COLECCIÓN CONOCIMIENTO CONTEMPORÁNEO

El poder de la comunicación: actores, estrategias y alternativas

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2022

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Diseño de cubierta y maquetación: Francisco Anaya Benítez

Madrid - 2022

N.º 61 de la colección Conocimiento Contemporáneo
1ª edición, 2022

ISBN: 978-84-1122-083-5

ÍNDICE

ACTIVISM IN THE AGE OF MEDIATED COMMUNICATION: THE IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ACTIVIST MOVEMENTS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence and expansion of mass media and, later, of new/digital media strongly marked the debate on the end of modernity and the beginning of the postmodern era, characterized by the emergence of a culture of masses, extremely complex, diverse, and even chaotic (Rotaru *et al.*, 2010; Vattimo, 1992).

However, if for some authors, such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1969), the mass media, such as television or radio, would allow new and more effective ways of exercising control over society, through the distribution of totalitarian propaganda and stereotyped views of the world, for authors such as Gianni Vattimo (1992) the media came to promote the decentralization of points of view and, thus, facilitate the emancipation of mankind. In this context, several authors have argued that the greater and faster transmission of different thoughts and ideologies, enhanced by the interconnection of traditional and new media, has changed the relationship between media and audiences and enhanced the dissemination of broader social

phenomena, such as activist movements (Cammaerts, 2015b; O'Neill *et al.*, 2013; Seelig *et al.*, 2019).

In fact, the interactive potential of the Internet and new media has played a leading role in the creation, strengthening and proliferation of activist movements, changing the practices by which these movements are developed and propagated (Cammaerts, 2015b; Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020; Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Karamat & Farooq, 2016; Seelig *et al.*, 2019;). The so-called Cyberactivism emerged from the use of the online by activists to engage in sociopolitical actions, with great ability to reach ever larger audiences (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017). Cyberactivism eases, for instance, the expansion of social movements and increases the ability for participation (Cammaerts, 2015a, 2015b; Campos *et al.*, 2016; Celi, 2019; Ishkanian, 2015; Seelig *et al.*, 2019), often far from State control (Garrett, 2006).

However, the new digital practices of doing activism also brought several challenges to these social movements, namely in terms of privacy (Morozov, 2011) and authentication (Couldry, 2004). Several authors even argue that the use of digital platforms to disseminate activist movements may not lead to greater participation (Dahlgren & Álvares, 2013; Morozov, 2009).

Based on a literature review and concrete examples, this investigation seeks to address and debate Cyberactivism, discussing the fundamental role that new media has on the development of current activist movements. Likewise, the advantages and risks that mediated communication has brought to activism will be addressed, as well as the increasing need to interconnect online and offline practices to ensure the effectiveness of these movements.

2. PURPOSE

2.1. The main purposes of this investigation are:

- Investigate the role that the emergence of the Internet and new media had in the dissemination of activist movements

and new notions of citizenship, as well as in the renewal of activist practices over time;

– Explore the new forms of activism from the Word Wide Web - the so-called Cyberactivism -, giving concrete examples of these movements.

– Discuss the advantages, as well as the challenges, that the new media have brought to current activist movements.

– Debate the need to implement mixed models in activist practices, with online and offline actions, to guarantee the success of these movements.

3. DISCUSSION

A social movement, such as activism, is a social process through which collective actors articulate common interests, express certain criticisms, and propose solutions to identified problems, through a variety of collective actions. These movements have three main characteristics: they are conflictual and have clearly defined ideological opponents; they are structured through dense informal networks; and, finally, they are directed towards the development, support and sharing of collective identities (della Porta & Diani, 2006).

The term *activism*, introduced in the mid-1970s and theorized at the level of social change and social movements theories, then refers to the practice and intentional development of actions with the aim of provoking or preventing sociopolitical changes (Cammaerts, 2015a). These movements can address the most varied issues, including political (Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Karamat & Farooq, 2016; Seelig *et al.*, 2019), social (Celi, 2019; Seelig *et al.*, 2019), environmental (Ishkanian, 2015; Kahn & Kellner, 2004), cultural (O'Neill *et al.*, 2013), economic (Ishkanian, 2015) or even media (O'Neill *et al.*, 2013) subjects.

