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# Digital Activism as a Sociopolitical Phenomenon: an Integrated Analytical Model

O Ativismo Digital como Fenômeno Sociopolítico: um Modelo Analítico Integrado

El Activismo Digital como Fenómeno Sociopolítico: un Modelo Analítico Integrado

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## ABSTRACT

**Research goal:** To map actions of digital activism and categorize them according to their purpose.

**Theoretical framework:** Discussions about potential combinations between different forms of digital activism and traditional activism, in addition to considerations about different conceptions of strategy, form the theoretical framework of this study.

**Methodology:** The categorization was carried out according to the content analysis technique.

**Results:** The research analyzed case studies published between 2008 and 2018 related to digital activism, hacktivism, data activism and cyberactivism, categorizing activist actions into 12 modalities and three main categories to create a model for analyzing digital activism.

**Originality:** By focusing on the purpose of activist actions, this study demonstrates how the same purpose can be achieved through different actions, in addition to allowing the prognosis of actions that were not found in the literature.

**Theoretical and practical contributions:** The work presents a set of tactics found in the literature review carried out, offering a representation of the possibilities of action that allow the reach of the activists' objectives according to their strategies.

**KEYWORDS:** Cyberactivism, Data Activism, Digital Activism, Hacktivism, Tactics.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo da pesquisa:** Mapear ações de ativismo digital e categorizá-las de acordo com sua finalidade.

**Enquadramento teórico:** Discussões acerca das potenciais combinações entre as diferentes formas de ativismo digital e o ativismo tradicional, além de considerações acerca de diferentes concepções da estratégia, formam a base teórica deste estudo.

**Metodologia:** A categorização foi realizada com base na técnica de análise de conteúdo.

**Resultados:** A pesquisa analisou estudos de caso publicados entre 2008 e 2018 relacionados ao ativismo digital, hacktivism, data activism e ciberativismo, categorizando as ações ativistas em 12 modalidades e três categorias principais para criar um modelo de análise do ativismo digital.

**Originalidade:** Ao colocar em foco a finalidade das ações ativistas, este estudo demonstra como uma mesma finalidade pode ser alcançada por meio de diferentes ações, além de permitir o prognóstico de ações que não foram encontradas na literatura.

**Contribuições teóricas e práticas:** O trabalho apresenta um conjunto de táticas encontradas na revisão de literatura realizada, oferecendo uma representação das possibilidades de ação que permitem o alcance dos objetivos dos ativistas de acordo com suas estratégias.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Ciberativismo; Data Ativismo; Ativismo Digital; Hacktivismo; Táticas.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo de investigación:** Mapear acciones de activismo digital y categorizarlas según su finalidad.

**Marco teórico:** Las discusiones sobre las combinaciones potenciales entre las diferentes formas de activismo digital y activismo tradicional, además de las consideraciones sobre las diferentes concepciones de estrategia, forman la base teórica de este estudio.

**Metodología:** La categorización se realizó con base en la técnica de análisis de contenido.

**Resultados:** La investigación analizó estudios de casos publicados entre 2008 y 2018 relacionados con el activismo digital, el hacktivismo, el activismo de datos y el ciberactivismo, clasificando las acciones activistas en 12 modalidades y tres categorías principales para crear un modelo para analizar el activismo digital.

**Originalidad:** Al enfocarse en el propósito de las acciones activistas, este estudio demuestra cómo un mismo propósito puede ser alcanzado a través de diferentes acciones, además de permitir pronosticar acciones que no fueron encontradas en la literatura.

**Aportes teóricos y prácticos:** El trabajo presenta un conjunto de táticas encontradas en la revisión bibliográfica realizada, ofreciendo una representación de las posibilidades de acción que permiten alcanzar los objetivos de los activistas de acuerdo a sus estrategias.

**PALABRAS-CLAVE:** Ciberactivismo, Data Activismo, Activismo Digital, Hacktivismo, Táticas.

# 1. Introduction

As digital technologies emerged, studies in the field of communication sprang up (Schaun, Aguiar, Dias, & Giangardi, 2013), significantly impacting the diversity of studies in the field of activism and the Internet (Velooso & Lopes, 2020). New possibilities arose to social movements, and the tasks of organization and sensitization to confront agents which act contrarily to activists' values and beliefs can be extremely facilitated by the use of digital media (Vegh, 2003).

Previous research has addressed several aspects of digital activism, such as the opportunities for marginalized communities to manifest their intentions (Núñez Puente, 2011; Fonseca, Pereira da Silva, & Teixeira, 2017; Sena & Tesser, 2017), the different forms of participation and their impacts (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Alcântara, 2016; Milan and Hintz, 2013) and the relation between hackers and activism (Jordan & Taylor, 2004; Milan & Hintz, 2013; Beck, 2016).

