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Protesting on Twitter: Citizenship and Empowerment from Public Education

Protestando en Twitter: ciudadanía y empoderamiento desde la educación pública

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Abstract

The use of social networks for protest purposes has been an essential element in recent global protests against the economic measures of privatization of public services. Social networks are changing political communication, mobilization and organization of collective protests. Taking into account the relationship between collective protests and new forms of network communication, the aim of this article is to analyze the new forms of citizenship empowerment from the collective protests in defense of public education in Spain. In the last five years the movement "Marea Verde" has generated protests on twitter that have generated new forms of empowerment of citizenship in the Spanish context. In this article we have analyzed three accounts of twitter with great activity and prominence, by the numbers of followers and tweets, of the social networks by «Marea Verde». In this article four categories of analysis have emerged that agglutinate and characterize the demands of collective protests through social networks. Two of the categories have been generated to reject the privatization of education and the standardized tests of the new educational reform act in the Spanish context. The other two categories claim for public education and an educational consensus between the political forces and the educational community.

Resumen

La utilización de las redes sociales con fines reivindicativos ha sido un elemento esencial en las recientes protestas globales contra las medidas económicas de privatización de los servicios públicos. Las redes sociales están cambiando la comunicación política, la movilización y la organización de las protestas colectivas. Tomando en cuenta la relación entre las protestas colectivas y las nuevas formas de comunicación en



red, el objetivo del artículo es analizar las nuevas formas de empoderamiento ciudadano desde las protestas colectivas por la defensa de la educación pública en España. En los últimos cinco años, en el contexto español, el movimiento «Marea Verde» ha generado protestas en Twitter que han dado lugar a nuevas formas de empoderamiento de la ciudadanía. En este artículo han sido analizadas tres cuentas de Twitter con gran actividad y protagonismo, por el número de seguidores y tweets, de las redes sociales de la «Marea Verde». Han emergido cuatro categorías de análisis que aglutinan y caracterizan las demandas de los movimientos sociales a través de las redes sociales. Dos de las categorías se han producido como medio de rechazo a la privatización de la educación y a las pruebas de evaluación estandarizadas de la nueva reforma educativa española. Las otras dos categorías reclaman la defensa de la escuela pública y el logro de un pacto educativo entre las fuerzas políticas y la comunidad educativa.

Keywords / Palabras clave

Education, communication, protest movements, social networks, citizenship, empowerment, educational policy, privatization.

Educación, comunicación, movimiento de protesta, redes sociales, ciudadanía, empoderamiento, política educativa, privatización.

1. Introduction

In late 2010, Greece experienced a series of demonstrations and citizen strikes which called for resistance to economic austerity policies, declining salaries, and tax increases. Twitter was used as a tool to facilitate communication between activists and citizens and to sustain the mobilization offline and in the public space (Theocharis, Lowe, van-Deth, & García-Albacete, 2015). Around the same time, Tunisia and Egypt captured the world spotlight as focal points of citizen protests in what was dubbed the “Arab Spring”, and they were later joined by other countries in the region (Attia, Aziz, Friedman, & Elhusseiny, 2011; Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012). In 2011, students mass-mobilized in Chile in favor of high-quality public education (Cabalín, 2014; Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012). In Spain, a wave of citizen gatherings calling for a participative democracy without corruption flooded the squares and streets in May 2011. This was the seed of the “Indignados” movement (Anduiza, Cristancho, & Sabucedo, 2014; Gerbaudo, 2017), in which young people used the new social media by connecting online, resignifying education, society and politics (Hernández-Merayo, Robles-Vilchez & Martínez-Rodríguez, 2013). The USA also witnessed the “Occupy Wall Street” protests. Just as in Greece, in all the other cases the social media, particularly Twitter, played a prominent role in the success of the popular demands and social protests (Theocharis, Lowe, van-Deth, & García-Albacete, 2015).

