



Brazil

Media and mediators in contemporary protests: Headlines and hashtags in the June 2013 in Brazil

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MEDIA AND MEDIATORS IN CONTEMPORARY PROTESTS: HEADLINES AND HASHTAGS IN THE JUNE 2013 IN BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines possible relationships between use of social media in online mobilization and mainstream print media coverage during the June 2013 protests in Brazil, a series of demonstrations which happened throughout the country initially around bus ticket prices.

In order to develop the research, we compared news from leading Brazilian newspapers (O Globo, Folha de S. Paulo, Estadão, and O Dia) with the activities of most influential Twitter users in the dissemination of messages about these events in the country during the period from June 01 to 30, 2013. The results show trends in the emerging dynamics of social organization that may indicate the role of old and new media in today's Brazilian politics.

The research analyzed the extent to which the events occurring on the streets shaped and/or reflected user-generated social media content.

Keywords: Demonstrations in June 2013; Brazil; Social Media; Mass Media; Media Influence

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines possible relationships between the use of social media in online mobilization and mainstream media coverage (print media) in the protests in Brazil in 2013, also known as *20 cents Demonstrations*, *June Demonstrations*, or *June Days*. The *demonstrations of June* were regarded as one of the largest popular mobilizations in the country in the past 20 years and had the support of 89% of the Brazilian population, according to a survey by Ibope in August 2013 (CNI-IBOPE, 2013, p. 10). Such a social phenomenon emerged in the country on the heels of the Arab Spring and a preceding global mobilization called *Occupy* and *Movimiento 15-M* or *Los Indignados* in Spain. According to some analysts (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2012; Laer & Aelst, 2010; Robles, Marco, & Antino, 2013), the “viral spread” of online messaging played a key role in inducing the population to take to the streets.

Inspired by theories of collective action and research on the dissemination of information cascades in online networks, this chapter starts by asking the following questions: What kind of user-actors contribute to such dissemination? How does traditional media interact with new media? How do forms of press coverage in traditional media help or hinder the amplification of event information? Starting with a theoretical review and including empirical analysis of mainstream and social media, this chapter discusses the social logic governing the spread of opinion and collective action channeled through the use of information and communication technologies. Preliminary results indicate trends in the emerging dynamics of social organization that may indicate the role of old and new media in today’s politics.

THE PARADOX OF COLLECTIVE GOODS PROVISION

Social scientists have long been concerned with the origins of collective action, especially where this collective action is oriented to the common good and entails the possibility of free-riding. Until the 1950s, the so-called traditional theory of social groups, developed by different political scientists borrowing from different theoretical perspectives, prevailed as the dominant interpretation of collective behavior. This theoretical framework traces the existence of associations and social affiliations on the basis of concepts such as “herd instinct.” Thus, collective action is interpreted as an evolutionary aspect of “primitive” societies that were organized around primary groups or kinship, which in modern societies are responsible for social roles.

This thesis was refuted in the 1960s by Mancur Olson, an American economist and sociologist, who uses neoclassical economic models to discuss social and political phenomena relating to collective action. In his book *The Logic of Collective Action*, Olson (2011 [1965]) refutes the idea that groups of individuals

with common interests act on behalf of such interests to the same extent as isolated individuals pursue their personal interests. He establishes the case for a disjunction between individual rationality and collective rationality. Olson (2011 [1965], p. 14) is clear: “the rational individuals focused on their own interests do not act to promote common or group interests.” This holds true even if they win as individuals, and as a group acting collectively to achieve their goals. Essentially, before the “collective action dilemma,” when public goods are on the agenda – that is, a benefit characterized by the inability to distinguish between those who have contributed and those who have not contributed to its provision – the “rational person” tends to prefer not to contribute to a common good. This is the case because the participant will gain the same rewards as the nonparticipant, but without any effort. In this sense, the “rational actors” find strong incentives to avoid participating in collective causes. This classic social dilemma leads to a conundrum: on the one hand, it is important for everyone that public goods are produced. At the same time, individuals prefer that other people expend the effort to produce them. If everyone acts like a freerider, however, no public good will be produced or offered, an outcome which leaves everyone worse off (González-Bailón, Borge-Holthoefer & Moreno, 2013).

The collective goods paradox has given rise to multiple research agendas and approaches. Some researchers, while investigating why people engage in collective action to the detriment of their self-regarding individual interests, begin to experiment with different starting points, such as the operation of nonrational behavior (Coleman, 1990; González-Bailón et al., 2013; Watts, 2011). This perspective takes into account social norms, but also considers group-based identity pressures and contagion effects in the shaping of collective action, hewing to the Durkheimian sociological tradition. It assumes that, unless groups remain small or conceive mechanisms to influence individual action according to common interests, rational individuals, focusing on self-interest, behave differently from collective and large groups. For Olson (2011 [1965], pp. 14–15), people will always be tempted to create mechanisms to make use of collective achievements without making personal investments, that is, “at the expense of others.”

