

## **The Construction of Symbolic Power: Comparing Offline and Online Media Representations of Occupy the Street in Spain**

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This article is an analysis of the contexts and discourses constructed around the social movement “Occupy the Street” in Spain (aka M15). This research shows the Movement’s symbolic counterpower—its capacity for defining social reality—and its resistance to the status quo. Specifically, this study compares (1) the media representations in the newspapers, (2) the discourses expressed by the Movement in Facebook, and (3) the conversations of citizens under the hashtag #M12M15 in Twitter. In total, we analyzed 1,088 units of raw data (187 pieces of news, 90 posts, and 811 tweets). The analysis of these three discourses illustrates the social movement’s image. The paper concludes that M15’s symbolic power was to manage the citizens’ discontent while framing a specific historical context through mass mobilizations.

*Keywords: social movements, symbolic power, social construction, discourse*

This article analyzes the contexts and discourses constructed around the M15 social movement, also known as Indignados (the Indignant Ones) in Spain during 2011–2012. M15 is a Spanish protest that was designed to express political and economic grievances. Since its inception, it has spread to hundreds of cities and more than 80 countries around the world with the name “Occupy the Street” (Castells, 2012). M15 started with a demonstration in several cities in May 15, 2011 (one week before the Spanish regional elections in May 22). The day after, protesters camped in the main squares of numerous cities to protest high unemployment, the lack of truly representative democracy, cuts to welfare-state payments, the fact that the Spanish system is controlled by the two main political parties (Socialist Party and the Party of the People), political corruption, etc. From the outset, the Movement was heterogeneous yet united by the citizens’ anger at and fatigue from the national crisis. The people in the camps organized discussions and

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popular assemblies for clarifying goals, proposals, and solutions for the situation. One of the biggest and most symbolic camps was in Puerta del Sol (Madrid). The camps in the main cities lasted until June 2011 with the development of these popular assemblies in the public squares. The antecedents of M15 can be found in several civilian digital platforms like "Real Democracy Now," "Youth Without a Future," and "Don't vote them," all of which protested against the Spanish situation—starting with the crisis of 2008. M15 organized several massive demonstrations in 2011 and 2012. Some of the most important protests analyzed in this paper include those of May 15, 2011; June 19, 2011; October 15, 2011; and May 12, 2012.

The goal of this paper is to develop a communication approach to the symbolic power—understood as the capacity for defining reality and influencing the course of social events and their accomplishments (Thompson, 1998)—of the M15 Movement in Spain. Since symbolic power works in a specific historical moment constrained by structural elements (Bourdieu, 1989), we have analyzed the discourses about M15 in relation to the political, economic, and communicative circumstances (also called contexts in this paper). As Gramsci pointed out, power is based on the capacity not just of economic or political domination, but of cultural production as well. This cultural production (intellectual, moral, political, etc.) is necessary for the construction of hegemony. Hegemony is the process of the coordination of the interests of a heterogeneous dominant group (also defined as a historic bloc) with the general interests of other groups and the life of the state as a whole (Gramsci, 1971). He did not point out the domination of a specific social class but that of a historic bloc over subordinate groups: "The hegemonic moment is not conceptualized as a moment of simple unity but a process of unification (never totally achieved), founded on strategic alliances between different sectors" (Hall, 1986, p. 25).

Furthermore, Gramsci overcame the reduction of superstructure to the economic structure (base) and developed the importance of the relations of force. As Hall explains,

The relationship between structure and superstructure or the passage of any organic historical movement right through the whole social formation, from economic base to the sphere of ethico-political relations, is at the heart of any non-reductionist or economic type of analysis. (1986, p. 13)

This idea of power as a system of hegemonic values (modes of thought and ways of resolving questions) that produces and is produced by economic, political, intellectual, moral, and ethical elements overcomes the gap that sometimes has separated the analysis of society between culturalist and structuralist approaches (Martinez Guillem, 2013). This phenomenon is something described as well by Williams (in Martinez Guillem, 2013) as cultural materialism, or by Bourdieu (1989) as constructivist structuralism.

The hegemonic domination creates a stable consensus that will be questioned during crises, because hegemony is not a static system of values that persists forever in society. On the contrary, it has to be actively constructed and maintained. Crises mark the beginning of the disintegration of a stable consensus because they "create a terrain more favorable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions involving the entire subsequent development

of national life" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 184). Economic crises are the historical opportunity for trying to change the balance of social forces through new ethical, political, and communicative struggles (Hall, 1986).

Starting from this theoretical conception where M15 tries to resist hegemonic values by proposing alternative modes of thought, our core argument is that the symbolic power of social movements depends on the discourses that construct their image in mass and social media within a specific historical moment. We understand discourses as systems of thought that shape our way of understanding reality. Discourses carry values, ideas, and beliefs that encourage specific vocabularies, ways of interacting, and specific approaches to making decisions.

