

**Title:** Serial Protest Activists: Unpicking the Global Network of Political Activism

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### **Abstract**

In this paper we introduce the concept of serial activism to capture and extricate present-day transnational movement entrepreneurship through an examination of cross-national protest communication on Twitter. Exponential discourse networks of political activism burst onto the scene in the wake of the demonstrations in the Arab world (late 2010 and 2011) that forced rulers out of power in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. These political events reportedly inspired the subsequent Indignados movement in Spain and the Occupy demonstrations in U.S. cities that later spread to other cities around the world. Ironically, while countries in North Africa and Middle East were in the grip of a revolution to bring in elements of representative democracy, many political upheavals in the West occurred as citizens were turning away from political parties.

We employed a mixed-methods design to a dataset of 20M tweets related to nearly 200 instances of political protest. The distinct political agendas populating the broad spectrum of movements were articulated in a global media ecology of self-publication and scalable mobilization that was instrumental for sparking the upheavals. Therefore, distinctions between these instances of political unrest are located at the ideological and not at the tactical level. In fact our data shows a considerable level of cross-pollination between users dedicated to political activism around the world. We found that 17% of users that tweeted messages with the hashtag #freeiran, 3% with the hashtag #freevenezuela, 15% with the hashtag #jan25, and 6% with the hashtag #spanishrevolution also tweeted messages with the hashtag #occupywallstreet.

In our analysis, we monitored 193 political hashtags from July 2009 to July 2013. The political movements considered for data collection cover the entire range of the political spectrum and took place across five continents. The dataset thus spans four years of online political activity and includes nearly 20M tweets (19,879,893) posted by 2.5M unique users (2,657,457). Of them, 100 were identified as being active across multiple instances of political

unrest. They were subsequently approached with request for in-depth interviews. The interviews considered the intricate interplay between political activism and social media usage. Our objective has therefore been to inquire into users' personal and political lives, concerns, and struggles with institutionalized power. The reported results will provide a baseline for scholarship grappling with the rapidly shifting architecture of political activism from a representative, hierarchical, and party-based system towards a decentralized, horizontal, and network-based mode of political engagement.

**Title:** Challenging traditional politics Partido X & the collision of public fields in Spain

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### **Abstract**

Around the same time that the Arab Spring broke out, in Europe and in the United States a movement with similar traits arose. Although this movement is mostly associated with Occupy, in Spain it is called 15-M (May) or *Indignados*. The 15-M movement is not only important because it stood at the basis of the European Occupy-movement, it is also important because offers the most promising follow-up of that movement by forming new political ‘organisations’ as Partido X. These parties challenge traditional politics by using new methods and new technologies and constructing a new/old public space.

Research on public space and public opinion in Spain is interesting because in this country both phenomena are relatively young. Until Franco's death (1975) a ‘public’ space in the modern sense almost didn’t exist and long after the dictator’s death this space in Spain was not very public because it was completely dominated by a few political parties and its allied newspapers. The most important of these ‘public opinion blocks’ were formed at one side by the socialists (PSOE) and the newspaper *El País* and at the other side by the christian democrats (PP, AP) and the newspaper *El Mundo*. Public television generally followed the course of the government. Since a couple of years, these blocks are losing grip, not so much because the leading newspapers are taking distance from ‘their’ political parties but more so because new ‘fields’ are emerging. Independent television channels form one of these fields. New political movements growing out of 15-M form another. Together they construct a different public space.

Especially interesting in the appearance of new public fields is the denial by 15-M (and Occupy) of the dominant field as localized in Parliament and the leading media. 15-M brought this about by occupying public spaces, *literally* and by using different media. Partido X is now seriously preparing its participation in the elections of the European Parliament (May 2014). In the meantime the party is bombarding Spanish society with heterodox ideas about politics, public participation and the future of the country. This is not the most interesting aspect of it. That is its completely diverging method, using real space, *la plaza*, and new media. Based on field work, interviews and literature I will sketch the origins,

development and leading ideas of Partido X, discuss new fields in Spain's public space and discuss public space as a collision of fields.

**Title:** Organised labour and social media in times of protest

**Bio:** Lina Dencik is Lecturer at Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies in the UK. Fellow with the Center for Media and Communication Studies (CMCS) at the Central European University in Budapest ([DencikL@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:DencikL@cardiff.ac.uk)).

### **Abstract**

The power of social media is said to be in the spontaneous and unpredictable ways in which networks of protest and solidarity can emerge. Commentators have attributed social media with key functionalities for contemporary activists as these platforms are presented as nurturing new forms of bottom-up, inclusive and horizontal movements of resistance. This has created a different kind of protest environment in which media practices and organizational structures are said to have become more diversified, individualized and decentralised. Much attention has been paid to the significance of this in shaping contemporary forms of popular resistance and uprisings, from the Arab Spring to Occupy to Gezi Park and beyond.