This approach is not new and incorporates the social theory of Tarde (1976, 2005) – devised at the turn of the 20th century. This theory claims that the behaviors, habits, beliefs, and desires shared by a collectivity stem from imitative contagion processes within social groups. Georg Simmel’s framework puts the emphasis on social networks. Not only Tarde but also Simmel emphasized the formal properties of social relations and the investigation of the configurations of social relations that result from the interweaving of action in social encounters. Later, in the mid-1950s, Paul Lazarsfeld extended this discussion together with Elihu Katz and Robert Merton. They elaborated the relationship between the media and collective action which, according to them, inspired the Tardian theory. The authors draw attention to the importance of social networks in the formation of behaviors and opinions, showing

that the influence of the mass media is relative and somehow dependent on the “supplementation” of the influence of circles of social interaction and contact (Lazarsfeld & Katz, 2006; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 2000).

Researchers developing this theoretical framework assumed that actors do not act in isolation as atomized individuals. Rather, they are embedded in a dense network of social interactions which shape their actions. This is one of the main assumptions anchoring network theory and in social network analysis research. The structure of networks allows both the effective implementation of standards and mechanisms for social coercion as well as the spread of values, beliefs, and desires on agents and institutions involved. Such assumption meets the micro-sociological vision by Tarde concerning the formation of public opinion. For Tarde (2005), public opinion is the result of micro operations of influence, suggestion, and contagion spreading within small groups. It is in this theoretical framework that the media must be taken into account.

In recognizing the importance of social networks, we may reframe the collective goods problem. The introduction of social networks forces us to acknowledge that social networks are a key factor in collective action because they allow the control and self-regulation of the groups, and encourage their members to develop a belief of “self-efficacy” (Bandura, 1994) that stimulates the individual contributions. Moreover, it spurs us to ask the same questions that the actors ask when faced with the decision to participate or not in a collective effort, namely, questions about the effectiveness of the network in achieving the common objective, according to Olson (2011 [1965]). This sense of effectiveness is measured by the dynamics of the group behavior. In other words, the actors decide neither in parallel, nor at the same time, but in sequence. This strategy allows them to analyze how many are joining the movement before joining too. Considering the heterogeneous individuals in various aspects, including their penchant for political participation or not, the sequential decision allows people who do not consider the possibility of accession at a given time to be able to join later, as far as they realize that a critical mass has been reached (González-Bailón et al., 2013).

This argument refers to the “Theory of the threshold” by Granovetter (1978), updated later by Macy (1991), Valente (1996), and Watts & Dodds (2010), that indicates that the behavior of individuals depends on the number of other individuals who have joined. Granovetter (1978) notes that people have different “thresholds” in relation to how many other actors need to be perceived as participants prior to any decision to join a particular movement. Therefore, the distribution of thresholds determines the result of collective behavior. Given this reframing, collective action appears closer to be governed by a logic of social contagion, rather than following the logic of selective incentives. This “contagious dimension” of collective action is crucial to understanding the logic of social behavior transmission. Contact networks and decision-making are interdependent variables whose combination can trigger a

chain reaction that does not necessarily need individual direct gains to happen (González-Bailón et al., 2013).

More recent studies suggest, contrary to rational choice economics assumptions, that collective actions take place under particular network conditions, as contagion effects depend on the structures of social networks. Currently, authors such as Hampton and Wellman (2003), Rainie and Wellman (2010), Easley and Kleinberg (2010), Scott and Carrington (2011), among others, apply the traditional theory of mass behavior of Granovetter (1978, 1973) – threshold theory and weak ties theory – to understand the behavior of individuals in today's society, considering that people act in network rather than in groups. This branch of research investigates the social logics of influence and contagion of perception, action, choice, and opinion among people through the analysis of social networks. Networks exhibit structural characteristics such as size, density, and centrality – which affect the conditions of the possibility of both the speed and the reach of chain reactions (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The position of actors in the network and the position of those to whom they are linked may point out trends and directions in the processes of diffusion and contagion. In addition, by assuming that actors learn during the experience, “adapting their decisions in accordance with the social feedback” (Macy, 1991, p. 731), the theory of networks creates possible points of contact between traditionally antagonistic visions, such as those of Durkheim (1989) and Tarde (1976). The innovative theoretical perspective opened by the social network analysis considers that individual thresholds are determined, at the same time, by processes of social influence, contagion in the micro level, and by the rules and social coercion applied at the macro level. As Gould argues (1993, p. 183), individual thresholds respond both to regulatory principles (to a law or social rule, for example) and to a penchant for a single collective contribution, which is conditioned on the proportion of other actors in the network that are also willing to contribute.

NETWORKED COLLECTIVE ACTION AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Since the economic crisis of 2008, we have witnessed the strengthening of social movements around the world. The Arab spring, the global mobilizations called Occupy, the *Movimiento 15-M* or *Los Indignados de Espanha*, and the Demonstrations of June 2013 in Brazil are examples. All cases cited feature similar processes of participation, convocation, and online engagement that preceded the occupation of the streets. So, with the recent wave of mobilizations in the world, we observe the emergence of protests on a large scale, which stand in need for explanation. They also invite us to engage with the collective action problematic, provoking the question: what causes ordinary citizens to

participate in protests that express collective demands, when these citizens can just enjoy the benefits without effort?

