NEW PATTERNS OF PROTEST AND REVOLUTION IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract: The article aims to analyse the role of social media in initiating and organising protest and revolutionary movements. Social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, are widely believed to have been used by activists involved in the global wave of protests and revolutions after 2009. However, the assessment of their role wavers between technological determinism and minimising the impact of new technologies. Considering the current state of research, the author offers his answers to a number of questions: (1) To what extent and how are social media used in the processes of political communication, mobilisation and organisation of protest and revolutionary movements? (2) What is the relation between the old and the new media? (3) What is the relation between the online and offline dimension of collective action? (4) Why has the occupation of public space become the dominant tactic of protest and revolutionary movements in the age of social media?

Keywords: social media; protest movements; revolutions; ICTs; mobilization.

The discussion about the role of information and communication technologies in the mobilisation, organisation and activity of social movements is not a new one. Indeed, the issue was broadly considered in the context of the Zapatista movement in 1994 (Knudson, 1998; Martinez-Torres, 2001). Also, the role of the Internet in the anti-globalist movement at the turn of the century stimulated analysis of new technologies in the organisation of protests, their coordination on the supra-national scale, building information strategy, etc. In this way, global activism became the subject of interest to scholars of globalisation, the media and social movements (see e.g. Ayres, 2004; De Jong, Shaw, & Stammers, 2005; Della Porta & Mosca, 2005; Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Langman, 2005).

The development of the blogosphere and the emergence and expansion of social media platforms in the 2000s stemmed from the move from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 (Jurgenson & Ritzer, 2012). To an increasingly greater extent, Internet users became co-authors rather than mere receivers of content, which meant a significant change in the potential of the new media for collective action. This had not been observed in the case of the anti-globalist movement, which operated in the Web 1.0 paradigm and lost its momentum in the second half of the 2010s.

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What proved to be a turning point in generating interest in relations between collective action and social media was the mass protests in Moldova (2009) and Iran (2009), known as 'Twitter revolutions'. Another impulse came with the protests in the Middle East and North Africa (2011), which came to be referred to as the 'Arab Spring'. While the role of Twitter was stressed in the case of Tunisia (Tremayne, 2014, pp. 111-112), the uprising in Egypt was explicitly called a 'Twitter revolution' or 'Facebook revolt' (DuPont, 2011).

The 'Twitter revolutions' of the period between 2009 and 2011 stirred a journalistic debate on the role of social media in initiating and organising social protests. Both cyberoptimists (Shirky, 2010; Shirky, 2011) and cyberpessimists (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2009) based their arguments on superficial observations, intuition and preconceptions rather than the results of empirical studies. As remarked by Clay Shirky, without an adequate theoretical framework developed on the basis of empirical evidence, attempts to outline the impact of social media on political action were reduced to 'duelling anecdotes' (Shirky, 2011).

This discussion, however, was a point of departure for an increasing number of empirical studies and theoretical reflection on the role of social media in initiating and coordinating collective action. What attracted particular interest was the Arab Spring in general, and the 'successful' revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt in particular. The Egyptian uprising was an important point of inspiration for mass social mobilisation in Portugal and Spain in the spring of 2011. The same year saw the rise of the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States, and the following years brought mass protests and revolutions in such countries as Slovenia (2012–2013), Bosnia and Hercegovina, Bulgaria, Turkey (2013), and Ukraine (2013–2014). In all cases the protesters used social media. A particularly considerable number of empirical studies were devoted to the Indignados movement in Spain, the Occupy Wall Street in the US and the Gezi Park protests in Turkey. On the one hand, theoretical reflection on the issue adapted 'old' theories and conceptual categories; on the other, it also involved the emergence of entirely new ideas relating to digital activism and online–offline relations in the activity of social movements.

The present article aims to analyse the role of social media in initiating and organising protests and revolutions. The discussion takes as a point of departure the characteristics of social media as Internet platforms which significantly transform the patterns of communication and creation of content in the Web 2.0 paradigm. Social media are explored as part of the media system rather than considered in isolation. This approach is supported by the results of empirical studies and theoretical reflection. The role of social media in the processes of mobilisation and coordination of, as well as generating involvement in, collective action closely corresponds to their 'revolutionary' communicative potential.

