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Anti-Chavistas on Twitter: Flying in the Face of Venezuela's Socialist Revolution

When Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez passed away in 2013 many speculated on how Nicolás Maduro would mediate the domestic concerns affecting the Venezuelan socialist revolution (Ellner, Just How Radical is President Nicolás Maduro, 2013, p.1). Maduro presides over a country controlled by a revolutionary movement, the Chavistas, that has attempted to institutionalize its ideology, and censor its opponents (Human Rights Watch, 2014), with limited success (Ellner, 2011, p. 446). A counter-revolutionary movement known as the anti-Chavistas, took to the streets to propose neoliberal political process reforms (Brading, 2012, p. 36). The anti-Chavistas began protesting against the Maduro government in droves, documenting their experiences and coordinating their actions on twitter (Friedman, 2014). Venezuelan Anti-Chavista/Maduro revolutionary activists use Twitter to bolster their organizational activities and promote their ideological tenets. In using Twitter these activists circumvent government influence and can exchange information and ideas directly with their supporters on a widely accessible platform.

Like many other Latin American countries, Venezuela's ascendance to the Chavista regime began when its premiers, led by Simon Bolivar, declared independence from Spain in 1811. Venezuelans experienced consistent struggles for power between caudillos, military-political leaders, throughout the nineteenth century. Significant protest movements emerged in the 1920s and 1930s against years of military dictatorship, culminating finally in the realization of a new democratic constitution years later in 1961, when meaningful elections were securely held. The most prominent political groups in early Venezuelan democracy were the *Acción*

*Democrática* (AD) and the *Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente* (COPEI), who won most presidential elections from 1958-1998 (DeFronzo, 2011, p. 432).

Venezuela's economy has heavily depended on oil and agricultural exports,and their prices in the international economy affected the political decisions of Venezuelan democratic governments. The original democratic governments did a poor job of managing wealth inequality, and struck compromises to legitimize Marxist rebels who challenged the legitimacy and efficacy of the democratic Venezuelan regime (ibid.,). In 1976 AD President Carlos Andres Perez opted to nationalize the oil industry, espoused anti-American policies, and supported the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Perez left office but when he returned in 1989 he adopted conversely neoliberal policies to repay foreign loans. These policies most pointedly increased the cost of public transportation by 100%, compelling many citizens, who used these services to get to work and school, to protest. Perez called in the army to suppress the protesters, much to the dismay of many soldiers (Ibid., p. 434-5).

In 1992 Parachute Battalion commander Hugo Chavez inspired similarly dissatisfied soldiers to rebel against the neoliberal Perez regime. They captured President Perez and the top generals in the Venezuelan army, but before they could secure a means to rally support from the general population battalions loyal to Perez detained Chavez's followers. Nonetheless Chavez was given an opportunity to address the Venezuelan public as part of his surrender, and in his one minute statement he impressed Venezuelan public with his "charisma, sincerity, and courage." Chavez was thereafter imprisoned until 1994 when Perez was found guilty of corruption charges and removed from office(Ibid., p. 435-6).Chavez ran for President of Venezuela in 1998, campaigning on promises to end neoliberal policies detrimental to the poor, to institute a more "humane capitalism," and to instate a new Venezuelan Republic based on a

constitution which would allow for greater citizen participation in decisionmaking processes. Chavez considered his platform revolutionary, and under the new *Movimiento V [Quinta] República* (MVR) party, he was elected with 56.2% of the vote in 1998, supported by 119 out of 131 legislative delegates. The referendum to vote on Cahvez's proposed constitution was passed with 88% approval, and his constitution passed with 71% approval (Ibid,. 436-7). Chavez's electoral triumph was supported by an effectively organized-and later institutionalized-social movement known as the Chavistas (Ramirez, 2005, p. 81).

Ellner describes the Chavista coalition in social class terms, differentiating between the organized working class, the ideologically left middle class, and members of the "unincorporated sectors" - individuals who are not part of an organized labor force. (Ellner, Social and Political Diversity and the Democratic Road to Change in Venezuela, 2013, p. 64-5) Ramirez asserts that Chavistas constitute a coalition of "classic left" groups, such as communists, progressive church groups, and student organizations, "alternative left" groups, such as women's organizations and LGBT advocates, and includes left-leaning members of the lower, middle, and upper classes (Ramirez, 2005, p. 84). Ramirez highlights five organizations in the Chavista coalition which exemplify how the revolutionary movement strives towards idealizing its societal transformation. *The Circulos Bolivarianos* (Bolivarian Circles) are a clandestine coalition of cadres (Boggs & Boggs, 2008, p. 64) that work to articulate and spread the Chavista ideology (Ramirez, 2005, p. 85). *The Trabajo y Tierra* (Work and Land) cooperative is located in downtown Caracas, and functions a large scale project in self-sustaining, with residents in the community working together to grow their own food, generate employment, reclaim un-or-misused land, and reinvest its profits in socially just projects, its residents frequently demonstrate on behalf of the Chavista regime and its political causes (ibid, p. 87). *The Fuerza Bolivariana de Trabajadores* (Bolivarian

