People Are the Message?
Social Mobilization and Social Media in Brazil

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In June 2013, protesters took to the streets of hundreds of Brazilian cities. The mobilizing factor was the rising fares of public transportation, which precipitated a wave of discontentment characterized by a mix of demands for better public services and changes in the discredited democratic institutions. This article discusses the role of social media in the protests and how such use configures a paradigmatic example of how communication occurs in network societies. To frame the discussion, we examine social media appropriation for the purposes of political participation through a survey applied online in 17 countries and an in-depth analysis of protests in Brazil. Looking at the Brazilian protests, the ways in which the appropriation of social media occurred and institutional responses to demonstrations developed, we argue that in the network society, the people, and no longer the media, are the message.

Keywords: Brazil, social media, social movements, networked communication

How do we enlighten the relationship between digital technologies and modalities of social mobilization? This was the starting point of our analysis on the role of social network sites (SNS) on social mobilization in Brazil and 16 other countries.[1] Our aim is to discuss whether newness can be attributed to

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[1] Our survey was developed by researchers of the Communication Lab of the University Institute of Lisbon, in collaboration with the Gulbenkian Foundation, and went online in the first trimester of 2013. The choice of countries and sampling strategy was informed by the following criteria: obtain a sample that reflects diversity and represents a significant fraction of Internet users from all continents and major regions, include the most spoken languages online, and achieve reliability and comparability between participating countries. The aforementioned factors led us to survey 6,000 Internet users in 17 countries: Brazil, Portugal, Spain, Mexico, United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, China, India, Egypt, Turkey, France, Italy, Germany, and Russia. The questionnaire was translated into the selected countries' native languages. At the time of the survey's application, many of the selected countries had already experienced social mobilizations; others were yet to experience those, such as Brazil and Turkey.

social mobilization related to use of information and communication technologies (ICT), focusing on a comparative empirical analysis between Brazil and a set of countries. Some authors assume that one of the key problems faced by many Western-like democracies is the decline in citizens' civic and political engagement (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Putnam, 1995; Wattenberg, 2002) and that strategic communication of political actors has left citizens with a sense of distance and inefficacy in politics (Dahlgren, 2009). However, others challenge these assumptions, arguing that the issue is not a declining engagement per se, but altered participation patterns and citizens' relationship with traditional political institutions, and that previous research has misinterpreted the trends by focusing on a portion of political action (Dalton, 2008; Stolle, Hooghe, & Micheletti, 2005). This leads to two differentiated ways to examine the political potential of ICT: one that analyzes how ICT can *enhance* the traditional and institutionalized participation patterns (Chadwick & Howard, 2008) and putative key indicators of vigorous democracies (Barber, 1984; Putnam, 1995), and other that investigates how ICT *alters* participation patterns and even promotes or supports new ones (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011; Castells, 2012; Poell, 2013; Rahaghi, 2012; Vissers & Stolle, 2013). Following this debate, we propose two fundamental questions: In what ways can social media contribute to political participation and social mobilization, and how do we define and characterize social mobilization in a world where the use of digital technologies has pervaded social and political life?

Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela (2012) acknowledged the multidimensionality of the construct "participation" by differentiating a set of participatory patterns: civic participation relates to behavior directed at community issues, whereas political participation, offline and online, relates to behavior seeking to influence governmental action and policy making. They also indicate that, on the one hand, civic (e.g., volunteering for charities) and political engagement (e.g., attending political rallies) and, on the other hand, political engagement and participation, refer, correspondingly, to different sets of phenomena. However, our focus is on the potential of social media to promote and support specific participatory forms, namely, online mobilization and participation in demonstrations. For the purposes of our analysis, we then define "social mobilization" as one particular dimension of political participation, outside the institutional and regular political participation by voting and militancy, relying on the autonomy of individuals. In the online realm, we identify several indicators illustrating varying degrees of engagement—from the light engagement of the "like" button; to the support of a cause (national or international), comment, or post content; to the creation of groups with social, ideological, and political agendas; to mobilization for protests.

Of particular interest is Dahlgren's (2009) identification of "civic cultures" that correspond to cultural patterns of political participation, which can be related with social media uses. Dahlgren examines how the Web has delivered new arenas for engagement and participation, such as the blogosphere, Facebook, and Internet-based news organizations that encourage content creation by citizens and participatory "journalism." His framework of civic cultures can be applied on social media regarding literacy (knowledge and skills); the valorization of democratic rules in SNS; trust formation, in the social capital sense; social media as a potentially richer mediated public space; and people's online identitary expression as citizens. Moreover, there is the issue of the psychological foundation of engagement, where Dahlgren claims that to be engaged an individual not only must demonstrate cognitive interest, but have an "affective investment" as well (2009, p. 83). This affective investment in recent demonstrations

throughout the world may be pinpointed to the perception of injustice that turns into protest (Castells, 2012; Howard et al., 2011), leaving the question of what the role of that perception is on informational motivations for using social media.

