The emerge of a 2-dimensional global society
The exploitation of the social media, herd behaviour, moral panics and the 5th estate

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Abstract

We live in a 2-dimensional global society divided between the physical world and the virtual world both representing the social reality but constructed into different norms and standards, that each defines the contemporary post-modern information society that we all globally have become a part of. This thesis gives an abstract overview of the significant determination of the virtual world implying different perspectives on everything from micro to macro, from social to political, from mental to biological with the intention of broadening the attention on sudden societal transformation as a function of rapid technological processes. Excluding the virtual world when analysing the behaviour of individuals in all global societies increases the possibility of research bias as technology has become the society today. The new virtual world has become a more significant agent of change than the physical world and this new world should never be taken for granted. This thesis will hopefully be an inspiration, despite its abstractness, for future scientists emphasising these issues.
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1 Introduction

The prescribed title might imply connotations about the content of this thesis, however, the guideline of this thesis relates to a personal experience, that I would like to include. Being subjective in a research relates to direct consciousness, personhood or emotions and relying on subjectivity is a poisonous act towards the unwritten sociological doctrines, that every individual, from the very young student attending a sociological class in the local elementary school to the highly gifted and intellectual sociologist, who has promised to sacrifice his life in the name of science, adapt through educational institutions. I want to make clear that the use of the personal pronounces “I” and “you” do not intend to promote any kind of subjective thoughts or thinking in this thesis, on the contrary, the personal pronounces “I” and “you” are reflections of the contemporary social reality, that we, human beings, commonly share. The social reality varies as a function of time and space, but the use of the personal pronounces “I” and “you” intends to create an allusion between the writer and the reader in a more personalized perspective no matter time and space.

Hence, allow me to introduce this thesis with an “I” and with a “you”.

While reading this thesis, you are sitting in a physical room within a physical world that is constructed in such a complex way, that all-natural human senses can detect the physical surroundings by seeing, touching, smelling, tasting and hearing. But your unconscious mind provokes conscious desires of constantly switching between the physical world and the virtual world, that implies a world of algorithms and social rules closely related, but not similar, to the rules of the physical world. You might want to review your virtual profiles such as mails, Facebook notifications or Twitter posts. You might want to check your salary, your homework or even checking the latest offers on Ikea’s website. You might feel the need to create social awareness by checking the latest news nationally and internationally or even checking the latest gossips that make you feel more grateful about yourself and your humble ‘normalized’ life. You might have noticed later, while reading this thesis, that you already have committed yourself to the virtual world several times while being in the physical world. You are not the only one. So, have I.

The intention of this thesis is to create an awareness of the rapidly changing technologized society that has resulted in increased dependency on technologized products. This thesis brings you into a new virtual world that not only defines the contemporary 2-dimensional globalized society but also gives an overview of a world, where virtual socialization of individuals and mobilization of the
‘human herd’ takes place, where leaders and monopolies perform their powers creating significant socio-virtual statuses and where immediate mediated cross-border communication has become a reality. A world, that is constructed in algorithms challenging the act of freedom, that implies different social norms and ethics not being recognized in the physical world, that challenge the old social orders due to its constant drastic changes creating moral panics among some individuals and that has resulted in a reformation of the median world where the mass media is passé replaced by the social media. These factors have created a globalized risk society where countries all around the world informationally have become interdependent on each other. This thesis seeks to bring you into a world of ideas and thoughts that compromise the exact same issue: the modern virtual world. This world hides billions of ideas and thoughts, that are yet to be discovered and that will put the sociological world into a new reformation if not the incredible domination of the new virtual world is either ignored or taken for granted. This thesis discusses these matters to promote more attention on the new virtual world that act as a driving force of the contemporary post-modern information society. This thesis will focus on the emerge of the new virtual world, emphasizing on the human herd both focusing on old and new theories, the 5th estate of power and the social exploitation of the social media.
2 The emerge of the social media

We live in a world society which through rapid technological processes has merged into a global village; a term that was first mentioned by Marshall McLuhan in his book *Understanding Media* (McLuhan, 1969). McLuhan argued that the focus on the media should switch from emphasizing on its content to rather focusing on how it affects the society. The contemporary society has merged into an information society with a liquid modernity that is characterized of a chaotic continuation of modernity with drastic systematic changes that seem to go hand in hand with the ongoing technologization of products (Bauman, 2015). The social media has become such a strong determinant in the global world society that sudden anomies and drastic changes among all transnational societies in many ways can be linked to the role of the social media, that is formed in a new virtual world beside the physical world dominating everything from the political agendas to the very specific lifestyle of an individual based on food consumption and physical activity. The global village has shrunk to a distance that metaphorically can be compared with the distance between people and their neighbours, as one can communicate with others by simply applying some movements on their fingers on e.g. a smartphone as individuals would walk few steps to their neighbours knocking on their door to ask for a bowl of sugar.

3 The Web 2.0

United States Federal Government constructed the ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network) in the 1960s, which was only available for scientific and military purposes and would later evolve into what we know today as the internet. The internet was developed from the ARPANET and became available for the public in the mid-1990s, where the World Wide Web was constructed into graphical interfaces having services like emails that attracted more audience and commerce to the World Wide Web. Since the release of Internet Explorer in 1995 developed by Microsoft, the release of Google in 1998, Wikipedia in 2001, Facebook, YouTube and Myspace in the mid-2000s, the amount of information that was available in these new virtual platforms continued to grow rapidly beside the large number of Internet users worldwide (Cottrell and Chayko, 2003). The development of the Web 2.0 has resulted in a new evolution of media technologies that compromise the same opportunities as those in the physical world but provide
with more flexibility and less limitations making it possible to conduct a task without effort (Alejandro, 2010). The emerging of the social media has created a new generation of youth that from the very early childhood learn how to cope with technology. Some children learn to cope with technology before learning oral communication skills from the very first time their parents decide to hand them out a computer or a tablet to make their children keep quite so they themselves can relax in front of the TV after a very long working day. Some websites do provide with cartoons or even talk-shows for children that, without any boundaries, can be found in different virtual platforms such as YouTube or MetaCafé just by conducting few clicks that the children learn from the observation of their spouses, siblings, friends, teachers and pedagogues. This accessibility of information and communication has made it more convenient for individuals to dig into the virtual world when requesting for something particular, as the virtual world implies information about almost every single thing that exist in the physical world and even beyond that. The internet presents a world that is populated by billions of people exposed to limitless information that are constantly shared by individuals creating a new era where individuals escape the mechanism of the physical world and desperately use the virtual world due to its almost endless possibilities, accessibilities; limitlessness and effortlessness (Boyd, 2015). The incredible domination of the virtual world in the lives among billions of individuals living in the contemporary globalized world society has reached a level, that when some individuals have no accessibility to things like the social media, they can be labelled as ‘not being connected with the world or being very isolated’ (Boyd, 2015, p. 5). In 2016, there were around 2.28 billion social media users according to The Statistical Portal that cooperates with the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) and the American Association of Advertising Agencies, Mashable.com, Business Insider, Wall Street Journal, The Independent and Forbes. The increased domination of technology has caused what some scientists call technological determinism; a term that is believed to have originated from the American economist and sociologist, Thorstein Veblen (1857 – 1929) (Mitcham, 2005). Technological determination is often referred as the idea of technology governing the forces of society, with technology directly controlling social changes (Bimber, 1990) and therefore history (Williams, 2003), that society relies on the technological advancement of being the new problem solvers resulting in constant technological processes that seems to be impossible to stop as soon the individuals feel attached to it (Green, 2002).
4 The social media – differentiating our way of being

The way we are interacting on social media sometimes refer to our real selves, as there are almost no filters in the internet telling us how to act. In the virtual world, you might create an anonymous profile and debate in several forums mentioning things you would not mention in the physical world due to the indoctrinated social norms that limits your behaviour. Or you might feel more comfortable to express things in the social media which you would not be able to express in the physical sphere due to the more personalized conversations you have with individuals that include facial and bodily expressions. When individuals create their own virtual profiles in games such as World of Warcraft or Counter Strike, cursing and threats become a normality as individuals feel safe expressing themselves behind the screen without the thought of putting themselves in danger. Individuals act differently according to the social situation.

When individuals have a conversation with people, whom they have close ties with, embarrassment and violation of the indoctrinated norms appear when the individual does not limit his or her ‘real way of being’. As the Canadian-American sociologist and writer, Erving Goffman, beautifully explained in his book The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life published in 1959, the individual acts differently according to different social situations. Goffman uses his metaphoric expression to explain human behaviour and interaction in which he presents a new sociological perspective called dramaturgical sociology as the human interaction and communication can be reflected with the way individuals are communicating on the stage in front of an audience and behind the stage being in his own personal sphere without having anyone around him, in which he can be himself. The dramaturgical perspective emphasizes the way some individual acts according to settings and contexts, that shape the performance, the role that the individual is given (such as job positions or being a student), and how the individual’s manners shape the interaction, whether they do shape the interaction and how they influence the whole performance. The individual would not be his totally self in the front stage due to the expectations that the audience have that the individual is somehow indirectly forced to follow as an act of rational choice. But in the back-stage the individual is alone and can be his personal self as there are no social norms, expectations nor any facial or bodily expressions that limit your way of behaving (Goffman, 1973). In 1963 Goffman published another book called Stigma where he describes that some social spheres do exist where individuals, despite being within the social sphere, can expect more confidence in acting in his own
way. Goffman explains that “there are places where he can expect with some confidence not to ‘bump into’ anyone who knows him personally and where (...) he can expect to remain anonymous (...) he is known personally will vary of course with the circumstances especially with the question of whom he is ‘with’” (Goffman, 1963, p. 83). Goffman’s argumentation fits very well in the explanation of how some individuals behave by being anonymous or by appearing in a socio-virtual situation with an unknown audience where the individuals can act by almost merely being themselves, as they know that their act will not hurt them.

