

'Repackaging' Cuban cultural consumption

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Abstract: Cuba's media underwent a profound shift from a commercial to a state-controlled media system within three years of the Cuban Revolution. Under that system, the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC) and the Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión (ICRT) officially monopolized the distribution of cultural materials, which were constructed to defend revolutionary ideals. The entrance of new media technologies for at least the last two decades, largely in the absence of state regulation, has slowly opened alternatives to the state system. This article reviews those changes and discusses what they mean for consumption of information and entertainment materials in Cuba. It explains the incremental development of the alternative cultural consumption market on the island by focusing on the Paquete Semanal (Weekly Package) as the most popular example of cultural distribution and consumption following an alternative logic of consumerism. Researchers on the island suggest the Paquete's attractiveness is based on the perceived diversity, quality and authenticity of its materials, as compared to state television. Its production and distribution network is decentralized, operates in unregulated or "a-legal" status, and is commercially driven, possibly employing thousands. The authors argue that, given the popularity of the Paquete, the product has implications for the conservation of the socialist ideological foundations of the Cuban government and the 'modus operandi' of communications media in the country.

Keywords: Cuban Alternative Media; Cultural Studies; Paquete Semanal.

Resumo: Nos três anos seguintes à Revolução Cubana, o sistema de mídia em Cuba passou por uma profunda mudança – de sistema de mídia comercial para um sistema socialista de mídia controlado pelo Estado. Nesse sistema, o Instituto Cubano de Arte e Indústria Cinematográfica (ICAIC) e o Instituto Cubano de Rádio e Televisão (ICRT) monopolizaram a distribuição de material cultural produzido para defender os ideais revolucionários. A chegada de novas tecnologias nas duas últimas décadas, em grande parte sem regulação pelo Estado, está abrindo lentamente formatos alternativos ao sistema estatal. Este artigo analisa essas mudanças e discute o que elas significam para o consumo de material informativo e de entretenimento em Cuba. Explica o crescimento do mercado de consumo cultural alternativo na ilha, concentrando-se no Pacote Semanal (Pacote Semanal) como o exemplo mais popular de distribuição e consumo cultural seguindo uma lógica alternativa. Pesquisadores cubanos sugerem que a atratividade do Pacote é baseada na diversidade, na qualidade e na autenticidade do seu conteúdo em comparação com a televisão estatal. Sua rede de produção e distribuição é descentralizada, opera com status não regulamentado, ou "a-legal", e tem objetivo comercial, possivelmente empregando milhares de pessoas. Os autores argumentam que, dada a popularidade do Pacote, o produto tem implicações importantes para a preservação dos fundamentos ideológicos socialistas do governo cubano e do modus operandi dos meios de comunicação no país.

Palavras-chave: Mídia Alternativa Cubana; Estudos Culturais; Paquete Semanal.

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Introduction

The triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 changed the media landscape from a highly developed commercial system to one designed to protect and preserve the socialist ideology of the Revolution. Mass media were nationalized and, with the foundation of the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC) and the Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión (ICRT), the dissemination of cultural material that supported and defended revolutionary ideals was consolidated. Cultural consumption became central in the discourse and propaganda strategies of the revolutionary government.

New technologies over the last two decades, such as the Video Cassette Recorder, satellite television receivers, and eventually mobile drives and computers, allowed alternative content producers and distributors to operate outside of the state in a liminal space where some went unregulated and others were officially illegal but rarely sanctioned. Mom-and-pop stores rented out movies captured surreptitiously from satellite signals and the commercialization of so-called “cables,” which connect separate houses to the same satellite antenna, appeared. Soon thereafter the DVD replaced VHS and disc “burners/sellers” pedaled branded mashups of music and entertainment.

Against this backdrop of technological innovation and spotty regulation, the most popular distribution platform emerged almost a decade ago. Called el Paquete Semanal, a weekly package of materials distributed via mobile drive has become the main distributor of alternative cultural content in Cuba. The Paquete is made primarily from illicit downloads in state internet centers with broadband and the “capture” of programs from satellite television antennas. Within this black market of content distribution, parallel to the official media and government institutions, the Paquete operates in “pseudo-legality” or “a-legal” status.

