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Guidelines for the cultural and political integration of the mass media society into the network society

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Abstract

Introduction. The purpose of this work is to verify whether the digital culture is continuing the pattern of mass culture, which is disseminated by analogue means, or if it is initiating a new cultural model in digital networks. If the latter is the case, it will also be verified whether or not different models correspond to different frameworks for the institutionalization of political activity, and what type of links connect the two. **Methodology:** The observations must verify whether there is a change of trend in the consumption of the culture industry in a given period. The methodology collects homogeneous statistical data that allow for the verification, both comparatively and quantitatively, of whether a direction is maintained during a prolonged interval. Three hypotheses are discussed: continuity between mass culture and digital culture; stability of mass culture through the convergence between television audiences and networks through different media; and discontinuity due to a rupture between the networks and the preceding mass culture. **Results and conclusions:** Conclusions: the available data confirm convergence as a consistent hypothesis. Television audiences increased until 2013. Since February 2013, a more evident fall has been observed among the target groups of children and adolescents than among the mature and adult target groups, with an increase in television audiences among seniors. The fluctuations are insufficient to identify a significant decline.

Keywords

Personal communication: social networks; digital democracy; indirect democracy; mass culture; digital culture; television audiences.

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1. Introduction

In this article we deal with a facet of the issue in which the research group that supports this publication is working: the political and cultural effects of the spread of face-to-face relationships by distance in digital networks. Taking into account the breadth of the topic, in this text the study focuses on defining the aspects that connect cultural changes to political attitudes. More specifically, we intend to focus on whether or not there is continuity or rupture between the changes in television audiences, being the dominant variety of mass culture, and the adoption of networks as the predominant type in the digital age. The purpose is to verify whether or not the digital culture continues the pattern of mass culture or if it is initiating a new cultural model. Moreover, in the latter case, the aim is to confirm whether or not different models correspond to different institutional frameworks of political activity, and the kinds of links that connect the two.

1.1. Theoretical framework of research: relational perspective

From a perspective that associates constructivism with realism (Searle, 1997, Núñez Ladevéze, 2005), new technologies do not substitute natural communication between human beings. Rather than replacing it, they permeate and prolong (McLuhan, 1996) the communicative capacity through devices that increase the spatial and temporal scope of communication. In the digitalized society, by digitizing audiovisual and written content, this scope has been multiplied by means of techniques that manage to project in space, and defer over time, the personal relationships originally limited by the physical conditions of people living in a material world. Even in 1998, Thompson wrote the following:

“When individuals use the media, they enter into ways of interacting that differ in certain aspects from the type of face-to-face interaction that characterizes most encounters in everyday life. They are able to act for others who are physically absent, or act in response to others who are in distant places. In a fundamental way, the use of the media transforms the spatial and temporal organization of social life, creating new forms of action and interaction, as well as new ways of exercising power, dissociated from the fact of sharing a common place” (1998: 17).

With the networks, something that does not fit into Thompson's forecast takes place: when the difference between a media relationship and a face-to-face relationship no longer exists, the capability attributed to the media by Thompson can now be carried out face to face. In the network, relations are simultaneously carried out through the media and face to face. The "encounters of daily life" can occur through the media and by distance without ceasing to be daily and private. Therefore, digital culture is not limited to the preservation and space-time transfer of content, and with regard to the impact of this situation, there is a lot more research that needs to be carried out with precision. This capability is also demonstrated in the power to expand human relationships without spatial or real time limitations. From this point of view, which emphasizes the relational aspect (Donati 1991, 1993), networks are a useful tool for accessing information, maintaining social contacts and expanding these contacts by spreading them among innumerable users. In turn, as each user may or may not forward the messages he has received to other members, and to other networks with whom he relates, then they may be reproduced or commented on by informative media of free access to the public at any point in the relational chain. In fact, this means there is no clear difference between public and private media in the network environment. Like many other disagreements established in preceding sociology born of, and for, the study of the analogue world, this fusion of private messages in the public sphere, and vice versa, shows the liquidity of the differences usually established between the public and private domain.

A consequence related to the transformation of the face-to-face relationship in media communications of those uses promoted by the application of digital technology in the creation of social networks is the fact that it diffuses the distinction between "public opinion" and "published opinion". (Núñez Ladevéze, 2016: 31). This liquidity, to continue with the metaphor of the "liquid" society of Bauman (2007), corresponds to the weakening of other differences, which also appeared conclusive before digitalization. Where interpersonal communication and published information are blended, the foundations of other distinctions are dispersed (Núñez Ladevéze and Irisarri, 2015: 483). As a global instrument of limitless bonding, the internet mixes the opinions disseminated by private networks with the published opinions in professional communication media, altering the processes of social leadership formation. Some feed others, and vice versa. In this mixture, in which the personal is reproduced in the mass media and the media are reproduced by personal networks, everything that can be published is published, either as "public", "private", "anonymous source", or "verified". There is no clear basis for separating rumour from information: the private expands, and the published is privatized. Nuances are lost, and the criteria for separating the serious from the frivolous are blurred (Núñez Ladevéze, 2016). This explains the appearance of new cultural phenomena that at the same time are significant due to their political effects.

1.2. State of the art regarding research

Continuing along this line of inquiry that phenomenological associates constructivism with relational realism (Donati, 1993), in the aforementioned projects we address specific themes of this common program. Related to this line of thinking, we focus on a formal discourse regarding how the novelty of spreading personal messages remotely through the networks without mediation is revealed in the field of politics and power relations. Several studies have analysed this particular aspect of the socio-political effects of networks, but it is not often approached from the perspective of a conception of the network as a relational medium that projects from a distance, or in other words, *in absentia*, personal relationships, or face to face relationships, that previous sociological work conceived as relations *in praesentia*.

To paraphrase a classic work by Lazarsfeld and Merton (1977), the question can be raised: How does communication through a new technology understood as a virtual space of face-to-face relationships at a distance, or *in absentia*, affect popular taste and organized social action, or in other words, the development of cultural and political attitudes and opinions. (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1944:), the usefulness of the approach adopted is that it shows the capacity of social networks to dissolve the differences between face-to-face and media-based relationships. Networks are communication channels that are both private and public, personal and media-driven.

