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## The Agenda-Setting Role of Instagram: A Case Study of Raphael Glucksmann's Online Campaign to Promote the Uyghur Cause

Salomé Charat

Mestrado em Comunicação, Cultura e Tecnologia da Informação

Orientadora:

Doutora Cláudia Álvares, Professora Associada  
Iscte-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

Outubro 2021



SOCIOLOGIA  
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

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Department of Sociology

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would first of all like to thank ISCTE-IUL, which was my home for these two years of Masters. As a foreigner, it was not always easy to integrate, but the environment and the professors really helped me, and everyone always collaborated, giving me all the resources that I needed to achieve my papers, project and, as such, my Master's thesis.

I am grateful to my thesis advisor, Professor Cláudia Álvares, who helped me all along the way even if I had doubts and changed my mind more than once. She always collaborated and supported me. I am also grateful for having such understanding students in my class, who were always ready to help each other, during the two years of class as well as during the thesis writing.

I should finally thank my parents, who supported me all along the way, as well as my sister. They pushed me to never abandon, and sustained my needs all along my Masters.



## RESUMO

O ambiente mediático mudou drasticamente durante a última década. O panorama dos media alterou-se com a chegada da Internet e das redes sociais como nova fonte de informação e criação de conteúdos. As teorias clássicas que têm estado ancoradas no campo da comunicação há várias décadas estão a ser revistas e por vezes até questionadas devido às recentes alterações decorrentes da era digital.

Aqui, vamos estudar as mudanças que os meios de comunicação social, e em particular a Instagram, trouxeram quer à teoria original do agendamento mediático de McCombs e Shaw (1972), quer à teoria do fluxo de comunicação em dois níveis de Katz e Lazarsfeld, (mais precisamente, à teoria do líder de opinião) e as suas adaptações através do tempo.

Os referidos modelos serão analisados com base num estudo de caso específico: a campanha contra a repressão do povo Uigur na China, realizada no Instagram pelo deputado europeu francês, Raphaël Glucksmann. Estas duas teorias são por vezes contestadas hoje em dia e veremos até que ponto o conceito de líder de opinião foi modificado pelo advento das redes sociais e como a influência destas últimas pode ter alterado a capacidade de definição de agenda dos meios de comunicação de massa tradicionais.

Palavras chaves : Redes Sociais, Uigures, Raphaël Glucksmann, Líder de Opinião, Agenda-Setting.



## **ABSTRACT**

The media environment has changed dramatically over the last decade. The media landscape has changed with the arrival of the Internet and social networks as a new source of information and content creation. Classical theories that have been anchored in the field of communication for several decades are being revised and sometimes even questioned.

Here, we will study the changes that social media, and in particular Instagram, have brought to McCombs and Shaw's original Agenda-Setting theory (1972) as well as to Katz and Lazarsfeld's two-stage communication theory (more precisely to the opinion leader theory) and their adaptation through time.

They will be related to a specific case: the campaign against the repression of the Uyghur people in China, played out on Instagram by the French MEP, Raphaël Glucksmann. These two theories are sometimes challenged nowadays and we will see to what extent the concept of opinion leader has been modified by the advent of social media and how the influence of the latter can alter the agenda-setting capacity of traditional mass media.

Keywords: Social Media, Uyghurs, Raphaël Glucksmann, Opinion Leader, Agenda-Setting





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## **I. INTRODUCTION AND RECONTEXTUALISATION**

More than forty years have passed since the pioneering analyses that identified the effects of media coverage on the formation of political opinions. Theories like agenda setting were presented and explained in a context of mass media where political information was hierarchical and received by large audiences simultaneously. The vast majority of citizens then consumed the same information at the same time mainly through the political narrative presented on television news.

The foundations of agenda-setting theory were issued in the pioneering study of McCombs and Shaw in 1972. This research, widely quoted, launched the foundations on the direct and powerful effects of the media, which has evolved over time and for which researchers still have an interest today. The agenda-setting model establishes a relationship between the importance given by the media to certain topics and the public's perception of the importance of these topics.

The theory describes how mass media has an important influence on the audience, suggesting what audiences should 'think about' by issue salience, exposing more of one topic than another for example. Later, the authors define the concept exactly as: "the process of the mass media presenting certain issues frequently and prominently with the result that large segments of the public come to perceive those issues as more important than others. Simply put, the more coverage an issue receives, the more important it is to people" (Coleman, McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2008, p.147).

This work was carried out before the arrival of the Internet and socio-digital media, especially before their explosive penetration into citizens' information habits. Indeed, traditional media's gatekeeping influence has been reduced by digital platforms, which may have enlarged the capacity of diverse types of actors to shape the agenda and impose a hierarchy of information. The multiplication and spread of social media have challenged the role of traditional mass media in setting the public agenda by proposing a new approach in which the public proposes subjects for the agenda, and the conventional media accepts it as public agenda. This phenomenon is now commonly named as "reverse agenda-setting" where people's opinion shared on social media platforms increasingly give them a real agenda-setting power. It is also one of the main reasons that impels independent media as well as politicians on new social media to enjoy and learn more about its advantages.

If twitter is considered as the tool of information and influence in the political arena, politicians have tried for a few years now to extend their influence on various other platforms, looking for other ways to reach out to citizens, especially young people. In France, after ex-President François Hollande gathered more than eighty thousand people, it was recently the turn of the current Prime Minister, Jean Castex, to take his first steps in a live on Twitch.

In 2019, the French Eurodeputy, Raphaël Glucksmann, decided to invest his time in a new type of political campaign on Instagram, and his campaign became viral. Documentary filmmaker and writer, Raphaël Glucksmann, son of the French philosopher André Glucksmann, became director of the “Nouveau magazine littéraire” and columnist for France Inter Radio at the end of 2017. In October 2018, he founded his centre-left political party named “Place publique”<sup>1</sup> (public square in English) and was named head of the joint list composed by “Place Publique” and the Socialist Party for the European Parliamentary Election.

After his election as Member of the European Parliament on 10 July 2019, he was appointed Vice-President of the Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament. Thereafter, he focused the majority of his attention on the situation of Muslim Uyghur “re-education camps” in Xinjiang, China, and the importance of shutting them down.

To justify taking control of this fight, he regularly insists on the heavy silence that reigns internationally on the part of States and the media, preventing the crisis in Xinjiang from being widely propagated and, as a result, failing to come to the assistance of the Uyghur people.

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<sup>1</sup> *Place publique - Mouvement politique citoyen*. (s. d.). Place publique. Retrieved on August 29, 2021, from <https://place-publique.eu>

## I. 1. Uyghur situation recontextualization

The Uyghurs are among the fifty-five ethnic minorities that inhabit the vast territory of China. Uyghurs are Turkish speaking, as are Kazakhs for example, and are predominantly Sunni Muslims. With a population of approximately eleven million, the Uyghurs live on the tip of Xinjiang in north-western China. Their will for independence has been growing for years. Nicknamed the autonomous region of Beijing, the only autonomous part is the name, as it is led by the power of Beijing. To try to revitalize this large territory of 1,6 million square metres, the Chinese capital has launched demographic campaigns to encourage people from the rest of the country to join this region. As such, the current population is evenly distributed between the Hans and the Uyghurs (formerly the majority). The desire for independence of some against the domination of others has crystallized tensions.

Around 2010, a wave of attacks shook the country, following the development of interest for religious extremism from a part of the Uyghur population through the Islamic Turkestan Party (affiliated with Al-Qaida).

Finding a solution to retrieve this region quickly became increasingly important, especially so as to eliminate any form of protest that would challenge the sovereignty of the Chinese state.

This was followed by a mass surveillance policy, from 2013 onwards, with spyware: facial recognition and recurrent control created a gigantic database that allows surveillance of Uyghurs and is used to justify their imprisonment. Among the total number of imprisonments in China during 2017, 21% of these concern Uyghurs. To understand the significance of this percentage, we should bear in mind that Xinjiang's Uyghur population constitutes only 1.5% of China's total population, consisting of 1.386 billion in 2017.<sup>2</sup>

In 2017, under the new government of the region led by Chen Quanguo, who became the executor of a violent policy of extermination, the first "re-education" camps appear.

Gradually, the world learnt about what was happening in these camps as well as in the Uyghurs' daily lives: birth control, forced sterilization, arbitrary internment in labour camps, forced marriages between Uyghur women and Han men, continuous monitoring, travel control, etc.

It remains difficult to document this information because of Beijing's absolute control over the region. As such, despite the difficulty in knowing the exact figures, it is estimated that around

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<sup>2</sup> Criminal Arrests in Xinjiang Account for 21% of China's Total in 2017 | Chinese Human Rights Defenders. (2018, July 25). *Chinese Human Rights Defenders*. <https://www.nchrd.org/2018/07/criminal-arrests-in-xinjiang-account-for-21-of-chinas-total-in-2017/>

1.5 million Uyghurs are held in these camps.<sup>3</sup> With the camps remaining impassable, relevant information is almost only available thanks to the Uyghurs who managed to escape. Some survivors who have accepted to describe their experience report psychological and physical tortures suffered as forced learning of Mandarin, acts of torture, sexual assaults, forced injections of drugs, prohibition of practicing Islam, among other violations of human rights. With the gradual release of various testimonies and news, the lack of response from the heads of Western and Muslim States, International Organizations and the international community in general started to provoke outrage among ‘public opinion’, especially among the refugees from camps who denounced this silence. This incomprehension is mainly visible on social media. In October 2019, the United States, the United Kingdom and about 20 other UN countries called on China to end the detention of Uyghurs and other members of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang Province. Unsuccessfully. China denies any accusation and simply explains that it is its way to fight terrorism.

The Uyghurs’ cause has difficulties to find echo in the West if not through social networks or through Uyghur demonstrations, organized by associations and then relayed. This situation may be due to Chinese economic power, which paralyzes any political opposition.