The year 2011 became the “year of the revolutions” (Fuchs, 2012: 775), with global protests in favor of real democracy via new forms of network communication (Castells, 2012). “Tweets and streets” (Gerbaudo, 2012) joined the “Twitter revolutions” (Tremayne, 2014: 110), showing that contemporary social mobilizations were characterized by a hybridization between new forms of network communication, protest gatherings and protest messages in the social media, coupled with citizen struggles in the public sphere. The use of the social media as a means native to the network society emerged (Castells, 2012), accompanied by citizen struggles unleashed in the public space.

Hybridization shaped other forms of democratization and citizen empowerment in the decision-making processes of public policies (Howard & Parks, 2012; Nisbet, Stoycheff, & Pearce, 2012; Valenzuela, Arriagada & Scherman, 2012). The “connective action” of collective protests (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), unlike the classic social movements (Della-Porta & Diani, 2006), stood out for the organizational dynamic of the mobilizations, which was mediated by new channels of communication that swiftly reinterpreted political actions by the protest groups and recreated meanings in the social media. These collective protest actions were not disassociated from the social media, whose nodes exponentially multiplied (Castells, 2012). Leadership was not needed for the success of the



mobilizations (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). The ICTs had been placed at the service of the generation known for flexible bonds and social commitment without the need for stable ties of membership in consolidated social movements (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Gradually, these new spaces of “citizenism” (Delgado, 2011) were orchestrated as the expression of “radical democracy” (Mouffe, 1992), which was capable of furthering democratic revolutions by connecting different claims.

“Marea Verde” emerged in this overall scene where new avenues of citizen empowerment were emerging, such as the ability to choose and influence the new social scenarios (Bauman, 2010) by unifying network communication and protests (Flesher & Cox, 2013; Juris, 2012). “Escuela pública: de tod@s y para tod@s” (“Public school: by all and for all”) is the slogan that has appeared on green t-shirts since 2011 to protest the privatization of education and the dismantlement of the public school system in Spain. Its embryo can be found in the collective protests over the crisis of neoliberalism which burst onto the scene in 2008 and led to austerity policies and the privatization of public services, which had dire effects on citizens’ social rights (Della-Porta, 2014). Hence, networked social mobilization emerged to defend the public, the common good and the pillars of the welfare state. It is a movement that reveals an understanding of the “exogenous privatization” and “hidden privatization” inherent in global educational agendas (Ball & Youdell, 2008).

From understanding, it transitioned to protest. In the middle of 2011, the Autonomous Community of Madrid issued a communiqué at the beginning of the academic year announcing an increase of 2 teaching hours for secondary school teachers and the elimination of 3,000 interim teaching positions. It also punished an activist teacher who had been reported by the education inspectors for wearing a green t-shirt in her school in Vallecas (Madrid) on the day that the standardized tests were being conducted. This detonated the flood of teacher mobilizations that were to come. The protests supported the teacher and called for improvements in public education. The “Green Tide” movement was in place at the time of a tweet that appealed to citizens to wear green t-shirts as a symbol of defense of high-quality public education for everyone. The Green Tide emerged on the sidelines of the Indignados movement, with little previous identity adhesion (Candón-Mena, 2015). In the past five years, the “Green Tide” movement has continued by enlisting the involvement of different sectors in the educational community who were connected online to combat the educational privatization policies (Díez & Guamán, 2013; Rogero, Fernández, & Ibáñez, 2014; Saura & Muñoz, 2016). Its utmost touchstone was the Organic Law on the Improvement in Educational Quality (abbreviated LOMCE in Spanish) approved in 2013.

The dearth of research on the new forms of collective protest on behalf of education based on interactions in the social media as the new channels of citizenship and empowerment pushes us to further our understanding of the new forms of communication used by online social protests (Fuchs & Sandoval, 2014; Castells, 2012; Fuchs, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012) based on the connective forms responding to educational privatization which empower citizens. The purpose of this study is to analyze the new forms of communication in the citizen empowerment protests based on collective protest actions in defense of public education in Spain. Thus, we shall strive to answer the question: How are collective protest actions working against the privatization of Spanish education on Twitter?