The usefulness of the approach adopted is that it shows the capacity of social networks to dissolve the differences between face-to-face and media-based relationships. Networks are communication channels that are both private and public, personal and media-driven. The messages transferred have an individualized origin and a receiver who lacks definite form, which can be personal as well as collective. Hence, even though many times they are the expression of subjective tastes, they have public significance. Through this channel, the personal opinions expressed in the networks become media that create public opinion. Since democracy is a system based on the free formulation of opinion, networks have proven to be effective instruments for the creation and modification of points of view, and at times, for social agitation and political activism (Rubio Gil, 2012: 3 y ss., Tascón and Quintana, 2012).

Some phenomena highlighted in the news, mainly during the economic crisis, have been studied and have appeared in recent academic literature (Deltell, 2011, Vázquez, Cebrián and Olabarrieta, 2014).

From the point of view of relational realism, the most important difference in the change that began with the expansion of digital technology is the fact that as networks are for personal use, they reach the general population. This means that the process of forming cultural tastes and political opinions are no longer subject to a dependency on audiences of large media companies, as was the case in the society of mass culture, because now they are open to personal initiative, which is spread by the networks. This capacity has been interpreted at times as the liberation of audiences with regard to communication companies. Assuming this is the case, some questions may be asked about its meaning and scope: how does this liberation manifest itself in practice? Does it involve a cultural change? What political significance does this change have?

In the political sphere, this last question can be clearly seen in a long-lasting debate about whether or not indirect democracy can be replaced by direct democracy, making use of the potential of technology to facilitate direct personal access to the public sphere. The discussion started, and is still continuing, on whether this substitution would offer more advantages than disadvantages, or vice versa (Becker, 1981, Carretero, 2012: 105 ff.).

In the field of cultural tastes, the question asks whether by replacing the forced dependence on large companies with personal choice, the production system of the culture industry will in turn be replaced by other patterns of consumption and production (Berrocal, 2016).

Interpretations on the magnitude of the social changes that might be produced by the application of digital technology from a distance in the context of personal relationships are varied. By reviewing the most conclusive academic literature, they can be outlined in two major areas as follows:

- A. Descriptive projections inferred from the empirical verification of the reach of remote diffusion of personal online operations. The predictions about a change in cultural taste are obtained from the data obtained in periodic studies

and investigations indicative of trends that allow for an evolutionary forecast of what might happen, based on what has happened in the past. To investigate how cultural change affects the re-adaptation of political processes through changes of opinion, it is necessary to distinguish between the following:

A.1. Descriptive projections that focus on empirical studies of the processes of digital readjustment of analogue procedures previously established both in the communicative media and in general services of public administration (or in the private sector).

The digital adaptation of conventional media can be considered correlated to the online simplification of public administration services, such as making it easier for tax payers to file tax returns, offering citizens the option of carrying out administrative tasks with the ministries or the social security administration, granting direct access to public information by citizens, or being attended online by administration.

A.2. More risky projections, due to their higher level of complexity, with regard to the streamlining of the process of shaping public opinion and that of political decision-making in democracies, have mainly focused on electronic voting (González de la Garza, 2008; Carretero, 2012: 109); on changes in the relationship between representatives and those represented, especially the strengthening of personal relationships between them (Túñez and Sixto, 2011: 210 *et seq.*); and more broadly, on the gradual implementation of a “virtual democracy” (Carretero 107 *et seq.*)

A.3. Predictions that relate the blossoming of new trends and political attitudes to an underlying cultural change (Shirky, 2008) produced by the adaptation of citizens' habits to the new flows of digital technology.

Within these, it is worth mentioning the following:

A.2.1. Those that forecast that new phenomena, such as political activism linked mainly to the use of social networks by young people (Rubio Gil, 2012), are manifestations linked to specific circumstances (especially the economic crisis);

A.2.2. Those that emphasize that digital flow alters, regardless of the circumstances, the pre-established stability of analogue communication processes (Bermejo, 2003, Jordan and Taylor 2004). This loss of stability is attributed to the fact that the deluge of personal use in social networks reinforces the emotional pressure in conflictive disputes and simplifies the discursive conceptualization, as happens in the political environment.

Where everything is mixed with whim, it is much more difficult to assess factual differences clearly defined in the theoretical conceptualizations of the preceding sociology. The emotional *pathos* is imposed on the deliberative *ethos* in the argumentation, the rumour is linked to information, and the same concepts are applied capriciously to opposite situations. Phenomena such as post-truth, sensationalism of politics or ‘politainment’ (Berrocal, 2017), emotionalism in networks (Arias Maldonado, 2017), deterioration of the conceptual precision of terms of continuous ideological use, such as “democracy”, “freedom”, “equality”, “empowerment”, “identity”, “nation”, “justice”, and “peace”, to which all are referring from opposing ideologies, contribute to the generalization of terminological amphibologies. The theoretical “lightness” of conceptual limits is a characteristic manifestation of the network society (Lipovetsky, 2016).

Having said that, if the networks feed the ideology that reactions are more passionate than reflective, they cannot avoid the stratification of the necessary knowledge for the scientific and technical support of the digital society. Furthermore, if the difficulty of separating emotional motivation from deliberative debate increases, this will contribute less in substituting representative for direct democracy, due to the fact it would risk the constant subordination of decision-making based on the criterion of technical, professional or cognitive qualification, to that of the emotional assumption of ideology. In both cases, the deliberative and intellectual profile of representative democracy would be devalued in order to reinforce those that are direct, passionate and emotional.

In relation to this digression of empirical projections, we will formulate in the methodological section three specific hypotheses that we later call coexistence, convergence and cultural change

B. Normative projections that promote or predict that the transformation of representative democracy to direct democracy is the result of an inherent imperative to a technological potential that determines a predictable course. This imperative gradually transforms the society of mass culture into an equally democratic digital society. From this point of view, predictions regarding the evolution of technology respond to an inherent design of the process of social change determined by digital technology. In our opinion, what is relevant about this projection is that it cannot occur without a profound cultural change taking place at the same time, and also raises the question of how democratic egalitarianism can coexist with a cognitive and cultural egalitarianism. A transformation of this kind can be neither compatible with a society stratified culturally and cognitively, nor as such can it be congruous with the expansion of a culture industry oriented to the massive consumption of entertainment. Therefore, two types of projections can be distinguished:

B.1. Those projections that argue that the possibility of establishing a direct democracy depends mainly on the political use of the advantages provided by digital technology in establishing long-distance personal relationships that are aimed at public utility rather than entertainment consumption.

