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**General Strike through the Social
Media Looking Glass: November
14th Strike Coverage by Spanish
Mass Media Profiles in Facebook**

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Abstract

Social networking sites are nowadays one of the most popular media in Spain, as remarked by the last “Observatorio de Redes Sociales”. According to this study, 91% of Spanish Internet users have at least one profile in of these sites. As a general consequence of this situation, social media have become an agora for postmodern democracy as authors like Berlanga (2012) have stated before. Social networking sites play an essential role in the public sphere nowadays. The “Observatorio” also reveals that Facebook is the most important social network site, because 85% of Internet users have an account on this site. So, in this study, we analyze the presence of the main Spanish media (newspapers, radio and television networks) in Facebook, focusing on the coverage of these media regarding one particular and controvertial issue: the general strike which took place on November 14th, 2012 in Spain.

In order to do so, the messages posted by the main Spanish media have been analyzed as well as the reaction of the Internet users, by boarding their comments on the ‘Facebook biographies’ of these networks. The number of ‘likes’ and ‘shares’ reached by every publication has also been considered. We also want to find out what types of content cause more sharing and engagement.

Keywords:

Corresponding Author:

Introduction

Social Media, News and Society

Relationship among social networking sites, media and news is getting closer and closer. The last *The State of News Media* report remarks that in 2012 ‘social media continued to expand its role in the news ecosystem, establishing itself as an indispensable tool for distributing content and attracting new readers, as well as for building deeper engagement with current ones’ (Sassen, Olmstead and Mitchell, 2013). As Glynn et al. have remarked, “it seems that social network sites have evolved to include news content as an important aspect of what is shared and discussed. Facebook users are able to post news stories to their “wall” (a type of home page for each Facebook account holder), and these posts are then seen by the user’s networked friends on the site. As a result, social networking sites (SNS) users are highly likely to encounter news stories and links even if their primary intention in using the source was to connect with friends. (2012: 14).

Thus, social media have become a new public sphere (Van Djick, 2012: 172) which sums up the characteristics of the classic *agora*: an open public space where different social classes gather and interact among them through spoken word in a deep social context (Berlanga Fernández, 2011). In this new public sphere “the dynamics of publication and distribution of news are being reshaped by networked publics” (Hermida et al., 2012: 816).

In this situation, users have ceased to play a role of mere consumers. They have evolved into active elements of the communicative system developing a role of “produser”, which not only implies engaging “in a traditional form of content production”, but also in “the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement” (Bruns, 2008).

Studies on the use of social media by American television networks underline that those networks do not employ SNS’s to obtain news but “for its role in connecting viewers with newsrooms and vice versa” (Lysak, Cremedas & Wolf, 2012: 203). Yet other researches on Spain argue that the ultimate aim of traditional media in SNS’s is lowly related to encourage conversation and interacting with their public but strongly tied to multiplying their presence on other distribution circuits and raising their web traffic (Bernal Triviño, 2009). Despite the potential of social media for strengthening pre existant communication channels such as e-mail or telephone (Palma Peña: 2012, 116), they are used as a tool for gaining audience loyalty (García Mirón: 2010, 14).

State of the Art

Most of the studies on social media are USA focused (Boyd and Ellison: 2007). Nevertheless since these authors highlighted this fact, finding researches on social media, news and public reaching different geographical areas has turned more frequent So, Hermida *et al.* (2012) have developed their study on the effects of social media and news consumption on Canadian. Outside the Anglo-Saxon ambit, Ozsoy (2011) has analysed the use of Facebook and Twitter by Turkish sports fans.

Academic writing of Iberoamerican countries has mostly boarded the strategies of media on different SNS's. Thus, García *et al* (2011) have examined the use of Twitter and Facebook by twenty seven Iberoamerican media. They have remarked that the latter is taken as a way to promote the media contents. In a similar way Jerónimo and Duarte (2010) point that reproduction of contents is also the main target in Facebook and Twitter by Portuguese newspapers.