The mobilising nature of the new media is analysed with reference to selected theoretical approaches and illustrated by a number of examples. This aspect is closely related to the hybrid nature of contemporary social movements, in which transition from online to offline involvement in collective action becomes natural and 'intuitive'. The discussion is focused on new trends in the activity of protest and revolutionary movements: the domination of 'weak ties' and 'connective action' rather than developed organisational structures, and preference for the occupation of public space as the key tactic of the 'age of social media'.

Social media and collective action

Social media are defined as 'Internet-based platforms that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content, usually using either mobile or web-based technologies' (Margetts, John, Hale, & Yasseri, 2016, p. 5). They enable their users to join the existing communities or

form new social networks (Tucker et al., 2014, p. 10), and they can take a number of different forms, including blogs and micro-blogs (e.g. Twitter, Weibo), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Tuenti, Instagram, Snapchat, Orkut), content-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube, Flickr, Vine), social bookmarking sites (e.g. Digg, Reddit), and virtual worlds for gaming or socialising (e.g. Minecraft, Second Life) (Margetts, John, Hale, & Yasseri, 2016, pp. 5-6).

A profound change of the Internet which occurred in the 2000s involved the emergence of social networks developed and controlled by their users. This was enabled by such developments as the spread of broadband Internet access and wireless communication, and the advent of more advanced social software (Castells, 2012, p. 231).

Social media are characterised by a high degree of interactivity and by user-generated content. Consequently, in practical terms their users are, to a greater or lesser extent, producers in communicative interactions (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 22). This means that the ethos of Web 2.0 blurs the distinction between authors and readers, as evidenced by the concepts of collective production and reproduction (Kaldor & Selchow, 2012).

Jon B. Alterman observes that the early analytical comments on the Arab Spring did not give sufficient credit to this new dimension of the Internet, as they focused on the role of social media in enabling their users to receive content rather than send it. However, it was in fact the latter that transformed people from observers to activists (or sometimes even leaders) and not just followers of the events (Alterman, 2011, p. 104).

The change in the pattern of collective action brought by the Web 2.0 paradigm and by social media is not limited to the new means of communication. Indeed, it runs deeper. W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (2012; 2013) discuss a new 'logic of connective action based on personalised content sharing across media networks', as distinct from the classic collective action described by Mancur Olsson (1965). Individuals reinterpret their grievances and create new meanings in their social media networks; they also share their cognitive resources across trusted social networks. The process operates without formal ties, commitment to organisations or other forms of group membership, which are all substituted by fluid connective action networks capable of self-organisation using technology and thus replacing organisational leaders or minimising their role (Anduiza, Cristancho, & Sabucedo, 2014; Sloam, 2014, p. 162).

In the new logic of connective action, the organisation of a social movement – which in classic theories was recognised as the key factor of its success (Caniglia & Carmin, 2005; McCarthy & Zald, 1977) – has lost a lot of its former significance. Connective action networks enable the development of alternative modes of political participation more suited to young people's preferences for non-institutionalised, horizontal involvement. For example, it is much easier to sign an online petition received from a friend than to support an organisation which would strive to resolve the issue (Sloam, 2014, p. 162).

According to the logic of connective action, social media can be perceived in terms of tools which facilitate looser and more personalised forms of collective action. As such, they play the role of organising agents in the place of formal organisations. This questions not only traditional concepts relating to the organisational dimension of collective action, but also the value of conventional understanding of social movements, including such concepts as collective identity, for explaining the current patterns of collective action (Kavada, 2015, p. 883).[1]

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[1] Megan Boler and Christina Nitsou suggest that the understanding of social movements in the digital media environment requires radical redefinition: 'The blurring of public and private, social and political, requires rethinking the binaristic vocabulary, discourses and assumptions' (Boler & Nitsou, 2014, pp. 249-250).

