

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA SETTING: THE 2019 HONG KONG PROTESTS CASE STUDY

O PAPEL DA MÍDIA NA AGENDA POLÍTICA: O CASO DOS PROTESTOS EM HONG KONG EM 2019

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Abstract: Hong Kong caught the attention of international media coverage during the mass mobilisation against the implementation of the Bill of Extradition in 2019. If approved, the law enforcement stated that police officers would be able to extradite or detain a person arrested outside mainland to face trial in mainland China. With the spread of information and communication technologies, the media started to be more effective in conveying events and at the same time at creating a perception. Undoubtedly, the media, known as the Fourth State, is the most important building block in shaping people's perceptions in the 21st century (Cooke, 2019). Therefore, this paper focuses on the role of the media as a tool for political change. The authors use the case of the 2019 Hong Kong Bill of Extradition protests, a non-democratic political regime, to understand how the media is fundamental for political debate and political change.

Key-words: Hong Kong SAR. Extradition Bill. 2019 Hong Kong Protests. Media.

Resumo: Hong Kong recebeu atenção da cobertura midiática internacional durante a mobilização de massas que surgiu para confrontar a implementação da Lei de Extradução de 2019. Caso aprovada, a extradição e o cárcere de indivíduos situados fora do território chinês para serem condenados pela jurisdição da China passariam a ser permitidos. Com a propagação da informação e da tecnologia da comunicação, a mídia passou a ser mais efetiva em transmitir eventos, ao mesmo tempo em que passou a criar uma percepção sobre os acontecimentos. É indiscutível que a mídia, conhecida como o Quarto Estado, é o mais importante fator que molda a percepção dos indivíduos no século 21 (Cooke, 2019). Portanto, este artigo tem como foco o papel da mídia como uma ferramenta para a mudança política. As autoras utilizaram o caso dos protestos da Lei de Extradução de 2019, em Hong Kong, cujo regime em vigor é de cunho não-democrático, para compreender como a mídia é fundamental para o debate político e para a mudança política.

Palavras-Chave: RAE Hong Kong. Lei de Extradução. Protestos em Hong Kong. Mídia.

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Introduction

As one of the attractions centres of the world, Hong Kong has the opposite image in its internal affairs, although it has a magnificent country image from the outside. Hong Kong's historical background and internal problems nowadays explain that Hong Kong sights for a stable order. After the First Opium War, China signed the Nanking Treaty, by which Hong Kong came under the auspices of Britain (Sheringham, 2012, p. 521).

Thereafter, during the Second World War, Japan conquered Hong Kong, but, in 1945, Hong Kong returned to Britain (History, 2020). In 1997, with the Basic Law between China and Great Britain, Hong Kong was established as a Special Autonomous Region (SAR) of China in the “two country, one system” rule (Cantoni et al., 2019, p.1027). Hong Kong, which was a British colony for 135 years, has felt uneasy since it came under the auspices of mainland China.

The most obvious reason for this is that Hong Kong residents think that mainland China can govern Hong Kong under its authoritarian regime and the libertarian environment in the region can disappear. Therefore, every statement made from China about Hong Kong and every target bill for the SAR has caused an extreme reaction in Hong Kong.

There are some reasons why Hong Kong residents are taking a stand against mainland China. The first reason relates to different political ideologies observed in both regions, that is, the influence of democracy, since the British rule has given Hong Kong citizens a reason to be against authoritarian rule (Shek, 2020). The biggest proof of this is monitoring Chinese citizens under the Social Credit System, which is a system that rewards and punishes people by scoring.

The Hong Kong citizens have not been able to establish a belonging attachment with China mainland (Bajpai, 2020). The reason for this may be that Hong Kong has been under the rule of Great Britain for a long time and its causal links with mainland China have been weakened.