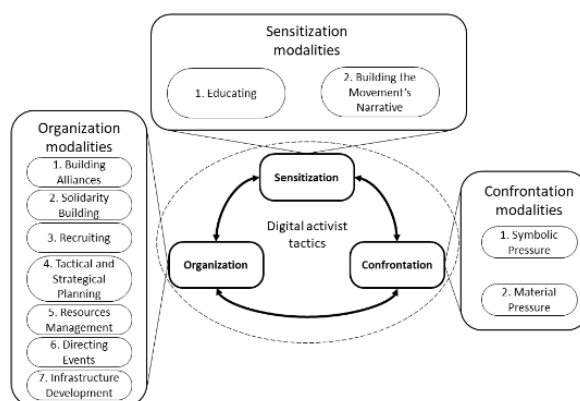
In addition to these topics, the construction of models to describe this novel form of participation has also been carried out by a number of researchers (Vegh, 2003; Christiansen, 2009; Earl, Kimpori, Prieto, Rush and Reynoso, 2010; van Laer and van Aeslt, 2010; Sandoval-Almazan and Ramon Gil-Garcia, 2014). As previous models have focused in different aspects of digital activism, they have mostly described this phenomenon, thus creating the basis for its understanding. However, a considerable part of this literature focuses on the digital technology tools used by activists, leaving a gap in regards to the conception of new tactics and strategies.

In this paper, digital activism is considered as activist practices supported by digital technologies which may take place partially or entirely in the digital environment. The difference between digital activist actions and offline actions is only pointed out in order to more clearly delimit the work's scope, since it only analyzes actions which make use of these technologies.

Therefore, this paper aimed to answer the following question: **how has the literature treated the incorporation of digital technologies by activists' tactics and strategies?** To answer this question, this paper aimed to develop an integrated analytical model which assists the understanding and deployment of digital activism.

The model was based on 41 digital activism empirical studies published between 2008 and 2018 on the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Capes) periodicals portal. These studies analyzed cases of digital activism and described multiple actions and their purposes. Subsequently, the authors applied a content analysis to categorize digital activist tactics, separating them into 12 tactical modalities and 3 main categories. The model dialogues with the recent literature on digital activism, especially Vegh's (2003) categories and Hanna, Vanclay, Langdon and Arts' (2016) identified purposes.

Figure 1: Categories and modalities



By discussing the concept of tactics and strategy according to Mintzberg and Waters (1985) and Mintzberg (1987), the authors propose a broad view over the tactics which can be deployed by activists and the interactions among them. Therefore, the paper presents how the strategical approach of the interaction among modalities allows for the diagnostic and prognostic of digital activist tactics.

On the following section, the authors discussed social movements and the use of digital technologies, strategy and tactics, and other digital activism categories. On the fifth section, the methodological path was presented. Subsequently, the analytical model was presented and discussed on sections six and seven and finally the authors pointed out the present paper's limitations and suggestions of future researches.

## 2. Social movements and the contemporary activist uses of digital technologies

The wide technological and organizational transformation caused by digitalization created new possibilities to activism, especially because of how easy it became to divulge information and swiftly spread it (Nossa & Leal, 2015; Segurado, 2015). Consequently, existent research methodologies have been applied and adapted to investigate activism, particularly the activist use of social media. Nevertheless, some authors point out that the creation of new methodologies would be necessary to enable the study of less investigated social media and other digital platforms (Caren, Andrews & Lu, 2020; Özkula, Reilly & Hayes, 2023).

The internet opens up the possibility for marginalized groups to have their voices broadened online (Núñez Puente, 2011; Fonseca, Pereira da Silva, & Teixeira, 2017; Sena & Tesser, 2017). By employing direct action, activists can use a range of practices, both online and offline – which vary from civil disobedience to more aggressive actions of intervention, such as boycotts, blockades and strikes – to prevent an action or decision they disapprove of (Jordan, 2002). In addition to enabling the creation of new actions of protest, digital media amplify existing forms of off-line activism, creating a complementary relationship instead of an exclusive one (Gomes, 2015; Aguilar-Forero, 2017). Tufekci (2017) highlights that these technologies act as a means to an action, and are not an end to themselves in the case of activism, and Ghobadi and Sonenshein (2023) present how multiple strategies can be deployed in order to pressure or collaborate with organizations which are the targets of activist action.

This paper considers that, since digital communication technologies have been used by activists in social movements, activism itself changed. In this context, Bennet and Segerberg (2012) noticed a novel perspective derived from the intensive use of social media for activism. This new logic, referred to as connective action, describes “the network as an organizational structure in itself” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 752). According to the authors, collective action can also appropriate such tools, but they are used to improve hierarchical organization, based on collective identities. On the other hand, connective action focuses on individuals while attempting to reach collective results (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Although connective action alone can weaken social movements due to an excessive focus on the role of individuals (Alcântara, 2016), some authors have studied the circumstances under which it can benefit activists. Milan and Hintz (2013) and Segurado (2015) suggest that, following the logic of connective action, instead of disappearing into the group's identity, individuals work together without losing their individuality. This happens mainly because of social media's user-centered design, which pushes the users to work more individually, even when they are part of a group (Bard Wigdor & Magallanes, 2018).