Knowing that this repression started around 2010 and camps are open since 2017, many are wondering why the Uyghurs’ repression and detention are facing such silence. In 2019, the international community, represented by twenty-three countries, including France, Germany, Canada and Japan, signed a declaration calling for "urgent action [to refrain] from arbitrarily detaining Uyghurs and other members of Muslim communities",<sup>4</sup> consisting in the first collective action as far as the UN is concerned. On the other hand, China claims to be fighting terrorism: fifty-four countries, including Russia, Egypt, Congo and Pakistan, approved the declaration approving China’s policy and emphasized "we also appreciate China's contributions to the international cause of human rights".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Defranoux, L. (2020, July 20). Ouïghours : l’entrave aux naissances, un critère de génocide. *Libération*. [https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2020/07/20/l-entrave-aux-naissances-un-critere-de-genocide\\_1794804/](https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2020/07/20/l-entrave-aux-naissances-un-critere-de-genocide_1794804/)

<sup>4</sup> Vaulerin, A. (2019, November 3). Ouïghours : la communauté internationale à voix tenue. *Libération*. [https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2019/11/03/ouighours-la-communaute-internationale-a-voix-tenue\\_1761379/](https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2019/11/03/ouighours-la-communaute-internationale-a-voix-tenue_1761379/)

<sup>5</sup> Radio-Canada. (2019, October 30). Chine : l’ONU se déchire sur les droits de la personne au Xinjiang. *Radio-Canada.ca*. <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1367570/minorites-religion-musulmans-islam-detentions>



The exchanges are tense and some countries, such as Malaysia, for example, fully assume the fear of the Chinese power, a commercial partner it would prefer not to lose.<sup>6</sup> However, in October 2020, the list defending Uyghur human rights was growing and there were no longer twenty-three but thirty-nine countries asking for an end to the Uyghur internments by China.

But then, why does Raphaël Glucksmann base the creation of his Instagram campaign on the supposed silence that reigns around the Uyghurs?

After searching the two best-selling newspapers in France, Le Monde and Le Figaro, we can see that the subject has been discussed several times.

Indeed, after some research, we realized that in the year 2020, the word ‘ouïgours’ is mentioned 103 times in 103 different articles by the newspaper Le Monde. However, by analysing the titles, we observed that more than half of the articles do not broach the Uyghurs as the subject of news, but simply mention them. Out of 103 articles, forty-two are really dedicated to the situation in Xinjiang; moreover, out of these forty-two articles dedicated to the Uyghurs, only three articles are published before July 2020.<sup>7</sup>

As for Figaro, the search for "Uyghur" over the same time frame delivered sixty-one articles mentioning the word. However, after reading the titles, only fourteen are really dedicated to the subject<sup>8</sup>.

Some French media, such as the number one channel of continuous information, BFM.tv, have come to assume their preferential focus on French information and the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>9</sup> They defend themselves by explaining that newspapers are not like social networks, and the

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<sup>6</sup> Vaulerin, A. (2019, November 3). Ouïghours : la communauté internationale à voix tenue. *Libération*. [https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2019/11/03/ouighours-la-communaute-internationale-a-voix-tenue\\_1761379//](https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2019/11/03/ouighours-la-communaute-internationale-a-voix-tenue_1761379//)

<sup>7</sup> *Articles pour “ouïgours”*. (2020b). Le Monde.fr. Retrieved on August 30, 2021, from [https://www.lemonde.fr/recherche/?search\\_keywords=ou%C3%AFgours&start\\_at=01/01/2020&end\\_at=31/12/2020&search\\_sort=relevance\\_desc&page=3](https://www.lemonde.fr/recherche/?search_keywords=ou%C3%AFgours&start_at=01/01/2020&end_at=31/12/2020&search_sort=relevance_desc&page=3)

<sup>8</sup> *Rechercher un article, une information, une archive — Le Figaro.fr*. (2020b). Le Figaro. Retrieved on August 30, 2021, from <https://recherche.lefigaro.fr/recherche/ou%C3%AFgours/?datemin=01-01-2020&datemax=31-12-2020>

<sup>9</sup> Relaxnews. (2021, May 9). Les Ouïghours sont-ils vraiment les grands oubliés des médias français ? *ladepeche.fr*. <https://www.ladepeche.fr/2021/05/09/les-ouighours-sont-ils-vraiment-les-grands-oublies-des-medias-francais-9534753.php>

lack of official information and opportunities to go to the field also makes coverage difficult. Social media are not subject to journalistic constraints (time invested in research, verification processes), relying in real time on opinions that have been shared (Herbert, V., Sirois, G., Tremblay-Potvin, E., 2015).

The MEP, Raphaël Glucksmann, is not satisfied with the media treatment of what he, like others, calls a genocide that is taking place under the eyes of all. Without extensive media coverage, it is as if the event has not existed. According to him, it is this "silence (that) kills".<sup>10</sup> It is therefore through the new media, that the MEP decides to launch his fight in favour of the Uyghur cause, trying to reverse the trend and put this subject at the centre of the attention of social media.

Raphaël Glucksmann succeeded, over a year, in "reverse agenda-setting" by "forcing" the traditional media to increasingly focus on the Uyghurs. We will see, in this case study, the concrete success of the campaign launched on social media by the European deputy by analysing how the concept of opinion leader has been transformed by social media and how the influence a leader can have, due to social media, tends to change who sets the agenda.

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<sup>10</sup> Glucksmann, R. (2019, November 5). *Silence, on tue. L'effrayante indifférence qui entoure l'enfermement de masse et les persécutions des musulmans ouïghours en Chine.* [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/rglucks1/status/1191611183339581445?s=20>

## I. 2. Methodology and structure

The dissertation follows a structure whereby we present two main chapters that study the impact of social media influence and how Raphaël Glucksmann used it to reach his objective, mobilising all the codes of the platform, demonstrating the uses of social media to obtain information in France. In a second part, we try to define how the Eurodeputy can be considered an opinion leader of the digital era and how this transformation allowed him to set the agenda in France in 2020.

The choice of a case study focusing on Raphaël Glucksmann's campaign on social media seemed to me to be the most judicious choice to demonstrate the desired purpose. Case studies allow for an intense analysis of a moment, an action, a personality and their respective development, being often chosen to try to understand a particular event.

In opposition to quantitative research – despite sometimes complementing the latter –, this constitutes another form of case study. The desire to look at the evolution of major theories, such as that of two-stage communication or yet of the questioning and reconfiguration of this model, only made sense if it were supported throughout the study by a concrete example to illustrate it.

In France, the year 2020, marked by the confinements due to Covid-19, has seen the appearance of a new politician at the centre of news, Raphael Glucksmann. Despite not being new to politics, having already been head of his political party, “Place Publique”, and European deputy, his popularity has only grown ever since he has made use of social media. This "sudden" popularity is not a due to Gluckmann’s status as politician but rather due to having assumed the role of spokesman of the struggle against the repression of the Uyghur people.

Raphael Glucksmann is now constantly associated with this cause, as much as with his Instagram account where the struggle has been disseminated, shared and seen.

This therefore provides an interesting subject for a case study, because Glucksmann corresponds perfectly to what we could call a new opinion leader.

To study the influence of a struggle played out on social networks, many tools are available for data extraction and analysis.

We chose Phantom Buster software to extract data around the hashtags created by the MEP for his movement, but also ImageSorter and PicArrange so as to perform more visual and meaningful treatment of the extracted data.

The study of Raphaël Glucksmann's Instagram account and its size was measured by using Social Blade<sup>11</sup> and HypeAuditor,<sup>12</sup> software that allows for detailed studies of the evolution of a profile on social media, its statistics and its rate of engagement.

The case study allows us to profoundly understand the phenomenon and its implications, through the collection of precise data and relevant analysis.

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<sup>11</sup> *Raphaël Glucksmann's Instagram Stats Summary Profile (Social Blade Instagram Statistics)*. (s. d.). Social Blade.

Retrieved on August 24, 2021, from <https://socialblade.com/instagram/user/raphaelglucksmann>

<sup>12</sup> *Report Preview @raphaelglucksmann*. (s. d.). Hype Auditor. Retrieved on August 30, 2021, from <https://app.hypeauditor.com/preview/raphaelglucksmann/>

## II. Call for humanitarian mobilisation through social media

While its main agents are currently NGOs or associations, non-governmental humanitarian action has been transformed during the past decade, having to pass the digital revolution challenge. Information and Communication Technology brought new tools that are now involved in the conduct of foreign policy, giving greater meaning to collective or civic responsibility.

In France, over the year, various examples can illustrate this change. For example, since 2016, the “Z Event” is yearly organized by two Twitch streamers to help raise funds for various associations. Each year they gather streamers and youtubers to play video games for hours on Twitch platform and the public can donate as much as they want to support the associations, with a different association being chosen as partner every year. In 2019, for the French Institut Pasteur (that studies diseases and help develop vaccines), the Z event managed to gather 3.5 million Euros. In 2020, the Z event was not cancelled with the pandemic and took place during the quarantine in France, leading 54 streamers to gather for fifty-five hours and draw up 5.7 million Euros for Amnesty International.<sup>13</sup>

Non-governmental humanitarian action’s digitization is a perfect example of the instrument that the Internet has become to encourage new forms of collective action. It is an interface but also a new democratic space of participation, and thus, action. Rethinking humanitarian actions through cybercitizen mobilisation shows the power of the impacts and challenges of digital communication.

The first advantage of social media, compared to the traditional means of communication of NGOs, is that they allow donors to visualize the material repercussions of their donations.