From this point of view, discourses are general ideas that organize the news, Facebook publications, and tweets. A social movement's influence depends on different discourses (mass media, citizens, M15, etc.) that shape its image in the public space. In order to determine the symbolic power of social movements taking into account culture (subjectivist) and structure (objectivist), we have analyzed the contexts (historical circumstances in the economy, politics, and communication) and the discourses disseminated by mass and social media in Spain during 2011 and 2012. Social media include M15's own discourses in Facebook and citizens' conversations on Twitter. Specifically, in order to identify mass-media discourses about the M15 social movement, discourses disseminated by the two most important newspapers in Spain were analyzed. To analyze the discourses disseminated by the social movement—M15's own voice—we decided to focus on the main social media network in Spain (Facebook) because it was also the primary tool used by this Movement to spread public communication and statements. Finally, we focused on citizens' Twitter conversations by considering microblogging as the most dynamic and useful tool to generate public discourses.

*RQ1. What are the political, economic, cultural, and communicative contexts that produced (and were produced by) M15?*

*RQ2. What are the social movement's own discourses as well as the media's and citizens' discourses around M15?*

*RQ3. What are the similarities and differences among the three discourses analyzed (on the part of mass media, M15, and the citizens involved)?*

### **The Economic, Political, Social, and Communicative Contexts of the Protests**

To fully understand the discourses that shape the image of M15, it is necessary to first understand the contexts within which the protest took place. Our approach tries to be objectivist and subjectivist (Bourdieu, 1989); that is why we outline how particular contexts have produced the social movement and how—at the same time—the social movement produced the historical contexts. As Martinez Guillem points out (2013, p. 199), in a "dialectical approach people are both shaped by processes they cannot control, while at the same time they possess the capacity to act upon the world." From this

point of view, M15 was the result of a complex interaction between the social actors and the economic, social, cultural, political, and communicative contexts in Spain in 2011.

From an economic perspective, from 1986 until the current financial crisis broke out in 2008, Spain experienced economic prosperity (with some exceptions like the 1993 crisis) stimulated by its incorporation into the European Economic Community in 1986, its entry into the European Monetary Union (1994), and its adoption of the euro in 2002. However, the global economic situation changed dramatically in 2008. Besides the global economic crisis, Spain suffered an enhanced crisis brought about by certain activities in the development sector together with the high debt that families, companies, and governments had acquired thanks to the low interest rates that prevailed until 2005 (Marqués, Maza, & Rubio, 2010). The speculation in housing and the high risk of (subprime) mortgages caused an overvaluation of properties. The demise of Lehman Brothers in 2007 brought an end to this overvaluation and was a milestone in both the global and the European economic crisis. The "Spanish crack" caused by the property-bubble crash and the sharp rise in interest rates plunged Spain into a hard economic recession unparalleled in its recent history.

Public skepticism towards politicians is one of the most studied phenomena of the last 20 years (Rosanvallon, 2008). Thus, the crisis over the credibility of the political system was another feature that explains the emergence of M15. The social barometer compiled by the CIS (the main center for analyzing Spanish public opinion) found that Spanish citizens were mainly afflicted by three severe issues in April 2011: unemployment, the general economic situation, and the ineffectiveness of the Spanish political system/political parties (CIS, 2011). These grievances provoked a change in government with two victories for the Conservative Party (the Party of the People) in 2011 (that is, in the local elections in May and the national one in November, respectively). Consequently, the Socialist Party suffered the greatest defeat in the history of Spanish democracy. Some of the countries most affected by the crisis experienced a fragmentation of their parliaments that didn't allow them to form their governments (e.g., Greece, May 2012). But such was not the case in Spain. The Spanish Parliament became more divided with the entry of minority parties after the elections in 2011, and at the same time, the Conservatives received a significant absolute majority.

In Spain, the unemployment rate climbed to 20% in 2011. Among the youngest workers, moreover, unemployment reached 50%, with a majority of the jobs created being low paying, low skilled, and temporary.

Furthermore, in the same year that the M15 Movement emerged and for the first time in decades, the number of people who left Spain exceeded that of those who immigrated. This was problematic because in the previous decade Spain had been the country with the most immigrants in the world, surpassed only by the United States (Nogueira, 2011).

Besides the above-mentioned reasons, there was another important issue in the social context from which M15 emerged: the rebellions in North of Africa, also known as the Arab Spring. These uprisings showed the instrumental role that social media played in the (initial) successes of their anti-

government protests (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). A few months later, the Arab Spring spread to Western cultures after its initial impact in the south of Europe.

The year 2010 was significant for the consolidation of e-social movements, citizen mobilizations in which digital technology became crucial. Essentially, these were protests with an enormous capacity for communicating (they created their own alternative media), without leaders, and with a decentralized, horizontal, spontaneous, communicative, flexible, and networked structure—as well as an enormous ability for adaptation and survival (García-Jiménez, 2012). Created in virtual spaces, the protests jumped to physical spaces once they had been constructed on the social networks. In general terms, e-social movements work as a network and are more decentralized and less hierarchical than previous social movements (Atkinson, 2010).

The use of digital technologies is essential to the emergence of the Resistance Performance (RP) that characterizes e-social movements (Atkinson, 2010). The Resistance Performance is an historical moment in which the amount of alternative media increases. These media offer critical perspectives that encourage users and audiences to resist hegemonic productions. “The power conceptualization we find in alternative media lead to build and reinforce points of view in favor of social justice” (Atkinson, 2010, p. 34). Said differently, RPs make possible the democratization of access to the production, management, and spreading of information—which increases the number of actors and discourses interfering with communicative social processes. There is also an increase in “the processes of exchange, production and symbolic consumption developed in a context with several users, media and languages technologically interconnected in a reticular way” (Scolari, 2008, p. 114). The communication of this digital bottom-up model favors consumers (users) in contrast to the previous top-down model that favored producers (mass media) (Scolari, 2008). In this sense, M15 was characterized by a crucial use of social networks and horizontal structures. An important detail that illustrates the influence of social networks in the Movement is that only two of its pages on Facebook (Democracia Real Ya [Real Democracy Now] and Spanish Revolution) brought together more than 600,000 users.