Our data showed that among Internet users in the surveyed countries, social media use is quite common. Only one tenth of the respondents have no profiles in social network sites and, among the social media users, a similar number don't use it for reading or posting. Facebook is the preferred SNS for 77.2% of the surveyed Internet users, followed by YouTube (37.5%), Twitter (36.3%), Google+ (33.9%), LinkedIn (18.9%), Myspace (13.7%), Orkut (8.1%), Hi5 (7.3%), and Weibo (6.4%).

Social media use accounts—in particular, Facebook, Twitter, VKontakte, or Weibo—are recurrent whether we look at protests on the streets and squares of Cairo, New York, Istanbul, London, Moscow, Beijing, Hong Kong, Barcelona, São Paulo, or Lisbon (Al-Azm, 2011; Baumgarten, 2013; Branco, 2014; Castells, 2012; Eltantawy & Julie, 2011; Ghannam, 2011; Ho & Garrett, 2014; Lim, 2012). Protests have even been labeled Facebook and Twitter Revolutions (Rahaghi, 2012; Sullivan, 2009), suggesting that social media were at the roots of protests. There are, nonetheless, problems with this kind of label. First, they tend to relativize context, projecting Western-like sociotechnical processes in other milieus. They overlook societies' own social stratification system in terms of socioeconomic status, but also concerning literacy skills and digital divides, two concepts that intertwine in complex ways (Warschauer, 2011), especially among developing countries characterized by noticeable social and digital inequalities. Moreover, they overemphasize the role of ICT in social change, oversimplifying the casual nexus of the reasons behind protests, and put technology, rather their appropriation by people, at the forefront of political processes. Thus, reproducing the McLuhanian notion that the "medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1997, p. 11). But arguably, it would likewise be an analytical oversimplification to only consider the Internet and specifically social media as mere tools, incapable of introducing change in the political processes, the values, the beliefs, the actions, and on our own awareness as subjects—that is, how we think of ourselves, our relation to the world, and the ability to autonomously drive the course of our life toward the accomplishment of given objectives.

The diffusion of ICT has given us the material foundations for the rise of the network society (Castells, 2000), but beyond the perception of the role of the Internet in the diverse layers of our social life and institutions, it leaves us with an additional question: Has the diffusion of social media changed the way we think and act in the network society? To develop our analysis and arguments, we will contextualize practices of political participation and autonomy mediated by the use of social media, and then focus on the protests that took the streets of Brazilian cities back in June 2013.

Social Media, Autonomy, and Us: Connecting and Mobilizing People

An essential trait of social media is the ability to allow the management of social relationships for longer periods of time, and the increase in the number of social interactions and people involved in those interactions (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social media bring to social relations a mediation of sociability through the morphology of networks, articulating preexisting offline connections and new connections made possible by online mediation (Vissers & Stolle, 2013).

Social network sites have changed not only the number of sustainable connections with other people but also the perception that it is plausible to relate with large numbers of people. The practice of socializing through social media constitutes a relatively new practice, but such practices also influence the representations we create of society itself and how social relations are built, interrupted, fostered, and socially appropriated for individual or collective autonomy.

Here, at the individual level, we follow Castells in defining autonomy as "the capacity of a social actor to become a subject by defining its action around projects constructed independently of the institutions of society, according to the values and interests of the social actor" (2012, pp. 230–231). We also consider the influence of digital networks on the creation of possibilities of autonomization (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). At the collective level, as claimed by Castoriadis (2010), an autonomous society's members are aware that its institutions and structural properties are the product of their work and, therefore, can be put into question and promote change. In this sense, the notion of autonomy has an eminently political character, stemming from reflexivity turned into participatory patterns, both online and offline, on Facebook or the streets. One example comes from the Movimento Passe Livre (MPL; 2013),[2] or Free Pass Movement, in Brazil, that supports the Zero Tariff (Tarifa Zero) proposal, a public policy concerning the financing of public transportation through public budget instead of charging fares. Through this movement, people decided not to pay fares, a collective practice labeled "*catracaço*" (a neologism derived from *turnstile*). According to the MPL, "the *catracaço* is the practical implementation of the Zero Tariff. It can be done by opening the rear doors of the buses or jumping the turnstiles" (2013, p. 31). This is an illustration of new ways of acting to one's own advantage, in addition to "normal" structural operating rules, where digital platforms were used to spread the message and articulate action and acquired centrality in the creative processes of autonomy. The transition from individuation to autonomy, operated through networking, "allows individual actors to build their autonomy with likeminded people in the networks of their choice" (Castells, 2012, p. 231).

For Burkell, Fortier, Wong, and Simpson, the "information sharing occurs in the context of online social networks that are typically much more extensive than their offline counterparts, including large numbers of weak ties" (2014, p. 2). This hypothesis is supported by the data obtained in our transnational survey on social media usage, which found that among the five most used features were sending messages, posting, chatting, and making likes and commentaries on other people's walls. Those uses display a mix of communication activities aimed at interpersonal communication and one-to-many communication, constituting examples of social media appropriation in order to sustain larger social networks, comprised of both strong and weak ties. If we connect with more people, does that change the way we participate and promote mobilization? To answer these issues, we turn to data concerning the use of SNS to engage in a series of political, cultural, and social activities, as shown in Table 1.

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[2] MPL was regarded by the press as a new actor in protests; however, similar movements have been promoting actions supporting a zero tariff for public transports for at least the past 10 years (Silva, 2013), though only recently they gained traction and visibility.