However, if initially these social movements took place only through direct actions, such as protests, demonstrations, strikes, boycotts or

civil disobedience, or through judicial practices within the dominant political system (Cammaerts, 2015a; Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020), the emergence of new media has influenced and transformed the methods by which activist movements are prepared and implemented (Cammaerts, 2015b; Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020; Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Karamat & Farooq, 2016; Seelig *et al.*, 2019). In fact, since the 1990s, there has been a growing debate about activism practices on the Internet and how new media can be used effectively by a variety of social movements (Couldry & Curran, 2003). Cyberactivism, network activism, digital activism, online activism, or net activism thus arises from the inclusion of digital media in activist movements, encompassing online practices that involve sociopolitical actions oriented towards social change (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017). Such practices can range from the symbolic signaling of a position on a politicized issue to a more complex involvement, such as the creation of content related to social issues (Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020) or the planning and coordination of activist movements (Campos *et al.*, 2016).

According to Manuel Castells (2002), the era of Cyberactivism began in the 1990s with the organization of various alter-globalization movements using networked digital technologies. An example of this was the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, which in 1994 mobilized thousands of people around the globe against Mexico's participation in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), economic modernization and capitalism. Castells (2002) dubs this movement as the first informational guerrilla movement for having integrated in its strategy the use of telecommunications, videos, and communication via computer to spread messages and gather groups of sympathizers that managed to condition the repressive intentions of the Mexican government. The neo-Zapatista struggle was followed by several other similar movements, some with great worldwide repercussion, as the case of the Seattle protests in 1999, which mobilized millions of protesters in the streets during a meeting of the World Trade Organization and whose mobilization was carried out through of the Internet (Castells, 2002).

However, for such movements to originate, there were several transformations and evolutions that occurred in the media, to which was added the fact that the new interactive technologies have come to provide broader notions of citizenship (Couldry, 2004; Hermes, 2006).

First, the emergence of new media and their use by ordinary citizens led to profound economic, cultural, political and social transformations, such as the intensification of globalization or the decentralization of geopolitical authorities, which marked the transition from an industrial society to the so-called Information Society (Cammaerts, 2015b; Webster, 2003). The Information Society – or Network Society (Castells, 2004) – arises from the common belief that information has become one of the most important assets of contemporary life, including in economic terms, with much of the creation, processing, storage, and transmission of this information now being carried out through new information technologies. Such technological developments – such as satellite transmission or digital networks – not only allowed information to have greater value than agricultural or industrial production, but also impacted social life at broader levels, expanding cultural circulation and blurring geographic limits (Webster, 2003). This allowed the Information Society to establish itself as a permanently connected and active society, characterized by co-production and feedback relationships, in which citizens use technological means to organize themselves according to their values, affinities and specific interests (Castells, 2004).

In addition, the emergence of Web 2.0 popularized digital infrastructures that allowed Web users to communicate on a large scale, such as blogs, forums, online chats and social networks (Kahn & Kellner, 2004; O'Neill *et al.*, 2013). On the one hand, these platforms constituted an alternative to the mass communication of traditional media, favoring peer-to-peer (either one-to-one or many-to-many) (Cammaerts, 2015b; Livingstone, 2004b; Seelig *et al.*, 2019) and horizontal (without hierarchical barriers) communications (Dahlgren & Álvares, 2013). In addition, it brought notions such as immediacy, the reduction of barriers between private and public issues (Cammaerts, 2015b), quick, easy and economic interactions and greater

opportunities for civic expression and transmission of alternative informational content, capable of influencing various aspects of social life (Seelig *et al.*, 2019). These characteristics of Web 2.0 have thus led to the creation of multiple "virtual communities" with common interests, giving them a greater ability to initiate or strengthen social movements worldwide, as they can communicate and share their ideals on a global scale and, consequently, more easily place such issues on the public agenda (Cammaerts 2015b; Castells, 2004; Hermes, 2006; Karamat & Farooq, 2016). As such, the Web has come to be used by a large part of the public as a platform for participation and expression on the most varied issues, for example through attempts to change corporate agendas or fight against militaristic governments, by distributing online petitions, creating new opposition spaces or encouraging critical media analysis and debates and new forms of citizen-journalism (Celi, 2019; Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Seelig *et al.,* 2019).