Another reason for the lack of acceptance of Hong Kong citizens relates to the strategy of China to obtain the control of the SAR. To clear civil service, law enforcement, judicial institutions, and university councils, Beijing used its selected chief executive of Hong Kong

to fill those positions with chosen representatives by the Communist Party of China (CPC) (Davis & Hui, 2019).

The last reason consists on the fact that the Extradition Bill comes from mainland China without the public and the parliament's opinion are adequately evaluated. This situation makes people of Hong Kong think that an oppressive atmosphere will blow in Hong Kong after 2047 and therefore they protest the remedy to prevent this (Eagleton, 2020, p. 46).

Another important aspect is to understand the reason why China wants to be effective in Hong Kong. Kewalramani and Seth (2020) clarify the motives to this question. China gives special interest to Hong Kong to facilitate the internationalisation of the Chinese currency, the Yuan, to shape incentives of various actors with "one country, two system" model in Hong Kong as to set an example of the model for China – Taiwan relations (Kewalramani & Seth, 2020, p. 5).

In this regard, the authors attest that China attaches importance to Hong Kong in both national and international interests. Hong Kong is an international trade zone that holds a crucial role in the world's economy, since it beholds many international companies not approved by CPC to enter the mainland. It is calculated by mainland China, which is referred to as the world's industry, that dominating such a place will bring benefits to China. Apart from the economy, China, which has been discussing with Taiwan on One Country Two Systems for years. It also aims to convince Taiwan that this system works well in Hong Kong and wants to implement this system in Taiwan.

This paper examines the media repercussions of Hong Kong protests and how they served as a tool to expose the domestic political relations between Hong Kong and mainland China and how they helped to endure the length of times, as well as the size of mass mobilisation. It is possible to evaluate the media as mass media and social media in two wings. This study examines the events by encompassing both types of media.

The research has used content analysis, one of the qualitative research methods. The authors also examined books, chapters, and journals related to the subject and reviewed comments. At the same time, the news on websites of various media organisations were especially considered. After examining the sources, the subject was handled with a critical approach.

The paper consists of three main sections. The first section discusses the reasons of the protests, the political scenario, and the evolution of the mobilisation during the period that it lasted. The second section describes the role of the media in international affairs. The third section discusses the connection between the media and the impact on the protest outcomes, for instance, debating the length and magnitude of mass mobilisation and the association with media exposure. In conclusion, those mentioned throughout the paper are analysed.

1. An overview of the 2019 Hong Kong protests

Hong Kong, a former British colony, returned to China in 1997 with the Basic Law signed between China and Britain. It was decided to be governed by China under a policy known as “one country, two systems” until 2047, with respect to institutions of Hong Kong under the status of Special Administrative Region (Cantoni et al., 2019, p. 1027). Following this agreement, Hong Kong residents have become concerned about the near future (Eagleton, 2020, p. 46). It is estimated that the “one country, one system” will be established to replace the current set of “one country, two systems” by 2047.

Hence, most decisions taken, regarding Hong Kong, testify the protests. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region turned to implement the “National Security Bill” to control the activities of foreign political organisations or bodies in Hong Kong under Article 23 of the Basic Law in 2003 (Tong, 2018). This decision was protested by Hong Kongers and could not be implemented.

Similarly, in 2014, people took to the streets to proclaim that they wanted to have a right to choose future chief executives of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) from the candidates. The 2014 Hong Kong protests are called “Umbrella Protests”, because protesters opened umbrellas to shield themselves from pepper spray and tear gas fired by the police officers. (Hui, 2015, p.111)

As can be understood, there is a contentious and difficult relationship between the citizens of HKSAR and the Chinese government. After all these protests, another new anti-Chinese demonstration occurred in Hong Kong in 2019.

The road to the 2019 protests is based on Chan Tong-kai, a young man from Hong Kong, murdering his girlfriend Poon Hiu-wing during his trip to Taiwan. After the murder, Chan Tong-kai returned to Hong Kong. Therefore, Taiwan Shilin District Prosecutors Office

asked for Poon Hui-wing's extradition for detention, until 2055. But, The Hong Kong government rejected the offer on the grounds that there is no extradition agreement between Hong Kong and Taiwan (Chen, 2019, p.134).