Lawrence Lessig, an American political activist and a professor of law at Harvard Law School, predicted in his book that was published in the year of 2000 that the internet would become some kind of an apparatus that would be able to track our every move while erasing important aspects of privacy and free speech in our social and political lives (Lessig, 2000) (Holmes, 2016). Lawrence argued, that the cyberspace has left to itself and will in the future become a perfect tool of control. Rachel Holmes, an English author of poetry and fiction, argued in an article published in The Guardian’s webpage in 2016 that the internet was created by the human being and now has become beyond the control of the majority. Holmes’s bases her concern on the fact that the constant dependency on technology and the virtual world distracts us from our self-awareness giving the opportunity for virtual monopolies to control the way of thinking through the total control of the content, that we experience in the virtual world. When Donald Trump tweets at 3 am, as Holmes argues, the mainstream media will repeat it the next day and the whole global village will emphasize on Trump’s tweet regardless of the many serious issues that happen all around the world, as Trump is a very powerful monopoly in the virtual world (Holmes, 2016).

5 Social media mobilization and strong societal determination

The mobilization of individuals in the social media can have a strong effect on the society, as mobilization has never before become so easy thanks to the globalized social media. The incredible influential role of the social media in the society seems to be evident, as the individual spend more time on the social media than anything else in the physical sphere (Alejandro, 2010). In October 2008 a citizen journalist from CNN reported that Steve Jobs, the former CEO for Apple, was hospitalized after a severe heart attack which was posted in iReport, stating: “Jobs was rushed to the ER just a
few hours ago after suffering a major heart attack”. The story immediately spread out through the social media, but the story turned out to be false (Hargraves, 2008). CNN immediately deleted the post from iReport, but the false story already had a huge impact on the financial market, as the Apple Stock, which at that time opened a US$104 a share, fell by 9% with a US$94.65 a share before rebounding (Hargraves, 2008). Examples like these are just a few to mention among the many billions of fake news that appear in the social media and that have a very influential effect on the world society. As Ulrich Bech beautifully predicted in his post-modern ideas about the risk society, the world societies have become more informationally dependent on each other through the internet while mediated cross-border communication and transnational media events, all appearing in the social media, strongly effect the everyday-life among individuals (Alejandro, 2010). Professor William H. Dutton, previously founding director of the Oxford Internet Institute at the University of Oxford, argues that the strong determining role of the social media has become a 5th Estate, which interestingly is a separation from the mass media that by many scientists has been referred as being the 4th Estate (Dutton, 2009).

A Canadian 15 years old Amanda Todd posted in September 2012 a 9-minute video on YouTube that was entitled: My Story: Struggling, Bullying, Suicide, Self-Harm in which she used some handwritten note cards to describe how she was blackmailed and sexually harassed by an anonymous individual in the social media while being bullied by classmates. A month after the video was posted, Todd committed suicide and her video spread throughout the social media all around the world representing an example of what consequences like bullying and tormenting other individuals can cause (Boyd, 2015). For the majority who spend time on the social media every day, it cannot be denied that the social media and the information that constantly circulates through different virtual platforms shape the way individuals are thinking, as the internet has become our information provider constructing the post-modern information society, that we are living in which has become the driving force of the globalized village.

6 My travel into the virtual world

6.1 Becoming a part of the virtual society
It was not for so long time ago that I decided to open my own Twitter-account through an advice from a friend; an advice that later would emerge into an eagerness. As the human mind is created into different emotions and identities, it should not be a secret that I, being both extrovert and
socially attached to other people, felt myself excluded from a whole new social dimension that consists of millions of expressions, thoughts and most importantly, information. I got myself a Twitter-account. My enthusiasm was a result of the un-written social norms that perform as a landmark of the consensus of the society but at the same time pushes you into different social stages, which might not necessarily be controlled by ‘your own free will’. The sentence ‘everybody does it’ is recognized as a way of expressing the common act of the ‘herd’ that is deemed to be followed to survive in a society, socially as well as mentally. We are simply following the herd to conduct the best possible rational choice depending on our own ego, which, both consciously and unconsciously, determines our acts into the best profitable way.

Adapting myself into the Twitter-world was as challenging as finding myself in a whole new job environment with strangers, who are fully aware of the social codes and responsibilities that represent the job, everything from clothing to way of talking, and whom you can only learn from by observing their way of acting within the job environment. I realized a whole new world where most individuals ‘appear’ to share information with each other but rather ‘intend’ to create as broad network as possible by gaining followers so their voices can be heard. Sometimes I received messages where people were asking me to follow them or sharing their posts. It is a competition of being the one who controls the information, whose voices are constantly heard and who can bring forward ground-breaking information, either opposing common societal values or rapidly response to sudden societal changes. I saw a whole new world constructed into significant socio-virtual statuses that appear as significant as Karl Marx’s perspective on social classes. From my own observation, I saw following: we have the silent ones, who only appear to be those who observe and ‘retweet’. These are the ones who do have points of views and perspectives but only act as neutral social factors being afraid of expressing themselves, who merely follow the flock and only response to higher social orders. These will rarely reach higher socio-virtual statuses but still survive by following the flock. We have those who have been labelled as deviant, who have very strong points of view and who constantly, through virtual collective oppose normalized social values, oppose injustice dominance and appear to be prominent in the virtual sphere. This collectivism creates a sub-group of people, who justify their deviant behaviour, such as establishing new kind of social norms that act as an opposition towards the majority. These are the ones who aim to succeed in establishing new societal changes, in which their deviant acts, if successful, go through a normalization process through collective practice as they emerge from being a minority to a possible majority. We have those who rather decide to stay away from social and political debates and, even with personal opinions and
thoughts, decide not to interact with them in order to prevent any oppositions against them. They share posts that can be appreciated by every kind of individual, such as motivational thoughts, nature photography or pictures of their families and pets. They can reach a very high status without much struggle through their inspirational, balanced or spiritual shares that do not oppose anyone. We have those who use the virtual world by proclaiming themselves, their political, ideological or religious point of view, their companies, movements or associations or their personal identities in a commercialized way. They will do anything to reach a higher social status to determine the information in the virtual sphere, to be the centre of the sphere and to be able to proclaim their ideas and interests. As many virtual platforms are commercialized such as Facebook and Twitter, it is possible to gain followers and likes simply by investing in your own profile or page. Some leaders and monopolies have gained millions of followers through payment. Having millions of followers gives the opportunity of socially exploiting the followers, controlling information while influencing and dominating the global society through the globalized social media. This significant gap between statuses in the virtual world is as serious as Karl Marx’s emphasis on social classes during the industrialization of the Western societies. We will emphasize these issues later on in this thesis.

6.2 Discovering the Twitter-sphere

As I was exploring what I call the Twitter-sphere I adapted some strategies and techniques to gain more followers. I recognized that my rapid responses to sudden happenings in society such as scandals, nature catastrophes, trends or sport events were the key-elements for gaining more followers without paying and therefore reach a higher socio-virtual status within the Twitter-sphere. During the boxing-fight between the undefeated eleven-time five-division boxing world champion Floyd Mayweather Jr. and the two-division mixed martial arts (MMA) world champion and at-the-time current UFC Lightweight Champion Conor McGregor, also called “The Biggest Fight in Combat Sport History” and “The Money Fight”, I was awake the whole night preparing my tripod and camera to record the fight and got access to the fight live on the internet; an access that normally would have costed 100$. I therefore knew that not many people had access to the fight, which made me more comfortable of succeeding in this new strategy that I carefully organized. My intention was to test whether the rapid-response method actually helped me gaining more followers. I decided to conduct a live-stream of the fight over Periscope; a live video streaming app acquired by Twitter, by recording my own computer screen. As I streamed the fight, I got over 700 people watching my
live-stream at the same time and the number kept increasing. I felt insecure about this method as I was afraid whether I was committing something illegal and immediately shot down the live-stream. I went for plan B: highlights. I began conducting some short clips of the fight uploading it on Twitter which appeared around 15 seconds later than the actual fight. I realized that my Twitter name “@Muhammediceland” was highlighted on the top of the hashtags #FloydMayweather and #ConorMcGregor. I managed to get almost 2000 followers in 40 minutes and as I was searching my name on Google, I could see that different broadcasting companies were retweeting my clips on their own webpages to keep their own followers updated without even reviewing whether my posts were reliable or not. The media broadcasts were acting upon speed and immediacy based on audience reach rather than accuracy. It seemed like those reaching highest in the twitter-sphere hierarchy were those most responsive and innovative.

