Some Reflections on Manuel Castells’ Book "Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age".

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Abstract

This paper provides critical reflections on Manuel Castells’ (2012) book Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age that analyses the “nature and perspectives of networked social movements” (p. 4) and gives special focus to the role of “social media” in movements that emerged in 2011 in Tunisia, Iceland, Egypt, Spain and the United States. I situates Castells’ book in an intellectual discourse that focuses on the political implications of social media and that has involved Clay Shirky, Malcolm Gladwell and Evgeny Morozov. The article also discusses the role of social theory and empirical research in Castells’ book, presents an alternative a theoretical model of the relationship between social movements and the media, discusses the implications that some empirical data that focus on social media in the Egyptian revolution and the Occupy Wall Street movement have for Castells’ approach, discusses how Castells positions himself towards capitalism and compares his explanation of the crisis and his political views to David Harvey’s approach.

Section overview:
1. Introduction
2. Social Media and Politics: A Controversy between Clay Shirky, Malcolm Gladwell and Evgeny Morozov
3. Castells on Social Media in the Context of Protests and Revolutions: The Dimension of Social Theory
4. Social Theory Recovered: A Model of the Relationship between Social Movements and the Media
5. Castells on Social Media in the Context of Protests and Revolutions: The Dimension of Empirical Research
6. Manuel Castells and David Harvey: The Question of Political Struggle - For or against Capitalism?
7. Conclusion

Author Biography

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Christian Fuchs is professor and chair in media and communication studies at Uppsala University’s Department of Informatics and Media. He is board member of the Unified Theory of Information Research Group and editor of tripleC (cognition, communication, co-operation): Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society. He holds a venia docendi in the field of ICTs and society. His research interests are: critical theory, social theory, media and society, ICTs and society, information society theory/research, political economy. He is author of many publications in these fields, including the books 'Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age' (Routledge 2008), which presents a social theory of contemporary society with a special consideration of media, information, and technology, and the book 'Foundations of
Social Movements in the Internet Age that analyses the "nature and perspectives of networked social movements" (p. 4) and gives special focus to the role of "social media" in movements that emerged in 2011 in Tunisia, Iceland, Egypt, Spain and the United States. I situate Castells' book in an intellectual discourse that focuses on the political implications of social media and that has involved Clay Shirky, Malcolm Gladwell and Evgeny Morozov. This paper provides critical reflections on Manuel Castells' (2012) book Networks of Outrage and Hope. Some doubts also arose as to whether the Euromaidan movement represented the whole Ukraine or it was rather an expression of dissatisfaction on the part of the radical or even extremist groups representing a minority of the society and mainly the western part of Ukraine. Manuel Castells, while describing social movements in the network society, analyses the 'Revolution for liberty and dignity' in Tunisia, the Egyptian Revolution, the Arab uprisings, the Indignados movement in Spain, Occupy Wall Street, the so-called 'Kitchenware Revolution' in Iceland and so on, and tries to find their common features. The opening sentence of Manuel Castells' latest book Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age. (Polity Press, 2012), sets the tone of the entire work: "No one expected it. Castells explores the variety and cultural diversity of these uprisings in an ambitious project. He considers the movements from Iceland and Tunisia, from the Egyptian Revolution to the Arab Spring, from the Indignados movements in Spain to the Occupy movements in the States. "A timely and important book … [Castells'] claims are powerful, his prose captivating and the examples he uses are fascinating." e-International Relations. About the Author. An important critique on the changing status quo in the advent of the internet, and globalized, networked age. Intelligent and current. Essential reading for anyone who gives a damn. Castells' conclusion expresses a hope that networked social movements will help to achieve a more democratic future. As someone whose roots, on his own admission, go back to Paris 1968, he could do well to go beyond analysis and indulge in speculation.