Although Hong Kong has mutual extradition agreements with 20 countries, there is no legal regulation to handle criminal cases when it comes to Taiwan, Macau, and mainland China (Kewalramani & Seth, 2020, p. 7).

Following the murder of Poon Hui-wing, the Government of the Special Administrative Region enhanced the "Extradition Bill", which regulates the extradition of criminal fugitives in different parts of China, including Taiwan, Macau, and mainland China (Shek, 2020, p. 619). However, the Extradition Bill has been interpreted for Hong Kong citizens as a move towards the "one country, two systems" ideology and the subjugation of mainland China (Eagleton, 2020, p. 48). Under the Extradition Bill, there is a perception that mainland China will gain a right to judge people in Hong Kong as they wish, thereby taking control over Hong Kong.

The proposed Bill triggered a very strong reaction in Hong Kong, including numerous demonstrations, vandalism, and the occupation of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Shek, 2020, p. 620). During the protests, the police responded violently to people on the streets and the protests escalated even more.

In the days of such tension, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong almost poured gas on the protests when she applied to the colonial-era Emergency Regulations Ordinance to prohibit people from wearing facemasks in public (Kewalramani & Seth, 2020, p. 9). International community turned its face away from Hong Kong as a result of inexpugnable and marginalised protests. Various international organisations, such as Amnesty International, Human Right Watch, and United Nations, made calls for Carrie Lam to stop the protests.

Lam said protests were "rampant violence and riots" occupied under the guise of democracy (Davidson, 2021). Attitudes towards the protests have become a sign of various denominations, indicating the reaction of the parties and how they view what happened in Hong Kong.

Chinese officials compared the movements in Hong Kong to terrorism and the colour revolution (U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2019, p. 481). Civil

resistance for democratisation took place, for instance, in Serbia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan, in the early 2000s, and this resistance was referred to as colourful revolutions.

The influx of financial, organisational, and personal assets from foreign organisations in the USA and in the EU supported these revolution. (Lipiński & Shukuralieva, 2014, p. 111-113). Hereby, the protests in Hong Kong are linked to these revolutions in that they receive foreign support.

Contrary to these comments, the international community viewed the movements as a peaceful rally that took place with the aim at pursuing rights (Amnesty International, 2020; Civil Rights Observer & Human Rights Watch, 2020). Labelling the protests as riots and especially Lam's discourse about riot had great reaction from the protesters (Davidson, 2021).

In consequence of protesters raiding Legislative Council (Legco) and attempting to prevent the bill, on 14 June 2019, the Hong Kong government announced to postpone that bill indefinitely and, two days later, Carrie Lam issued a written apology. However, the government's postponement of the bill, rather than withdrawing it, caused a decrease in confidence in Carrie Lam, and slogans shouted for Lam's resignation. (Purbrick, 2019, p. 8)

Due to Carrie Lam's appointment by mainland China and her close ties with Xi Jinping, people in Hong Kong are already suspicious of Lam. Additionally, Lam's negative attitude in the bill further increased this suspicion. At this point, Hong Kong residents do not trust not only Lam, but also all chief executives of HKSAR in general, since they are elected by the CPC.

Even if the bill is resolved, Hong Kong citizens' demands are not limited to one of the requirements. They persistently want five demands to be fulfilled. These are formal withdrawal of the bill; establishment of an independent inquiry into police brutality; removal of the designation of the protests as "riots"; release of all those arrested during the movement; and institution of universal suffrage (U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2019, p. 481).

Until now, no protest or insistence on demands has been able to put the Hong Kong government on the bargaining table. Hence, the Hong Kong government and Beijing were confident that the protests were fated to cease. (Davis & Kellogg, 2020) As they said, the protests continued until 2020 and, because of COVID – 19 pandemics, they were settled down.