2. Method

The research methodology followed an orderly process in three stages. In the first, which determined the case studies, an analysis was performed of the narratives in three Twitter accounts: @YoE-Publica, @SoyPublica, and @EsPublica. Our choice of these three accounts was based on the criteria of prominence online and activeness (Table 1). Prominence was determined by accounts with more than 10,000 followers and activeness by discarding accounts with fewer than 30,000 tweets posted. The sample was developed in accordance with the summary shown in Table 1 and the 1,894 tweets resulting from the search performed according to the criteria in the second phase.



Table 1. Sample to determine the case studies

Account	No. of followers	No. of tweets
@YoEPublica	25,600	47,200
@SoyPublica	24,100	45,300
@EsPublica	14,000	35,800

In the second phase, in which we searched for and gathered information, we used Twitter's "advanced search" to filter data by accounts and dates. We performed searches using logical Boolean operators to filter information based on the interests of the study on privatization. With this logic, we conducted successive searches in each account based on the semantic fields of capitalism, subsidized private schools, economy, evaluation, mercantilisation, neoliberalism, LOMCE, PISA, public, private, privatization and cutbacks. The searches were conducted between 25/11/2012 (publication of the draft LOMCE) and 31/12/2016. The 1,894 tweets comprising the data set analyzed resulted from this search. The information was gathered using the NCapture application integrated into the NVivo11 program (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

In the third phase, we analyzed the information using the procedures from the qualitative methodology and an inductive logic that made it possible to understand and grasp the meaning of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The tools in the NVivo11 program allowed us to generate nodes or clusters of references to a specific topic. Thus, the references were clustered around relevant terms for the study which became the units of analysis.

At times, a semantic analysis of terms is needed to create units of meaning; in our case we clustered different signifiers with the same meaning (Strauss & Corbin, 1998): LOMCE (LOMCE, Wert Law, educational reform and educational law), public school (public education, public school, the public, public education, public centers, public schools and public center), subsidized private school (subsidized, subsidized private education, private- subsidized, subsidized private education, subsidized private schools, etc.) and private school (private centers, private, private education, private education and private schools).

A matrix which identifies matching text segments in the previously established units of analysis was developed as a codification mechanism (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and a way to identify the interactions among them. The results of the matrix were used to construct a set of convergent subcategories that would systematize the data collected. Subsequently, with a cluster analysis in NVivo11, the subcategories were grouped according to word similarities in the codified references (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Edlund & McDougall, 2016).

3. Analysis and results

Bearing in mind the Pearson coefficient, we only estimated those values with a positive relationship between 0.85 and 1. The results of the cluster analysis revealed that all the subcategories are inter-related, as shown in Figure 1, which depicts the subcategories on the perimeter and uses straight lines to show the relationships among each of the elements.



Figure 1. Cluster of subcategories of analysis.

Based on this initial overall result, we developed different subcategories which inductively converged into the four main emerging categories which give the contribution meaning: defense of public schools, privatization of education, standardized testing and educational consensus. A new cluster among these four categories allowed us to interrelate them based on correlation coefficients, which intersect in up to 6 different highly significant ways (Table 2).

Table 2. Correlation between categories and coefficients		
Categories		Correlation coefficient
Privatization of education	Defense of public schools	0.946633
Educational consensus	Standardized testing	0.930637
Privatization of education	Educational consensus	0.905051
Educational consensus	Defense of public schools	0.888287
Privatization of education	Standardized testing	0.859135
Standardized testing	Defense of public schools	0.850226

Based on this, the results further explore each of the categories. We present them including the subcategories comprising them, the number of codified references and the correlation coefficients of the subcategories. The results also depict the nodes clustered by word similarity and the most representative tweets for the interpretative analysis from the narratives, from the evaluative perspective of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).



