

Rocking the Vote in Mexico's 2012 Presidential Election: Mexico's Popular Music Scene's Use of Social Media in a Post–Arab Spring Context

MAGDELANA RED

University of Colorado Boulder

This article examines the use of information and communication technologies and social networking sites by the movement *Músicos con YoSoy132* in the lead-up to Mexico's July 2012 presidential election. Much was at stake in this election, as the party that had ruled the country for seven decades through a semi-authoritarian regime was poised to regain power. Questions of free and fair elections, media bias, and voter participation were raised as disaffected youth and a supposedly apolitical music scene joined forces to impact the election. This article examines these events in a post–Arab Spring context that probes some of the assertions and conclusions made by communication scholars about recent happenings in the Middle East and North Africa.

Introduction

On July 1, 2012, the people of Mexico elected their current president. The election was significant because it had the potential to bring back into power a political party that had dominated Mexico for more than 70 years through what scholars have called a “semi-authoritarian” regime (Levy, Bruhn, & Zebadúa, 2006). The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was ousted in 2000 as Mexico worked its way through a slow process of democratization that took decades to evolve. The end of the PRI's semi-authoritarian reign and the early stages of a fragile democracy that officially began in 2000 were challenged in 2012 as the PRI's telegenic candidate Enrique Peña Nieto led the race, bringing with him promises of a more stable, less violent Mexico while also raising the specter of a return to authoritarianism, corporatism, cronyism, and a threat to democracy.

Spring 2012, therefore, was an important moment in contemporary Mexican history. The fledgling civil society that proved influential in the late 1990s had—with the ousting of the PRI in 2000—largely faded during the two *sexenios* (six-year presidential terms) of the new millennium. In particular, young people, who had proven to be agents for change through the 1990s, appeared to be absent and had checked out of political activity by the mid-2000s. One indicator of this shift was that the popular rock music scene that had been utilized as a space for national political discourse and a tool for political expression for Mexican youth in the 1990s had become decentered, fragmented, and largely devoid of political content, much less political force. Yet in the lead-up to the 2012 presidential election, Mexico's

Magdalena Red: magdelana.red@colorado.edu

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rock music scene demonstrated a surprising spark of collective action. Harnessing information and communication technologies (ICTs), including social networking sites (SNSs), a group called *Músicos con YoSoy132* (Musicians with I am 132) launched an online campaign designed to increase youth participation in the election through election monitoring, media vigilance, and voter turnout. Though *Músicos con YoSoy132* did not explicitly endorse a candidate, Mexican youth had largely been alienated from the centrist PRI party for more than 30 years. Thus, implicit in the groups' efforts was the desire to thwart PRI ascendance and Peña Nieto.

In this article, I examine *Músicos con YoSoy132*, whose online activism at a crucial moment in Mexico's national politics took place on the heels of uprisings and revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and whose efforts can therefore be examined in a post-Arab Spring context since these movements have in common the use of ICTs and SNSs, though for different ends and with varying effects. I use participation observation and interviews with musicians, fans, and industry professionals involved in Mexico's popular rock music scene conducted from 2010 to the present, as well as documentary analysis of the *Músicos con YoSoy132* website and Twitter campaign, in order to probe communication scholars' assertions and theorization of ICTs, social media, and contemporary social movements. I examine two complementary processes: (1) the role of ICTs in Mexico's rock music scene and how that scene took on a political dimension it was supposed to have abandoned; and (2) how ICTs and SNSs were used by young people in Mexico as tools and spaces for political activity. I argue that Mexico's rock scene has had many roles during the decades of its popularity depending on the needs of its users—sometimes politically oriented, sometimes not—and confirm that there must be a precipitating context that allows the use of ICTs to be meaningful. Additionally, the analysis presented here echoes other scholars' assertions that on-the-street mobilization must accompany virtual activities in order for an effective political contribution to be made, while I also raise the question of the longevity of dissident movements that have online hubs. Finally, the case of *Músicos con YoSoy132* provides an opportunity to briefly examine the role of popular music in contemporary social movements.