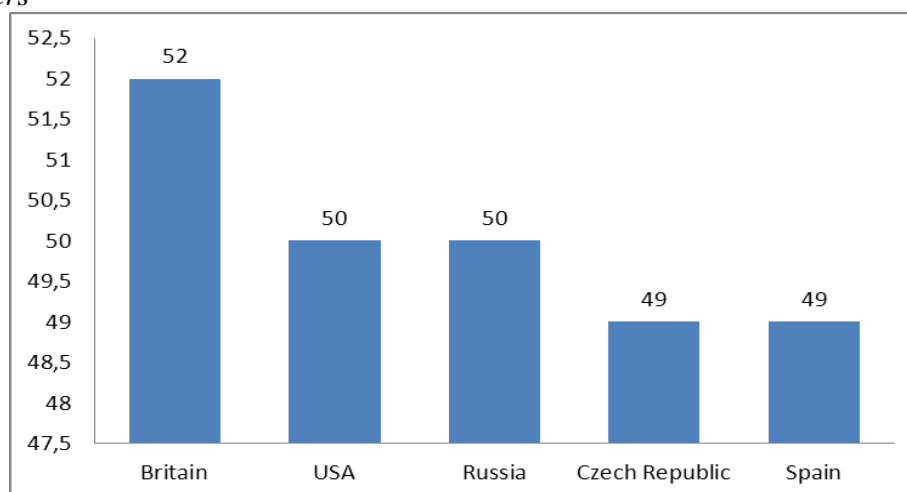
From a different point of view, Canavilhas and Ivars (2012) analyse how Spanish and Portuguese journalist employ social media as a source of information. They found out that SNS's are the most employed 2.0 resource, far above other platforms as wikis or blog even though their credibility is lesser than some of that other resources'.

Studies focused on Spain have unveiled low interest in media on promoting interaction with their publics through social media. In this sense Noguera-Vivo stated that 69,3% of the messages published in Facebook by the (on-line and off-line) Spanish newspapers he analysed didn't answer any question asked by their reader nor answer any relationship with them. Similar studies regarding Spanish radio networks have offered similar data (Palma Peña, 2012).

Relevance of Facebook in Spain

Spain offers a good case study given the popularity of SNS's on their Internet users. In fact, Spain is the fifth country in the world on social media usage (see (see fig.1)

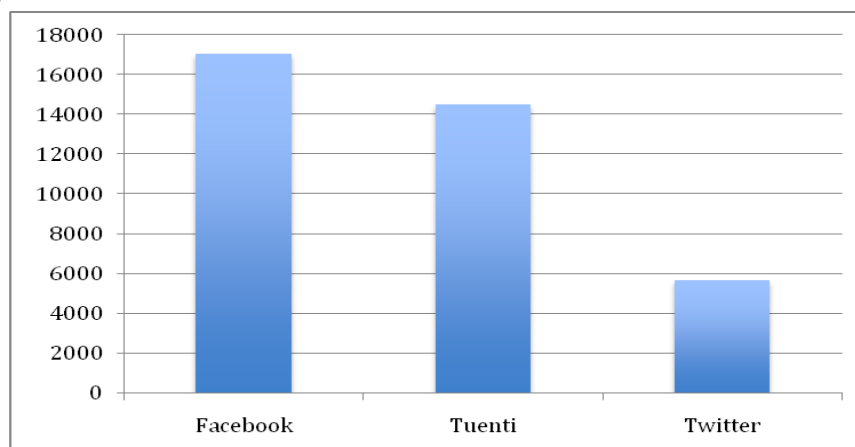
Figure 1. *Top Five Countries in Percentage of SNS's use among Internet Users*



Source: Pew Research Center: 2012

Among other SNS's as Tuenti, Badoo, Google + or Myspace, Facebook is the most popular SNS's in Spain not only in number of unique visitors: 17.069.000 against Tuenti's 14.491.000 and Twitter's 5.671.000 (see Figure 2)

Figure 2. *Number of Unique Visitors (in hundreds of thousands) of SNS's in Spain*



Source: Barlovento Comunicación, with data from ComScore (Diciembre, 2012)

These data, along with its eighteen million registered users (SocialBakers, 2012), place Facebook as the most popular SNS in Spain.

