

#YoSoy132 and the Influence of Class in Digital Politics
Panel Response to “Micro Politics in the Digital World”
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It began with a purposeful misrepresentation. Following a public shaming of then-presidential candidate Enrique Peña Nieto by students at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, the candidate’s campaign team portrayed the students as thugs paid off by the opposition, while the news media neglected to report the incident. In response, 131 students created and circulated a YouTube video, after which others chimed in to support by claiming ‘Yo Soy 132’ (I am the 132nd). The #YoSoy132 movement quickly gained online notoriety, and eventually even international fame, by becoming associated with a call for media transparency and with a stance against political corruption. For the movement, the Internet provided a nationwide platform to uncover, and provide an alternative to, the political biases of the country’s television duopoly; yet paradoxically, this medium also proved a limited venue for communications across class lines.

In this paper, I will refer to the #YoSoy132 movement’s composition before the 2012 Mexican presidential election to illustrate how offline societal structures, notably those informed by class, still exert a significant influence in the development of online political movements, particularly given the influence of class on access, literacy, and agency.

In terms of access, Mexico’s still highly classist society has enormous effects on the digital divide between urban and rural areas. If it is estimated that only one fifth of households in the country have a computer, and even less have regular access to an Internet connection, it comes as no surprise that the movement was originally restricted to a limited amount of the population, namely those with both the physical access to the Internet and the literacy to engage in online discussions.

As such, #YoSoy132 was widely considered as an almost exclusive student movement. More importantly, these were university students, who had ready and constant access to the Internet, and therefore to a news reporting alternative to the Televisa-TV Azteca television duopoly. In order to gage the pervasiveness of this duopoly, contrast the estimated 20% of households with a computer to over 80% of the country that has at least one television set. Since access to an alternative news source was crucial to making sense of and gaining support for the movement, the lack thereof was #YoSoy132's first significant hindrance.

Historically, students from the public universities, particularly those of lower classes, had always been actively political, while those from private institutions were notoriously apathetic. Perhaps the online origins of the movement and its connection to a specific event at the private Universidad Iberoamericana can explain the inclusion of these previously apathetic groups. Whatever the case, one of the most widely celebrated aspects of the early stages of the movement was the heretofore unseen collaboration of university students from different class backgrounds.

However, the apparent convivial collaboration of both private and public education institutions is misleading. Although they may have had access to the Internet, many students still lacked the media literacy to actively engage in the creation of online discourses, resulting in a clear distinction between those in control of the medium (i.e. the web page, Facebook and Twitter accounts) and all the rest. This media literacy discrepancy resulted in limited online agency for a significant portion of those interested in participating in the movement. As the self-proclaimed leadership began to form its committees and representation in the offline world, the apparent uniformity of the movement was shaken by the sometimes conflicting interests of different segments of the student population. It was not long before reports circulated that contradictorily positioned #YoSoy132 as against political corruption generally or specifically

against Pena Nieto, for the freeing of telecommunications markets or for their increased regulation, as a popular movement or as a populist one.

When #YoSoy132 organized a third presidential debate to counteract the two sponsored by the television networks, the online transmission was plagued by faulty connections and constant interruptions, and even the radio broadcast ultimately reached only a limited segment of the urban population. Notoriously, Enrique Pena Nieto refused to attend the event, signaling that he believed it would not have an impact on the elections results. It did not; he still won. Following the July 1st elections, the movement's online activity has increasingly become secondary to its offline planning, and not coincidentally, the usual class divides and struggles have begun to creep in, threatening to divide #YoSoy132 even further.