The first decades

With the triumph of the Revolution in January 1959, the landscape of the media in Cuba changed. Private companies disappeared and the mass media were nationalized. Radical modifications in the political system covered all aspects of life on the island, including the use of free time. Modifying people’s cultural habits and preferences was one of the key mechanisms used to build “a new man” in Cuba (LINARES et al., 2008). As a result, media became educational, cultural and political instruments dedicated to socialization and mobilization within the new system.

The emergence of the Cuban Institute of Art and Cinematographic Industry (ICAIC) and, later, the creation of the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television (ICRT), in 1962, institutionalized the communicative policy of the country. The institutions

held a near monopoly on creating and distributing the audiovisual production on the island, thus consolidating a system that supported and defended revolutionary ideals.

Cultural consumption and leisure activities were defined as “essential for the construction of socialism” and became a central focus of the revolutionary government (LINARES et al., 2008, p. 3). In 1966 the International Seminar on Leisure and Recreation was held in Havana, an event sponsored by the International Council of Physical Education and Sports, the Cuban National Commission of UNESCO and the National Institute of Physical Education and Recreation. That same year, the Research Group on Free Time was created at the University of Havana. Thanks to these events and the state’s interest in learning what people were doing outside of the work day, “the analysis of the use of free time and cultural and recreational consumption became established as the most relevant and best developed research areas” (LINARES *et al.*, 2008, p.2). The objective of this research was to provide government bodies with scientific data to support information strategies and investments in sports, recreation and culture centers.

During the next decade, the Revolution went through a further process of institutionalization. In 1971 the National Congress of Education and Culture was held, a year later it became part of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance, while in 1975 the First National Congress of the Communist Party took place and in the following year a new Constitution came into force. However, this period is known as the “Gray Quinquenio,” considered a negative period for Cuban culture. On the one hand, human capital in the academic sphere was formed through training, specialization and the creation of research centers. On the other, a dogmatism and homogenizing discourse emanating from the Soviet Union was enthroned, which stunted the creativity and originality of social thought characteristic of the sixties (LINARES *et al.*, 2008, p. 4).

After 1990, with the fall of the socialist camp, institutions such as the Center for Social Research of the ICRT, the Research Section of the ICAIC and the Cuban Institute of Cultural Research (ICIC) “Juan Marinello” were created to investigate cultural production and consumption. This opened an important space for research on film consumption, viewer motivations, attitudes and preferences for some types of cinematography, the use of cinema as a means of changing attitudes, the reception of criticism and the understanding of cinematographic language.

Alternative consumption since the 1990s

Alternative distribution and consumption in Cuba is a phenomenon rooted in technological, social and political changes occurring almost twenty years before the existence of the Paquete. From the 1990s, with the

popularization of Betamax lecto-recording equipment and Video Home System (VHS) players, small video stores (bancos de películas) became popular.

Customers rented films and some even arranged home delivery. The Paquete has since displaced DVDs as the most popular consumption platform of consumption, even though consumed materials have not changed much. “The types of preferred materials are the same: movies, shows, series and telenovelas,” said Vanessa Márquez, who led a Social Research Center (CIS) study on the Paquete. Technological change rather than content innovation has driven changes in Cuban consumption (BARRERA, 2009, p. 77).

Large external storage disks with USB connection reached Cuba in the first decade of this century. With greater storage capacity, they are gradually replacing DVDs and reshaping the information distribution system. The future communication landscape in Cuba depends on what happens politically in the “post-Castro” era due to the ratification of Miguel Díaz-Canel as new president by the National Assembly in 2018 and the constitutional renewal process later that year.

