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Abstract

This chapter explores the study of social movements in the communications sciences. In order to do this the chapter takes four key themes of protest research. The first section centres on media representation of social movements and the factors which impact on the nature of the reporting. Overall there is a general focus on the tactical approach of social movements and this is especially apparent when spectacular or novel tactics are used. The second part of the chapter takes this further to examine the methods activists use in communicating their messages and/or applying political pressure and how digital media has increased social movements' ability to challenge dominant media narratives and correct inaccuracies. The third section covers the incorporation of digital technology into the tactical repertoires of protest groups and the impacts this has. Finally, the chapter considers the repression of social movements and the part that digital media plays in this.

Key Words

Social movements, protest, media coverage, surveillance, activism, communication

Communication Sciences and the study of social movements by Jonathan Cable

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore the study of social movements in the communications sciences. In order to do this the chapter will take four different elements of protest research. The first section concerns the media representation of social movements and the factors which impact on the nature of the reporting. This will demonstrate that although technology has changed the general overall reporting of protest has remained relative similar. Overall there is a general focus on the tactical approach of social movements and this is especially apparent when spectacular or novel tactics are used. The second part of this chapter takes this further to examine the methods by which activists attempt to communicate their messages and apply political pressure and how protesters interact with traditional media. The third section examines the impact of digital media and how this has increased social movements' ability to challenge media narratives and correct inaccuracies. Finally, the chapter will consider the repression of social movements and the part that digital media has played in this before closing with some final thoughts.

To begin, the term 'social movement' needs to be detailed in order to set the boundaries of discussion. The definition of what constitutes a social movement centers on a number of common themes, and by combining the definitions of Diani (Quoted in Wright 2004), Van Aelst and Walgrave (2004), and Tarrow (1998) social movements can be defined as:

- 1) A network of individuals, groups and/or organizations.
- 2) Condensing around a common purpose and shared identity.
- 3) To challenge and interact with their targets, using conventional and unconventional actions.
- 4) In order to achieve specific movement goals. (Diani quoted in Wright 2004: 77-78; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2004: 100; Tarrow 1998: 4)

There are however additional characteristics to add to this definition for more contemporary, radical groups, which became known as new social movements. Anderson lists new social movement characteristics as follows "grassroots activism outside of formal political structures; informal, relatively unstructured, network forms of organization" with "an emphasis upon direct action and identity and lifestyle politics" (2000: 94).

The increasing existence of social movements is because institutional politics is constantly in a state of flux, and the public is increasingly rejecting traditional forms of political engagement. There are decreases in electoral turnout, and a perceived increase in voter apathy. Although, rather than absolute political disengagement the public is instead turning to a type of politics that is constructed around highly personalised and individual values and concerns. This altering of political attention is separated from traditional ideologies of left and right, and is in turn changing the focus, targets and mode of political engagement (Dahlgren 2004: xii). Electoral politics has consequently "lost its captive audience" (Painter 2001: 29). The communication of party politics has increasingly turned to the techniques of media professionals to control the news agenda. This is essentially symbolic gesturing which is selectively carving an image through the use of sound bites, processed photo opportunities and the celebrity endorsement has taken precedent to a structured, rational political discourse (Street 2001b: 212-213). This marketing of political policy is similar to consumer products such as soap powder or breakfast cereal, and has essentially caused the reduction of the electorate to the level of a consumer (Franklin 2004). The consequence of this disillusionment with electoral politics has increasingly led people to turn towards protest politics and despite falling voter turnout the public is far from apathetic (Milne 2005: 10).

In contemporary society it is social movements who are at the forefront of championing causes and highlighting politically contentious issues. The politically contentious issues

mentioned here cover many different topics that range from identity politics, to cultural, social, economic or political issues. These issues, more accurately, encapsulate everything from civil rights to localized 'not in my backyard' campaigns. The grievances around these issues are said to originate from the "structural conflict of interests" that exist in society (Klandermans 1986: 19). It is at these points of structural conflict where social movements, their protest targets and the traditional mainstream media interact, contest, and define issues. The visibility of social movements in the public arena often follows some kind of protest activity. The protest actions often have the aim of bringing an issue to light by gaining publicity. Lipsky's forerunning work on the topic provides a helpful definition of protest activity:

...protest activity is defined as a mode of political action oriented toward objection to one or more policies or conditions, characterized by showmanship or display of an unconventional nature (1968: 1145)

Building on Lipsky's definition Eisinger talks about social movements as 'collective manifestations', which attempt to provide "relatively powerless people' with bargaining leverage in the political process" (1973: 13). However, in the case of contentious politics it is protest activity that causes conflict between those protesting and those being protested, and the relative power concerns a group's ability to define an issue. It follows that protest activity occurs in one of three ways, it is either "demonstrative, confrontative or violent" (Kriesi et al. 1992: 221). Furthermore, Kriesi et al go on to describe five broad forms of protest action within these three types of protest activity:

- 1) Direct democratic events (such as a vote)
- 2) Demonstrative events (such as petitions and demonstrations)
- 3) Confrontational events (such as blockades and occupations)
- 4) Events of light violence (such as violent demonstrations and limited damage to objects)
- 5) Heavy violence (bombings, arson and violence against persons). (Kriesi et al. 1992: 228)

Where exactly protest activity lies in-between these three different types of protest action has consistently made a telling impact on the nature and tone of traditional mainstream media coverage as the next section will now explore.