However, even if we accept that today's protest and revolutionary movements are more loosely structured than those of the past, they still have to develop their self-understanding as distinct collectives (Kavada, 2015, p. 883). We can thus make an initial assumption that the logic of connective action does not rule out creating a collective identity. The effectiveness of contentious action requires forming ties between those involved, sharing their outrage and developing a sense of togetherness. Since all these processes are dependent on interactive networks of communication, digital communication networks based on the Internet and on wireless platforms make the task easier, and collective identity can be consolidated as a result of supplementary face-to-face communication and the occupation of urban space (Castells, 2012, p. 229).

Social media in the media communication system

An analysis of the role of social media in contemporary collective action should not overlook the role of television, radio and print newspapers. Indeed, what needs to be considered is a broader ecosystem of communication which includes the traditional and the new media. Henry Jenkins (2006) argues that a 'convergence culture' that has emerged in today's societies involves a collision and intersection of different forms and types of the media: the old and the new media, as well grassroots and corporate media. The ensuing result is the emergence of a complex media matrix, in which different forms of media interact (DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012, p. 487).

Although for analytical purposes social media can be discussed in isolation from other platforms, what needs to be borne in mind is that people switch between different media platforms, and that the impact of grassroots media can be amplified by the mass media (Comunello & Anzera 2012, p. 459). Hence, a proposed departure from a narrow platform-focused approach in favour of analysis of 'social movement media cultures', defined as 'the set of tools, skills, social practices and norms that movement participants deploy to create, circulate, curate and amplify movement media across all available platforms' (Costanza-Chock, 2012, p. 375). Indeed, the connectivity infrastructure should be approached as a complex ecology rather than limited to any particular platform or device (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012, p. 365).

Social media were only one component of a new system of political communication which had evolved in the period preceding the so-called Arab Spring. The system involved three interrelated components: (1) satellite TV channels (such as Al-Jazeera); (2) the Internet and social media platforms (such as Facebook and Twitter); (3) increased accessibility and expanding capability of mobile phones (smartphones with photo, video and Internet functions). As a result, information infrastructure in Arab societies underwent a rapid transformation whose consequences were difficult to predict (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012, p. 365).

According to some analysts, in spite of such catch phrases as 'Twitter revolutions', the political movements of 2011 revealed not so much the power of the new media, as the power of twentieth-century media. Although the talk of the impact of television did not sound attractive, it was in fact television that was crucial to the development of events. Even in cases where social media played an important role, they were closely related to traditional media (Alterman, 2011, pp. 103-104).

Al-Jazeera played a particularly important role in the Arab world. Launched in 1996 in Qatar, it was the first TV channel available to Arab receivers which provided them with a point of view alternative to that presented in official channels controlled by the state authorities of different countries in the region (Salem, 2015, p. 176). In addition, its news coverage was integrated with social media. At the time of the Arab Spring, Al-Jazeera and other media (e.g. France-24, Al-Hiwar, the BBC, *The Guardian*) largely used content created both by professional and grassroots journalists, as well as by political bloggers and protesters. This material was made available

on the Internet and broadcast on television. Coverage of current events also made use of information posted on social media in general, and Twitter in particular (Flesher Fominaya, 2014, p. 164; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012, p. 367).

When Egyptian authorities banned journalists from Tahrir Square, citizens took over their role and provided international public with information. In a sense, this amounted to the function of civil watchdogs, as new information and communication technologies radically increased the people's capacity to provide and share information, and thus made it far more likely that misconduct by authorities would be revealed and made widely known (Flesher Fominaya, 2014, p. 165; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012, p. 367).

The pursuit of media attention by protest movements indicates the importance of 'media spectacle', a concept referring to 'media constructs that present events which disrupt ordinary and habitual flows of information, and that become popular stories which capture the attention of the media and the public' (Kellner, 2012, p. vii, 2013 pp. 252-253). Thanks to new technologies, media spectacles can be instantly diffused using television, Internet and social networks, mobile phones, etc., focusing public attention on particular events (Kellner, 2012, p. vii, 2013, p. 253).

What is more, in a global networked society, media spectacles proliferate through the matrix of old and new media and become viral. While in some cases they can become an instrument of political control, in others they may function as tools of political opposition, as well as empty media hype in pursuit of sensation. The wave of protests and revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa can be interpreted as a series of interrelated media spectacles, which in turn generated similar developments in other parts of the world (Kellner, 2012, p. vii-viii, 2013, pp. 253-254).