At this point, it is important to mention some data on the use of technology in Spain. In the last quarter of 2011, the rate of Internet connection reached 57.6% (EGM, 2011). The sector of the population between 25 and 34 years old comprised the largest sector of users at 25.6% of the total (EGM, 2011). The users of social networks had increased noticeably, surpassing the previous 43.5% and reaching 52.4% in February 2011 (EGM, 2011). Social networks changed from being the fourth-most used service in Spain, immediately behind e-mail services, news, and instant messaging to becoming the second-most used service together with breaking news.

### **M15 as a Counterpower**

Symbolic power is the capacity of defining, selecting, and excluding the elements that shape our common understanding of things. This capacity is not distributed among all members of society in an equal way, since there are forces (or historic blocs) that establish hegemonic systems of thought. But this latter consensus is not permanent. In some historical moments, like the current economic crisis that started with the crash of Lehman Brothers in 2007, crises appear and start breaking down the hegemonic

consensus (Gramsci, 1971). Crises bring about the loss of authority (its capacity for directing in moral and intellectual ways) by the dominant historic blocs. These blocs start to disintegrate, and subordinate groups no longer believe so strongly in what they originally believed (Gramsci, 1971). Such crises are "marked by constant movements, polemics, contestations, etc., which represent the attempt by different sides to overcome or resolve the crisis and to do so . . . [to] favor their long term hegemony" (Hall, 1986, p. 13). In this situation, our object of study, M15, represents a counterpower that tried and is still trying to overcome the existent hegemony.

For these reasons, symbolic power changes the course of events and outcomes because it implies the construction of specific social meanings. Historically, mass media have been a very important social institution because of their strong symbolic power and capacity for constructing social reality (Berger & Luckman, 2001). But mass media have traditionally been adverse to social movements (Candon, 2012), neglecting these movements or framing them in negative or stereotyped ways (De Luca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012). Therefore, social movements try to influence the public by producing power through social media. However, social movements still need the external resources of mainstream media to influence public opinion. Through the use of the Internet, social movements influence the media agenda, organizing collective action and online activism (Treré, 2012). They also use the Internet to reinterpret mainstream media messages (Candon, 2012). In our current society, cyberactivism is projected on social networks away from other traditional forms of action (Tascón & Quintana, 2012).

We characterize contemporary society as a symbolic battle between official power (the status quo that is sustained by political and economic institutions) and counterpower created by social movements. Society is an area with symbolic struggles between dominant ideologies and those that do not share the hegemonic ideas of the status quo (counterpower), i.e., social movements. Both the status quo and the social movements try to exercise their influence on society through gaining symbolic power for interceding in the course of social events. In fact, any success of social movements in the current cultural-political environment depends upon a certain playfulness in its messages.

In this situation, the M15 Movement can be considered a counterpower group. Counterpower is the social actors' capacity to resist and even change the power relationships institutionalized in society (Castells, 2007). The nontraditional horizontal and networked power structure that characterizes social movements has a network geometry that is open and decentralized. In this context, insurgent political and social movements are able to intervene more decisively in the new media space (Castells, 2007). This phenomenon reflects a new organization of power in the digital sphere because the control of the social meaning has devolved more and more into the hands of ordinary citizens (Gross, 2003).

Understanding media representations of social movements is important because their symbolic power depends partly on mainstream constructions. But this does not mean that the construction of reality falls only on media representations. Currently, because of the existence of the information society, the discourses expressed on digital networks are also able to construct part of social reality. Castells (2007) points out that the mass media do not own power, but they build a privileged space where power is constructed. The mass individual communication, that is, the digital communication that is open, personalized, and massive, offers an extraordinary opportunity for social movements and rebellious

individuals to build their autonomy and confront the institutions of society on their own terms and around their own projects (Castells, 2007). As Lim (2012) argues, the power of social movements cannot be separated from the power of social media, because social media are not just technological but sociopolitical as well. In this way, the symbolic power of these movements (their influence on the course of events) and their resistance to the meanings established by status quo depend partly on mainstream media and also on social media.

To understand how the M15 protest was constructed (who were the actors and what were the issues, actions, and attributes of this social movement), we analyzed the discourses of mass and social media complementing those studies that have mainly focused on how traditional mass media portrayed these kinds of protests (Candon, 2012; De Luca et al., 2012; and Pinilla, 2011). Furthermore, this paper also complements those scientific analyses that have been specifically interested in just how social movements are using social media for spreading and organizing their actions (De Luca et al., 2012; Papacharissi & De Fatima Oliveira, 2012; Petray, 2011; Stein, 2009).