Similarly, the two-way communication provided by Web 2.0 led to profound changes in the behavior of the public, which, by starting to participate in communication exchanges, became not only a receiver but also a producer and user of online content (Bruns, 2007; Couldry, 2004; Hermes, 2006; Karamat & Farooq, 2016; Livingstone, 2004b; O'Neill *et al.*, 2013), in addition to becoming more selective, self-directed and plural (Livingstone, 2004b). The participatory and collaborative environments of Web 2.0 break down the boundaries between producers and consumers and instead enable all participants to be producers as well as users of information and knowledge, with content being frequently created and changed by multiple users in a continuous process, and with a fluid heterarchy (Bruns, 2007, 2009). The new media thus constituted a new stage of communication, in which citizens assume the role of *Produsers*, that is, active audiences regarding media content, creating and using content capable of influencing the attitudes of other Web users in relation to the most diverse subjects, which means that the public is also able to shape and influence opinions and co-create value (Bruns, 2007, 2009; Couldry, 2004; Treré, 2012).

In the business field, in the 1970s, Alvin Toffler (1971) had already coined the term *Prosumer* to highlight the emergence of a more informed and involved consumer of goods, for whom greater customizability and individualisability of products would have to be allowed. In this production and consumption model – *Prosumption* –, the consumer shares vital data, information and knowledge for the production process, through user-created content (Toffler, 1990). However, Bruns (2009) comes to argue that Toffler's concept of *Prosumption* does not provide a useful model for many of the practices of content creation in Web 2.0 environments, especially regarding initiatives entirely or predominantly led by users or virtual communities that take place without the supervision or coordination of commercial entities. *Produsers* engage not only in a traditional form of content production but are also involved in *Produsage* (Production + Usage) – a models that strive to describe the practices of Web 2.0 users from the inside, rather than from the perspective of commercial operators seeking to exploit user-led content creation for their own ends, and that involves the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement (Bruns, 2007, 2009).

In this way, as Couldry (2004) argues, citizens start to adopt production practices with the aim of generating or sustaining, through participation, new spaces of public connection and reciprocity, including in political terms. Such practices are carried out both directly, through the sharing of explicit opinions and involvement in debates on blogs or social networks, and indirectly, for example through the individual choice of news sources (O'Neill *et al.*, 2013). In addition, the Internet made it possible for the Vox Pop segments, in which the common citizen becomes an actor in the news, to be more easily gathered and distributed (Hermes, 2006), and "open publishing" software and websites enabled more transparent content production and promoted public engagement as content *produsers* (Bruns, 2007, 2009; Couldry, 2004). In these new hybrid models, public opinion on political, economic or social issues started to be actively communicated by citizens through digital media, leaving its assessment to be confined to formal

instruments controlled by third parties, such as polls (O'Neill *et al.*, 2013).

Thus, the potential of new media to generate flows of information, opinion and feedback, the ability to produce, use and distribute alternative information by the common citizen in digital media and the new forms of social connection enhanced by new technologies came to enable, according to Couldry (2004) and Hermes (2006), an "broader" and more inclusive notion of citizenship, in which citizens manage to create new contexts of public communication, trust and citizen participation and in which it no longer makes sense to make a distinction between citizens and consumers. Valenzuela (2013) also argues that the possibility of expression offered by Web 2.0 was a first step towards a more effective notion of citizenship, which is now exercised through various practices and in various locations (Couldry, 2004).

In fact, digital technologies do not necessarily produce different citizens, but provide new and important citizenship practices with greater ability to interfere in the formation of public opinion, through virtual communities that serve different types of citizenship objectives and incite diverse political, social or cultural actions and debates (Hermes, 2006; Ishkanian, 2015). New media, in this context, can be understood both as a means of communication, propagation and interaction, as well as a symbolic arena of struggle for meaning, where the construction of meaning is coordinated through shared communication practices (Cammaerts, 2015b; O'Neill *et al.*, 2013). Thus, it becomes important to connect the concept of audience, as a mass association, with the concept of public, as a collective with common interests, goals and agendas (Hermes, 2006; O'Neill *et al.*, 2013). In this way, there is a construction of shared identities between publics, which include a series of rights, duties, norms and rules, involve a wide variety of knowledge and activities and provide, to varying degrees, a state of information exchange and engagement with wider communities (Hermes, 2006; Valenzuela, 2013). Such virtual communities range from fan groups to groups with activist purposes, which create new dynamics of social interaction and self-representation with the potential to

contribute to the formation of broader, alternative and integrative networks that transcend the existing limits of the traditional conceptualization of public and citizenship (Cammaerts, 2015a, 2015b; Couldry, 2004; Kahn & Kellner, 2004; O'Neill *et al.*, 2013).