A general view of media practices needs to include some estimates of the level of use of particular social media in collective action. For example, there was a correlation between the extent to which protesters used Twitter and the spread of this medium in different countries. It was more popular among participants of protest movements in Spain and the United States rather than Greece (Theocharis, Lowe, van Deth, & García-Albacete, 2015, pp. 215-216).

In addition, it is hardly surprising that, depending on the country, Twitter users were engaged in debating different issues. While discussions in Greece made frequent references to austerity measures imposed by the so-called Troika,[2] those in the United States focused on inequality, and in Spain – on police violence. Tweeter users in Greece expressed their distrust of, or even hostility towards, mainstream media, perceived as an instrument of government-sponsored propaganda, which explains the proliferation of political blogs and alternative media websites. On the other hand, American and Spanish protesters often spread links leading to the mass media (Theocharis, Lowe, van Deth, & García-Albacete, 2015, p. 216).

The mobilising power of social media

The Internet has radically changed two elements related to the mobilisation of protest: the costs of participation and the need of co-presence. In the new model, the costs of participation have become practically negligible, which enables more individuals to quickly join in collective action at a very little time and content investment on their part (flash mobilisation). The ensuing result involves a 'surplus of participation' and a greater extent of mobilisation than was previously possible (Theocharis, Lowe, van Deth, & García-Albacete, 2015, p. 204).

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[2] The European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The falling costs of communication have also enabled a faster and easier circulation of information important for social movements and made it possible for activists to stay in touch with more people. This was conducive to the development of 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973, 1983) which allow activists to expand and manage social networks and join them with other groups and individuals. Unlike electronic mailing lists and media platforms (such as Indymedia) that were used by the anti-globalist movement (also known as the Global Justice Movement) in the past, social media are more egalitarian, as they are characterised by lower barriers of access and participation. Indeed, since they enable many-to-many communication, they enable joining-up and cooperation of different social environments: not only activists, but also those groups and individuals which have been unrepresented and remained politically inactive. To a considerable extent, this explains the phenomenon of mass participation in the Occupy-type movements (Bohdanova, 2014, p. 135; Juris, 2012, p. 267; Theocharis, Lowe, van Deth, & García-Albacete, 2015, p. 204).

According to Manuel Castells, contemporary social movements are mostly formed spontaneously, since they are sparked by an outburst of indignation related to a particular event or a climax of disgust with the decisions of the rulers. A call to create an instant rebellious community in the physical 'space of places' comes from the virtual 'space of flows' (Castells, 2012, p. 224).

A perfect example illustrating this mechanism is the case of protests in Kiev in the autumn of 2013. Following the decision of Ukrainian government to suspend the negotiations of the European Union Association Agreement, the investigative journalist Mustafa Nayyem issued a Facebook post calling for a demonstration on 21 November 2013. The response took the form of mass protests in Independence Square (Bohdanova, 2014, pp. 133–134; Diuk, 2014, p. 85). This shows that a large number of citizens responded to a call which had come from virtual space and urged them to create a community of resistance in physical space.

However, just like in the case of the Egyptian revolution in 2011, the mobilising power of social media and other social networking services in the course of the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine should not be overestimated. Although they played a significant role in diffusing information and mobilised some of the early joiners, citizens were generally more inclined to join the protest if they were accompanied by a family member or a friend. The strength of offline ties provided potential protesters with a sense of security when making a decision to join in (Onuch, 2015, p. 233).

In addition, the mobilising role of social media varied in different categories of protesters, as did their use of this form of communication. For example, early joiners more often relied on social media for information about where and how to protest (Onuch, 2015, p. 233). Neither is it surprising that the extent of use of particular types of media differed, e.g. the use of Twitter, which was relatively low at an early stage, considerably increased with each wave of protests. This would seem to indicate that some protesters discovered that Twitter was more useful than Facebook when it came to discussing the unfolding events as they happened. A massive increase in the use of Twitter following the outbreak of violence on 18 February 2014 could suggest that the 'monitoring' function of this medium became even more apparent (Tucker et al., 2014, p. 14).