### **Method**

Apart from the historical approach already developed, this paper measures the social influence of the M15 Movement by analyzing the different discourses about the Movement. We examined the Movement's milestones, including the protests that took place on May 15, 2011; June 19, 2011; October 15, 2011; and May 12, 2012. The periods analyzed are May 16–20, 2011; June 20–26, 2011; October 16–23, 2011; and May 13–19, 2012. Specifically, we include comparative research among (1) the discourses disseminated by the two main Spanish newspapers, (2) the discourses expressed by members of the Movement on Facebook, and (3) the public discourse generated through citizens' conversations on Twitter under the hashtag #M12M15 during May 13–19, 2012. We analyzed each piece of news (n=187), each post on Facebook (n=90), and each tweet (n=811) as an independent unit for investigation. Altogether, some 1,088 units of raw data were generated. All empirical data have been analyzed by longitudinal quantitative media content analysis (newspapers and Twitter) and a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the newspapers' front pages and of posts on Facebook.

In the analysis of the newspapers, we identified in every piece of news the following elements: name of the newspaper, date, main and secondary subjects (M15, ordinary citizens, politicians-political parties, mass media, experts, famous people, police, other social institutions, other), topic (protests, relationships with political parties, conflict, contextual information about the Movement, reasons for the protests, other), genre, and whether or not the piece of news appeared on the front page. All journalistic genres were included (only letters to editor were excluded). The data have been analyzed with SPSS Statistics 19 software, and only the relevant results have been considered (those crosstabs with a Chi Square lower than .05).

Concerning our quantitative approach to Twitter, we analyzed the citizens' conversations occurring from May 12, 2012 to May 19, 2012, the period in which the Movement celebrated its first anniversary. The analysis illustrated some of the questions that citizens had in mind just a year after the beginning of the M15 Movement and identified the actors who played the role of information sources, the

content of their contributions, their purposes, and the tone (optimistic, pessimistic, neutral, non applicable) they used on their tweets.

On the other hand, CDA has allowed us to deeply analyze how each discourse was built in relation to specific contexts, and how language (a form of social practice) and power have been linked. In fact, CDA as a methodological approach offers “not only a description and interpretation of discourses in social contexts but also an explanation of why and how discourses work” (Rogers, 2004, p. 2). CDA demonstrates and challenges how social inequalities are reinforced and reproduced. In terms of analysis, CDA takes the view that texts need to be considered not only in terms of what they include but also what they omit—alternative ways of constructing and defining the world. We have made a critical discourse analysis of the news printed on the front page (N=25 units) that determined how the main actions were represented, through verbs, attributes (or adjectives), and photographs. The goal was to find out the underlying meaning through the elements present and to go beyond the written words (Grandi, 1995). By studying the headlines, actors, actions, sources of information, and photographs, we were able to figure out the social narrative constructed by the media. These elements were not examined in an isolated way because they were linked to the general presentation of the news and the historical moment that formed the context (Lozano, Peñamarín, & Abril, 1989).

Finally, the discourses of the Movement were analyzed through their Facebook profiles during the same weeks for which newspaper coverage was analyzed. The selection of Facebook profiles in this article are analyzed from the “official” webs or main voices of the Movement. They were the following:

- 15M Movement (<http://www.facebook.com/Mov15M>),
- Spanish Revolution (<http://www.facebook.com/SpanishRevolution>),
- Democracia Real Ya (Real Democracy Now) (<http://www.facebook.com/democraciarealya>),
- Juventud Sin Futuro (Youth Without a Future) (<http://www.facebook.com/juventudsinfuturo>), and
- Acampada en Sol (Encampment in the Sun) (<http://www.facebook.com/acampadaensol>).

The 90 units compiled were interpreted with a codebook to identify the actors, the actions, and the issues. Other data included the period of publication, linguistic and non-linguistic elements in the postings, main subjects, use of verbs and adjectives, topics, and meta-texts (semantic relationships with the related pictures).

## **Results**

### ***Newspaper Coverage of the M15 Demonstrations***

In general terms, 62% of the units were published in *El Mundo* (the conservative newspaper) and 38% in *El País* (the liberal newspaper). The media coverage was predominantly news stories (59.4% of the units were written in this journalistic style) while opinion pieces were also important (31%). Thus, although the coverage of the M15 protests had both an informative and a judgmental/editorial character, it lacked the deeper analysis of the information that would have been provide through interviews, reports,



and features stories. The lack of interviews showed the shortage of individual points of view in the mainstream media from experts on social movements, M15's members, politicians, social researchers, and others.

The news coverage had an important presence on the front page (44.9% of the analyzed units occurred on the front page), a sign of the visibility given to the demonstrations and other actions. Results showed that without differences among the newspapers, the main actor of the analyzed units was the M15 Movement itself (51.9%), characterized by its different social groups (including Indignados, Democracia Real Ya, Acampada en Sol, Juventud sin Futuro, Afectados por la Hipoteca, etc.), followed at a considerable distance by politicians (28.3%). Citizens not involved in the Movement were mentioned less (9.6%), while institutions (Trade Unions, Electoral Commission, etc.) had a lower rate of mention with only 4.8%; celebrities accounted for a mere 2.1% (Table 1 shows the main subjects).