Workers Force) is a political organization of unionized workers which asserts the demands and coordinates the activities of its 455 member unions; its ideological tenets are fundamentally in accordance with Chavista ideology, as it advocates for decentralizing administrative power and authority, and for greater worker participation in political decisionmaking (ibid, 88,). *The Asamblea de Trabajadores del Instituto Veneolano de Investigaciones Cientificas* (Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Investigations) is an organization composed of researchers and blue collar workers dedicated to raising consciousness for Chavista policies within the scientific community (ibid, 89). *El Banco de Desarollo de La Mujer* (Women's Development Bank) accepts financial support from the Venezuelan government in exchange for educating its members about the ideals of the Chavista movement and about methods to increase economic productivity (ibid, 90)

Although the Chavista movement aspires to enact perfected socialism in Venezuela-Chavismo, it differs from other socialist movements insofar as Chavez encourages a "democratic, peaceful, gradual path to socialism" by participating in democratic elections and working to seek direct citizen input in decision making (Ellner, 2011, p. 423). Like other socialist movements, the Chavistas view Venezuela as a country in a constant state of revolution towards realizing socialism, but within the movement there exist multiple conflicting ideological approaches for how to achieve the desired socialist end. The Chavista movement is ideologically divided into three groups, one favoring transformational Marxist socialism with the eventual destruction of the Venezuela as a Neoliberal state, a second idolizes revolutionary leaders and stresses the importance of revolutionary Communist values of solidarity and community, and a third focuses on economic objectives and industrial development (Ellner, Social and Political Diversity and the Democratic Road to Change in Venezuela, 2013, p. 65). These different ideologies promote unique and sometimes conflicting priorities within the Chavista movement

(Ibid., 67, 71). Boggs and Boggs assert the need for revolutionary movements to confront and overcome their internal contradictions (1998, 20), and the Chavistas continually struggle to overcome theirs. (Ellner, Social and Political Diversity and the Democratic Road to Change in Venezuela, 2013, p.77)

The policies enacted by the Chavez regime have been at different times in accordance with the disparate ideological positions within the Chavista movement (Ibid.,). The Chavez regime implemented policies to support underprivileged Venezuelans and bolster civic participation by providing comprehensive education through the University level, job training services, and new forums for civic engagement (Ellner, 2011, p. 427-9). A hallmark of Chavista initiatives has been providing institutional opportunities to previously ignored constituencies through "community councils," formal organizations for local communities to provide formalized authority to these communities (ibid, 429). Although the councils gave citizens the opportunity to more directly impact political decisionmaking, for many "unincorporated" Chavistas, the only trustworthy policymaker was Chavez himself (Ellner,Just How Radical is President Nicolás Maduro, 2013, p.1). Ellner furthermore notes that the community councils have been somewhat ineffective because of mutual distrust between the lower class Venezuelans who sit on the community councils and the bureaucrats who attempt to negotiate local projects with them (Ellner, 2011, p. 431). Ellner notes that "Some Chavista leaders were influenced by the strategy designed by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), which viewed the development of human resources, encompassing education, vocational training, communications, interpersonal relations, culture and politics, as a basic requisite for economic development" (ibid, p.428). That Chavista policymakers held an international NGO's recommendations in serious regard demonstrates that although the Chavista

movement openly rejects Neoliberalism, transnational ideas still affected their ideology (Ellner, Social and Political Diversity and the Democratic Road to Change in Venezuela, 2013, p.68).