It has been argued that this use is inherent to the possibilities opened up by the same technology to regulate egalitarian relations of domination and social empowerment (Becker, 1981). Direct democracy is thus presented as an unquestionable improvement, which in its less demanding version can disregard representation, and in its most ambitious form can prescribe equality of opportunity as an effect of technology itself. For this effect to occur, the proscription of the entertainment and diversion industry would have to be forecast (Debord, 1995, Levi, 2000).

B.2. Predictions that consider that this process not only has normative value, but is also inherent to the use of digital media (Rifkin 210; Mason, 2016). It is important to note that this classification is not dependent on the numerous typologies of reviews of the changes that democracy may experience as a consequence of the adaptation to digital technology, the incorporation of this technology, or the possibility of change that it opens up, such as typologies proposed by Hagen (2000) and van Dijk (2013), among others. It adheres to the specific approaches of this research that study the relationship between the cultural alterations produced by the incorporation of communicative technology and the political changes opened up by the use of those same technologies, or subordinated to it.

1.3. Specification of the hypotheses under study

This text specifically attempts to grasp the political implications of the cultural change associated with the use of networks. To choose whether to frame the analysis in the context of a “descriptive projection” or a “normative projection”, the criterion adopted was to check whether there is an evident alteration in the patterns of cultural consumption between the analogue mass society and the cultural consumption patterns of the network society. The basic hypothesis assumes that if there were an inherent orientation, it would have to present itself in clear tendencies of cultural change from a mass society to a network society. Another thing would be to surrender to the vicious circle, and with this being an imperative, it does not need to be described, because it will have to be fulfilled. However, if a compliance process cannot be described, then it is useless to formulate a forecast whose compliance cannot be shown. If it cannot be shown, there is no way to prove it.

In contrasting both projections to concretize the hypothesis, and due to the fact that the main feature of mass society is the dependence of television audiences on a massive entertainment production industry, the normative interpretation of the democratizing capacity of the networks should be manifested, not only in the declining numbers of television audiences, but also in the continued adoption by networks of forms of content that differ from those originating from the mass entertainment culture industry. In other words, in some way it should be verified how the proclivity toward gregarious entertainment goods can be replaced by a reinforcement trend that is differentiated from the cultural requirement of being up to the level demanded by a direct, participatory and deliberative democracy that is capable of ensuring the technical, scientific reproduction required for the evolutionary maintenance of a digital society.

On the contrary, a consolidation trend in the entertainment industry, which is stratified thematically and aesthetically, is correlated to the discussion regarding the advantages and disadvantages of direct democracy. If networks are more a source of emotionality than deliberation, it is understood that they are also more conducive to converting the information and knowledge into a show rather than to a culture based on creative rigor, imaginative innovation and aesthetic creativity. Creativity, as well as discursive coherence, are assumptions of a socially selective stratification, unless equality of opportunity in the emission and reception of content in the networks is coupled with a correlated elevation of the collective level of knowledge and creative innovation, which is always pending verification.

Consequently, by specifying the basic hypothesis, the lines of discontinuity between mass culture disseminated by unidirectional analogue media and digital culture would have to be shown, even more than with audience analysis, with regard to preferences of the supply and demand of the culture industry, and in the reinforcement of flows of public interest and the discursive textuality in social networks.

2. Methodology

Our overall objective is to compile an empirical foundation in order to choose between a descriptive model and a normative model. In order to establish our choice on an empirical basis, our team proposed the investigation of the features that may define “mass culture” in order to distinguish it from “network culture”. Given that mass culture is characterized by the dependence of large audiences on the analogue means of communication, generally of a unidirectional nature, to establish conceptual limits between a mass culture and a network culture, a proposal was made to study whether empirical patterns of

cultural continuity and discontinuity are observed among both processes. The observations must verify whether or not there is a change of trend in the consumption of the culture industry. Therefore, it involves measuring the statistical variations that occur in supply and demand in the culture market. If the method has to gather homogeneous statistical data that allow for a comparative and quantitative contrast as to whether or not a direction is maintained during a prolonged interval and is not limited to the short term, it is not within the reach of specific investigations and leads to an examination of reports and global statistical sources that are reliable, open and permanent, and institutionally planned for the continuous monitoring of medium and long-term changes.

2.1. Formulation of specific research hypotheses

According to the basic hypothesis, the objectives of the research are to verify whether the adaptation to digital technology by unidirectional analogue media modifies the patterns of tastes and dependency linked to this technology, and to what extent, when it is forced to coexist in competition with networks. On this particular topic, we discern three specific hypotheses.

The hypotheses are not based on when the progressive simplification of political processes and administrative services is announced, which are legally envisaged and institutionally encouraged. They are based on changes that are not imposed, such as the relationship between the change from mass culture to digital culture. As it is the main exponent of mass culture, we adhere specifically to television audiences. This reduction allows us to further specify the field of empirical verification of the hypotheses:

a) Hypothesis of continuity by adaptation. Television will easily coexist with social networks as a medium: the digital adaptation of analogue technology facilitates the coexistence of network audiences with those of television. The television audiences will persist undisturbed, whatever the amplitude of the networks, through the adaptation of their content to the technical possibilities that allow for selection on demand, delayed viewing and the fragmentation of audiences;

b) Hypothesis of continuity by convergence: digital adaptation of analogue technology allows it to compete and coexist with the audience of the networks. The television audiences will suffer fluctuations and regressions due to the fact that they cannot progress indefinitely. Networks can contribute to increasing the television audience, keeping it constant, or decreasing it. However, the decrease would only be apparent if it were caused by the television audiences being transferred to other screens that are generally used for connection between social networks, such as mobile phones, tablets or computers. Therefore, what is relevant in discerning if there is continuity or discontinuity between mass culture and digital culture is not whether a possible decrease in television audiences is transient or continuous, but whether or not it alters the production pattern of a culture industry oriented to the consumption of massive amounts of entertainment.

c) Hypothesis of discontinuity of cultural change. The digital adaptation of analogue technology cannot compete with network audiences due to the fact that these networks prepare the way for egalitarian patterns of cultural taste. Television audiences will be residual as a consequence of a profound sociocultural change. The correlation between adaptation of the television medium and the blossoming of new political attitudes is linked to this deep underlying change (Shirky, 2008), which is derived from the adaptation of citizens' habits to the new flows of digital technology.