The wave of protests in the world from 2011 offers an unprecedented empirical terrain in which to evaluate the social dynamics and the logic of the collective action in the digital age. It is acknowledged that the movements *The Arab spring*, *Los Indignados*, and *Occupy Wall Street*, as well as the Demonstrations of June 2013 in Brazil, differ widely on their motivations, and on the circumstantial contingencies of their local contexts. However, these protests share two common characteristics. On the one hand, the emergence and the coordination of actions have taken place without the need to set up a typical structure of formal organizations. On the other hand, these movements were able to attract and mobilize a large number of people who were recruited through online social networks.

Most political messages of engagement and convocation, received by different groups and audiences, were broadcast via digital platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Castells, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2012; Malini & Antoun, 2013; Recuero, Zago, Bastos, & Araújo, 2015). Therefore, it is worth asking to what extent it is possible to apply the theory of the logic of collective action given the new strategies of online recruitment, mobilization, and activism.

FROM THE LOGIC OF COLLECTIVE ACTION TO CONNECTIVE ACTION

The phenomenon of online recruitment, associated with the recent wave of mobilizations in the world, has generated much discussion on how social media relate to the diffusion of the protests. Recent research on the subject shows that the conditions leading to the emergence of information cascades that can generate mass mobilizations are rare and difficult to predict, even in online networks (Bakshy, Hofman, Mason, & Watts, 2011). Additionally, it is difficult to mobilize a large number of people on the Internet. However, the question discussed here is not the historical-political context in which these mobilizations happen, but to analyze the extent to which the use of online social networks (like Twitter) generates an inflection point in the information cascade process, triggering a rapid and exponential rise in information flow.

The new social logic of online recruitment defies two fundamental assumptions of traditional theories about collective action: (1) that the costs of individual participation encourage a behavior of “social parasitism” (“free-riding”) and (2) that both formal organizations and the small groups of interaction are required to encourage individual contributions (González-Bailón et al., 2013). Various theories about the emerging forms of social mobilization suggest that the Internet activates a new channel of political action available to the common citizen. At the same time, it also has a positive effect on offline political participation as far as it encourages the engagement of people who, in other circumstances, would tend to

remain inactive (Robles, Marco & Antino, 2013). However, the use of social media in today's mass demonstrations begs a new question, namely: Do digital technologies allow a sort of "political engagement" which did not exist previously (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012)?

According to Bennett and Segerberg (2012), the understanding of these changes in the dynamics of collective action requires the distinction between two social logics at stake. On the one hand, we have the logic of the classic collective action problem associated with the formation of collective identities and the need for high investments in organizational resources. On the other hand, there is the new "logic of connective action," a term coined by the authors to designate participation based on custom content sharing through online social networks. It is appropriate to observe that, in the connective action, the conventional political organizations such as parties and NGOs are still participating, but through a light¹ involvement – especially because they tend to be considered as part of the object of political questioning.

The authors claim that the process of individualization and structural fragmentation of contemporary societies caused the emergence of the need for more customized interaction forms among individuals. This new pattern of interaction is based on flexible identities that separately take into account the needs, complaints, beliefs, and lifestyles of each person, even if the objects of claim and fight are the same. In this context, the need for individual-specific communication is brokered through the use of online social networks that allow individuals to organize themselves in a differentiated way in accordance with the interests of each one. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) calls this phenomenon "large-scale connective action." This form of action features in the foreground the recognition of digital media as an agent of organization.

There are two elements of the "custom communication" of particular importance for the formation of a "connective action," according to the authors. The first is the transmission of agendas and themes of political claim expressed in a simple way and easily customizable, whose messages can be shared in different contexts. For example, if an individual feels part of an underprivileged majority they tend to share the *Occupy Wall Street* message "We are 99%" as a form of protest; or if they are personally outraged by x, y, or z they include "*los indignados*" ("outraged" in Spanish) in their posts on social networks. These are examples of viral communication that characterize a "meme": a symbolic package that spreads easily among large and diverse groups due to the ease of imitating, of adapting to each person and widely share such messages with others (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

This form of personal action is inclusive inasmuch as it can be motivated by different personal agendas even as it is addressed to common situations. The second feature of such connective action is the availability of different information and communication technologies that enable the sharing of these ideas (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). In this respect, the process of dissemination of

texts itself, hyperlinks, videos, tweets, posts, and memes in social networks also involves customizing to include comments directed to friends and close people by the shared content.

Authors like [Lupia Sin \(2003\)](#) and [Bimber, Flanagin and Sthol \(2005\)](#) argue that the new online communications environment attracts new generations by significantly reducing the costs of political participation. In this sense, the reduction of costs would make the issue of “social parasitism” less problematic and reduce the role of institutions in the application of penalties or selective incentives. Collective action, as well as the production and dissemination of messages, is mediated by organizations that hierarchically define the communication strategy according to available resources. Conversely, according to [Bennett and Segerberg \(2012\)](#), connective action reveals a quite different economic, psychological, and social logic as it operates through the custom communication based on co-production and peer-to-peer sharing. In connective logic, the action or the individual contribution toward a common good becomes an act of personal expression, self-recognition, and self-validation, which occurs through the sharing of ideas and actions within trusted networks.