Table 1. Participation and Social Mobilization Through Social Media:
Selected Countries 2013 (%).

During the last year have you ever used social network sites to...?	Yes	No	Don't know
Comment positively or negatively on policies being enforced by governments	45.7%	9.6%	4.6%
Comment positively or negatively on a given political figure	39.1%	6.2%	4.7%
Criticize economic practices or decisions made by private companies or banks	31.5%	1.8%	6.7%
Make a post or submit a "like" supporting private companies or banks' performances	31.8%	2.3%	5.9%
Support a national cause through a "like" or a comment	57.3%	8.0%	4.8%
Support an international cause through a "like" or a comment	50%	4.3%	5.8%
Suggest support to one official political position through a "like" or a comment	32.2%	1.1%	6.6%
Mobilize participation in street demonstrations	17.9%	6.1%	6.1%
Mobilize participation in a cultural event	30%	4.0%	5.9%
Create a group in support of a given social, environmental, or civilization issue	22.8%	1.2%	6.0%

Source: Global Social Networks Survey, 2013, ISCTE-IUL/FCG

The data suggests that the use of comments, "likes," or the creation of groups for political, social, environmental, or business protest and action is not a generalized practice. Exceptions are found in the support of national or international causes. But, though not involving the majority of respondents, there are several uses that should be highlighted when studying mediated political participation. Namely, it is more common to comment positively or negatively on policies being enforced by governments (45.7%) than to comment positively or negatively on a given political figure (39.1%). Of note is that there is a higher percentage of respondents who, over the last year, had used social media to mobilize participation in a cultural event (30%) than to mobilize participation in street demonstrations (17.9%). On average, uses regarding mobilization for cultural events are always higher than mobilization for protests, a trend that is particularly visible in countries where democratic processes are mitigated or absent, such as Russia (31.1% vs. 9.7%) or China (30.8% vs. 15.8%).

Regarding countries where mobilization for protests through social media is higher, three different groups are identifiable: the first one includes Brazil and Egypt, with nearly 40% of mobilizers, followed by Spain, Portugal, and India, with around 30%, two times above the average, and finally, Italy and Turkey, with percentages above 20% of mobilizers. On the opposite trend, we find the U.S. (5%), Canada (5.4%), South Africa (5.9%), Germany (6.1%), Australia (6.2%), and the UK (7.2%). Concerning the age of users engaging in mobilization for street demonstrations, both the U.S. (40.9%) and the UK (37.5%) present higher percentages of mobilizers in the 18-to-24-years-old age group, whereas, considering all countries surveyed, the highest percentage of mobilizers is in the 25-to-34-years-old cohort.

The data show that 51.6% of SNS users can be categorized as having a profile of "weak or no activism," and 48.4% as having a "high activism" profile regarding online mobilization of others for street demonstrations. The cross tabs displayed on Table 2 indicate that users whom, over the last year, had used SNS to mobilize others to participate in street demonstrations are overall intensely engaged in all other political online activities ($p < .000$ for all chi-square tests), as shown by the association measure phi coefficient ($r\varphi$), that ranges between 0.6 and around 0.8.

Among people with "high activism", 87.7% have supported national causes and 82.2% have supported international causes. Among people with "low activism", 50.1% stated that they have supported national causes and 42.9% have supported international causes.[3]

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[3] This association between Internet use, local and national activism, and the concern with nonnational issues is a known social phenomenon, at least, since the Zapatista movement in 1994. It is also identifiable in the demonstrations of 2003 against the war on Iraq (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011; Castells, 2009) and, more recently, in the uprisings of the Arab Spring (Di Fátima, 2013; Wilson & Dunn, 2011), the Los Indignados movement in Spain (Delclós & Viejo, 2012), and Occupy Wall Street (Poell, 2013).

Table 2. Cross Tabs Between Mobilization Profiles and
Engagement in Different Political Actions.

During last year have you used social network sites to…?		Mobilize to participate in street demonstrations (high activism) Yes[4]	Mobilize to participate in street demonstrations (weak or no activism) No	*p* value	*rφ*
Comment positively or negatively on policies being enforced by governments (% Yes)	*N* % row *N* % column	36.3% **87.5%**	57.9% 36.0%	.000	.635
Comment positively or negatively on a given political figure (% Yes)	*N* % row *N* % column	39.3% **80.2%**	55.4% 29.1%	.000	.680
Criticize economic practices or decisions made by private companies or banks (% Yes)	*N* % row *N* % column	43.0% **71.1%**	52.4% 22.4%	.000	.651
Support a national cause through a "like" or a comment (% Yes)	*N* % row *N* % column	29.5% **87.7%**	65.4% 50.1%	.000	.606
Support an international cause through a "like" or a comment (% Yes)	*N* % row *N* % column	31.3% **82.2%**	63.5% 42.9%	.000	.618
Support an official political position through a "like" or a comment (% Yes)	*N* % row *N* % column	42.6% **70.5%**	52.7% 22.5%	.000	.704
Create a group to support a given social, environmental, or civilization issue (% Yes)	*N* % row *N* % column	52.0% **64.2%**	43.7% 13.9%	.000	.799

Source: Global Social Networks Survey, 2013, ISCTE-IUL/FCG.

