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 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. The article also discusses the role of social theory and empirical research in Castells' book, presents as 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.

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Castells argues that social networking has made social movements and revolution possible by allowing movements to share moments of outrage and hope. When activists and participants first began sharing their triumphs and struggles via social networking platforms, which increased visibility of poorly reported or ignored social movements, others were given hope for their own social movements. Social media then became an organizing tool as well as a sharing tool for primary accounts of the movements. Castells argues that the integration of social networking into social action movements has changed