Similar observations can be made with reference to protests in Turkey in 2013, in the course of which both the number of tweets and Twitter users greatly increased (the latter from 1.8 million on 29 May 2013 to 9.5 million on 10 June of the same year). When the protests and clashes with the police intensified, the protesters used Twitter to disseminate information about incidents of police violence, including their place and time, as well as instructions how they can be documented. There was also information on the availability of medical and legal aid (Yesil, 2016, p. 109).

Twitter enables different subjects to engage in horizontal communication practices and organise them around particular leading themes or key words (Theocharis, Lowe, van Deth, & García-Albacete, 2015, p. 205). During the protests in Turkey in 2013 and the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine (2013–2014), Twitter helped the protesters to keep in contact and inform a broader public about the unfolding events. In Turkey, these aims were served by such hashtags as #occupygezi and #resistgezi (Yesil, 2016, p. 108); in the case of Ukraine, it was, for example, the #Euromaidan hashtag and @EuroMaydan_eng, the 'official' protest Twitter account in English (Bohdanova, 2014, p. 136).

It follows that Facebook and Twitter can have a significant impact on the dynamics of protest actions through continuous networked communication which is important for the process of recruiting participants (Bastos, Mercea, & Charpentier, 2015, p. 334). However, the impact of social media on activity of today's protest movements is not limited to the mobilising function, as they are used in a far broader range of activity of organisational nature, particularly if the movement continues over weeks or months, sometimes losing momentum in the process.

In the case of movements which switch between the phases of 'street' mobilisation (protest marches and demonstrations, short-term occupation of public space) and grassroots work, Cristiana Olcese uses the term 'micro-abeyance', which refers to the stage in-between mobilisations. Although invisible to the general public, it involves processes important for the survival of a protest network, such as consolidation of group identity and evaluation of goals and tactics. In the past, micro-abeyance processes used to be carried out offline by way of more or less efficient organisational effort (regular meetings, letters, etc.). Today, on the other hand, some movements tend to perform them mostly online, using, for example, social media for the purpose (Olcese, 2014, p. 273).

Hybrid nature of protest and revolutionary movements

New social movements of the Internet age combine cyberactivism with activity in physical public space and the relationship between online and offline activism is not a simple one. Although some forms of cyberactivism are only limited to the online environment, in the case of protest and revolutionary movements the ultimate aim of online activism is to produce effects in the offline world (Flesher Fominaya, 2014, p. 166). In other words, the use of the Internet does not lead to the domination of cyberactivism over mobilisation in physical space. What is more, the fate of particular protest movements was in fact decided in the streets, with the occupation of public space as the key factor in their success. This observation does not downplay the impact of new technologies and social networks on initiating, organising and developing such protests. Rather, it suggests that the complexity of interplay between the online and offline activism of today's protest movements requires careful attention (Flesher Fominaya, 2014, p. 166; Pleyers, 2014).

In order to understand the role of the Internet in contemporary protest and revolutionary movements, we need to go beyond the binary oppositions between the virtual world (with its cyberactivism) and the real world (with its mobilisation on the streets and squares). Online activism and occupation of public space, global connections and national frameworks, the use of alternative media and the appeal to mass media are complementary rather than opposing forms of activity (Pleyers, 2014).

According to Manuel Castells, '[t]here is a close connection between virtual networks and networks in life at large', which means that the real world as it is today is a hybrid: neither an entirely virtual world, nor a segregated world separating online from offline interaction. And it is

in this hybrid world that networked social movements come to life (Castells, 2012, p. 232). The combination of online and offline activism generates a hybrid autonomous space for mass contentious action (Flesher Fominaya, 2014, p. 186).

The Internet is conducive to 'organisational hybridity' not only in the case of social movements, but also political parties and interest groups. 'Hybrid mobilisation movements' blend repertoires which are typical of these three organisational patterns. Contemporary political mobilisation is also characterised by fast 'repertoire switches', both spatial (between the online and offline environment) and temporal (within and between campaigns) (Chadwick, 2007, p. 283).