Ellner argues that Chavez regime policy has evolved over time to navigate the ideological challenges and real potentials for rebellion he encountered (Ellner, 2011, p.444). Ellner notes that throughout Chavez's 13 years in office, his public policies fluctuated between the philosophically moderate and the extreme (Ellner, Social and Political Diversity and the Democratic Road to Change in Venezuela, 2013, p. 64). After Chavez survived a 2002 coup attempt when his supporters rallied to his support en masse (DeFronzo, 2011, p. 438), his regimes policies increasingly favored state oversight into all aspects of Venezuelan industrial development (Ellner, Social and Political Diversity and the Democratic Road to Change in Venezuela, 2013, p. 68). While Chavez originally supported efforts for workers to independently seize control of their industries, after 2007, and perhaps to become more competitive in the international economy, Chavez strongly promoted the nationalization of these worker-led companies, and an emphasis on increased efficiency through more and more effective work (ibid., 67). Within the Chavista movement, those who oppose the nationalization efforts are known as "autonomists," because they believe in the rights of the workers to dictate the course of industry, and those who support the Chavez regime are seen as "nonautonomists" because they believe that the state is the primary revolutionary force on the road to Venezuelan socialism (Ibid., 66). Hugo Chavez died in early 2013 and Nicolás Maduro, his foreign minister and successor, was a staunch nonautonomist (ibid, 69). Despite concerted attempts to encourage a shift in collective thinking about how society is structured, Chavista initiatives have only achieved limited success because of clashes between the state and the workers over their best interests, mismanagement of community council project funds by under-experienced citizens,

and underdeveloped avenues for communication between citizens and elected officials (as opposed to Government bureaucrats) (Ellner, 2011, p.431, 434).

Nicolás Maduro succeeded Chavez after his death, but because he did not cultivate the same cult-of-personality as Maduro, and because he came from a pre-established school within the Chavista movement, he faced a combination of opposition from inside and outside the Chavista movement (Ellner, Just How Radical is President Nicolás Maduro, 2013, p.1-2). Within the Chavistas Maduro is seen by some as too radical and by others as not radical enough, and although he cultivated credibility because he began his career in organized labor, he has so far been unable to attain a dedicated following comparable to that which Chavez commanded (Ibid, 3). Opposition to Maduro's presidency stems from opposition to the Chavista ideology. It is important to note that neither Chavez nor Maduro won a super majority (more than 60%) of the electorate when running for President (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Opponents of Chavismo often cite rampant crime, limitations on political liberties/obvious instances of political censorship & oppression by the Chavista regime, and a fundamental rejection of socialist economics as reasons to oppose Chavez and Maduro (Brading, 2012, p.33). Students compose a sizeable portion of the opposition to the Chavez regime, along with liberal democrats, capitalists from the middle and upper middle classes, and individuals who believe that the Chavista regime is a dictatorship (Ibid, 36). Furthermore beginning in 2010 and continuing throughout Maduro's presidency, Chavista responses to the opposition have included media censorship, physical intimidation, and imprisonment for some opposition leaders (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

The 2014 protests against the Maduro government were motivated as collective behavior by mass hysteria (Miller, 2000, p. 20-23) after the murder of Monica Spear, a Venezuelan beauty queen. Insofar as the protests express grievances with the Maduro regime and speakers articulate

a desire for alternative governance (Tayler, 2014), they demonstrate a political process approach of collective action (Miller, 2000, p. 54). The 2014 protestors against the Maduro regime are a coalition of primarily young adults and activists who initially supported a failed 2002 coup against Chavez (Tayler, 2014). The protesters specifically note the inavailability of basic goods, oppressive government influence on the political ideology that citizens can privately hold, and rampant crime as reasons they are displeased with the current government. The anti-Chavista protest movement is counterrevolutionary, but also represents a shift back to the right in terms of supported policy changes for Venezuela (Friedman, 2014) and exemplifies that revolutions do not happen in a straight line (Class notes, 3/10/14). Leopoldo Lopez, an anti-Chavista political leader, was charged with terrorism and had his home searched because the Maduro regime accused him of inciting anti-Government sentiment (ibid.,). Nonetheless, anti-Chavista and Chavista supporters are both responsible for proliferating violence during the recent protests (Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 2014).

As its popularity has increased, online social media network Twitter has become an instrumental organizing tool for protest movements around the world (Bastos, Raimundo, & Travitzki, 2013, p.1). Twitter is wildly popular in Venezuela, where 21% of the population tweets, establishing Venezuela as the country with the fourth highest Twitter adoption rate in the world (Friedman, 2014). Bastos, Raimundo, & Travitzki assert that Twitter represents the removal of a "gatekeeping" because users can communicate valid information with each other and the world without going through an official news source (5). One of the most well documented examples of this is the Egyptian revolution, where one protester described the role of social media as "we use facebook to schedule the protest, twitter to coordinate, and youtube to tell the world".(In class lecture, 4/28/14).