In a recent interview this year, in March, Raphaël Glucksmann discussed his choices in this campaign and admitted that his parliamentary attaché and partner in this struggle, Pierre Natnael, helped him on the technical part to choose the right social network:

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<sup>13</sup> Lamy, C. (2020, October 19). Z Event 2020 : le marathon de jeux vidéo récolte 5,7 millions d’euros pour Amnesty International. Le Monde.fr. [https://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2020/10/19/z-event-le-marathon-de-jeux-video-recolte-5-7-millions-d-euros-pour-amnesty-international\\_6056580\\_4408996.htm](https://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2020/10/19/z-event-le-marathon-de-jeux-video-recolte-5-7-millions-d-euros-pour-amnesty-international_6056580_4408996.htm)

“I noticed that teens were dropping Facebook for Instagram [...] it is the attention of young people that we need to capture”; “Instagram has a phenomenal viral potential, creating a strong proximity relationship with people”.<sup>14</sup>

## **II. 1. Instagram as a mass mobilisation tool**

The Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2020 declares that use of the platform to access news has doubled across all age groups since 2018, especially among young people. Overtime, Twitter has established itself as politicians' preferred social network choice and has become a real tool for communication strategy and influence. As an example, in France in 2019, out of 577 deputies, 530 were active on twitter.<sup>15</sup> If this choice was made because of Twitter's affordance of text sharing being limited to short and concise messages, many political figures are now using social networks for real storytelling by sharing more photos or videos, especially to retain followers, while keeping their initial thread. As such, it is now Instagram that many have decided to choose.

In France, we count, since the end of 2020, twenty-two million users on Instagram (ranked 12th worldwide), being the first most used social network among the 15-24 age cohort in France and ranking fourth as the most used social network in this country, lurking behind Facebook, Messenger and What's App. Its utilization grew even quicker this last year, with Instagram having become the most used platform during the confinements due to the crisis of Covid-19 in France.

Although the Eurodeputy Raphaël Glucksmann posts content on other social media, like Twitter where he is indeed really active, it is on Instagram that we can witness his dedication to Uyghurs, with almost half of his posts concerning the subject (200 out of 500).

Indeed, Instagram works only through photos and videos, and it is therefore the perfect social network for a storytelling focusing on emotion, where the visual format can highlight the human side or feeling essential to political mobilisation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Vigoureux, E. (2021, March 5). La rencontre de ces trois-là a rendu la cause ouïgoure puissante en France. L'Obs. <https://www.nouvelobs.com/monde/20210304.OBS40949/glucksmann-reyhanbussiere-la-rencontre-de-ces-trois-la-a-rendu-la-cause-ouigoure-puissante-en-france.html>

<sup>15</sup> Twitter, outil d'information et d'influence dans la vie politique. (2019, October 14). Master 2 Communication Média Hors Média (M2 CMHM) -IAE Bordeaux. <http://mastercommunication-iaebordeaux.fr/2019/10/14/twitter-outil-dinformation-et-dinfluence-dans-la-vie-politique/>

<sup>16</sup> Osman, M. (2021, March 10). *Brand Storytelling : Using Instagram images to tell your story*. Metigy. <https://metigy.com/metigy-learning/brand-storytelling-using-instagram-images-to-tell-your-story/>

## Instagram, the new platform for info-activism?

During the year 2020, we saw the platform transform itself by increasingly proposing political, social or humanitarian content.<sup>17</sup> Content available in the media but which received a different reception on Instagram, can be exemplified by the coverage of events that arose concerning the Black Lives Matter movement, with profile pictures replaced in black, black publications (Blackout Tuesday), the #BlackLivesMatter, a large amount of videos on the death of George Floyd and the protests that subsequently took place.

Instagram has been moving towards more politicised and news-oriented content for some time with the growing rise of independent info-activist accounts. Indeed, the latest Digital News Report states that among French people who get information on the Internet, more than 20% do so via social networks. While Facebook remains the leading social network of choice for accessing information among the French, Instagram and What's App are those that have made the strongest progress over the past year.

It is in the 16-25 age range that Instagram is the first choice for accessing information, with about 73% of these youths using the internet to access information and 36% choosing to use Instagram daily.<sup>18</sup> This can be seen as a choice for shorter, more visual information. Many news accounts have been created, often dedicated to specific topics, such as climate change, feminism or racism for example. They present real "instagrammable" articles that follow all the codes of the platform (example Annex 1). The art of presenting information obeys aesthetic and digestible objectives so as to attract and maintain the reader.

Over the last year, we have seen the development of more and more Instagramics "justice slideshows" on Instagram, presenting a main piece of information while keeping a clear and uncluttered aesthetic. The objective is that of attracting the reader's attention and curiosity while encouraging him to use the platform's slideshow and slide function to get the

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<sup>17</sup> Stewart, E., & Ghaffary, S. (2020, June 24). Political content has taken over Instagram thanks to Black Lives Matter. Vox. <https://www.vox.com/recode/2020/6/24/21300631/instagram-black-lives-matter-politics-blackout-tuesday>

<sup>18</sup> Asselin, C. (2021). Les réseaux sociaux utilisés pour accéder à l'information en France. Digimind. <https://blog.digimind.com/fr/agences/les-r%C3%A9seaux-sociaux-utilis%C3%A9s-pour-acc%C3%A9der-%C3%A0-l'information-en-france>

explanations on the starting sentence. These posts are called "explainers"<sup>19</sup> and are therefore based on a simplification of an idea or situation to make it more accessible and understandable.

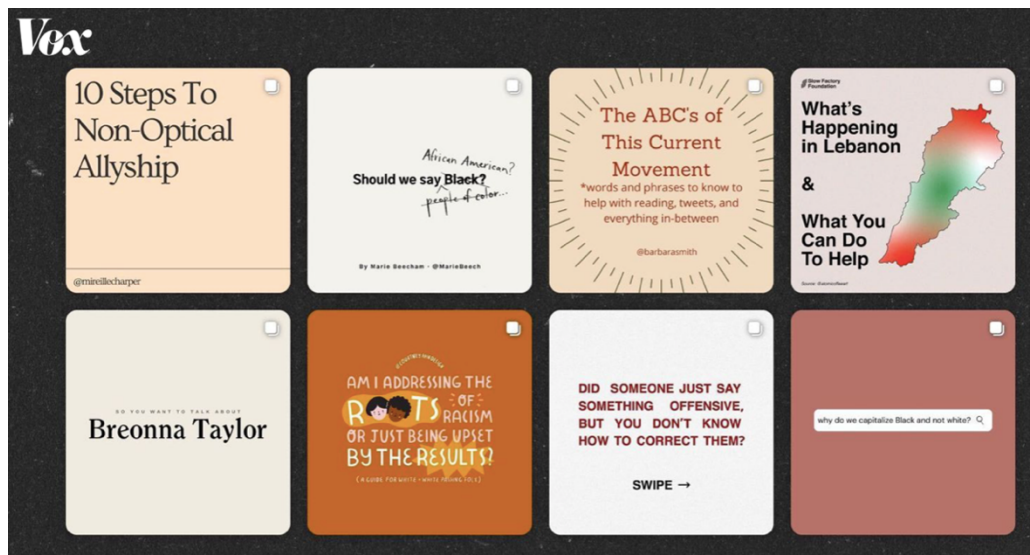


Figure 1 — Examples of Justice Slideshows <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/21359098/social-justice-slideshows-instagram-activism>

Their design, based on a style often called "Corporate Memphis", uses squiggly, cartoon figures with disproportionate limbs set next to clear-cut, easily-readable font – and has been criticised for the homogenisation of the internet's visual language.<sup>20</sup> It forces the user to stop and read the rest of the information, while making these posts extremely shareable in stories, due to their simplification.

This is indeed the choice that essayist Raphaël Glucksmann made in September 2019, with his very first Instagram post following these new codes of the "social justice slideshow" focusing on Uyghurs (Appendix B).

<sup>19</sup> The Lazy Liberalism of Instagram Slideshows. (2020, August 19). The New Republic. <https://newrepublic.com/article/158972/instagram-black-lives-matter-posts>

<sup>20</sup> Smith, A. (2021, May 13). Social justice slideshows are going viral on Instagram -here's what to remember about what they're sharing. The Independent. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/israel-hamas-instagram-viral-slideshow-b1846951.html>



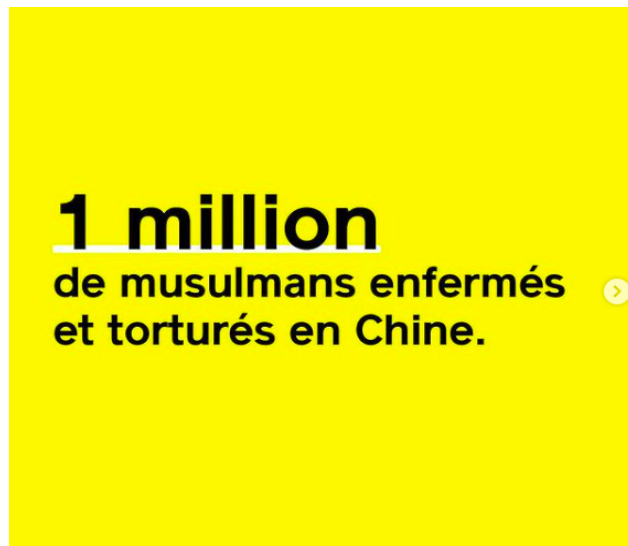


Figure 2 — First Instagram publication about Uyghurs  
by Raphaël Glucksmann on Instagram  
<https://www.instagram.com/raphaelglucksmann/>

From the first Instagram post on the situation, the tone was set. We can still find the same "editorial line" today in all his posts about the Uyghurs.

The choice of post format is very appropriate to the struggle: Bright yellow posts, with black lettering, carrying few but poignant words making for an easy read. The goal is to attract the eyes and attention of the reader, but above all to encourage participation. He then uses the slideshow function of Instagram, so that the reader slides to access detailed information on the sentence previously read.

In this manner, a real campaign is launched, each post focusing on the situation by providing new information, new facts, new figures, new testimonies. The figures or new information are directly presented starting from the first image of the post, in large, bold, always black on yellow, figures like “37 countries have approved the Chinese policy of internment of Muslims” or “more than 80,000 Muslim Uighurs enslaved”, while keeping the slideshow function so as to allow the reader to obtain information, in these cases for example, on which countries have signed and when, or on the conditions of slavery of the Uyghurs. All this data is made available while keeping the thread of the visual campaign. The information is thus presented in an “Instagrammable” way: in the infinite scroll mode (web design technique where, as the user scrolls down a page, more content loads automatically and continuously at the bottom, eliminating the user’s need to click on to the next page)<sup>21</sup>, these posts attract attention, are read in a short time and most of all can easily be shared via stories.