6.3 A moment of frame of fame

I decided to conduct another test: emotions. After a longer period of investigating Twitter- and Facebook profiles who have at least 500,000 followers, several of them seemed to have one thing in common: a moment of frame of fame. By looking at their previous posts focusing on their Facebook or Twitter time-line it became clear that the “likes” on each picture appeared to increase drastically after one specific moment of share that put them under the spot-light. These shares are commonly related to something that can be recognized by the major population, which could be a picture of a household debt appearing to be unfairly high, a picture of a student being bullied by a group of students, a video of a person rescuing a dog being found under a manhole cover, a picture of a mom and her baby sitting under heavy rain on the streets begging for money unnoticed by people passing them by, a video of a Chinese student committing suicide by jumping out of a window in front of other classmates when receiving the exam questions, a video of an American man who visits a lunar park not being able to try any of the rides due to his height being above 2.10 meters, a video of a black man explaining how he experience technological discrimination when computers or games did not recognize his face because of his skin colour, etc. Not only do these posts have an impact on people but people can personally relate to these posts. The one who has shared the post often provides a detailed explanation of his/her experiences and the story behind it, which acts as a magnet for news broadcasts. The speed and immediacy of the media can easily transform a simple share from a personal profile into a new social trend, where the awareness of the post spreads through a chain-reaction of shares and likes both nationally and internationally. These posts appear as first-hand information rapidly being spread around in the social media as second hand, third hand, fourth hand,
and so on, information. The name of the one who posted it is often tagged in each news to prevent any accusations of copyright infringement which makes it easy for the audience to reach the one who acted as a first-hand informer. A moment of frame of fame that becomes a reality made fame. A moment that is absolutely beyond the control of the one whose post has gotten viral. With these observations, I carefully planned the best possible way of catching peoples’ attention through an extra-ordinary post that highly implies emotional associations while being personally related to the vast majority of users within the Twitter-sphere.

6.4 Emotional sharing: a big mistake
The 17th of August 2017 Hurricane Harvey formed in the Caribbean Sea and evolved into a dangerous category 4 major hurricane heading towards Houston, Texas; an area that easily gets affected by heavy rainfall, storm surges and wind as the city is situated in an area that is elevating below sea level. When the strongest wind field reached Houston area, the biggest fears beside the extreme wind were storm surges and rising lakes and rivers. Both Houston Lake, Sheldon Lake, Lake Houston, Burnet Bay, Bear Lake, Buffalo Bayou, Sims Bayou, Greens Bayou, Brays Bayour, Galveston Bay and Trinity Bay, situated in and around Houston, were at risk of rising, causing even more significant flooding in the city. This was the moment when I saw an opportunity to conduct my test by publishing an emotional picture that could be personally related to people in the social media following this disaster. I searched on Google-pictures under the title: “Houston disaster” and saw an incredibly emotional picture of a black man walking in a flooded neighbourhood with the water reaching his stomach while dragging a refrigerator floating on water having his wife and his kid sitting in it. Words like Flooding, family, disaster, mother, kids, bravery, black, Houston etc. came into my mind when seeing this picture. I uploaded the picture on Twitter with the trending hashtags #houstonflood, #houstonflooding and #HurricaneHarvey while observing the number of people interacting with this picture. The next morning, when I woke up I saw that more than 100,000 people have interacted with the picture; a number that would increase to over 200,000 few hours later. Everything from celebrities to big news broadcasts began retweeting my tweet and I became anxious not knowing what to do nor how to react. I received many comments from people from all around the world and over 2000 people retweeted my tweet that literally was flowing around the social media beyond my control. I received personal messages from huge companies asking whether they could have the permission to use my tweet. I had absolutely no control other than just letting the
picture flow around in the Twitter-sphere. Nothing was in my control anymore. I could only sit there and watch while the number of people interacting with my tweet keep rolling like a money machine.

But there was a problem. I noticed that few of the comments argued that the post was from the last year flooding in Houston and was not related to flooding caused by Hurricane Harvey. But a feeling of fame and power began spreading throughout my body. A feeling of being able to control information and being the head of the herd was too strong and desirable, that I was able to conduct an indirect lie justifying my act by whispering to myself: “well, I have never mentioned that my post is from this year disaster. It is up to the users to believe it or to be critical”. I lied in front of over 1.000.000 people from all around the world. I knew that my act was wrong but being the centre of the flock was absolutely mesmerizing. I never lie, as lying is an act of misleading someone to falsified information that can ruin generations, as words go from mouth to mouth and easily can make a lie even more distorted. But this time I did. My surroundings say I did not, my family and my friends said that I did not, but the feeling of guilt told me that I did. I always asked myself how leaders can use power and punishment to maintain the status of being the leader of the flock, but it seems like every kind of human being has ‘a dark side’ that easily can get provoked, when the unconscious and egocentric mind see an opportunity to take a huge step higher in the hierarchy in the name of pleasure and survival. My lie brought its consequences. In the afternoon same day, I began searching my name on Google and it appeared everywhere. Washington Post wrote a title in their website saying: “No, the shark picture isn’t real: A running list of Harvey’s viral hoaxes” with my tweet attached on the article:

Source: https://conservativetribune.com/jaw-dropping-hurricane-harvey/
as well as AJ+, which is an online news channel run by Al Jazeera Media Network posting a video about Debunking Hurricane Harvey Myths:

A video that has been watched by 766.000 Facebook users. Interestingly, AJ+ did not quote my name as I managed to delete my Tweet immediately after seeing the article written by Washington Post. In the corner of the picture it is clear that KHOU; an American television station licensed to Houston, Texas, got victimized by this picture as they reported it in their own website. Several other Twitter-users, who retweeted my tweet, got victimized too. Steve Silberman, a well-known American writer, was one of them. I do remember that he retweeted my post and later made his own tweet by tagging KHOU.
Silberman’s post was screenshotted by BuzzFeed and his profile picture and name flourished all around the global media. I sent him a mail to apologize:
7 Freedom of Speech?

So, what about the freedom of speech? Is the media world really under the control of the majority? The word *freedom* is relative; a social constructed word that differ as a function of time and space. It is a fallacy to argue that we are living in a society (mainly emphasizing on the Western societies) with total freedom. We have never been able to act independently as we are strongly tied to external societal factors that sometimes force us into situations beyond our control, like sharing incredibly inspirational posts in the social media and later being punished for it. We create inner peace and consensus by implementing personal balances between societal expectations and personal needs. We do not ‘act’ the way we want and the way we think as we carefully observe our social surroundings to determine our next acts, so they do not oppose social norms and expectations from those who observe us. We do sometimes commit risks through extra-ordinary acts that both can push us high in the social order and allow us to take a step towards the pure sense of freedom or label us in never-lasting social roles that limit our freedom even more. The social media is not merely *a splendid specimen* of total freedom but can be an argument towards it. Our freedom has been taken away from the very first time we enter the virtual world when we are required to provide with personal information, willing or not, to create own virtual profile. Our virtual profile is under constant monitor and is dependent on monopolies and authorities that act as decision-makers in all virtual dimensions. The virtual world is compromised and constructed through algorithms that carefully transform us into different kind of virtual spheres, control the content that we see while recommending us to try new kind of virtual platforms. The microscopic minority that has managed to reach a significantly high socio-virtual status has gained the ability to move around an enormous group of people that are forced to follow the flow of information committed by those microscopic powerful ones. We are both consciously and unconsciously following the human caravan as we are a part of a human herd, that is controlled by leaders moving us around like bricks on a pallet and no matter how independent we call ourselves, total independency can never be reached when living on a blue planet shared by over 6 billion people. So, to say, my personal imaginary ideas and thoughts will be no value without credibility.
8 The human herd

Intelligence and rationality distinguish the human being from other beings such as animals and plants but as our bodily desires rely first and foremost on survival, we are all dependent or interdependent with a flock. The famous slogan ‘survival of the fittest’ that was first formulated by Herbert Spencer as a reaction of Charles Darwin’s book *On the Origin of Species*, in his *Principles of Biology* (1864) is commonly used as a reflection of an individual opposing the world and its strains and challenges, and constantly aims to reach the top of the hierarchy by being the one most responsive to changes that occur in the society. Our stimulus is a reaction of an observed occurrence or happening in the social sphere as the socially constructed definition of ‘survival’ in metaphorical terms would not exist without social complexity. One might not merely agree on Darwin and Darwinism which implies biological conceptualizations of human existence, however, as one would not throw out a bag filled with 19 pieces of coal and 1 piece of gold, a total denial of Darwin’s theory and Darwinism would equally be an act of stupidity.

The British economist and the father of liberalism, Adam Smith, mentioned in his book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) that “as people imagine themselves in another’s situation, they display motor mimicry” (Smith, 1971, p. 4). Adam Smith referred this common pattern in human behaviour merely as an act of self-interest based on rational choice. All earthly living creatures are strongly dependent on each other and an extinction of a living specie will go beyond everything from animals to plants including the intellectual human being as they together form a biological cycle. Animals seek a herd in order to reduce their predation risk by placing other conspecifics between themselves and the predators (Hamilton, 1971). This might not be a precise reflection of human herding behaviour; however, the concept of survival, security and best possible outcome rely on the same behaviour patterns that are only differentiated between animal instincts and human intellectuality. The social cycles that are only recognizable among the intellectual human being is strongly dependent on socialization. The human being is from the very first moment he opens his eyes of the geometrical world not able to act upon rationality as rationality is an act of selfish behaviour that cannot be recognized by an infant without learning the social complexity around them.

