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Abstract

The chapter examines two major impacts of increasingly pervasive information and communication technologies (ICT) usage, one on protest and social movements themselves and another on scholarship about these phenomena. For the former, we review research on ICT-enabled infrastructural changes within movements, including: (1) the introduction of new formats of protest and a new model of power; (2) the ability to organize outside of formal social movement organizations (SMOs) and/or within dramatically altered SMOs; and (3) the facilitation of transnational and non-Western protest and social movements. Regarding social movement scholarship, we argue that the information-saturated environments that social movements operate within increasingly require scholars to draw on political communication research. This connection may lead social movement scholars to complicate existing understandings (e.g., agenda setting), identify hitherto unexamined determinants of social movement effectiveness (e.g., priming), and add nuance to social movement scholars' understanding of audiences and audience reception, among other topics.

The increasingly pervasive use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in recent decades has yielded a wide variety of changes in social and political life. In this chapter, we examine how ICT use has affected protest and social movements (SMs), particularly in a global context. *First*, we focus on ICT-enabled infrastructural changes within movements, which: (1) introduce new formats of protest and a new model of power; (2) allow for greater movement activity outside of formal social movement organizations (SMOs) and/or within dramatically altered SMOs; and (3) facilitate transnational protest and SMs in non-Western countries in instrumental and less instrumental ways. *Second*, we argue that increasing ICT use changes the information environment in which activists and supporters operate, creating an information-saturated environment requiring SM scholars to import insights from political communication research. Although these topics highlight key infrastructural changes and scholarly opportunities brought by ICT use, we recognize that scholarship on ICTs and activism is far broader in scope and deeper in substance than we are able to review here (interested readers should see the following for more reviews: Earl, Hunt, and Garrett forthcoming; Garrett 2006).

Enabling Ephemeral Collective Action

One critical outgrowth of widescale ICT usage has been the rise of collective actions requiring only ephemeral engagements from participants, such as massive online petition drives, email campaigns, distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks (i.e., when a server is rendered inoperable by flooding it with requests), and viral campaigns (e.g, Kony 2012). In democratic nations, these new online actions are often fairly low cost (i.e., easy online petition signing) and don't require long-term or sustained commitments from participants. Online tactics such as these

have become very widespread, making up the majority of protest opportunities online (Earl, Kimport, Prieto, Rush, and Reynoso 2010).

We argue that these ephemeral forms of engagement build on a new, alternative model of protest power, which research reveals can be effective in affecting agendas, policy decisions, corporate policies, etc. (see for a review of related studies: Earl and Kimport 2011). Whereas power from social movements traditionally comes from sustained and persistent activism by a smaller but dedicated core of activists, this model uses a "flash flood" model of power in which short, massive bursts of activity by loosely (and even temporarily) engaged participants create pressure on targets (Bennett and Fielding 1999). Just as a flash flood can be devastating despite rapidly abating water levels, we expect that flash activism influences policy-makers, public opinion, and subsequent media coverage by showcasing massive mobilizations and attracting widespread attention. In developing and authoritarian countries, where governments may be markedly less responsive to direct expressions of concern by their citizens, we expect that these tactics can still be influential by generating a deluge of international attention and concern. Although the now (in)famous Kony 2012 video was produced and released in the U.S., it nonetheless illustrates this point. With over a hundred million views, the video did not "work" by persuading the Lord's Resistance Army to stop child abductions; instead, it generated significant international attention, which persuaded the Obama administration to prioritize and act on the issue (Kristof 2012) and led to a U.S. Senate resolution.

However, many activists and scholars have been skeptical of these campaigns, often derisively referring to them as "slacktivism" and assuming their ineffectiveness. We believe that such cynical labeling is at least premature—and is more likely inaccurate—for several reasons. First, it discounts the flash flood model of power, presuming that only sustained activism can be

successful. We join Earl (2011) in arguing that instead of assuming that either flash activism cannot be successful (which is not empirically supported in the literature) and/or assuming that street activism is always successful (which is also not empirically supported in the literature), scholars should move this discussion forward by investigating *the circumstances under which flash activism may be tactically useful* to movements.