3.1. Defense of public schools

This category reveals the highest correlation index between the subcategories “cutbacks-public school” and “cutbacks- subsidized private school”, along with “LOMCE-cutbacks” and “economy-LOMCE”. Both exceed 0.90 and express a rejection of the cutbacks and the dearth of public funds to finance education.

Table 3. “Defense of public schools” category

Subcategory and codified references	Correlation of subcategories		Correlation coefficient
Cutbacks-public school (154). LOMCE-cutbacks (102). Economy-LOMCE (62). Cutbacks- subsidized private school (46). Defend-public (42). Public funds-private school (34). Public funds- subsidized private school (28). Democracy-public school (26). Public funds-cutbacks (23).	Cutbacks-public school	Cutbacks- subsidized private school	0,916558
	LOMCE-cutbacks	Economy-LOMCE	0,906967
	Cutbacks-public school	Democracy-public school	0,899577
	Cutbacks-public school	LOMCE-cutbacks	0,883138
	Public funds-private school	Public funds- subsidized private school	0,877904
	Cutbacks- subsidized private school	Public funds- subsidized private school	0,878175
	Cutbacks-public school	Public funds- subsidized private school	0,865017
	Cutbacks- subsidized private school	Democracy-public school	0,863601
	Cutbacks-public school	Economy-LOMCE	0,857358

Nodes clustered by word similarity from Table 3 (goo.gl/RkCE9e).

The original meaning of “public” in education was framed under the ideal of citizenship in nation-states but has changed with the processes of globalization (Novoa, 2000), in which the steadfast defense of public education is a frequent demand when faced with agendas that attack and weaken public policies that claim the need for society to operate based on civil rights and individual freedoms (Harvey, 2005).

We are joined by the defense of this social asset which is Public Education, achieved with the dedication of many other citizens (@YoEPublica).¹

Now civil society is using social protests to call for the construction of a citizenry that is capable of using an educational model that is truly connected to social justice and a more democratic public sphere. Public education is viewed as an inalienable social right supported and financed by the public administration, and a priority in achieving a more equitable, fair and democratic society (Biesta, 2016).

“Free public education is the most powerful instrument for practicing democratic equality” (@YoEPublica).

The Institution of Education in Spain is viewed as public because it is free and has an open-door policy, a guarantee that everyone is included without any kind of discrimination or exclusion. Furthermore, it has sufficient capacity to universalize scientific, secular, intercultural, plural and critical knowledge (Seville Forum, <https://goo.gl/x1ngJ9>).

“We advocate 100% public, secular, inclusive education whose main objective is to educate critical, responsible citizens” (@YoEPublica).

The appearance of urgent measures to rationalize public spending sparked numerous criticisms of the cutbacks in public education.

“The quality of public education has deteriorated with brutal cutbacks” (@Espublica).

The platform “Yo Estudié en la Pública” (I Studied at Public School) joined Twitter and launched a YouTube channel to disseminate videos calling for a halt to LOMCE. It garnered 4,000 subscribers, and one of its videos had more than 500,000 views (<https://goo.gl/6lg9ng>). Personalities from culture



and academia appeared in it, including Mayor Zaragoza, the former Director-General of UNESCO (1987-1999) and Minister of Education of Spain (1981-1982), to support the social movement in favor of public education, against the privatization of education and in defense of citizen participation in political decisions. The video was reframed as a means of politically reviving communication and as the citizens' appropriation of social and political transformation (Sierra-Caballero & Montero, 2015). This collective resistance, along with others, shared the claim that the role of public education was to promote a citizenry that is critical and watchful of society through political participation (Sartori, 2007; Bolívar, 2016).

"Public schools teach us how to be socially conscious citizens" (@YoEPublica).

Thus, public education should be organized and managed under parameters of effective, responsible citizen participation as the foundation of democratic schools which, along with culture, contribute to the transformation of the working classes' sensibility into critical consciousness.