In addition to the Internet becoming a propitious space for the emergence and promotion of activist movements and new notions of citizenship, the potential of the new media also generated a new space of mediated communication, characterized by production flows, circulation, interpretation and recirculation of contents, allowing multiple interpretations in different directions (Couldry, 2008). This brought several advantages, but also challenges, for the communication of activist movements (Garrett, 2006; Seelig *et al.*, 2019; Valenzuela, 2013). As argued by Dahlgren and Álvares (2013), the media are currently the most significant space in which civic cultures can flourish, as well as be obstructed.

Regarding the advantages of producing digitally mediated communications for activist purposes, digital media provide new tools, methods and practices for the creation and implementation of social movements, which brought some facilities for the expansion of these movements (Cammaerts, 2015a, 2015b; Campos *et al.*, 2016; Celi, 2019; Ishkanian, 2015; Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Karamat & Farooq, 2016; Seelig *et al.*, 2019).

In a *Prosumption* and/or *Produsage* model, greatly boosted by platforms such as social networks, blogs, portals, forums, wikis and e-mail, activist movements gained a new place to organize themselves internally, communicate their ideals and promote the reflection around the defended cause (Campos *et al.*, 2016; Seelig *et al.*, 2019). This communication thus began to involve the expression of opinions and facts produced in a personalized, individual and independent way, mainly through the transmission of texts, share of links and production of useful, engaging, and informative visual speeches, mainly with the aim of generating interaction (Cammaerts, 2015b; Seelig *et al.*, 2019). According to Seelig *et al.* (2019), the new media allowed activist entities to be able to share information and generate debates around their causes, which not only permitted a wider range of people to talk about

alternative topics and to be part of the creation of a broader social debate, but also allowed activist movements to easily carry out a "social listening" and thus find new opportunities to approach and engage the public.

This more interactive, low-cost and large-scale type of communication thus fulfills a wide range of material and symbolic objectives (Cammaerts, 2015b). The digital space is used by activist movements for the dissemination of the collective's ideological image and new agendas (Cammaerts, 2015b; Campos *et al.*, 2016), fundraising (Garrett, 2006; Seelig *et al.*, 2019), organization of online and offline protests, boycotts and demonstrations (Campos *et al.*, 2016; Seelig *et al.*, 2019; Valenzuela, 2013), dissemination of alternative news projects or independent media channels (Cammaerts, 2015b; Campos *et al.*, 2016; Karamat & Farooq, 2016), monitor or attack ideological enemies (Cammaerts, 2015b), internal organization, coordination and decision-making (Cammaerts, 2015b; Campos *et al.*, 2016; Garrett, 2006; Valenzuela, 2013), mobilization and/or recruitment of new supporters (Cammaerts, 2015b; Campos et al., 2016; Garrett, 2006; Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020; Karamat & Farooq, 2016; Seelig *et al.,* 2019; Valenzuela, 2013), establish national and/or international social networks around the same cause (Campos *et al.*, 2016; Garrett, 2006; Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020; Karamat & Farooq, 2016), internationalize resistance practices and discourses (Cammaerts, 2015a) or even more radical actions, such as *defacing* practices, in which activists manage to change the homepage of a given website, replacing the original content with a provocative message (Campos *et al.*, 2016).

Likewise, the information circulation and the feedback processes provided by activist mediated communication are better able to influence and change norms, connotations, beliefs, and civic representations by disseminating and transmitting alternative content that is not so easily disseminated by other media, such as traditional media, and by enabling the creation of new forms of identification and interconnection (Campos *et al.*, 2016; Garrett, 2006; Karamat & Farooq, 2016).

On the one hand, new media such as blogs and social networks stimulate integrative dialogues and disseminate alternative information

through the autonomous participation of citizens, in many cases far from the State's supervisory power or the frameworks of large media organizations, by hampering their ability to control the flow of information (Garrett, 2006; Karamat & Farooq, 2016). This has enabled the emergence and transmission of new ideas, values and practices, including self-organization, autonomy and solidarity, as well as greater openness to public scrutiny and debate on multiple issues (Ishkanian, 2015). At this point, the growing development of lighter digital technologies such as tablets, mini-cameras and smartphones led to an abundant flow of information on the web, especially by younger generations (Campos *et al.,* 2016; Celi, 2019; Kahn & Kellner, 2004), constituting an alternative citizen-journalism format with contents that often go viral (Cammaerts, 2015b) and end up becoming news in the mass media (Garrett, 2006). Thus, the new media allow the creation of parallel circuits of information and empowerment, especially regarding minority causes, which question hegemonic thinking or dominant narratives (Campos *et al.*, 2016) and contribute to the collective negotiation of new shared realities (Greijdanus *et al.,* 2020).