Second, calling these actions slacktivism implies that ephemeral activism is consistently "easy," only undertaken by those too lazy to participate in more meaningful ways. This reveals a strong Western bias to such criticisms. In more authoritarian countries, engaging in such actions can entail considerable risk. Nevertheless, we suspect that these tactics will persist in authoritarian contexts (e.g., Lai 2005; Parker 2013): despite authorities' capacities for Web-based surveillance and repression (Morozov 2011), flash activism is harder for authorities to control and less costly for protesters than street protests. Such tactics may be especially accessible when criticism of the state can be veiled through polysomic uses of words, phrases, or images. For instance, in China, two images and related phrases have become important digital markers for pro-free speech Internet users: the grass mud horse and the river crab (Qiang 2011; Wines 2009). The grass mud horse is a Mandarin homophone for "f*ck your mother." Use of the phrase allows brazen displays of anger about online censorship and other government decisions but in a way that was initially difficult for Chinese officials to recognize and has subsequently proven hard to control. The river crab as a symbol is an even more barbed criticism of Chinese censorship, which is referred to by the government as "harmonizing." The river crab is a homonym for harmonize and symbolically can refer to a bully in Chinese culture. Thus, images of the river crab are used as a way of criticizing Chinese censorship. To describe posting and

helping to popularize these critical tools as slacktivism is difficult to justify in the Chinese context.

Finally, the denigration of slacktivism is often paired with the empirically unsupportable assumption that *if not for* opportunities to engage in flash activism, participants would have chosen more costly forms of participation such as offline street protests. Decades of research on micro-mobilization reveals this assumption to be false for the vast majority of individuals. Even when people agree with the position of a movement only a very small fraction actually mobilize. The challenge for social movement scholarship has been explaining how to get someone to go from doing nothing to doing something. Instead of distracting would-be long-term movement participants from participating, flash activism likely allows millions of people who would otherwise never have been active to engage politically.

It is possible that engagement in new media and flash activism can also support later street mobilizations. For instance, early research shows that ICTs spread news of street protests quickly, driving offline protest and its diffusion (Castells 2012; Tufekci and Wilson 2012). Thus, we argue that SM studies would be well-served by moving past increasingly tired and empirically anemic debates about whether these new tactics and forms of power can be effective, and toward an understanding of the circumstances under which ephemeral mobilization might facilitate movement goals.

Organizing Outside of and through Different Organizations

ICT usage has also influenced the role and function of SMOs; we focus on two sets of impacts. First, ICT usage has increasingly allowed SM participation outside of organizations. Indeed, the literature contains numerous examples of organizing outside of organizations and the media has touted examples from multiple countries of relatively spontaneous protests erupting

after individuals called for them on Facebook. More systematically, Earl (2013) shows that over half of protest-related websites across 20 different SM areas were not run by SMOs (i.e., being run instead by individuals, loose networks, etc.).

Rationales for why so much activity is happening online outside of organizations vary. For instance, Earl and Kimport (2011) argue that online tools can reduce the costs of organizing and participating so much that it is just as easy (and sometimes easier) to build and organize outside of organizations as within them. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) assert that digital communication networks have contributed to a new "logic of connective action", in which individuals are mobilized primarily by the exchange of personally relevant information across fluid social networks, not by the organizations to which they belong. Shirky (2008) claims that the desire to route around SMOs has resulted from diminishing returns for investing in SMOs and their maintenance, except for higher cost forms of activism like street protests (Earl 2013). Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl (2005) suggest that the free rider dilemma is less relevant in the information age, implying that SMOs are less necessary for providing selective incentives to drive participation. Raine and Wellman (2012) claim that organizations of all types are being broadly displaced by ICT-facilitated extended social networks as a primary means of organizing. Still others argue the decline of standard media gatekeepers and the ability to garner public attention without forming long-term connections leads to a rise of online organizing (Chadwick 2011). In our view, these are all complementary accounts of an empirically well-established phenomenon—widespread organizing and mobilization outside of SMOs—and we suspect that future research will show many of these factors are in play at the same time.