The 2012 Elections, Social Media, and a Newly Active Youth Population

On May 11, 2012, in a campaign event prior to Mexico's July 1 presidential election, PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto spoke at the private Universidad Iberoamericana. He and his entourage were met by student protesters who made it clear that the former governor of Mexico was not welcome. Shouts of "Out! Out!. Out!" and "Ibero doesn't want you!" followed the candidate through campus, while posters labeling him "assassin" reminded those present of Peña Nieto's checkered human rights record (Vice Media Inc., 2012). Some of the protesters had organized for the event, but, according to participants, masses turned up in a spontaneous gathering communicated through Twitter and Facebook (Vice Media Inc., 2012). Immediately following the spectacle at the Universidad Iberoamericana, Peña Nieto turned to Mexico's dominant television conglomerate, Televisa (on which his wife is a soap opera star), to undermine the student protesters, who he claimed were not really Ibero students but activists working for leftist candidate Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador, AMLO (Trejo, 2012). The media- and technology-savvy students wasted no time in responding: 131 participants in the May 11 events created a video proffering their student ID cards and declaring themselves to be real students in legitimate protest

and not pawns of any candidate or political party. The video went viral and the "YoSoy132," or "I am 132," student movement was born.¹

Wealthy, privileged students of private universities launched the movement, but were quickly joined by public university students as well as nonstudent youth throughout the country (Trejo, 2012). Yet, participation in YoSoy132 extended beyond students. In a startling break from their supposedly apolitical, disaffected, and checked-out character (discussed in more detail below), many Mexican rock musicians also joined in. They worked to galvanize voters, create awareness, and encourage active participation in election monitoring, launching "Músicos con YoSoy132," or "Musicians with I Am 132." Indie artists declared their participation in the movement in videos uploaded to YouTube, circulated via the website www.musicosconyosoy132.com, posted on the movement's Facebook page, and shared through the Twitter account @MúsicosConYoSoy132. Although not all of the artists, music journalists, and rock promoters featured in the videos were household names in Mexico, many of them were well-known, successful, and nationally recognized members of Mexico's contemporary popular rock music scene, which helped bring increased visibility to the movement and its efforts. These included, Natalia LaFourcade, Instituto Mexicano del Sonido, Hello Seahorse!, and Carla Morrison, among others.

Harnessing the power of social media, Músicos con YoSoy132 used ICTs in a multiplatform, Internet-based effort to bring national and international attention to the upcoming presidential election. Without a spokesperson and utilizing statements by musicians themselves, the group made its aims clear. First, they demanded free, fair, and transparent elections. Second, they encouraged active citizen election oversight. Third, they mobilized youth voter participation on election day and in demonstrations. Finally, they insisted on higher standards of media coverage, drawing attention to the pro-PRI, pro-Peña Nieto coverage on Mexico's major media outlets (Músicos con YoSoy132, 2012; UC Berkeley CLAS, 2012). Curiously, music itself (i.e., specific songs) was not central to Músicos con YoSoy132's efforts. Instead, the movement was most notable for the way it drew people with different music industry roles—artists, journalists, promoters, and the like—together for collective action, uniting them "by the rhythm of a just and free Mexico" (quoted in Kun, 2012).

Músicos con YoSoy132's impact was seen most clearly on June 26, 2012, when the group launched a Twitter campaign and enlisted followers to tweet about Mexico's upcoming presidential election, mainstream media bias, and the need for election oversight and increased participation. The campaign instructed Twitter users to use the identifier #SOS132, post one of the videos created by Músicos con YoSoy132, and address their tweet to preselected music and media icons. For each hour of the day, a different group of six addressees was targeted, including the Associated Press, BBC World, CNN, Huffington Post, Coldplay, Calle13, Kanye West, Justin Bieber, Lady Gaga, and many, many more. By targeting internationally famous artists and news agencies, thus increasing views thanks to these entities' many followers, Músicos con YoSoy132 generated buzz in the Twitter-verse. The campaign was also domestically salient, becoming Mexico's number 1 trending topic on Twitter for at least 14 hours (J.

¹ The name "YoSoy132," or "I am 132," is a numerical symbol by movement participants to include themselves in the original Universidad Iberoamericana protest, like the "12th man" metaphor in U.S. football when fans present at a game try to help their team as an additional, symbolic, player.

