Social networks and their influence on social movements

Las redes sociales y su influencia en los movimientos sociales

CANDIA, Gabriela*†

Universidad Mayor Real Pontificia San Francisco Xavier de Chuquisaca, Facultad de Derecho Ciencias Políticas y Sociales-Sucre, Bolivia

ID 1st Author: *Gabriela, Candia*

Abstract

This article will examine the social networks as a new organizational instrument of social movements. For this purpose, first there will be a brief summary of the history of the sites social encounter and characteristics of social movements using the theory of Álvaro García Linera, Santiago Puricelli and Rovira on social movements, the theory of resources and tech temptation deterministic. Be taken as a case study the history, characteristics and form of organization called Indignados movement.

Resumen

Este artículo examinará las redes sociales como un nuevo instrumento de organización de los movimientos sociales. Para ello, en primer lugar se hará un breve resumen de la historia de los sitios de encuentro social y las características de los movimientos sociales utilizando la teoría de Álvaro García Linera, Santiago Puricelli y Rovira sobre los movimientos sociales, la teoría de los recursos y la tentación tecnológica determinista. Se tomará como caso de estudio la historia, características y forma de organización del movimiento denominado Indignados.

* Author Correspondence (e-mail: gabyalethea@gmail.com)
† Researcher contributing as first author.

Introduction

The article revolves around the influence and participation of social networks in the organisation and development of social movements, especially the "indignados" movement, a group of mostly unemployed young people who started their protests because of the financial crisis that Europe and especially Spain are going through, with the lack of employment, the housing bubble, the lack of a "decent" future for a stagnant generation, budget cuts and a host of economic problems that are the trigger for the emergence of this social movement that without the undisputed help of social networks and new technologies would not have had the reach it has so far and that day by day is growing more and more.

The article will be divided into three sections: the first will refer to the new approach to social networks, part of their history and their current prominence within the social order. The second section will refer to the movement called "Los Indignados", its origin and its main characteristics; the third and last section will refer to the characteristics of social movements and how the movement of the indignados complies with each of them, becoming an example of a more effective organisation of struggle and protest.

New approach to social networks

The media and new technologies (ICTs) have developed in an astonishing way in recent years. With the advent of the Internet and especially the creation of social meeting places called "social networks", from Messenger, created in 1997, to Facebook (2004), Twitter (2006), Google+, Instagram, Tumblr, Badoo, Linkedin, MySpace and many others.

They represented a significant change in the way people communicate, however these social networks also had their evolution; they went from being simple communicative spaces to taking the form of spaces for action and protest, as Rovira states in his book Movimientos sociales y comunicación la red como paradigma "social movements are communicative and action spaces where experiences of struggle and self-organisation are shared, where a certain reflexivity lives and a shared sense of protest is constructed.

Beyond a social morphology, networks have become a model for emerging forms of politics" (Rovira, 2012, p. 92). Apart from this characteristic, another very important one is that social networks not only have to do with the appropriation of technologies but also with the search for non-hierarchical forms of organisation, with a democratic and horizontal ideal, a characteristic that was the ace up the sleeve of those involved in these movements, such as: anonymous, indignados and the Arab Spring movements, all movements whose main characteristic is that none of them has a head and, in this sense, trying to find a leader of the movement would be like trying to cut off the head of a hydra.

Apart from this, social networks have generated what Rovira calls "the technodeterminist temptation". In order to avoid falling into this trap, the definition of Juris is taken from this, who proposes making an analytical distinction between three dimensions that appear simultaneously in the networks of social movements:

Formal: the network is an organisational structure without a centre.

Technological: the network has an infrastructure based on information and communication technologies (ICTs), especially with the advent of mobile phones with internet, one can be informed of what is happening anywhere in the world, wherever one is, no matter the time or place.

Normative: the network is a utopia: to make another world possible here and now (Wellman, 2013; p.13).

These characteristics made their participation in the organisation and development of different social movements inevitable, such as: the Arab Spring, the revolts in Syria, the revolutions in Egypt, the 15M movement "Real Democracy Now!", which would later lead to "Los indignados".

The indignados

The Indignados are a movement that did not develop overnight but are the product of a systematic process, in this sense, this movement has its roots in different movements that were structured to such an extent that it became one of the strongest and largest in Europe and the world in general, an example of this is the great march for equality, on May 1, 2013 in the United States.

The background to this movement was:

The oil spill disaster that destroyed the Galician coastline in 2002.

The attacks of 11 March 2004 in Madrid and the national elections 3 days later that meant the fall of Mariano Rajoy's government and the triumph of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.