**Table 1. Main Subject of Newspaper Coverage.**

Main subject	Percentage (%)
M15	51.9
Politicians	28.3
Citizens	9.6
Other institutions	4.8
The famous/celebrities	2.1
Mass media	1.6
Experts	1.1
Other	.5
Police	0
Total	100.0

Regarding the main actions linked to the topic, our results show that the predominant information had to do with the relationship between the social movement and traditional political parties, mostly in terms of conflict (23.5%). However, the social movement mobilizations (21.4%) and the contextual information of how this particular Movement was created (12.3%) were also important. It should be noted that the amount of information about the reasons for the protest was particularly low (just 11.2%), something that would have improved understanding of the M15 Movement.

Our data show important differences regarding the topics of the news pieces (see Table 2). *El Mundo* focused mainly on issues related to the political parties (17.1%), while the coverage of *El País*

positioned itself further from the political parties (with only 6.4%) and closer to the mobilizations, contextual information, and reasons for the protests (these foci together accounted for 25.8% of the units). The editorial line of each newspaper, with *El Mundo* the more conservative and *El País* the more liberal, can explain this result.

**Table 2. Topics and Newspapers.**

	Topics							
	Mobilization-actions	Relation with political parties	Conflict/confrontation	Contextual information	Protest reasons	Several topics	Other	Total
<i>El País</i>	10.2%	6.4%	3.2%	8.6%	7.0%	.0%	2.7%	38.0%
<i>El Mundo</i>	11.2%	17.1%	7.5%	3.7%	4.3%	.5%	17.6%	62.0%
Total	21.4%	23.5%	10.7%	12.3%	11.2%	.5%	20.3%	100.0

When M15 was the main subject of the information, the more relevant issues included protests and other Movement actions (18.7%) as well as information about the Movement's idiosyncrasies (10.7%). These data underscore how the Movement tried to set its own discourses and proposals, with a minimum of references to its relation to the political parties (just 1.1%). However, the newspapers generally did not consider the reasons for the protests (just 6.4% did). On the contrary, when politicians were the main actors, partisan issues were highly represented (20.3% of the units). That means that politicians' actions referred to their own interests (citizens' vote, a call to a Movement's members, etc.) with minimal references to M15's actions and rationale (just 2.6% at al.).

The lack of interviews in which M15 was the primary focus of the articles (1.1%) was also significant. This journalistic genre would have given more voice to the Movement. In addition, the lack of feature stories or reports (only 4.8%) is another important datum because these two genres could have disseminated the information about the Movement in greater detail.

Adding depth to our analysis of the data, news published on the front pages of both newspapers was discursively analyzed to understand how each newspaper framed this social movement. We analyzed the main journalistic elements (headlines, subtitles if applicable, and the body of the articles) to obtain relevant information about the actors playing the main roles in the units, a general assessment of the information, attributes defining the Movement, and the adjectives and verbs used. In total, 25 front pages (16 units from *El Mundo* and nine units from *El País*) were reviewed.

Regarding the nature of the people who made the demonstration, *El País* estimated that the M15 involved "tens of thousands of citizens" (*El País*, May 16, 2011 & May 19, 2011) and declared that the Movement was attracting more and more people. This newspaper consistently assessed the number of participants as massive. By defining the demonstration's members as "citizens" (*El País*, May 16, 2011) or

"the people" (*El País*, May 19, 2011), the newspaper conferred more prestige on the Movement and its nature. In fact, most of *El País's* coverage (in seven of its nine news articles) described M15 as an autonomous social movement with its own voice.

Alternatively, the main characters in *El Mundo* were politicians (in eight of the 16 news stories analyzed), while the protesters were the main actors in just four. Furthermore, M15 was described as mainly "young people" (*El Mundo*, May 22, 2011). For this newspaper, the political parties were at the center of the information presented, with inter-political fighting used as the relevant framework for discussion. In that context, the left-wing politicians (the Socialist Party) were described as supporters of the demonstrations against the Conservative Party. This fact not only highlights the two-party system prevailing in Spain, but also the politicization of all social issues as a requirement for inclusion in the mainstream press.

However, neither newspaper presented any information on the reasons for the protests, nor for any of the Movement's proposals. By contrast, *El País* focused on the demonstrations or programmed actions (in seven of its nine news stories) while *El Mundo* focused on the relationship between M15 and the political parties (in eight of its 16 news stories). In this way, *El País* characterized the M15 as a "massive," "peaceful," "global," and "democratic" movement, and a strong Spanish social force (*El País*, October 16, 2011). On the other hand, *El Mundo* mentioned specifically the violence linked to the M15 social movement, something that was absent in *El País's* representation.

For *El País*, the Movement's energy was achieved by its overseas presence: "Demonstrations organized by Spaniards also took place yesterday night outside Spain, in cities like Brussels, London, Lisbon, Rome, Berlin or Athens." It was "a huge and peaceful wave" (*El País*, May 22, 2011). M15's massive and pacific character was also reflected in the editions of June 29, 2011 and October 16, 2011 of this newspaper. As we might expect, the violent side of the Protest was almost a non-existent issue in *El País's* treatments, where it was reduced to a headline like "Indignados from Madrid and Barcelona occupy buildings to rehouse evicted people" (*El País*, October 17, 2011).