3.2. Privatization of education

In this case, the largest correlation index between subcategories is found in "LOMCE-mercantilisation" and "LOMCE-citizenry", which along with "Privatize-public school" and "Mercantilisation-public school" had a correlation coefficient of more than 0.90 and demonstrate the repudiation of companies and mercantile values in education policy.

Table 4. "Privatization of education" category			
Subcategory and codified references	Correlation of subcategories		Correlation coefficient
Privatize-public school (151)	LOMCE-mercantilisation	LOMCE-citizenry	0.919090
	Privatize-public school	Mercantilisation-public school	0.916743
LOMCE-mercantilisation (97)	LOMCE-democracy	LOMCE-citizenry	0.906222
	Privatize-public school	Privatize-subsidized private school	0.898845
Privatize- subsidized private school (95)	LOMCE-mercantilisation	LOMCE-democracy	0.897765
	Mercantilisation-public school	Citizenry-public school	0.896678
Citizenry-public school (87)	LOMCE-citizenry	Citizenry-public school	0.889045
	LOMCE-democracy (40)	LOMCE-company	0.886130
LOMCE-citizenry (81).	LOMCE-company	LOMCE-democracy	0.885902
	Mercantilisation-Wert (38)	LOMCE-neoliberalism	0.882187
Mercantilisation-public school (37)	LOMCE-choice	LOMCE-democracy	0.871735
	LOMCE-company (33)	LOMCE-choice	0.870720
LOMCE-choice (29)	LOMCE-neoliberalism	LOMCE-citizenry	0.870688
	LOMCE-choice	LOMCE-citizenry	0.868655
LOMCE-neoliberalism (27)	LOMCE-mercantilisation	LOMCE-company	0.860479
	Mercantilisation-citizenry	Citizenry-public school	0.856638
Mercantilisation-neoliberalism (27)	LOMCE-neoliberalism	LOMCE-democracy	0.855209
	LOMCE-mercantilisation	LOMCE-choice	0.852520
Privatize-neoliberalism (25)	LOMCE-mercantilisation	LOMCE-choice	0.852520
	Privatize-public school	Citizenry-public school	0.851858
Mercantilisation-citizenry (19)			

Nodes clustered by word similarity from Table 4 (goo.gl/RkCE9e).

Educational agendas promote a focus on the new school reforms following the market practices common to global governance (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). The draft LOMCE (<https://goo.gl/MSAZsS>) would stress this logic: "Education is the engine that promotes the competitiveness of the economy and the level of prosperity of a country, whose educational level determines its ability to compete successfully in the international arena."



It is asserted that LOMCE would privatize education in that it would subject citizens to the mandate of a strictly economically-driven, mercantile labor market. The condemnation was clear: the right to education could not be subjugated to the market, economy and productivity.

"#LOMCEenmiendaalatotalidad because education is envisioned not as a Right but as a productive factor serving the economic model" (@YoEPublica).

An inherent part of these reform processes is to include privatization mechanisms concealed in education which are delimited in the new public management practices, school quasi-markets, economic incentive systems, accountability policies, and standardized testing or rankings (Ball & Youdell, 2008). LOMCE is a clear example of this when it specifies that its principles are: "to increase the independence of schools, to reinforce the management capacity of school administrations, to perform external evaluations at the end of an educational stage, to rationalize the educational supply, and to make tracks more flexible" (Official State Newsletter, 2013: 97862).

This is a statement of intentions which gave rise to the first collective outcries on Twitter via the hashtag #LOMCEBasura. This protest was intense among members of the "Marea Verde", who harshly criticized the privatization of education. Just like other "tides", their main goal was to communicate their defense of public education (Álvarez-Ruíz & Núñez-Gómez, 2016).

"The exercise of power takes on the form of domination when citizens remain silent. Do not obey; shout NO #LOMCEBasura" (@YoEPublica).