Media Representation

The media landscape is ever changing and has been accompanied by the adaptation, adoption and creation of alternative forms of media by, for example, social movements. This

has increasingly turned the mass media into a much more contested space for competing voices to make themselves heard. It is at this point where protest tactics comes into play. If we were to look at media representation stemming from the type of actions carried out then the correlation in research tends to be the greater the spectacle the more a social movement is covered in the press. But, the spectacle has the unintended side-effect which causes the media to critically divorce protest activities from their protest politics, and this removes the overriding context of why people are protesting (Rosie and Gorringer 2009a; Gitlin 1980; DeLuca 1999; Cable 2016). The spectacle in this respect is what appeals most to the visual aspects of news reporting. This is in keeping with the arguments presented by Eisinger who states that protest is “disruptive in nature” (1973: 13), and this is complemented by Lipsky who talks of protest as “characterized by showmanship or display of an unconventional nature” (1968: 1145).

The spectacle feeds the media need for entertainment in what Gamson calls the media tendency to “emphasize entertainment values relative to journalistic values, media strategies may try to satisfy these entertainment needs” (2003: para 69). However, the media coverage of protest activity tends to sit on a spectrum between episodic and thematic types of reporting. These two categories are, as to be expected, not mutually exclusive because a news report can move from the episodic, to the thematic, and back again. To define these two categories Iyengar offers the following: Episodic coverage is described as “a case study or event-orientated report”, and thematic report contains a “more general or abstract context” and explains the “general outcomes or conditions” of protest action (1991: 14, see also Smith et al. 2001: 1404). This type of journalistic convention in the covering of protest has been incorporated into the tactical repertoires of some groups whose protest tactics incorporate ‘news hooks’ in order to attract news coverage (Smith et al. 2001: 1402). In particular those who engage in symbolic direct action. What is important to differentiate here when comparing direct action to a mass demonstration is the matter of timing (Cable 2016: 161). The use of these types of protest action is an attempt to ‘maximize the benefits’ of a protest by firstly reducing the cost of the protest, and perhaps more importantly costing the protest target either financially or morally (Wall 1999: 41).

Cable’s work compared the symbolic direct action group Plane Stupid who were campaigning against the expansion of Britain’s airports, and the mass demonstration network G20Meltdown who protested against the G20 in London in 2009. Cable found that direct action by its very nature is often not publicized before an event or is not known about beyond the activists involved, whereas the date of a mass demonstration will have been advertised months in advance (Cable 2016: 161). The knock on effect is that the news

media are reacting to direct action covering the event as it happens, as opposed to a mass demonstration where there is a gap in the news before a protest is dominated by reporting what the protest will look like (ibid: 161). In terms of mass demonstrations this tends to take on a fear and anticipation of violence narrative. This particular framing of mass demonstrations is not particularly new.

The anti-Vietnam War protests in London in 1968 were anticipated by the press to turn very violent (Halloran et al. 1970: 92). Similarly, Murdock's analysis of the press during this time uncovered a fear of suspected violent plots in the run up to the demonstration which was in stark reality to the peaceful nature of the march (Murdock 1973: 160). Moreover, Halloran et al discovered that when the scale of the violence that was predicted did not occur caused the majority of peaceful protesters to be compared to a violent minority (Halloran et al. 1970: 90). Fast forward to the G20 protests in London in 2009 and a similar strand of coverage is evident. In the run up to the demonstration in the British press there was a focus on perceived 'extreme' elements being present on the march, the police and security operation and an anticipation of violence (Cable 2016). How this impacts on the perception of a protest is described by Rosie and Gorringer as being "if anything more important than how an event itself is reported" (2009b, 2.9). This type of stereotypical and historical pattern of coverage has been referred to by Klein as a "McProtest" (2002: 157), in which protests end up looking "pretty much like every other mass protest these days: demonstrators penned in by riot police, smashed windows, boarded-up shops, running fights with police" (Ibid: 157). A big part of this theme of protest coverage is due to impact that perceived violence has on reporting.

Violence, can serve a paradoxical role. In DeLuca and Peebles research into the demonstrations at the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle, 1999 they found that instead of protesters becoming divorced from the issues the violence gave a voice to the voiceless, and opened up debates about WTO policy and public order policing (2002). The WTO ministerial meeting was meant as a grand image event for the Clinton administration and the outcome of the summit was scripted to show the triumph of free trade (ibid). Instead the lasting images of Seattle was human blockades, tear gas and rubber bullets as well as fighting running battles with protesters, and the symbolic vandalism of the shop fronts of corporate icons such as McDonalds, Starbucks and Nike (Ibid:138). It was these confrontations which led to the protest being dubbed the 'Battle of Seattle', and heralded as "the coming out party of a movement" (Klein 2002:3).

The genesis of this movement popularly seen in the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico in the mid-nineties. But the history stretches further back to protests against the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the eighties and early nineties. It is the policies and politics of economic structural readjustment that led to what became known as 'IMF riots' which occurred in a number of different countries from Venezuela to South Korea. The European part of the movement has its roots in 1988 when 75,000 people protested against the meetings of the WB and IMF in Berlin (Katsiaficas 2004: 3-10). In Britain a similar movement was building and at the Birmingham 1998 Group of Eight (G8) meeting 70,000 people formed a human chain around the summit. They were mainly demonstrating for the cancellation of third world debt (Clayton 2005: 167).