Beyond establishing this change is occurring, it is important to understand its consequences. For instance, we suspect that organizing outside of organizations may facilitate

illegal protest activity. SMOs have at times been held liable for the actions of members, effectively forcing SMOs to choose between going underground and disavowing members. Indeed, even nominally online "groups" that regularly engage in illegal conduct (e.g., Anonymous) are often actually networks of actors rather than organizations in a traditional sense, making repression of a central organization impossible (Beyer 2011).

Organizing outside of organizations may also assist protesters in more authoritarian contexts. In these contexts, official or state media are often highly censored and repression of specific SMOs is relatively easy. Social media, which often involves masses of user-generated content, further complicates the censorship of ideas, while still leaving SMOs vulnerable (Faris and Villeneuve 2008). Of course, authorities may begin to track individual protesters instead of groups, but this is a much more taxing form of repression for a regime, especially when a protest sentiment is widely held.

Organizational Adaptation

ICT usage has led to a second SMO-related shift: existing SMOs are being forced to adapt to new digital environments. Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl (2012) argue that organizational members vary widely in their orientation to organizational authority and technology use, with some members happy to allow organizations to lead while other members push the boundaries of entrepreneurship within these organizations using technological tools. These differences are likely to force organizational accommodations over time. Similarly, Karpf (2012) forcefully argues SMOs are having to change, leading to "organizing through different organizations." He positions industry leading SMOs like MoveOn as spurring on these transitions throughout the SM sector. For instance, MoveOn's position as an issue generalist allows it to fundraise and act upon "hot" issues of the day, and in doing so, out-compete traditional advocacy organizations

who must fundraise and organize about their specific issue, whether that issue has traction at a given moment or not. Over the long term, Karpf argues this will impact the viability of traditional, issue specialist organizations, requiring traditional SMOs to adapt to survive.

Many scholars see these two lines of work as in opposition to one another as if people were *either* organizing "outside of organizations" *or* "organizing in different organizations" (e.g., Karpf 2012). However, we argue that these two changes are not at odds as some have claimed: it is likely that both phenomena are happening simultaneously. Other scholars have also seen these phenomena as reconcilable (e.g., Bennett and Segerberg 2013). The empirical evidence shows that many people are routing around organizations but that others are changing SMOs. As Earl (forthcoming) argues, the rise of organizing outside of SMOs is unlikely to spell the end of SMOs. SMOs will remain important in a variety of circumstances and they will increasingly adapt, but many people will also use ICTs to route around SMOs.

Transnational/Non-Western Online SM Activity

Transnational and non-western SMs have achieved levels of continuity, visibility, size, and connectivity that would be impossible without ICTs (Diani 2000). According to della Porta and Mosca (2005), part of ICTs' contribution is instrumental: they allow for cheap, fast, and easy modes of communication and participation that facilitate activism, particularly for resource-poor actors, as they have for environmental organizations in China (Yang 2003) and NGOs in Africa (Wasserman 2003). ICT usage can also allow geographically dispersed actors to easily participate in online campaigns and usage may limit the need to travel across state-monitored political boundaries (Garrett and Edwards 2007; Reid and Chen 2007). ICT usage has allowed SMs to respond to transnational issues and actors with a rapidly evolving transnational repertoire

of contention (Bennett 2003). These instrumental effects are fairly well-established and have received substantial research attention.