For the conservative newspaper *El Mundo*, however, the violence was substituted for the Movement's global and peaceful character, although in just two of 16 news articles. In its October 16, 2011 issue, for example, one reads the following: "M15 reemerges peacefully in Spain and other parts of Europe but violently in Rome where some serious disturbances have taken place." The Indignados who crowded the square were contrasted with the violent people from Rome, an authentic "guerrilla band." The use of war vocabulary in *El Mundo* highlighted the seriousness of the events—with the Movement shown as having a double face, a peaceful and a violent one. The photographs illustrated this double nature with a picture showing the Indignados from Madrid (a calm protest) next to those from Rome (people burning cars).

The role and characterization of the M15 in *El Mundo* also included the use of irony in the news coverage. On the Governmental Elections Day (May 22, 2011), the headline published was "Real Democracy Now." This title refers directly to the name of one of the most popular M15 groups, Democracia Real Ya (Real Democracy Now). This newspaper moreover asserted that real democracy takes

place on election days and not during meetings in the streets. In fact, the headline of June 20, 2011 stated, "The Indignados now ask for a national strike." With the adverb "now," the newspaper pointed out a certain extra-democratic improvisation by the M15.

The use of verbs also differed between the two newspapers. In *El País*, the M15 "demanded," "claimed," or "spoke on behalf of the unemployed and people with mortgages," while in *El Mundo*, Occupy the Street "chanted," "had fun," "flouted the law" (colloquialism), "disobeyed," and to a lesser degree "demanded."

The metaphoric term used to define the M15, "Occupy the Street," was interpreted differently as well. For *El País*, the M15 "reaffirms their protests with a mass demonstration" (*El País*, June 20, 2011), which implies that it affirmed something said before and thus showed its solidness and coherence. This newspaper considered that citizens did not occupy the squares or camp on them specifically but simply met there for civic and democratic purposes (*El País*, May 19–20, 2011). However, for *El Mundo*, the Movement "camped" and "occupied" the streets (*El Mundo*, May 21–22, 2011). In this sense, thousands of people went out into the streets to "yell" slogans, disobey the law, or even have fun, but not to protest for political and economic changes they felt were needed. According to *El Mundo*, young people did not reflect but *reflect* (in italics): "There were *batucadas* [dancing as in Carnival], street bands, and also assemblies to continue *reflecting*" (*El Mundo*, May 22, 2011). The electoral festivity was described as having a humorous atmosphere, a characterization that reduced the protest to a non-serious event: "They turned the center of Madrid into a festive celebration for the success of their challenge to the Government" (*El Mundo*, May 22, 2011). On the other hand, the National Electoral Commission banned the demonstration and the mobilizations during the day before the election on May 22, 2011 to protect the electoral law. In this context, M15 flaunted the law and altered the established order, because it "disobeyed," "challenged," or "dared" both the Government and the law. This "disobedience" with which M15 was implicitly charged in most of *El Mundo's* news was reflected several times. "They flouted law and order and celebrated a banned act" (*El Mundo*, May 19, 2011). And "the people camping on the square shout disobedience and maintain their protests" (*El Mundo*, May 20, 2011). Further, "the activists ratify their challenge, and the protest continues," or "they disobeyed the political power" (*El Mundo*, May 21, 2011) and "people camping on the square will continue today with the[ir] disobedience to the Electoral Commission" (*El Mundo*, May 22, 2011). By contrast, in *El País* the Movement "battled" in only one news story (*El País*, 5/20/2011). According to this newspaper, the Spanish Government (Socialist) did not authorize or forbid the actions but "tolerated" them since "the protests had always been peaceful" (*El País*, May 21, 2011).

### ***Discourse Analysis of M15's Facebook Profiles***

An analysis of M15's discourses on its own five Facebook profiles (M15 Movement, Spanish Revolution, Democracia Real Ya, Juventud Sin Futuro, Acampada en Sol) was also reviewed for the same weeks analyzed in the newspaper coverage.

Table 3 shows the distribution of units in each of these profiles during the time periods in question. We can appreciate that the period with the greatest number of units was from May 13–19, 2012, coinciding with the Movement's first anniversary. The rest of the periods all reflected a similar, lower level

of activity. Among the five Facebook profiles that were included, Democracia Real Ya was the most active group.

**Table 3. Distribution of Units in Each of M15's Facebook Profiles During the Named Time Periods.**

Facebook Profile	May 16-20, 2011	June 20-26, 2011	Oct. 16-23, 2011	May 13-19, 2012
M15 Movement	12.5%	37.5%	25%	25%
Spanish Revolution	5.9	5.9	11.8%	76.4%
Democracia Real Ya	17.7%	10.5%	11.2%	60.6%
Juventud Sin Futuro	28.5%	0%	21.5%	50%
Acampada en Sol	0%	6.7%	0%	93.3%
Total (100%)	13.3%	12.2%	14.5%	60.0%

At the beginning, M15 defined itself using different labels: "Democracia Real Ya," "Spanish Revolution," "El Pueblo," "M15," "The Indignados," "Acampada en Sol," etc. In any case, the Movement tended to simplify its name by means of a key date (15, 12, etc.) followed by the first letter of the month when a protest took place (M for May, O for October, etc.). In some cases they also used the name of the city where mobilizations took place (Lisboa O15, Madrid O15, etc.). Some of the momentary initiatives like citizens' marches (#marchaeste, #marchaoeste, #marchanorte, #marchasur) became the actors named in the publications.