Woodside Woods, personal communication, 2012). Starting off slowly with fewer than 100 tweets in each of the first two hours, the campaign gained momentum throughout the day and logged close to 1,000 tweets for each hour block at 2:00 p.m., 3:00 p.m., and 4:00 p.m. CST. By the end of the campaign, an additional 100,000 people had viewed the four videos that were tweeted about and circulated via Twitter.² At midnight, *Músicos con YoSoy132* tweeted, "We have yelled, we have sung, we have danced and we've learned to be heard, now we exercise the right #SOS132, we vote and we are informed."³

When it came time to vote on July 1, 2012, the efforts of *Músicos con YoSoy132* and the youth and student participants of *YoSoy132* had contributed to shrinking PRI candidate Peña Nieto's lead from more than 10% to 5% (Hernandez, 2012). More significantly, for the first time in more than a decade young people mobilized in large numbers and actively engaged as protesters, voters, and election observers throughout the country (UC Berkeley CLAS, 2012). Allegations of voter manipulation and electoral fraud were widely circulated and in many cases well-documented (Weisbrot, 2012), and young people using social media assisted in the recording and dissemination of this information. Although Peña Nieto successfully avoided any threat to his election as Mexico's next president, the black marks of overt media bias in his favor, his clear fear of the student protest movement (evidenced by his attempts to discredit it), and his campaign's practice of vote buying all badly damaged his and his party's standing in the eyes of many observers (UC Berkeley CLAS, 2012). The return of the PRI via vaguely legal and possibly antidemocratic means underscored doubts about the new and improved image proffered by the party. Additionally, these doubts further alienated Mexico's newly awakened youth and student movement from the PRI, whose history is a painful reminder of Mexico's dark, semi-authoritarian past.

Músicos con YoSoy132 in the Post-Arab Spring Context

The activities of *Músicos con YoSoy132* are significant in two complementary ways. First, according to musicians, fans, and industry professionals, since 2000 rock music in Mexico has lost its role as a political force and means of dissident political expression for youth. Much of the blame for this perceived shift in meaning for Mexico's rock music scene has been attributed to new ICTs and the digitalization of music. Therefore, the overtly political efforts initiated by Mexico's rock musicians, promoters, and industry professionals in the lead-up to the 2012 presidential election represent a transformation in the meaning and political wherewithal of Mexico's rock music scene. Second, the use of ICTs by *Músicos con YoSoy132* and the citizens who answered their calls to action and participation took place in a post-Arab Spring context—where digital communication networks and social media have changed the face of social movements—thus providing a rich area of inquiry and an opportunity to engage analyses of "new" media and political protest. This section examines each of these elements in turn.

Músicos con YoSoy132: The Perplexing Role of Rock in Mexico

From the late 1980s through the 1990s, Mexico's rock music scene experienced a boom in popularity that drove it from relative obscurity to national and international success and firmly entrenched

² I collected these figures while monitoring the campaign June 26–27, 2012.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

it as part of Mexico's popular culture and national identity. This *rock en español* (rock in Spanish), as it became widely known, rapidly gained fans and airtime thanks to its innovative style that mixed traditional Latin American rhythms and instrumentation with Anglo-style, guitar-driven, R&B-inspired rock (Lechner, 2006). The genre was beloved for its accounts of everyday life that chronicled social, political, and economic realities through accessible and honest lyrics (Rulo, 2011).

Highly mediated and part of mainstream popular culture since the early to mid-1990s, Mexican rock has been described as an overtly political musical movement that is dissident, rebellious, nonconformist, antiestablishment, and antistatus quo (Castillo Berthier, 2004; Marcial, 2010; Urteaga Castro Pozo, 1998; Zolov, 1999). Historian Eric Zolov (1999) writes, "Left to ferment in the barrios, rock music would eventually rear its defiant head once more, only this time in the voice of the truly marginalized" (p. 233). Renowned Mexican social critic Carlos Monsiváis states that Mexican rock is now the "principal instrument for those who are marginalized in society, the first zone of expression for the under class" (quoted in Zolov, 1999, p. 258). Following in this rhetorical vein, Mexican sociologist Héctor Castillo Berthier (2004) argues, "Since its beginnings, Mexican rock has connoted rebellion, nonconformity, generational struggles, and the search for new forms of expression" (p. 259). Additionally, these writers emphasize rock's connection with democratization and social protest. According to these chroniclers, rock is necessarily, if not exclusively, related to young people and particularly those deemed to be part of the marginalized underclass of Mexican society.