Max Weber defines rational actions in his book *Economy and Society* (originally published in 1922) as being purposeful and calculated as a response to the expectations about the behaviour of objects in the environment, being based on ethical, religious or aesthetic motives, being based on feelings and emotions or being an act upon the invisible indoctrinated social norms; all implying social
complexity (Weber, Roth and Wittich, 1968). The social environment within a social complexity is a strong determinant of human socialization. Individuals form their identity and behavioural patterns through the socialization processes that begin early in the childhood, when the infant becomes a child and when the child begins imitating their parents’ bodily and vocal behaviour (Jung and Hull, 1991). The socialization process is crucial for the individual to create an awareness of social groups within the framework of the society that fits the individual’s self-socialized identity best. In contemporary global societies, different social groups will always appear, as collective behaviour not only is a social phenomenon but is as well a core-element of survival among all living beings. Our rationalized selves become restless searchers and constantly try to fit into a larger group that appears until the best and most self-recognized and self-reflected group become visible. Collective behaviour has never been easy to explain as it is strongly dependent on social processes and the social reality that constantly change as a function of time and space. Collective behaviour can emerge into herd behaviour when groups of people begin following the leader(s) of the herd and become unaware of self-desired thoughts and feelings as the individual experience total attachment with the herd.

8.1 Gustave Le Bon and Sigmund Freud’s perspective on the human herd
In the book The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions Thorstein Veblen described herd behaviour as being a result of individuals comparing their own conditions with similar people, who are slightly better, a theory, which is similar to Adam Smith’s theory, as they both see human behaviour in term of economy and social classes (Veblen, 2010). Gustave Le Bon wrote the book The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind (originally from 1896) in which he argues that a herd is formed when the ideas and sentiments of the person becomes one with the herd. The individual’s consciousness and personality vanish as a collective mind is formed as one presenting very clearly defined characteristics (Le Bon, 2001, p. 13). The crowd becomes homogenous as the individuals within the crowd turn their feelings and thoughts into the same definite direction. Compared to previous perceptions of human behaviour and human herd, Le Bon’s book, despite focusing mostly on males, as females where rarely active collectively during that time, was a ground-breaking fundament of describing human herd from a whole new perspective mainly from a psychological point of view. But as Le Bon also argues, describing the mind of crowds is very difficult as its organization is constantly under change and varies as a function of race and composition, nature and intensity, time and space (Le Bon, 2001, p. 14). Le Bon’s argumentations can be defined as indirect subjectivity as collective behaviour and human herds are determined from his point of view by an extra ordinary, sometimes extreme, mindset that intend to directly
influence an ‘isolated individual’ to become a part of the many illogical and utopic images that flourish throughout the herd. The modes of persuasions are important tools for the head of the herd to directly influence the flock by appealing to the audience both emotionally, logically, ethically, rationally and metaphorically constructing some visions and images that often oppose normality and that often transform utopic images into something meaningful. Le Bon says that these ideas and suggestions “enter the brain and tend to transform the suggested ideas into acts which are the principal characteristics of the individual forming part of a crowd” (Le Bon, 2001, p. 19). When individuals become a part of the human herd or the crowd, as sometimes referred by Le Bon, all rational and logical senses become disintegrated and the individual becomes one with the mindset of the herd; a process of hypnotization and brainwashing, that is determined by the head of the herd and directly influences those who have become a part of it. As Le Bon argues: “Here, as always, we have the power of the hypnotizer over the hypnotized. Moreover, when this power is seen in action on minds of a superior order and previously invited to be suspicious, it is understandable how easy it is to deceive ordinary crowds” (Le Bon, 2001, p. 26).

As his arguments might appear as a reflection of his own subjective thoughts, which indeed it is, a denial of his explanations of this kind of social phenomena would have been a destruction of the many crucial theories in the contemporary sociological world that emerged from Le Bon’s ideas. It is easy to recognize some of Le Bon’s arguments about human hypnotization despite being a man who wrote his theories for over 100 years ago when conducting a comparative analysis of the contemporary Western society where leaders mainly rely on words, images and ideas to ensure the trust and the support of the herd. But Le Bon fails to include any reasoning of this common human behaviour as his arguments are not based on any universal explanations such as biological factors or historical comparatives. This critique is not intended to totally debunk Le Bon’s ideas and argumentations as Le Bon present some of the most crucial and relative ideas that still seems visible in the Western societies today, but as Sigmund Freud also writes in his book, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego:

“If the individuals in the group are combined into a unity (as mentioned by Le Bon), there must surely be something to unite them (…). But Le Bon does not answer this question; he goes on consider the alteration which the individual undergoes when in a group and describes it in terms which harmonize well with the fundamental postulates of our own depth-psychology” (Freud, 1949, p. 76).
Sigmund Freud argues that Le Bon’s description of the unification of individuals, what Le Bon normally refers as the *crowd*, must be explained from a psychological perspective. Freud continues:

“It is easy to prove how much the individual forming part of group differs from the isolated individual, (referring to Le Bon’s explanation of an isolated individual becoming a part of a group) but it is less easy to discover the causes of this difference” (Freud, 1949, p. 76).

Freud does not directly intend to oppose Le Bon, but his critical point of view is an attempt to legitimate his own ideas that are referred in a more biological and socio-psychological aspect. The intimate emotional relation between people that last for some time such as the relationship between children and their parents, the relationship with a spouse or the relationship with other individuals in the social environment such as friends, classmates or neighbours, reflect on common universal human patterns that emerge as a result of our social attachment with our mothers that purely reflect on our biological instincts in the name of survival (Freud, 1949). When the human being experiences lack of independency, weakness of intellectual ability, the incapacity for moderation and delay, the lack of emotional restraint and the inclination to exceed every limit in the expression of emotion, (Freud, 1949, p. 116) the human being seek a way to find comfort and to share own thoughts and feelings with other people whom they can personally recognize. The herd instinct, as Freud mentions, is a result of a reunion of emotions that emerge into acts from our unconscious mind becoming one with a group as the individual seek the group the same way the individual would seek their mother to find solace and consolation. Certain ideas and feeling cannot be transformed into acts except in cases of individuals forming a group (Freud, 1949, p. 76). A group is not necessarily homogenous, as Le Bon would say, but the functionality of a certain group can be described as organic, since the psychological group is formed through heterogeneous elements that are combined into one whole body like the many organs and cells that each have different functionalities but commonly emphasize on keeping the body alive. The collective herd behaviour is not necessarily a reflection of visible thoughts and feelings that can be analysed and measured but can be determined by external secret causes that have gone through generations after generations forming a group in the social reality. These secret causes are formed by other secret causes through the millions of branches between generations that become one with our socialization process resulting in the way we are behaving in the contemporary social reality. These hidden motives, that cannot be seen nor observed but only assumed being a result of previous historical causalities, make it even harder to explain human herd and collective, which both Freud and Le Bon openly admit. The French sociologist and one of the architects of modern social science, Émile Durkheim, mentions in his theory of group dynamics (see Sawyer, 2002) that
individuals’ thoughts and behaviours are strongly influenced by the group that they belong to, which could be a community or a society as a whole, and like-wise each individuals’ behaviour influences how the group as a whole thinks, acts and behaves (Sawyer, 2002). This is a theory that might oppose some of Le Bon’s argumentations as he, Le Bon, from a more socio-psychological perspective refers the members of a mobilized herd as a ‘hypnotized’ flock that have their personal opinions diminished only being able to follow the head of the herd. As the construction of thoughts and feelings in the society constantly differentiate as a function of time and space, the interpretation of general human behaviour can hardly be falsified due to the multitude of theories that appear, but at the same time make it impossible in constructing an absolute definition of human behaviour. That means individuals inhabit a world that is mostly socially constructed, per definition, based on the meaning of objects, behaviours and events but also in accordance to time and space, which both Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead explain in their theory of Symbolic Interactionism (Coser, 2003). These interpretations, however, vary from one group to another, which Cooley explains in his theory of “looking glass self” as human being create a self-reflection as a reflection of appraisals given by other people within what he calls a “primary group” (Coser, 2003). That also means, as mentioned by Mead, that individuals do not directly react to events, but their acts are based on how they interpreter the meaning of an event that get constructed through communicational processes denying the absolute definition of human behaviour (Coser, 2003). The way the human being behave can only be analysed through historical causalities forming the contemporary society, that we are living in and strongly dependent on that same society that individuals socialize in and where individuals discover their true ‘selves’. Chris D. Frith, Ramsay Rafaat and Nick Chater describe beautifully in a very simplified way:

“(…) In other words, people are treated as units or atoms with certain simple, well-defined properties and modes of interaction that yield herding: the focus is patterns, not people” (Rafaat, Chater and Frith, 2009, p. 422).

Human beings are the only living specie that can go beyond instincts through learning. The human being learns and forms meanings of things they have observed and experienced. The individual is dependent on other individuals’ preferences, beliefs and thoughts when determining own perspectives and way of being. The biggest bigotry and ignorance that exists on this blue planet appears when behaviour and mind-sets are referred to racial factors, opposing the most truthful reality that even the most praised scholar cannot deny; that human beings will always be the same one human being no matter their pigments, racial, cultural and religious background. The mind of the human being always starts from the absolute zero when seeing the light for the very first time,
and some individuals construct different identities based on the socialization process that they experience. Some appear to be more intellectual than other, some get socialized through strain and difficulties while other get socialized in comfort and dignity. But by dividing the human being into 5, 10 or 30 different species based on these patterns is an act of an eternal level of pure stupidity.