On the other hand, communication through new digital media allows for the preservation of protest information and artifacts, working as an archive, memory or global repository of text and audiovisual symbolic content related to protests, tactics, organizations and ideals (Cammaerts, 2015b; Garrett, 2006; Greijdanus *et al.,* 2020; Karamat & Farooq, 2016). The permanent nature of these artifacts allows individuals to access this information long after the mass media attention ends, and that such information resist the limits of time and space (Garrett, 2006; Karamat & Farooq, 2016). This makes it possible for the symbols embedded in these contents to be culturally transmitted, feeding activist movements and contributing to a collective memory of protest with the transmission of knowledge that can influence future movements through the spillover of social movements (Cammaerts, 2015b).

In addition, the ability to organize and communicate social movements across borders, strengthened by digital media, has made it possible to reduce the differences between what is considered a local or

global issue (Karamat & Farooq, 2016) and, consequently, facilitate the comparison of individual experiences and social norms (Garrett, 2006; Greijdanus *et al.,* 2020). This has thus led to an increase in the relevance of certain socio-political problems worldwide and to faster mobilization and response cycles, with a greater ability for the formation of collective movements influenced by the practices and norms of various communities (Garrett, 2006).

As such, one of the great advantages of digitally mediated communication is the ability to influence and interact directly and in real time among its users, providing them with specific conditions to actively participate in communication processes (Seelig *et al.,* 2019). It was in this way that civic movements managed to introduce new understandings and practices of citizenship and activism and initiated public debates around specific issues, such as Governance or the Rule of Law (Ishkanian, 2015), enhancing direct and offline political actions, such as mass protests (Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020; Valenzuela, 2013).

Thus, there are several examples of spontaneous acts of activism by civil groups on the web, many initiated on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, emphasizing the role of new media in activism and social change (Karamat & Farooq, 2016). One of the most mediatic movements was the so-called "Arab Spring", a series of protests that began in 2010 and overthrew dictatorships in the Middle East and North Africa (Simões, 2021). Such protests were mainly organized through blogs and social networks, such as Facebook, Youtube and Twitter, in addition to having used these digital platforms to raise awareness of the international community about the attempts of repression and censorship on the Internet by dictatorial states, getting instructions from other activists around the world on guerrilla techniques or even tutorials on how to reactivate the Internet (Castells, 2013; Karamat & Farooq, 2016; O'Neill *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, the triggering event of the Arab Spring was also disseminated through the Internet, with the diffusion and transmission of the news that a young street retailer, Mohamed Bouazizi, had set himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid, in the countryside of Tunisia, in despair in the face of the misery in which he lived. The sharing of this tragedy in the new media

quickly turned into protests against unemployment and corruption in Tunisia and mainly against the dictatorial regime of Ben Ali, who ruled the country for 23 years. The protests in Tunisia expanded to the neighboring regions of Egypt, Libya, Syria, Algeria, Sudan, Saudi Arabia or Iraq, and the mobilization of civilians through the Internet provided a new way of making a revolution that managed to overthrow decades of authoritarian regimes through popular pressure, such as the regime of Ben Ali (Simões, 2021).

Another movement driven by a sequence of mobilizations on social networks was the Spanish 15M movement, popularly known as Indignados or Spanish Revolution. Contemporary with the Arab Spring, the 15M movement challenged the current economic and political model, namely the austerity policies implemented at the time, having as a high point the demonstrations of May 15, 2011, which involved hundreds of protesters in several Spanish cities (Garijo *et al.*, 2011). These demonstrations were convened by the *Democracia Real Ya* movement, which emerged in early 2011 through social networks and organized the protests together with other movements, such as *Juventud Sin futuro* or *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca*, through a group of coordination on Facebook where the various spaces for the demonstrations were managed (Garijo, 2011; O'Neill *et al.*, 2013). A platform was also created for the transmission of information, obtaining the support of several Spanish community radios (O'Neill *et al.*, 2013). These demonstrations also led to the so-called *"acampadas"* in several Spanish cities – a kind of camping, publicized through messages on Twitter, which brought together thousands of people to debate proposals and the next steps of the movement –, being also a precedent of movements like Occupy Wall Street months later, a protest movement against the effects of neoliberalism that also heavily used digital platforms for its structuring (Castañeda, 2012).