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<sup>21</sup> Koss, H. (2021, January 9). *Infinite Scroll: What Is It Good For?* Built In. <https://builtin.com/ux-design/infinite-scroll>

## II. 2. Raphaël Glucksmann: participatory communication strategy

Agenda-setting theory presents the public as being influenced by traditional media, by the salience they give to a particular topic, encompassing the frequency of appearance, its location on a newspaper page or in broadcast news (whether it appears at the beginning or at the end), therefore presupposing the public's passivity towards the transmission of information. However, social media, as a new source of information, have become a provider of media content that depends on its users, and therefore on the public, in a much more active sense. This turn towards social media in recent years allows us to witness a redistribution of the power of influence between the media and the public. In the first instance, the user appears to have become a consumer who uses these platforms to inform himself, while having the ability to perform his own filtering of information and to choose which accounts he wants to follow and watch and which ones he is not interested in, contrary to what the traditional media offer.

However, in a second stage, the user is also a content producer. In the case of Instagram, the user posts photos and videos or stories, shares with their community the stories or posts of the accounts he wants and asks his community to share, as if in a chain sequence.

As such, involved users are increasingly moving from being passive receivers to active producers, organising events from social networks and mobilising money in the form of funds for social causes.

And Raphaël Glucksmann follows this trend by placing the participation of his community at the centre of his struggle to draw attention to the Uyghur situation. The essayist's communication strategy for mobilising people appears to follow the "principles for having a presence on social networks" established by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) in *Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media*, as we will see below.

Until now, and during his fight, he has followed the first principle referred to by the above-mentioned authors, namely the recommendation to be *active* and to be *constant* in the dissemination of posts. He publishes regular content, with almost half of his Instagram posts focusing on Uyghurs, and communicates his community daily via stories and comments. He then follows the rest of the principles: be interesting (his content is relevant and he understands what the audience is interested in reading about, mobilising attention through short and explicative posts), be humble (he knows the platform and adapted his content so as to show his community of followers that without them he cannot advance in this fight), and, lastly, be honest (having asserted himself as a political figure from the start). In effect, this is a strategy that combines presence and participation.

The first requests for active and official participation from his community of followers are not even about sharing posts or information via the platform, but about joining him at the very first official Parisian rally in support of the Uyghur people, on 24 November 2019. The second request came a little later in December, when the essayist asked his followers to sign the petition named "Mr. President, act to protect the Uyghurs".

Over the next year or so, the MEP asked his followers to increasingly share the Uyghur plight that he highlights in his posts, whether it consist in new information on the subject, testimonies of survivors of Uyghur camps or even speeches he delivers in the European Parliament, such as that titled "J'accuse", originally delivered in November 2017, which became the one most relayed by the media. Echoing the tone of Emile Zola's famous speech of 1898, he directly accuses those he considers guilty for the current situation of the Uyghur people: firstly, China and the camps it has created; secondly, the multinationals that continue to collaborate with suppliers "employing" Uyghurs; and lastly, the silent European media and leaders who fail to act.

It is an increasingly engaging succession of actions that will partly boost the visualization of this struggle on Instagram. During the whole week of September 28 to October 2, 2020, Raphaël Glucksmann offered an opportunity each day for his community of followers to act, encouraging them to act at the same time so as to reinforce the impact on public opinion through the media.

In effect, participation took on another meaning when it was no longer just about sharing information in a story or message. He first relaunched the old petition already created and addressed to the President of the French Republic in 2019, but this time, due to already being more followed after a year of communication through this social media platform, he obtained more than 100 000 signatures in 48h. He then, on the second day, shared the email address of the Chinese Embassy in France on his Instagram account and asked his community of followers to send the email "Close the camps, free the Uyghurs. #FranceforUyghurs" to this address at 6 PM. As a "result", tens of thousands of emails were sent, according to the MEP, who displayed, as proof of this intense correspondence, the error message that appeared indicating that the message quota was full upon trying to send an email to that address that particular day. On the third day, he asks his community of followers to print one of the various informative yellow slideshow Instagram posts and to stick them in streets, shops, colleges or high schools, while asking those followers to tag him by taking a picture of their actions so as to be able to share this again on online social networks as proof of mobilisation.

He then set up the "charter of solidarity with the Uyghurs" and asked his community of followers to send it to the mayors of their cities and villages so that they may be able to sign it, alongside the French President.

On the fourth day, he asked his followers to tag three international brands on the list of brands, with suppliers involved in the slavery of Uyghurs, and cut this relationship. For him, this is one of the keys to mobilization around this cause. As he explains, Xinjiang is indeed far from Europe and Europeans can feel distant from the problem, but brands that are involved in the slavery of Uyghurs – such as Zara, Nike or Adidas – and which are part of the daily life of people here, make the fight closer. “The very structure of globalisation means that a crime committed on the other side of the world can be part of the production chain for our everyday objects.” (France Culture, 09/08/2020).

The last action, and probably one of the most important, consisted in sharing a turquoise blue square, the colour of the Uyghur flag, on the Chinese national holiday, October 1st, accompanied by a simple request that followers not only repost this blue square on their Instagram account with the hashtag #FreeUyghurs, but also place it in their profile picture to attract people’s eyes.

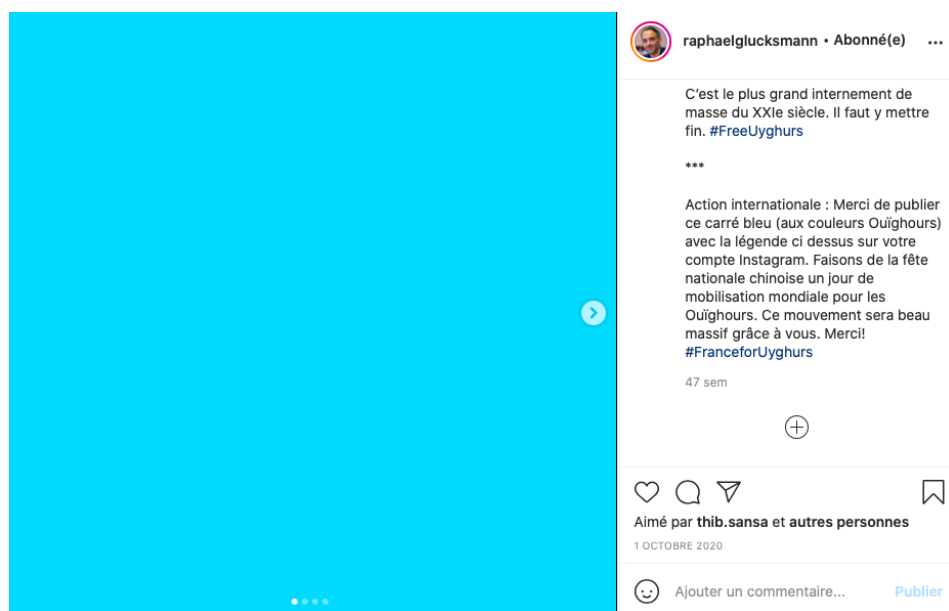


Figure 3 — Request publication for posting a blue square  
<https://www.instagram.com/raphaelglucksmann/>

Rapidly, Instagram witnessed a wave of turquoise blue and, in only few hours, the turquoise blue square became the profile picture of more than forty thousand Instagram accounts<sup>22</sup> and continued to grow during the day, partly as a consequence of celebrities entering the movement. In effect, the support and posts of actor Omar Sy, Miss France (Marine Lorphelin), or the actress Marina Foïs brought their communities of followers to the movement. This somewhat echoed what happened during the Black Lives Matter movement and the black posts and profile pictures.

On this day, a large variety of online newspapers wrote articles about the movement: “Why so many blue squares on Instagram?”<sup>23</sup> (L’Obs); “Blue squares to sensitize people to the Uyghur situation”<sup>24</sup> (Elle); even internationally, RTBF Belgium asked, “... what is the objective of this blue square that is flooding Instagram?”<sup>25</sup>. Indeed, we will see below a more concrete extension of the movement through the use of Phantom Buster. These articles were particularly probative and thus important, because most of these online versions of newspapers, or radio for that matter, suddenly came to support the Uyghur cause on China’s National Day by highlighting the blue squares on Instagram and what these meant.

By October 2nd, the blue square post had already been shared more than one hundred thousand on Instagram.<sup>26</sup> The online software Phantom Buster allowed for the extraction of specific data from Instagram through the “Instagram hashtag collector”. Using one hashtag only, this software enables the extraction of each post that uses this hashtag, giving us information on the URL profile, the post’s author’s name and username, the number of comments and likes, as well as the post’s description and location.

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<sup>22</sup> M. (2020, November 25). #FreeUyghur : pourquoi des carrés bleus sur Instagram ? Agence Influenceur. <https://agence-influenceur.fr/freeuyghur-pourquoi-des-carres-bleus-sur-instagram/>

<sup>23</sup> Pourquoi tant de fonds bleus sur Instagram ce jeudi ? (2020, October 2). L’Obs. <https://www.nouvelobs.com/monde/20201001.OBS34160/pourquoi-tant-de-fonds-bleus-sur-instagram.html>

<sup>24</sup> Guillon, A. (2020, October 2). Instagram : un carré bleu pour sensibiliser au sort des ouïghours en Chine. Elle. <https://www.elle.fr/Societe/News/Instagram-un-carre-bleu-pour-sensibiliser-au-sort-des-Ouighours-en-Chine-3885122>

<sup>25</sup> Larue, C. (2020, October 2). Quel est le but de ce carré bleu ciel qui inonde Instagram ? RTBF Info. [https://www.rtf.be/info/monde/detail\\_quel-est-le-but-de-ce-carre-bleu-ciel-qui-inonde-instagram?id=10598643](https://www.rtf.be/info/monde/detail_quel-est-le-but-de-ce-carre-bleu-ciel-qui-inonde-instagram?id=10598643)

<sup>26</sup> Sud Ouest. (2020, October 2). En soutien aux Ouïghours, la vague bleue fait son retour sur les réseaux sociaux. SudOuest.fr. <https://www.sudouest.fr/economie/reseaux-sociaux/en-soutien-aux-ouighours-la-vague-bleue-fait-son-retour-sur-les-reseaux-sociaux-4713406.php>

A difference has to draw between the number of shares of the publication and the number of users of the hashtag. Indeed, the blue square movement started with Raphaël Glucksmann, but among the one hundred thousand shares, a probably large part of the Instagram users were not familiar with Raphaël Glucksmann’s original post, having taken notice of it from other celebrities’ accounts sharing it on their feed or stories. Their community of followers had, in turn, proceeded to do the same as them, also sharing it. It is indeed a great help that we can measure the dissemination of the blue square movement by the fact that Raphaël Glucksmann’s post came to have almost one million likes, when we know that his account did not originally surpass 200 thousand followers previously to this date. Omar Sy’s two million followers, or the influencer JustRiadh and his 4 million followers, for example, definitely helped reach more people by sharing the blue square posts with their followers.