The most striking aspect of the 2019 – 2020 Hong Kong protests have a side which includes the active media users. In this perspective, it assembles the Arab Spring popular movements, which started as an organisation and was announced on social media platforms. Thanks to the easy communication and people gathering with the Internet, organisations have accelerated, and the cumbersome state structure has been undermined (Kewalramani & Seth, 2020, p. 4).

In addition, the media plays a role in making people's voices heard to the international community and in their mobilisation. The protests in Hong Kong set a good example of the effectiveness of the media, as a tool to strengthen the movement by spreading its ideology.

2. The media coverage impact on international affairs

Thanks to the internet and information and communication technologies, most people's lives have started to pass in cyber-space. Social media is one of the most actively used areas in cyber-space. According to the "We Are Social" report, 49% of the world population actively uses social media in 2020 (Kemp, 2020).

Social media has become an important democratic space for an open political and social debate. The new media is a great channel to massify information in real time experience, as it is a power tool for sharing news and spreading information (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020).

Sakamoto (2013) believes that all types of technologies for the use of communication and information, and more specifically, social media, are tools for construction and reconstruction of a reality. Therefore, when individuals use the new media, they are more than describing a situation, but also the new media is serving as an author of change of a specific reality. In the big picture, one can see the changes in political participation and political reforms happening with social media (Sakamoto, 2013).

Mass media is as effective as social media. Events are heard around the world via the mass media. If social media gives an acceleration to the society to take action, mass media also gives an acceleration to inform the society. Both types of media go hand in hand with each other. Media organisations report the events through mass media. The reaction to these events is embodied on social media which is offered an interactive environment.

The influence over political discourse means a great amount of power (Gilardi et al., 2020). Both social media and mass media have the power to influence a diverse and massive number of individuals about political and social rights in a short amount of time. Communities outside cyber-space can be originated by social media, option outside the monopoly of formal institutions - traditional media - to establish a more open and democratic space for debate (Rodrigues, 2013).

On social media, people can communicate and coordinate with each other more quickly, depending on the opinion or an issue they defend. Mass media does not offer such an opportunity. Undoubtedly, this opportunity offered by social media enables people to express their thoughts freely compared to the past.

Mass media have never appeared more politically consequential in the 21st century (Rohlinger & Earl, 2018, p. 1). Since movement actors use mass media to target external audiences in order to spread information about a cause to the broader public, as it shapes political debates and outcomes and mobilises by-stander publics to action (Rohlinger & Corrigall-Brown, 2018, p. 140).

Similarly, after learning about the Hong Kong protests from the mass media, thousands of people's attention turned to the autonomous Chinese region. International media organisations, particularly the Western media, have played an important role in announcing the Hong Kong protests and informing the international community on their content. On the fourth section of the paper, the news by media organisations are given in detail.

Social media is like a catalyst to mobilise people. It is possible to see examples of this in many cases. Mobilisation of protests caused by social media interaction, for Agur and Frisch (2019, p. 6), is the capability of the new media to “motivate activists and would-be activists to add their physical and digital efforts to the protest”.

Recent political and social movements, such as Arab Spring, #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and the Umbrella Movement, have brought to daylight these issues and affected not only the activists involved, but the society as a whole. Even though the Arab Spring had spread through many countries in the Middle East and North of Africa, though still only perpetuated its ideology in Tunisia for a pro-democracy, it has shown the powerful influence of social media. The noise made by protesters can be more powerful than to change government implementation and to change the political culture of a country.

For this purpose, the new media holds a key role in the process of broadcasting the ideology of each political movement worldwide, having each manifestation its own specific environment and claim (Granillo, 2020).