Since the early 2000s, however, developments in communication technology, struggles in the music industry, and international music trends have noticeably influenced Mexico's popular rock music. People interviewed for this project describe the late 1990s as the end of the boom for Mexico's rock music. At that time, listeners' experiences of commercial, mediated popular music changed because, with the genre's growing popularity, there were suddenly so many bands with different ways of relating everyday life that listeners across the socioeconomic spectrum found rock music that reflected their reality, while the music itself became increasingly repetitive and *estancada*, or stagnant, as one of today's popular musicians puts it (Chiosan, personal communication, September 29, 2010). Also, by the early 2000s, popular bands began to distance themselves from the Mexico-oriented themes that characterized earlier work. Indeed, as the new millennium started, informants agree that Mexican rock began to sound more like rock from the United States and the UK as it moved away from the lyrical content, rhythms, and instrumentation that distinguished Mexico's *rock en español* of the late 1980s and much of the 1990s.

By the early 2000s, *rock en español's* dominance of Mexican rock gave way to tremendous diversification and fragmentation: "I feel that the audience has fragmented a lot, since the Internet," says music industry professional Eric Gamboa (personal communication, September 22, 2010). One musician describes the shift:

Before it was all the *rock en español* movement. . . . Everyone was part of a movement of Mexican rock. But now there are so many bands. There are those that play punk, those that play goth, the metal-heads, the punks, the mainstream, those who don't know what they are. . . . There are thousands of little voices, no one knows what each one does. Very few talk of politics. (Salvatore, personal correspondence, 2010)

This musician goes on to say that in Mexico there are thousands of bands and thousands of discourses. Unlike the period when *rock en español* consolidated itself as Mexican rock with its overtly political references and its chronicling of everyday life (Lechner, 2006), today there are countless bands becoming increasingly niche in their appeal and a corresponding audience that is immense but deeply fragmented.

No longer making rock Mexican—that is, adapting it and hybridizing it from its “original” (U.S.-derived rhythm and blues) iteration into a locally and regionally particular brand of music that resonates with Mexican youth because it *sounds* like their everyday lived experiences—Mexico’s indie rock is, according to many fans and rock music professionals interviewed for this project, imitative and regressive. Indeed, many Mexican indie rock bands sing in English—something anathema to *rock en español*. Referring to this new trend, José Manuel of the band La Barranca laments:

Now you find Mexican musicians who not only appear to live in another country, but on another planet, because their lyrics don’t reflect what they live. . . . I thought it was a phase we had already overcome, but when you don’t know your history you’re condemned to repeat it. (quoted in Jáuregui, 2010, p. 27)

Yet, young musicians defend the trend. Having grown up during a period when globalization was celebrated and a great deal of English language music was available, they contend that singing in English feels natural (Kun, 2007). Nevertheless, many English-singing Mexican rock bands do not communicate effectively in the language. Producer and member of über-band Café Tacuba, Emmanuel del Real describes the perplexing nature of this trend, as follows:

Here, there are many groups . . . that speak in English and you notice right away that they are pronouncing it badly. But it’s not just that, it’s the content . . . it’s even more empty than simply singing in English would be. Why? I don’t know. (personal communication, April 7, 2011)

So although writing songs in English is popular, fans and musicians remain ambivalent about both the literal and metaphoric meaning of the trend for Mexico’s rock music scene.