Back to Seattle and DeLuca and Peeples state that the disruptive protest was "necessary ingredients for compelling the whole world to watch" (2002: 130). Most importantly they argue that the violence did not succeed in "stealing the limelight of legitimate protest, the compelling images of violence and disruption increased the news hole and drew more attention to issues" (ibid: 139-142). Therefore, this is not to say that activists have no control over their media representation. It is at this point that the spectacle of protest should be mentioned again, because it is this which resembles a performance on the media stage. Wall talks of "activism, even in its most serious form, is a method of performance that must be developed and improvised" (1999: 96). Furthermore Gamson and Mayer argue that the spectacle is the primary news value of protest:

Spectacle means drama and confrontation, emotional events with people who have fire in the belly, who are extravagant and unpredictable. This puts a high premium on novelty, on costume, and on confrontation. Violent action in particular has the most of these media valued elements. Fire in the belly is fine, but fire on the ground photographs is better. Burning buildings and burning tires make better television than peaceful vigils and orderly marches (Gamson and Meyer 1996: 288).

This is one of the major disadvantages of this 'performance' is that activists become characters in the storyline and as Gitlin explained "celebrated radicals become radical celebrities; four-star attractions in the carnival of distracting and entertaining international symbols" (1980: 162).

What should be emphasized at this moment is that protesters using the spectacle as more than just a political photo opportunity which can be interpreted as a symbolic gesture. Instead, these actions are utilized tactically and have obvious symbolism in and of themselves (DeLuca 1999: 20). The main goal of which is to "critique through spectacle, not critique versus spectacle" (ibid: 22). The spectacle is what plays into the visual narratives

news reporting, and straddles the line between what is considered 'legitimate' political expression and pure hooliganism. Rucht identifies four particular aspects of the spectacle which have particularly attractive news values:

- 1) Size of protest, i.e., the number of people participating
- 2) Degree of disruptiveness or radicalness
- 3) Creativity or newness of the form of action and its accompanying symbolic elements
- 4) The political weight or public prominence of individuals or groups supporting or actually participating in the protest (Rucht 2013: 257)

Part of the reason for these conventions is because "media and attention cycle is notoriously short" (Rosie and Gorringer 2009: 5.7). This was apparent during the coverage of the student demonstrations in London in 2010 against the increase in tuition fees, Cammaerts detailed the implications of the spectacle for the protesters who were there (2013). Put simply, the spectacle is needed to get mainstream media attention, but if these actions are seen as going 'too far' then it creates distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable protest (ibid 545). Furthermore, the disruption and property damage which occurred on the day of the protests serves as a dramatic example of the attraction of property damage versus peaceful demonstrations. *The Evening Standard's* early edition on November 10 2010 before any property damage occurred had the demonstration on the front page but it was not the main story (Davis 2010). By comparison, following the property damage at Millbank Tower, the Conservative Party headquarters, the protest was the main story on the late edition of the newspaper (Davis et al 2010). Similarly, the coverage the following day in the national newspapers could not have been starker. Nine newspapers used basically the same image of one of the demonstrators kicking at a crack window (Cammaerts 2013: 19).

Activist Media Relations

How activists communicate is vast and wide ranging from leaflets and activist newsletters, to mass demonstrations, direct action and social media. What these different mediums are used for spans internal communications to external messaging. For instance, the organising and running of an activist campaign to mobilising people to join a protest. Internal communication is relatively cheap and numerous different platforms exist via which to communicate. It is the external communication where decisions need to be made over what to medium to use and what the advantages and disadvantages of each outlet are. This next section will look specifically at the relationship between the traditional media and activists. The section that follows this will focus more on digital media, in particular social media and

its uses. There is a certain power balance between protest groups and the media is found in the work by Wolfsfeld who, when commenting on the power relationship sets out the following equation:

The relative power of either side – a given news medium and a given antagonist – is determined by the value of its services divided by its need for those offered by the other. (Wolfsfeld 2003: 84)

The division of power in the above quote is dictated to by the “relative dependence” of each side on the other (ibid: 84), or more simply who needs who more. This equation though is skewed towards the media having the most power in the relationship, and this has been specified as “movements need the media, media does not need the movements” (Rucht 2004: 35). The traditional media do not have to cover protest activity if they do not want to, and this leaves protesters open to the prospect of being exploited and pressured into conforming to what the news media requires. It is for this reasons that activist attitudes towards interacting with the media vary from ambivalence and aversion to cooperative and active relationships. In reaction to a lack of media coverage, and based on the differing attitudes of activists towards the mainstream media Rucht offers the following list of potential activist responses:

- 1) Abstention – Following successive negative experiences at trying to influence the media a movement withdraws from making any further attempts.
- 2) Attack – An explicit critique and protest action against the mainstream media.
- 3) Adaptation – Acceptance or the exploitation of the mass media and its rules and criteria that govern the ability to provide positive coverage.
- 4) Alternatives – The creation of an independent media, from leaflets and zines, to websites and online forums. In order to compensate for a lack of media coverage and correct the distortions portrayed by the press. (2004: 36-37)

For Feigenbaum et al it is number 3 in this list, ‘adaptation’ which is an important aspect of activist media relations and the construction of the representation of protesters (2013: 73-90). It is because this adaptation is part of the differentiation between the ‘front stage’, or the protest action itself, and the organization of protest events which occurs ‘backstage’, and it is this that effects activist attitudes towards the press (ibid: 74).