9 Social contagion

In 2012, Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler published the article Social Contagion Theory: Examining Dynamic Social Networks and Human Behavior, where they argue that people who are exposed to the same environment might through face-to-face interaction spread emotions among each other creating a common belief or thought. The individual is strongly dependent on other individuals’ beliefs and attitudes when forming his/her own perspectives as the society relies on aggregated and digitized opinions of others to make decisions. The social sphere consists of priming that influence the way the individual thinks and acts which appears to be eminent within the social contagion processes, which are the driving forces in human collective and herd behaviour. Social contagion can appear through emotional contagion which is a phenomenon where a person’s emotions that are expressed through behaviour directly trigger similar emotions and behaviours among other people (Fowler and Christakis, 2012). As these emotions and behaviours expressed by the one who intend to promote collectivism seem to have interrelations with other individuals, the process of herding can emerge in a way that ambivalent behaviour become unacceptable among those who have become a part of the herd. Hysterical contagion, that might be considered being a radical form of emotional contagion sometimes related to mass hysteria, collective hysteria or even mass psychogenic illnesses, occurs when a group of people falsely believe that they are victimized by an external social force. They believe that they are suffering from a similar ailment as the rest of the flock and most importantly the leader of the flock, who by appealing to emotional thoughts and feelings about the same common suffering, ensure the status of being the mouthpiece of the flock (Fowler and Christakis, 2012). People can be primed into certain ways of thinking which can determine the common behaviour of the flock such as dancing, marching, protesting etc. (Raafat, Chater and Frith, 2009). The contagion process can cause individuals into action after being a part of the herd for some length of time. Le Bon argues that the herding process can bring the individual into such a condition that the individual entirely has lost its consciousness as the individual’s personality has become one with the herd. These conditions allow and legitimize the individual to commit all kind of acts by obeying the leader of the herd even though these acts might be contradictions of the individual’s
character and habits (Le Bon, 2001). The individual lacks the ability of criticism and let himself be a part of the flow driven by the herd (Freud, 1949).

10 Herd against its leaders – mobilization during the Arab Spring

Despite the many arguments about the increased monopolies occurring in the social media and the concern, sometimes paranoia, of an invisible power controlling the individuals as puzzles in the virtual world, every human being carries out a rationality that can be provoked in such a way that even the biggest and most powerful leader sometimes comes to a point where controlling the herd simply becomes an impossibility. When the basic human needs are not fulfilled, when strain occurs, when safety cannot be maintained by the leader of the herd and when the majority of the population experience what Abraham Maslow would characterize as a lack of physiological needs (Maslow, 2015), the herd will mobilize into a large opposition towards the tyrant and a situation will occur which Karl Marx would refer to as a conflict between the repressors and the repressed (Marx and Engels, 1988). The social media gives individuals the opportunity to mobilize into groups and call for a message that easily can be spread out through the different dimensions within the virtual spheres. The question is whether one can deny that the social media perhaps acts as a force for good, perhaps have broadened democratic values due to free speech and the opportunity to directly being able to interact and negotiate with several leaders within the society, who lead and represent a particular group of people or the whole society for that matter. Is, as some scientists would argue, ‘democracy just a tweet away’ Morozov, 2012, p. 37) or is the social media just yet another world of repression and division of power between those controlled and those who control? Wael Ghonim, an Egyptian Google executive, once said that ‘if individuals would like to liberate a society, just hand them the internet’ (Hofheinz, 2011, p. 7).

In early 2011 the whole world was pointing their attention to the Arab speaking countries as the Arab Spring Revolution was in escalation. The Arab Spring Revolution fostered a focus on the functionality of the social media and its influence on the revolution. Despite the revolutions in Moldova1 and in Iran2 that both were named Twitter Revolutions the attention towards the influence of the social media has never been such an important issue which occurred as a reaction of the Arab

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1 April 2009 Moldovan parliamentary election protests
2 Iranian election protests, also known as Green Revolution and Facebook Revolution
Spring Revolution, where social mobilization starting from Egypt spreading throughout many Arab countries like blazes in a forest fire. The main mobilization happened in the social media and some factors were used as a legitimization to mobilize against a repressed government. When the demonstrations in Egypt occurred, the protest organizers heavily relied on the social media such as platforms like Facebook and Twitter to mobilize people and to organize initial protests (Storck, 2011). The first protests occurred between the 25th of January 2011, when protesters gathered in the Tahrir Square in Cairo till the 11th of February 2011 when Hosni Mubarak stepped down from power. During this period, the Egyptian government attempted to block Facebook what would later develop into a total blockade of the internet, as the main mobilization of protesters happened in the social media, that at the same time inspired individuals from other countries to mobilize in the same way which resulted into this chain-reaction of protests against totalitarian governments in the Middle Eastern and North African countries (Storck, 2011). Tunisian activists succeeded in using the same methods as the Egyptian activists, while activists in countries like Saudi Arabia and Bahrain were immediately cracked down by state-led security forces meanwhile promising immediate reforms to prevent any escalation of protests which stabilized the political situations in these countries. Countries like Morocco and Algeria provided with immediate reforms and promises to prove the opposition that the leaders were listening to its people. The situation in Libya was different. The Gaddafi regime shut down the internet in Libya couple of times, but compared to Egypt relatively few Libyans had internet access during that time. According to Jillian York, a coordinator of the OpenNet Initiative, only 6% of Libyans had internet access during that time in which those who had internet access were individuals who were well-educated and politically aware, which made them very influential factors in the social media (York, 2011). Muammar Gaddafi, who had been governing Libya for 49 years, argued many times that he had never been a president and only a leader, a commander and an Islamic preacher for the Libyan population; a representative for the country who was under attack by terrorists (referring to the protesters). Gaddafi actively attended in the international media openly arguing that he would do anything to stop the terrorists which seemed to be a mistake, as his media activity would increase the international awareness of the situation in Libya and therefore increase the international mobilization despite the shutdown of the internet in Libya which would backfire on Gaddafi and his family. Factors such as the link between the Pan Am Flight 103 plane crash in Lockerbie in 1988 committed by two Libyan nationalists, Gaddafi’s security force mainly consisting of women and Gaddafi’s army mainly consisting of mercenaries supported by the Azawad National Liberation Movement, an army group from Mali, increased the international attention and interrogation of the situation in Libya (Storck, 2011).
In Syria, other interests played major factors, as Syria is largely divided into many different religious and ethnic groups who saw the opportunity to overthrow Bashar Al-Assad, who is a Shia Muslim, and legitimize riots based on the way the Syrian forces were treating the demonstrations and based on Assad’s religious background (Storck, 2011). Back in the traditional media telegraphs, radios, cassettes, printing press and televisions were, despite the lack of media independency, all challenging the existing social orders during that time. The social media today can both be repressed by governments and be employed by governments to motivate their supporters; however, it is a reality that total control of the social media seems to be unrealistic today as the social media has resulted in a globalized world village due to increased international awareness and more mediated cross-border communication. Technology has become the society today and it is difficult to explain the society without including technology. The internet allows mobilization with even the weakest ties with strangers, thus mobilization in the social media does not require any close mutual ties between individuals. The collective among individuals is most likely to happen when individuals, who mobilize into larger groups, commonly have weak mutual ties as those with close ties would only share their ideas and thoughts between each other, as weak ties allows information to be diffused and easily spread out through social groups. This interesting argumentation was mentioned by Mark Granovetter in a seminal study conducted in 1973 named *The Strength of Weak Ties*. If the activists during the Arabic Spring only shared their stories to near friends and families, whom they share strong ties with, the revolution would most likely not happen as this information only stays within these strong interpersonal ties, as Granovetter argued: “those linked with strong ties tend to share friends” (Granovetter, 1973). Even though the Libyan, Egyptian and other governments in the Middle East and in North Africa, that were affected by the Arabic Spring Revolution, blocked the internet to stop the communication, ideas and messages to spread out through the social media, this did not stop the demonstrations from happening. Some individuals outside these countries where through technological communication able to bridge the geographical barriers and continuously provide coverage of the situations. As an example, John Scott-Railton, an American graduate student, were publishing information on Twitter about the situation in Egypt that he got informed through phone by Egyptian friends. When the young Egyptian man, Khaled Mohamad Saeed, died in police custody near Alexandria in June 6th, 2011, a photo of Saeed’s deformed face as a result of the beatings spread out through the social media and went viral internationally (“Demonstrators in Egypt”, 2011). Joe Stork, who was a deputy Middle East and North Africa director for Human Rights Watch reacted to the photo commenting that “photos of Said's battered and deformed face published
on the internet show a fractured skull, dislocated jaw, broken nose, and numerous other signs of trauma” and that “all those involved should be speedily interrogated, and the prosecutor should fully investigate what caused the fractures and trauma clearly evident on his body” (“Demonstrators in Egypt”, 2011). Wael Ghonim, an internet activist and a computer engineer, was a Google marketing executive at the time of the incident of Saeed’s death, and Ghonim, who was located in Dubai, saw the pictures and created a Facebook memorial page for Said called *We are all Khalid Said* five days after his death. The name of the page would within short time become an influential slogan for activists, not only in Egypt, but all around the world where many protests appeared such as the famous protest in front of the Egyptian Embassy in London, where over 3000 people attended.

