-en-crecimiento/

AVN, (2014b). Maduro denunció vínculos de funcionarios de embajada gringa con guarimberos [Maduro denounces that US diplomats are taking part in street protests]. *Redpres* [Online]. Retrieved from http://www.redpres.com/t10119-maduro-denuncio-vinculos-de-funcionarios-de-embajada-gringa-con-guarimberos

AVN, (2014). El día que Caldera le arrebató los espacios del Jardín Botánico Universitario a la UCV. [The day that Caldera stole the spaces of the Central University of Venezuela's Botanic Garden]. *Opsu* [Online]. Retrieved from http://www.opsu.gob.ve/extranet/rrpp/noticias/index.php?id_not=4241

Bisbal, M., (2011). La plataforma mediática del Estado bolivariano, o la desmesura del Estado-comunicado [The media platform of the Bolivarian state or the excesses of a communicated-state]. *Actual Investigación*, *66*, 15–46.

Bonina, C. M., & Illa, M. R., (2008). Telefonía móvil y pobreza digital en América Latina. ¿Puede la expansión de los teléfonos celulares reducir la pobreza? [Mobile phone technology in Latin America. Can the expansion in the use of mobile phone help reduce poverty?]. *Dirsi* [Online]. Retrieved from http://dirsi.net/sites/default/files/dirsi_07_CJ2_es_0.pdf

Borch, C. (2006). The exclusion of the crowd. The destiny of a sociological figure of the irrational. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *9*(1), 83–102.

Calhoun, C., (1997). *Neither gods nor emperors: Students and the struggle for democracy in China*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Canetti, E., (1962). *Crowds and power*. London, UK: Macmillan.

Cañizález, A., (2010). Política oficial de hegemonía comunicacional en Venezuela [The official policy of communication hegemony in Venezuela]. *Diálogo Político*, 27(1), 63–78.

Cañizález, A., (2013a). ¿El fin de la libertad de expresión? [Is it the end of freedom of expression?]. *Confictove* [Online]. Retrieved from http://www.conflictove.org.ve/analisis-y-opinion/el-fin-de-la-libertad-de-expresion-articulo-de-andres-canizales.html

Cañizález, A., (2013b). De mediadores a protagonistas: crisis política, medios y comunicación en Venezuela [From mediator to main actors: political crisis, media and communication in Venezuela]. *Íconos-Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, 16(1), 30–36.

Cañizález, A., (2014). The State in Pursuit of Hegemony over the Media: The Chávez Model. En: M. A. a. M. M. Guerrero, ed. *Media Systems and Communication Policies in Latin America*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 157–178.

Chinea, E. and Ore, D., (2014). Clashes flare after Venezuela student camps raided, one dead. *Reuters* [Online]. Retrieved from http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/08/us-venezuela-protests-raids-idUSBREA470MT20140508

Cordero, F. F., (1959). *Autonomía Universitaria* [University Autonomy].
Caracas,Venezuela: Imprenta de la Universidad Central de Venezuela.

Dahlberg-Grundberg, M. (2015). Technology as movement. On hybrid organizational
types and the mutual constitution of movement identity and technological
infrastructure in digital activism. *Convergence*. DOI: 10.1177/1354856515577921

Dant, A., & Richards, J. (2011). Behind the rumours: how we built our Twitter riots
interactive. *The Guardian* [Online]. Retrieved from
http://www.theguardian.com/uk/interactive/2011/dec/07/london-riots-twitter

de Sucre, M. D. L. A., & Mendoza, C. M. N. (1967). *La generación venezolana de 1928.
Estudio de una élite política* [The 1928 generation. A study of the political elite].
Caracas, Venezuela: Ediciones Ariel.

Denova, Tarver, H. T., & Rivas A. A. (2004). *El fracaso de un sueño: un breve análisis
de la insurgencia en Venezuela, 1960–1968* [A failed dream: A short analysis of
the guerrilla warfare in Venezuela, 1960–1968]. Mérida, Venezuela: Ediciones
Universidad Los Andes.

Dewey, J. (2012 [1927]). *The public and its problems: An essay in political inquiry*.
University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.