To really measure who shared content thanks to Raphaël Glucksmann, we have to search the hashtag #FreeUyghurs that he used to spread information on the subject on Instagram. The first extraction retrieved the hashtag #FreeUyghurs, used on the blue square of the original post: 90 710 publications were made using this hashtag. Once the data is extracted in a CSV file (Comma-Separated Value)<sup>27</sup>, the DownThemAll application makes it possible to download the images corresponding to each post and transpose them to “ImageSorter” or “Pic Arrange”, to sort the image by pattern/colour.

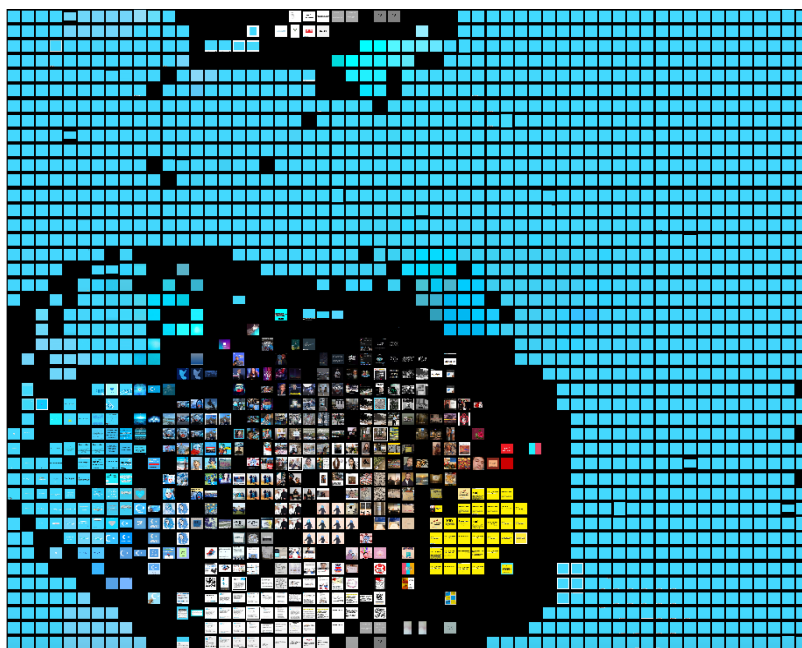


Figure 4 — Image Sorter for the #FreeUyghurs Instagram publications

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<sup>27</sup> Delimited text file that uses commas to separate each value. Each line of value on the CSV corresponds to a record.

To obtain more specific information on our object of research, the data range was reduced to one month counting from the date of publication. A literal wave of blue can be seen and shows that more than people just sharing the blue square that they could have seen in any celebrity or friend reposting on a story, the obvious majority used it with the hashtag that Raphaël Glucksmann had set up, serving as proof of his role as link between the dissemination of information and its subsequent sharing.

However, what is really interesting would be to see to what extent these posts and the original one in particular actually augmented the number of posts on the topic or not, and thus awareness of the subject. With this objective in mind, we proceeded to extract, by resorting to the same procedures mentioned above, the more general hashtag #Ouïghours in French, which was not created by the Eurodeputy.

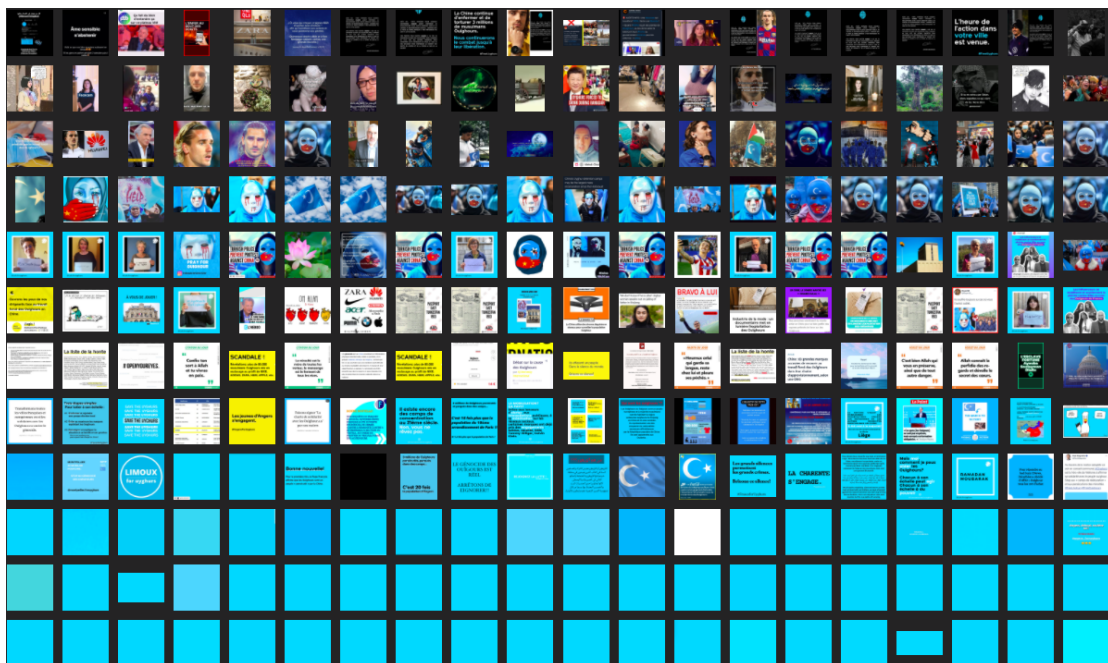


Figure 5 — Pic Arrange sort of #ouïghours Instagram publications

Here, as we can see, a wider mix of pictures appear, due to this hashtag being of a more general nature and thus used by people who are not necessarily followers of Raphaël Glucksmann. Nevertheless, knowing that anyone wanting to post about this topic on Instagram will use the #Ouïghours in France, and, despite this, half of the posts still consist in a blue square constitutes significant proof of the MEP post's influence.

One can thus conclude that the MEP shows how social networks have an "immense democratic potential"<sup>28</sup>, and that it is by making his community of followers an actor and not a "receiver of political discourse" that the campaign works. In effect, the campaign succeeded in creating a movement of opinion that compensated for the silence of the traditional media or the political parties.

Over the years, it has been possible to witness a mutation of public debate from offline to online, progressively opening the democratic potential that social media were initially regarded as offering. Social media today represent a literal daily democracy where everyone can – and indeed do – give their opinion all the time. In “Changes in the Online Public Debate” (2019, p. 28), Badouart qualifies social media as a platform where “citizenship is not a punctual and ceremonious experience, but rather a habit that is now familiar”.

Indeed, the design of social media platforms are made to mobilize people into participating, encouraging them to react to everything: the whole concept is based on sharing a personal opinion or preference, disliking and commenting someone else's, what Badouart calls the “push button forms of citizen expression” (2019, p. 26). This is a non-compellent way to participate, and this characteristic is particularly important as it offers a possibility to speak to everyone, even people usually excluded from public debate.

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<sup>28</sup> Mouvement de soutien aux Ouïghours : « Les jeunes sont avides d'engagement ». (2020, August 9). France Culture. <https://www.franceculture.fr/geopolitique/mouvement-de-soutien-aux-ouighours-les-jeunes-sont-avides-dengagement>



### **III. Raphaël Glucksmann: A Modern Opinion Leader?**

#### **III. 1. The traditional opinion leader and the evolution of the concept during the digital age**

If the prevailing theory was that of the direct effects of the media and of Lasswell's epidermal syringe and therefore that the receiver receives information and accepts it, making him a passive receiver whose beliefs and behaviour are influenced by the media, this conception came to gradually give way to the acceptance of the existence of filtering of information between the producer of this information, in this case the media, and its receiver. Lazarsfeld and Katz's "two-step flow of communication" theory, published in 1955, demonstrates empirically that the transmission of information is not really direct, but rather that it passes through a third person whom they call an "opinion leader".

Indeed, the media deliver their information but this information does not reach the receivers directly, passing first through opinion leaders, who, in the 1950's, were considered to be individuals who were well-placed within their groups of reference to interpret this information coming from the media. In short, these opinion leaders collect information, study it but above all interpret it and then distribute it to the rest of the receivers.

Following this theory, we see that the information we receive does not come from the media directly but rather is subject to the processing on the part of an opinion leader. In Lazarsfeld and Katz's (1955) study, which focused on elections and voting, the authors discovered that only five percent of people surveyed would change their voting opinion after consuming information directly from the media, whereas interpersonal connections, discussions between friends or within their professional circle were more likely to be better predictors of a person's electoral behaviour. This study thus allowed for two important conclusions: on the one hand, the environment and the social group were regarded as having more influence on the decision-making power of information receivers than previously thought; on the other hand, the public ceased to be seen as a homogeneous mass that responded uniformly to the media, as previously presented.

Today, both the supply of information and the opportunities for the reception of information have expanded considerably with the advent of digital media. Although it is still possible to obtain information through traditional media, we have already seen that this tendency is disappearing and the new generations instinctively turn to social media for news. This

avalanche of permanent information available to users can be complicated to follow and therefore many follow this information via an intermediary.