The "PASALO" or "the night of the short messages", where hundreds of people, without a single convener to unite them, coincided protesting in front of the headquarters of the Popular Party, on the night of 13 March 2004. At that time, in Spain, the fate of the elections was at stake. A message that helped to change the course of the country. With a silent rally in front of the headquarters of the Popular Party. As one of its members says: "This was the beginning of something that, as the hours went by, was spreading minute by minute. For every message people received, ten, fifteen, twenty more messages were sent. There were people who received up to ten messages from different groups of people: family, work, place of study, people from school, from the neighbourhood, and these messages multiplied ad infinitum, spreading like the flames of a fire in the wind".(Vélez & Aldana, 2011)

The SINDE Law and the Digital Canon of 2009, where several Internet users, consumer associations, companies and trade unions, as well as hundreds of collectives and individuals joined together in the platform ALL AGAINST THE CANON, which was an unjust law prohibiting freedom of expression.

THE ARAB SPRING; that is, as its protagonists call the awakening of the Arab countries, which began in 2010 in Tunisia and even now continues with the civil war that is developing in Syria. Revolt that developed partly thanks to social networks, since one of the elements that triggered the Tunisian revolution in the first place was the lack of freedom of expression, in this sense, bloggers proliferated and acquired the political commitment to disseminate what the official media kept quiet and tried to censor; for example the demonstrations in Egypt with its Twitter link #Egypt was one of the most visited as Natalia Morar, a young Egyptian who together with her companions spread many of the demonstrations against the government, states: "We use Twitter, in addition to other social networks and we use the social networks to spread the message of the revolution.

Twitter, as well as other social networks and SMS messages to organise a demonstration from one day to the next" (Plebeians, 2012). The fact is that during the uprisings in Tunisia, both

Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, mobile phones and blogs were flooded with videos of demonstrations and calls for protest.

The revolution was gestated in the non-conformity and repression suffered over the years, in this breeding ground, the message of Bouazizi's suicide (a young Tunisian who immolated himself because he was denied the right to work) lit the fuse, spread virally and multimodally, in all conceivable communicative media, in addition to the live voice, in real time or almost, people took to the streets and took to the squares. Communication allowed for coordination and self-awareness of the dimension that the mobilisation was acquiring (Rovira, 2012, p. 99). It is worth noting that Facebook use in the Arab world grew by 30 per cent in the first quarter of 2011, according to a study by the Arab Social Media Report (2011).

All the social economic problems that gave rise to all these calls and revolutions such as: Unemployment, job insecurity, budget cuts in education, the Bologna plan and the increase in university fees. The financial crisis, the bailout, the housing bubble, the cost of mortgages.

All of these are some of the elements that created a critical mass in an intergenerational society that sees and feels itself facing an uncertain future.

One of the most outstanding groups of protests and manifestos through social networks are the "anonymous", whose main attack is through hackers against the "webs" of the political parties of the bipartisan system and in favour of social movements. They share similar characteristics with the indignados.

In order to talk a little more about this movement, it is convenient to cite the research conducted by the "COL- LEGI D "ADVOCATS" of Barcelona, on May 25, 2011, who presented a survey conducted by the GATER institute of professors at the University of Castilla-La Mancha. In this research the lawyers Jhusep Yure and Carlos Sánchez Palmeira and the economist Arcario Riveras intervened; the conclusions reached by the study to know who the indignados are, are the following:

In terms of age, 52% are between 25 and 34 years old, 18% are between 18 and 24 and 24% are between 35 and 44. This constitutes a youth movement, which does not show favouritism towards any party as the survey states, since only 2.55% of them belong to a political party. To this we can add that 26% believe that the political class is responsible for the financial crisis, 25% for unemployment, 13% for corruption and 9% for economic problems.

As stated in the consequences, the majority of this group is unemployed, as 48% do not work and of those who do work, 59% believe that it is very likely that they will lose their job.

On the level of education: almost 25% have a bachelor's degree 17% are professionals with a higher degree 17% have a postgraduate degree or specialisation 12% have a diploma. Regarding political tendency, 34% consider themselves to be left-wing, 25% centre-left, 15% centre and 6.5% centre-right, only 2% say they are right-wing.

In relation to what we are interested in, the majority of the participants, 82% specifically, came to the campaign through social networks and the rest through friends they knew from TV, the press or radio.

Of the participants, 90% had Facebook, 54.5% had Twitter, 38% had Twitter, and only 6% had none of these social networks (Delgado, 2012).

Characteristics of social movements and indignados

Álvaro García Linera in his article "What are they, where do they come from? Movimientos sociales" states that in order to be considered a social movement, any movement must be a type of collective action that seeks to modify the established social system.

He also sets out the main characteristics that they must fulfil such as:

–   Mobilisation structure
–   Collective identity
–   Method of struggle

In this sense we can affirm that the indignados are a social movement with all the characteristics of one, since it is a type of collective action that seeks to modify the established social system.

