

The Logic of Connective Action

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From the Arab Spring and los indignados in Spain, to Occupy Wall Street (and beyond), large-scale, sustained protests are using digital media in ways that go beyond sending and receiving messages. Some of these action formations contain relatively small roles for formal brick and mortar organizations. Others involve well-established advocacy organizations, in hybrid relations with other organizations, using technologies that enable personalized public engagement. Both stand in contrast to the more familiar organizationally managed and brokered action conventionally associated with social movement and issue advocacy. This talk examines the organizational dynamics that emerge when communication becomes a prominent part of organizational structure. It argues that understanding such variations in large-scale action networks requires distinguishing between at least two logics that may be in play: The familiar logic of collective action associated with high levels of organizational resources and the formation of collective identities, and the less familiar logic of connective action based on personalized content sharing across media networks. In the former, introducing digital media do not change the core dynamics of the action. In the case of the latter, they do. Building on these distinctions, the article presents three ideal types of large-scale action networks that are becoming prominent in the contentious politics of the contemporary era.