Hypothesis and Research Questions

The objective of this research is analysing the information published by the main Spanish media through their Facebook accounts regarding the general strike on November 14th, 2012, as the interaction triggered among users by these pieces of news.

That strike was called by the most relevant Spanish trade unions as a protest for austerity measures taken by the conservative Partido Popular, in the context of the European sovereign debt crisis. The government led by Mariano Rajoy had announced severe welfare cuts (mainly in health and education) and taxes increases.

This strike was followed in other European countries, mainly Portugal and Italy, and had parallel demonstrations and actions in France, Greece, Belgium, Malta and Cyprus. In Spain, the strike was supported by the social democrat PSOE and the leftist Izquierda Unida, the second and third political groups in number of deputies in the Parliament.

Trade unions labelled the strike as a 'success' stating that 76,7% of Spanish workers followed this action. On the contrary, the most important Spanish employer's organisation –Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales, CEOE- calculated that only 10% of workers followed the strike and that the impact in some areas was even null. During the day, police arrested 142 people and 74 people suffered different injuries according to Spanish Ministerio de Interior¹.

¹ http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2012/11/13/actualidad/1352838703_548795.html

This research considers that, given the relevant role assigned by media to their presence on SNS's on their strategy to attract readers, listeners and viewers, media have published on their Facebook profiles the most important pieces of news for their respective audiences. That is, they have used their Facebook walls as the, dynamic and interactive, equivalent of a front page in the Wall of a virtual and massive newsagent's window display. So, this study will analyse the content of these messages and the public reaction to them

In concrete terms, this research will test the following hypotheses:

H1. General strike won't be followed by a raise in the number of news published by media in their Facebook profiles

Harmon and Lee stated that U.S.A. television coverage on strikes has been declining between 1968 and 2008 (2010: 511). This study will check the different degree of attention shown in the different media towards this strike. This hypothesis is divided in other two sub hypotheses:

h.1.1. Number of messages published by media in Facebook on that day is lesser than on an average day

h.1.2. Number of messages about the strike is lesser than the number of messages dealing with other issues

H2. Messages about the strike reach a higher level of interaction than messages about other issues

An study about messages posted by local newspapers in Andalusia pointed that news about social, political, economic and sport issues reached a higher amount of comments and likes (Guirardo Zamora, 2012). It could be assumed that an event as the general strike –which could be labelled as a ‘social’, ‘political’ and ‘economic’ issue- would get an over the average number of comments, shares and likes.

As proceeded with the previous hypothesis, two sub hypotheses have been enounced:

H 2.1. Degree of interaction of a message about the strike is higher than the average

H 2.2. Degree of interaction of a message about the strike is higher than the degree of messages dealing with other issues

Method

The researchers conducted a quantitative analysis covering the messages published in Facebook by Spanish media with the highest audience, according to data provided by Estudio General de Medios (for press and radio) and by Kantar Media (for television). The researchers have selected four newspaper, three television channels and three radio networks in order to get a sample as representative as possible (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Medium	Kind	Audience	Facebook URL
<i>20 minutos</i>	Free Newspaper	1.900.000	https://www.facebook.com/20minutos.es
<i>El País</i>	Newspaper	1.929.000	https://es-es.facebook.com/elpais
<i>El Mundo</i>	Newspaper	1.181.000	https://www.facebook.com/mundo.es
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	Newspaper	811.000	https://www.facebook.com/LaVanguardia
<i>Cadena Ser</i>	Radio network	4.500.000	https://www.facebook.com/cadenaser
<i>Cope</i>	Radio network	1.668.000	https://www.facebook.com/cope
<i>Onda Cero</i>	Radio network	2.343.000	https://es-es.facebook.com/ondacero
<i>Tele 5</i>	Television ¹	14,3%	https://www.facebook.com/tele5
<i>Antena 3</i>	Television	13,9%	https://es-es.facebook.com/antena3
<i>TVE1</i>	Television	10,6%	https://es-es.facebook.com/rteve

Source: EGM and Kantar Media

As just stated, sample collected three media of each kind (press, radio and television). The only exception has been made in printed media to include a free newspaper (*20 Minutos*) in order to include an example of a kind of press with a high relevance in Spain not only because its circulation, but for its influence on traditional (Berganza y Chaparro, 2012: 31). Sample includes nine media of private ownership and one from the public corporation *RTVE* (*TVE I*).