Indeed, we can now talk about a multi-step flow process, where information is disseminated through a multitude of layers where the most connected users play a role in the creation and distribution of information. The latter can be seen, in the present context, as the new opinion leaders of the digital age, still playing a relevant role in the filtering of information. As such, although the times are very different from those in which Lazarsfeld and Katz (1955) elaborated their model, with much more diverse possibilities of being informed, the two-step information flow still appears to constitute a framework of analysis that remains relevant.

This leads us, then, to pose the following question: Can we consider Raphaël Glucksmann to be a modern opinion leader, who, through social media, filters the information he receives and distributes it, already interpreted, to his community?

The characteristics of the opinion leader thought up by Lazarsfeld and Katz in *The People's Choice* (1955) are not necessarily those that one thinks of when imagining an opinion leader in the classical sense. The term 'leader' can be interpreted in several ways, but according to those authors, in the context of filtering and redistributing information, we are talking about a leader coming from all walks of life, someone that Katz (in the updated preface dating from 2005) defines as 'common', due to not being necessarily linked to high social status, there being opinion leaders in every social layer. Anyone can be an opinion leader and there is no typical profile, with the so-called leader adapting to each different social group in accordance with the latter's profile.

However, the authors define some attributes that should be common to all opinion leaders. Firstly, they believe that opinion leaders can only influence their peers or *entourage* in a specific area and not in a multitude of more general areas. Logically, the opinion leader first selects the information he or she is interested in from the media, a first filter, before disseminating the information. This first filtering will first of all make sense in relation to his or her interests, but also give him or her a certain knowledge of the subject and therefore greater legitimacy. This first characteristic makes the opinion leader non-permanent. Specialised in a subject, his role is more localised and specific, and he cannot therefore play this role constantly. Finally, the authors also emphasise the interdependence of the opinion leader with the group. It is the relationships that exist within the group, whether they be friendship, professional or familial, that will give him his leadership, because it is only through the acceptance, knowledge or trust that the group has of him that his influence can be applied.

Over the recent years, a lot of theories tend to confirm that some different characteristics have to be applied to qualify as an online opinion leader. In “Does Twitter motivate involvement in politics? Tweeting, opinion leadership, and political engagement” (2013), Park argues that, on Twitter, opinion leaders tend to rely on their expertise, making them a reference in one range of topics but not a reference in general terms, a characteristic which is enhanced due to the instantaneity of social media. As the influence on social media is more wide-reaching, the interdependence with the group can be seen as less important. Indeed, social media implies a change in terms of size, with the possibility of reaching and therefore influencing, and being reached and/or influenced, by many more people. Functioning more as a network than as part of a real relationship, the online opinion leader can have influence on peers as much as on strangers. The definition of online opinion leader fits more into the definition of the multistep flow of communication (also developed by Katz and Lazarsfeld in 1955), where a “multistep flow indicates that a message is distributed through a myriad of intermediary channels” (Park, 2013, p. 1642).

But where then does the essayist's influence fit in? While Raphaël Glucksmann places himself in this situation as an opinion leader on social media and, in particular, on Instagram, we can also see an evolution in his role as digital opinion leader, as well as in his real life through his status as MEP.

How, then, does Raphaël Glucksmann exercise his influence as a *multi-opinion leader*? The concept of influence, which can be defined as "exerted by an individual, or a group of individuals, on a person that results in the modification of a belief, an attitude or an anticipated behaviour" (Verette, Bertrandias, Galan & Vignolles, 2012), used to be based on the support that the traditional media gave an individual. In the case of celebrities, for example, this would encompass the time spent interviewing them, the photos shared, the songs played on the radio, etc. Influence implies that the more someone appears, the more that person is followed and, the more a person is followed, the more they can influence. This dependency on traditional media for influence exists much less today, since each person can be in direct contact with his public via social media to the point of creating a real community of followers.

However, we can see that the trend is moving towards a choice to inform oneself through social media, and not necessarily directly on the Twitter or Instagram page of a previously known traditional newspaper or other medium, but also through independent accounts, corresponding to real modern opinion leaders. The everyday, rather than the non-permanent nature of the opinion leaders defined by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), is ultimately a reflection of the new digital social networks.

Before we can consider Raphaël Glucksmann an opinion leader, we know that he is first and foremost a political leader. In his case, he doesn't really tick the box of the common opinion leader, knowing that he is the son of a well-known philosopher in France, a writer who has already sold hundreds of books, the head of his own political party, but above all, for about two years now, a European deputy. This background gives him an advantage in disseminating information: his notoriety. Indeed, it is easier to disseminate information *en masse* if one already has the social capital (Putnam, 2000) that allows for wider reach.

On the other hand, Raphaël Glucksmann fulfils the category of opinion leader very well because of his specialisation in the defence of human rights. Elected two years ago to the position of Vice-Chairman of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights, he regularly highlights this interest and devotes most of his time to it on social media. On his Instagram account, there are about 50 posts about his book, his political party or his children, while the other 450 posts focus on his struggles.

As a political leader and public figure, the interdependence with the group is more difficult to analyse. With over six hundred fifty thousand followers on Instagram today, he does not really know who he is sharing his posts with, and the people following him do not know him personally; they have chosen him, and it is notably his position as an MEP and, therefore, his legitimacy to speak about human rights that inspires trust and allows him this leadership.

Another interesting definition that is relevant to understanding online opinion leadership, from the point of view of influence, defends that one is only an opinion leader, when people are influenced by what one says or posts. From this viewpoint, an online opinion leader is, more simply put, someone “with a large number of followers, representing a high level of influence on social media platforms due to this accumulated social capital [...] people who are active and have lots of followers for a certain topic” (Rorholm, 2018, p. 27). However, it is important to distinguish between large numbers of followers and influence. While the number of followers may indicate “individual popularity”, the level of influence is more relevant to understanding the implications of the community of followers.

To measure the influence of an Instagram account, the platform will use a calculation to find the *engagement rate* of that account, which is the performance indicator on that network. The engagement rate refers directly to the activity of the followers on the account and on the different publications, in other words, people who really *engage* with the content.

We can proceed to assess the engagement rate on the basis of the following calculation, which involves summing up the average total number of interactions on the account (average of likes + average of comment), dividing that number by the number of followers and finally multiply that result by 100 to reach a percentage. In Raphaël Glucksmann's case, we have an average of 57,420 thousand likes for an average of 1,130 thousand comments for a total number of 649,560 thousand followers, at the end of August 2021.

$$\begin{aligned} & (\text{Like}+\text{comments})/\text{Followers} \times 100 \\ & = (57\,042+1\,013)/649\,056 \times 100 \\ & = 8,93\% \end{aligned}$$

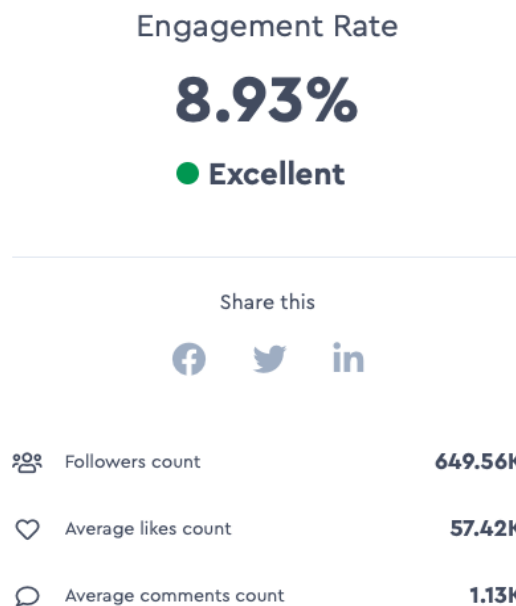


Figure 6 — Engagement rate of Raphaël Glucksmann's Instagram account <https://app.hypeauditor.com/preview/raphaelglucksmann/?from=suggester>

Considering that for an account that has between 500 000 to one million followers on Instagram, the average engagement rate is 2,05% (see appendix C), any engagement rate above this percentage is good proof of a strong and committed community of followers, and that is what we can observe with Raphaël Glucksmann's account.

It is however here that we can find one limit to qualifying who and what is an online influence: ephemerality. As exposed in “Power and Influence of the Modern Internet Opinion Leader” (Rorholm, 2018), it is difficult to set characteristics that define an online opinion leader when social media are filled with new content every minute: “A number of hot topics and new influential users appear every day on the web, the influence of the social media user dynamically and quickly changes over time” (Rorholm, 2018, p. 27). In social media content that is increasingly temporary, how can we then measure this influence?

### III. 2. Concrete results and evolution on the platform

A judicious use of social media seems to be able, internally, to promote the participation of members and, externally, to increase claims for visibility. For social media to really become a lever for democratization and strengthen actions, social media communication codes must be respected, as the Eurodeputy demonstrates with visual and emotive publications.

Raphaël Glucksmann congratulates what “thousands of young people on social networks have done more in a year than all our leaders put together”.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, in terms of more concrete results, we can use Google trends to see the impact of his campaign on the visibility of the situation.

For the year 2020, we can thus study the tendency of searches for the word “Ouïghours” in France on Google through Google trends application.



Figure 7 — Google trend for "ouïghours" in 2020  
<https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2020-01-01%202020-12->

We can see the evolution of interest for this search which is near zero during the whole first half of the year and then starts to grow around the Summer, with a first peak in July that Google trends evaluates as occurring between the 19th and the 25th of July and a second one, the largest in scale, between the 27th of September 2020 and the 3rd of October. To have more exact results, the date range can be changed to weekly or monthly modes, so as to comprehend precisely on what days the peaks took place.

<sup>29</sup> Figaro, L. (2020, December 20). Ouïghours : « J'accuse » , le discours de Raphaël Glucksmann. *LEFIGARO*. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/ouighours-j-accuse-le-discours-de-raphael-glucksmann-contre-les-dirigeants-europeens-20201220>

The first trend can be associated with the first feature article dedicated to the Uyghurs in a quality newspaper, *Libération*,<sup>30</sup> published on the 20th of July, also shared on Raphaël Glucksmann's Instagram account, coupled with the publication of the Eurodeputy announcing the publication of an article about his fight against multinationals and brands in the *New York Times* on the 22nd of July.