To illustrate this point further McCurdy conducted extensive interviews with activists from within the Dissent! Network who were protesting against the Group of 8 (G8) in Gleneagles, Scotland in 2005. Dissent!’s origins are in the anti-nuclear movement, and the environmental direct action movement active during the 1960s to the 1990s, the British anti-roads movement of the early 1990s, and Global Day of Action Against Capitalism in London’s

financial district in June 1999 (McCurdy 2010: 46; Trocchi 2005: 63). He looked specifically at Dissent!'s attitude towards using the media as a platform for publicity, and investigated the existence of a perceived binary between pro and anti-media activists (2010: 43). On the contrary, what McCurdy found was that activists were either hostile, media averse, or rather than positive saw press strategies as a necessary evil. It appeared that rather than pro or anti-media stances a third more pragmatic view of the mainstream media existed, and this was based on three main beliefs:

First, media are viewed as sites of social struggle. Second, the 2005 G8 Summit as a media event provided a political opportunity. And, third, alternative media have a complimentary role to mainstream media in articulating protest. (McCurdy 2010: 44)

This struggle however, is either helped or hindered by the ideological view point of a British national newspaper. Activists, it must also be noted, are 'reflexively aware' of the media and how it functions for two reasons; 1) they are often sources for news organizations, and 2) they are consumers of news media and therefore know about how the media covers protest events (McCurdy 2013: 61)

This adds to the media's complex role and relationship within a democratic society. Having previously been accused of attempting to 'engineer consent' through a willingness to promote the status quo by reporting high profile events are treated as isolated episodic events (Curran 2002: 138). This does not account for the other role that British newspapers play which is to make themselves the official opposition to government. This is achieved by supporting and promoting specific single issue campaigns where the support and condemnation for issue becomes divided along the ideological lines and editorial stances of the newspapers (Milne 2005: 10). For example, in the early 2000s the Countryside Alliance were protesting in Parliament Square in London against a ban on Fox hunting received a large amount of support from the right wing *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* (ibid: 19). Their politics is seen as leaning towards protecting rural traditions and perceived British values. During the protest a number of activists invaded the chamber of the House of Commons which was describe by the center left *Guardian* as "a desecration of the basic principles of democracy and law and it was absolutely beyond excuse" (*The Guardian* 2004).

This type of support by newspapers for contentious issues can be seen as a reaction to the nature of a competitive and gradually dwindling newspaper market. The press in this instance is searching the public sphere for courses they can seize upon, publicize, present in a way that the readership can engage, support and identify with. The political engagement that is occurring has been referred to by Milne as "manufacturing dissent" (2005:45). That is

not to say that the newspapers or other forms of traditional media for that matter have the power to start a campaign and provoke political action far from it. This would attribute far too much power to the national press. They can however aid campaigns in reaching an audience through the power of the oxygen of publicity.

Celebrities and Protest

The other tactical method which could be employed is the use of high profile personalities such as celebrities, and feeds into the use of spectacle and what attracts media attention. It is the “changes in the political economy” and the increased mediation of public life which makes celebrity endorsement attractive. The logic behind associating with someone who has been created by the media is that the publicity which follows them is able to transfer that attention to a campaign (Street 2001a: 199). It is appeal by association (Ibid: 191). The proliferation of the political use of celebrity is matched by the willingness of the celebrity to lend their profile to campaigns. The relationship between celebrities and the public is through the mythical label of “star quality” that is manufactured by the mainstream media (Gitlin 1980: 148-149). The benefits for the celebrity are an increased socially conscious profile, and potentially a heightened celebrity (Pompper 2003: 149-150). Social movements utilise the status of celebrity for their own purposes, and the media coverage will be heavily dependent on the profile of the celebrity, but their fame can have the unfortunate effect of garnering all the focus placing the celebrity above the issues (Ibid: 160). The increased use of celebrity has potentially created what has known as a ‘celebritocracy’. This is where political legitimacy is given over to media created personalities (Marks and Fischer 2002: 371-384). Through the use of celebrity politics becomes trivial. The image matters more than policy and superficiality overtakes thought out political argument (Street 2001a: 185).

However, this tactic has been used to good effect by charities and other Non-Governmental agencies. For instance Make Poverty History (MPH) in 2005 who were a “unique alliance of charities, trade unions, campaigning organisations, faith communities and celebrities” (Bedell 2005: 9). They campaigned on a platform of fairer trade, increased aid and the cancellation of third world debt (Ibid: 13). A white wristband was sold in conjunction with the campaign and the public bought between 8 and 9 million. The ubiquitous band was intended to be a prominent symbol of the campaign and those who wore the garment were demonstrating their agreement with the goals of the campaign (Ibid: 28). The genesis of the MPH campaign stretches back to the G8 Birmingham summit in 1998. Here a similar group of charities, NGOs, faith groups and celebrities formed the Jubilee 2000 coalition. Their focus was to bring attention to the subject of debt cancellation for poorer nations. As the name suggests Jubilee 2000 wanted to achieve their goal of debt cancellation by the turn of the millennium

(Clayton 2005: 167). Live 8 and MPH would repeat some of the same campaigning techniques, as Jubilee 2000 used an online petition to gather 24 million signatures and the protest itself formed a large human chain around the summit (Ibid: 174). Jubilee 2000 like MPH also utilised celebrities their use of celebrity was based around the “irresistible power of celebrity” with the objective to “make third world debt famous” (Jubilee 2000: 25-26).