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[4] Percentages in bold refer to the fraction of respondents with a high activism profile (i.e. mobilized others to participate in protests) that engaged in other forms of political participation on social media.

Centering on the posts content in SNS, the five most read and commented on contents are messages left by online friends (88.8%), personal stories (87.1%), opinion of friends (85.3%), congratulatory posts (83.6%), reviews of other users (78%), and jokes (77.6%). Overall, the political contents are read and commented on by 56%. Those with weak activism profiles are more prone to only "read" rather than "read and comment" on posts. But reading and commenting on posts with political content and mobilizing through social media are not foolproof predicators of participating in demonstrations. Although considering the perspectives that argue that practices performed on the Internet tend to be an extension of offline practices (Poster, 1999; Rheingold, 1993), the survey of the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics (IBOPE; 2013) found that, during the June 2013 demonstrations, 46% of respondents that had used social media to mobilize others were participating for the first time in a protest.

As to the relation between the degree of activism and news following, a similar percentage of people with weak (50.4%) and high (49.6%) activism profiles followed news regularly. Yet among people with high political engagement, there is a higher proportion of users who shared news on social media (71.3%), whereas those with low activism profiles only represented 28.7% of the total. Therefore, sharing news on SNS seems to be associated with higher levels of activism. This is consistent with several studies indicating that news consumption on the Internet raises discussion about politics, fostering engagement in the public sphere (Nah, Veenstra, & Shah, 2006). Just as Thompson (1995) and Giddens (1990) argued that the printing press accounted for the emergence of the new centers of power, "the morphology of the network is also a formidable source of reorganizing power relations" (Castells, 2000, p. 607).

Brazil, the Rise of the Social Value of Social Media

According to the Regional Centre of Studies for the Development of the Information Society - Cetic.br (2012), the country has 80.9 million Internet users, representing a penetration rate of 49% of the population. When 1.4 million people took to the streets in over 335 Brazilian cities in June 2013, traditional media, its journalists and commentators, politicians and intellectuals, tried to find similarities between these demonstrations and other historical moments in the country's history. Those attempts were unsuccessful because the movements presented particular goals, modus operandi, and organizational structures (Cardoso & Di Fátima, 2013; Castells, 2012).

Mainstream media also tried to link the demonstrators with violence, but changed their speech when journalists themselves became the target of police brutality. An example is the editorial of June 13 in the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, which stated that the protesters were a "youth predisposed to violence" (2013a, p. A2). But by July 18, the editorial of the same newspaper warned that "a lesson that the Brazilian authorities, lost amid abuse of force against non-violent protests … have yet to assimilate" is "the perception that demonstrators, which peacefully exercise their right, pose no threat and cannot be mistaken for criminals" (2013b, p. A2).

Many micro-uprisings in Brazil (Malini & Antoun, 2013; Silva, 2013) have been strongly linked by physical and virtual networks of actors. For instance, the Movement of People Affected by Dams promoted over 700 demonstrations across the country in 2009 and 2010. Activists marched against domestic

violence in 2010 and 2011, planted brooms against corruption in front of the National Congress, and students protested against problems in national high school exams in 2011. Teachers went on strike because of the minimum wage, a popular committee held demonstrations in the host cities of the FIFA World Cup, and there were national marches against corruption in 2011 and 2012. The "threat of eviction" of the Kaiowa Guarani Indians, in Mato Grosso do Sul, created solidarity networks in 2012. Citizens asked the veto to the Forest Code in 2012 and the Protest of People's brought together more than 80,000 people during the Rio+20 summit of the same year. More recently, in 2015 and 2016, there were movements and demonstrations for and against the process of impeachment of the former Brazilian president, Dilma Rousseff, a process that was galvanized by previous protests in 2013 and 2014.

These events created conditions conducive to political debate by providing meetings, physical and virtual, in which dissatisfaction with certain issues was the unifying element. They have a common identity in their organizing essence (Cardoso, 2011), the willingness to transform cultural values (Touraine, 1988), the growing distrust in state institutions (Castells, 2009), and the use of ICT, at different levels, to mobilize civic cultures (Dahlgren, 2009) and to convene, organize, and share information about causes (Costanza-Chock, 2006).

The recent movement in Brazil was born in February 2013, in the city of Porto Alegre, convened by the Fight for Public Transportation Block (BFPT), against the increase in fare prices. One of the first protests started through a Facebook event. This first mobilization brought together about 200 people. The fare actually rose from R$2.85 to R$3.05 (about US$ 1.28 to US$ 1.37) and demonstrations were articulated through the Internet and popular assemblies. Some of these acts ended in clashes with the police and were reported by traditional media. The success of the struggle came when, on April 4, the Court granted an injunction reversing the price increase. Celebrations brought together 3,500 people, according to the police, and 10,000 people, according to the BFPT.