The second peak corresponds perfectly to the intense weekly campaign of the essayist on Instagram, and all his requested actions to make the cause more visible.

By reducing the data range, the main and highest peak of the Uyghur word search on Google in France, during the time under evaluation, occurs on the 1st of October 2020, corresponding to the blue square post and share on Instagram.

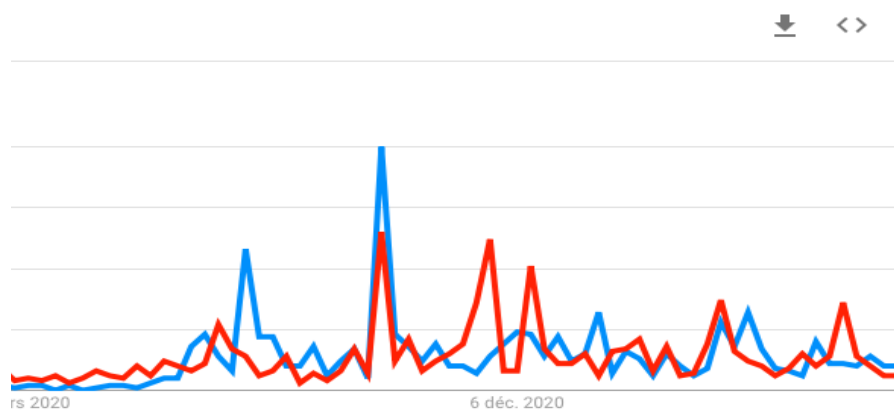


Figure 8 — Google trend for "ouighours" (blue) and "Raphaël Glucksmann" (red) [https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2019-07-01%202021-07-01&geo=FR&q=ouighours,%2Fg%2F122nh\\_94](https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2019-07-01%202021-07-01&geo=FR&q=ouighours,%2Fg%2F122nh_94)

Going still further and using the application functionalities, we searched for the associated subjects that came up under the search for the word Uyghur on Google. This exploration allowed us to see an association between the two terms, to the extent that in the top five subjects associated with the "Ouighours" word search, we find "Raphaël Glucksmann, Eurodeputy".

<sup>30</sup> Ouïghours Génocide en cours. (2020, July 20). *Libération*. [https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2020/07/20/ouighours-genocide-en-cours\\_1794799/](https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2020/07/20/ouighours-genocide-en-cours_1794799/)



Sujets associés <span>?</span>		En progression <span>▼</span>	<span>↓</span>	<span>&lt;&gt;</span>	<span>↻</span>
1	Nike - Société				Record
2	Nike - Sujet				Record
3	Esclavage contemporain - Sujet				Record
4	Organisation des Nations unies - Organisation ...				Record
5	Raphaël Glucksmann - Député européen				Record

Figure 9 — Associated topics of the Google trend "ouighours"  
<https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2020-01-01%202020-12-31&geo=FR&q=ouighours>

The second main official result, in terms of associated subjects, concerns his fight against international brands, the latter which continued to act as if nothing had happened, even after being contacted and asked to stop collaborating with furnishers “employing” Uyghurs – in an attempt that had still given them the benefit of the doubt. In March 2020, Raphaël Glucksmann, thanks to his position at the European Parliament, sponsored a legislative proposal which aimed to make multinational companies juridically responsible for the violation of human, social and environmental rights.

However, while the initiative was welcomed, it simultaneously gave rise to various questions, including those concerning its real effectiveness on the ground. Indeed, while the Eurodeputy ensured his legitimacy as an opinion leader, the reality of the social and political context was not in synchrony with the desire to put a stop to an injustice. On the 1st of July of the same year, the Eurodeputy announced a “historical day”, due to French justice having opened an investigation for “concealment of crimes against humanity”, referring to the deliberate hiding of crimes committed against humanity by the Inditex group (ZARA, Bershka, Stradivarius etc.) Uniqlo, Sketchers, Fast Retailing Japanese group and the French SMCP group (owner of Sandro, Maje, Claudie Pierlot brands), as the justice system managed to prove that some of these brands’ products took recourse in Uyghur slave labour.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Afp, L. M. A. (2021, July 1st). Enquête en France contre quatre géants du textile, soupçonnés d’avoir profité du travail forcé des Ouïgours. *Le Monde.fr*.  
[https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2021/07/01/travail-force-des-ouigours-enquete-ouverte-en-france-contre-quatre-geants-du-textile-pour-recel-de-crimes-contre-l-humanite\\_6086547\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2021/07/01/travail-force-des-ouigours-enquete-ouverte-en-france-contre-quatre-geants-du-textile-pour-recel-de-crimes-contre-l-humanite_6086547_3224.html)

These measures are indeed impressive when we know that everything started with an Instagram publication in 2019, and it is a rare result that is difficult to reach. It is important to consider that social media undeniably constitute one of the main approaches to engage and mobilize people around a cause, but reaching results depends on different factors.

The classical opinion leader, as firstly defined by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), would perhaps not be able to reach the results achieved by Raphaël Glucksmann. The community of followers is the largest value of social media, because to be seen and heard one needs to be shared by one's community of followers. The number of people that compose a community of followers will then obviously influence the number of shares.

As such, we can say that it now has become nearly impossible to start a movement around a specific cause, without a minimally strong social media personality to represent this movement: the followers are the ones that are going to do the job of sharing and make the visibility grow. We can take the example of the "Love Army" in France, where the mobilization force of social media was witnessed in 2017, with the initiative of a youtuber, Jérôme Jarre, who used his hashtag #LoveArmyForRohingya to spread word of what was happening in Myanmar and therefore to give maximum visibility to the problem on a global scale. Although criticized, due to it being judged illegitimate for a youtuber and humourist Vine celebrity to talk about a political subject in a dictatorship, two million dollars and sixty tons of supplies ended up being routed to Myanmar,<sup>32</sup> thanks to this movement. Jarre was already an influencer with a substantial following, when he started a movement tagging celebrities and asking them to tag other celebrities. This resulted in celebrities such as Omar Sy, Ben Stiller, Alicia Keys, and Paul Pogba, for example, sharing the same request for money donations and, in few days, the fundraising surpassed two million dollars. Reliance on the number of followers and their respective social capital in any campaign of this kind is always one of the major starting points. Instagram turned out to be a real visual and political springboard for the Uyghur cause to emerge within the public debate, but at the same time, by heavily contributing to this situation, Raphaël Glucksmann's influence became intimately connected to his use of Instagram.

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<sup>32</sup> L., Z. (2020, April 22). Rohingyas : la « Love Army » d'Omar Sy et Jérôme Jarre a levé près de deux millions d'euros. *leparisien.fr*. <https://www.leparisien.fr/international/rohingyas-la-love-army-d-omar-sy-et-jerome-jarre-a-leve-pres-de-deux-millions-d-euros-13-12-2017-7451274.php>

His Instagram account, which had 7,000 followers in September 2019, is now exploding, with 650,000 followers. The statistics speak for themselves: 95% of subscribers are under the age of 30, 75% live in France, only 15% are Parisian, 3% are between 13 and 17, 42% between 18 and 24, and 41% between 25 and 34.<sup>33</sup> His average of likes rose exponentially, and his account is now the 293rd most followed in France.

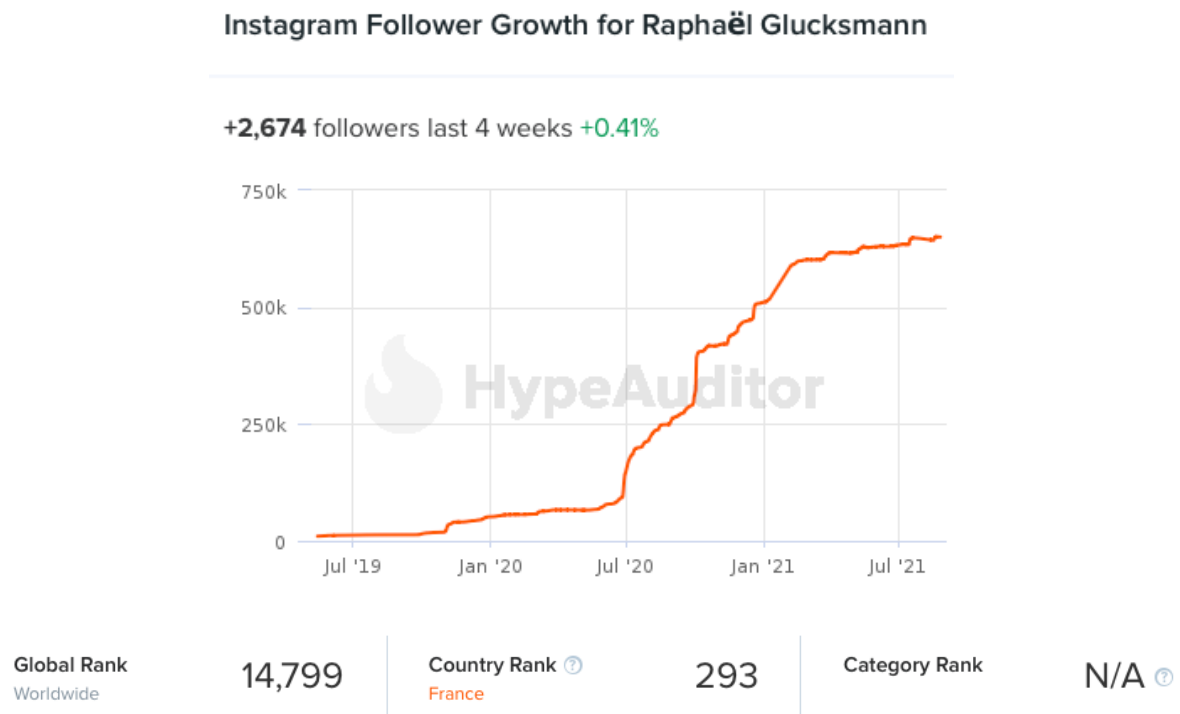


Figure 10 — Social Blade Instagram statistics <https://socialblade.com/instagram/user/raphaelglucksmann/monthly>

<sup>33</sup> Vigoureux, E. (2021, March 5). La rencontre de ces trois-là a rendu la cause ouïgoure puissante en France. *L'Obs*. <https://www.nouvelobs.com/monde/20210304.OBS40949/glucksmann-reyhan-bussiere-la-rencontre-de-ces-trois-la-a-rendu-la-cause-ouigoure-puissante-en-france.html>



## IV. CONCLUSION

On Instagram, movements such as Black Lives Matter and MeToo have made the platform more political than ever, increasingly encouraging petitions and protests. Activist content creators have thus managed to make activism a common thing.