Therefore, the traditional patterns of political messages diffusion do not disappear, but they are disrupted by the structure of online networks. The network communication seems to become a form of social organization typical of our time. Many activists believe the highly differentiated political mobilizations, the ones that use individual-specific channels to convey their messages in large scale on the Internet, count as a “social movement” ([Earl & Kimport, 2011](#)). This argument suggests social learning and contagion are not themselves products of the digital age. However, they acquire unprecedented scale and intensity with the use of the Internet, thereby endowing these networked social movements with a qualitatively different aspect ([Castells, 2015](#)).

However, the ease of customization does not guarantee the success of the broadcast of a message or the engagement of receptors, nor the occupation of the streets. The political context and the social conditions for the adoption of a certain collective behavior are crucial and they differ for each situation. The customized messages enabling easy appropriation do not automatically spread in social networks. Participants must show each other how they can appropriate, adapt, and share the ideas that circulate to the point of generating contagion. Just as the efforts of a traditional collective action may not result in continuous or effective movements, there are no guarantees about the results of the articulated movements through online social networks. On the contrary, in most cases, these initiatives fail. Social media can help to reduce some costs in the processes of dissemination of information on a large scale, but it does not seem to change fundamental aspects of the logic of collective action. There are common characteristics between the two social phenomena. For example, both the theories of networks such as the classical studies about social movements highlight the importance of centrality of the actors to reach and mobilize essential resources to

the success of a collective action (Diani & McAdam, 2003). Distribution network structure – like hubs (actors with central positions) and clusters (groups of different actors) – is also crucial in the processes of diffusion due to distribution channels whose local connections enable (Burt, 1987; Iyengar, Van den Bulte, & Valente, 2011; Marwell & Prah, 1988; Valente, 1996).

Therefore, we return to the central questions animating this project: to what extent can connective action be a new catalyst of latent demands that favor the triggering of social events? What is the role of the traditional media in face of the new logic of political organization? How do digital media contribute to the organization of the protests? How can traditional media interact with the transmission of messages through social networks?

RESEARCH APPROACH

The work combined different search methods to analyze the extent to which messages from Internet users anticipate the events in the streets and determine, are determined, or coincide with the interpretation of the journalistic materials about the protests. To carry out this research we compared journalistic materials produced by leading Brazilian newspapers (*O Globo*, *Extra*, *Folha de S. Paulo*, *Estadão*, and *O Dia*) with the activities of the most influential Twitter users in the dissemination of messages about the demonstrations in the country in the period from June 1 to 30, 2013. Through the service Clip on the Web, 390 news articles covering the protests were collected.

Regarding the analysis of print media, we selected five newspapers located in the two largest Brazilian state capitals (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) with the largest circulation in 2013 according to the ranking of the National Newspapers Agency. We excluded the newspaper *Lance!* because it is devoted solely to sports news coverage. Using the service Clip on the Web, 390 news articles covering the protests were collected. We used content analysis to organize, codify, and classify material. The organization and codification of the news reports were made by extracting metadata and key characteristics regarding each article. Specifically, we analyzed the source, date, size, title, keywords, newspaper section, topic, characters in the story, and images used. Our next phase of analysis used interpretive techniques to categorize the titles and contents of the articles as wholistically positive or negative.

For analysis of social media, online activities of the most influential users (with the largest number of retweets and followers) were monitored during the same period, June 1–30, 2013 through eight of the leading used hashtags on Twitter about the protests (*#Verasqueumfilhoteunaofogaluta*; *#Vempraruá*; *#MudaBrasil*; *#GiganteAcordou*; *#ProtestoSP*; *#ProtestoRJ*; *#AcordaBrasil*; *#ChangeBrasil*), according to the number of citations. According to the data extracted from software Topsy during this period, the use of the hashtags chosen throughout the month of June was distributed as shown in Fig. 4.

The data were extracted through software *Topsy*, which indicates the most influential users by hashtag. The most influential users were indicated by Topsy's software algorithm, which measures the most influential users of a hashtag those whose messages were more shared, copied, and retweeted on the network. Topsy is software that collects and catalogs data from social networking platforms including Twitter, by capturing the universe of data generated from each social media site. Based on Topsy's selection of most influential users, we analyzed the hashtags most used in Brazil during the period analysis and selected the first eight hashtags based on volume measured as the sum of tweets and retweets containing the hashtag that were related to the theme of the protests that occurred in the same period.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The content analysis of the 390 news articles published in the period from June 1 to 30, 2013 presented the results shown in Figs. 1 and 2. This data shows the news articles published in the selected major Brazilian newspapers – *O Globo*, *Extra*, *Folha de S. Paulo*, *Estadão*, and *O Dia*. Figs. 1 and 2 show that the major newspapers started to cover the protests of June 2013 through articles