Eckstein, S., (1989). Power and popular protest in Latin America. In S. Eckstein (Ed.),
*Power and popular protest in Latin America. Power and popular protest: Latin
American social movements* (pp. 1–60). Berkeley, CA: University of California
Press,

EFE. (2011). Fundación venezolana Infocentro gana un premio de la UNESCO [Venezuela foundation wins UNESCO prize]. *Noticias24* [Online]. Retrieved from http://www.noticias24.com/actualidad/noticia/183320/fundacion-venezolana-infocentro-gana-un-premio-de-la-unesco/

EFE. (2014). Venezuela ante el riesgo de quedarse sin papel periódico [Venezuela faces risk of newspaper shortage]. *El Nacional* [Online]. Retrieved from http://www.el-nacional.com/politica/Venezuela-riesgo-quedarse-papel-periodico_0_336566517.html

El Nacional. (2014). Silvia Alegrett: El gobierno ya no cierra medios, los compra [Silvia Alegrett: The government no longer closes media outlets, it just buys them]. *El Nacional* [Online]. Retrieved from http://www.el-nacional.com/sociedad/Silvia-Alegrett-gobierno-medios-compra_0_472152874.html

Figueroa, N. S., (2008). *El joven Rómulo Betancourt: de la Semana del Estudiante al Plan de Barranquilla (1928–1931)* [The young Rómulo Betancourt: From the students' week to the Barranquilla Plan (1928–1931)]. Caracas, Venezuela: Fundación Rómulo Betancourt.

FIP. (2009). La FIP y la FEPALC condenan el asesinato de un periodista y exigen seguridad a las autoridades de Venezuela [FIP and FEPALC condemn murder of journalists and demand security from officials]. *Eurolatinpress* [Online]. Retrieved from https://eurolatinpress.wordpress.com/2009/01/19/la-fip-y-la-fepalc-condenan-el-asesinato-de-un-periodista-y-exigen-seguridad-a-las-autoridades-de-venezuela/

Gargarella, R. (2008). El derecho frente a la protesta social. *Revista de la Facultad de Derecho de México*, 250, 183–200.

Gramsci, A. (1996 [1950]). *Prison notebooks*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Habermas, J. (1971 [1968]). *Toward a rational society: Student protest, science, and politics*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Hernández, J. A. (2004). Against the comedy of civil society: Posthegemony, media and the 2002 coup d'état in Venezuela. *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, *13*(1), 137–145.

Ito Cerón, J. C. (2014). Escenario de agitación socio-política en la Venezuela contemporánea: de los factores de conflictividad a la apertura de ventanas de oportunidad [Sociopolitical uprising scenarios in contemporary Venezuela: From the conflicting factors to the windows of opportunity]. *Memorias*, *10*(24), 24–48.

IVAD. (2014). IVAD: 71,4% del país evalúa positivamente al movimiento estudiantil (encuesta) [IVAD: 71.4% of the people surveyed perceived as positive the student movement]. *La Patilla* [Online]. Retrieved from http://www.lapatilla.com/site/2014/04/05/ivad-714-del-pais-evalua-positivamente-al-movimiento-estudiantil-encuesta/

Juris, J. S. (2012). Reflections on# occupy cverywhere: Social media, public space, and emerging logics of aggregation. *American Ethnologist*, *39*(2), 259–279.

Konducta, Z. (2014). Divulgan video de Lorent Gómez Saleh hablando de "calentar" Táchira [The show the video of Lorent Gómez Saleh inciting to riot in Táchira]. *Noticias Venezuela* [Online]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WR1HWt1qIMA

Kurmanaev, A. and Russo, C., (2014). Venezuelan Bonds Slide After S&P Lowered
      Credit Rating. *Bloomberg* [Online]. Retrieved from
      http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-09-16/venezuela-s-rating-cut-by-s-p-to-
      ccc-on-deteriorating-economy.html

Le Bon, G., (2003 [1895]). *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. Mineola, NY:
      Dover Publications Inc.

Leher, R., (2010). *Por una reforma radical de las universidades latinoamericanas*
      [Seeking a radical reform of the Latin American universities]. Buenos Aires,
      Argentina: Homo Sapiens.

Levi, M., & Stoker, L., (2000). Political trust and trustworthiness. *Annual Review of
      Political Science*, 3(1), 475–507.

Lévy, P., & Bonomo, R., (1999). *Collective intelligence: Mankind's emerging world in
      cyberspace*. New York, NY: Perseus Publishing.

López Maya, M., (1999). *Lucha popular, democracia, neoliberalismo: protesta popular
      en América Latina en los años de ajuste* [Popular struggle, democracy,
      neoliberalism: popular protests in Latin America during the years of structural
      adjustment]. Caracas, Venezuela: Nueva Sociedad.