In France, Raphaël Glucksmann has clearly participated in developing militant mobilisation on social media and, above all, in showing that it is possible for militancy to rise out of such platforms, by making the causes more concrete. He is now the leader of this movement in France, which aims to help spread what is happening in Xinjiang and try to stop it. In a few months, his actions, the majority of which are facilitated through the sharing and participation of his community of followers on social media, have really paid off and have come to reinforce the weight that initiatives starting on social networks represent.

The petition asking the French President Emmanuel Macron to support the Uyghur cause has now reached more than 273,000 signatures; if 300,000 signatures are reached, it will have become the most signed signature on the change.org website.

Raphaël Glucksmann's campaign in support of the Uyghurs has included videos of survivors' testimonies, proof of the internment of Uyghurs disseminated on the Internet and in newspapers, millions of emails sent to the Chinese Embassy, and, particularly, one of the main pillars of his struggle, that of encouraging some brands to respond globally by stopping their involvement with suppliers incriminated in the slavery of Uyghurs and their internment in "re-education" camps, such as Calvin Klein or H&M, for example.

But it is true that the most telling thing is the figures that speak for themselves. The hashtag #FreeUyghur, created by the MEP, has been used more than 130,000 times on Instagram, 213,000 times on Twitter, with 8,000,000 views of videos containing this hashtag on TikTok and more than 300,000 shares of the blue square post-dating from October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

As we have previously seen, the original definition of the opinion leader has changed with time and the emergence of social media. On these platforms, expertise is based more on the visibility of the content produced by the opinion leader, a status that he or she obtains thanks to his or her ability to make content visible to Internet users. It is through the measurement of his mediatization (volume of production carried out, place on search engines, increase in the number of subscribers on a continuous basis) and his interaction with his audience (shares, comments and, in the case of the MEP, requests for more active participation outside social media) that one can measure how visible his content is.

While the visibility of Raphaël Glucksmann's content is clear, it corresponds neither exactly to the so-called "traditional" opinion leader nor to the so-called "modern" digital opinion leader and would rather be placed between the two. Indeed, he does not translate into the typical opinion leader of the Instagram platform: he already is a political leader in everyday life, with his cause having made him an opinion leader and not the other way around; he sprang out as opinion leader from social media through his role as MEP. At first, he was not considered an opinion leader, due to not being a classic influencer of the platform. However, the form of his fight, played out on an online campaign, marked by all the codes of the social network to fit it, and his behaviour, seeking to engage his community of followers in almost every post, came to tick the boxes of the definition of an online opinion leader.

While the Covid-19 pandemic left little room for other topics in the French (and international) media in 2020, Raphaël Glucksmann nevertheless succeeded in his bet and propelled the Uyghur cause into the mainstream media much more than previously, having the former effectively been, until recently, more mentioned than dealt with. In addition to raising the issue in the mainstream media, thanks to his position as an MEP, he managed to take the issue to the European Parliament and tried to put in place sanctions and solutions for the situation of the Uyghur Muslims in China.

The agenda-setting of the mainstream media is still a relevant concept in our societies, and we can see that it is difficult to set up such a movement without confronting great difficulties, with the objective of simply seeking to increase the visibility of a cause. However, it can be said that the power to choose the agenda is no longer a one-way street for the traditional media, but rather that it now involves a two-way relationship of mutual influence, with social networks and traditional media influencing each other (Herbert, Sirois, Tremblay-Potvin 2015).

This struggle is a perfect example, when one considers that some mainstream media only started their coverage of the repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang after the struggle had gained momentum through social media. This restores the balance of power between the mass media and the public (through social networks) and gives the public the opportunity to set the agenda. Indeed, since the Arab Spring protests, we witness more and more online organization of offline protests. As seen above, Black Lives Matter protests were initiated by social media after the diffusion of the shocking image of George Floyd's murder. It is a perfect example of a revolt that started by sharing comments of indignation on Twitter and Instagram to the point of

translating into massive street manifestations all over the world.<sup>34</sup> Algeria had witnessed the same phenomenon in 2019 when Facebook groups against the reelection of President Bouteflika started to grow and reached more than 800,000 people, calling for protests. For the first time in Algeria's political history, a popular uprising lasted for more than four Fridays in a row.

These examples also show the impact that social media content can have on the offline political reality. However, these two network protests can serve as examples of what the author Zeynep Tufekci, in *Twitter and Tear Gas* (2017), referred to as "adhocracy". For her, an adhocracy concerns how the organization of these online protests is taking place: "tasks can be accomplished in an ad hoc manner by whoever shows up and is interested" (2017, p. 53).

While this consists in a novel way for people to attract and convince each other that they can join offline for a common reason, we see a slight difference in Raphaël Glucksmann's procedure. The presentation of the network protests by Zeynep Tufekci agrees on a pattern: the distribution of roles, namely decision-making processes, are not made on the basis of a hierarchical organization chart but simply rely on the mutual will, coordination and availability of the participants. We see in the MEP's struggle for the Uyghur cause the main difference as regards the decision-making processes described above, where we have Raphaël Glucksmann as a leader, telling his followers' community what to do and when.

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<sup>34</sup> Liubchenkova, N. (2020, June, 15). *In pictures : Black Lives Matter protests taking on the world*. Euronews. <https://www.euronews.com/2020/06/15/in-pictures-black-lives-matter-protests-taking-on-the-world>

#### IV. 1. Limitations and implications for future research

One of the main limits of this case study is the fact that the struggle is still in process. In effect, the campaign of Raphaël Glucksmann on Instagram is still ongoing and it is, as such, more complicated to measure it due to our not being able to guess its future developments, due to the possibility that it may either grow more the next few months or completely disappear. That is the main explanation for focusing on the year of 2020 to study Glucksmann's communication strategy, when the campaign started to really expand. However, our research indicates that future results may be expected as the visibility of the campaign is expanding and the struggles are shared and the target of participation by more and more people. It is complicated to measure the final results that could occur in the next few months or in a few years, depending on whether the Eurodeputy decides to continue his fight with the public on social media, or whether he decides that, on a platform like this one, he has achieved the best possible results in terms of raising awareness for the cause, but has no room to take the struggle any further to help the imprisoned population

It would be interesting, then, in a study, following from this one, to focus on Glucksmann's whole campaign, from the beginning to end, so as to manage to calculate, from a larger perspective, its impact: in France but also internationally, if the struggle extends abroad; on the segments of the population most involved and where; on new modes of participation and inclusion of the public in the 'real' action. It would also be important to see if the actions continue after the buzz. Indeed, on social media, the flow of information is so important that another issue can rapidly assume more salience, with the Uyghur cause slipping into oblivion. Seen as the leader of the movement in France, the Eurodeputy will have to proceed with cautiousness: in order to be truly effective, his action will have to be long-term and last in time beyond the online buzz that it achieved.

It would be then interesting to continue this case study by evaluating the intentions of opinion leaders initiating these kinds of struggle. While it is definitely laudable and almost necessary, knowing that traditional mass media were keeping the subject out of the light, how can we measure the real intentions of such online campaigns? Taking as an example this politician, head of his own political party, how can we know if the primary intention was not related to a certain search for more notoriety?

Recently, Raphaël Glucksmann released his new book *Lettre à la Génération qui Va Tout Changer (Letter to the Generation that will Change Everything)*, focusing on his political fights



in general but also on his social media campaign and the active participation of the public, young in its majority.

This book is now available in all the bookshops in France and is witnessing a big success, which indicates that Glucksmann's recent rise in notoriety on social media has done its bit. On his six last Instagram publications, three concern his recent book release and the gathering he is organizing in different theatres or libraries to promote the latter: he shares all this experience on his stories and shows the affluence of people who come buy his book every day.

Using those platforms as a springboard is something that is being replicated more and more, as we can see with La France Insoumise, a political party that is increasingly present on YouTube, Instagram or Twitch.

Further research would be needed to understand if the motivation to exert opinion leadership and attract followers supersedes the ideal of giving more light to a cause. The choice of doing a case study is "parti pris", but we cannot exclude the major inconvenient: the complication of performing a generalization of the results.

Indeed, it is unlikely that there will be studies of other exactly comparable cases to allow the conclusions of the first one applicable to an entire population. In this particular case, what Raphaël Glucksmann represents as leader of opinion and how he has managed to set the agenda, cannot be easily applied to other cases.

In terms of more concrete content, this case study was limited by more technical problems. The initial idea was to compare the affluence of social media on this topic, thanks to Raphaël Glucksmann's campaign, with the coverage of French traditional mass media on the same topic. Unfortunately, it became impossible to realize this objective due to the fact that the application, Crowdtangle, needed to extract the right data coming from French legacy newspapers, did not manage to extract the data from French content. The most efficient application to sort images, ImageSorter, has been shut down, so I only managed to use it for a part of this study and had to use the Pic Arrange application for the rest of the study. Another limitation derived from the fact that, in order to perform a detailed study of Instagram profile statistics, almost no free application exists, with many offering annual subscriptions, or only partial use for a shorter period of time, which makes it difficult to really experience the application in its totality without paying.



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## APPENDICES

Appendix A – French Instagram Account « @humanist.news » created in 2020





Appendix C – Average Engagement Rate  
<https://phlanx.com/engagement-calculator>

### Average Engagement Rate on Instagram