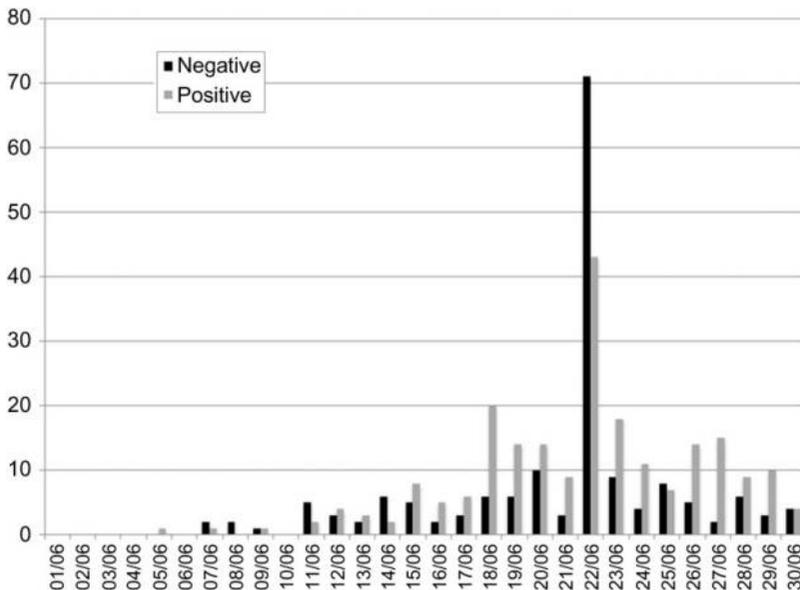


Fig. 1. Stance of Headlines from News Articles in Selected Brazilian newspapers in June 2013.

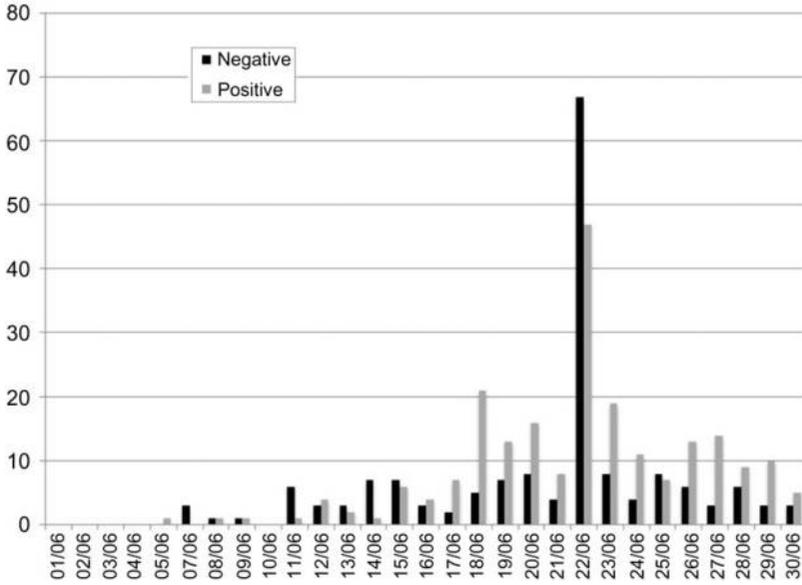


Fig. 2. Stance of Content from News Articles in Selected Brazilian Newspapers in June 2013.

with positive views, starting on June 18. This took place two days before a major nationwide protest on June 20 that drove more than one and a half million people onto the streets. Fig. 3 shows the growth of mobilizations per day on the streets according to the figures published in the newspapers analyzed.

Examples of positive news report headlines are those which highlighted the movement as a cause that united (or that should unite) all Brazilian society. One example was: “All of Society is mobilized against raising ticket prices” [“*Essas mobilizações contra o aumento (das passagens) são da sociedade*”] (*O Globo*, 6/18/2013); “Victory of the Streets” [“*Vitória das Ruas*”] (*Folha de São Paulo*, 6/20/2013); “Why we are in the streets” [“*Por que estamos nas ruas*”] (*Folha de São Paulo*, 6/13/2013); “Protesting, an act that brings together different tribes” [“*Protestar, ato que reúne diferentes tribos*”] (*O Globo*, 6/12/2013); “The street is Brazil’s largest stage” [“*A rua é a maior arquibancada do Brasil*”] (*O Globo*, 6/23/2013).

Negative news report headlines highlighted the violent aspects of the protests: “Riot in Rio” [“*Quebra-quebra no Rio*”] (*Estadão*, 6/11/2013); “Protesters get into scuffles with police downtown” [“*Manifestantes entram em confronto com PMs no Centro*”] (*O Globo*, 6/11/2013); “Violence out of control” [“*Violência sem Controle*”] (*O Dia*, 6/21/2013); “The March of folly” [“*A marcha da insensatez*”] (*O Globo*, 6/12/2013).

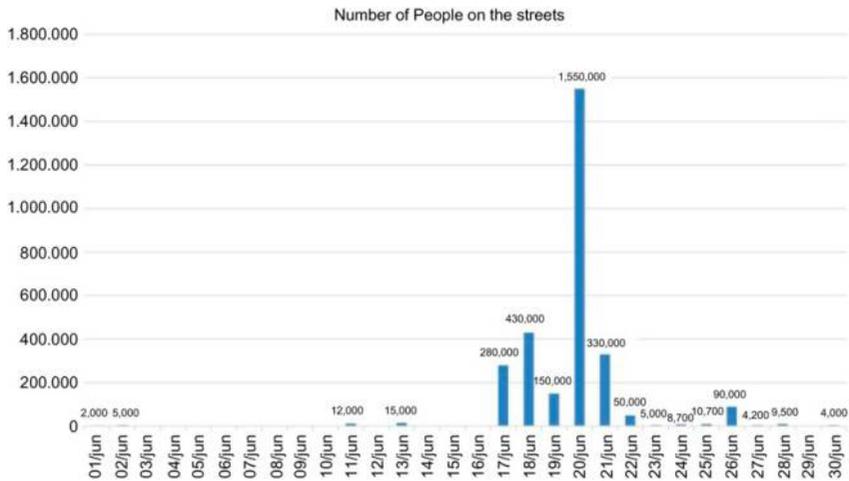


Fig. 3. Number of People on the Streets in the Capitals of Brazil in June 2013. *Note:* This figure was prepared by us. The data presented were based on the information published in the 390 newspaper reports that make up the corpus of this research.