Reshaping communication space

Cuban media and all the alternative platforms that have emerged in the country in recent years, including the Paquete, have not escaped the political logic of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC). However, new technologies such as DVDs, computers, Internet, electronic reproduction devices (e.g. Mp4, iPod) and cell phones offer citizens new possibilities for recreation and knowledge acquisition. Access to new technologies has gradually contributed, firstly, to the privatization of the lives of Cubans and, secondly, to an irreversible loss of the government’s ability to influence people based on revolutionary control-and- command mechanisms. Traditional forms of socialization are disappearing, with increasing speed.

New media and platforms occupy greater amounts of Cubans’ leisure time, provoking changes in the organization of production and structure of labor, and generating new links between the public and private (ALONSO & RIVERA, 2001). The growing prominence of technology within the consumption behavior of Cubans has prompted Cubans to rethink communicative processes and the consumption of cultural goods. As Castells (1999) explains, perceptions of life itself change depending on the devices with which people interact. Belief systems and norms produced throughout history are deeply transformed by new technological systems.

Although television remains predominant, trends are toward digitalization, virtual environments and the embedding of the most technologically advanced tools in daily life (LINARES; RIVERO; MORAS; MENDOZA, 2010, p. 25). In addition to

political controls, like every country with fewer financial resources, Cuba receives new technologies later than more-developed countries. In terms of availability of equipment and the internet, Cuba is far behind the global average: "Our national context is unique, for example, the levels of distribution of access differences are much lower than in other nations," says researcher Pedro Urra (2015, personal interview), former director of the medical networks Informed (Cuba) and Bireme (Latin America). The director of the Center for Information in Culture, Rafael de la Osa (2015, personal interview), highlights the negative impact of the digital divide on Cuban cultural industries, spotlighting the effects caused by the absence of technologies in the processes of creation, production, distribution and consumption.

Access to the Internet is quite scarce and most of the homes and work centers that benefit from the internet have slow and poor connections. According to data from the National Organization for Statistics and Information (ONEI, 2014), in 2011, for every thousand inhabitants there were only 70 personal computers, 117 using mobile phones and 232 Internet users. Government data in 2018 counted 630 internet access rooms and an additional 684 Wi-Fi sites in operation, with 250,000 connections are made from these Wi-Fi hotspots every day.

The relative scarcity of ICTs and the rigid attitude of the government toward expansion of access and opening of content do not prevent new alternatives from emerging to replace the supposed disconnection from the world. In Cuba, broadband internet is a scarce luxury and, even so, in most of the country the most popular videos on YouTube, recent episodes of foreign series and successful movies, circulate. This widespread circulation of information, entertainment and cultural products is carried out fundamentally through non-state commercialization and distribution channels.

Origins of El Paquete Semanal

To understand the emergence of the Paquete, it is necessary to go back to the 1990s and mid-2000s when VHS-format readers became so popular that the rental of videocassettes was the favorite free-time activity of those who had the means to access them (PERTIERRA, 2011). In the absence of a state-regulated market, the "legal" means of technology purchase took too long and most of the video rental shops operated on the "black market." The extra-legal rental or sale of audiovisual materials of all kinds - information, entertainment, etc. - stimulated the informal market for the commercialization of films, series, telenovelas, alternative Cuban media and diverse contents from other countries, mainly the United States and Europe.

The inability of the state system to adapt to Betamax and VHS technologies

in the 1990s set the course for their informal integration into Cubans' consumption habits (ARCOS, 2015, personal interview). Newer technologies entering Cuba followed the same pattern, entering through the black market with mass consumption occurring spontaneously in the absence of national policy. In the absence of state regulations, "entrepreneurs have found their sources and alternative ways of marketing what their people want to consume" (DE LA OSA, 2015, personal interview).

The pseudo-legal characteristics of informal audiovisual consumption in Cuba mirrored the functioning of the Cuban society during the "special period" of drastic economic decline following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Cuba's main trading partner, in 1991. "The ambiguous status of video and audio players in the rental of videos - which were, at the same time, illegal and totally respectable - is emblematic of many of the complex political, economic and social structures that affect the lives of Cubans in the post-Soviet era" (PERTIERRA, 2011, p. 17). The Paquete, due to its illicit sources of downloading and the legitimacy of the unauthorized ways of obtaining content, is also part of this dichotomy between "illegal" and "respectable," because the informal distribution system allows Cubans to obtain what the State cannot provide them (REYES, 2015).