Less instrumental effects on movements have been studied less frequently, but this does not mean that such effects are nonexistent. For instance, research has found that ICT usage can help to build transnational movement cultures (e.g., Alest and Walgrave 2002) and collective movement identities across national borders (e.g., agrarian reform movements, see: Mann 2008; the European Women's Lobby, see: Pudrovska and Marx Ferree 2004). Likewise, social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter , YouTube) further contribute to the creation of large, more inclusive SMs (Aouragh and Alexander 2011), promoting group identification and shared grievances, as when user-generated material shared on Facebook helped catalyze the "We are all Khaled Said" campaign in Egypt (Lim 2012).

In fact, scholars are only beginning to understand the significance of user-generated content for SMs. Early research shows that protesters' ability to document and share information can extend the reach of protests (Castells 2012), reduce the reliance on news organizations that ignore protest activity or parrot state discourse (Aday, Farrell, Freelon, Lynch, Sides, and Dewar 2013), and generate foreign pressure to resolve problems, as demonstrated in Burma (Chowdhury 2008) and Afghanistan (Kensinger 2003). User-generated content can also alter how people living under repressive regimes perceive the risks and efficacy of activism, which may alter individuals' willingness to participate. Illustratively, the real-time flow of online information (including SMS) about Arab Spring protests allowed would-be activists to track police responses to protests and gauge potential consequences of street protest (Aouragh and Alexander 2011; Tufekci and Wilson 2012). We suspect that additional research on the impacts of user-generated content will reveal other important movement implications.

Of course, we acknowledge that technology is not a panacea for problems facing transnational activists. ICTs do not eliminate all of the burdens facing SMs (e.g., Smith 2004), and they do not automatically enable all-inclusive and globally equitable means of participation and organization. Concerns about digital divides have lost some traction due to continuing ICT diffusion, but recent research on the Arab Spring demonstrates that differences in political, social, and economic contexts can significantly impact the manner and success with which ICTs are used for protest (Howard and Hussain 2013). Moreover, although research cited above suggests that ICT usage could limit repressive risks for protesters, others have countered that ICTs can increase repression by helping track activists or spread propaganda (Lynch 2011; Morozov 2011). Service providers are also vulnerable to pressure by states to act against their users' interests (Youmans and York 2012), and networks may be entirely shut down (as occured in Egypt, although the strategy backfired, see Howard and Hussain 2011).

Bringing SM Studies and Political Communication Together

In addition to the infrastructural changes discussed above (i.e., flash activism, altering the reliance on and role of SMOs in SMs, and supporting the growth of transnational activism), we argue that the widescale use of ICTs should change *how* we study SMs by forcing greater integration between research on political communication (PC) and SM studies, which have been hitherto oddly estranged.

Both fields share common theoretical concerns. For instance, SM scholars have long studied framing and how the media disseminates frames. Framing has also been widely studied within PC (Scheufele 1999). Likewise, both fields have been interested in agenda setting. As a central topic in media effects research (e.g., Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007), PC research on agenda setting finds that as a topic receives more news media coverage, the topic becomes

increasingly important to the public (McCombs and Shaw 1993). SM scholars also study agenda setting, examining how media coverage and movement mobilization set policy agendas and influence public opinion.

Despite these common concerns, and other more general shared interests about messaging and influence, these two literatures have remained relatively independent. A primary exception has been in research on online activism, as evidenced by the large number of publications on online protest in interdisciplinary and communication journals and the departmental affiliations of key senior scholars in online activism (e.g., Castells, Bennett). This exchange has begun to bridge these fields; extending this initial bridging would be productive for SM studies (online *and* offline) for several reasons.

First, insights from PC could extend existing SM knowledge on shared concerns, a move that the information age makes ever more important. For instance, communication research has shown that agenda setting is influenced by increasing source choice (Stroud 2011), differences between online and offline cues about importance (Althaus and Tewksbury 2002), and increasing reliance on social media cues (Messing and Westwood Forthcoming). These insights have not been accounted for in SM research on agenda setting, but should be.