In the following months, similar events against rising fares were registered in several states, such as Amazonas, Goiás, and Bahia. Some of these political events were labeled on the Internet by the hashtag #RevoltaDoBusao. The protests began in São Paulo, on June 3, summoned by the MPL, which defines itself as "horizontal, autonomous, independent and non-partisan, but not anti-party." Between June 6 and 13, 2013, the daily actions gathered around 5,000 people that marched under the slogan "3.20 is a steal," referring to the 20-cent fare increase of public transportation. Clashes with the police, who used tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets against citizens and press, ended with hundreds injured.

The images of police violence were captured by traditional media, individual protesters, and independent collectives, such as Media Ninja[5], which transmitted the events online in real time via streaming. Flows of images and texts obtained in real time, during the demonstrations, had a daily peak of 150,000 people watching the protests transmitted from the epicenter of events through the use of cell-

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[5] Media Ninja is a network of independent journalists producing and distributing information via streaming in Brazil. The group was founded in 2013 and played an important role in covering the protests. See more: https://ninja.oximity.com/

phone cameras and 3G connections. People watched on YouTube and shared on Facebook videos of police action while people were calling for new actions. Twitter interactions exponentially grew shortly after the police's violent interventions on June 13, showing how it's use and diffusion has become central for citizens but also for journalists "in breaking news by providing real-time updates" (Small, 2011, p. 873).

Demonstrations multiplied quickly across Brazil, and new causes were included. Bennett and Segerberg explained that "protests in this era of relaxed individual affiliation have often been impressive in terms of speed of mobilization, scope of issues, and the ability to focus public attention on these issues" (2011, p. 773). The next demonstrations, on June 17, drew 65,000 people in São Paulo. More than 30 political events were recorded in capital cities like Belo Horizonte, Brasília, Curitíba, and Rio de Janeiro. Handwritten posters were shown on the streets with the motto *let's repeat Porto Alegre*, in allusion to the results achieved by previous protests.

Howard et al. ensure that "certainly some images of suffering" (2011, p. 22) can raise indignation. In this sense, political actions produced by people flow directly into SNS in the form of multimedia content, to reach thousands, if not millions, of new actors. This connection between physical and virtual space can, in turn, lead more people to the street (Castells, 2012)—a hypothesis in line with many testimonials of people who have joined the movement after the dissemination in social media of police violence images.

A transnational solidarity network was also formed around the movement. Lawyers created fan pages with telephone contacts to give free legal advice to demonstrators. On Twitter, users offered first-aid materials and provided their homes as a refuge place. On Tumblr, webpages like Brazilian Protests translated information to English, Spanish, and other languages.

These actions aimed at garnering support of public opinion and of similar international movements around the globe (Castells, 2012; Sawchuk, 2012). The site Grunz ("3 milhões de pessoas confirmam participação", 2013)[6] brought together the events created on Facebook that called for manifestations between June 17 and 30. The data collected by Grunz, displayed in Figure 1, suggests that, at least, 3 million people attended the events in 611 cities: 538 in Brazil and 73 abroad. Many of these international protests took place in front of Brazilian embassies in 27 countries.

The Brazilian activists were connected to international networks and attentive to what was happening in other countries, because slogans such as "we are part of a global fight" and "Brazil is not alone" were used, and demonstrators followed protest patterns that have been shared since the Battle of Seattle and during the Arab Spring. In addition, young demonstrators said that they had learned techniques of how to protect themselves from tear gas in YouTube videos posted by Greek and Turkish activists.

The Brazilian street demonstrations seem to support Castells's (2011) claim that the connection between "youth and Internet" has created a new form of power. And this power is "diffusing a democratic

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[6] World map in Grunz: www.grunz.com.br/mapa-dos-protestos-no-brasil-pelo-mundo

model of individual participation in networked organizations that lack central coordination" (Mercea, 2013, p. 1309).

Figure 1. Demonstrations around the world (June 17–30, 2013).
Source: www.grunz.com.br/mapa-dos-protestos-no-brasil-pelo-mundo/

Brazil experienced the largest demonstration in its history in June 20, 2013. According to the National Confederation of Municipalities (CNM), at least 438 cities recorded protests in the week from June 16 to 22, which resulted in nearly 2 million citizens on the streets. The crowd of anonymous supporters marched under new slogans such as "it is more than just 20 cents" and shared them through horizontal communication networks, creating a common identity for the protest under a diversity of claims.

The IBOPE (2013) survey, on June 20, drew an activist profile in which 89% of demonstrators did not feel represented by political parties and 83% by any politician. The overwhelming majority confirmed not to be affiliated to any party (96%) or union (86%). These results show a crowd that did not represent anyone except themselves. The survey also indicated that 65% of protesters were on the streets with friends or colleagues, 22% were alone, 11% were with spouses, and 8% were with brothers or relatives. Regarding the police action, 57% of respondents said it was "extremely violent".

Social media can also help to map the main demands of the movement. The project Causa Brasil[7], developed by companies Seekr and W3Haus, monitored the most publicized issues about the protests, between June 16 and July 17, on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Google+. The data were obtained from 1,209,514 mentions based on over a hundred hashtags, such as *#ogiganteacordou* (the giant awoke), *#mudabrasil* (change Brazil), *#vemprarua* (comes to the street). Results reveal the dominance of two major topics: Basic Rights, with 42.21% of all content, followed by

[7] Data from Causa Brasil Project were made available exclusively for this article.