Activism and Digital Technology

Social movements and their relationship with digital technology is detailed by Van De Donk et al. as having three specific uses:

- 1) Resource Mobilisation – For structural, professional, institutional, linkages, and mobilisation of members.
- 2) Political Opportunity – The structural conditions in a movement’s environment, and intension shaped by the structural and contingency elements of the groups involved.
- 3) Ideology, Identity and Persuasion – The core values, collective identity and management of movement frames and perspectives. (2004:14)

The advent of the internet radically changed protest politics and digital media access increased the rate at, and altered the ways in which groups communicated with each other. The internet served several useful purposes such as a convenient, cheap, research and publishing tool, where worldwide communication is used to inspire people to join unconventional actions, and as a site of virtual action (Rucht 2004:50).

Despite all the promise the digital communication brings to international protest organisations it has some negative attributes. Rosenkrands research into anti-corporate websites found that while serving as a useful tool they failed in fully exploiting the potential of the internet, and dismisses the claim of ‘virtual communities’ as it “presumes a level of interaction between users” (2004:75). Further to this, the web is one step removed from face-to-face communication and is “isolating us in front of our monitors, keeping us off the streets... faceless one-dimensional stranger to stranger interaction” (Stoecker quoted in Wright 2004:82). There are also problems with information overload and the prospect of reaching those already involved in the movement and informing the already well informed. Digital technology is also not an all-inclusive medium with significant divides between those who are connected and those who are not (ibid:84-87). However, these negatives aside the online world is a way to practice democracy beyond the limitations of space, time and other physical constraints.

One of the earlier and more successful internet campaigns was against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). This was a treaty designed in secret in 1995 by the most powerful industrialised nations and was set to become law in 1998. The treaty failed to pass into law after facing considerable opposition, questions and criticisms from a network of 600 organisations from 70 countries over how the MAI will impact on the distribution of wealth. The failure of the treaty was partly due to the informational and mobilising resources of the internet (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2004: 100). Indymedia was first established in November of 1999 in the month leading up to the WTO protests in Seattle. Its sole purpose was to provide an alternative view of protest events, correcting the inaccuracies of the mainstream media, and utilised both print and online materials (Platon and Deuze 2003: 338). One of the major stories from Seattle to break first on the Indymedia network was the police use of rubber bullets, while consistently denied by the authorities Indymedia obtained footage of the Seattle Police Force utilising rubber bullets in their operations against the protesters. This effectively destroyed the authorities' story, reducing the subsequent legitimacy of their arguments and raised questions about the police tactics in Seattle and the focus was not solely on the actions of the protesters (Carr 2000).

Platon and Deuze's study of Indymedia uncovered some of the practices and processes behind the Indymedia network detailing some of the similarities and differences with the mainstream media. By utilising an Open Publishing platform and an open source infrastructure Indymedia allow for the freest sense of public and participatory journalism. This played and manipulates the very foundation of what people considered news. In doing so the line between audience and writer are switched at will (Platon and Deuze 2003: 336-339). They also looked at the ideology, practices, access and processes of the network based on several interviews with active members and partaking in 'participatory research'. One of the research authors Platon became a reporter for Indymedia at a couple of different protests in London on Mayday 2001 and in Gothenberg, Sweden later that year (ibid: 341).

Despite the name, Indymedia is not completely independent and has some of the same dilemmas as the mainstream media (ibid: 338). The editorial decisions of the network were decided by group consensus where the "opinion of the collective is the most authoritative one". When objectionable or substandard content can be 'hidden' from public view, but importantly the decisions behind the hiding remain public (ibid: 345). However, the practices and processes of Indymedia are very similar to the mainstream media adhering to the need for traditional news values, the need to build a reputable brand name that can be trusted, and a reputation for authoritative viewpoints. There was a constant battle occurring between

participation for everyone and maintaining the level of quality (ibid: 349). The choices over content being made by an editorial team and the teams responsible for the maintenance of the technology, the uploading of content has a distinct correlation with the amount a persons involvement in a social movement, which creates an almost elite dynamic (ibid: 349). This however creates a paradox of attempting to maintain an open platform while also excluding content on the grounds of not meeting standards, “open publishing is not the same as free speech” (ibid: 351).

The blurring of the reporter audience divide is a consistent attribute of alternative journalism and leads to some other unintended consequences. Atton and Wickenden’s examined the alternative weekly newspaper SchNEWS through the use of content and discourse analysis. They found that rather than giving a voice to the voiceless SchNEWS in part replicates the mainstream media’s sourcing strategies creating a set of counter elite sources (2005). In doing so this has created a brand new hierarchy of sources where the public remaining at the bottom of the pyramid, and the reporters became ‘experts’ in their own stories (ibid: 354-355). Unlike the mainstream media SchNEWS made absolutely no claim to impartiality, and favoured the views of activists and like-minded individuals instead of traditionally perceived authorities. For instance the police and government ministers who appeared in SchNEWS content were only there for the purpose of discrediting them (ibid: 353). This type of source selection effectively mirrors the mainstream media’s routinising of sources creates a sense of authority through an act of pure ideology (ibid). SchNEWS worked on the basis of being a voice of the marginalised, similar to Indymedia it is run by politically active volunteers with a view to the activist becoming the journalist where the source and journalist roles become one and the same (ibid:349).

