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New media technologies and the city spaces.

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Introduction

In the following essay I will explore how media technologies are transforming our experience of city spaces focusing in two different aspects. First of them will be the new ways of consumption based on the propagation of smartphones. The second is the power of the social network Twitter in citizen movements providing the example of the current Spanish Revolution.

Life on the city is usually based on the anonymity, the poor interaction between citizens and consumption. City spaces where crowds usually congregate like public transport promote this lack of interaction. However, the proliferation of new media - especially smartphones- has created a new way of human contact. Nowadays, even people do regular things like taking the bus or buying on the corner shop without looking into others eyes, they are more communicated that even.

Citizens could be completely disconnected about the woman's life sited next to them on the tube but they know just by clicking on their smartphones what is globally going on. They can read from the local or international news to the latest gossips about last night out with their friends. It also means that this kind of interaction makes them lose their anonymity while they mix real and virtual life.

In addition, the improved of Internet applications on mobiles has increased this way of interaction promoting the use of social networks as well as new ways of consumption. The shopping experience is transforming and modern marketing has realized of this change on consumers. For this reason, companies are investing on develop of smartphone applications and ads in order to be more profitable.

On the other hand, the social network Twitter has showed its power on citizens' social movements. The Islamic revolutions on 2011 (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia etc.) are the clearest example of citizen movements against government's regimes. These events were baptized as "Twitter Revolutions" proving the importance that social media - especially the microblogging network Twitter- had on the mobilizations.

On October 2008 a citizen movement was created in Iceland to say no to the payment of the British and Dutch debt of 4.000 million of euros. They demanded the imprisonment for those bankers who were responsible of the country bankruptcy. Then, citizens won that war.

The Icelandic experience is the example currently followed by Spain. This Spanish movement started last 15th May and it is already taking place. In addition, it grows every day thanks to the use of social media. This is a citizen movement that have mobilized thousands of people in Spain and Spaniards living abroad in order to demand a real democracy and change the current political system. Even it is a generic and unspecific request, they have gained the support of thousands of angry citizens at the political class and the high unemployment rates in the country.

All of these points show that new media technologies could be used as a powerful tool of democratization as well as a global way of communication and the promoter of modern consumption.

New ways of consumption

> "The metropolis has always been the seat of the money economy" (Simmel, 1903)

Consumption is an important lifestyle element on the city, is central to the urban experience and is part of the city's identity. We could link this "identity" with consumers' behaviour so according to this idea the metropolis as we have always known it is changing very quickly. Quoting Plafrey and Gasser: "The digital era has transformed how people live their lives and relate to one another and to the world around them" (2008:3). This "world" includes the idea of consumption, the key of capitalist societies like European ones.

The e-commerce concept and the proliferation of companies' investment on applications for smartphones in order to improve their profits are part of the new shopping experience on the city, based on the use of the Internet. Nowadays, many people buy online and receive these services online too like the flight and music

concerts tickets. Another possibility is receiving the products they buy online using websites based on e-commerce like Amazon or any retail company to their own house. In a society where citizens are so busy working long hours, the chance of covering basic needs like buying food online seems to be a solution for the busy daily lifestyle of the city. Hence, the traditional shopping experience where consumers had to physically go to a store to obtain the whished product or service is transforming into a more flexible experience based on the Internet.

Comfort is usually related with consumption. The more you consume the happier you are. However, as George Simmel pointed in the beginning of the 20th century: "For here as elsewhere it is by no means necessary that the freedom of man be reflected in his emotional life as comfort". More than a release, consumption could be turned into oppression for citizens. They are forced to consume in order to follow the rules of the society game and contribute to the growth of the country's economy.

"Computers are more than a simple addition. Through virtual reality they enable us to spend more of our time in our dreams" (Turkle, 1995:266). If we understand this "dream" as the possession of commodities it is easy to understand why companies are actually investing so much on this "virtual reality". It is a way to keep consumers dreaming while they get addicted to their products.

During the last few years, smartphone users have significantly increased. It means that an important percentage of citizens are changing their way of communication as well as their way of consumption. Following this tendency and taking advantage of the situation, part of the modern marketing is based on strategist for this new media.