Due to the fact that the results of this hypothesis concur with the predictions of the normative projection we have discussed, it is descriptive only insofar as the prediction of the end of television is based on empirical verification and statistical sources.

In any case, in order to establish patterns of cultural continuity and discontinuity, it is necessary to distinguish between “television audiences” and the consumption of “culture industry” products. This distinction is important in order to verify whether the networks have been modifying cultural tendencies established by television and radio audiences of the unidirectional media given that the receiver has not been able to act as a provider, producer, or issuer of content. It may be that the substitution of some communicative processes for others may or may not imply a modification of the social strata or the supply of cultural consumer goods. Consequently, we understand “culture industry” as being that which is oriented to the production and diffusion in an unlimited open market of audio-visual and/or textual content, whatever means of dissemination is used. The first two hypotheses refer to the descriptive model. Confirmation of the third would lay the foundation for considering whether the cultural changes confirm the normative model. In other words, it would show that the tendency to change cultural patterns is equally democratic without detriment to aesthetic and cognitive innovation.

It affects the popular patterns of taste and content consumption in such a way that they mark a normative orientation of a predictable transition from representative democracy to direct democracy. The prescriptive capacity of that evolution would then have to be attributed to the action of a technological imperative, to an inherent normativity in the use of digital technology.

This interpretative possibility links the evolutionary scenario of the digital society to previous interpretations propitiated by philosophical and economic immanentism, such as the one that associated the assumption of an egalitarian, democratic society with the dialectical action of the class consciousness of the proletariat. In fact, predictive exegesis of this type is not lacking (Mason, 2016).

2.2. Reduction of the hypothesis and method applicable to the objectives.

The most obvious relationship between cultural and political patterns refers to the study of the changes produced by the undoubted familiarity of younger generations with digital society that contrasts with that of adult generations. Contributions are significant from research in which there has been a noticeable increase in the activity of young people through the networks “that are acting as a driver of new types of political involvement” (Rubio Gil, 2012). The increase is presented in a general way in the report by the Reina Sofia Centre for Politics and the Internet:

“The use and importance attributed to the Internet as a means of exploring politics is undeniable among young people, in view of the data. Moreover, the consequence is its ability to transmit and amplify social and citizen movements, which through its support have managed to attract a majority of the public’s attention. The question was asked regarding this topic, “In recent times, social and political movements have emerged by way of the Internet. Do you know of any?” The figure of 41.6% responded affirmatively. Almost half of the young people access the Internet to follow “political news” more than twice a week (Ballesteros, Rodríguez San Juan and San Martín, 2015: 83-86).

However, even reflecting the constant increase in the interest of young people, the Reina Sofia Centre team confirms that television is the main source:

“Television is still the most used means to follow political news: Nearly 3 out of 4 young men and women use it (73%), with a large difference with regard to the second informative channel, which is alternative online media and online newspapers, both with similar numbers of 44.5% and 43.6%, respectively. This triad took prominence in terms of media, and television continues to be the protagonist of political information, although it arouses little confidence due to the perception of its proximity to power” (Ballesteros, Rodríguez San Juan and San Martín, 2014: 80).

The report also states that “blogs or forums are much less important as information channels (19.2%)”. (id 81).

It is interesting to highlight the “continues to be” aspect, because this preference for television as a news source affects the objective of marking a boundary of discontinuity between mass culture and digital culture. The supremacy of television shows in the discontinuity of the remote use of face-to-face relations through the Internet, a line of coexistence with the continuity in the use of television as an informative medium. As the object of the study is to indicate patterns of continuity and discontinuity between mass culture and digital culture, we will be interested in the contextual scope of this continuity, focusing now on the evolution of television audiences.

Due to the fact that in the process of specifying hypotheses we have demonstrated that analysis of the history of television audiences is a preferred indicator either in pointing out the discontinuity, or recognizing the continuity, between patterns of cultural consumption typical of mass society in the digital society, we now take on the task of checking the distribution of television audiences by target age groups. Therefore, based on the empirical evidence that states that adolescents and young people are the target group that is closest to digital culture to the point that they have been called “digital natives”, we delve deeper into the hypothesis. Although for various reasons this label has been questioned, the fact that the name has prospered indicates that at least the assumption of greater proximity of children and young people to the digital society is socially verified and also accepted in the research community. Different statistical data confirm this as can be observed in the Fundación Telefónica reports.

Taking these aspects into account, we can see how the evolution of digital use affects television audiences in children and young people in comparison with the entire audience, and the distribution of the audience in other age groups established by audience registers.

The scope of specific verification of the hypotheses generically formulated is reduced, in this way, to the study of the variables of the different target age groups facilitated by the audience measurement services of Kantar (formerly Nielsen Sofress), which has been prepared for our use by the consultancy firm Barlovento Comunicación.

As conditions that are necessary and sufficient in indicating a trend that confirms or refutes the generic hypothesis of continuity, convergence, or discontinuity for society as a whole, we accept the following as evidence:

- A) Dissemination of the networks and coverage by television during the last decade;
- B) The impact of the increase in network audiences on the stability of television audiences historically;

As conditions that allow us to verify the specific hypothesis of whether or not there is a generational detachment from the television audience by transferring to social networks, we accept as indicators the following:

C) Variation of the different target groups according to audience age: *children* (from 4 to 12 years old); *youth* (from 13 to 24 years old); *mature* (25 to 44 years old); *adults* (45 to 64 years old) and *over 64* (we adapt Kantar's age classification, the terminology in italics is ours)

D) The use of networks for the enjoyment of selective cultural leisure or of the cultural entertainment industry.