Other actors included the bankers and some politicians, both highly criticized by the Movement's members. These actors were portrayed as enemies of ordinary citizens. Framed this way, "rich people" (bankers, politicians et al.) were against "poor people" (ordinary citizens). They were also referred to in this context as "people from above" versus "people from below" or similarly, as the "1%" (politicians, bankers et al.) against the "99%" (citizens, members of the Movement, young people et al.).

From the beginning, the Movement used different communicative tools to illustrate—through pictures, banners, links, or videos—its social protests on the streets. Consequently, most of the venues they chose for celebrating their protests were precisely the streets and public squares, a territory that they had appropriated, and these scenes became increasingly a part of their identity. Thus they defined themselves as "a rebel movement born on the streets" (Juventud sin Futuro, May 12, 2012).

The messages published by the Movement on social profiles showed its peaceful character, contrary to those descriptions that defined it as a violent movement (associating it with the violent acts in Greece or Rome). The interest in doing that was the desire to be known as a peaceful and sensible movement.

Its massive nature was another attribute used for representing the Movement on Facebook. With pictures of its many participants, M15 wanted to show the support they were receiving, even at the international level. In this way, they denied the invisibility or isolation that conservative politicians attributed to them. The necessity to reaffirm that they had support caused them to upload foreign front pages to show their influence (e.g., the front page of the Washington Post of May 19, 2011) (Juventud sin Futuro, May 19, 2011). Some other pictures from foreign newspapers were also used, for example, one from the France Press Agency, uploaded by M15 Movement (May 19, 2011) to reinforce the importance and magnitude of the Spanish demonstrations.

The environment of the protests, which was positive and exciting, was mentioned together with several criticisms of the mass media because of the biased coverage they had been providing (e.g., according to M15, mass media minimized the number of protesters). However, even in these cases, the images of young participants were highlighted to show their courage in the face of political repression (Juventud sin Futuro, May 17, 2011).

When the Movement was consolidated, especially in the case of the camp set up on Sol Square in May 15, 2011, protests became symbolic and full of ironic criticisms of politicians, while featuring the Movement's large-scale character. It is important to emphasize the desire of the Indignados to link the Movement to more disadvantaged people (for example, immigrants) and poor sectors (representing the 99%) in opposition to the upper class with its politicians and bankers (representing the 1%). In this way, during the last period, the Movement became more rebellious and anti-establishment as it presented more reasons for its social protest.

In general, the first media representations were based on showing the mobilization in photos of the protests to gain national and international recognition. Additionally, the call to participate was a main message disseminated through Facebook. One of the expressions that best captures the manifestation was, "Take the street [Toma la calle]" (Juventud sin Futuro, May 16, 2011). These first moments were crucial for mobilizing the citizens. "Don't just look at us; join us" or "Come here in your pajamas" (Acampada en Sol, June 21, 2011). In this first stage, social media was used to coordinate and organize the protests (demonstrations, the action to stop evictions, and others). The confrontation between police and activists, who defended themselves from police abuses, were published a few times. Sometimes the citizens' collaborations were asked to document these abuses (Acampada en Sol, May 18, 2011).

These defensive actions were used by M15 to justify its criticism of the mainstream mass media that they had significantly under-reported the mobilization's magnitude. For this reason, the publications on Facebook tried to demonstrate that they were not a minority at all. For example, they used the front page of *El Jueves* magazine (a satirical magazine) where two politicians were shown discussing the mobilization and saying "Bah, they are just four hippies" when in fact the front page shows a massive group of people protesting (Juventud sin Futuro, October 17, 2011).

Demonstrations were increasingly organized and coordinated. And in the same way, more and more audiovisual resources were used to gain social support and show the peacefulness of the

demonstrations. As an example of this strategy, Juventud sin Futuro used an aerial video with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony as background music (Juventud sin Futuro, October 16, 2011).

In the last period analyzed (May 2012), the Movement appeared in the form of "M15 Reloaded" (Acampada en Sol, May 12, 2012), a second part of a social protest now called M12. Despite the change of name, the Movement carried out its acts with the same strength as before, "We still make noise," "We remain opposed to savagery," "We have come back to the street" (Juventud sin Futuro, May 12, 2012).

The Movement was more mature in this last stage, and its actions were more organized. As an example, some marches from different parts of the country went to the Plaza del Sol in Madrid. The Movement also provided more reasons to protest by focusing on government cuts in public education and health ("Because Our Rights Are Uninstalled," Acampada en Sol, May 15, 2012), the rise of the risk premium, the increase in public-transportation tariffs in Madrid ("el tarifazo," Juventud sin Futuro, May 18, 2012; Acampada en Sol, May 19, 2012), the bank system's abuses, and the crisis in Greece.

Furthermore, social media were used to provide information about the most recent invitations to join a specific protest (places and times of assemblies, demonstrations or protests against evictions, etc.) with messages even being sent by smartphones during the demonstrations themselves. Irony and humor were used to show the unfairness of the system and the differences between the rich and the poor. For example, some activists dressed up as rich people in their protests against the "tarifazo" (a significant increase in the cost of public-transportation rides) (Juventud sin Futuro, May 18, 2012). Moreover, protesters made fun in their messages of politicians because the latter did not know how to count the people joining the demonstrations (Juventud sin Futuro, October 17, 2011).