It is important to examine who is using Twitter to spread their views and ideas within Venezuela, and who is seeing these messages. Social networks are most popular with younger populations, and the significant cost of the technology and internet access required to use Twitter results in a young, middle to upper class demographic dominating most of the Venezuelan Twitter network.(Friedman, 2014). The tweeting demographic matches those who are most vehemently anti-Maduro: the middle to upper class students with internet access (ibid,), so the most popular messages on the social network, by hashtag and retweet, support the pro-capitalist anti-maduro protest movement.(ibid,) For this reason we will not be using Twitter to extrapolate that the anti-Chavistas are clearly winning the rhetorical battle over the future of Venezuela, but rather to analyze how this social movement is using Twitter to bolster solidarity and spread information about ongoing protests.

Messages are sent through Twitter by "Tweets": 140 character long messages, often with attached photos or video, that are shared with anyone who chooses to "follow" the tweeting user (Bastos, Raimundo, & Travitzki, 2013, p. 3-4). To observe Twitter use in Venezuela we used the "TweetDeck" service, a tool that allows us to aggregate and sift-through real-time twitter activity using custom filters. For the purposes of our research, we examined tweets matching two important criteria: hashtags and retweets. Twitter tracks trending topics on its service by showing which "hashtags," short slogans prefaced with a # sign, are most popular in ongoing tweets; hashtags enable Twitter users to situate their messages within a communal conversation about a topic (ibid, 4-5.). We examined tweets tagged with #Venezuela or other movement-specific hashtags such as #SOSVenezuela, both of which have been tweeted many millions of times over the past few months.(Franceschi-Bicchiera, 2014)

Twitter users can also “retweet” someone else’s message. To “retweet” means that you are sharing someone else's message with everyone in your social network, analogous to a microphone-less speaker's words being amplified by members of the crowd repeating verbatim what they heard so that those behind them can hear the words. Retweeting furthermore gives Twitter users who see a retweeted message the opportunity to retweet the message themselves, meaning that a message could be theoretically retweeted infinitely throughout the twitter universe. By filtering out tweets with less than 10 retweets, we were able to focus on what the Venezuelan Twitter community decided are the most important messages to pass on.

Twitter is an incredibly power microphone because of this ability for members to spread messages to their own networks, which can consist of hundreds, thousands, or even millions of people. In 2010 the Venezuelan National Assembly passed a law granting the government the power to suspend or close private media organizations (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Since 2010 Venezuelan government has removed two news TV stations from the airwaves, sued newspapers for reporting on illegal arms trade, and investigated internet service providers who allowed their users access to websites disparaging Maduro’s handling of the Venezuelan economy (ibid,). However, when the Maduro government asked Twitter to remove the accounts of individuals who reported on Venezuelan currency manipulation, Twitter declined their request (ibid.,); because the Venezuelan government cannot control Twitter, Twitter users can access information critical of the Chavez regime that would be otherwise inaccessible (Franceschi-Bicchiera, 2014).

Student groups have harnessed this uncensored amplification effectively, using Twitter to spread messages of solidarity. One example is a youtube video of four high school students holding a Venezuelan flag and speaking a message of solidarity in unison. The video spread through Twitter, showing up in our feed after being retweeted by pro-democracy Twitter

accounts such as “Patricia Rincón.”(see appendix A1) This is a common scenario for the spread of student solidarity through Twitter, another example is a picture of students marching barefoot with the caption “Students marched barefoot ‘suffering’ of Venezuela”(translated from Spanish), publicizing a symbolic sacrifice beyond just the local protest. (see appendix A2) Examples such as these show how student groups have harnessed the use of Twitter to spread local messages of solidarity on a massive level.

Protests not just by students, but also by parents have been bolstered and amplified by Twitter. One widespread tweet is of a collage of photos from a protest against Maduro’s education reforms by parents in Valencia.(see appendix A3). Another tweet featured a picture of a pregnant woman wearing a gasmask at a protest, with the caption “She fights for two things, democracy for her son and freedom for her country.”(translated from Spanish)(see appendix A4) Student groups and parent groups are just two examples of how the multiple facets of this Venezuelan revolutionary movement can using Twitter to raise solidarity and awareness for their cause.

