

**Manuel Castells:  
*Communication Power*  
Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2009**

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Manuel Castells is known for his extensive work. He is among other things the author of *The Internet Galaxy* (2001) and *The Rise of The Network Society* (1996). With his new and latest *Communication Power* (2009), he focuses his attention on communication as power and guides us on a tour de force through landscapes of international politics, mass communication, media convergence, neural networks, war, rhetoric and social movements. Politics is a central theme through the whole book. With an enormous overview, he merges complex fields and creates new perspectives, and his dissertation builds on comprehensive material consisting of quantitative and qualitative research. He alternates between the individual and the social, the local and the global. He moves between grand theory and analyses of specific cases. Thus, the book is not a theoretical presentation for the sake of theory; the theories are primarily a way of qualifying the perspective in terms of reality.

Castells shows us how communication in and between networks creates the possibilities of power: the possibilities for the states to execute the monopoly of violence, the possibilities for the organisations to promote economic and political interests, the possibilities for the citizens to challenge established structures. Relations of power fluctuate in different networks, but exclusion from the network is a fundamental mode of power that saturates them all. Persons, groups or nations can be excluded from some networks and included in others, but the central networks are global, and the tendency is that the valuable global is included and the invaluable local is excluded. Castells provides us with concepts that can help us understand how power in the network society is executed. *Switchers* are social

actors who establish and sustain contact between different networks. *Programmers* are actors in the separate networks who through linguistic discourses are *framing* the possibilities for networks and actors to act. "Power in the network society is communication power" (p. 53).

The evolution of digital media provides an important context for the analyses. Society is radically changed with the digitalisation of communication, the commercialisation of the media, the globalisation of corporations and the segmentation of markets. Multimedia corporations converge, and digital gaps in and between countries create a culture of inequality where some of the privileged have easier access to power than others. Corporations create an audience on the terms of the market, but at the same time citizens all over the world are using the new media to promote their own projects, interests and values. *Mass self-communication* is gaining ground between *mass communication* and *interpersonal communication*. In blogs and social media, the many are communicating with the many using self-generated and self-oriented messages. Castells shows us the grand design in his story about global evolution and revolution, but the book also distinguishes itself with analyses that concentrate on individuals and processes.

Castells draws on neuroscience and theories about neural networks. "*We are networks connected to a world of networks*" (p. 139). Man is not an empty shell, but guided by an organising principle. "*This organizing principle is the self*" (p. 139). Neural patterns in the brain correspond with mental pictures in the mind, the mind as an integration of emotions and reflections that guide how we act. With cognitive research, Castells provides detailed explanations about the correlation between feelings, attitudes and actions. He shows with multiple studies how the government, by communicating specific images through the mass media, called for specific feelings in the public, for instance when they needed support from voters regarding the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the War Against Terror. Castells' achievement is that he connects mental patterns on the individual level with politics on the global scene.

The media play an important role in the dissertation: "*the framing of the public mind is largely performed through processes that take place in the media*" (p. 157). Communication to a great extent is the communication of messages to an audience, and communication is thought to be, in a hierarchical structure, a top-down movement. In a further development of Entman's model, communication is seen as cascading information that is diffused from political and administrative networks through media networks to interpersonal networks. The model contains elements of feedback in the shape of response from, for example, the public to the media, but basically it is a classical linear conception of communications as information from a sender to a receiver. Castells calls attention to the fact that the model is a construction that expresses the political elites' and mass media's view of the public as political consumers or target groups, a construction that perceives the public as surveys and voter patterns.

The mass media are operating through *agenda setting*, *priming* and *framing*. Power is considered to be based on the ability and potential of specific actors to articulate specific subjects. Furthermore, Castells emphasises that power is not the possession of a political elite, and that social actors fight to discursively construct reality through *framing* and *counter-framing*. But because the political elite possess a vantage point, their messages more often become national and international news stories. They have privileged access to knowledge, and their political choices more often have consequences in the real world. For instance, the Bush administration had great success neutralising the critiques from the Democrats even in periods when the Democrats were in power in both houses. Castells is to be noted for the multiplicity of concrete examples that show how the theories manifest in practice and that serve as support for his assertions. The Iraq War is just one of many cases where he goes into specific analyses regarding the communicative processes.

Castells shows how different sources in the political system of the US *framed* the reason to go to war in Iraq with information and misinformation, and how this framing influenced the public opinion of the American population. "*It appears that information per se does not alter attitudes unless there is an extraordinary level of cognitive dissonance*" (p. 169). Castells refers to multiple theories, researchers and studies, and with a tremendous overview he narrates a complex and coherent story. Lakoff is just one of the researchers who play an important role in the presentation of agenda setting and framing. Castells points out how the War Against Terror and connected themes, such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Muslims in general, constructed a network of associations in the minds of the public, associations that activated feelings in the deepest layers of the brain: the fear of death.

Combining audience research and psychological research, Castells shows how questions about death influenced political opinion. In a survey, three out of four voters reportedly would vote for the Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry if *not* reminded of death, while two out of three voters would vote for the republican candidate George Bush if reminded of death. Alternating frames are a part of alternating narrative strategies and they evoke different emotions. Frames about *death* evoke feelings of fear. Frames about *patriotism* evoke feelings of enthusiasm. Other frames are about *self-defence*, *victory* and *liberation*. Castells is critical towards the irrational appeal to feelings, but at the same time he stresses that feelings are essential in political processes. Historically, rational sense has been the ideal and emotions an evil that should be avoided. In his opinion it is important that difficult decisions about war and other important issues are made on a rational basis, but the reality is that political decisions are also emotional.

The book ends with in-depth case analyses of programming and reprogramming of communication networks. Politics are primarily media politics, and according to Castells political legitimacy is facing a crisis, among other reasons because of political scandals and mistrust among voters. But he also questions if democracy as such is in crisis. With extensive research of, for example, Barack Obama's election campaign, the environmental movement and global warming, and the movement against corporate globalisation, he investigates the

possibilities of social movements to change the world. The overall analytical theme is the political synergy between mass self-communication and the capacity of the civil society to create social change. Castells completes a massive and impressive dissertation with essential questions about power, and with his book he offers a frame for understanding complex questions about communication and networks that invites further analysis.

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