Within this "a-legal" situation, the satellite antenna preceded and coexists with the Paquete. Its origin in Cuba, explains Arcos (2015, personal interview), dates from the late 1980s, when the Canal del Sol was created to transmit foreign programming to the small sectors of tourism that existed in Cuba at that time. Soon, Arcos explained, "ingenious Cuban telecommunicators appeared with adapters to capture that signal." Years later, when the country embraced international tourism and began to build more hotels, "a package was created with a dozen channels with the same purpose." Once again, "the clandestine antennas, placed inside Cuban homes, captured the restricted signal and were commercialized."

Channels such as Cinemax, HBO, ESPN, Discovery and Disney began to be received in Cuban homes. The phenomenon spread throughout the country and "the cultural [and political] leaders were alarmed," Arcos said. To disrupt the new distribution, the satellite transmitter located in the Habana Libre hotel was removed and each hotel imported its own satellite dish. Arcos' believes the change did not achieve its intended purpose. Those in charge of marketing the devices modified the approach to capture the signal, directing the devices to the sky, in order to capture not 10, but hundreds of channels. "This decision was a Pandora's Box. Each time the Cuban State intervenes in these alternative routes, it does so in ways that are erroneous, controlling and completely out of touch. The reactions of

the people are even stronger and technology offers more and more possibilities.”

The proliferation of satellite dishes in Cuban hotels fostered an illegal but widespread cultural alternative within the Cuban population, neighborhood cable systems. Reyes (2014) describes these jury-rigged systems as “a neighborhood phenomenon, (the) local exchange signal of foreign television, popularly known as ‘el cable.’” Police have harassed and penalized users of this illicit source of the consumption of audiovisual material, fundamentally American, for years. Yet the popularization of satellite television via neighborhood cable systems took “possession of entire neighborhoods,” reports the website, Progreso Semanal. “It was a coaxial cable running from balcony to balcony, from house to house; and it was a door or passageway to television in the outside world.”

Cable is not the only way to access to satellite television in Cuba (CIS, 2012), however. Others include possession of a satellite antenna for private use, payment for access at home to a programming package from a private but illegal signal distributor, capture of the signal through a personal computer that has the required accessories, and free reception of the broadcast signal through the antenna or cable of someone who owns the service.

Despite the continued presence of satellite and neighborhood cable piracy, the Paquete currently offers a lower costs alternative that is more popular with the population (RODRÍGUEZ, 2014). Further, lack of regulation provides more safety to users. While unauthorized satellite or cable television consumption is formally illegal and can be fined, the Paquete operates in an in-between space, neither illegal nor legal. “Thanks to the Paquete Semanal, many people have avoided being imprisoned or fined,” wrote Sabdiel Batista in *Letra Nueva* (2014).

According to a study carried out in 2015 by the Social Research Center of the Radio and Television Institute (CIS), the Paquete is consumed by at least 40 percent of the population of Havana. Furthermore, as Vanessa Márquez (2015, personal interview), one of the authors of this research, believes this figure is very conservative, because some people in the study likely hid their consumption due to the pseudo-legal nature of this product. Even the conservative figure indicates the popularity of the Paquete, which is widely perceived by cultural critics. Víctor Fowler (2015) defines the product as “one of the main Cuban cultural phenomena of this century” and renowned filmmaker Rebeca Chávez (2014) states, “Cuba’s programming is the Paquete.”

Recent research (CABRERA, 2012; FUENTES, 2014; DOMÍNGUEZ, REGO & CASTILLA, 2014; MÁRQUEZ, 2015, personal interview) draws attention to the shift from consumption of traditional media towards

new alternatives for audiovisual consumption. While this trend is a global phenomenon, in Cuba it happens with idiosyncrasies that reflect the history and political system of the country. Studies from the CIS (MÁRQUEZ, 2015, personal interview) and the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Havana (BARRERA, 2009) demonstrate how subjects reduce consumption of national television after accessing audiovisual products through alternative media. The Paquete is a good example of this phenomenon, since 44 percent of the people who consume it say they now watch less TV.