Google has recently launched a video where they showed some relevant figures about the use of smartphones on daily lives' consumers and the importance of mobile ads. The film, called Video The Mobile Movement: Understanding Smartphone Consumers, is based on a market research studio conducted at the end of 2010 by Ipsos OTX where 5,013 US adult smarphone users were interviewed. The figures show that: "79% of people use smartphones to help them with their shoppings. 70% use smartphones when they are still on the store. 74% make a purchase based on a smartphones search". These statistics reveal the importance of this technological

device as a tool of consumption. Internet users opinions are crucial for many people who want to buy a new product. If it has good reviews online it is more likely to be bought that any other product without any review or bad ones. It happens the same when we talk about restaurants, exhibitions or films.

Even the importance of new media technologies is growing really fast, "old" media like TV have still the main power. According to the Google studio, "finding local information is one of the most popular smartphone activities: 95% look for local information. 88% take action within the same day. 71% of the sales are made because we saw an ad. 43% search after seeing a TV ad. 17% search after seeing a display ad on a mobile device".

> "A rapidly expanding system of networks, collectively known
> as the Internet, links millions of people in new spaces that are
> changing the way we think, the nature of our sexuality, the
> form of our communities, our very identities". (Turkle, 1995:9)

City spaces like squares and public transport are perfect for marketing campaigns. Publicity agencies are currently using public spaces trying to involve citizens who cross by that space. These actions go from codes included on bus shelter ads to flashmobs. Both examples include the interaction of a smartphone.

The codes added on traditional ads on public transport or any other public spaces of the city are designed to be scanned by a smartphone so they need the interaction of the people. Once it is done they received to their mobiles a trailer, short film, picture or whatever the company is promoting. The idea of this kind of interaction is if the user likes what he/she is watching he/she would be likely to share it online contributing to the company purposes.

The second example provided is flahsmobs. They are performances of a group of people that suddenly meet in a public space for a brief time. Most of them have a commercial purpose. If it is a stunning flashmob each smartphone user who crossed by will take a picture or film a video to show it to their friends. The quickest way of

sharing it is online using the social networks like Facebook, Twitter and Youtube obtained a powerful viral effect.

The Spanish Revolution

> "The growth of civic participation and the opening of the media market to new voices leads to increased transparency. It means that individual citizens have greater autonomy as political actors". (Plafrey and Gasser, 2008:269)

Spain is currently living a citizen revolution. It started last Sunday 15th May (Movement 15M), a week before the regional political elections, when citizens demonstrate in 60 different cities of the country demanding a change on the political class. The demonstration was organized by the platform Democracia Real Ya (Real Democracy Now) who announced the initiative online as well as its messages.

The 15M demonstrations congregated thousands of people. Even figures are unclear, organizers estimate that 25.000 people demonstrated in Madrid and 15.000 in Barcelona. When demonstration finished, some people spontaneously talked about camp on the Puerta del Sol, the main square in Madrid. First night was not really successful but the following ones thousand of citizens went to different Spanish squares being the Puerta del Sol the main one. Since Monday it has turned into a massive campsite located in the heart of the city.

The original platform Democracia Real Ya has dissociated from this new initiative but they support them. Acampada Sol (Sol campsite) is the new citizen movement in charge of this spontaneous movement that has surprise the whole society, from the citizens to press and politicians.

The message of Democracia Real Ya, the organizers of the demonstration on Sunday, was the germ of the movement. They uploaded a manifest in its website where they call for a change on the current Spanish political system as well as other topics like a solution for the high unemployment rate and the commendation of responsible of the financial crisis.

This is mainly a movement sustained by a young generation of "digital natives" who have quickly introduced the social media, especially Twitter, as a powerful way of mobilization. According to Plafrey and Gasser: "New technologies are transforming certain aspects of politics. The fundamental rules still apply, but the way the game is played is changing. Digital Natives are, in many cases, leading the way" (2008).

According to Manuel Castells "We were drugged by a society based on consumption and right now we went cold turkey because we can not consume" (2010:CNN interview). Once we are not "drugged" and we wake up from the dream, citizens are taking the streets.

There is no political party behind the movement and the message is spreading fast via Twitter and Facebook. At this point of the event, the mobilization's message is still imprecise. However, corruption on politics and the high unemployment rate are two of the main topics heard on people congregated on Puerta del Sol in Madrid and any other Spanish square.

Even they are currently having some legal problems, the campsite is still in Madrid. Following the announces on its Twitter account @acampadasol, they plan to keep camping until Sunday 22nd, the election day. This is mainly a young citizen movement because is especially the Spanish youth who is more disappointed with the political class. The main reasons is the unemployment rate in the country, the highest in the EU: 4.9 million of Spaniards are jobless not to mention the youth unemployment rate that is the 33,9%.