The rest of the sample belongs to different media groups, such as PRISA, the biggest one in Spain and a traditional supporter for the social democrat Partido Socialista Obrero Español. It owns, among many other, the newspaper *El País* and *Cadena Ser* radio network.

Since its creation in 1976, *El País* has been the main centre-left newspaper in Spain, though during the last year it has shown a more rightist ideology. It has to be noted that during the weeks preceding the general strike, it had been suffering its own labour dispute due to a planned firing of 149 workers (*El Mundo*: 2012a). In fact, an strike was called by workers on November 6th, 7th and 8th (*El Mundo*: 2012b).

Similarly, *Cadena SER*, is known by its leftist orientation, comparable with the traditional political attitude of *El País*.

Another relevant company, owner of more right oriented media, aligned with Partido Popular is Grupo Planeta, which controls *Onda Cero* radio networks and *Antena 3* television channel.

The media group led by Silvio Berlusconi, Mediaset, operates in Spain a wide number of television channels, among them Tele 5.

The also Italian RCS Media Group holds the highest part of *El Mundo*, which has supported the rightist Partido Popular during the last years.

The newspaper with a highest circulation in Spain not edited in Madrid is *La Vanguardia*, which headquarters are in Barcelona. Today it is still held by

¹ Data for televisions are expressed on share, not on number of readers or listeners

the family group which founded it in the XIX century, Godó Group, close to conservative and nationalist parties.

20 Minutos, as mentioned before, is a free newspaper which ownership is shared by Norwegian Schibsted Media Group (80%) and Spanish Grupo Z (20%). It was the first free newspaper to be edited in Spain.

Only generalist media have been added to the sample, excluding sports and economic newspapers and radio formats.

The total number of messages published between October and December 2012 by each one of these newspapers in their Facebook profiles has been quantified in order to obtain the average number of daily messages and the number of likes, shares and comments reached by each message. (see Table 2)

Table 2. *Number of messages, likes, comments and share obtained by messages posted, and average by message (October-December, 2012)*

Medium	Messages (number)	Messages (Average)	Likes (number)	Media (average)	Comments (total number)	Comments (average)	Shares (total number)	Shares (Average)
<i>20 minutos</i>	902	14,5	27869	30,9	6729	0,24	20354	3,02
<i>El País</i>	726	11,7	99898	137,6	23646	0,23	41718	1,76
<i>El Mundo</i>	1159	18,7	65874	56,84	34745	0,53	3503	0,1
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	739	11,9	9416	12,74	2897	0,3	4438	1,53
<i>Cadena Ser</i>	770	6,3	28748	37,3	10091	14,9	1818	9,8
<i>Cope</i>	47	0,4	3256	69,2	1462	31,1	360	7,6
<i>Onda Cero</i>	589	4,8	22749	38,6	5679	9,6	1245	4,7
<i>Tele 5</i>	473	3,9	4145	8,7	1599	3,4	502	1,5
<i>Antena 3</i>	1283	10,5	85024	66,4	24973	19,5	23970	18,7
<i>TVE1</i>	-		-		-		-	

Source: Compiled by authors

Needless to say, special attention has been paid to messages published on the very day of the strike. On the one hand, messages dealing with the crisis have been separated from messages about other topics. To develop this selection, only messages containing certain words have been labelled as ‘messages about the strike’ (see Table 3). Those terms make explicit reference to the strike or to the measures against which the strike was called.

Table 3. *List of terms regarding the strike*

Spanish	Translation
Huelga	Strike
14-N	November 14th, nickname given to the strike
Manifestación	Demonstration
Recortes	Cuts

Source: Compiled by authors

Once these two categories have been established, their presence in percentage has been calculated, by global terms, by groups of media (printed

and audiovisual) and by specific media. Data regarding virality and interaction has also been obtained by calculating the number of likes it reached, the number of comments it generated and the number of times it was shared.