11 Technological determination and the social media

The human herd has entered a whole new socio-virtual dimension, that defines the society today and that has become an essential tool for the herd; the social media. The social media has become a common tool for all individuals in all ages but especially among the younger generation, who are born under the technological determination. When Danah Boyd, an American technology and social media scholar, interviewed eighteen-year-old Skyler’s mother in the year of 2006, when MySpace became very popular, her mother told Boyd that Myspace was utterly essential to Skyler’s life (Boyd, 2015, p. 5). Alice was saying that: “If you are not on Myspace, you don’t exist” (Boyd, 2015, p. 5). Danah Boyd’s book, *It’s complicated* (2015), gives an interesting view of how the generations have changed after the development of the social media creating a new world where smartphones and virtual profiles have become every individual’s basic need. Back in the early 90s every neighbourhood was crowded with young people and kids playing outside during sunny weather or visiting each other to play some board games when the weather did not allow them to go outside. But the technologization of the society has created a new generation of young people who are strongly dependent on the virtual world beside living in the physical world as they have gotten socialized through a 2-dimensional world from the very early childhood. Boyd (2015) argues that young people nowadays are so dependent on smartphones that those not owning one would be considered being ‘outsiders’. Teens do not have a smartphone to merely call, text or surf in the internet, but having a smartphone is also an indication of being a part of the herd; being aware of the latest trends and information floating around in the virtual platforms, being socially active and being the lord of your own virtual world. Boyd sometimes went to schools to observe how young people were interacting
socially with each other while using their smartphones. What caught her attention was that many
teens were holding a smartphone in their hand, but rarely did they use them to text or to call:

“And even though many teens are frequent texters, the teens were not directing most of their attention
to their devices. When they did look at their phones, they were often sharing the screen with the
person sitting next to them, reading or viewing something together.” (Boyd, 2015, p. 3).

Boyd argues that the social life among young people often take place in the virtual world and
not necessarily on the streets or in front of the nearest grocery shop as young people used to do before
the smartphone was invented. The younger generation has established their own kind of network that
shifts between the physical world and the virtual world which Boyd refers as ‘networked publics’.
Young people are socially active in the virtual world in social platforms such as Facebook, YouTube
and Twitter which provides young people with new opportunities to participate in the public life,
which is not necessarily a bad thing, but which has created concerns among many anxious adults.
While young people see the social media as a public sphere, adults focus more on what it means to
be networked with other people, whether strangers appear to be following their children or their
children appear to be following strangers. The social media has become a place the teen call their
own having their freedom to explore the world without asking for permission by their parents. The
new social media has created moral panics among adults, according to Boyd (2015). Like those who
created rock-and-roll music and comic books, who were previously seen as sinister figures trying to
brainwash children into delinquent behaviour, are now praised to the highest in the post-modern
world, the fear of the social media is yet another episodic occurrence that by time will be normalized.
Moral panics are episodic, according to Boyd, and the way some people are looking at the social
media being a threat towards the society is just another natural way of responding to sudden societal
changes, that will in the future be accepted in the same way rock-and-roll music and comic books
after a longer process became accepted (Boyd, 2015).

12 Moral panics and social media

The development of smartphones and the strong controlling role of the social media has created
concerns among parents, who have realized how dependent the younger generation is to the social
media. Boyd’s book (2015) presents a rarely discussed and yet very interesting perspective of how the relations between parents and their children has changed over time, being strongly linked to the dependency of the social media. Many American teens are not able to run around after school, take an evening walk alone in the nearest park or playing in the forest with their friends. Some teens are not able to go out of the house until they have gotten older when they are able to drive by themselves while parents are strongly concerned with what kind of friends their children are playing with. When Boyd were visiting some American neighbourhoods, the teens who were walking outside were often echoed concerns by their parents about possible dangers ‘that might occur’ if not they were careful. Parents know well that they have restricted their children’s mobility more than their parents restricted theirs, as Boyd mentions, and it is a reality that young people and children today both have different bonds with their parents and are much restricted to act freely when walking out of the door compared to the time when the social media did not exist. (Boyd, 2015, p. 87).

Children today are growing up with restricted freedom in the physical sphere while being able to act freely in the virtual sphere without being concerned with their parents’ restrictions, which creates even more dependency on the virtual world. Parents have become more protective and want to interfere with their children’s free time to monitor whether they are putting themselves into danger. The changes of the mobility among young people today are very clear. Boyd mentions that according to a study conducted in 1969, 48% of young people and children who were in the grades of kindergarten to eight grades in the elementary school were walking or biking to school while 12% of them were driven by a family member (Boyd, 2015, p. 88). In 2009, the numbers have taken an opposite turn in which 13% of children in the same grade interval were walking or biking to school while 45% were driven by a family member in which Boyd connect this tendency with the emerge of the digital world. It is a reality that the nowadays post-modern society represents a safety-obsessed society, a term that Boyd mentions in her own way, where parents continuously are strongly worried about the safeness of their children. In other words, the German sociologist Ulrich Beck would have linked this tendency to the modernization of the society and rather would refer Boyd’s term of safety-obsessed society to a risk society (Beck, 2010). Technological rationalization on the modernized society does not only create changes in work organization, but should be emphasized from a higher perspective in which it affects the society both from a micro to a macro perspective. As Bech mentions:
“[…] surges of technological rationalization and changes in work and organization, but beyond that includes much more: the change in societal characteristics and normal biographies, changes in lifestyle and forms of love, change in the structures of power and influence, in the forms of political repression and participation, in views of reality and in the norms of knowledge” (Beck, 2010, p. 50).

Modern society is a fear-ridden society as the social media provides with constant information and gives an awareness of things happening both from a national and from an international perspective creating a global village in which countries have informationally become interdependent on each other. As Bech would argue, things that happen in a tiny little village on a small island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean are sometimes as relevant as the things that happens around our neighbourhood (Beck, 2010). The social media works as nerves in the brain. The information that appear through the social media can easily spread out through chain reactions as individuals will begin interfering with the content such as sharing them or commenting on them, which, however, depends on how ground-breaking the information is. As most of the media is privatized and commercialized, the media is focusing on own interests and therefore priorities what kind of information that is shared in the social media in order to catch as much attention as possible. This perspective will be discussed more in-depth later in this thesis. When parents hear about a wanted paedophile in a city that appears to be over 200 km from their own houses or when a murderer has killed three persons in another country due to a new drug that has become a trend on the streets, parents begin worrying whether this might happen in their own neighbourhoods (Bech, 2010) (Boyd, 2015). The media constantly focuses on danger and ground-breaking news to catch the attention of the audience; everything from terror to gang wars or from hospital scandals to violent teachers, which feeds the fear among parents. Parents tell their children not to walk in the forest as sexual predators are lurking in these areas to keep their crimes unknown from the public as this is the same methods used by serial killers when they hide behind the trees and attack people without anyone being around, which especially go beyond women (this is only a given perspective of how things are commonly interpreted and not a factual argument) (Boyd, 2015). Parks, forests and other public spaces have become demonized spaces where drug dealers and sexual predators commit their crimes after the dark.
The social media – the home of predators?

In 2006, different news media in the United States began reporting and warning people about the use of Myspace which was the same year Myspace increased its popularity especially among young people. The different news media suggested that Myspace was a place for sexual predators who used this sphere to get in contact with young people, while young people mostly appear to be naive and confused not knowing that they interfere with a predator (Boyd, 2015) The American news cable and satellite television network, MSNBV, premiered the series To Catch a Predator in 2004, presented by the famous American television journalist, Chris Hansen, where predators, who used online features, got confronted by the police. Representatives in the series created fake online profiles of boys and girls mostly appearing to be 10 to 14 years old in various of communities in the social media and got in contact with possible predators, who shared nudity pictures of themselves while agreeing on meeting on the teens’ house, where the predators, when arriving in the house, directly got confront by the police who conducted undercover sting operations in cooperation with Perverted-Justice and MSNBC. This series, among others, triggered the concern about the increasing number of teens using Myspace in 2006 which created a chain reaction of news focusing and labelling Myspace being a dangerous place for teens. The fear and uncertainty towards the virtual world, which has gone beyond the physical world, does not prove any facts about whether some particular kinds of criminal acts have increased its tendency as a function of the social media (Boyd, 2015). The increased fear and uncertainty is a total result of the way that information is handled in the public. When moral panics about the safety of children appear in society, politicians feel that they should take immediate action or, as Boyd argues, capitalize on the appearance to doing so (Boyd, 2015, p. 103). The English sociologist and criminologist, Stanley Cohen, which Boyd (2015) mentions in her book, argues that the escalation of fear in society can in certain time become out of control and therefore produces moral panics in the society. Moral panics become a reality in the public when a common believe of cultural artefact, a practice, a trend, an ideology (etc.) threaten the social order (Boyd, 2015).