Another feature that distinguishes contemporary Mexican rock from previous iterations and makes the activities of *Músicos con YoSoy132* particularly interesting is that informants argue it has become apolitical. Rarely referring explicitly to national political issues or raising consciousness, the music has shifted from the overtly political content that Zolov, Castillo Berthier, Monsiváis, and others point to as characteristic of the genre. Music industry professional Uriel Waizel notes that many of today’s popular rock musicians sing “songs for adolescents, romantic songs” (personal communication, October 1, 2010). He goes on to say:

Hello Seahorse!, Austin TV,⁴ are more like timid children, existentialists, and their songs are equivalent to KidRobot,⁵ no, just like pretty toys, pastel colors, smiling alongside [one another] . . . but smiling alongside [one another] is the furthest thing from politicization. (personal communication, October 1, 2010)

Another industry professional calls the music "happy, sappy, people in love kind of folk" (Gamboa, personal communication, September 22, 2010). Meanwhile, the manager of a rock music venue in Mexico City relays the widely articulated sense that today's rock music has become devoid of protest, that "there are now very few" groups that include explicit political positions in their projects (Pineda, personal communication, September 28, 2010). Finally, Waizel suggests that today's music is hedonistic, preferring to talk more about glamour, kitsch, and romance than politics (Waizel, personal communication, 2010).

This barrage of comments about contemporary rock music and the loss of the political character it had in the 1990s sharply contrasts with the activities of *Músicos con YoSoy132*. Ironically, the new ICTs that provided the tools used by *Músicos con YoSoy132* are the same technologies interviewees say have contributed to the depoliticization and fragmentation of Mexico's rock music scene since the mid-2000s, as well as the loss of a center from which to foment any kind of sociopolitically engaged discourse. In contrast, *Músicos con YoSoy132* swiftly brought politics and political mobilization to the center of Mexico's rock music scene, the same scene supposedly made rudderless and incoherent by rapidly changing communication technologies that spurred involvement in international musical movements while simultaneously obfuscating unique or innovative national music trends. Singer-songwriter Natalia LaFourcade, for example, penned a song in honor of the movement, while *Colectivo Emergente de Artistas Independientes* (Emerging Collective of Independent Artists) and *La Escuela Nacional de la Música* (National School of Music) both composed unofficial movement anthems (Kun, 2012).

In sum, the characterizations that associate dissidence, opposition, and antiestablishment politics with the Mexican rock scene are clearly incomplete. Rock music's role in Mexican youth politics has been widely varied over the past 30 years, occasionally raising consciousness and prescribing avenues for social change, or, alternatively, providing a means of escape and disconnect from Mexico's increasingly violent and hostile social world. Rock, therefore, has no inherent political value or meaning. Rather, it is the ends to which users put this mediated content that should be the object of investigation.

Examining how ICTs were mobilized for social change and political participation by *Músicos con YoSoy132* will help illuminate the changing role of Mexico's rock music scene in the lead-up to the 2012 presidential election. Additionally, this examination will provide the opportunity to scrutinize some of the theories and questions that arose from the recent widespread use of ICTs in bringing about political and social change in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) from 2010 to the present.

⁴ Two alternative pop/indie rock bands from Mexico City who have achieved international success in part by blending global indie/pop/rock trends.

⁵ KidRobot is a line of designer cartoon-like stuffed animal toys imported primarily from Japan and Hong Kong.

ICTs, Popular Music, and Social Change

Describing the Arab Spring movements in his book *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, Manuel Castells (2012) writes "it was primarily the humiliation provoked by the cynicism and arrogance of those in power, be it financial, political or cultural, that brought together those who turned fear into outrage, and outrage into hope for a better humanity" (pp. 2–3). Castells contends that institutions are challenged when they fail to adequately address economic crises and their legitimacy is therefore questioned. Citizens demanding democracy, transparency, and institutions that better meet their needs turn their outrage into hope through protest and uprising. Spurred by emotions and the desire to upend the status quo, social movements in the Internet Age utilize digital social networks such as social media to communicate broadly spread messages, share information, and coordinate efforts. Today's social movements are a "new species" of movement because, according to Castells (2012), their use of ICTs represents a fundamentally different kind of communication that changes the "characteristics of communication processes . . . the more interactive and self-configurable communication is, the less hierarchical is the organization and the more participatory is the movement" (p. 15).