The Paquete's Attractiveness

Most of those in the CIS and university studies who abandoned official television said it was due to the poor quality of its programming, while they highlighted the diversity and quality of content in the Paquete. Another reason is rejection of ideologically charged content such as that which predominates in some of the materials produced by the ICRT, said Granma journalist and film critic Rolando Pérez Betancourt (2015, personal interview). "Cuban society has changed a lot in the last 20 years," he said. "It has been de-ideologized and one of the ways in which this phenomenon manifests itself is in the rejection of television as the institutional representative of a determined ideology."

A third reason is that state programmers schedule political content during times viewers prefer to relax:

Television is excessively controlled by the Ideological Department [of the Communist Party of Cuba], which governs, determines and conditions programming. This has as a consequence that many topics that offer TV at prime time do not consider the needs of the public. That's when alternative businesses thank those responsible for programming, as the public comes to them to satisfy their moments of leisure and relaxation (ARCOS, 2015).

Besides a disjuncture between ideological content and demands for relaxation, youth issues specialist Idania Rego (2015, personal interview) explains younger Cubans have difficulty identifying with official television models that were developed long ago: "The generational differences are significant. Today's young people develop in other contexts, face other problems. Therefore, it is necessary to disseminate information using communication models that engage more the issues youth about."

The former director of the Center for Psychological and Sociological Research (CIPS), María Isabel Domínguez, like Rego, considers that Cuban youth are more demanding and critical (2015, personal interview): "This generation demands a more critical position of television in accordance with the reality in which they live. The image of the young person who appears on television is too two-dimensional and elitist, which

negatively affects the degree of identification they feel with the small screen. This causes a certain distancing and rejection towards many of the messages that are transmitted.”

Specialists agree that television programming should be more open and representative of Cuban tastes. They suggest an emphasis on sport, especially the US Major League Baseball games where Cuban athletes, who are not linked to the national team, participate. According to Arcos (2015, personal interview), “TV cannot continue to censor many interesting materials such as Major League Baseball games where Cubans are featured. What TV censors is what the Paquete sells the most.”

Most of the reasons state television is no popular can be summarized the lack of identification with native programs. “Many people of all ages watch television because they have no other alternative. The work of the ICRT is not satisfactory. Sometimes television is used only as a background noise”, says the intellectual Graziella Pogoloti (2015, personal interview).

Although the audience size of the Paquete Semanal does not threaten the supremacy of television as a means of communication in the Cuban context, the Paquete does constitute a challenge to state control of production of all media and audiovisual content on the island. Barrera (2009, p. 43) describes alternative media consumption as an established practice within the daily life of Cuban households and a “decentralized space of reality configuration” that goes beyond rigid governmental practices. For Novak (2014), the Paquete Semanal is today a recognized national network while Ravsberg (2014) catalogs it as a business that provides “income to thousands of Cubans, generates tens of millions of dollars a year and has become a socio-cultural phenomenon, penetrating hundreds of thousands of homes.” Del Pino (2014), underlines that “the moment the Package arrives, the fiction and entertainment menu for the week, seems to be a decisive time in the life of many Cubans.”

Specialists on the island believe the influence and reach of the package has been so great that it has set the pattern for consumption for the new technologies to come. “Cultural consumption ... will have to deal with the forms, tastes and interests of consumption that conform with the Paquete Semanal,” said Rosa Miriam Elizarde, PhD in Communication Sciences and vice president of the Union of Journalists of Cuba (UPEC), (2015, personal interview).

The loss of state programming control means that the logic of revolutionary socialization that drove programming for decades is also being challenged. Since the Paquete is conceived of as a commercial enterprise rather than a tool to create a set of values, its “parents” are concerned with making a compendium of information that is commercialized effectively and generates income for thousands of people. Therefore,

in their criteria for selecting the content they take into account “what sells best.”

