Mexico’s Move Toward the Digital Age

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Introduction

Mexico shift toward the digital age has been a slow transition. In this essay I will discuss the major reasons why this transition has been slow. One concept that explains it best is the political economy of the media. The major media conglomerates and the government have a lot to do with what information is being distributed and who has the power to control it. The media consumption of Mexicans is great in television but is low for the internet. A lot that has to do with this fact is the socioeconomic factors of those who cannot access the internet. This prevents the consumers of internet ever becoming prosumers in their country. Journalist also have a difficult time reporting what news they want to share and a major factor that affects this is the ongoing drug war. Mexicans who have access to this new technology, mostly the middle class, are taking advantage of their voices being heard by these big conglomerates through social media. The digitization process is slow but with the right regulations and laws passed, Mexico will be able to make the full transition by 2022.

I. Political economy of media and information

Learning about political economy and seeing how it plays a big role in how information is distributed throughout the media made me understand Mexico’s media market. As Janet Wasko states, “the political economy of communication as the study of the social relations, particularly power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources” (Wasko, 2005). As we can see from the data I collected, Grupo Televisa and Azteca are the largest spanish speaking media groups in the world and in Mexico, it is hard for other media groups to compete with them in the media market. In my interview with
Professor Rodrigo Gomez he said that digitization is helping reshape Mexico in allowing to have more players in terms of television networks. Gomez also said if Mexico takes advantage of digitization Mexico could have a more democratic communication system but that is under construction. Gomez states, “the main players, like Televisa and TV Azteca do not want to change the conditions they have because they will lose some markets.” What Mexican regulators are working on today is establishing new laws to prevent the growth of Televisa and hopefully has the chance to make a new network, which increases to show the cultural diversity in Mexico.

II. Mexico’s transition from consumers to prosumers

The transition of Mexicans from consumers to prosumers is still relatively low compared to other countries. A big reason for this is because a large percentage of Mexicans do not have access to the Internet. According to Giovanni Cesareo, the work of consumption involves more and more searching, selecting, assembling, and connecting information (Cesareo, 2005). Mexicans in that case are not able to become prosumers until they are more of a consumer first. From my research, at least 95 percent of Mexicans still get their information from watching television and not the internet. I also found that about 79 percent of Mexican lives in urban areas which leaves at least 21 percent living in rural areas. People who live in rural areas find it hard to have connection with new technology like the internet. Since television is cheaper than having internet and internet is essential to becoming a prosumer in this digital age, it is hard for there to be a high percentage of prosumers.
III. Comparative analysis of media system and political context

The relationship between the media system and political system has always been growing in Mexico. The relationship between the government and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has always been there for decades until 2000 where it was stopped when the National Action Party (PAN) was voted into office. It was not until the current President Enrique Pena Nieto was voted back into the office in 2012, the PRI took power again. Many say there was a link between Televisa and President Pena Nieto in his political campaign. In months following the election many protestors claimed that Televisa should apologize to Mexicans for their election bias. There was evidence shown that President Pena Nieto bought news and entertainment coverage from the big media conglomerate (Navarro, 2012). Mexicans felt tricked by Televisa for promoting him so much on their network, which brought many of the protesters who were students to express how they felt. We can see here how active the young adults are involved in raising their voice to their government.

IV. Internet and democracy in Mexico

In my interview with Professor Gomez he said that citizens of Mexico are taking to social media sites to get their voices heard. He says they are trying to get Televisa to push the government to open the possibilities of having more options in their communication systems. Most of Mexico’s population is still watching television. Gomez says it is because their socioeconomic systems are still very unequal. Almost fifty percent of their population is under the poverty line and they do not use internet because there is no access to it. Gomez also says that the middle class uses social media as any other first world country does, but as long as there is an imbalance in their society there will not be a high percentage of Mexican internet users as there are in other countries.
V. Gatekeeping in Digital Media

The organization that regulates the distribution of broadcast licensing is IFETEL. It used to be COFETEL. There are no clear regulations on the use of radio spectrum like that of the FCC in the United States. Gatekeeping in Mexico’s case is a question of competition. The focus is on incumbents defending their market positions, or new players wishing to enter the media market and the gate in this case is usually the point at which the organization controls access to media and uses the gate to gain a competitive advantage (Looms, 2011). The reason why there is no competition in the Mexican media market today is because they do not distribute broadcast licenses to just anyone. That is why the duopoly of Televisa and Azteca still exist and remain at the top. The government’s involvement in media has a lot to do with what information is allowed to be distributed out to the public. There is also no funding from the government for public service broadcasting programs and if there is they are given very little. This shows the lack of cultural diversity and the prevention of letting people’s voices be heard by the networks. If Televisa and Azteca continue to be the only major media networks, there will be no opportunity to diversify the gatekeeping roles of how information is distributed.

VI. Main trends in digital consumption in your country

As I have stated before, television in Mexico has remained the top way Mexicans get their news. With television being the highest percent of usage, compared to internet usage being at 39 percent, it remains that way because of the lack of access to internet for those who live in rural areas and below the poverty line. I believe this to be the main problem Mexico faces in the digital age. Without the lack of internet, one cannot make that advanced move to digitalization. I think that goes for a lot of countries in Latin America as well. The analog switchover date is set
to January 1st, 2022 and I think for Mexico to make that deadline they need to take their lower socioeconomic citizens into consideration. Digital television is expensive for those living in rural areas and that is why most of them still have analog. If they want to make the transition run smoothly, one thing they can do is have the network providers have reasonable prices. That also goes for internet providers as well. Also, the government should have a fund for computers access in rural areas in order to restore that imbalance in socioeconomic classes not being able to consume internet. Allowing them to consume information from the internet, will also allow them to become prosumers and let their voices be heard on issues that need to be fixed in their areas.

Discussion

One thing I learned from this project is how imbalanced socioeconomic classes can be when it comes to media consumption. It is unfortunate to find the lack of involvement of the government to create a more balanced way for all their citizens to have access to digital television and internet no matter where they live, rural or urban. The big ongoing event in Mexico too is the drug war. Journalist are not able to report on this subject that affects so many peoples lives because they create the risk of getting themselves killed. They also face violence if they report something bad about the government or politicians. Reporting on the government’s links to the drug cartels is the biggest risk of them all. It is reported that Mexico has one of the lowest press freedom index scores. In my interview with Professor Gomez he says there are policies and regulations trying to protect journalists in paper but they are not working. Although there is a drug war going on and violence against journalists, he says there has not been a decline in journalism but he has seen a decline in correspondents who try to report about drugs or issues related with the drug cartel because it is dangerous. Mexico has a lot to do regulation wise when
it comes to media access and journalist safety. When they fix that, it will ensure every one of their citizens is getting the equal opportunity to take part of the digitization process.
References


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