Analysing MoveOn as an example of a hybrid mobilisation movement, Andrew Chadwick observes that sometimes it acts like a social movement, sometimes like an interest group, and sometimes like the wing of a traditional political party during an election campaign. This organisational type would not be possible without the Internet. Indeed, it is the new media that enable complex interactions between the online and offline worlds, and the organisational flexibility which is vital for fast repertoire switching, both within one campaign and between different campaigns (Chadwick, 2007).

The hybridity of contemporary protest and revolutionary movements is evidenced by combining their activity in physical public space (which is often subject to long-term occupation) and the use of social media platforms for the purposes of sharing information, as well as communication, organisation, mobilisation and documentation. The key element is the ability to broadcast offline events (such as marches, protests in occupied main squares, incidents of police brutality, inspiring speeches) by means of personalised digital mobile devices and Internet platforms (Boler & Nitsou, 2014, p. 241). In this way, hybrid social movements aim to maintain their visibility both in physical space (e.g. by setting up protest camps) and the virtual space of the Internet (mainly by using social media platforms and live streaming).

The protest movements which emerged in 2011 in Portugal (12 March Movement, M12M) and Spain (Indignados, also known as the 15 March Movement, M15M) used both media systems (including the new media) and physical public spaces. The movements were initiated online and new technologies enabled the exchange of information and mobilisation of supporters. However, what became the key participatory focus was the occupation of actual physical spaces. In both cases, online and offline activity mutually reinforced each other: the online initiative had an offline participatory focus (protest camps), which, in turn, was sustained by social media (Sloam, 2014, p. 166).

It follows that hybrid movements combine web-based and more traditional face-to-face interactions (rallies, protest camps, crowds in the streets) (Boler & Nitsou, 2014, p. 238). Although Castells's 'networks of outrage' can be initiated and developed online, they 'materialise themselves' in the form of an offline participatory focus, as both of these dimensions are closely connected. Indeed, such is the nature of protest movements of the age of the Internet.

The Internet is then more than just another medium of communication. It provides conditions for a form of collective practice which enables a movement without clear leadership to coordinate its action and expand. In addition, social media and other ICT-enabled communication tools protect the movement against the repression in the occupied physical spaces by informing about the actions of official authorities as they happen (live streaming, tweets). It is possible to maintain communication not only within the movement, but also between the movement and society, and even the international community (Castells, 2012, p. 229).

Discussing the case of the UK Uncut movement, Cristiana Olcese analyses how the use of social media and the lack of clear preferences for online or offline activism blurs the distinction between them. Social media are used to inform the followers about the movement's actions both

in the offline and online environment (particularly Facebook). The author observes that sometimes ideas are born in physical space, become the subject of online discussion (Facebook and Twitter) and materialise themselves in the form of offline actions, which are successful if they are filmed, described, shared, retweeted in social media and covered in the mass media. Another possibility is that actions are first debated and decided online, carried out in physical space, and acquire significance as a result of their online visibility. What is involved in this case is a debate which is consciously started in virtual space by posting most initiatives (mostly on Facebook) and exchanging views about them (mostly on Twitter) (Olcese, 2014, p. 279).

However, hybrid protest movements are not free from tensions between online and offline activism, and divergences between online activists and those protesting in physical space are not an unknown occurrence. The latter often condemn 'clicktivism' as a form online activism which is out of touch with reality and only creates an impression of participation. In some movements, protesters occupying the squares tried to keep their distance from those who posted their comments and gave 'likes' on Facebook (Pleyers, 2014).

These tensions mostly stem from the different nature of the two spaces. Social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, facilitate communication between people regardless of physical distance involved and enable forming shallow relations without fully engaging in them. On the other hand, the experience of protest camps, with their density of bodies in close physical proximity, seems to be the exact opposite of online contacts (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 12).

Occupation of public space

Charles Tilly observes that different socio-historical contexts are characterised by particular repertoires of collective action (Tilly, 1979, p. 131). In other words, social actors in a particular place and time have a rather limited and predictable repertoire of contentious action at their disposal (McAdam & Sewell, 2001, p. 113). Although protest and revolutionary movements of the past sometimes resorted to the occupation of public space, this form of action never became part of the 'master template' (McAdam & Sewell, 2001) or the 'revolutionary script' (Baker & Edelstein, 2015).