However, much less attention has been paid to how existing structures and institutions of resistance such as trade unions and labour organizations are engaging with this new protest environment and the ways in which social media gets integrated into broader practices of organizing and campaigning for workers rights and conditions in such a context. At a time when corporations are increasingly becoming powerful political players, infringing upon and effectively using influence to redraw workers' rights, and governments can no longer be seen to be able or willing to protect the interests of their working citizens, labour movements have had to develop a wide and complex range of activities to organize and meet these new challenges. Social media can arguably be said to play an important role in this broader transformation of the labour movement as worker resistance takes on an increasingly multifaceted and complex form that moves away from the traditional corporatist model of formal and informal political party affiliation.

However, social media platforms equally present new challenges and tensions for trade unions and labour organizations as they attempt to integrate social media practices into a very different existing and deeply entrenched protest and organizational culture. Drawing on empirical research into a number of recent union campaigns and protests as well as interviews with organizers and union activists, this paper will look at how social media has been used by labour movements and explore some of these tensions, highlighting some of the limitations

and problems with social media for organized labour in times of protest. In particular, it will explore issues around short-term advocacy, ephemerality and simulation of protest, as well as questions around the notion of ‘authenticity’ as a narrative for social media driven activities. This will introduce some significant insights into the possibilities for sustained resistance to the ongoing corporate exploitation of labour in the current context.

**Title:** Padres y Jovenes Unidos: Exploring Internet use and the cultural work of performance among counterpublics

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### **Abstract**

Padres y Jovenes Unidos is a multi-issue organization started by people of color in Denver who work for educational justice. It first began as a parent group that organized to remove a principal who refused to end the practice of disciplining Mexican children by forcing them to eat their lunches from the floor of the cafeteria. High school students later became involved in organizing for student immigrant rights. Then, linking with national efforts through Internet-based outreach, those in Denver were successful in reaching a groundbreaking agreement with the Denver Police to limit the role of police in schools and to work toward removing racial disparities in scholastic discipline. This case study explores a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) effort that provided support for high school students involved in Padres y Jovenes Unidos who sought to utilize social media to rally their fellow students in support of these efforts and to garner support among their parents and communities.

Utilizing Michael Warner's (2002) concept of counterpublics, this paper considers the ways that these students involved in Padres y Jovenes efforts envisioned the audiences to which they addressed themselves in the creation and use of social media to campaign for this effort. It also considers the applicability of Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) logic of connective action in this case, considering the extent to which the new capability of online networks provided greater efficiency or fundamentally changed preexisting social movement efforts. The paper argues that sustainability remains a challenge for small and flexible groups such as Padres y Jovenes, particularly in relation to Warner's vision of a public that must be constituted and re-constituted regularly and that must provide a means for both timely and punctual responses to efforts.

**Title:** “Weibo, WeChat, and the Transformative Events of Environmental Activism in China”

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### **Abstract**

The emergence of China and the advent of social media are two events that rupture the world as it is and force us to rethink activism and public spaces. Exploring the thousands of environmental protests annually in China, often performed on a mediascape dominated by social media, suggests new conditions of possibility for activism and the need for adoption of new methods and tools for understanding the myriad practices of activists in China today that exceed the strictures of governmental control and offer hope for different futures. This essay theorizes emerging practices of citizenship and inventive imaginings of public spaces supplemented by social media.

Moving beyond dated architectural metaphors, fenced-in pre-approved “free” speech zones, and eclipsed rights that guarantee nothing but moribund public spaces and an apathetic people, we want to embrace here *wild public screens*, places full of risk, without protection, without guarantees. Displacing the public sphere and its ossified attributes is necessary in order to account for the practices of activism people perform on myriad wild public screens. From Shanghai’s Nanjing Road to Times Square, from Tokyo’s Shibuya District to London’s Piccadilly Circus, from TVs to iPhones, from computers to iPads, public screens are ubiquitous. In comparison to the rationality, detachment, embodied conversations, and compulsory civility of the public sphere, public screens highlight dissemination, images, hypermediacy, spectacular publicity, cacophony, immersion, distraction, and dissent. Exploring how images eclipse words, image events displace books, glances replace gazes, speed shatters contemplation, immersion erases objectivity, broadcasting drowns out dialogue, panmediation trumps mediation, and distraction erodes focus as a mode of perception highlights public screens as contemporary venues for participatory politics and public opinion formation that offer striking contrasts to the public sphere.

In moving from the public sphere to wild public screens, we pay attention to activism beyond institutional approval and control. Environmental activism in China provides a compelling case study. Instead of neglecting environmental activist practices in China because China is not a democracy, focusing on wild public screens pushes us to explore how environmental activism is practiced in China and how citizen practices form publics that hold the government accountable and foment social change. In our exploration, we analyze how Chinese environmentalists deploy Weibo, WeChat, and other social media platforms in their activism.