However, the possibility of communicating and establishing activist practices through digital technologies also brings some challenges. If for authors such as Celi (2019) the new media have reduced the ability to control *produsers* and increase the resources for such social movements to emerge and strengthen, other authors believe that the

potential of the Internet and digital media should be critically analyzed, as its use does not necessarily generate greater participation (Dahlgren & Álvares, 2013; Morozov, 2009).

One of the main challenges of digitally mediated communication, pointed out by several authors, is the so-called "digital divide" (Campos *et al.*, 2016; Karamat & Farooq, 2016; Livingstone, 2004a; Seelig *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, although the Internet offers a space for citizens to come together around causes, if the social impact of these movements is concentrated or dependent on digital networks, the possibility of accessing them becomes a precondition for mobilization and participation in these movements (Campos *et al.*, 2016; Seelig *et al.*, 2019). In this sense, new inequalities and hierarchies arise around social movements due to inequalities in access to technology (Karamat & Farooq, 2016; Seelig *et al.*, 2019), with the Penetration Rate and the Use Rate of new digital media being far superior in western countries and more evident in younger generations (O'Neill *et al.*, 2013). Added to this, there are also different levels of psychological predisposition or motivation on the part of the public to research information on this type of movements and their goals (Cammaerts, 2015b; Valenzuela, 2013) and different degrees of digital literacy or media literacy (Campos *et al.*, 2016; Livingstone, 2004a). Regarding this last point, Sonia Livingstone (2004a) argues that digital media represent an information and communication environment whose potential can only be explored by users with technical skills to use technological interfaces, and not all of them have the same abilities to access, analyze, evaluate and create online content. To the technical skills is added the ability for normative and critical thinking, which can facilitate or hinder the civic empowerment of certain groups (Dahlgren & Álvares, 2013). Moreover, in activist movements there are actors with different levels of technological competence, leading to the occurrence of very different practices, which can lead to the overvaluation of certain causes to the detriment of others (Campos *et al.*, 2016).

Additionally, the very space in which this new activist communication takes place has particularities that can, in a way, harm social movements.

On the one hand, and although some attributes of the Internet make content regulation more difficult, the cyberspace also offers new forms of surveillance and control, namely by the State and large corporations (Cammaerts, 2015b; Campos *et al.*, 2016; Garrett, 2006; Morozov, 2011), many of which control the information that is presented on digital platforms and can repress the goals and tactics of certain activist groups or social movements, when such practices go against their interests (Cammaerts, 2015b). This enhances network surveillance, especially in repressive regimes, with the control of citizens' online activities and the suppression of protests that challenge the prevailing powers (Cammaerts, 2015b; Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020), which has already led to the emergence of various social movements specifically aimed at defending the independence of Internet use, digital rights and greater online privacy (Cammaerts, 2015b).

On the other hand, the multiplication of digital platforms where this activist communication takes place – such as social networks, blogs or websites – and their nature of transience and constant renewal of information, also present some challenges for activist movements. The constant renewal of content required on these platforms often leads to information overload and excessive fragmentation. This not only does not favor a more detailed attention to this information, namely regarding its veracity and reliability, but also promotes a paradigm of “viral” episodes and of simple and fast communications, transmitted between closed circuits (such as friends networks) or monocultures (discursive cocoons or "echo chambers", where people are less likely to be confronted with different views), rather than a reflection and debate sustained by multiple points of view, potentially enhancing the ephemerality of these movements (Campos *et al.*, 2016; Dahlgren & Álvares, 2013; Garrett, 2006).

In the same way, and even though the new media have stimulated a greater participation of opinion leaders or even digital influencers and microcelebrities in the defense of activist causes, making them more appealing and contributing to the increase of public participation, this also raises some questions about the potential fragility of this participation (Nickel & Eikenberry, 2009; Tatarchevskiy, 2011). The lower

costs of online participation, combined with the stimuli of these opinion groups in filter bubbles – in which individuals are mostly faced with ideas similar to their own – do not benefit a sustained democratic participation and favor the so-called click activism or slacktivism (Cammaerts, 2015b). Slacktivism represents effortless online activist practices that have no real sociopolitical effects, but only increase the personal satisfaction of those involved (Cammaerts, 2015b; Morozov 2009), often leading to a lack of coherence between the online and offline roles and practices of citizens (Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020).