Regarding the content of the articles, a number of articles highlighted positive aspects of protests in the text of the article. For example, the article “10,000 police on the streets of Rio” [*“Dez mil policiais nas ruas do Rio”*] (*Estadão* 6/29/2013) states: “(...) Through social networks, about 20,000 people reported their presence ... hope to gather ‘no less than 100,000 people’ or a larger audience than the last protest in Belo Horizonte: 60,000. ‘Our intention is to get to Maracanã. We are fighting for rights and freedom of expression that cannot be suppressed ...’” [Portuguese original version: “(...) Pelas redes sociais, cerca de 20 mil pessoas confirmaram presença, mas integrantes esperam reunir ‘não menos do que cem mil pessoas’ ou um público maior do que o do último protesto em Belo Horizonte: 60 mil. ‘Nossa intenção é chegar em frente ao Maracanã. Estamos lutando por direitos e a liberdade de manifestação não pode ser controlada.’”]

By observing *Figs. 1 and 2* it is possible to see that the titles and contents of the articles published in the main Brazilian newspapers presented positive views of the protests occurring in June 2013 until the 22nd of June. On this day the largest number of protesters was registered on the streets across Brazil, as shown in *Fig. 3*.

This data is consistent with the results of previous studies highlighting the importance of mass media in the dissemination of waves of mobilizations, according to *Myers (2000)* and *González-Bailón et al. (2013)*. Research presented by *Coleman, Menzel Katz (1957)* and *Bulte Lilien (2001)* also indicates

how exposure to a common and global source of information (traditional media or marketing campaigns) interacts with the transmission of messages through local networks. These results indicate that the sources of social pressure are mostly exogenous and not internal to the network. In that case, one realizes that the news coverage with positive views about the protests may have influenced the progressive engagement of the protesters.

As shown in Fig. 4, on June 18 the Twitter trendline peaks when hashtags on the demonstrations reach nearly one million tweets. This date coincides with the publication of journalistic materials by traditional newspapers with opinions of support vis-a-vis the mobilization that had already begun in the streets.

The popularity of the hashtags *#verásqueumfilhoteunaofogaluta* and *#vemprarua* suggests a strong relationship with the content disseminated by the mass media. In June, the major communication vehicles covered the Soccer Confederations Cup, which took place in Brazil and whose title was won by the Brazilian team. At this moment the national anthem, which includes the verse “you will see your son does not flee from the fight” (translation of the hashtag *#verásqueumfilhoteunaofogaluta*) was played several times during the competition. The second most popular hashtag was inspired by the jingle of a Fiat advertisement which included the call “Come to the streets!” (translation of the

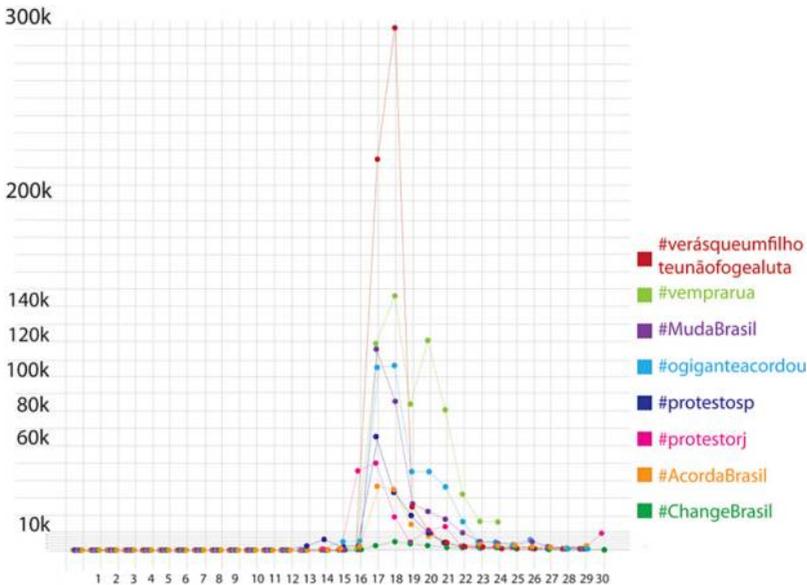


Fig. 4. Most Commonly used Hashtags on Twitter in June 2013.

