

A new era of political activism?

Raphael Tsavkko Garcia, Bacharel em Relações Internacionais pela PUCSP e Mestrando em Comunicação pela Faculdade Cásper Líbero

tsavkko@gmail.com

Abstract:

The paper aims to discuss a few aspects of the role of the network tools in promoting new forms of activism, such as fundraising, creating awareness and allowing new forms of civic participation, taking in consideration recent political uprisings and revolts in which social tools have been used.

The power and range of the internet is already well-known – to start using a cliché – throughout the world as a powerful tool for social and political change at least since the “Green Protests” after the electoral fraud that led to the victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran, back in 2009.

Since then, the internet, and specially online community and communication tools such as Twitter and Facebook, but also Youtube and others, have been used to spread the waves of discontent and, why not, revolution. Of course it is not possible to say that those revolutionary processes (counting also with the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, of Ben Ali in Tunisia among other events) happened just because of the use of social tools, but it is impossible to deny their use and effect on gathering and spread.

Huge social websites such as Global Voices Online played a significant role during massive demonstrations all over the world, covering live or explaining to a global audience what was happening or just happened, creating an “atmosphere of discontent and interest” within a broad audience, and not just a simple audience, but mostly a militant and well-connected one.

Local websites and tools also play a very important role in denouncing and calling attention to the most different issues, such as a network from the south portion of the city of São Paulo, Brazil, called Rede Extremo Sul (Extreme South Network) that aims to denounce abuses by the authorities against the impoverished population of that portion of São Paulo and also to try to improve their situation by giving awareness and building partnership with other organisations.

There are similar projects all over Brazil, from small impoverished communities to indigenous rights groups and even bigger movements that enroll from hundreds to thousands of citizens or, in this cases, netizens.

Similar within all these groups is the online platform, the online engagement that overflow to live actions. The idea of empowerment presents itself in most of the projects, social platforms and networks as a way for in other ways disconnected people (from themselves more than from the internet) to gather in common actions to share same problems or similar ones and, above all, to get informed and involved.

Information is the key for the overcoming of most problems within communities, and social networks, collaborative ones, can provide tools for people to get in touch not only with

different realities, but to get to know their own in a different perspective. Not only as a passive observer, but as an actor capable of doing something to change it's own reality and the reality of other – not just the near community, but the global community.

Knowledge brings freedom, set's you free, and gives the capacity to think globally. Knowing that your situation (considering that there's a situation of oppression of some level) is not unique, but is as harsh and important as the situation of your immediate neighbor or of a citizen of a different continent gives you the need to make something, to act. And the communication tools, the social networks make this action possible.

Fundraising, creating awareness, advertising, spreading the word, inciting, urging, and even investigating. Those are a few possibilities for someone, with social tools, to act in any kind of situations, locally or globally.

Impossible to predict whether someone will act globally or locally, but a world of opportunity is open . One might act against the poverty in Somalia at the same time engages in the online fundraising of a recycling program of his neighborhood. It'll depend of one's intention and will to make a difference.

It is possible to foresee a new level of engagement among citizens while with full access of social media tools and, now, with mobile devices connected to wireless or 3G networks, making possible for everyone to take action from anywhere.

Of course in countries such as Brazil, with loss and poor 3g connection and not even good landline connections, the issue of a decent access becomes a reason for protest and engagement.

Social networking is definitely creating a new form of political activism and engagement and, also promoting, new forms of participation.

In one hand we may consider that the so called "Sofa Activism" has it's limitations and cannot substitute the street protests, the face-to-face action, but it's impossible to deny that is starting to create a new form of awareness and access.

In countries such as Egypt or Tunisia, the internet played a major role in engaging and "forcing" people to act, at the same time, gave the world the real image of what's going on. As a tool to promote and advertise, the social networks are fulfilling the script.

We may not talk about a new dawn of civilisation, but definitely about a new era of political participation, where one only needs a computer to get to know the world and to act in some level.

With all its limitations, it's not arguable that we're creating a global community with common interests and struggles that is undermining frontiers and distances.

References:

ANDERSON, Benedict. *Comunidades Imaginadas*. (Editora 70, 2005).

BICKCHANDANI, S., HIRSHLEIFER, D., and WELCH, I. Learning from the Behavior of Others: Conformity, Fads, and Informational Cascades(*Journal of Economic Perspectives*. Volume 12, Issue 3, pp. 151-170, 1998.

HALL, Stuart. *A Identidade Cultural na Pós-modernidade*. (Rio de Janeiro: DP&A, 2001).

LÉVY, Pierre: *A inteligência coletiva*. (São Paulo: ed. Loyola, 1998).

MADUREIRA, Gisela. *Ciberconhecimento: um estudo sobre as novas tecnologias da comunicação, a cognição e a globalização do saber*. Dissertação (Mestrado em Comunicação). Rio de Janeiro: ECO/UFRJ, 2004.

PRETTO, Nelson de Luca; ASSIS, Alessandra. *Cultura digital e educação: redes já!*. In: Nelson De Luca Pretto; Sérgio Amadeu da Silveira. (Org.). *Além das redes de colaboração: internet, diversidade cultural e tecnologias do poder*. (Salvador/Bahia: Edufba, 2008, v. , p. 75-84).

RECUERO, Raquel. *Redes sociais na internet*. (Porto Alegre: Sulinas, 2009).

SILVEIRA, Sérgio Amadeu. *Convergência digital, diversidade cultural e esfera pública*. In: Nelson de Luca Pretto; Sergio Amadeu da Silveira. (Org.). *Além das redes de colaboração: internet, diversidade cultural e tecnologias do poder*. (Salvador: EDUFBA, 2008, v. 1, p. 31-50).