Why is it, then, that in the age of social media most protest movements favour mass assemblies in public space, in the main squares or streets of large urban centres? Is this type of collective action particularly linked with the above outlined hybrid nature of contemporary social movements? Do social media generate or supplement this type of practice (which has been frequently applied in recent years) in any particular way?

Social media facilitate the diffusion of information at the stage of mobilisation for collective action and can be effectively used to coordinate it in physical space. Jeffrey S. Juris argues that they are probably most effective at assembling large numbers of protesters in particular locations, since they link interpersonal networks and enable the fast and large-scale aggregation of individuals by means of viral communication flows. In other words, such tools as Twitter and Facebook can generate 'crowds of individuals'. (Juris, 2012, p. 267).

In this context, the author makes a distinction between two cultural frameworks: (1) a 'logic of networking', which fosters complex practices of communication and coordination, and (2) a 'logic of aggregation', which is conducive to the assembling of masses of individuals from different social backgrounds in physical spaces (Juris, 2012, p. 260). The latter is shaped by interactions in social media, which both enables generating temporary 'smart mobs' in particular locations and makes them visible. In this approach, physical occupation not only amounts to a tactic, but also embodies a virtual crowd of individuals who aggregated through the viral flows of social media (Juris, 2012, pp. 266–269).

Although the role of social media in communication processes is crucial, they do not guarantee the emergence of lasting organisational networks. A collective subjectivity of protesters remains under constant pressure of disaggregation and fragmentation, which is why it is important for them to create a sustained community in physical space. This purpose can be served by indefinitely extending smart mob protests, which is conducive to building collective identity and affective solidarity (Juris, 2012, pp. 266-268).

The emergence of a sense of emotional community among spatially dispersed online protesters is the key factor for their aggregation in physical space. Castells suggests that the impulse to move from virtual space to the occupation of physical public space came from an emotional mobilisation triggered by outrage against injustice and by hope for change, often stimulated by successful uprisings in other parts of the world (Castells, 2012, p. 220-221). This emotional community was subsequently developed and consolidated in the occupied squares of the cities.

Zizi Papacharissi (2014), in turn, argues that crowds are mobilised via online networks generating 'affective publics' in the process. Drawing on the concept of 'networked publics' proposed by danah boyd, Papacharissi defines affective publics as 'networked public formations that are mobilized and connected or disconnected through expressions of sentiment' (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 125; cf. boyd, 2014, p. 80). Affective publics are transformed by networked technologies which create space for the interaction of people, technology and practices, and for the imagined emotional community evolving as a result of such interactions (Papacharissi, 2014, pp. 125-126).

The above approaches proposed by Juris, Castells and Papacharissi correspond with the suggestions put forward by Paolo Gerbaudo (2012). According to the author, social media play the key role in creating a sense of emotional community, which is required to mobilise spatially dispersed and socially diverse individuals. Facebook posts, tweets and blog entries are channels of sharing not only information, but also emotions. As a result, individual sentiments of indignation, anger, pride and a sense of victimisation can be condensed and transformed into a common political spirit driving the process of mobilisation (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 21).

In his analysis of the symbolic construction of a sense of community and emotional tension which 'extend[s] from distant mediated connections to the "effervescence" of physical proximity' (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 14), Gerbaudo uses the concept of a 'choreography of assembly'. It is a process of a symbolic construction of public space, focused on emotional scene-setting and scripting the participants' roles in their gathering in public space. This practice is apparent in the use of social media, which focus people's attention on particular protest events, provide suggestions and instructions about how to act, and construct an 'emotional narration' conducive to assembling in public space (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 12).

In this way, Gerbaudo argues that social media are tools which serve the purpose of creating new forms of proximity and face-to-face interaction in physical space. Tweets and Facebook posts contribute to generating a sense of 'social centrality' of the occupied squares, which thus become 'trending places' and 'venues of magnetic gatherings' characterised by a considerable power of emotional attraction. Like Juris, Gerbaudo notes the risk of isolation and disaggregation if the use of social media does not go hand in hand with street-work and interaction also with those who do not have a Facebook account (Gerbaudo, 2012, pp. 12-13).