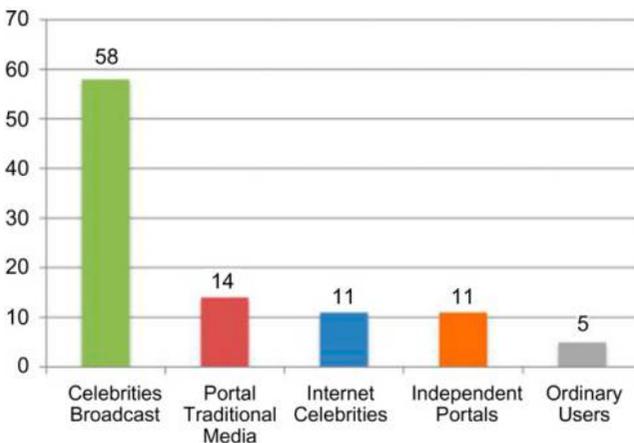
hashtag #*Vempruarua*), which became an “anthem” in the demonstrations in Brazil in 2013.²

By analyzing the types of most influential users (with the largest number of followers and/or retweets) indicated by software Topsy through the extraction of data from the eight major used hashtags on Twitter about the demonstrations, we find the profiles presented in Fig. 5. Users were classified into: (1) celebrities broadcast (i.e., from the traditional mass media); (2) portal of traditional media (sites of mass media); (3) Internet celebrities; (4) independent portals; and (5) ordinary users.

Fig. 6 shows the profiles of the most influential Twitter users who have used hashtags. This figure is sorted according to the number of tweets per user.

Comparing Figs. 1–4, one can observe some behavior-related correlations between the graphs. The peak usage of hashtags on Twitter referring to the demonstrations and encouraging people to take to the streets (Fig. 4) occurred one day prior to the peak trending of positive reports regarding the demonstrations of 18 and 19 June (Figs. 1 and 2). This peak trending, in turn, occurred one day prior to the largest demonstration in terms of number of participants nationwide (Fig. 3). This means that by cross-referencing the data of these four graphs the sequential occurrence of events becomes apparent. Therefore, one could argue that a correlation may exist between widespread dissemination of online messages via social media, mass media coverage and strong adhesion, and popular support for the street protests on subsequent days, insofar as the graphs exhibit similar behaviors.

However, it is difficult to ascertain any direct causal relationship among the phenomena presented in Figs. 1–4, as it is not possible to accurately measure the influence of the media on people, or of a single person on other people. As



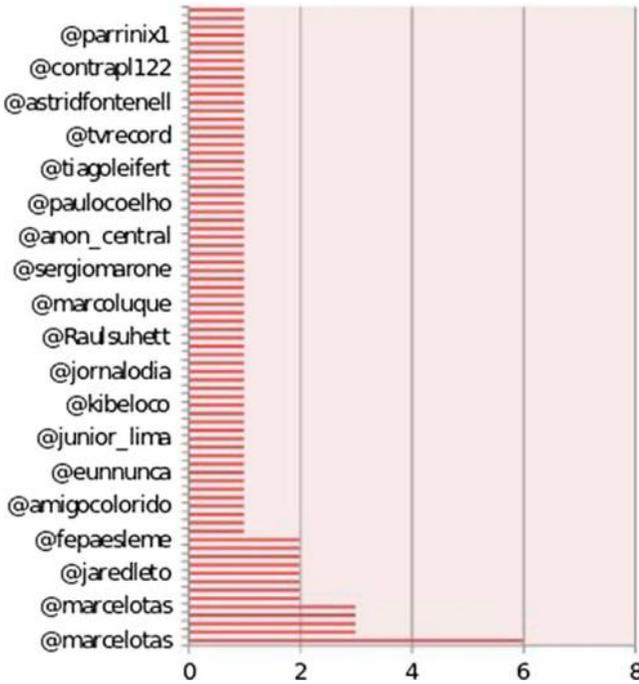


Fig. 6. Number of Tweets by Most Influential User.

Watts argues (2011, p. 94), even if we limit the research issue to direct and interpersonal influence – excluding the media, celebrities, and global bloggers – measuring this influence is still very difficult. What can be measured are the chains of messages (their range and prevailing meanings), identification of the senders involved, and mapping of sequential social phenomena. That is why we chose to engage different methods (studies of social networks and mass media content analysis) to discuss the possible impacts of traditional mass media and the new media on the 2013 demonstrations in Brazil.

Several studies have shown over recent decades that some people are more influential than others. However, research into influence and contagion is more closely related to thought experiments than to actual experiences and, as such, tends to raise more questions than it answers (Watts, 2011, pp. 95–99). On the other hand, investigating the dissemination of information in a huge network like Twitter is a very promising possibility. The purpose of Twitter is to draw other people’s attention by transferring information to “followers,” which means, in other words, to influence them.

Figs. 5 and 6, concerning the most influential Twitter users in the protests of June 2013, comport with network theories which highlight the role of the hubs

on the formation of information cascades. The results also confirm the research by González-Bailón et al. (2013) about the role of broadcasters (mass mediators) as key factor in the Spanish movement 15-M, but in this case concerning the demonstrations of June 2013 in Brazil. That is to say, the data highlight the importance of the hubs regarding the dissemination of information in network – in this case, the appearance of the population on the streets – but one must identify who they are. In the case of collective action, such hubs are mostly portals owned by traditional media. This fact brings up the old question about the role of mass media in the shaping of social behavior and collective action. The data analyzed reveal an important trend. In the current networked society, the influence of mass media seems to be more widespread, even as it is masked through online social networks. Traditional media messages disseminated through online social networks tend to be more decentralized, spontaneous, and overtly disinterested, which makes them potentially more influential than before.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Unraveling the social motivations undergirding political action has long posed challenges for social scientists. Recent discussions between theoreticians and experts who analyze the dawn of “a new policy” in our time tend to characterize the Internet as a tool for social innovation, and representative democracy, especially by reducing the individual costs of political participation. The data presented in this chapter, and the accompanying theoretical review, indicate that the simple personal and social “cost reduction” is real. However, it is not the only way the Internet is changing the logic of the collective action. Online networks also reinforce the interdependence of variables in decision-making, indicating that reference groups can change actors’ behavior and influence their final decisions.