Political Themes, with 40.61% of the posts. The most mentioned causes concerning Basic Rights were health (9.44%), safety (7.99%), education (7.38%), transportation fares (7.22%), and quality (4.87%). The main causes of Political Themes were Dilma Government (11.28%), corruption (8.41%), the bill PEC 37 (4.88%), parties (4.75%), and public spending (2.61%). The protests in Brazil had no party color as a preferential target, and most people were protesting about something outside institutional politics. According to Causa Brasil, among the 14 most cited political posts on social media, six criticized politicians and governments of the country's three largest parties: PT, PMDB, and PSDB.

Rainie and Wellman (2012) contended that the networked individual is the outcome of practices performed in the network through the mediation of Internet technologies and its network connectivity. But arguably we can't categorize someone as a networked individual just by his or her use of a given technology and ascribed practices (Castells, 2000). We must also look at how individuals experience such practices, how they perceive the social value of Internet technologies, and how their own experience is built in the network society.

We argue that social value is ascribed, either to the symbolical or material dimensions of social practices, when these are perceived as having a fundamental role in some domain of our lives. We can also claim that journalists and academics recognize that social media had enough social value to be used for classifying the protests as revolutions, as in the labels Facebook and Twitter Revolutions (Rahaghi, 2012; Sullivan, 2009). Hence, we should focus on the question of whether people using social media did perceive its centrality in the protests rather than delve about its attributed importance by the media and academia. At this point, it can be said that we have witnessed the rise of the social value of social media in protests, not just because people have used it to communicate, to tell others their views, and to organize themselves, but, more important, because in the process of doing so they became aware of the importance of social media to support their practices and the changes in their lives.

Networked Communication and Social Change

The Brazilian movement can be interpreted as a popular, spontaneous, and peaceful network of demonstrations (Castells, 2012). The protagonists were mainly young, university graduates, technologically savvy, and from the middle class (IBOPE; 2013). Over the last decade, different studies have shown a direct relationship between age, higher education, and Internet use (Castells, 2012). In Brazil, young people chose ICT as the media tools of protests because these are at the center of their daily lives, giving them access to entertainment, work, friendships, dating, research, and education (Brazilian Internet Steering Committee, 2014).

Building on our data, we argue that newness in the relationship between social media and social movements in the Brazil can be found in three different layers: the networking of political news content production (e.g., the flow of content captured by traditional media, individual protesters, and independent collectives and redirected, remixed, and editorialized by new online institutional actors); the building of political awareness and political capital (e.g., almost half of respondents that mobilized others for the June 2013 demonstrations through social media were participating for the first time in a protest); and the

mobilization for protest participation (e.g., the exponential growth of mobilizing tweets, posts, and online subscriptions to Facebook events after initial protests).

Social network sites are ambivalent tools, given that their appropriation allows a "building space of collective dissent" (Di Fátima, 2013, p. 13), but they can also disseminate words and ideas to build trust (Maireder & Schwarzenegger, 2012). This happens especially when traditional media do not perform their role according to journalistic criteria. This leads to the question of whether the subject who is politically mobilized through social media can be perceived as nonconformist, especially when comparing news consumption through traditional media with news and content sharing on social media. Although for Fuchs (2014), a self-professed heir of the Frankfurt School, social media can also be regarded as conducive to conformity, his argument relies extensively on the ownership of digital platforms by powerful corporations and in the characteristics of those platforms. Less attention is paid in the novel participatory modes of appropriation of emerging media. Moreover, if we assume that there is an emerging networked communication model (Cardoso, 2007) that is different from mass communication processes, we cannot simply transpose the Frankfurtian critiques of the culture industry and traditional conformity establishing to the new media reality.

Though mainstream media still occupy a privileged place in the news menu, almost half (47%) of Brazilian Internet users prefer SNS as a news source, and mass media now share the power of communication with new stakeholders (Allagui, 2014; Houtart, 2007). When the Brazilian mainstream media tried to build up a narrative of linking the protests with vandalism, hundreds of witnesses came online to state that undercover cops had started violent riots. These claims made their way through the Internet and, eventually, reached the mainstream media, changing their stance toward the protesters.

Figure 2 presents a possible correlation between Internet access and demonstrations. If social media appropriation by movements is able to foster the networking of political news content production, the building of political awareness and political capital, and the mobilization for protest participation, then the more connected areas, and not the most highly populated areas, will be the ones more prone to political demonstrations by linking the networks of the Internet with the networks of streets.