Músicos con YoSoy132 recognized the collective outrage and hope felt by large swaths of Mexican youth and turned to social networks and digital technologies to galvanize young people and mobilize them into action during Mexico's 2012 presidential election. According to Mexican anthropologist Alfredo Nateras Dominguez, Mexico's young people best demonstrate the social crisis and disenchantment that characterize Mexico today. Nateras Dominguez's studies of youth culture have revealed general trends facing youth of all socioeconomic backgrounds in Mexico. Namely, there is a *crisis institucional* (institutional crisis) in which the government, political parties, the Catholic Church, the military, the police, the media, and educational institutions have lost their credibility. Despite the successful transfer of power from the PRI to the PAN in 2000 and the end of the semi-authoritarian state, employment opportunities and financial security remain elusive for the vast majority of Mexico's youth (Nateras Dominguez, 2005). Additionally, rampant violence has become part of everyday life in Mexico. One scholar told this author, "here we *breathe* violence" (M. Urteaga, personal communication, 2010). Whether experienced directly or not, no one can escape violent images on television, in sensationalistic newspaper coverage, in film, and even in informal conversation (Reguillo Cruz, 2010a, 2010b; Urteaga Castro Pozo, 2010). All of this leads scholars of Mexico's youth to conclude that, for the young, the future is bleak. Peña Nieto's use of media monolith Televisa to discredit student protesters placed him firmly on the side of the institutionalized status quo, thus alienating young people from the PRI and driving many to action via the less hierarchical, broad reaching digital communication networks to which Castells refers.

Recent use of SNSs like Facebook and Twitter by activists both in Mexico and in the MENA, where events were more widely documented, has prompted mainstream media analysts to credit the sites with causal power. However, media and communication scholars as well as activists themselves have been quick to point out that while SNSs provide useful "tools" and "spaces," to use Aouragh and Alexander's terms (2011), social movements are precipitated by already present political and economic dissent and, in some cases, extant organized opposition (Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Kreps, 2011). Social media scholar Christian Fuchs, for example, critiques Castells, arguing that his characterizations imbue technologies

themselves with too much agency (Fuchs, 2012, p. 781). Charging Castells with technological determinism, Fuchs reminds us that human actors create the social world and its technologies, not the other way around. Yet Castells (2012) is very aware of this point when he writes,

Neither the Internet, nor any other technology for that matter, can be a source of social causation. Social movements arise from the contradictions and conflicts of specific societies, and they express people's revolts and projects resulting from their multidimensional experience. (p. 229)

These pre-existing contradictions and conflicts are the sparks that lead to the creation of social movements. This is certainly the case in Mexico where widespread anti-PRI sentiments have long predated *Músicos con YoSoy132*. Additionally, skepticism surrounding Mexico's electoral institutions, suspicions about media bias, and popularly assumed cronyism between politicians and corporate sponsors, including mainstream media conglomerates, are deeply embedded in the popular imaginary (Camp, 2003), thus creating a public receptive to the claims and entreaties of *Músicos con YoSoy132*. SNSs, therefore, were not responsible for galvanizing the rock music scene and many of Mexico's young people, but they did provide useful tools for mobilization and spaces for interaction, collaboration, and discussion.

But in order for digital communication technologies to have a political impact, the following elements are needed: "a precipitating event strong enough to arouse anger or other emotions," such as Peña Nieto's attempts to undermine student protestors; "support from respected institutions," in this case national and international music superstars; "supplementary information," such as campaign coverage that contradicted mainstream media portrayals; and "people involved [who] feel that they can really bring about change . . . which can sometimes be directly implemented through the voting process," such as the 2012 Mexican presidential election (Castells, Fernández-Ardévol, Linchuan Qiu, & Sey, 2006). Again, social movements like *Músicos con YoSoy132* cannot have political impact simply because of the technologies they use; rather, social actors employ the technologies in response to social and historical realities.