There were also protests against school competitiveness and rankings. Similarly, the new public management and schools' independence would enter this privatization in a concealed fashion (Ball & Youdell, 2008), which sparked opposition because of their potential to create a hierarchy in the functioning of schools and to downgrade the democratic processes implemented in them.

"Headmasters hand-picked by the administration and teachers chosen at the whim of these same headmasters. This is LOMCE's 'autonomy'" (@YoEPublica).

3.3. Standardized testing

In the category of standardized testing, the largest correlation index is between the categories "final exam-LOMCE" and "LOMCE-evaluation". The coefficients were higher than 0.98, showing a rejection of standardized tests as the cornerstone of LOMCE.

Subcategory and codified references	Correlation of subcategories		Correlation coefficient
Final exams-LOMCE (192) LOMCE-evaluate (64) Final exams-public school (22) LOMCE-examine (15)	Final exams-LOMCE	LOMCE-evaluate	0.903072
	Final exams-LOMCE	LOMCE-examine	0.896332
	Final exams-LOMCE	Final exams-public school	0.888209
	LOMCE-examine	LOMCE-evaluate	0.885177
	Final exams-public school	LOMCE-evaluate	0.866389
	Final exams-public school	LOMCE-examine	0.856077

Nodes clustered by word similarity from Table 5 (goo.gl/RkCE9e).

Governments usually construct political problems and then determine their solutions beyond the national sphere (Novoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003). LOMCE was perpetrated as a response to a need to improve Spain's academic results on the OECD's PISA tests (Bonal & Tarabini, 2013). For this reason, it included the "final exams" which proved too worrisome to the social movement on behalf of public education, which glimpsed that standardized testing would open the doors to the segregation and exclusion of students.

"The purpose of final exams is not to improve the quality of education when they are also lowering the requirements to pass a grade #NoALaFinal exam" (@Espania).

"Why don't we like LOMCE? Because of the final exams that exclude students" (@YoEPublica).



These standardization policies, governed by supranational spheres to “control from a distance” (Miller & Rose, 2008) and “govern with numbers” (Ozga, 2011), were tools of control that proved worrisome to the protest movement, which felt that educational policy was emigrating at the whim of the OECD based on a market law that was privatizing policy.

“Companies decide on the social model or citizenry decide on their productive model? We cannot allow the #OECD and #LOMCE to replace us” (@YoEPublica).

If education is “the space in which national identity is constructed” (Novoa, 2000: 33), the educational community was reproaching LOMCE’s principles with their narratives. They were calling for citizens to participate in political decisions and to stop giving in to the blackmail of international organizations that were bent on introducing privatizing logics. They asked for the elimination of standardized tests that questioned the trust and authority of teachers. They even questioned whether these tests could be used to improve education (Carabaña, 2015).

“#LOMCE the same ones who boast about wanting to give teachers more authority are trying to take it away from them with final exams #MareaVerde” (@SoyPublica).

Standardized tests were rejected because they sought to change the identity of the teaching staff. In neoliberal reformist policies, the culture of performativity is what leads to a loss in teachers’ professionalism and independence, while in no way does it lead to teacher professionalism (Moore & Clarke, 2016). Teachers who are aware of this made their opposition to this tendency known.

“Final exams will cast doubt on teachers’ professionalism and require many of them to become test preparers #LOMCE” (@SoyPublica).

3.4. Educational consensus

In in the last category the largest correlation index is in the subcategories “resistir-LOMCE” and “paralizar-LOMCE”, “resistir-LOMCE” and “movilización-LOMCE”, “paralyze-LOMCE” and “consensus-LOMCE”, with coefficients higher than 0.90, which show the necessary repeal of LOMCE and the desire for an educational consensus.