Elio Héctor López, “El Transportador” (The Transporter) (2015, personal interview), manager of one of the versions of the Paquete that circulates around the island, said the selection criteria for inclusion criteria is “pleasing the whole world” and that every person can “choose” what to consume according to personal taste and preference. As “The Transporter” (2015, personal interview) explains, the criteria is “whatever is fashionable, will be consumed.” However, there are educational and news materials as well entertainment.

López said he also takes pains not to include information that would attract government regulators. “Everything is checked. We make sure that it does not bring us problems, or the country. We do not want that, but quite the opposite.” Thus, no materials explicitly oppose the social model championed by the Cuban government. So, as Grillo said, “these entrepreneurs of the Paquete act as merchants and not under the responsibility of managers of cultural policy” and offer material beyond the information proposed by the official media. Still, the foreign content offered in the Paquete sometimes transmits messages and values different from those that the socialist model of the Cuban Revolution tries to inculcate in the citizens of the country.

The commercial priority and the “frivolousness” of the content are the issues that most concern the government, say authorities in charge of regulating the broadcast, distribution of the contents, media and journalists. However, not all the products that circulate are created strictly for commercial purposes, since the range that it covers is very broad. Instructional information and news are also included. The makers of the Paquete have been increasing and diversifying their product to reach a mass audience where anyone can find attractive material “no matter the age, sex or intellectual level” (GRILLO, 2015).

To regain control, state entities will have to change the logic they have followed since the founding of the Revolutionary media system. They must update their content taking into account the needs of the public and not so much the ideological guidelines imposed by the socialist political system.

Decentralized Distribution

The Paquete contains one terabyte of materials primarily from US, Mexican, Spanish and Korean origin, including award winning films, humorous videos, shows, newscasts, documentaries, music, cooking shows, literature, magazines, updates for antivirus, applications for android systems, among many other choices. Reproduction for sale of much of this content is thought to violate international copyright laws.

The first person to create a compendium of digital information to distribute throughout the country remains a mystery. Rodríguez (2014), in his article "How Cubans have access to international TV," develops two hypotheses about the origin of the Paquete. The first one refers to downloads "from State institutions where bandwidth allows it, and from homes where there are illegal antennas." In the second one, he speculates about a possible making in Miami before sending the Paquete to Cuba. The journalist Fernando Ravsberg (2014), in his article "The Cuban Youtube," believes the Paquete grew from a network of unofficial audiovisual distributors dating back to 2008, including many who branded their curated products.

While state broadcasting and print media are centrally controlled and distributed, the Paquete's distribution is thoroughly decentralized. Rodríguez (2014) explains that the national distribution is done through interprovincial transportation buses and through a network of Paqueteros (packagers) who distribute it in each city. The distributors circulate the information in several ways: at specific points under official license as Seller-Buyer of Disks, by visiting homes using removable hard drives, and renting flash memories with the materials selected by customers. Somoza (2014), on the website Cuba Contemporánea highlights the reach of this compendium of materials: "I have the impression that this network has a growing market and covers the island from end to end."

The Cuban government recognizes the existence of black markets and alternative platforms for distribution of alternative cultural content and funds research about the influences of this content in several state cultural studies entities, including the Center for Psychological and Sociological Research, the Cuban Institute of Cultural Research Juan Marinello, the Social Research Center of the Radio and Television Institute and the University of Havana. Therefore, the official political institutions have full knowledge of the Paquete and its potentially wide repercussions. However, the government maintains its state of "a-legality" or "pseudo-legality," without restricting its sale, but neither creating the norms to frame it within the law. The Paquete, specifically, exists in a climate of a-legality and, perhaps for that reason, operates on a decentralized property regime, without rigid operating structures. This has enabled it to adapt more efficiently to changes within the Cuban media ecosystem.