As media scholar Howard Rheingold asserts regarding virtual communities, it takes more than "words on a screen at some point if they intend to be other than ersatz" (Rheingold, 2000). *Músicos con YoSoy132* utilized their "words on a screen" to mobilize action and create awareness about pressing social and political events, despite the fact that until recently Mexico's indie rock scene's use of the Internet and digital communication networks had been little more than words on a screen, conspicuously unable or unwilling to stimulate anything more than chatter about favorite bands and increasingly niche subgenre affiliations. Recent scholarship on dissident movements in the MENA echoes Rheingold, arguing that although new ICTs may provide extraordinary tools for organizing and implementing collective activities, without a context of dissent, unrest, and a collective will for change ICTs and SNSs alone are insufficient to effect social change (Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Castells et al., 2006; Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011; Tusa, 2013). As Eltantawy and Weist (2011) write regarding Egypt:

What these activists were doing—in terms of debating, organizing, and planning—is not new in itself, but the means employed to communicate with each other and execute the revolution represents an important new resource for collective action. Social media

introduced a novel resource that provided swiftness in receiving and disseminating information; helped to build and strengthen ties among activists; and increased interaction among protesters and between protesters and the rest of the world. (p. 1218)

Similarly, *Músicos con YoSoy132* harnessed the discontent with and disenfranchisement from traditional political institutions felt by Mexican youth and utilized a space (the Internet) that young people were familiar with to *enhance* connections between people and to *motivate* them to participate in collective action for lofty goals, such as free and fair elections, high voter turnout, and unbiased media coverage.

After all, participation in online protest is only as effective as the on-the-street mobilization of actors (Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011; Iskander, 2011; Rheingold, 2000). *Músicos con YoSoy132* tapped into Mexican rock's recognized potential for political mobilization, used its Twitter campaign to garner national and international attention, its videos to raise awareness, and well-known artists to generate buzz. Yet, from the beginning, organizers made it clear that people had to participate; they had to show up to vote, to monitor elections, to report police or campaign irregularities, and to create content that challenged mass media portrayals of events (Woodside Woods, personal communication, 2012). Just as in the Egyptian case, activists had to "translate online political awareness to offline action" (Aouragh & Alexander, 2011, p. 1353).

But what of the long-term impact of social movements that rely on new ICTs and SNSs as sources or hubs of mobilization? Eltantawy and Weist (2011) contend that "[c]ollective identity in cyberspace seemed to reach an apex for Egyptians worldwide immediately after the announcement of Mubarak's resignation" (p. 1218). Similarly, *Músicos con YoSoy132* was extremely active in the days preceding the election on July 1, 2012, announcing demonstrations, posting participant-generated content, and continuing to utilize Twitter to encourage active involvement in election proceedings. Yet just weeks after the election, the *Músicos con YoSoy132* website was disabled, all of its content wiped from the Internet except where it overlapped with the *YoSoy132* site, www.yosoy132media.org, which remains active at the time of this writing. In this vein, regarding the political changes in Egypt, Elizabeth Iskander (2011) cautions:

Although it took just 18 days of protests to force the resignation of President Mubarak, constructing a new political culture will be a slower and more challenging process. If social media are to provide a real channel for political debate and activism, they must connect with traditional forms of media and civil society. (p. 1225)

The disappearance of *Músicos con YoSoy132* following Mexico's presidential election casts doubt on the staying power of this form of social protest. However, Iskander's proposal that online activists must connect with traditional forms of media and civil society is problematic in the case of Mexico, where the mass media, while increasingly open and democratic, demonstrated in this election cycle that they could quickly be pulled back into the pocket of the PRI (UC Berkeley CLAS, 2012). In a country where civil society is young and fragile (Camp, 2003), virtual spaces may be the most important sparks of energy and critique even if they are disjointed and short-lived.