The simultaneous information about the protests' outcomes, with the police intervention news in almost real time, have built the need of commentators to explain what amendments activists request. Memes and amateur videos about the protests have taken the curiosity of many users online to consume more information about the topic driven by the aim to understand what was happening in Hong Kong. Even Chinese living abroad have made a stand on the protest about the Bill of Extradition.

The social media has the power to impose a need for people to manifest their political views, as has occurred in the #BlackOutTuesday, where people were manifesting their solidarity for Black Lives Matter movement in the United States by sharing a black screen in their social media platforms and giving space for black people to manifest their discourse.

People from all around the world took a political stand and the traditional media had to interview and put black people at the center of the debate. The intensity of the Black Lives Matter movement had online made a greater impact on the real world. This is to say how social media has a power to push people to go to the streets and change political culture (Agur & Frisch, 2019; Granillo, 2020).

3. How does the CPC deal with the media?

Media is a free and open communication platform. People from all kinds of languages, races, religions, and many more have the opportunity to use media tools to spread their thoughts and to form communities and groups. Thanks to the media, people's freedom of speech has increased more than ever before. Controlling the media, in which such people can move freely, is a difficult action. However, the CPC have initiatives in this direction. CPC's initiatives on media will be examined in this section.

The impact of CPC on the media can be considered as mass media and Internet flow – social media. Mass media in China is under control of a state-centered structure. The Chinese government's efforts to dominate the media can be traced back to the time of Mao Zedong. Regarding the media, in 1959, Zedong said, “newspapers must be run by politicians” (Volland, 2003, p. 1).

Media is an effective factor in influencing public opinion. Since the media is an effective tool in influencing people's thoughts, there is a perception that whoever owns them, controls the majority. Therefore, the Central Propaganda Department (CPD), which has existed for more than half a century, is an agency that maintains the relationship between the media and government (Jingrong, 2010, p. 925). More recently, CPC and various Chinese government entities have been trying to influence not only the Chinese media, but also the global flow of information.

In general, local journalists, who have links with the Chinese government, are trying to influence the global flow of information through propaganda, censorship, surveillance, and control over infrastructure (Cook, 2020). However, for now, it is not possible to say that there are successful results in influencing the global information flow.

To control Internet flow, CPC uses the Great Firewall. As a powerful tool of mass control, the Great Firewall of China is a censorship and filtering system that controls streaming on the Internet. Therefore, it is a well-debated point when talking about repression and social media use inside the country. The repression of the CPC is well articulated and manages to supervise the individual use of the Internet all over China. The CPC has been censoring the population's use of the Internet after the Tiananmen Square demonstration against the government. In doing so, it has become an extremely sophisticated system in the world (Shen & Zhang, 2018).

The government ruled by Xi Jinping, since 2012, has become stricter and more committed to online order (Creemers, 2017). Hong Kong and Macau are the only regions that stay beyond the massive censorship apparatus of Beijing. By the year 2013, China had 618 million Internet users, almost half of the population at that time. About 45% of the users were actively participating on social media, by writing on micro-blogs platforms, the most popular being Sina Weibo, released in 2009 (Qin, Strömberg & Wu, 2017).

The Office of the Central Leading Group for Cyberspace Affairs was established in 2014 to regulate all telecommunication and Internet connection. When Xi Jinping started his second presidential term, he merged both sectors into a singular Central Cyberspace Affairs Commissions. In 2017, Beijing published the Cyber-security Law to take control, officially, over cyber-space (Wagner, 2020).

The decision to restructure the regulatory body of internet and digital concerns is due to Xi Jinping supreme leadership. It can be noticed that the Chinese president is concerned with sustaining the integrity of the Party at all costs. Therefore, social media activism is seen as a threat for the achieving of his main goal, as the growth of the 2019 Hong Kong movement has shown holes in the state control apparatus (Leiras, 2020). Is understood by Shirky (2011) that

[a]s the communications landscape gets denser, more complex, and more participatory, the networked population is gaining greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action. (Shirky, 2011, p. 86)

Since the Chinese government holds the first place in the aspect of censorship, it allows the use of media for its own advantage. Having the activists communicating about the next step in message apps, the Party is able to anticipate anti-government riots and control its proportion (Jost et al., 2018). The encrypted apps, such as WhatsApp and Telegram, have held an important role in enabling the communication between activists to coordinate the movement encounters (Bell & Jakhar, 2019).