The media accuracy

Jennifer Alejandro wrote in her paper Journalism in the Age of Social Media, published in Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper (University of Oxford), that an individual with a camera or a keyboard has become its own story-teller while self-publishing is the norm (Alejandro, 2010, p. 7). The media
industry has changed as the access to information has become available for everybody creating a wide informational diversity where everyone has the opportunity to act as news providers. The mass-media is characterized by outdoor media when transmitting information or by printed media, but as information today is mostly dominated by digital media, some media scientists have begun questioning whether the print media sector is dead. The mass media is passé, Alejandro argues, as the information that flows through the many dimensions within the virtual world is all about personal media (Alejandro, 2010). In the old traditional society, most of the media in Western societies were constantly under governmental influence and media publishing required printing which made the circulation of information to a fraction of a geographical location very limited. The media stories today are mostly received and provided to the public as third sometimes fourth and fifth hand through social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, so when the story is assigned to the reporter, the story has already been known by a part of the social media through shares and likes (Alejandro, 2010, p. 8). The competition between media organizations today is mainly based on speed rather than accuracy and content which increase the chance of publishing false media due to lack of considerations. Nic Newman, Future Media and Technology Controller for BBC, argued in 2010 that the media gathering commit a threat towards trust, accuracy and identity due to the news distribution and its resourcing which explains how fake information easily can spread out in the social media without anyone noticing its lack of credibility (Alejandro, 2010). News organizations have lost their monopoly as the face of competition has changed by time parallel with the expansion of the social media. Big social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are strongly competing and challenging big news-papers and television news channels such as the Guardian, CNN, New York Times and BBC. Individuals are depending more and more on the social media platform and according to a sample conducted by The Nielsen Cooperation, a global marketing research firm, global consumers spent in 2009 more than five hours daily on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter which is almost the double of 2008, where global consumers arguably consumed around three hours daily (Alejandro, 2010).

14.1 Enlightened or lazy generation?

As one might think, that the emergence of the information society would create more positive awareness, unify people due to more information and knowledge while destroying bigotry and ignorance, this might not necessarily be true. Individuals in society are strongly dependent on
information, but information is always controlled by the one who provides it. Some people argue that the technologized post-modern society has created a lazy generation, in which criticism towards information has become less favour while having less interest of seeking knowledge through books and other reading materials beyond the internet. The internet is an easy tool to search for succinct information, but internet is at the same time a virtual platform that consist of many false and biased information, that through its realistic way of expression such as photoshop or logic explanations easily can fool those using the internet. Dean Obeidallah, a well-known American comedian, wrote in June 18th, 2011, an article published on CNN’s website where he argues that the consumers of the internet and the social media are those who have highest tendencies of living in a biased world due to lack of criticism. These consumers represent a lazy generation who are attached to the internet and rely on it in a daily basis, commenting on information appearing in the internet while sharing them with other individuals (“Are social media”, 2011). Individuals have become slactivists which means they believe committing a comment or a ‘like’ in the social media somehow affect the world and legitimize their activity in the social media with the idea that their thoughts and feelings expressed in the social media have a big impact on individuals in the society when their expression, in reality, are one of the many billions ineffective expressions, that constantly float throughout different social media platforms (“Are social media”, 2011). Shelley Kinash and Jeffrey Brand (2014) argue in their article Does social media breed learner laziness? that despite the easiness of gaining information in the virtual world, the internet has given an opportunity for young people and students to explore the world at a whole new level. When a professor discusses about a popular polar bear during a course in front of many students, which the professor has only red about and never seen, students, who listen to the professor talking, can watch the polar bear live via a recorded snow-cam while observing the polar bear’s behaviour. Kinash and Brand argue, that some universities do not longer purchase the assigned textbooks and rather use the advantage of the internet to provide the students with reading material. Some students have never set their feet in the library, as the educational process mostly go by searching in the internet, skimming online and finding usable reading materials that can easily be printed (Kinash and Brand, 2014).

15 Politics, the emerge of neo-populism and the social media

The word populism comes from the Latin word populus which means people in English in the sense of a nation or a folk. The word populism, which implies abstract definitions, has been a very common
political phenomenon throughout history all the way back to *Populares* which was a political group that emerged in the late Roman Republic which supported laws of provisioning of a grain dole for the poor majority (Taggart, 2000). Paul Taggart, a Professor of Politics at the University of Sussex European Institute, describes in his book *Populism* that populism today can be categorized in 6 features: the people as a heartland – venter of populism ideology, lack of core values, hostility to representative democracy, tendency to be highly chameleonic, self-limiting quality of populism and emergence as a reaction to sense of extreme crisis (Taggart, 2000). Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell describe in their article *Twenty-First Century Populism – The Spectre of Western European Democracy* that neo-populists see themselves being ‘true democrats’ as they fight to reclaim peoples’ sovereignty from the minority of elites, who rule the society. Neo-populists voice popular opinions that are ignored by the authorities while targeting special kind of voters who see themselves as victims of the rulers (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008, p. 4).

Populists are striving for a *lost paradise* that has been machinated by corrupt elites, who destroy the society allowing sudden social changes happening such as masses of immigration, technologizing of the society or differentiating the family roles or the roles of the genders. Populists tend to target special kind of voters who feel left behind by the society; ideas that can be recognized in socialism and the fight against a tyrant over-class, a significant social stratified society and exploitation of labour. However, populists can target anything that go beyond human rights as a result of an elite such as ideas, beliefs, religion, culture, economy, ethnicity, etc. Those voting for populist parties are different people from all kind of social strata who feel politically isolated, alienated from the society, who have difficulties in integrating themselves in the capitalistic, post-modernistic reality, who are neither member of any kind of organizations, who mainly have a lower educational degree and who sometimes are referred as “losers of globalization” (Bryder, 2010).

Margaret Canovan argues in her book *Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy* (1999) that three appeals can be noticed to the *people* in populism discourses, as she mentions, a *united people*, which means a united people that oppose the higher elites such as politicians and parties, that try to divide the society, our *people*, that act as a contrast to *others*, which means those who do not belong to the group (such as immigrants) and the *ordinary people*, who are those mobilizing against the higher elites and those being in the higher social status (Canovan, 1999). As mentioned by Albertazzi and McDonnell, populist leaders promise ‘to make the people, once more, masters in their own homes, in the widest sense of term’ (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008, p. 96). The political correctness seems to have been replaced by leaders who do not necessary have any
connection with politics but rather can be recognized by people who see the leaders as normal individuals sharing the same views as its people in which this relationship between the people and its leader mostly take place in the social media. Recent events taking place on a global perspective such as the disintegration of EU, political debates, the conflicts in the Middle East, the war on drugs, the rise of right-wing politics, the emerge of neo-populism and the recent refugee crisis have become challenges towards political institutions worldwide (Grossauer and Celebic, 2017). The political communication and the relations between leaders and people have changed drastically due to the advent of the social media (Dittrich, 2017). As mentioned by Engessen, Ernst, Esser and Büchel (2016), the theoretical relation between online communication and populism was already topics discussed early in the history of internet, as some scholars argued that the internet would “restructure political power in a populist direction and to promote unmediated communication between politicians and citizens” (Engesser, Ernst, Esser and Büchel, 2016, p. 9). The social media is frequently used as an opportunity to reach the audience among politicians and especially among populists who use the media to reach their audience in a more personalized way. That means, the social media acts as a personal reference between the populist politicians and the audience, who can follow the activity of the politician which increase the trust and comfortability of the politician. Bennett and Segerberg argued that the most recognizable method in the post-modern society used by populists is to establish collective action among the audience through personalized and inclusive content; a method that is referred as ‘personal action frames’ (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012).

In 2009 protests occurred in London’s streets when the opposition declared their support to the person-centred planning that was a set of approaches designed to assist individuals providing them with personal support in circumstances such as learning - and development disabilities, physical disabilities, elder people and people who suffer mental illness. The protestors used personal action frames with slogans such as Putting People First and We are the 99 percent (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). Andrew Chadwick wrote in 2013 the book The Hybrid Media System with the latest version published in 2017 where he argues that we live in a world of social media that is controlled by a hybrid media system where politics increasingly is defined by individuals, groups and organizations blending both older and new media logics: everything from the latest American presidential campaign to the WikiLeaks, from presidents being victimized through political scandals to the clash of media logics that create disintegration and confusion among individuals but at the same time challenge the patterns of integration and order (Chadwick, 2017). The mass media was normally adhered to professional norms, but the social media has regulated the view of professionalism of the median world and now serve as a linkage to the people allowing populist groups to circumvent the journalistic
information, to have the freedom of articulate their ideas and spread their opinions and messages (Engesser, Ernst, Esser and Büchel, 2016). As mentioned by Albertazzi and McDonnell, populism mainly consist of homogeneous groups opposing the elites of the society and deprive the sovereign people of their ideas, thoughts, norms, cultures, values, rights and even prosperity, identity and social conditions (Albertazzi and McDonell, 2008).