The Paquete has come to dominate the scenario of cultural consumption within just a few years. Today it faces a national panorama where multiple transformations are taking place, but where the official press remains regulated, the practice of triumphalism stifles critical assessment of the national reality, and entertainment niches with great promise have yet to penetrate the Cuban cultural scene (RAMOS, 2016).

Conclusions – Maintaining Cuban cultural identity

In today's highly globalized context, it is impossible to prevent overlap between different cultures. The issue is that this exchange is made within an unequal structure where the ideologies of the most-powerful producing countries are those that are globalized. These inequalities reinforce the need for a Cuban cultural policy adapted to new times, but still based on the strong national identity.

Cuba, compared to other Latin American countries, has the advantage of an educational system recognized for its quality. However, it is still necessary to strengthen education in addition to updating cultural policies to reflect the convergence of new and traditional, informal and formal, and alternative and institutional media platforms and audiences. Alternative systems, platforms and media for communication, information and consumption of informal content represent a threat or an opportunity for the conservation of the socialist ideological foundations of the Cuban government institutionalized in the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC). The government's skepticism of the changes that are taking place in the media and the cultural and informative platforms outside the official system encourages the emphasis of certain citizen sectors on the development of individual freedom, which sometimes threatens the "harmony" of a system that has been characterized by its hermeticism and uniformity.

The contents of the Paquete do not coincide with what the current legislation in Cuba recommends be consumed by Cuban citizens, but rather reflect what citizens prefer to consume. This is a turning point for the communication policy of the Cuban government. For the first time in almost 60 years of the Revolution, management of free and leisure time of people no longer depends solely and exclusively on the regulatory bodies of the Cuban revolutionary government. As its own producers and distributors recognize, although the Paquete has very varied information that includes all audiences, content that is easiest to commercialize predominates. This strong commercial character is due to the formation of the Paquete as a private medium for the circulation of content obeying the laws of an informal market and not the strategies of the Cuban socialist system for the dissemination of cultural goods.

Although the Paquete has been circulating in all the provinces of the country for only few years, its embeddedness within and impact upon the non- institutional distribution of content is part of the evolution of a phenomenon that began at least two decades ago when a new technological era because to complement the broadcasting era within which the Revolution took place. Based on the evidence presented in this essay, informal audiovisual consumption has intensified in Cuba due to 1) the gradual evolution and popularization of the new information and communication

technologies; 2) the legitimization, from the 1990s, of a black market for obtaining all kinds of products; 3) the ineffectiveness or absence of state policies to guarantee a network of access to the products that the Paquete distributes; 4) the dissatisfaction of the population with the official media and the limitations in access to the internet; and 5) the legalization of the alternative market for audiovisual distribution with the granting of licenses to private companies under the role of the buyer- seller of discs.

The social uses of the Paquete suggest that in Cuba the traditional ways of audiovisual distribution are waning as informal alternatives gain prominence. The imaginary of young Cubans is strongly permeated by symbols and images transmitted by audiovisuals produced from the global centers of hegemonic power in the field of communication. Cuban youth are adopting a diversity of preferences, as well as critical positions concerning the materials consumed. In this process of value formation of Cuban youth, informal mechanisms for the distribution of contents and information are more determinant than those governed by state institutions. Young people prefer to spend their free time consuming audiovisual materials that are entertaining. In most cases, they do not use leisure time to educate themselves or follow socialist teachings.

The consumption of the Paquete has important implications for the formation of values and identity - both individual and generational - of the Cuban people. The new generations prefer to interact with this alternative rather than the traditional media, because the Paquete offers a greater abundance of cultural options and seems more authentic given the reality in which they live. The rising prominence of informal content consumption in Cuban society, beyond the official media, constitutes a challenge for the country's policymakers, especially those associated with the communication and culture sectors. These policies must be updated to address new patterns of cultural consumption.

Notes

[1] Hans Lindahl (2013) in his book "Fault Lines of Globalization: Legal Order and the Politics of A-Legality" speaks about "a-legality" develops in five stages. In our proposal of "a-legality" we refer to the third stage, that describes how and why the strong dimension of a-legality reveals legal boundaries as normative fault lines.

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