Chapter 5
Organizing With Self–Organization?
The Ramifications of the Strategic Use of Facebook in Informal Civic Activism

Rui Alexandre Novais

University of Mindelo, Cape Verde & CEFH Catholic Portuguese University, Portugal

ABSTRACT

This chapter aims at exploring the ramifications of the strategic usage of Facebook in informal civic activism against the yet-to-be-studied case of an African third wave democratic country. Focusing on the emergence of Sokols up to the unprecedented 2017 street demonstration in Cape Verde, it reviews findings from a multidimensional empiric-holistic method that addresses the associated role of Facebook. The study confirms the existence of a heterarchical and distributed leadership alongside a horizontal and collaborative decision-making arrangement in a Facebook-mediated civic activism movement. While corroborating the tendency of grassroots activism in adopting a hybrid blend of online and offline, it concludes that Facebook was used in support of the largely self-organized Sokols movement and the loosely structured street demonstration held in São Vicente. However, besides not necessarily changing the fundamental structures of the civic activism movement—including organization, leadership, decision-making and protest staging—Facebook only supplemented the offline practices.

INTRODUCTION

It is generally accepted that the internet and its associated new media technologies have impacted upon activism in general (Ems, 2014; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Bimber, Flanagin & Stohl, 2005; Tsatsou, 2018; Valenzuela, Correa & Gil de Zúñiga, 2017). The form, the intensity, and the outcome of online media usage and influence in civic activism, however, are not consensual issues amongst academics. Indeed, not only the role of online media in citizen activism has delivered fragmented and inconsistent insights (for a recent review see Tsatsou & Zhao, 2016), but also several related criticisms can be put forward regarding in particular civic activism and the associated role of social networks.

There is a frequent overlapping and undifferentiated usage in the literature of concepts often associated with civic activism, such as 'movements' (Coretti & Pica, 2015, e.g.), 'collective action' (Bimber et al. 2005, e.g.) and 'social movements' (Harlow 2012, e.g.). This is arguable since neither all social movements are necessarily involved in civic activism nor informal civic activisms are associated with pre-existing purposeful and organized groups or social movements. Thus, a better alternative way to overcome such confusion is by proposing a *civic activism movement* notion *per se* and employing it consistently throughout the chapter.

Another finger-pointing possibility, closely linked to the previous one, regards the scarce attention granted to either the circumstances of the life cycle of the civic activism movements (Blumer, 1969; Tarrow, 1998; Tilly, 1978, e.g.) or the considerations about their orientation. Indeed, identifying and distinguishing the different stages in the life cycle of civic activism movements - how they emerge, grow, and in some cases, die out - would allow to more accurately distinguish informal from organized movements. To further differentiate informal (civic activism) from organized (social) movements, the autonomous orientation that entails "self-management, egalitarian, nonhierarchical structures, and consensus-based decision making" should be contrasted with the institutionalized orientation characterized by "a clear division of labor and authority, a centralized organization, and a loose coupling of ends and means" (Pruijt & Roggeband, 2014, p.145).

The third criticism relates to the fact that studies on civic activism movements do not habitually address in detail the organizational ramifications of the usage of social networks (Juris, 2012; Mercea, 2013).

A final faultfinding concerns the often tendency of lumping together within the same umbrella (of the information and communication technologies or the internet) very different applications with diverse uses and functions in terms of civic digital activism (Gladarev & Lonkila, 2012).

Against that background, this chapter aims to make an empirical contribution to the subfield of literature on the social media and civic activism against the yet to be studied case of an African third wave democratic country. Focusing on a specific civic activism movement - the digital native Sokols from its inception or emergence to the coalescence phase in preparation first manifestation - and the July 2017 street march in Cape Verde - it reviews findings from a multidimensional empiric-holistic method.

This is done with the dual purpose of assessing a relevant under-explored example of informal organization of a civic activism movement and the ramifications of the associated role of social media (Polanska & Chimiak, 2016; Tsatsou, 2018).

Indeed, an online Facebook provocation post triggered the July 2017 street march in the São Vicente Island, which amounted to the biggest civic manifestation in the country's short democratic history. Amongst the factors that extended this street march convocation into an episode of mass mobilization of thousands of people, mention should be made to the will for activism combined with the structural opportunities of a latent social grievance that had been lingering for years, and the historic anniversary of the Independence Day. But above all, it was due to the ability to organize informally, at such short notice, both online (through Facebook) and offline, combined with a flexible leadership structure and spontaneity in both the decision-making and the protest staging dynamics.

To further help to close the abovementioned gaps in the literature, a preliminary definition of civic activism movement is proposed that goes against the undifferentiated usage of other concepts often associated with civic activism. In the same vein, it reconstitutes Sokols' life cycle, leadership, and decision-making process up to the staging of its first display of power manifestation – the 5 July street protest.

21 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/organizing-with-self-organization/312672

Related Content

Social Networks and Cultural Differences: Adidas's Case on Twitter and Sina Weibo
José Duarte Santosand Steffen Mayer (2021). *Analyzing Global Social Media Consumption (pp. 121-137).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/social-networks-and-cultural-differences/264935

Distrust of Employers, Collectivism, and Union Efficacy
Jack Fioritoand Daniel G. Gallagher (2013). *International Journal of E-Politics (pp. 13-26).*
www.irma-international.org/article/distrust-of-employers-collectivism-and-union-efficacy/101754

How Students are Using Social Networks?: Emotional Intelligence as a Determinant
Sobuh Abu-Shanaband Emad Ahmed Abu-Shanab (2023). *Research Anthology on Applying Social Networking Strategies to Classrooms and Libraries (pp. 1143-1160).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/how-students-are-using-social-networks/312974

Artificial Neural Network Research in Online Social Networks
Steven Walczak (2018). *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking (pp. 1-15).*
www.irma-international.org/article/artificial-neural-network-research-in-online-social-networks/235457

The Politics of Immersive Storytelling: Virtual Reality and the Logics of Digital Ecosystems
Christian Stiegler (2017). *International Journal of E-Politics (pp. 1-15).*
www.irma-international.org/article/the-politics-of-immersive-storytelling/186960