Social media are instrumental in aggregating individuals in a particular physical space. In addition, they stimulate participation of not only activists but also general public. By gathering large numbers of dispersed individuals around the same actions, social media facilitate 'focal practices', i.e. concentrate people's attention on particular places and events (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 136). As mentioned above, the politics of visibility consciously pursued by activists is reinforced by traditional media, which ensures presence on the world's public screens (DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012, p. 488).

Protest camps set up in central locations of a large cities provide a public space which enables a debate about important political issues between people from different social environments (particularly considering that some of these camps continued over weeks or months) (Bastos, Mercea, & Charpentier, 2015, p. 333; Flesher Fominaya, 2014, p. 180). Apart from long-term occupation of particular public spaces, the protest movements continued to function in the free space of the Internet (Castells, 2012, p. 221). In other words, although protesters assembled in a particular physical space, their continued activity in social media, blogs, etc. meant that their occupation extended beyond it (Flesher Fominaya, 2014, p. 180).

In line with the logic of networked publics (cf. boyd, 2014), protesters gathered in the camps operated in a horizontal, consensus-based decision-making mode. In the physical environment, which relied on face-to-face interaction as the key form of communication, this involved experimenting with different forms of participatory democracy (Bastos, Mercea, & Charpentier, 2015, p. 333). The hybrid, networked nature of these movements enabled debates and interaction between multiple nodes, which made an impact on the decision-making process in physical space. It follows that hybrid protest movements do not need a vertical structure, a command centre or a formal leadership to transfer information or instructions (Castells, 2012, p. 221).

Conclusion

Change in collective action which has been brought by the development of new information and communication technologies, including social media, is not limited to its communication aspect. In a model where collective action is initiated and coordinated by means of the new media, the organisational dimension of social movements has lost much of its former significance, as social media foster looser and more personalised forms of collective involvement, as well as fast mobilisation and coordination.

Analysts of political significance of social media rightly consider them in a broader ecosystem of communication, which includes also the old media, such as television, radio and print newspapers. Indeed, today's world is marked by interaction between the old and the new media, with their users naturally switching between them. From the point of view of social movement activists, the traditional media not only improve the visibility of their action in public space, but are also instrumental in generating the 'media spectacle' effect. In the case of digitally excluded or passive citizens, they can be the key source of information. In recent years, both the old and the new media played an important role in the regional or global diffusion of repertoires of contention, including the slogans and symbols of protest.

The move to Web 2.0 radically reduced the costs of communication, which enabled a faster and easier circulation of information important for social movements among more people. Characterised by lower barriers of access and participation, social media penetrate wider social networks and foster contact and cooperation across different social environments, not only activists, but also those who have been politically inactive. The development of 'weak ties' between people suffering from similar problems and sharing their grievances is conducive to fast mobilisation in case of triggering events (e.g. indignation over a particular decision of the government). Such mobilisation is possible in spite of the weakness of political opposition, leaders or organisational structures.

Contemporary social movements combine activity in social media with that in physical public space, which are complementary rather than opposing forms of involvement. In addition, the new media enable fast repertoire switching between the online and offline environment. Consequently, these movements can be approached as hybrid phenomena, characterised by organisational flexibility, amorphous structure and the strength of 'weak ties'. Their hybrid nature involves a

combination of activity in public space with the use of social media for communication, recruitment and organisational purposes, as well as for the purpose of ensuring the visibility of the movement in the offline world. This is achieved by means of personalised digital mobile devices and social media platforms.

Protest and revolutionary movements of the recent period have displayed a preference for the tactic of occupation of public space. Indeed, protest camps became the symbol of revolutions in Egypt (2011) and Ukraine (2013–2014), as well as the Indignados movement in Spain and Occupy Wall Street in the United States. This type of collective action is clearly related to the increasing use of the new media by social movements. A gathering in physical public space can be interpreted as the physical embodiment of a virtual crowd of individuals generated by communication in social media.

Facebook and Twitter are not only instrumental in assembling people in particular physical locations, but also make gatherings of this kind visible to broader audiences. Such aggregation of a virtual collective in the offline environment is a point of departure for transforming a 'loose' emotional community established online into a more lasting community of action with its 'natural' physical proximity and face-to-face interaction.

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