The available data seems to support such hypothesis: Strongly connected regions recorded a higher number of protests, between June 16 and 22, 2013, than areas with low penetration of high-speed Internet. Thus, the Southeast, with the largest Internet population in Brazil, had 165 events, followed by the South (95), Northeast (86), and Midwest and Federal District (47). The North, with the lowest broadband access, recorded 45 protests.
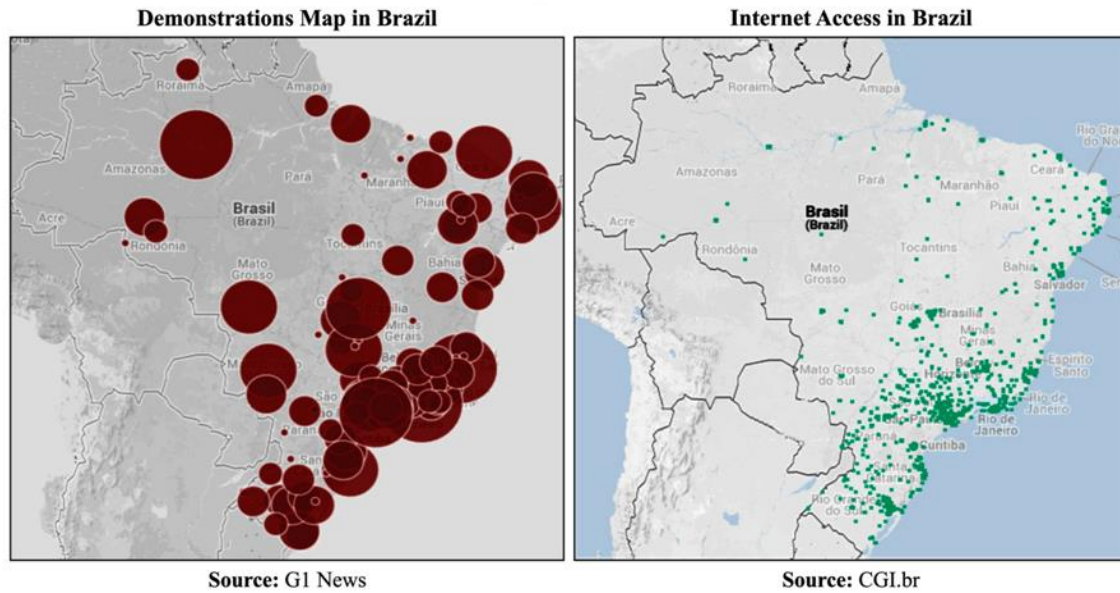
Figure 2. Geographical distribution of demonstrations and Internet access in Brazil.

The Internet, as an infrastructure and tool, does not generate the revolt, but its use can create meeting places where social actors, scattered on cyberspace meshes, cultivate networks of political action. The first change has to happen in citizen's minds, because "the way people think determines the fate of norms and values on which societies are constructed" (Castells, 2007, p. 238).

In one layer, social media use during Brazilian protests allowed the creation of links between individual content producers, loose networks of editorial aggregators, with a larger audience. It brought change in the ways in which media producers, consumers, commercial media, and independent media rebuilt their links and interdependences. But, more important, it altered users' representations toward reporting and media coverage of events by journalists and citizens and introduced potential changes in social relations by allowing the building of communicative autonomy.

A second layer concerns the building of political awareness and political capital. Political issues are not among the most posted, commented on, or shared topics within social media, but in key moments, political issues tend to stand out. During Brazilian protests, street demonstrations were mentioned more on SNS than the ongoing soccer event Confederations Cup. According to the monitoring company Scup[8], Brazilians, in the putative "country of soccer," made over 2 million posts about the protests, between June, 13 and 21 on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Google+. The Confederations Cup was the topic of only 214,000 posts. Posts about Brazilian demonstrations reached, at least, 136 million

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[8] Newspaper O Estado de São Paulo (Estadão) released Scup data on June 22, 2013. Retrieved from http://blogs.estadao.com.br/link/na-internet-atos-mobilizam-136-milhoes/

users around the globe. Such behavior indicates that social media appropriation tends to amplify the reach of high noticeability topics.

This occurs because political issues, especially those linked with the perception of injustice, seem more prone to generate comments, remixes, and strong involvement. Arguably, social media appropriation for political issues is best suited for following ongoing events, to build faster awareness for causes, and to build transversal coalitions of interests, leveraging political capital for a given cause between different people with common concerns.

A third dimension of novelty is SNS's role in mobilizing people for protests and passing the word, to invite other prospective participants. IBOPE (2013) revealed that 62% of people participating in demonstrations did so through Facebook events. Pimentel and Silveira's (2013) study shows the exponential growth of online subscriptions to Facebook events that called for protests in São Paulo. This growth followed the most violent police reaction against protesters that took place in the demonstration of June 13. This demonstration had 28,228 Facebook subscriptions, whereas for the demonstration of June 17, subscriptions rose spectacularly, to 287,457. This indicates a chain reaction process. The engagement rate was extremely high, given that at least 75% of the people who were called for demonstrations on SNS also mobilized other people online.

Looking at the Brazilian protests, we can identify events where social media created meeting places online, linking points between people's ideas, views, and calls for action that, in turn, connected individuals to other offline meeting and protest places. Our argument is that social media appropriation might catalyze one's autonomous action when actors feel empowered in their choices and gain awareness of their life as part of a set of networks (either local and interpersonal or global) through social media use. This does not entail, however, that in the diffusion of protest all actors display the same degree of autonomy. As suggested by González-Bailón, Borge-Holthoefer, and Moreno (2014), who analyzed thresholds in protest diffusion dynamics online, there are social divisions between participants. Innovators and early participants can be considered as more autonomous in their strive to influence others and pioneer mobilization, whereas the late majority and laggards of a movement might be considered as more prone to normative behavior and social influence from local and global networks to make the decision to participate. In other words, the consolidation of autonomy and success of the first depends on their capacity to mobilize network ties to influence others and catalyze a chain reaction. Nevertheless, albeit with differences between individual actors, if we change the focus to the aggregate level, the reinforcement of ties between individuals through social media might change the required critical mass and momentum of a movement, when diffusion becomes self-sustaining, promotes novel ways to challenge preestablished values, beliefs and institutions, and, thus, forms of collective action that can be regarded as autonomous, in the sense of Castoriadis (2010).