Findings

Strike Coverage through Media SNS's

Printed media show an equal interest toward the strike. *El País* is the paper where it acquires a higher relevance compared to other issues of the day. In fact, the only two messages posted on its Facebook Wall are about the general strike. The inner labour conflict between the newspaper workers and their employers mentioned above influences the information provided by the newspaper through the analysed channel. Accordingly, the data obtained by this study will also be influenced by this conflict. Thus, their number of messages posted that day is below the average.

Number of messages is also below the average in *20 minutos* and in *La Vanguardia* and slowly above in *El Mundo*.

The attention shown towards the strike in comparison with other issues also differs from the high presence of the strike on *20 minutos* to the moderate percentage of messages in *El Mundo* and the low in *La Vanguardia*.

Regarding audiovisual media, it must be mentioned that three of the analysed networks (*Cadena Cope*, *TVE* y *Antena 3*) do not post any message at all. It is a surprising fact, even more, given the transcendence of the general strike.

The rest of the analysed media do not offer a high quantity of published message during that day. Nevertheless, except the case of *Tele 5*, the vast majority of the messages make reference to the strike. In fact, almost every message published in Cadena Ser Facebook profile did mention the strike. The only exception to this rule was a message published to conclude the daily broadcast of the flagship magazine of the network, *Hoy por hoy*.

From other perspective, the number of messages published during the general strike is similar to the average rate (see Table 4). This fact implies that the general strike did not have any effect on audiovisual media activity on Facebook. So, the global number of messages published by these three media on November 14th raises to 19 (see Table 4), from which twelve are related –in one way or another- to general strike. The latter do not have an informative aim, but stimulate interaction with the audience, asking their opinion about the strike or inviting them to send photographs of demonstrations

Table 4. Messages published by Spanish media on Facebook

Medium	Total number of messages	Messages about the strike	%
<i>20 minutos</i>	7	6	85,7%
<i>El País</i>	2	2	100%
<i>El Mundo</i>	20	11	55%
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	6	2	33,3%
<i>Cadena Ser</i> ¹	5	4	80%
<i>Cope</i>	-	-	-
<i>Onda Cero</i>	7	6	85,7%
<i>Tele 5</i> ²	7	2	28,5%
<i>Antena 3</i>	-	-	-
<i>TVE1</i>	-	-	-

Source: Compiled by authors

Engagement of messages about the strike

Number of 'likes'

A lack of homogeneity has been found among printed media regarding the number of “likes” got by the messages about the strike compared to the global quantity of messages of the day. In the case of *20 minutos* the bigger number of “likes” is expressed in pieces of news about this issue meanwhile in *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia* this percentage remains near 50%. In *El País*, given that their only two messages covered the strike, all the “likes” are concentrated on this topic.

Regarding audiovisual media, special attention must be paid to the data obtained in the *Onda Cero* profile with 576 likes on messages about the strike from a global quantity of 778. A detailed study of this data brings the fact that 375 likes are received by the same message: a link to listen the daily comment of Carlos Herrera, the anchorman of *Herrera en la Onda* the flagship magazine of the network. So, in this case, this profile has experienced a raise on the number of likes above its daily average per message: 38,6% (see Table 5). In fact, in an strategy to get a higher amount of traffic and users to the network profile and web (Díaz del Campo y Segado, 2012), this radio magazine (*Herrera en la Onda*) does not have its own official profile on Facebook even though almost every other programme of the network does.

In the other two media, user generated activity has not reached extremely higher levels above the average, being slightly above this ratio on the *Cadena Ser* profile. Furthermore, the bigger part of this activity has been generated by messages about the strike.

¹Data regarding the *Hoy por Hoy* profile, magazine of *Cadena Ser* and leader of audience on Spanish Radio according to EGM. From now on, data attributed to Cadena Ser refers to this profile

²This data and the following refer to the newscasts Facebook profile of the network.