In addition, the *Prosumption/Produsage* model means that any citizen can generate informative content, often based on unofficial sources, and disseminate it on a large scale on the Web (O'Neill *et al.*, 2013). At the same time, the richness and veracity of content in these hybrid models necessarily also depend on the diversity of the community that creates it, since a uniform group of content creators with similar levels of knowledge, interests and beliefs will be unable to create content effectively as its members lack the difference in skills and opinions required to investigate an issue from all sides (Bruns, 2009). This has multiple consequences, namely in terms of trust, the real social inclusion of those involved and the possible dependence on hidden funds (Couldry, 2004). While removing certain filters makes previously little publicized information available, it also makes it more difficult to distinguish accurate from fabricated information, such as conspiracy theories (Wright 2004). Thus, a greater ability of activist movements is required to differentiate themselves from less credible ones (Garrett, 2006), as well as a greater need for citizens to be able to question the authority, objectivity or quality of mediated knowledge (Livingstone, 2004a).

As such, one of the biggest challenges of Cyberactivism may be the possible superficiality and ephemerality of these movements, achieving an enormous reach and rapid mobilization, but emerging as a fleeting and sometimes unstable phenomenon (Campos *et al.*, 2016). For instance, although the Arab Spring led, in some countries, to advances in democracy, the truth is that even today there is a situation of extreme violence and instability following the Arab protests. Known as

the Arab Winter, this period is characterized by major civil wars, economic and demographic decline, religious wars and the bloody campaigns of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (Simões, 2021).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The emergence of new media, and their interactive and integrative potential, have made it possible for citizens to participate in content creation more easily, as well as in the sharing of information and in the co-creation of common meanings (e.g., Couldry, 2004; Hermes, 2006; Treré, 2012). The quick and easy way in which citizens can communicate and organize through the Web has, over time, promoted the emergence and solidification of new activist movements, which found online a space where they could make their voices heard for a wider audience, promoting a broader debate about their causes with the potential to achieve better results in terms of social change (Cammaerts, 2015a, 2015b; Campos *et al.*, 2016; Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020; Karamat & Farooq, 2016; Valenzuela, 2013). Cyberactivism has thus gained great relevance for the effectiveness of these social movements, allowing them not only to communicate their causes across borders, but also to organize themselves internally more easily and quickly and obtain support from other activist movements (Cammaerts, 2015a, 2015b; Campos *et al.*, 2016; Garrett, 2006; Seelig *et al.*, 2019).

However, the extreme inequalities in the access and effective use of new media (Livingstone, 2004a; Dahlgren & Álvares, 2013), combined with problems of interpretation, surveillance and trust in mediated communication (Campos *et al.*, 2016; Garrett, 2006), also bring several challenges to Cyberactivism, which can undermine the effectiveness of activist movements, as well as their strength and respectability (Campos *et al.*, 2016). New media thus emerge as a platform that can either benefit or harm current activist movements, depending on the context and the way in which they are used (Cammaerts, 2015a).

Thus, it is increasingly important to establish a balance between traditional and digital forms of activism, with the interconnection of

communication and online actions with direct actions such as demonstrations, face-to-face communications or partnerships with Non-Governmental Organizations, so as not to run the risk of distort and weaken activist militancy and ensure trust among supporters (Cammaerts, 2015a; Campos *et al.*, 2016). For social movements to achieve their goals, it is important to overcome the online/offline, alternative media/mainstream media and new media/traditional media dichotomy, as a way of diversifying strategies of mobilization and debate (Cammaerts, 2015a), because despite these movements manage to introduce new citizenship practices, social transformation and structural changes only occur with the support of civil society and coordination with State institutions (Ishkanian, 2015).

This holistic approach, in which activists take advantage of all communication technologies locally and internationally, allows for the promotion of broader agendas and interests and enables a greater influence of online events on offline actions and of offline activities on online debate (Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020; Treré, 2012). However, this does not diminish the importance of the emancipatory power that the new media came to provide to activist movements, allowing them to establish more comprehensive and bidirectional communications that promoted new models of involvement and civic participation, being materialized as an emerging space for new voices, new social relationships, and alternative practices at the cultural, social and political level (Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Seelig *et al.*, 2019).

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS/FUNDING

This investigation is funded by national funds through the FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., under the scope of the Project 2020.07567.BD.

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