Table 6. “Educational consensus” category			
Subcategory and codified references	Correlation of subcategories		Correlation coefficient
Paralyze-LOMCE (120) Consensus-LOMCE (58) Resist-LOMCE (50) Mobilization-LOMCE (39) Mobilization-public school (31)	Resist-LOMCE	Paralyze-LOMCE	0,964594
	Resist-LOMCE	Mobilization-LOMCE	0,925328
	Paralyze-LOMCE	Consensus-LOMCE	0,904404
	Paralyze-LOMCE	Mobilization-LOMCE	0,891850
	Consensus-LOMCE	Mobilization-LOMCE	0,885557
	Mobilization-LOMCE	Mobilization-public school	0,884028
	Resist-LOMCE	Consensus-LOMCE	0,866063
	Paralyze-LOMCE	Mobilization-public school	0,861950
	Consensus-LOMCE	Mobilization-public school	0,856276
	Resist-LOMCE	Mobilization-public school	0,855806

Nodes clustered by word similarity from Table 6 (goo.gl/RkCE9e).

Consensuses in education are essentially palpably complex when we bear in mind that they must be made between sources of power with different ideologies and within civil society (Tedesco, 1995). In fact, in Spanish educational policy, the latest debates and discussions have rendered it impossible to reach a statewide consensus due to the ideological differences between the principles of freedom and equality and the creation of policies which place the prime emphasis on some values over others (Puelles, 2007: 38).



In Spain, the “Stop Ley Wert” platform emerged in allusion to the Minister of Education who was behind LOMCE, emulating the Chilean protests against the privatization of education and in a bid to stop standardized tests and rankings (“Halt the SIMCE”, <https://goo.gl/evXESj>). This platform sought to paralyze the regulation and carry out an exercise in conscientious objection towards it, as it was regarded as anti-democratic and enslaved to the doctrine of neoliberalism.

“Resistance and disobedience to an unfair education law subordinated to the neoliberal economic model” (@YoEPublica).

To do so, they used narratives on Twitter, asking for signatures in support of a manifesto for schools’ conscientious objection, the “letter of democratic compromise” (<https://goo.gl/wTiFTs>), as an expression of democratic resistance. Numerous schools and teachers signed the manifesto on Twitter.

“Spread the word on LOMCE, essential to stop SoyPublica” (@Espublica).

In Catalonia, for example, 52 schools, grouped into the “Xarxa d’Escoles Insubmises” (Network of Resistance Schools), refused to apply LOMCE.

“Neither stupid nor wolves. The Network of Resistance Schools starts its campaign #VotaNoALaLOMCE <http://noalalomce.net>” (@YoEPublica).

The protests gradually shifted towards calls for the resignation of the Minister of Education. The negative view of his actions spread throughout the citizenry, to such an extent that in January 2015 he reached the lowest approval ratings that any minister had ever received in the history of Spanish democracy (a mean score of 1.36 over 10) (<https://goo.gl/WTRd98>). The citizens who were calling for his dismissal also wanted to take part in the future of education by repealing LOMCE and reversing the economic cutbacks in education.

“The State Public School Platform is demanding that Wert submits his resignation” (@YoEPublica).

As the outcome of all the citizen protests, the Spanish Parliament approved the suspension of LOMCE with the support of all the parliamentary groups with the exception of the PP and C’s (<https://goo.gl/nmQ6g6>). First, the calendar of the law was frozen, and then the first negotiations got underway to achieve an overarching social and political consensus for education with the approval of the PP, the PSOE and C’s (<https://goo.gl/mNujAh>). However, the current Minister of Education spoke not about replacing LOMCE but instead merely about the need to negotiate this consensus (<https://goo.gl/XWXEdB>). The social movement on behalf of public education rejected an educational consensus among the three political parties mentioned above and using the hashtag #TumbarLaLOMCE they once again called for the repeal of LOMCE before embarking on negotiations for any consensus.

“Repeal LOMCE: a necessary precondition for an educational consensus” (@SoyPublica).