3. Results and discussion

In order to verify whether the previously proposed assumptions confirm or refute the specific hypotheses, we have used the main sources that show statistical series in the medium and long term. The evolution allows for the detection of whether or not there are signs of continuity or discontinuity in the use of access means to the culture industry as a consequence of the progressive penetration of Internet and the type of expansive use of networks through small and medium-sized screens:

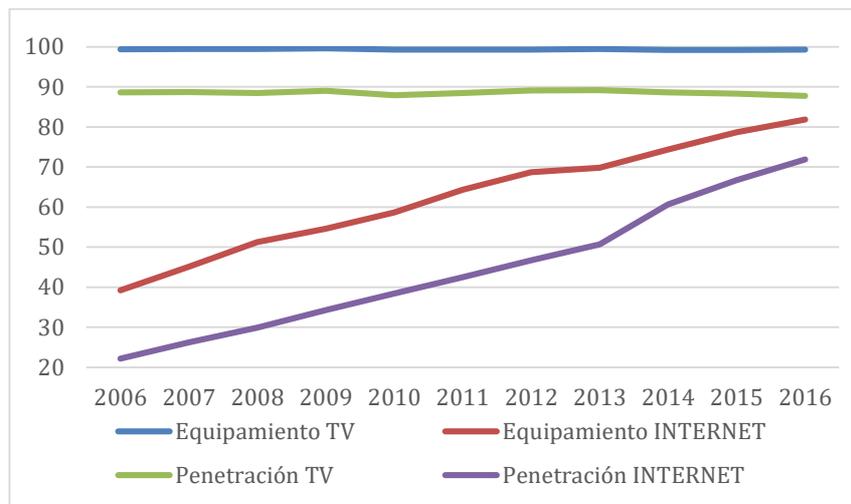
3.1. Comment on coverage and penetration of television and Internet expansion (*ad A*):

We compare this to the equipment and penetration of the Internet in Spanish households during the decade of 2006-2016. We use the statistical series measured by the EGM (General Media Studies) and the INE (National Institute of Statistics) as supporting indicators:

Table 1: Internet equipment and penetration in the last decade. Created by the authors based on information from EGM and INE

YEAR	Equipment TV	Equipment INTERNET	Penetration TV	Penetration INTERNET
2006	99.4	39.2	88.6	22.2
2007	99.5	45.1	88.7	26.2
2008	99.5	51.3	88.5	29.9
2009	99.6	54.6	89.0	34.3
2010	99.3	58.7	87.9	38.4
2011	99.3	64.3	88.5	42.5
2012	99.3	68.7	89.1	46.7
2013	99.5	69.8	89.2	50.7
2014	99.2	74.4	88.6	60.7
2015	99.2	78.7	88.3	66.7
2016	99.3	81.9	87.8	71.9

Graph 1. Coverage and domestic penetration of screens and internet.



Source: INE and EGM

The television is the most common household appliance. It exists in nearly every home and has not shown fluctuations in the last decade despite the progressive incorporation of the internet in household consumption. Obviously, the accelerated penetration of the internet through medium-sized screens, such as those of the computer and console, as well as small screens such as those of tablets and mobile phones, has not altered the market for television sets or its penetration in homes over the last decade. The following graph shows that the accelerated progression of Internet has a very high degree of compatibility with the TV screen, due to the fact that it does not diminish its penetration, or only very slightly, no matter how much Internet increases.

3.2. Comment on the penetration of networks in the historical evolution of audiences (*ad B*)

Table 2.

YEAR	Minutes per Individual/day	Average 1993- 2017
1993	209	225
1994	222	225
1995	221	225
1996	229	225
1997	231	225
1998	222	225
1999	224	225
2000	222	225
2001	208	225
2002	211	225
2003	213	225
2004	218	225
2005	217	225
2006	217	225
2007	223	225
2008	227	225
2009	226	225

2010	234	225
2011	239	225
2012	246	225
2013	244	225
2014	239	225
2015	236	225
2016	237	225
2017	237	225
MEDIA	226,08	225
	225,625	

Source: Television analysis 2017. Barlovento Comunicación. Created by the authors.

Even today, television is the activity that Spaniards spend more time on each day (and not only them, it is practically generalized in vast areas of the world), after sleep and work, and it holds first place among leisure activities: a total of 225 minutes per person per day from 1990 to 2017 and almost 230 minutes if the data refers to the 21st century. As evidence in verifying whether or not there are alterations, we have used the information related to audiences from the Barlovento Communication Institute, our usual collaborator in providing audience measurement data from the Kantar records (Nielsen Sofres until 2010). We offer the historical evolution of television audiences by target age groups since 1993.

The table shows a discontinuous decline between 1997 and 2010, but a steady increase since 2010, and a decline in the last three years, which in any case is not lower than the recovery of 2010. This setback cannot be considered significant due to the fact that data from February 2013 (which is the highest average) to October 2017, put the daily average above the year 2010. This recovery is in agreement with the adaptation of television to digital technology, the expansive increase in the use of social networks, and the progressive competition from small and medium-sized screens. It is worth noting that the recovery that began in 2010, a time in which analogue television reached its highest level, occurred at a time when digital culture was not yet being talked about, although obviously its effects had started to be felt back in 1997 (it was not until 2001 that the controversial work in which Prensky contrasts *natives* to digital *emigrants* was published), and this coincides with the “analogue switch-off” in Spain and when the adaptation of analogue television to DTT was commercially established.

3.3. Comment on whether the increase in activity in the networks modifies the audience by age (*ad C*).

Table 3. Distribution of television audiences by target age group 1993/2009.