The advent and proliferation of mobile and digital technology within activist culture has had the impact of increasingly personalising communication. The variety of social media platforms available has enabled people to express their own private concerns publically, and to an audience which is only constrained by the visibility of the social network and user to other people. This is a much more individualised and personal style of politics where anyone can mediate, coordinate and mobilise around a particular campaign to which their political sympathies lie (Cammaerts and Jiménez-Martínez 2014: 45, Bennett and Segerberg 2011, 771). The perfect example of this is Occupy’s very simple yet widespread message of ‘we are the 99%’ (Juris 2012). Without digital technology the ability to spread the message quickly through things like images would not have been there, Bennett and Segerberg refer to this type of propagation as ‘connective action’ (2012: 742-744). The clear advantage for activists with this technology is it substantially reduces the costs of communication and

circumvents some of the more traditional media channels to potentially appeal to the public directly (Earl 2010).

This is not to say that digital communication is a complete replacement of the traditional media systems it is more of a complementary or alternative media system which has come under intense academic scrutiny. This stems from perceived successes of social networking by Occupy, the 15-M movement in Spain and across the Middle East during the Arab Spring, to name by a few (Gaby and Caren 2012, Tremayne 2013, Hintz 2016, Hammond 2013, Fenton 2015, Gerbaudo 2012). If we take the Arab Spring as an example Cottle argues that digital technology was very effective in facilitating protests and informing the world outside of the Middle East and North Africa what was happening on the ground (2011: 651). Moreover, Cottle argues that the way the old and new networks of news media work is they feed off each other:

... social media and mainstream media often appear to have performed in tandem, with social media variously acting as a watchdog of state controlled national media, alerting international news media to growing opposition and dissent events and providing raw images of these for wider dissemination. (Cottle 2011: 652)

This is one of the most important points to make about digital communication. It drastically reduces the level of information asymmetry between the producers of media and consumers of content (Earl et al. 2013: 469, Cammaerts and Jiménez-Martínez 2014). The other key advantage of digital communication is that it is not geographically dependent and has the potential for communication with a lot of people.

The use of digital communication is not particularly new in activist culture, for instance Van Aelst and Walgrave found that the anti-globalization protests in Seattle in 1999 used an email distribution list entitled 'StopWTORound' to communicate with other activists (2002: 469). The difference however, with say Occupy and the WTO protests, is that activist early adopters of digital technology were focused on creating their own media, for example the Indymedia network (della Porta and Mattoni 2015). This has now changed and there is now much more of a focus on commercial platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (Hintz 2016: 1). This has taken the primary control of the medium away from activists and placed it into the hands of social media companies. How this technology is used by activists can be summarised into four fairly broad categories:

- Brochure-ware – information distribution through websites, email lists and social media

- Online facilitation of offline activism – logistical information and recruitment for offline protest actions
- Online participation – from less confrontational actions like e-petitions, to the more confrontational denial of service attacks which is akin to a digital occupation of a website
- Online organising – Purely online organisation with no real offline component (Earl et al. 2010: 651)

Taken further, Gerbaudo divides the use of two of the largest social networks Facebook and Twitter into serving different purposes. Facebook he sees as a recruitment tool, and Twitter as an internal coordinating platform between activists (2012: 17). These networks serve as a very public place for them to publicise their views of the world. In Spain the 15-M movement who protested against austerity measures and rising unemployment by occupying the central square of Madrid in May 2011 used Facebook and Twitter as follows:

In using social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter activists constructed resonant emotional conversations across the internet and managed to harness a widespread collective indignation transforming it into a political passion driving collective action in public space. (Gerbaudo 2012: 110)

Furthermore, Bennett argues that digital networks are creating political ties around protest narratives (2003: 147). But the ability of these platforms to reach a truly mass audience is incredibly difficult to ascertain. Take Occupy Wall Street's social media presence as an example, it was not until the movement appeared physically in New York that their digital presence was engaged in more widely, and more so following police repression (Gerbaudo 2012: 113). That said it is the potential to reach a global audience which lies at the heart of these technologies, and the considerable benefits of movements on these platforms for reduced costs, advertising of actions, and mobilising of participants.