Communication networks disseminate information. This allows agents to infer how other people, at both the macro and micro level, are engaging or participating in a particular social movement. Therefore, these networks function as a means of collective vigilance. Online monitoring of the behavior of the reference groups is an important social fact, for it increases the sense of political effectiveness, and encourages the modeling of what may seem to be normative behavior. For example, participants are more likely to comply with the average contribution if they know how much other people are contributing. This phenomenon leads us to reflect on the collective action not as much as a problem of incentives that potentially compensate agents for their participation costs, but rather as a matter of communication. Access to relevant information on the subject changes the assessment of the effectiveness of the participation.

However, the observation of the dynamics of online networks raises a fundamental question: what are the determining elements of these networks that

make them so effective in the process of social influence in favor of political participation? The results found in this research converge with previous research (Gerbaudo, 2012; González-Bailón et al., 2013). They show the assumptions of some theorists about the horizontal character of social networks are unfounded. If online social networks are efficient instruments in triggering cascades of information, it is precisely because they have a highly centralized structure which allows content to reach a large number of people quickly through short chains of diffusion.

Our analyses reveal that the cascades of information that maximized the number of people exposed to information about the protests of June 2013 in Brazil may have been influenced by users positioned in the center of the network, represented in Figs. 5 and 6. Therefore, classical studies such as by Lazarsfeld and Merton (2000) and Lazarsfeld and Katz (2006) show that the scope of a social movement of any kind seems to be in the hands of a few influential people who have high exposure in the mass media. However, according to the results found on this research (Figs. 5 and 6), it is not advisable to ignore the existence of hidden influencers. These actors play essential roles in the diffusion process on a large scale by introducing the so-called “memes” or ideas to be distributed. Moreover, it is also a mistake to deny the role of mainstream media in the coverage of political events which tends to contribute to the agenda setting.

The results of this research also indicate that online networks supplant the mainstream media in the early stages of the movement: they provide the main channels for the dissemination of information. They offer the groundwork for successful protests. However, once the protests occupied the streets, the traditional media started covering the events. At that moment online communication has begun to interact with the exposure of information through mass media. Thus, the interaction between the old and new media before the social mobilization seems to create a feedback effect between them. It is appropriate to mention that the traditional media seem to affect this process not only as an exogenous factor, but also as a relevant actor within their own online communication networks. Our data show that most of the opinion leaders on the Internet, indicated by the software Topsy as the “most influential users” on Twitter, belong to the category of celebrity broadcasters (see Fig. 5).

However, we cannot neglect the existence of ordinary users able to compete with the mass media in terms of centrality and visibility, even though they are comparatively rare (see Fig. 5). No matter how much the traditional mass media still monopolizes most of the widespread information flow among the Brazilian population, online social networks can help disrupt the logic of preferred connection (tendency to reinforce the centrality of the already central users). We emphasize that these users are – even as exception – crucial for the gestation of mobilizations that gain social relevance.

Finally, this study suggests that, as far as the networks expose the behavior and the degree of political participation of a broad set of users, its dynamics offers the key to understanding one of the essential mechanisms for the emergence of collective action. According to Granovetter (1978), the necessary factor for the triggering of reactions in national and/or global scales is the “activation of the individual thresholds.” Although online networks are not the only means to facilitate the activation of thresholds, they represent an important tool for the quick dissemination of information. However, we argue that online networks may not always fulfill the function of facilitating collective action. Social media networks operate in only one of the many layers forming the social structures in which we are inserted. It means that, on the one hand, we cannot predict the next wave of protests through an analysis of the new media. On the other hand, the uses of online networks can act as a trigger for the growth of any given movement. Despite the fact that the events analyzed are specific to Brazil, the contemporary experience of political action coupled with the use of social media is becoming ubiquitous. Therefore, new empirical research in this field is needed to advance the discussion about the role of new and old media on contemporary politics so we can better understand the emerging social logic of our time.

NOTES

1. The term “light” here refers to the provocation of Slavoj Žižek in the book *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2003), in which the author makes a critique of the contemporary redefinition of politics as the art of competent administration, in other words, politics without politics, the same way in which we start to consume decaffeinated coffee, nonfat sour cream, beer without alcohol, having virtual sex (sex without sex), etc. In the case of participation of conventional political organizations in the new logic of connective action, we refer to a sort of engagement without much involvement.

2. To watch the official Fiat commercial *#vem pra rua*, released in 2013, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGai5q27pUg>. Accessed on January 19, 2016. For analysis of the advertising agency that did the campaign of Fiat and the relationship with the Confederations Cup and the protests of 2013, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrbTbgLJhwA>. Accessed on January 19, 2016.

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