Second, insights from PC could help identify unexamined effects on both offline and online movements. For example, the third leg of media effects theory, priming (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007), asserts that information context influences how much weight people give to different factors (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, and Carpentier 2009). While well-known to sociologists doing survey designs, priming effects in information consumption or SM action have rarely been considered but may exist offline and online. What if all the money spent by LGBT forces to defeat California's Proposition 8 to ban gay marriage could not overcome

priming effects from voting in churches? SM scholars have not even considered this larger information and persuasion environment. Online, it is likely that the context in which web surfers find information about movements strongly affects its reception, and yet research on framing doesn't strongly attend to information context or the possibility of priming effects.

Third, SM scholars have not seriously theorized about information reception and interpretation, leaving the audience largely absent. PC scholars, however, have examined how people respond to messages about contentious issues. For instance, research suggests that people are cognitive misers, adopting satisficing strategies (Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Zaller 1992). Citizens also have numerous strategies to guard against persuasive messages and propaganda. Without this important skill, individuals' beliefs would be unstable and easily manipulated, but the ability to guard against manipulation can also lead individuals to reject legitimate critiques. Persuasive appeals can also boomerang, leading people to embrace their initial views more vigorously (Byrne and Hart 2009).

The Information Age and Political Communication

In addition to the benefits to SM research on both offline and online activism discussed above, we argue that incorporating PC research is critical in the information age. SM studies will become increasingly impoverished if research from PC is not seriously considered. Specifically, much of the SM literature tacitly assumes that if movements produce resonant frames and receive media attention, people will necessarily learn about movements and some proportion of attitudinally compatible people will be mobilized. This suggests that the core information problem facing movements is information scarcity: there is not enough information available to catalyze potential supporters.

But, widespread ICT usage has created both an avalanche of information and the ability to selectively search for information of interest and/or that fits with one's existing views. This makes information overload, not scarcity, a core SM problem. These changes elevate the importance of the audience-related questions raised above since movements must increasingly compete for attention against vast amounts of information and appeals. For instance, individuals may selectively expose or attend to information (Hart, Albarracín, Eagly, Brechan, Lindberg, and Merrill 2009), leading political attitudes to shape information consumption (though not necessarily at the expense of exposure to counter-attitudinal messages, see Garrett 2009). Political interest also shapes political information consumption, although there is some evidence that Internet usage can independently increase political interest and do so more powerfully than other mass media (Boulianne 2011).

Despite the possibility of selective consumption, PC research shows that ICT usage exposes individuals to political information in non-political online spaces and that information in these contexts often conflicts with users' existing beliefs (Wojcieszak and Mutz 2009). This can lead to byproduct learning, which can help politically disinterested individuals become engaged (Jensen, Jorba, and Anduiza 2012). However, strong context-dependent priming effects may exist (e.g., learning about politics through a religious website).

Dozens more examples of meaningful overlaps between these fields are possible. Our goal in this section is not to fully map out how PC and SM research might be integrated, as we lack sufficient space to do so. Rather, we argue that future theorizing and research should place a premium on this integration because the questions, and potential answers, that PC holds for communication processes within SMs become ever more important as information environments become even more overloaded and increasing amounts of political information moves online.

Conclusion

This chapter had two overarching goals: (1) to summarize research on some of the largest infrastructural changes in protest and SMs brought by the widescale use of ICTs; and (2) to argue for greater integration between SM and PC research. We reviewed research on three major infrastructural changes: (1) the rise in ephemeral forms of contention; (2) the changing necessity and roles of SMOs; and (3) the expansion of online transnational protest and online protest in authoritarian and/or developing states. We also argued that the integration of PC research and SM studies is long overdue. Even without consideration of ICTs, greater integration would be profitable. But, ICT-exacerbated information overload has made this integration critical. We suggest some lines for integration and hope that other scholars take up this cause.

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