Twitter can be a powerful microphone not just for different coalitions of the movement, but for the political leaders as well. Leopoldo Lopez, a leader of the anti-Maduro movement, has over two million followers on Twitter, which means that whenever he tweets(or retweets) a message over two million people will see it.(@leopoldolopez, 2014) To fully understand this massive reach, consider that this two million people is just the initial audience; each of these followers can retweet Lopez’s message to their own network, and anyone in that network can retweet the message to even more people, meaning that innumerable people have seen Lopez’s words. For instance, when Lopez was arrest in February he tweeted "I'm disconnecting. Thank you Venezuela. The change is in each one of us. We will not give up. I will not do it!"(translated

from Spanish), a message that was retweeted more than 80,000 times. (see appendix A5) Lopez also commonly retweet messages from activists to his massive following, using his own influence to promote others in the movement.(@leopoldolopez, 2014) The use of Twitter as a microphone gives public figures an unprecedented reach in spreading the views and ideas of their movement, and by doing so strengthen solidarity and unity within a movement.

In the past, it has been difficult to hold governments and police accountable for alleged abuse and misconduct independent of Chavista interference (Human Rights Watch, 2014). With Twitter and the rapid spread of smart-phones, protesters are now armed with tools that they can use to both record evidence of abuse, and instantly diffuse this evidence to a network of supporters and portray police as a hostile, antagonistic presence. Protesters are now able to film police brutality as it happens, resulting in tweets with videos of police beatings, and captions such as "Brutal attack on protesting youth in #Rubio #Tachira #Venezuela I am filming so that everybody will see what's happening in Venezuela".(see appendix A6) Pictures also circulate of wounds suffered from police beatings or munitions(such as non-lethal buckshot), to further emphasise the brutality of the police crackdowns.(see appendix A7) In some cases individual police are singled out, such as a picture that circulated of a police officer in Apure, with a caption claiming that he murdered a six year old boy during the protests.(see appendix A8)

Beyond increasing animosity against the government and police, Venezuelan activists also use Twitter as a tactical tool for coordinating protests and spreading word about police movements. Much of the protest strategy in Venezuela has been to disrupt traffic and daily life through roadblocks, marches, and vehicle convoys.(Vice, 2014) For instance, a tweet with a picture of an ongoing protest march included the text "#21A 6:10pm Distribuidor #SantaFe #Venezuela #Caracas", with hashtags containing the detailed location and time information for

anyone who would want to join the march. (see appendix A9) By using these hashtags, the tweet would reach anyone who is paying special attention to this area on Twitter, helping the protest to gain more members and publicity (Bastos, Raimundo, & Travitzki, 2013, p.9). In addition to assisting in mobilizing protests, Twitter is also used to communicate important information about police activity to activists. One tweet includes a video with long column of soldiers marching into Valencia, and another tweet contains a video showing police using teargas to block off a freeway in Caracas.(see appendix A10 & A11) Both videos are relatively uneventful, but include detailed location information providing a tactical value in informing other protesters in the area of police movements. The anti-Chavistas can thus use twitter proactively and reactively-in advance of a protest and in response to police activities.

Recognizing the tactical and ideological advantage that Twitter has given anti-Maduro activists, the government has tried, and failed, to block access to Twitter and other online activist networks (Human Rights Watch, 2014). There is recent precedent for attempted blocking of social media in countries undergoing revolutionary protests. In 2011, the Egyptian government shut down the internet infrastructure of the nation in an attempt to suppress massive protests spreading throughout the country.(Schmidt & Cohen, 2013, p. 138) Not only were Egyptians able to find ways to access the internet through text messages and dial-up loopholes, but shutting down the internet electrified the protests by enraging even more Egyptians.(ibid, 139) More recently, Recep Erdoğan's government in Turkey imposed a block not on the entire internet, but just on Twitter, which Turkish activists had been using heavily to coordinate protests.(Letsch, 2014) Once again, the block further enraged and was easily circumvented by activists: the number of tweets coming out of Turkey actually *increased* after the block was put in place, reaching a record-breaking 17,000 tweets per minute.(Letsch, 2014) Venezuela has taken an

even more subtle approach to censoring Twitter by allowing access to the site, but blocking users from submitting or viewing images and videos.(Franceschi-Bicchiera, 2014) The government lifted this block after three days of public outcry and intensified protests, releasing a vague press release in state run media implying the censorship was the result of cyber warfare from an unnamed foe.(VTV, 2014)