Social Media and Institutional Change

Whereas mass communication fostered the exercise of power by integrating individuals in the existing institutions of society, networked communication fosters the building of new institutional settings of power through networking. Mainstream media embodied the given values of society because they were

the locus of power. Access to mass media entailed a process of gatekeeping that tended to be more reactive than proactive and involved more keepers of given institutionalized values and beliefs than their challengers. On the contrary, social media tend to ease the emergence of new perceptions and propositions on how to read reality. If societies are increasingly characterized and (re)produced by a networked communicational model, we should consider the possibility that networked belonging might increasingly be a fundamental cultural trait of the experience of mediation. The profiles of SNS materialized the networks of belonging that build up our life. Such perception might be changing our subjectivity, by making us aware of our condition as networked individuals. By linking offline and online networks, we have not only become users of social media but we have built networking cultures that are a fundamental trait of reflexivity and action in our contemporary societies.

The social mobilization processes and protests that took the streets over the last year in many places exemplify the arguments about social media's role in institutional challenge and change. What happened in Brazilian cities in June 2013 was the result of the perception of the existence of multiple voices (and posts) saying the same. Online mediation, through social media, gave individuals a widespread assessment of the reach of messages, allowed them to perceive who else was out there, to become quickly aware if they shared the same views with others, and to support the decision to adhere or not to a wider movement of people.

In this process, first we have a group of highly mobilized people positioned against a given issue, and only after that we find the mimetics of action of a greater number of participants, which can only materialize when people are aware that something is happening. That is where communication plays a fundamental role—a role traditionally fulfilled by mainstream broadcasts, but that is increasingly defied by social media. When mass media are perceived as not performing the role of informing, or as being controlled by some power opposing the general interest, it is through social media that trust and alternative action can be built and the constraints that limit participation and joining other people in protests are overridden in people's minds.

At the time people were on the streets and appropriating social media, the Brazilian government was unable to communicate properly. The Brazilian case study seems to depict that governments are still shaped by mass communication models, not just in their action but also in their subjectivity—the way they think about themselves and others—and that is a challenge for democratic governments. Social media are tools built to connect individuals, but they are not particularly good at networking institutions and individuals. They might connect actors in institutions of power with individuals in counterpower movements, but that implies that individuals in power might also learn how to incorporate, in their thinking and action, the networked cultures of their citizens.

The Brazilian case demonstrates the challenges of many governments to meaningfully speak with their citizens because they appear unable to think like them and don't understand they increasingly act in an era where "the message is the people". If people disagree with governmental policies, they will mobilize networks to get the support of others. We find in these protests the confrontation between two ways of thinking about political institutions that are reflected in two different conceptions of power:

governments tuned to the power of communication of mass media and protesters adapting to the conception of power based in networked communication.

In a sense, it is as if the emulation of how a search engine works has been brought into Brazilian cities and elsewhere. In other words, as if protesters look at political institutions as if they were a search engine, where people making different queries are looking for the suitable replies to be displayed on the screen. The "government search engine" must deliver simultaneously the most appropriate answers—and quickly, so that people click and check if the responses are what they are looking for. Given that there are always multiple answers available, this means that democratic political institutions are not the keepers of solutions, but rather the ones that produce the links toward them. It is the citizen who, faced by multiple choices, will always need to validate them. Such logic of thought and action and expectations toward political decision making and governance, influenced by the use of the Internet and social media, might pose novel challenges to institutionalized political practice, urging the adaptation of such practice.

The events in Brazil seem to illustrate a society where individuals not merely act in the network but think and perceive their actions as networked. As Wieviorka suggests, "they are telling the parties in power, the classical representatives of politics and the intellectuals, that it is high time they changed" (2012, p. 18). The public appeal for change, and nonconformity to established rules and norms, happens because people understand that their own perception of themselves in relation to their social environment has changed. In the words of Touraine, they perceive the need to assert publicly their "individual and collective claims to the right to become free actors" to be able "to constitute themselves as actors, capable of changing their environment and of reinforcing their autonomy", to become more than social actors—to become *subjects* and to use "creative freedom against social statuses and social roles" (2000, p. 909).

Demonstrators seem to be networking thought and action under a new networked culture sustained by social media. That is, the cultural innovation brought by social media, where "the appeal to morality or justice, the assertion of democracy and the non-violent challenge of various forms of domination" (Wieviorka, 2012, p. 18) might be sustaining the emergence of "new" new social movements. Such is, perhaps, the fundamental novelty brought by social media appropriation: We are increasingly thinking about social relations, institutions, power, social change, and autonomy as based in networks.

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