López Maya, M., (2014). Febrero 2014 en Venezuela: Reflexiones para un balance
      [February 2014 in Venezuela: General reflexions for an assessment]. *Prodavinci*
      [Online]. Retrieved from http://prodavinci.com/2014/03/05/actualidad/febrero-
      2014-en-venezuela-reflexiones-para-un-balance-por-margarita-lopez-maya/

Lozada, M., (2004). El ciberciudadano: representaciones, redes y resistencias en
      Venezuela y América Latina [The cybercitizen: representations, networks and

resistance in Venezuela and Latin America]. In: D. Mato, ed. *Políticas de ciudadanía y sociedad civil en tiempos de globalización* [Citizenship public policies and civil society in times of globalisation]. Caracas, Venezuela: FACES, Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV).

Lugo-Ocando, J. and Romero, J., (2003). From friends to foes: Venezuela's media goes from consensual space to confrontational actor. *Sincronía*, 1 (15). Retrieved from http://sincronia.cucsh.udg.mx/lugoromeroinv02.htm

Luhmann N. (1995) *Social systems*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.

Machado, F., Scartascini, C. and Tommasi, M., (2011). Political institutions and street protests in Latin America. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 55(3), 340–365.

Martínez, C. and Rico Díaz, R., (2014). El presidente venezolano apoyó su uso. Otra mentira más acerca de Hugo Chávez y Twitter [The Venezuelan president supported its use. Another lie about Hugo Chávez and Twitter]. *Old Kaosenlared* [Online]. Retrieved from http://old.kaosenlared.net/noticia/presidente-venezolano-apoyo-uso-otra-mentira-mas-acerca-hugo-Chávez-tw

McNair, B., (2006). *Cultural chaos: Journalism and power in a globalised world*. London, UK: Routledge.

Newburn, T., (2011). *Reading the Riots*, London, UK: London School of Economics.

Nikandrov, N., (2014). La conspiración en Venezuela o la Plaza Independencia con sesgo latinoamricano [Conspiracy in Venezuela or the Independence Park in Latin American terms]. *Aporrea* [Online]. Retrieved from http://www.aporrea.org/oposicion/a182866.html

Nye, R. A. (1973). Two paths to a psychology of social action: Gustave Lebon and Georges Sorel. *The Journal of Modern History*, 411–438.

Ortega y Gasset, J. (1966 [1930]). *La rebelión de las masas* [The Revolt of the Masses]. Madrid, España: Espasa Calpe.

Pérez-Liñán, A., (2008). Instituciones, coaliciones callejeras e inestabilidad política: perspectivas teóricas sobre las crisis presidenciales [Institutions, street coalitions and inestability: theoretical perspectives about presidential crises]. *América Latina Hoy*, 49(49), 105-126.

Pons, C., (2014). Crime Hobbles Venezuela's Economy. *Businessweek* [Online]. Retrieved from http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2014-01-30/venezuelas-high-crime-rate-hobbles-economy

Postill, J. (2014). Democracy in an age of viral reality: A media epidemiography of Spain's indignados movement. *Ethnography*, 15, 51–69.

Puyosa, I., (2014). Contagio de ideas políticas, identidad colectiva y movimientos sociales en redes. Con punto y aparte para el Movimiento 12F [Contagion of political ideas, collective identity and social movements on social media]. *Comunicación. Estudios Venezolanos de Comunicación*. Centro Gumilla, 166, 40–46.

Ramírez Alvarado, M. D. M., (2007). Escenarios de comunicación en una Venezuela polarizada: Del Grupo Cisneros a la Ley Resorte [Communication scenarios in a polarised Venezuela: From the Cisneros Group to the new broadcasting law]. *ZER*, 12(22), 283–300.

Ramirez, D., (2014). Disparo a Bassil da Costa [The shoting of Bassil da Costa]. *Daniel Ramírez* [Online] Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3DS2uxihGk

Rinke, E. M., & Röder, M. (2011). The Arab Spring| media ecologies, communication culture, and temporal-spatial unfolding: Three components in a communication model of the Egyptian regime change. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 13. Retrieved from http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1173

Robertson, E., (2014). Venezuelan unrest increases pressure on health services. *The Lancet*, 383(9921), 942.

RSF (2010). El Gobierno de Hugo Chávez toma control de los medios [Hugo Chávez's government takes control of the media]. *Reporteros Sin Fronteras*. Retrieved from http://es.rsf.org/venezuela-el-gobierno-de-hugo-Chávez-toma-el-23-07-2010,38014.html

Sádaba, C., Bringué, X., & Calderín, M., (2011). La Generación Interactiva Venezolana: Su relación con la computadora y el acceso a Internet [The Venezuelan interactive generation: Its relation to computers and Internet]. *Anuario Ininco/Investigaciones de la Comunicación*, 1, 1–14.