Communicative Repression by Authorities

Beyond the confines of the traditional media there are the endless possibilities of digital media for activism, but this needs to be counter balanced by the increased potential of surveillance of social movements who use these technologies. As well as the dramatic impact on activism of the Edward Snowden leaks and the Pitchford Inquiry into the use of undercover officers in the UK (Undercover Policing Inquiry 2016). The ramifications of these events are only just being felt, but they have huge implications on the future of dissent. There is a history of surveillance and interference of activists by public and private entities,

and the protest tactics and tools of resistance employed by activists groups to fight against these surveillance practices. Surveillance here is defined as the targeted, covert, routine and purposeful collecting of information about private individuals or a group of private individuals (Lyon 2001). However, the increased ubiquity of digital technology in our everyday lives has changed surveillance from a more targeted collecting of data with a “trend to replace the dedicated gathering of specific data with the systematic and ongoing retention of all data” (Hintz, 2012: 132). This ‘hypersurveillance’, as Jeffries calls it, in some senses needs to be at least somewhat publically visible in order to be effective, as she states:

To function as a deterrent, public surveillance must communicate its capacity to see the space it is meant to protect (whether or not it actually does see is less important than giving the impression of seeing), which requires that it be seen by those who enter its perceptual orbit. (Jeffries, 2011: 182)

Surveillance in this respect is about the state maintaining its control over the population and buttress existing societal hierarchies. Digital technology on the other hand has the potential for disrupting these existing hierarchies by allowing for greater freedom of expression, but as Neumayer and Svensson argue that the potential for digital freedom and space is not realised (2016: 135). Consequently the mass surveillance programmes of the National Security Agency (NSA) and Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) it has been clearly demonstrated that in order for the digital realm to be considered ‘free’ activists need to be aware of the risks of surveillance and the tool which can resist this information gathering. The actors in civil society who make it their cause to challenge people and institutions in positions of power are in many ways most at risk of the types of surveillance mentioned so far. As Greenwald says it is the state which has the power and the ability to designate political opponents and threats as risks to national security, or in the most extreme terrorist (Greenwald, 2014: 185). The activist response to repression and surveillance is problematized by Monahan, who argues that activism serves to individualise surveillance and how civil society should resist it (Monahan, 2006: 515). This, he continues, insulates those responsible for the policies of surveillance, the institutions which carry it out, and the perceptions of the issue from coming under attack (ibid). That being said the surveillance of protest groups is a particularly pressing and real issue because the publication of revelations relating to activist surveillance over the past four decades. The following section will detail some of the methods used to target activists, and will detail some examples of where this has taken place.

There are several different typologies which have been created around the types of repression which protest groups encounter. Della Porta's typology is based on five dimensions which are not so much the form the repression take; they are more of a guide to the severity of the repression:

1. Repressive versus tolerant, that is dependent upon what is conceived as 'prohibited behaviour'
2. Selective versus diffuse, based on the range of groups facing oppression
3. Preventative versus reactive is contingent on the timing of police repression
4. Hard versus soft, in other words the amount of force used
5. Finally dirty versus lawful and amount to which legality and democracy is emphasised (della Porta, 1996: 66)

As Boykoff points out however della Porta's typology is centred on the police and does not take into account other repressive sources (2007: 284). Earl on the other hand has taken this further and separates repression under the categories of coercion and channelling (2003: 48). Where coercion is the use of force and other types of repression by police and military (ibid: 48). Channelling is a much more 'soft' and indirect. It affects the ability of activist groups to use certain forms of protest, when they can carry out actions and how they gather resources (ibid: 48). Take, for instance, the Spanish authorities attempts at dampening the mass mobilisations in Spain against governmental financial austerity. This 'soft repression' took the form of fines, changes to by-laws, and identity checks, what García refers to as 'bureaucratic intimidation' (2014: 304). The specific propagators of these types of repression Earl splits into three 1) state agents tied to national elites, 2) state agents with loose ties to national elites, and 3) non-state agents (2003: 49). Taking these further Boykoff repurposes these typologies to suggest four dynamic mechanisms of repression 1) resource depletion, 2) stigmatisation, 3) divisive disruption, and 4) intimidation (2007: 287). One of the key differences in this is the specific highlighting of the media as a source for protest repression, to quote Koopmans "repression and dissent have increasingly become acts on a public stage, and third parties who watch, comment on, and intervene in the play are crucial to understanding the sequence of events" (2005: 159). The surveillance of civil society groups has not been a recent occurrence.

Modern surveillance techniques and their information gathering crosses technological boundaries. This transmedia surveillance brings with it its own set of activist considerations, new dangers for infiltration, and opportunities for repression. This following few paragraphs breaks the different forms of repression into state, as in government, police and security

services, and private repression, such as corporate spying. Digital surveillance in many ways is a far more destructive form of repression when it comes to activism. The difference between digital surveillance and say repression on a mass demonstration where public order tactics like containment serve to dissuade people from attending future demonstrations is the ever present nature of digital communication. This has been described by Greenwald as:

A system of ubiquitous surveillance achieves the same goal but with even greater potency. Merely organizing movements of dissent becomes difficult when the government is watching everything people are doing. But mass surveillance kills dissent in a deeper and more important place. As well: in the mind, where the individual trains him- or herself to think only in line with what is expected and demanded. (2014: 177-178)

This type of repression is much less visible to the public, and represents a more abstract and subtle way of attempting to control the flow of dissent. This lack of public visibility also reduces the chances of a much more apparent and coordinated form of resistance to this type of repression. In Trottier's article about policing social media it becomes clear that this type of digital communication has made the security forces ability to gather information on anyone they choose much easier than using 'human' sources, such as undercover officers (2014a). It is because of the simple reason that this information is in the public domain and can be accessed by anyone wishing to view it, and as an extension becomes a platform for gathering evidence (ibid: 417). Thorburn has written about this type of surveillance occurring during the G20 protests in Toronto, where she talks about the use of facial recognition technology to track down and charge perpetrators of property damage and violence (2014: 58). Other forms of digital repression mirror the offline world where activists are turned, or agents are used to go undercover in an effort to stem the flow of illegal actions, and bring criminal charges against people and groups. This happened with a subsection of the hacktivist collective anonymous LulzSec (Coleman 2014).