#### ***Civic Conversation on Twitter Under the Hashtag #M12M15***

Finally, we studied the citizens' conversations on Twitter on the occasion of the May 12, 2012 mobilizations, the date of the Movement's first anniversary, and their impact on the following days (until May 19, 2012). We made a quantitative analysis of the tweets published under the hashtag #M12M15, the most important one during this protest.

If we focus on the main source of information on citizens' conversations in general, these anonymous citizens became the main source of information about the social movement (79%). The second source was the M15 activists (13.4%) and to a lesser degree some organizations and political parties, which together did not exceed 5%. This information shows that the M15's mobilization of power, as has been mentioned already, had been built on the widespread feeling of a threatened citizenry. In this sense, the conversation on Twitter became the perfect platform for citizens, the main social actors, to reinforce their collective identity (see Table 4 below).

**Table 4. Main Sources of Information in Twitter.**

Active subjects (who participated in the conversations):	Percentage
M15 members	13.4%
Anonymous citizens: citizens who gave their opinion and collaborate but were not members of the Movement	79%
Politicians	2.1%
Police	0%
Other institutions (Labor Unions, National Electoral Commission, Provincial Electoral Commissions, Spanish High Court, etc.)	1.5%
Media	4%
Experts, including those who gave their opinions about the Movement (sociologists, philosophers, et al.)	0%
Public personages	0%
Other	0%

In regard to the main actions discussed under the #M12M15 hashtag, the mobilizations and other specific actions were priority matters (in 57% of cases). Thus citizens used this microblogging to create a contagion effect through citing all the actions organized during the Movement. Furthermore, Twitter was a platform for denouncing the abuses of power and other negative actions that occurred during the confrontations with and evacuation by the police (21%). By contrast, the reasons for the protests scored relatively poorly (18%).

On its first anniversary, M15 became a more mature, consolidated movement that offered strong reasons for its existence. In this sense, the public discussion—apart from the conversation about the financial crisis—involved such other issues as the illegitimacy of the current democracy, in which citizens were not involved in political decisions and their opinions were ignored. Citizens criticized the current Spanish electoral law because it favored the governance of the two biggest political parties in Spain (the Conservatives and the Socialists) and was thereby detrimental to small political groups.

Regarding the intention of the public discourse published under the hashtag #M12M15, we found that most of the content tried to inform the public about the Movement's actions (59%), and to a lesser degree to criticize something or somebody (19%) or mobilize public opinion (17%). These tweets



constructed a discourse where an optimistic tone prevailed over a pessimistic one (59% against 18%). By creating a public consensus, the Movement dissociated itself from other more easily recognizable organizations and ideologies. This independence gave the M15 legitimacy based on the citizenry and enabled the Movement to become the voice criticizing the system's irregularities, mistakes, and contradictions.

### **Discussion**

This study yields three findings:

(1) Discourses presented in the analysis of mass and digital media provide a coherent picture of M15 despite the differences detected. This picture involves some of the characteristics with which the Movement was formed in the Spanish collective memory. The newspapers focused their coverage on the programmed mobilizations and actions, as did the citizens' conversation on Twitter and Facebook M15. Mass and social media were interested in the protests (an important social event because of its magnitude) rather than in what the demonstrators said. The proposals and the Movement's program received limited coverage both in the newspapers and in social media.

(2) We found a certain coherence in the definitions of the actors. In both the newspapers and on Facebook, the main actor was the M15—but not on Twitter, where ordinary citizens were the primary actors, rather than M15. Ordinary citizens originated the conversation. They were also the objects of their reflections, something that shows how their collective identity was created.

(3) The M15 Movement was represented in the media and on Facebook by its massive, global, and peaceful character (and, to a lesser degree, by its violence). In both, violent events (confrontations with the police or quarrels) were given less attention. However, in citizens' conversations on Twitter, the police actions (out of proportion to what incited them, according to the analyzed tweets) were more important than in the newspaper accounts or Facebook. This difference could reflect a higher awareness among citizens about the true nature of the confrontations with the police, a topic that was less important for the media.

### **Conclusions**

We have proposed a theoretical framework rooted in a historical approach that has brought together culturalist and structuralist perspectives. Further, quantitative and qualitative methodologies have allowed us to understand a current and complex historic moment more deeply than would otherwise have been possible.

Findings from this study indicate that up to now, the M15's symbolic power shaped the capacity to manage the citizens' discontents while defining and framing the specific historical context of the mass mobilizations in question. M15's counter-power was to "institutionalize" and to "mobilize" resistance against a hegemonic system that started to disintegrate during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century because of the then-current economic crisis. The Movement's effectiveness derived from its ability to use

the general discontent and to offer answers to the needs of contemporary Spanish society through massive protests. The disaffection went from being a secondary issue to playing the main role in the public space (both physically and symbolically). As a result, the disaffection became a collective way of feeling and thinking for the Spanish people. This is an important achievement because the shared sentiments of the people comprise the terrain where the practical consciousness of the masses can be formed (Hall, 1986).

The heterogeneous identity of M15, with the confluence of many different social groups, may reflect a new historic bloc. However, it cannot yet be determined whether this heterogeneous movement will be able to change the current distribution of social forces by elaborating and strengthening new discourses and structures. We believe that this is one of the main research foci that social thought needs to keep exploring during the decades to come.

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