Table 5. *Global number of likes and number of likes on messages about the strike*

Medium	Global number of likes	Number of likes on news about the strike	%
<i>20 minutos</i>	277	233	84,1%
<i>El País</i>	552	552	100%
<i>El Mundo</i>	840	418	49.8%
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	33	13	39.3%
<i>Cadena Ser</i>	79	61	67%
<i>Cope</i>	-	-	-
<i>Onda Cero</i>	778	576	74%
<i>Tele 5</i>	12	10	83,3%
<i>Antena 3</i>	-	-	-
<i>TVE1</i>	-	-	-

Source: Compiled by authors

Number of comments

On the one hand, data obtained regarding participation on the printed media profiles show a similar trends to the number of likes. Once more *20 minutos* reaches the highest rate of comments, while it descends slightly in *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia*.

On the other hand, messages about the strike generated a higher participation on the comments on the audiovisual media profiles. More than 90% of the comments written by users in the *Onda Cero* and *Cadena Ser* profiles were on messages about the strike (see Table 6). This number of comments per message is also higher than the average on this two networks, yet being lower in *Tele 5*.

Table 6. *Global number of comments and number of comments on messages about the strike*

Medium	Global number of comments	Number of comments on the strike	%
<i>20 minutos</i>	37	33	89%
<i>El País</i>	66	66	100%
<i>El Mundo</i>	962	507	52,7%
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	24	8	33,3%
<i>Cadena Ser</i>	298	285	95,6%
<i>Cope</i>	-	-	-
<i>Onda Cero</i>	263	242	92%
<i>Tele 5</i>	17	9	52,9%
<i>Antena 3</i>	-	-	-
<i>TVE1</i>	-	-	-

Source: Compiled by authors

Number of shares

In terms of virality, printed media show a number of shares higher than the daily average. In all of them it reaches or even breaks a 50%, but once more is *20 minutos* the newspaper with a higher rate

In audiovisual media this activity is almost monopolised by *Onda Cero* profile, whose messages are shared 323 times against the two reached in *Tele 5* and *Cadena Ser*. *Onda Cero* messages about the strike are shared a total of 149 times.

Table 7. *Global number of shares and number of shares on messages about the strike*

Medium	Number of “shares”	“Shares” related to strike	%
<i>20 minutos</i>	144	122	84,7%
<i>El País</i>	414	414	100%
<i>El Mundo</i>	618	365	59,1%
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	6	3	50%
<i>Cadena Ser</i>	2	2	100%
<i>Cope</i>	-	-	-
<i>Onda Cero</i>	323	149	46%
<i>Tele 5</i>	2	2	100%
<i>Antena 3</i>	-	-	-
<i>TVE1</i>	-	-	--

Source: Compiled by authors

Discussion

With the data obtained through the previous analysis, the enounced hypotheses can now be tested and contrasted.

H1. General strike won't be followed by a raise in the number of news published by media in their Facebook profiles.

The number of messages published by the different media in the Facebook profiles collected in the sample is below the daily average rate of messages, except in *El Mundo* and *Onda Cero*, which show a soft raise in this number of messages. Nevertheless, in the rest of analysed profiles, this quantity is always lesser when no widely lesser. So, this hypothesis is clearly confirmed.

In the case of the two sub hypotheses, conclusions are different. Sub hypothesis h1.1 is verified because, as it has been exposed, the number of news published in the media Facebook profiles is below the average rate, and then, general strike did not generate a higher number of messages. Yet, sub hypotheses h1.2 could not be fully verified, because in half of the analysed profiles the number of messages about the strike overpasses the number of messages about the other issues of the day. Even, in four of these media, the general strike is the topic for more than 80% of the published messages.

H2. Messages about the strike reach a higher level of interaction than messages about other issues

This hypothesis and the two sub hypotheses in which it was divided has been also completely verified, given that the amount of 'likes', shares and comments registered on November 14th place above their respective average rate. In addition to this, it has been checked that interaction has been higher in those messages dealing with the strike and that those very messages were the cause of a higher interaction on the analysed Facebook profiles.

Yet, it must be noted that newspapers show substantial differences according to their ideology. The number of messages published over the strike and also the interaction triggered by them is higher in the left oriented papers and lower in the rightist journals. This attention (or lack of attention) is shared then by the media and by their readers. But, it also must be noted that this tendency has not been found in radio networks with a common political bias. The case of *Onda Cero*, also with a conservative profile, experimented those day a rise in the number of messages published on its profile and on the interactivity generated by them.

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