The surveillance of activists by the state is only part of the story. The sharing of information between public bodies and private security firms has been referred to as 'grey intelligence' (Hoogenboom 2006: 374). Moreover, Earl has argued that the combination of public and private actors in intelligence gathering is tantamount to the "social control of protest" (Earl 2004 quoted in Walby and Monaghan 2011: 23). Taken further the private sector with its vast resources and data gathering capabilities has an extensive role in mass surveillance as demonstrated by the Snowden documents. As Lyon discusses the NSA uses private contractors and gathers data from telecommunications companies such as universities and

social media outlets (2014: 2-3). This point becomes particularly pertinent when considering the non-activist specific internet platforms used by activists are owned and controlled by private interests and have the “mechanisms to exploit, enclose, and control online communication” (Hintz 2012: 129). An example of a protest group experiencing repression by corporate platform comes in the form of the closure of the Twitter account @Anon_Operation which was part of the hacktivist collective Anonymous (Neumayer and Svensson 2016: 137).

This however is just one of the strategies private interests use in their attempts to control the content of the online world and aid in the stifling of dissent. Hintz discusses this in more detail when he talked about ‘digital gatekeepers’ and five obstacles to free expression online including: 1) Access to information; 2) Access to infrastructure; 3) Surveillance; 4) Denial of service – critical resources; and 5) Intellectual property and repression (2012: 130-133). The existence of barriers such as these blunts the power of the internet to be an effective tool for the transmission of messages, mobilisation, and the planning of protest.

The use of digital technologies by activists is not only matched, but surpassed by the state’s use of the same technologies to identify and prosecute activists. Trottier has written extensively on the topic of social media surveillance, and how it is carried out by both the police on the public, and by the public on itself (2012a, 2012b, Schneider and Trottier 2012). In summing up the form that this surveillance takes on platforms like Facebook Trottier makes the following argument:

Sites such as Facebook are remarkably effective platforms for citizens to persecute each other, following a broader online culture of sharing and interacting. On the other hand, police and other investigators scrutinize social life on these platforms. (2012a: 411)

One particular example of this happening in relation to collective action involves the G20 meeting in Vancouver, Canada which was characterised by clashes between the authorities and activists generated a lot of imagery on social media, but as Thorburn argues the citizenry were then tasked by the police to identify people and “create citizen-snitches” (2014: 58). The prevalence images of the disorder which occurred was due to people involved in, or near the demonstration posting images, videos and text about what was happening on social media (Schneider and Trottier 2012: 59-60). The consequence of which was to turn citizens into volunteer police officers, dubbed ‘crowd-sourced policing’, tasked with the goal of identifying people suspected of committing a crime (ibid: 62).

This alternate use of social media with respect to the public order policing has a dramatic impact on activist practice where social media is concerned. This was evidenced during Occupy Wall Street (OWS) which exposed how vulnerable activists were to legal action based on what they tweet (Penney and Dadas, 2014: 87). The concerns of the OWS activists were prompted by a court request to Twitter to pass three months' worth of tweets by OWS protesters to the Manhattan District Attorney's Office to aid in a trial about disorderly conduct (Associated Press 2012). Social media therefore has two distinct characteristics one is the protection and reinforcement of existing power structures and hierarchies, and the other is as an extremely powerful subversion tool to challenge and disrupt said hierarchies (Neumayer and Svensson, 2016: 135). The role of social media for activists in an age of mass surveillance is encapsulated by Penney and Dadas who quote one OWS activist who raises a key issue despite the apparent dangers by saying "I think we feel the need to be transparent ... we want to be really honest about our plans and what we do and our next steps and all of that" (2014: 88). The idea being that if protesters withdraw from these mass communication mediums they are somehow being too secretive, and openness with the public is seen as paramount to remaining transparent and accountable.

Closing Thoughts

Surveillance concerns aside the use of digital technology by activists is perceived in a very positive light with its potential ability to mobilise and publicise collective action. As Hintz mentions the pre-election Spanish protests in 2004 were dubbed 'sms protests', and the post-election Moldovan protests in 2009 'Twitter Revolutions' (Hintz 2012: 128). This demonstrates the relationship between technology and activism where new technologies are embraced by activists to both coordinate their activities and promote their key messages. There is of course the opposing argument to be made and attention paid to the attraction of social media policing and the structure of these platforms. They are, by their very nature, highly visible and searchable and provide an access point into people's everyday lives, and because of the varying understanding and implementation of privacy settings this information is more or less freely available (Trottier, 2012: 413). From an activist perspective the use of social media such as Twitter despite their obvious positives in terms of communications tools are still controlled by private interest, and much like the mainstream media should be used strategically and carefully by activists (Penney and Dadas 2014: 88). It would be naive of activists to ignore the attempted depoliticisation of communication and marketization of data companies such as Facebook engage in, as Andrejevic states "personal information is exchanged for access to social networks" (2014: 2621). The data economy is therefore

founded on the surveillance of individuals and what information they are providing regardless of whether or not they are activists or simply members of the public.

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