YEARS	AGE								
	total+4	M	F	child 4/12	youth 13/24	mature 25/44	adult 45/64	senior >64	4/24
Year 1992	192	182	02	62	147	171	224	278	153
Year 1993	204	193	15	68	157	181	243	296	161
Year 1994	210	198	21	60	164	190	247	299	162
Year 1995	211	198	23	59	162	192	242	297	161
Year 1996	214	200	28	59	166	195	244	302	164

Year 1997	209	192	24	52	156	191	239	298	155
Year 1998	210	194	25	53	153	190	239	304	153
Year 1999	213	197	28	58	155	189	241	314	156
Year 2000	210	193	26	53	153	187	244	312	153
Year 2001	208	191	23	43	150	188	241	300	147
Year 2002	211	192	29	46	151	193	246	301	149
Year 2003	213	194	31	46	143	191	253	302	144
Year 2004	218	198	37	51	144	195	259	310	146
Year 2005	217	196	36	42	143	195	258	306	143
Year 2006	217	198	36	40	143	196	255	306	142
Year 2007	223	204	41	44	146	198	263	314	145
Year 2008	227	210	43	48	144	201	270	317	146
Year 2009	226	210	42	49	145	203	272	311	146
1992/2009	213	197	28	52	151	191	249	304	151

Source: Nielsen Sofres. Created by the Barlovento Comunicación service

The purpose of the commentary is to verify whether there is a significant variation in the distribution of age-specific audiences for children and young people compared to those referred to as mature, adults, and seniors, which gives cause for thinking that a change could be occurring in cultural patterns of children, adolescents and young people. A condition for the hypothesis of discontinuity is that the distinction between mass culture, based on analogue diffusion of content, and a democratic and egalitarian digital culture, would be manifested in a rapid yet gradual disaffection of child and youth audiences. If the spontaneous adaptation of the child to digital technology means a cultural rupture that also has an impact on the political environment, then television audiences, considered to be the main characteristic of mass culture, would have to clearly drop, so that the withdrawal by the child and youth target audiences would have to be reflected in the distribution of the historical evolution. For these purposes, we have gathered from our data provider through Kantar the corresponding audiences per target age group an annual basis since 1992. In the table below, we disregard the monthly distribution, and in order to simplify the table, we have limited ourselves to annual data.

Table 4. Distribution of television audiences by target age group 2010/Oct. 2017

YEARS	AGE								
	total+4	M	F	child 4/12	youth 13/24	mature 25/44	adult 45/64	senior >64	4/24
Year 2010	234	219	249	159	148	206	281	323	152
Year 2011	239	224	254	158	148	209	290	330	152
Year 2012	246	233	258	161	153	213	295	339	156
Year 2013	244	230	256	150	146	211	293	341	148
Year 2014	239	225	251	145	134	204	286	342	139

Year 2015	234	221	247	137	129	193	284	343	133
Year 2016	230	216	243	126	120	182	280	351	123
Year 2017	233	219	248	135	114	179	280	353	124
2010/2017	238	224	251	147	137	200	286	340	141

Source: Nielsen Sofres. Created by the Barlovento Comunicación Service.

The viewing time of children reflects a decline from its highest point in 1993 of 168 minutes as a daily average to 140 in 2006. It is not possible to say that the reason for this fall, rather slow and oscillating, resulted from the rise of the audiovisual society, which was still in its infancy in those years at a time when mobiles were still not widely used and tablets had not yet appeared on the market. In addition, it was then rectified in the registers until 2012 when it reached its third highest level in the data series of 161 minutes, which had only been exceeded in 1992 and 1993. If we refer to the group that is composed of children and youth, there were four years, from 1992 to 1994, that exceeded the 158 minutes of 2012 in this series. The decline began as of February 2013, so it is possible to consider that a change of trend is taking place.

As of February 2013, the month in which the audience reached its maximum level, a progressive decline in the audience as a whole began. The descent has been shared among all of the target age groups, except for seniors. Although a five-year period is not a sufficient time frame for the purpose of verifying a trend, it is clear that there has been a continuous decline, and even more pronounced than the one in the fluctuations that occurred before 2012, especially the oscillations from 1999 to 2006.

This contrast between the data series of children under 24 and those over 64 may be indicative of a progressive abandonment by the younger audience, and may also mean that the future continuity of audiences is dependent on the older age groups. This fact is confirmed because only in the target group over 64 is there resistance, even upward, of the downward trend produced as of February 2013.

These data reinforce the hypothesis of convergence between media. They are also compatible with the hypothesis of discontinuity and attenuate the one of the continuity of adaptation.

3.4. Comment on whether the networks indicate a change of cultural patterns (*ad D*).

The question is whether or not the use of networks alters the propensity of mass culture to stratify the cultural entertainment industry in order to channel it toward the enjoyment of cultural leisure that is equally demanding and selective. Having confirmed that the television set maintains universal coverage and that television audiences sustain, though in a downward direction for the last five years, the voluminous consumption of mass industry, it is very risky to consider that there will be discontinuity that transforms the specific cultural stratification of mass culture into an egalitarian heterogeneity of selective cultural demands. The concept “egalitarian heterogeneity of selective cultural demands” is complex. We resorted to this phrase in an attempt to avoid as much as possible the oxymoron “selective equalization”. In fact, heterogeneity implies the “stratification” that produces the fragmentation of the audience by selective themes and preferences.

As there are no statistical data available to show a trend in transfers from one media to another, or from couplings between audiences of television and networks, it is not possible to evaluate trend periods. Kantar announced this service years ago, but it has not yet begun in Spain. Although we cannot yet quantify it, we nevertheless know that an amalgam is produced by coupling. Through mobile phones, tablet computers, Internet, and now through watches and other gadgets, network users are coupled to television, regardless of any other use they make of the networks.

We presume that this coupling more than compensates for the downward trend of television audiences over the last five years. Although it does not compensate these audiences fully, it is undeniably true that it reinforces them to some degree.

Evidently, this means that the continuity and discontinuity hypotheses are not very compatible with the amalgam scenario of television network audiences. If it is not possible to resort to the registers to confirm it, there is no doubt that both hypotheses yield to the convergence hypothesis, which is obviously reinforced.

There are other practices related to the use of networks that support this inference. In the first place, we refer to so-called “social television”. It is a novel use of digital interactivity. The 2012 Nielsen report used the name “social television” to describe the progressive increase in users who utilize networks to comment on television programs while watching them. This is a use of networks for the purpose of discussing products offered on audio-visual screens. This is different from coupling, since it does not refer to viewing through non-television screens content offered in television programming, but rather refers to the way in which two or more different screens are used simultaneously to comment on the same content among groups composed of individuals *in absentia*, although this content may be seen by some users on one type of screen, and by other users on another type. This is a coalescence of the interactivity facilitated by digital technology among members of the audience, who can also interact with the broadcaster in some types of programs. Some additions to televisions allow for direct interaction. As a recent manifestation of convergence, complementarity, or reciprocal coupling among the media, there is a coexistence or amalgamation of the transfer of audiences from television screens to medium-size and small screens. Considered separately, this is compatible with the hypothesis of continuity and convergence and an assumption of refutation of the discontinuity hypothesis of the cultural process. However, if the features are taken into account in their entirety, this reinforces above all the continuity of the culture industry by convergence in the use of digital networks, either through the concurrence of screens, or through a concurrence more focused on the commentary of content among distant users.