Sagarzazu, I., (2014). Venezuela 2013: Un país a dos mitades [A country divided in two halfs]. *Revista de ciencia política*. 34(1), 315–328.

Sampson, T. D., (2012). *Virality: Contagion theory in the age of networks*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Schramm, W. (1955). Information Theory and Mass Communication. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly June*. 32(2), 131–146.

Singer, D., (1970). *Prelude to revolution: France in May 1968*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang.

Sosa, A., (2014). Palabras del Padre Arturo Sosa S.J. sobre la situación socio-política de Venezuela [Words of Jesuit father Arturo Sosa about the socio-political situation in Venezuela]. *CentrodeFeyCulturas Medellin* [Online]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=203ueL8FhWU

Strate, L. (2006). *Echoes and reflections: On media ecology as a field of study*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Taylor, V., & van Dyke, N., (2004). Get up, stand up': Tactical repertoires of social movements. In: D. A. Snow, ed. *The Blackwell companion to social movements*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 262–293.

TeleSur, (2014). Es el rostro del fascismo, dice Maduro de evidencia fotográfica [This is the face of fascism says Maduro in relation to photographic evidence]. TeleSUR tv [Online]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCiOxBM91kE

Tendencias Digitales, (2012). La penetración de internet en Venezuela alcanza 40% de la población [Internet penetration in Venezuela reaches 40% of the population]. *Datanalysis.* Retrieved from http://tendenciasdigitales.com/1433/la-penetracion-de-internet-en-venezuela-alcanza-40-de-la-poblacion

Trereì, E. (2012). Social Movements as Information Ecologies: Exploring the Coevolution of Multiple Internet Technologies for Activism. *International Journal of Communication*, 6, 2359–2377. Retrieved from http://ijoc.org/ojs/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1681

Universal, E., (2014, November 22). Exigen al Ministerio Público liberar a estudiantes detenidos por protestar [Demands place upon the national prosecutor to release the students incarcerated because protesting]. *El Universal*. Retrieved from http://www.eluniversal.com/nacional-y-politica/141122/exigen-al-ministerio-publico-liberar-a-estudiantes-detenidos-por-prote

Urribarrí, R., (2011). Redes sociales y medios digitales: ¿alternativa comunicacional en Venezuela? [Social media and digital networks: Is it a communication alternative in Venezuela?] *Estudios Venezolanos de Comunicación*, Centro Gumilla, 156, 47–52.

Usher, N. (2010). Why spreadable doesn't equal viral: a conversation with Henry Jenkins. *Nieman Journalism Lab*. Retrieved from http://kultur.tvmkanal.dk/files/2011/09/Jenkins-spreadable-vs-viral.pdf

Uzcategui, R., (2014). Movilizaciones Estudiantiles en Venezuela. Del carisma de Chávez [Students protests in Venezuela. On Chávez charism]. *Nueva Sociedad*, 251, 153–165.

Vargas, C. (2015). Ortega Díaz: 39 personas están privadas de libertad por las guarimbas de 2014. [Ortega Diaz: 39 people are imprisoned because of the 2014 'guarimbas' of] *Radio Nacional de Venezuela*. Retrieved from http://www.rnv.gob.ve/index.php/ortega-diaz-39-personas-estan-privadas-de-libertad-por-las-guarimbas-de-2014

VenEconomia, (2005). El deterioro de la sociedad venezolana [The deterioration of Venezuelan society]. *VenEconomia Hermeroteca*, 22(10).

VTV, (2013). Maduro: Vamos a dar la batalla en las redes [Maduro: We will give the battle on social media]. *VTV* [Online]. Retrieved from

http://www.vtv.gob.ve/articulos/2013/11/01/maduro-vamos-a-dar-la-batalla-en-las-redes-no-podran-con-el-pueblo-de-Chávez-638.html

VTV, (2014). Presidente Maduro a víctimas de guarimbas: Gobierno no cesará en su lucha para que no haya impunidad [President Maduro tells victims of the protests: The government will not allow these things to go unpunished]. *VTV* [Online]. Retrieved from http://www.vtv.gob.ve/articulos/2014/11/18/pdte.-nicolas-maduro-el-gobierno-no-cesara-en-su-lucha-para-que-no-haya-impunidad-4470.html

Yashar, D. J., (2005). *Contesting citizenship in Latin America: The rise of indigenous movements and the post-liberal challenge*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.