16 Populism and the division of power

When Donald Trump tweets about an issue and the whole world discuss the tweet, this indicate Trump’s power to affect the whole human herd with no effort. Having around 45 million of followers on Twitter and 23 million of followers on Facebook, Trump, like many other political leaders, have seen the opportunity of using the social media to gain support and to become more influential and powerful (Dittrich, 2017). Trump’s populist methods became visible during the United States presidential election in 2016 when using the slogan Make America Great Again while accusing previous presidents for standing behind the destruction of the American Dream that he promised to get back. Targeting politicians, minority groups and international relations became important factors for Trump’s victory of being the 45th President of the United States. Trump alienated many of the American politicians by arguing that they, through their political correctness, were not able to recognize the main problem of the today’s America. Trump appealed to the population by arguing that he was not a politician but a business man, who did not support political correctness but rather would bring the American Dream back again by first and foremost get rid of the corrupt politicians (the elite), immediately end all illegal immigration, especially among Mexicans, by building a wall between US and Mexico and let the Mexican authorities pay for it, as they should have the consequences of illegal immigrants passing through the US/Mexican border, blaming the Muslims for bringing terror into the country and promising a better national and international mark et blaming many international relations for being partly guilty of the struggle Americans constantly have to live through. The media is according to Trump commercialized or payed by the corrupt politicians to oppose him and his ideas, to prevent a better America and to give better opportunities for the elite meanwhile leaving the vast majority in strain (etc.). Despite Trump being an elite himself as one of the richest living Americans, Trump could see the big gap of social stratification between individuals in the United States and used this opportunity to conduct a populist campaign to catch the voters’ voices and opinions. Interestingly, Trump’s whole campaign can easily be related to Margaret Canovan’s three appeals that was mentioned earlier in this thesis when she discusses about the people
of populism respectively mentioning *a united people, our people and the ordinary people* (Canovan, 1999). Over the last 10 years, populist parties, organizations and movements have been able to turn the social media into an effective political communication platform by investing in the social media to gain more followers. Online social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have become one of the primary outlets for enterprises and business to advertise and communicate with their customers (Cristofaro, Friedman, Kaafar and Shafiq, 2014).

The success of the populist movements in European countries can be linked to political or social events happening such as the latest refugee crisis beside the increased tendency of terror resulting in risk factors and moral panics, which many political parties, especially the right-wing parties, have taken the advantage of. Far right-wing parties such as the German *Alternative Für Deutschland (AfD)*, took the advantage of the refugee crisis by appealing on individuals’ emotions constantly campaigning with propaganda pictures and videos on their Facebook page, in which they succeeded gaining 320.000 *likes* on Facebook in 2016 only (Dittrich, 2017). The emphasis on the social media being a productive political virtual platform is not only a tendency that is seen among far-right nationalists and populists but a general tendency that politicians have taken the advantage of. The French presidential election between Le Pen and Macron was sometimes related as a *virtual presidential race*, where those who managed to get most followers and likes were those most likely getting most support from the audience, as the vast majority were closely following the presidential campaign in the social media (Dittrich, 2017). The emerge of neo-populism can be related in their success of mobilizing and communicating with their followers in the social media. Researchers working on this new wave of populism tend to focus on specific aspects that relate to the phenomenon such as ideology, narratives, strategy and organization. These categorizations can relate to things like EU-scepticism, anti-elitism, anti-immigrant sentiments etc. (Dittrich, 2017) Seen from a historical perspective propaganda videos and pictures have long been a part of political propaganda and it has become a reality, as mentioned by Farkas, Schou and Neumayar, that digital media technology has increased the potential accessibility of these methods (Farkas, Schou and Neumayar, 2017).

17 The social media – polarization, filter bubbles and de-democratization

Many scientists have previously argued that the Internet and the World Wide Web would result in a more positive democratization process of global societies, increase the exposure to political difference and increase the freedom of speech. This optimistic assumption has not lived up to its standards and
it seems like the process has taken an opposite turn transforming the social media into those determining and those being determined (Spohr, 2017). As Jennifer Brundige mentions:

“The empirical support for increased exposure to political difference as a result of the internet use is somewhat limited and indirect” (Brundidge, 2010, p. 686).

The Internet and the social media platforms tend to foster selective exposure behaviour due to the very large amount of information that circulate in the virtual platforms, that users constantly are presented with. Social network platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are, due to the overload of constant information circulation, designed in a way to facilitate the ability of consumers to be able to “attend to the information selectively whether intentional or not” (Spohr, 2017, p. 152).

The social media today is dominated by increased ideological polarization and homophilic socio-virtual structures determined by the social network platforms as the algorithms that are constructed in the virtual platform curate the online experiences based on the users’ interests and activity. Eli Pariser wrote the book *The Filter Bubble* in 2011 explaining that the phenomenon of polarization in the social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram has resulted in what he calls *filter bubbles*. Pariser argues that the algorithms constructed in the social media platforms intend to customize and personalize the experiences among social media users in a bubble, that only appears to be relevant to the user according to previous consumption behaviour (Pariser, 2011). The social media platforms connect people with information that they are most likely interested in while making the access to the information easier by highlighting it on their news feed or when ads appear on the screen when they log into their virtual profiles. The information in the social media today has become increasingly customizable and a more personalized experience, which create significant filter bubbles all around the social media platforms. Many users are not particularly aware of how the social media algorithms work, how they are controlled by the contents that appear in their virtual profiles and how prediction engines in the social media create a variety of information that fundamentally alter the way we encounter ideas, believes and information. This is not merely a positive thing as individuals in the social media platforms have the capability to increase the chances of receiving information that confirm their existing belief and therefore decrease the probability of encountering diverse information that appeal to be beyond their interests (Spohr, 2017). Furthermore, users have the ability to sort out information according to their interests and letting, aware or not, the algorithms control the information content. This partisan selective exposure is not merely a positive promotion for the democratic values, but as Stroud argues:
“If partisan selective exposure is widespread, the public may [not only] develop more polarized, or extreme, attitudes in the direction of their political predisposition (…) [but may also] develop different beliefs about the world” (Stroud, 2007, p. 343).

When individuals constantly receive information on the social media, this might develop a news-find-me perception among the individuals having the expectation that they do not need to actively seek out for news and information as these already appear in their news-feed, profiles etc, which increases the chance of division and polarization among individuals in the society (Spohr, 2017) When fake news are shared in the social media, these news can easily be spread out through likes and shares making them even more reliable when people begin debating about them. As Farkas, Schou and Neumayer explains, some cloaked Facebook pages are created by those who try to target a specific group of people. As such in 2014 a Danish page called Islam – The Religion of Peace was sharing some extreme radical ideas and graphic contents representing the name of the page, but with further investigation, the page appeared to have been created by Danish supremacist who used the opportunity in the social media to victimize peaceful Muslims (Farkas, Schou and Neumayar, 2017). Individuals have limited control of the information that appear in their virtual worlds as information is controlled by the algorithms and trends that dominate most of the virtual world or by those who have invested in the social media platforms questioning whether we are dealing with a modern socio-virtual exploitation due to this incontrollable force. When certain individuals invest in their social media profiles, their shared information, willing or not, can appear in the news-feed even though they have absolutely no relations to these individuals. This force individuals to read information that has nothing to do with their interests.

So to say, being totally paranoid about the development of the virtual world, which has in many ways provided positively for the society, will be a contradiction towards the one who writes this thesis, as much of the information mentioned in this thesis have been found after days of research in the internet platform, as the internet platform gives the opportunity to reach required information within short time.

18 Conclusion?

The intention of this thesis is not to draw conclusion(s) but rather to create an awareness of the rapidly changing technologized society, that has resulted in increased dependency on technologized products. The new virtual world has emerged as a function of the technologizing process and implies virtual platforms that not only construct and dominate the society but also dominate the behaviour of
individuals. It might be reasonable to argue that the mass media is passé replaced by the social media that has become the 5th estate of power in which scientific, cultural, religious, material and political expressions increasingly are mediated by electronic communication. The risk society is a result of the increased dependency of the virtual world creating a tiny globalized village that metaphorically can be compared with the distance between two rooms separated by a wall. Higher socio-virtual status can easily be reached through investments of virtual profiles resulting in a minority of individuals and monopolies who not only dominate the information, who not only appear to be the dominator of the herd but also determine the mindset of thoughts and feelings appearing in the virtual world. The free will and the act of free choice therefore seems to be a utopia due to the domination of the minority but also when individuals are coordinated into filter bubbles through the many algorithms that are constructed into the many different virtual dimension determining what kind of information people receive and what they have to react upon. The significant socio-virtual stratification appearing in the virtual world becomes visible when the world media debates about a single tweet or a single comment given by influential profiles such as political leaders, which indeed paradoxes the common universal ideas of freedom. Nevertheless, the emerge of the new virtual world still reflects on a post-modern information society that allows people to become political active and act as crucial decision makers, as the filter between leaders and individuals has weakened when individuals closely interact with the leaders over the social media while following their time tables. The vast majority of individuals in the globalized society have all become citizen journalists when they inform the virtual world about certain events happening around them or about certain issues that are deemed to be discussed which has diminished the power of media institutions and at the same time forcing the media institutions to act upon speed rather on accuracy in order to compete with the citizen journalists. This lack of accuracy increases the chance of approaching biased and faked information which sometimes can get out of control when the citizen journalists begin interacting with them. This chain reaction of information spreading out through the different virtual spheres also give the opportunity for political podiums to spread out ideological ideas or even propaganda. Some political movements, such as populist ones, use the social media as an advantage of getting into more personal relationships with their supporters and followers, which by the help of filter bubbles tend to mobilize and separate the individuals into ‘them and us’. The human herd is reaching some new challenges due to the emerge of the virtual world, which in some perspectives have become out of human control. The new virtual world has become more significant in change than the physical world and this new world should never be taken for granted. This thesis will hopefully be an inspiration, despite its abstractness, for future scientists emphasizing on these issues.
References


