

Chapter 39

Action Potentials: Extrapolating an Ideology from the Anonymous Hacker Socio–Political Movement (A Qualitative Meta–Analysis)

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ABSTRACT

An ideology is defined as a set of ideas that “explains and evaluates social conditions, helps people understand their place in society, and provides a program for social and political action” (Ball & Dagger, 2011, p. 4). As such, these concepts underpin the actions of various groups and organizations, including that of the Anonymous hacker group, which professes no ideology or creed. Rather, the group has styled itself as a kind of anarchic global brain connected by various spaces on the Internet. This work explores four main data streams to extrapolate the group’s ideology: the current socio-political context of hacking and hacktivism; the group’s self-definition (through its professed values); the group’s actions (through the “propaganda of the deed”); and the insights of others about the group. This chapter defines the socio-technical context of this Anonymous hacker socio-political movement, which draws ideas from the Hacker Manifesto 2.0, which suggests the advent of a new economic system with the new technological vectors (mediums of communication). This movement is apparently pushing forth the advent of a new information regime in which the abstraction of ideas adds a “surplus” economic value that may be tapped. Styled as fighters against government tyranny, they are pushing hard against an international regime of intellectual property and information control by governments and corporations. This is being published in the spirit that (some) information wants to be free and that there is a value in direct discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Especially in our age of globalized communications, no amount of force can kill an infectious inspiration—a potential source of counterterrorism, especially when it is spread through

informal networks operating below the radar of state bureaucracy (Kurth Cronin, 2003, p. 143).

We are Anonymous. We are Legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Expect us (Anonymous).

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Action Potentials

Whatever code we hack, be it programming language, poetic language, math or music, curves or colourings, we create the possibility of new things entering the world. Not always great things, or even good things, but new things. In art, in science, in philosophy and culture, in any production of knowledge where data can be gathered, where information can be extracted from it, and where in that information new possibilities for the world are produced, there are hackers hacking the new out of the old. While hackers create these new worlds, we do not possess them. That which we create is mortgaged to others, and to the interests of others, to states and corporations who control the means for making worlds we alone discover. We do not own what we produce—it owns us (Wark, 2004).

The Anonymous hacker group has presented itself in the public media as an amorphous leaderless group that is all-pervasive but also nowhere. Its role is to keep governments accountable by restricting their instincts against totalitarian control (of information, of privacy, and of individual rights of association). It has a masked leader who is like the proverbial Everyman. It argues for a kind of individual and group freedoms that may be achieved with hacking, and it is guided by some of the ideas of the modern age—such as the idea that “information wants to be free.” Its media optics are self-aware and self-promoting, an effort to reach out to their constituents and to win over more powerful allies to their cause. As a so-called self-organizing group with libertarian and anarchist leanings, Anonymous draws from The Hacker Manifesto and other artifacts of the electronic age. An ideology (or “policy package”) is critical to a group because it is what is used to recruit group members and to rationalize the group’s existence and its actions in the world. An ideology is defined as a set of ideas that “explains and evaluates social conditions, helps people understand their place in society, and provides a program for social and political action” (Ball & Dagger, 2011, p. 4). Ironically, Anonymous claims

to have no ideology but does act on some core ideas (this strategy may be a part of the group’s messaging and a kind of strategic ambiguity to make it more acceptable to many self-identifying members who opt-in on particular operations). Others have observed that this organization has “no coherent ideology, but a track record of considerable damage” (Sengupta, 2012). Their expressed values are a body of sentiments more than a comprehensive worldview. The organization may be conceptualized as self-organizing, with members opting in and out, and animating ideas capable of emerging from any sector is this dispersed organization (in the study of organizations, a lack of a strong core ideology means lesser abilities to maintain followership beyond the near-term).

While the organization claims not to have any ideology or creed (which may be part of an approach of “strategic ambiguity” (leaving open a broad range of options by not committing to a particular approach) to avoid alienating potential followers), this chapter takes the approach that “character reveals” over time. It is wholly possible to reverse-engineer at least a partial ideology based on the group’s actions and public statements. For a global-level group with no figurehead, no charismatic spokesperson (and an anti-leader and anti-celebrity ethic), no *dramatis personae* (except a mask), and computer synthesized voiceovers of videos, this group all the more needs something to appeal to virtual followers:

Although there is no authority figure or any leading group in Anonymous, there is ‘policy, ethical sensibilities, and norms, all of which develop over time and often continuously formed and reformed in reaction to historical events’ (Coleman, as cited in Ohhashi, 2011, p. 5).

Its international brand consists of its logo, its press coverage, and its ideas. The ideas then have to trigger its members, who ostensibly could hail from anywhere in the world. Virtually every public message, digital attack, legal action, ad private

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