At this movement the mobilization and its numerous messages are globally spreading thanks to the massive use of Twitter and Facebook. If traditional press mainly silenced the Iceland revolution, this one is actually being international heard appearing on the front page of newspaper like the French Le Monde as well as every national Spanish papers.

Twitter is being a key tool for the growth of the movement and the citizen mobilization. Since Sunday, people from different cities and countries are *twitting*

what was going on. Even not everyone was able to attend physically the protest many of them did it and still do it online. People is sharing information, pictures and videos that other users *twitted* including the *hashtags* (tracking topics) #spanishrevolution, #acampadasol (solcamping)*,* #nonosvamos (#wedontleave)*,* #yeswecamp on their *twitts*.

The movement in Twitter is so big that during the whole Tuesday 17th May the *hashtags* #acampadasol and #nonosvamos were the firsts trending topic in Spain and the third worldwide trending topic during the morning. On Wednesday the *hashtag* #nonosvamos were still a trending topic in Spain appearing a new one #notenemosmiedo (#wearentafraid).

Social media is blurring the boundaries between cities and countries offering a global way of communication and interaction with the world: the cyberspace. Based on my own experience I could affirm that new media technologies approaches realities and provide the chance to virtually participate in movements like this one. I read about this mobilization on Monday when I was updating my Twitter account. Since this moment on I am an online activist supporting the movement.

As a blogger I could also prove the relevance of the movement. My blog (http://blog.masquetrapo.com/) usually have an average of 60 visits a day. On Wednesday 18th May I wrote a post about the London demonstration organized for that afternoon. Just in a day, the post had 1.619 visits. It is caused because it was shared on Twitter using the movement's *hashtags*.

But there are more example based on the experience that proves this protest movement is turning global. Same day, 18th May, around 200 people demonstrate in front of the Spanish Embassy in London using the same message of dissatisfaction with the Spanish government and its political class. I went to the demonstration and I filmed a short video of the event. I uploaded it to Youtube on Thursday morning, 19th May; just in a couple of hours (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4PqA17gFEI) the video had 278 views.

The Spanish Revolution is a new movement who is already creating its basis. They did not expect this big acceptation and participation especially because on April of this year another platform called Juventud sin futuro (Futureless Youth) tried to do something similar but they just congregated a few thousands in Madrid. Then, the initiative did not keep on.

The proximity of the regional elections and a well-organized system based on the use of social media are the success keys of this citizen movement named as The Spanish Revolution or Movement 15M. However, as we have pointed this is a new movement that is already shaping so just the time will let us now if they take long term actions in order to achieve a real change or if it is just an important citizen movement that lasted a week.

Most of the information obtained to write this part of the essay was obtained based on my experience as a blogger, as a Twitter and Facebook user, on citizen's twitts related to the movement, on Facebook pages and the Spanish media.

Conclusion

New media have definitely established as part of our daily life melting the boundaries between virtual and real life. Its power is so big that thanks to them consumers are changing the marketing rules and citizens are able to create global movement asking for real democracy.

The proliferation of smartphones gives us the possibility to be connected 24 hours a day 7 days a week. This new media technology is building new ways of interaction between people covering the social need of feeling part of a community. Even the Internet has created the most communicated and interactive society ever it is mostly in the virtual life because in the real one. Cities are still places where people do not usually interact with each other.

Marketing professionals still create its strategist based on "old" media like TV or traditional press. However, every year companies invest more money on new media technologies research in other to be more profitable. Publicity companies have also

realized of the real possibilities of new media introducing new campaigns where traditional and new publicity is mixed. Consumers are turning the shopping experience into an online experience of consumption. For this reason the agencies specialized on social media marketing are growing so fast.

On the other hand, the Spanish Revolution is a huge example of the enormous possibilities of new media technology. The web 2.0 is changing the way we communicate creating a more democratic system of information. Even some traditional media firstly avoided this citizen movement, the amount of information uploaded on blogs, Facebook and Twitter were very difficult to be ignored.

However, it is already really soon to know if this citizen movement will go further or not. They possible do not achieve their aims, firstly because they do not have a clear speech and secondly because some of their ideas are too utopian (one of their main aims is to obtain a real democracy giving more power to citizens and less to politicians). Even thought, it is a relevant moment on the current history because it shows the citizen power of demonstration and mobilization using the web 2.0 as their main tool.

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