Failing to effectively reduce the impact of Twitter of the revolutionary movement, the Maduro government and Chavistas have taken to Twitter in an attempt to spread their own agenda over the huge social network. Common Chavista tweets try to delegitimize and condemn the anti-Madero protests, such as a photo of a burnt out cement truck with the caption "TODAY terrorists of the opposition in #Venezuela burned a cement mixer in the Carabobo state".(see appendix A12) By framing the opposing activists as terrorists, and diffusing claims of questionable accuracy, such tweets aim to turn public opinion against the revolutionary movement. The Venezuelan government has been know to use Twitter as a propaganda platform by creating fake pro-Maduro accounts and hiring online agents to harass and delegitimize dissidents online.(Franceschi-Bicchiera, 2014) Following failed attempts to hinder Twitter access within Venezuela, the Maduro government and Chavistas have adopted twitter as a counter-revolutionary propaganda platform.

Venezuelan activist Twitter use has not only been focused on domestic issues and audiences, but has also sought to impact foreign affairs. In late April 2014, Venezuela received a delivery of Russian armored vehicles, and a photo of one of the vehicles being loaded off the cargo ship was leaked on Twitter, with the caption "No medicine, food, cleaning products, parts … but here come Russian tanks".(see appendix A13) The tweet addresses scarcities, one of the major issues being highlighted by the revolutionary movement, and uses foreign trade deals,

which would likely have otherwise been unpublicized, to make the government look irresponsible and hostile.

In addition to criticizing foreign relations of their government, protesters have also been using Twitter to publicize their movement and gain international support. A common sentiment in anti-Maduro movement is that they are under-covered by both the domestic and international press, so must take reporting into their own hands. (Vice, 2014) There are a high volume of tweets in English on the Venezuelan Twitter feeds, most attempting to rally support for the movement, such as a picture of a gas-mask wearing protester holding a flag, with the overlaid english text in "I stand with the people of Venezuela." (see appendix A14) Interestingly, this tweet was tagged with #teaparty, a clear attempt to play to the sympathies of the US far-right. The system of government that the anti-Maduro protesters are rallying for is a rightward shift toward capitalism and neoliberalism, which protesters use to raise support in countries with similar economic systems such as the US. This is similar to tactics used by the South African anti-apartheid movement, which used ideals of racial equality and justice to rally significant support from US college students.(Defronzo, 409) Venezuelan Twitter activism reaches beyond the nation's borders to influence public opinion on foreign policy and to rally international support for the revolutionary movement.

In her essay on Communicative Capitalism, Jodi Dean presents an engaging counter-argument to our analysis of the impact of Twitter on the Venezuelan revolutionary movement. Not focusing on any particular social movement, Dean presents the theory of "communicative capitalism", which essentially argues that online exchange of information is not free because the government can control the internet, and not revolutionary because ideas expressed over the internet carry less weight than those expressed in person, the internet is crowded by information

that people never see, and online activism rarely impacts the real-world (Dean, 2005 in Boler, 2008, p.109, 113-5). Dean's theory, which was published in 2005, would dictate that the Venezuelan revolution was not strengthened by the it's digital presence, but rather that the cyber-activism was a detrimental distraction from the street-level protests. While these views may have been true for the relatively obscure activist websites she used as examples, the emergence of Twitter and the rapid growth of internet connected smartphones has made such conjectures more difficult to justify in the present.

We have seen how the mainly young, but nonetheless diverse anti-Chavista movement in Venezuela finds Twitter is not only extremely effective at spreading ideas and messages through massive social networks, but is also a useful tool in organizing and coordinating real-life protests. Bassos, Raimundo, & Travitski assert the importance of followers, hashtags, and retweets (2013, p. 3-5, 9) in assessing how twitter amplifies the spread of anti-Chavista messages. Technological improvements have made twitter increasingly accessible, while censoring twitter is logistically impossible (Shmidt & Cohen, 2013, p. 138-9). Although the theory of communicative capitalism raises interesting questions about the nature of online communications and the pretense of democratic communication over the internet (Dean, 2005, in Boler, 2008, p. 107, 113), we find that the anti-Chavista movement uses Twitter to organize in a legitimate attempt at collective action to affect the political process (Miller, 2000, 54).

## Appendix

To fully understand the primary sources used in this paper, it is important to be able to not only read the text contained in the tweets, but also to view the user-submitted images and videos that are contained within many of the tweets.

For this reason we have created a digital appendix of the tweets we used throughout the paper at: http://triestpa.github.io/Venezuela-Twitter-Appendix/

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