In November 2016, for the first time, the Spanish government agreed to replace LOMCE with a new education law in the negotiations on the education consensus in the Congress of Deputies. In this regard, it agreed to create a subcommittee in the lower chamber for the “social and political consensus for education,” the first step towards a new draft education law. The voice of the social movements emerged once again, this time to request that the “consensus” be “grassroots,” from the educational community and with the social participation of the citizenry in the political and public affair of education.

“Reach a consensus with the citizens and repeal LOMCE NOW #DiálogoPorLaEducación” (@SoyPublica).

4. Discussion and conclusions

The economically-driven policies applied in Spain as a consequence of the “fiscal and economic crisis” which took root in 2008 have weakened the public and social nature of education. Citizens have expressed their protest through spontaneous social movements. In this study, we have focused on what is called the “Green Tide”, which started in 2011 with the goal of reprogramming the hegemonic power around interests and values in favor of democracy and social justice (Castells, 2012), including the defense of “Public school: by all and for all”.



The social movements were spurred via the Internet and the social media, and in this study, we have analyzed three Twitter accounts. This methodology is of interest because the prime access to information through these technologies has triggered deep-seated changes in the way large population groups participate in politics as forms of democratization and empowerment (Howard & Parks, 2012) by joining network communication and protests (Juris, 2012). As we have analyzed, in this complex social fabric citizenry has mobilized and become empowered, participating actively in the debate and defense of education as a fundamental social right through its democratization and universalization.

The methodology used suggests the emergence of four categories of analysis which agglutinate and describe the demands of the social movements via the social media. On the one hand, they reject the “privatization of education” and “standardized testing,” while on the other they call for the “defense of public schools” and seek an “educational consensus” with the political forces and educational community.

Public schools are heavily involved in democratic culture (Apple & Beane, 2007). For this reason, this movement rejects economically-driven considerations that seek to weaken it, such as cutbacks or the dearth of public funds to finance it. Thus, it expresses heavy opposition to subsidized private schools because of the economic protection received by the state. The fierce rejection of neoliberal policies has coalesced around LOMCE because of its privatizing, mercantilist proposals.

The privatization of education is part of the neoliberal strategy to weaken public schools. The social movements’ protests are opposed to forming an educational market because this turns schools into companies that sell educational services to families. This reconfiguration of schools is identified with the proposals of Wert, the former Minister of Education, who is harshly condemned by the “Green Tide” movement. There is also a categorical rejection of the final exams proposed by LOMCE because they harm the equity upheld by public schools and introduce mechanisms of socio-educational segregation and exclusion. Ultimately, the protests against LOMCE translated into resistance actions that caused it to be paralyzed. One non-negotiable requirement is to achieve an agreement or consensus that gives the education system credibility and political and social stability in order to shape a model of school that is agreed upon by all the political forces and socio-educational stakeholders.

Finally, this kind of study reveals the prominent role played by the social media because of their ability to alter the traditional role of the public powers. In this new cyber-society context in which digital citizens play a particularly important role (Ribble & Bailey, 2004), we must pay attention to the actors who are calling for active participation in the public debates in order to critically understand the social and cultural milieus that affect the meaning of everyday life. It is important to bear in mind that the collective protests use the Internet as an information and communication channel to bring together their claims, shaping a social fabric with a high degree of connectivity in which citizens are empowered to discuss affairs of common interest in deliberative democracies (Gozálvez & Contreras, 2014).

The new social reality emerging around social interaction mediated by the Internet requires specific methodologies. The majority of analyzes import processes from other similar scholarly fields, with a preponderance of quantitative methods. For future studies, we suggest more qualitative approaches in order to understand the meaning that people assign to these emerging social phenomena. To do so, it would be invaluable to examine these changes via participant observation, surveys and in-depth interviews with activists. This study was limited in this sense by its main objective and the research question, which was limited to analyzing the empowerment of the collective protest actions against the privatization of Spanish education on Twitter.

Notes

¹ The original tweets in Spanish from @YoEPublica, @EsPublica, and @SoyPublica have been translated and are presented between quotation marks throughout this whole document.



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