It has a structure of mobilisation, since apart from lacking a leader, they have a complex and structured organisation, since even when they carry out what they call the encampments in each city they take on a different structure, a clear example is the structure taken by the encampments in Madrid and Barcelona, the former being set up like an Arab casbah with small, labyrinthine streets and leaving the place for the assemblies a little to one side.

The Barcelona encampment follows the model of the Greek agora, with the place for the assemblies being the centre of the square and the encampment and arranging everything else around this centre, as can be seen in the images below (Verdaguer, 2013).

Continuing with the characteristics cited by the vice-president, the second is that every social movement has a collective identity; as we mentioned throughout the article, the indignados are a vast group of people who are mostly young people in search of the longed-for dignified future that unfortunately with the current economic problems are frustrated, this means that they all share the same identity, the same indignation.

The last characteristic of a social movement is the method of struggle, which in this case is represented by the ICTs and above all the social networks, because without this medium the indignados would not have reached their current magnitude.

In this sense, we can make a crossover with the resource mobilisation theory since the main characteristic of this theory is that "a movement lies in the following key variables ubiquitous in the discourse: organisation, interests, resources (variety and sources), opportunities, strategies, bureaucracy and, above all, mechanisms to reduce costs" (Puricelli,

2010, p. 5), all characteristics that "the indignados" fulfil, since:

They are organised, a clear example is the encampments and their form of organisation; interests, indeed the indignados are a group of people who pursue the same goal the same interest, to have a dignified future.

Resources, the indignados use different resources; however, the main resource they use is ICTs as the main tool for organisation and communication within the movement.

Strategies, an example of the different strategies they use is the form of peaceful protest that puts any government in conflict, as nobody wants to have a hundred people sleeping in the main squares reminding them that something is wrong.

Opportunities, that is to say that they are at the house of any opportunity that may appear to them such as the march on May 1st 2013 in Chicago, United States, a group of outraged Americans marched for workers' rights taking advantage of the symbolic day, thus increasing the number of followers and supporters of the cause.

Bureaucracy, as Max Weber states in his concept of the iron cage and perfect institutions, one of them is bureaucracy, since without it there would be no order and people would be lost within their movement, an example of this is the well-organised system of the camps, which have up to 22 different commissions, all of them bureaucratised to improve attention.

Finally, there is the reduction of costs, in this sense we return to the social networks, which are the cheapest and fastest way to keep in touch and therefore the most recommended and used by "los Indignados".

Conclusions

As Rovira states, in recent decades, the transnational dissemination of what happens in local contexts has become highly relevant to the success or failure of social movements and protests (Rovira, 2012).

At the national level, Álvaro García Linera in his article What are they, where do they come from? Social movements. One of the characteristics that we can rescue from this book is the method of struggle where social networks play an important role becoming one of the most important methods to take into account.

According to the theory of resource mobilisation, the existence of a movement implies the maximisation of its resources (Puricelli, 2010), in the case of the "indignados" movement, the main resource they have is free software, as with it they can communicate and organise in order to spread not only within Spain but also to reach places as far away as the United States, Syria, Egypt, Argentina, etc. Squeezing all the juice they can from the Tics by creating accounts in most of the social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, creating their blog pages, and different links like these in order to reach as many people as possible, making their movement grow day by day.

The insertion of social networks has meant a change in the modus operandi of social movements, helping them to structure and gather in a quick and more orderly manner, allowing for enormous effectiveness in virally convening both local and international protests through circles of interpersonal trust and at the same time microblogging enhanced by the use of mobile digital devices, such as multifunctional mobile phones, which relay messages and extend denunciations or calls in real time (Rovira, 2012).

In summary, we can affirm that the morphology of social movements has changed, and although in Bolivia this change is not yet visible, it is due to the scarce access to ICTs.

An example of this is the collection of signatures that took place in El Alto in 2013, calling for more and better internet for this city and Bolivia in general, in commemoration of International Internet Day, which takes place on 17 May. Apart from the scarce access to the internet in Bolivia, 3 out of 10 people have access to it, the number of internet users is much lower than the number of mobile phone users, a service used by 7 out of 10 people (BOLIVIA, 2011), and the number of accounts on Facebook, twitter or other social networks in Bolivia is 1,778,580, of which 55.4% are identified as male users (977,840) and 44.6% (786,280) as women (Sádaba, 2012). These data are increasing day by day, predicting the inevitable change in the structure of social movements.

In this sense, it is not difficult to imagine that tomorrow, on a national level, movements of the stature of "Los indignados" could be generated, a movement that would not have been possible without the help of social networks.

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