The 2013 report by the Fundación Telefónica refers to the viewing on mobile and tablet screens of the contents transmitted by television as an “individual act”: “the number of devices with a screen connected to Internet has only grown (...), due to the fact that 64% of smartphone users view content of this nature, and 41% access such content through Web browsing (...) Both phenomena have helped to define a new scenario in which the user can access multimedia content from anywhere, and in which consumption becomes an individual act. All of this has meant an important increase in the viewing of television channels via online means” (Fundación Telefónica, 2014: 8).

There are many other recent phenomena that have contributed to maintaining within the digital society the stratification of the trend toward the uniformity of a culture based on entertainment. The growing use of infotainment to raise citizens’ interest in electoral confrontations (Berrocal, 2016) has been studied, as well as the sensationalism of political actions by anti-establishment movements, the appeal

to drama as an instrument of ideological persuasion, the success of populist attitudes that contribute to radicalism, the difficulty of making a distinction in the networks between informative impartiality and the techniques that propagate unsubstantiated rumours, the blooming of post-truth as a propaganda resource, victimization as a resource of mass support, etc.

Phenomena that call into question the presumption of some that the egalitarian exercise of networks strengthens direct democratic discursive activity. Increased interest in politics by young people in times of economic crisis has no effect on the cultural sequence. This interest can be an indication of alterations in political orientation compatible with the continuity of cultural patterns. The study entitled “Youth, Participation and Political Culture”, INJUVE EJ 153, carried out months after the demonstrations of May 15th in several Spanish cities that led to the mass protests in Madrid's Puerta del Sol square, stated that 73% of the people believed that the “unemployment rate” was one of the main problems for Spanish people, whereas only 1.5% thought the same about “corruption among the political class”. The study is reflected in the following table which shows the level of interest toward politics according to age group.

Table 5

	15-19	20-24	25-29	TOTAL
Ample	5.7	7.4	7.7	7.1
Sufficient	19.5	25.8	26.3	24.3
Little	38.7	41.3	37.3	39
None	36.3	25.5	28.4	29.3
Do not know / No response	0.6	0	0.4	0.3

Source: INJUVE 153. Enquiry from November 21 to 30, 2011. Prepared by the authors.

This same report confirms television as the main source of political information for people between 15 and 30 years of age.

Table 6

	Newspaper	TV	Radio	Internet
More than once a week	36.5	77	25.7	34.8
Infrequently	21.8	11.3	21	17.5
Never	41.6	11.4	52.9	47.6
No response	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.1

Source: INJUVE 153. Political news media used by age. Prepared by the authors.

Television is not only established as a distributor for the culture industry aimed at entertainment, it was also the main source of information on political issues among young people during the period with

the greatest degree of political high-spiritedness in Spain in the last decade on the part of youth. Through the association between networks and television, this trend has not decreased. It has been strengthened. Television has demonstrated that it “enjoys robust health”, reads the 2014 report by Barlovento Comunicación: “After several years of advertising recession, the first nine months of 2014 indicate a percentage increase of 10 points over the same period last year. This variation should amount to approximately 1.850 million Euros by the end of the year (turnover in 2013 registered 1.703 million)”.

The bibliographic citations that refer to each of the different aspects mentioned are abundant. We have indicated relevant specific research references. We allude to them as a whole in order to show the difficulty of interpreting a process of change from a normative approach based on the presumption that a technological imperative acts as a predictive determinant of the course of the process. The selective homogeneity of exigent tastes not only expresses a rhetorical oxymoron. In the conjunction of these phenomena, the hypothesis of cultural discontinuity has reasons to be refuted.

The available data show that audience culture can easily be blended with network culture. The use of networks does not diminish the production of cultural goods for entertainment consumption, but rather reinforces it, and explains the adaptability of the television set by means of its coupling with the network in order to converge with the new screens. The fact that they are able to coexist while competing is significant in itself. However, the fact that there is an amalgam between networks and television in social use is even more notable.

4. Conclusions

In the section of results and discussion, it has been shown that in order to consolidate a hypothesis regarding the continuity between mass culture and digital culture, it is not enough to verify whether the increasing expansion of Internet interferes with the continued use of television sets or not, but it is necessary to confirm that it is incompatible with the discontinuity hypothesis.

It is also not enough to confirm the maintenance of audiences for consumption of mass culture entertainment products through transfers to screens other than those of television sets in order to ensure the continuity hypothesis, but such confirmation is sufficient to rule out that of discontinuity.

It does suffice, however, to study the stability of television use and the continuity of audiences through coupling in order to confirm the hypothesis of convergence between media that disseminate mass culture through digital media, due to the fact that the data analysed show continuity in the habits of culture industry consumption.

Although the hypothesis of discontinuity may be partially compatible with a change in the democratic perception of youth during the period of crisis, and with the rise of participatory movements, there is no indication that this change, which may have been due to a combination of factors, reinforces the deliberative and reflective potential of an egalitarian, participatory, and democratic society. Appeals to participation reflect attitudes and ideologically-focused responses, more emotional than discursive. The hypothesis of cultural discontinuity does not find, at present, any descriptive foundation.

4.1. Conclusions compared

Ad C). The television set is not only universal, but the most common household appliance. However, if one takes into account the evolution of audiences and the coupling with media, there are signs, though still in the early stages, that this coverage might decrease. We refer to the progression of the adult audience in relation to the decrease in the number of youth audiences. Those under 24 years of age do not have the capacity to buy home appliances, yet they are the ones that show the most detachment from television audiences. This does not mean that such a detachment shows a trend of cultural change, as it could be entirely due to the convergence of different media in the predominant patterns of the culture industry, so it would not indicate substantial changes.