Finally, this case raises the question of the role of popular music in social movements. *Músicos con YoSoy132* sprang from the music scene writ large. While popular musicians were members of the movement, it also included industry professionals, music promoters, and music journalists. Unlike *rock en español* during its heyday when specific bands and songs embodied political expression, *Músicos con YoSoy132* was a different kind of movement that utilized ICTs to pull diverse people associated with Mexico's music scene into its fold. The musicians who became the face of the movement thanks to their fame (most of whom were not previously political), like Natalia LaFourcade, used *Músicos con YoSoy132* and online platforms to solicit artistic inspiration from fans. La Fourcade went so far as to crowd-source lyrics through Twitter (Kun, 2012). Music proved important to the Arab Spring movements as well, although in a very different way. Scholar Lara Dotson-Renta explains that "these movements [were] accompanied by a very strong musical component," as she describes the contributions of Tunisian rapper El Général and the Egyptian group Arabian Knightz, among others (Dotson-Renta, 2011, para. 1). Similarly, the Euphrates Institute blog chronicles Egyptian, Syrian, Palestinian, Tunisian, and Yemeni artists who have long utilized their music for political protest (Admin, 2013). Unlike *Músicos con YoSoy132*, however, these artists did not join other artists and industry professionals in their countries to launch a *collective* project of political action with specific aims. The lyrical content and public personae of the artists described by Dotson-Renta and the Euphrates Institute are more explicitly political than many of the people involved in *Músicos con YoSoy132*. As scholar Josh Kun explains, "Music has certainly not been the spark of the Yo Soy 132 movement," but "the political expression of Yo Soy 132 has increasingly taken musical forms" (Kun, 2012, p. 1). Without the explicit political content of the days of *rock en español*⁶, those involved with *Músicos con YoSoy132* drew from *rock en español's* legacy, repopularizing songs from decades past in their efforts to mobilize today's youth (Kun, 2012). Their innovation lies in the use of digital communication networks such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook to inspire action and participation. Duly inspired, young people came out in droves to participate in collective action in the form of demonstrations, concerts, and protests where the on-the-ground work of election oversight and voter turnout took place.

Concluding Remarks

Much was at stake during spring 2012 in Mexico. After losing presidential power in 2000, the semi-authoritarian party that had ruled Mexico for more than 70 years through a combination of centralized authority, electoral manipulation, corruption, and cronyism was poised to return to power. Mexico's transition to democracy in the late 1990s had ushered a new political party into executive power, but the benefits of democracy had not yet been experienced by vast sectors of the population who continued to experience economic marginality, reduced education opportunities, and few avenues for employment. The young people who have experienced this situation most acutely have been left disenchanted with government, politics, and institutions. In spite of this relatively bleak scenario, scholars of Mexican youth have argued that while largely absent from politics throughout the 2000s, young people

⁶ It should be noted that although mass-mediated popular music has lost much of its political force since the late 1990s, *rock urbano* (urban rock) with its social commentary and oftentimes harder edge (sonically and politically) has survived and thrived on the geographic, economic, and industry fringe.

recently have begun to demonstrate a spark of creativity and a do-it-yourself ethic to change their circumstances.

This spark and its underlying motivation were evidenced in the lead-up to the 2012 elections when young people across the socioeconomic spectrum actively participated both on and off-line to make their presence and their hopes for a new government known. One group whose presence was particularly interesting was *Músicos con YoSoy132*. Mexico's rock music scene, especially its indie rock subgroup, had been described by fans, musicians, and industry insiders as apolitical, decentered, and no longer capable of playing the overtly political role rock music had in the 1990s. Therefore, the active participation of Mexico's rock music scene in this political process demonstrated how rock music, just like the ICTs and SNSs used by *Músicos con YoSoy132*, has no inherent meaning. Rather, the genre's meanings and uses are determined by the sociocultural needs of its users.

The case of *Músicos con YoSoy132* is understood most productively in the context of the Arab Spring and communication scholars' analyses of events in the MENA. This study confirms scholarly observations that ICT and SNS technologies themselves do not have causal power, but are dependent on users and their needs. Additionally, there must be a precipitating context that allows the use of ICTs to be meaningful, and, in order for this use to have political impact, movements must arouse emotions and tap into existing feels of both outrage and hope, as Castells puts it. This study also echoes assertions that virtual activities can enhance connections and increase motivation, but they must be accompanied by on-the-ground action. Finally, this study raises the question of the longevity of dissident movements with online hubs. In the end, *Músicos con YoSoy132* combined the political potential and widespread appeal of Mexico's rock music with ICTs and SNSs to galvanize young voters, increase participation, provide citizen-driven election oversight, and monitor biased mainstream media coverage. These efforts impacted the election and contributed to narrowing the race. Additionally, they demonstrated that when the stakes were high, the supposedly apolitical music scene was capable of engaging in a meaningful movement for social change. Although the movement itself appears to have been short-lived, increased youth participation, greater public awareness of questionable campaign activities, and the knowledge that widespread voter mobilization is possible are all positive developments for Mexico's democracy.

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