Chapter 8
The Music That is Here to Stay: New Rules in State–Society Relations in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

The chapter aims at understanding a recent phenomenon in Mexican politics: the use of Internet and social media as a new and powerful resource for mobilization and social participation in the policy process. Based on a review of two recent movements in Mexico (#YoSoy132 and The Wirikuta Defense Front), the chapter argues that although the Internet is still restricted to the middle and upper classes, the use of social media and its impact transcends class boundaries, draws public attention, creates valuable social capital for mobilization, and influences the decision-making process. The chapter does not intend to provide evidence to the theoretical discussion on why and how social media enhances political participation and mobilization; rather, it reflects the features shared by these two movements in order to draw some lines for further research. It finds that, if used appropriately, social media is actually an effective tool to facilitate mobilization and modify the public agenda.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter aims at understanding a recent phenomenon in Mexican politics: the use of the Internet and social media as a new and powerful resource for mobilization and social participation in the policy process. The paper argues that although the Internet is still restricted to the middle and upper classes, the use of information and its impact transcends class boundaries, draws public attention, and creates valuable social capital for mobilization and influences of the decision-making process.

The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I will review the academic discussion on the use of Internet and social networks. The second section will analyze two major movements that have arisen in Mexico through social networks: #YoSoy132 and the
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campaign to protect the Wirikuta area. Finally, the chapter will discuss the use of social networks for mobilization and participation in the consolidation of democracy in Mexico.

The Use of Information Technologies for Mobilization and Public Participation

This section provides a brief review of the academic discussion on the impact of information technologies (ITs) for enhancing participation and mobilization. Although the chapter is not intended to contribute to the theoretical discussion on the use of information technologies, it will serve to frame the analysis of the Mexican case discussed in the following section.

There is a common acceptance that the Internet, in general, and social media, in particular, has incorporated a new feature in the way people acquire information that has triggered the monopoly that traditional media have had. There is also an agreement that the web socializes information at such a high speed unimaginable a few decades ago. From this perspective, the impact of the Internet and ITs is not minor: they have disempowered the State and traditional media since they cannot longer regulate public transaction and monopolize information (Turnsek and Jankowski, 2008). This makes political information more attainable to a larger share of the population (Stanley and Weare, 2004).

However, the extent to which the Internet and social media enhance political participation and mobilization is more debatable. There is still little evidence to support this argument. On the one hand, some argue that although ITs help in socializing events that happen around the world in few seconds, the use of ITs have an impact only on those who are already politically involved in a specific cause by providing more information and disseminating it. Also, they argue that, since Internet use is still limited to upper and middle classes, it has not yet replaced the traditional institutions for mobilization, such as parties or unions; neither it has replace traditional media as the most important tool to gather and disseminate information.

On the other hand, those who argue that Internet has a positive impact on political participation and mobilization state that Internet and social media allow people to gather information, express their opinion and mobilize; in their view, having more information from direct sources convinces people to join a specific cause because they feel that their participation is bound to other activists who share their experiences and achievements.

In this sense, Internet has a transformative effect in society in at least three ways: it opens traditionally inaccessible information to public scrutiny; it opens spaces for unmediated deliberation in which people can interact with one another, with different communities and with people from another country; it changes the way representatives perform because now they can be questioned directly and this, in turn, changes the way in which traditional powers, unions, parties and media relates to their constituencies and publics (Coleman, 2001).

In this view, civic and political mobilization is an outcome of individual agency and mobilizing agency (Norris, 2002). On the individual agency, mobilization depends on economic resources, motivation and skills. On the mobilizing agency, political activity relates to the structures for spreading information and for the reasons why individuals mobilize in the first place. Social media has specific and new characteristics that affect these two dimensions of political and social mobilizations:

The networks functionalities and affordances characterizing social media makes them po-