There is a large amount of data available to support the hypothesis of convergence, such as the rise of the “social audience”, or the use of tablets and mobile phones as substitutes for the television set as a means of accessing the same content of the culture industry that appear in television programming that is shared by way of being broadcast through other gadgets. We must also add to the calculations the “guest” audiences and viewers of recorded programs. This phenomenon is similar to that of the film industry. The fact that film production is not exhibited in specific cinemas, but is intended to go directly to television for viewing by cable or DTT, does not alter the cultural pattern of the film industry. Rather, this situation consolidates it. This is a phenomenon of convergence. The same would occur if production were intended for direct consumption through mobile phones and tablets instead of TV screens. The screen change does not imply a change in the consumption trend of the culture industry.

From this point of view, the available data confirm that the most consistent hypothesis is that of convergence, though if only universal TV coverage is taken into account, this would not be enough to invalidate the continuity hypothesis. Similarly, if only the decrease in the daily consumption average of audiences under 24 years of age is taken into account, this would also not be enough to rule out discontinuity.

Ad B). Television audiences were progressing until February 2013 when they started to fall. The decline has not been enough to determine a significant drop, nor can it even be assured that there has been a change in trend until there is data available on media coupling. However, there are other additional factors that must be pointed out. We have listed the most significant as follows:

1. Until March 2017, statistical measurements did not count the presence of “guests” in homes or centres where audience measurement devices were located. Nor did they include “recorded” viewing, which can now be done directly through broadcast services, whereas before it was necessary to have an *ad hoc* reproduction device, which makes diagnosis more difficult.
2. In order to assess whether the progressive amplitude and competence of the networks can be a factor in causing this decline in the audience, we must also consider contextual aspects. An example is the closing of nine specialized channels in the month of May 2014 by a Supreme Court Decision. The audiences of these channels had to be transferred to others, so there was an inversion of the fragmentation process between audiences and access habits. These alterations might have influenced the decline of average annual daily consumption.
3. As the records did not offer transfer and access data by screen type, it is not possible to verify that the drop is significant. Kantar plans to begin processing this data as restricted access information. It is possible that the company already has this data, but they have not yet commercialized it.

In short, the convergence hypothesis is also confirmed. The measurement gap of the coupling and the nuances with which the decrease in audiences must be interpreted since March 2013 allow us to minimize the hypothesis of discontinuity and lessen that of continuity.

Ad C) Since February 2013, there has been a more pronounced fall in the target groups of children and adolescents than in the mature and adult groups, and an increase in television audience numbers among seniors.

The turning point coincides with a sudden attitude of disaffection toward conventional politics of representative democracy, mainly on the part of young people, and with an abrupt modification of the socio-political environment caused by the economic crisis. The disaffection returns in reaction. There has been a sectoral increase in young peoples' interest in political information, and networks have become an incentive for activism (Tascón and Quintana, 2012). This change also appears statistically in the variation of audiences by age group in 2013 and 2014.

The convergence hypothesis has been confirmed. The continuity of the audience culture cannot be assured if its stability ceases to depend on access to the television set because of its replacement by access through other means. The hypothesis of discontinuity is open to the conjecture of whether or not political change is an episode caused by a variety of circumstances.

Ad D) Cultural change driven by emotional factors tests the aspiration of transposing it to a system of direct democracy.

The data show that increased interest in participation in citizen movements in which indifference is perceived in ideologically-biased sectors due to the limitations of the representative system are driven by emotional attitudes. Calls for a breach are concentrated in disillusioned focal movements, not in cultural patterns of a generalized selective egalitarianism. It can be seen in Study 2921 of the CIS (*Centro de Investigación Sociológico*) entitled “political representation and the May 15th Movement (*movimiento M-15*)” or in the 2012 INJUVE report.

Once the circumstantial causes that gave new life to breach activism had been reduced, interest in politics then varied among young people and became directed toward new electoral options. As stated in advance by Anduiza (2009), “the transformation potential of the Internet lies more in its attribute as an organizational tool aimed at sympathizers and activists than in its communicative aspect aimed at undecided voters”. What stands out is its ability to make an appeal and efficiently bring people together who are inclined toward a certain point of view, and this is accomplished through face-to-face relationships at a distance when there are alterations in socio-political circumstances (Deltell, 2011).

A breach is an emotional indication that does not alter the social tendency to organize by stratification and to preserve the decisions of power in social leadership, which change or are renewed, thereby confirming stratification in the decision-making processes of any kind of complex social organization. Breach emotionalism confirms the hypothesis of convergence as a verifiable explanation of the continuity and discontinuity of the culture of entertainment from a mass society to a digital culture. Attempting to change emotionality by deliberation is useless when the actors of change themselves appeal or yield to emotional simplifications and shun those that are deliberative.

4.2. Other conclusions

1. The continued use of television sets would be compatible with the continuity hypothesis if it were confirmed that the same mass entertainment industry is common to the screens that connect the networks to the television.
2. The selective preferences of young people indicate that the transfer of television audiences to the networks does not modify the predominant patterns of cultural taste established by stratification in the mass consumption industry, but rather contributes to the adaptation of the television to digital technology and to its renewal, favouring new stratification processes such as the fragmentation of audiences by thematic preferences and access to the audio-visual industry through other screens.
3. Television is confirmed as a great means of communication that dispenses audio-visual entertainment culture to vast audiences, although it is possible that in February 2013 a point of saturation had been reached. This still needs to be verified with the data regarding the interconnection of screens.
4. The main uses of social networks are for personal relationships and entertainment, or “social television”, which is combined with conventional television. This demonstrates continuity by convergence between the preceding mass culture and the predominant digital culture.
5. Forecasts on the direction of change cannot be explained as historically inherent tendencies guided by a technological imperative. Rather, they anticipate trends that may or may not be confirmed as resulting from an implied anthropology of a realistic nature. We presume that normative interpretations of technological mediation are based on an anthropological error with a Cartesian basis (Damasio 2011) with regard to the condition of the human being as part of nature in a material sense, of which humans form part as a result of their conscious intelligence. They do not respond to the peculiarity of the insertion of the human species into common nature. They respond to a presupposed anthropology inaccessible to research and verification, not to an approach compatible with the scientific and explanatory description of the empirical reality of natural anthropological conditioning.

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