Particularly to the autocratic regimes, the media tools provide the government a lot of information on the behaviour of users, used to monitor citizens' performances on local level politics. The CPC use the monitoring of discontentment of its citizens not only to understand the effectiveness of its institutional apparatus, but, most importantly, to anticipate any signs of political unrest (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020). The 2017 Cyber Security Law states that the Chinese society should denounce suspicious situations in cyber-space via network operators (Cyber-security Law of the People's Republic of China, 2017, p.14, *apud*, New America, 2018). In this direction, the Chinese state aims to get help from the public in its control in cyberspace.

Beijing tries to control the Internet in general and the media flow in particular with both official measures, for instance the Cyber-security Law and technological measures, by controlling applications and activating the Great Firewall. Additionally, Chinese companies, such as ZTE, Lenovo, Huawei, and Datang Mobile, support the Chinese government with technology (Gierow, 2015: 2).

The Chinese government and the Chinese industry cooperate closely in targeting the academia, the industry, and the foreign government in order to accumulate espionage and technological secrets (Kaska, Minárik & Beckvard, 2019, p. 10). Chinese government is

getting prepared by increasing control against possible threats on the media. However, Hong Kong is not a place like mainland China, where control mechanisms surrounds the media. The next section will examine in detail the impact the media have in Hong Kong.

4. Impact of media on Hong Kong protests

The open space provided by mass media and social media appeals to individuals that face repression and censorship imposed by authoritarian regimes. The case of the riots in Hong Kong is a different movement if compared to democracies with proper universal suffrage. Since the SAR is an autocracy, political change cannot be perceived by vote and mass mobilisation has to occur to reclaim change (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020). In this section, firstly, it highlights how the Hong Kong protests were announced through the international mass media and, then, how it gained momentum with the effect of social media.

In a study of social movements, newspaper records are a most common way (Rohlinger & Earl, 2018, p. 3). News portals convey current issues to people instantly. For this reason, news portals are among the referenced sources to understand the dynamics of the time when social movements are experienced. Within this scope, news about the Hong Kong protests on various news portals were examined and evaluated.

During an interview, for the CNBC News (2019), about the protests, a senior communication management professor at the Singapore Management University, Tracy Loh, stresses that social media has had a crucial and more apparent role during the protest if compared to other movements that occurred in the SAR.

A more usual comparison is made with the 2014 Umbrella Movement, in which there is a vast content of research analysing the role of social media on the spread and participation growth. However, according to Loh, the difference between the role of the media in 2019 consisted of using it as a convincing mechanism to build a narrative of trust and influence over people. According to her, either the government or the protesters use the new media as a way to expose their perspectives. On one side, it has shown aggressive behaviour of the riots, and, on the other, one has seen police brutality (CNBC News, 2019).

The Hong Kong protests reflected in the news of many media organisations in various ways. BBC News has made and is still doing news to tell the international community what has happened since the protests in Hong Kong began. In 2019, “The Hong Kong protests

explained in 100 and 500 words” (BBC News, 2019a) and in 2020 “Why are there protests in Hong Kong? All the context you need” (Cheung & Hughes, 2020) news conveyed the details of the protests.

Due to the support of an international press, the protesters’ views on the correctness of the principles they defend and the guilt of rulers, such as Carrie Lam, who resisted them, are reinforced. Of course, getting the support of the international press or the community does not make a definitive decision as to whether a movement is justified. However, if a movement is supported by someone, it will be a factor that strengthens its faith even more. So, Lam has worked overtime to scrub any debate about the Extradition Bill and the protests on the Internet and social media (Ide & Huang, 2019).

The power of information is a threat to the CPC, because the flow of information in Hong Kong lacks mechanisms, such as the Social Credit System, the Great Firewall and the Cyber-security Law, that is state-controlled. The free movement of information indicates the existence of all kinds of different opinions. Social media is a tool of information in a country that has few alternative sources not government related. This directly affects the behaviour of politicians, in this case, Lam (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020).

To illustrate the political moves following the protest, it is important to analyse the media coverage published during the protests. As an example, there is the title “Hong Kong’s Carrie Lam abandons speech after protests”, published on 16 November 2019 (BBC News, 2019b), mentioning that opposition law-makers shouted and projected slogans to Lam, during her speech at Legco. According to another newspaper, on 19 November 2019, “Hong Kong protests: A city’s identity crisis”, the violence between police and protesters and between Hong Kongers and main-landers is increasing (BBC News, 2019c).

Regarding the title, “Hong Kong kicks off 2020 with fresh protests”, published on the first day of 2020, millions of people joined the pro-democracy march (BBC News, 2020). In line with the article, distrust towards Carrie Lam continues in Hong Kong. Lam, disturbed by the continuation of the massive protests in Hong Kong, expressed ‘deep sorrow’ (BBC News, 2019d).

These and similar statements made by Lam in order to soften the protests are unfortunately not seen as convincing people and therefore protests are not stopped after Lam’s speech. Because of Lam’s close ties with Beijing, it does not seem that she will shed her

image of an unreliable leader. When Xi Jinping declared “high degree of confidence in Lam” (BBC News, 2019e), she lost the support of Hong Kong residents.

In this context, it is possible to say that the media plays a significant role in the reinforcement of people’s perception. Sort of the news in the media, the distrust of the people of Hong Kong towards Lam gained legitimacy.

The younger generation prefers digital platforms and digital media to steer protests (Rohlinger & Earl, 2018, p. 12). The use of social media as a tool to mobilise support during a protest is not new, but Hong Kong’s current protesters are using it in a way that demonstrates a heightened awareness and growing understanding of how to communicate effectively with the media (Stewart, 2019).

On the streets of Hong Kong, there are young people who are urban, have full democracy ambitions, and understand the Internet (Friedman, 2019). Besides, social media functioned very actively as an element of the protest during the 2019 protests.

Comparing to the Umbrella Movement, the 2019 protest has a core difference: the lack of an identified leadership. The activists have remained anonymous to avoid retaliation from the CPC and social media has been a platform to hide at the same time as it is a way to spread information and mobilise protesters.

Bennet and Segerberg (2013) stress the important role of sharing individual frames online to sustain a larger purpose of a movement. Therefore, the power of sharing pictures and videos on social media platforms has been as a way to gain not only the demonstrators' support domestically, but also internationally.

People all over the world shared the posts about the struggles of the protesters in Hong Kong. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have used the hashtag #FightForHongKong to share news, pictures, and support messages (Lijiam, 2019). In addition to it, posts were made with #StandWithHongKong hashtag against the government’s censorship of the media and international awareness increased for what happened in Hong Kong (Moveme, 2019).

Social media sharing enabled protests to be heard, but, most importantly, they showed their support for the protesters. The unity and solidarity in social media have almost illustrated that not only the people of Hong Kong, but the entire international community is opposed to the Extradition Bill and the Chinese government policy.

During the protests, thousands of people were arrested, hundreds were injured, and four died (Hollingsworth et al., 2019). These tragic events did not weaken the protesters, but strengthened them even more. A manifesto, shared on Telegram, thanked people who died in the Hong Kong protests, with the message “heroes who pay their blood and their lives” (Hollingsworth et al., 2019).

It is possible to observe that, even with proper army equipment and trained professionals to intervene, the CPC stood through the period of riots. To understand those reasons, one must realise that as easy as it is to publish and share information about the progress of protests, it is a way to show what happens inside China, where everything the government exposes is programmed and selected ahead. Perhaps, one can suppose that this was the purpose of the news coverage and social media posts, that is, to watch closely for the reaction of the authoritarian regime. The reasons why this did not happen relates to history and the present.

In the historical scope, China is not the same as it was during Tiananmen Square. The country learned that the media could cause a lot of fuzz, particularly when the CPC has shown no tolerance for free speech or any kind of anti-government demonstrations. The Party has learned to contain and disseminate the union of the community altogether.

In terms of the present and future that China is building, it has to do with t institutional reforms and political slogans of Xi Jinping, as he presented the Chinese Dream concept. The dream is to pursue the position that has always belonged to China, it means the leading role in international affairs. The relations the CPC has been building with foreign countries - close and far from home - to build the most important project of this century, the Belt and Road, are one of the main reasons not to silence Hong Kong for the last time.

If the international influence and good relations that China has been building fails because of military intervention in the SAR, this can result in billionaire losses (Mooney, 2018). China, which wants to be a responsible power in the international community and draw attention with its growth in the economy, should be more careful and understanding in such protests. Perhaps, China may tend to be cautious in its decisions and behaviours, with the concern of attracting the reaction of the international community through the media.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to understand the impact of the media on the endurance of political protests that occurred in Hong Kong, in 2019. It is an experience to understand a democratic space – cyber-space, in this case - used by individuals inside an authoritarian system to share and inform what they are witnessing in a domestic political point of view. At the same time, it is seen that media tools play an extremely active role in spreading what is happening in the globalising world.

The study and debate on non-democratic regimes are a challenge that has not appealed to most researchers on political affairs. This can be explained by the lack of verified information, since the government notifies official data one can collect about politics. Nonetheless, the media worldwide repercussions of the 2019 protests cannot be left aside. It is an important matter for the debate of the media role for setting the political agenda.

The main reason for that is the crucial role that China and Hong Kong as a SAR has been playing on the international political affairs scope. China, as the second largest economy in the world cannot be ignored, and, now more than ever, it is in need to understand domestic affairs and how they affect international trade.

When authoritarian rule fails to supervise every piece of information that has been said and posted on the internet, it uses the prohibition as a powerful tool for information control. The repression of news headed by the CPC is sophisticated and the political culture of China has never experienced democracy as a regime, as did Hong Kong during a considered period.

Even though the authoritarian rule of the Party is an unquestionable status, the protesters caught the media attention and made an online riot which repercussions cannot be denied, since the protests became a big concern of the international political media agenda. From one side of the discussion, the impact of the protests can mean the initial stage of ideological cracks that leads to the collapse of the Party. On the other hand, according to History (2020), with the Tiananmen Square Massacre, the CPC is not fragile and has learned a lot from its past.

Mass media and social media have played an important part during the Hong Kong events for several reasons. Firstly, it has a big impact on the massification of information and coverage on day-to-day events. Secondly, it is a facilitator on the aspect to involve and invite more people to join the movement. Thirdly, particularly in the case of social media, message

encrypted apps provide an important space for Hong Kong movement in specific as it provides an open space to debate political views that differ and disagree with the government.

Additionally, social media platforms facilitate the communication between heads of movements and the rest of activists. This is a unique feature for the frame of this particular regime, since it is not the same as similar movements, such as the independence movement of Catalonia, in Spain, or Scotland, in the United Kingdom. Differently from both examples, Hong Kong citizens have partial freedom of speech since massively censored by the CPC.

There is a large variety of research on how communication and media impact political outcomes. Politics and media have a deep interaction and the authors conclude that the bond between them is even stronger with new technology. For future research, it can be important to understand more deeply the propaganda discourse of the CPC, for what concerns China and Hong Kong relations, and what is set for the fusion between the two in the near future.

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