Milan and Hintz (2013) explain that in “radical tech groups”, a new individual's knowledge enriches the group as a whole. The authors agree with other scholars when they state that the

combination between collective and connective action has more to offer than one or the other alone. In the case of radical tech groups, connective action appears to work fairly well, since the groups are usually formed by very few people and demand sophisticated technical skills to perform their actions. Although radical tech groups may act alone, they can also build alliances and develop tools for other activist groups (Milan & Hintz, 2013). Since this type of activism demands knowledge and resources which are not easily accessible, the link between radical tech groups and other activists offers strategic importance to activism.

Other authors refer to the actors of radical tech groups as hacktivists. In this paper hacktivism is considered as the political activist use of hacking skills (Jordan & Taylor, 2004). Hacktivists are important in the contemporary world because they offer an alternative to the tools created by corporations and governments, which are permeated by these organization's interests (Milan & Hintz, 2013; Beck, 2016). Therefore, they no longer depend on the tools created by corporations and governments, which is recommended by Mattoni (2017).

This paper is aligned with Currie and Paris (2018) when the authors state that activists and the people must appropriate digital and data technologies, strategically articulating the different forms of using digital technologies for activism. The authors highlight the confrontational dimension of hacktivism to pressure agents who are opposed to the movement where they are participants. This way, hacktivists' knowledge can support technically less skilled activists, offering privacy, infrastructure and data processing to larger groups and benefiting broader movements. It is important that activists acknowledge the potentialities and limitations of digital tools in order to strategically employ them in the movement's context.

### 3. Strategy and tactics in contemporary digital activism

When formulating a strategy, it is important that activists consider the new possible actions in order to implement the tactics which better suit their goals. Besides comprehending the risks and limitations of acting in the digital sphere, activists must consider how hacktivist knowledge might interact in the development of their strategy.

Strategy has been an object of study among researchers of diverse areas, varying from Military and War Sciences to Management, and has multiple conceptions (Vilar, Walter, & Braum, 2017). Mintzberg and Waters (1985) differentiates intended strategy from realized strategy. To the authors, the process of implementing the intended strategy considers unrealized and emergent strategies. Activists must, therefore, concretize their strategy while managing unforeseen events and environmental changes.

Mintzberg (1987) presents five complementary definitions of strategy. The present authors highlight three of them due to their broad perspective, which is not focused on private organizations: plan, ploy e pattern. Strategy as plan is the conception which precedes the action. It has two characteristics: it is idealized before actions take place, and it is developed consciously and purposely. Strategy as ploy is a simulation in which the real intention is not the action itself, but the reaction it arises in the target. Strategy as pattern is defined as a pattern in a flow of actions, whether or not they are intentional, and considers the plan as much as its result (Mintzberg, 1987).

Schultz, Slevin and Pinto (1987) state that the separation between strategy and tactics is equivalent to the separation between plan and action in the strategic management literature. The authors thus defend a more precise distinction between each one's functions. Schultz *et al.* (1987) and Mintzberg (1987) describe tactics as the engagement of people and resources which results in the implementation of a strategy. To comprehend social movements from this analytical lens, however, it is fundamental to adapt these concepts.

As a classical author in the Management field of studies Mintzberg (1987) has elaborated quite an objective and contemporary definition of strategies and tactics. As mentioned in the introduction, this work aims to allow for the diagnostic and prognostic of digital activist tactics. Mintzberg's

(1987) definition is aligned to this goal since both works aim to facilitate an efficient action over concrete reality.

Like Mintzberg (1987), the present authors consider strategy as a plan which proceeds an action (plan), simultaneously considering it as the result of the implementation of this plan (pattern) which may be formulated with the goal of deceiving the target (ploy). In this case, it is important to briefly define strategy as a means, a manner or an arrangement of methods by which a tactic or set of tactics is carried out.

This paper considers that a successful strategy has three fundamental characteristics, namely: the actions' design or architecture, the surprise effect to the targeted subject and the rational and most effective use of available resources. The architecture of tactics can be perceived as the behavior pattern which characterizes the deployment of a strategy. The surprise effect, which can be perceived in the definition of strategy as ploy, may be determinant to the success of a strategy. Finally, identifying the strategy as a plan is important to social movements since planning the use of resources might optimize their use.

According to Munro (2015), creating stateless organizations which are able to circumvent persecutory states' jurisdiction is one way of attaining this goal. The author claims that statelessness enables peoples' surveillance of formal organizational actors, such as governments and corporations, forcing the latter to be transparent and held accountable for acts that would previously be made invisible. Therefore, he highlights the opportunity for conjunct work seized between stateless and territorialized organizations, guaranteeing a surprise effect which enhances the chance of success.

Nevertheless, Casero-Ripollés (2015) highlights that monitoring and reporting wrong deeds is not enough to reach activist goals. According to the author, digital technologies also facilitate the production and propagation of content aligned to the ideas defended by the group, besides allowing the movement to intervene on the media's agenda. The author points out the importance of designing a mobilizing action along with monitoring and reporting.

Fernandes and Pante (2019) state that digital activism can amplify the reach of subaltern groups' actions. These groups are able to use social media to promote the approval of laws and public acts in order to sensitize people about a subject. This platform is less expensive than the presence in physical spaces, enabling activists to attain their goals by means of the efficient use of available resources.

Once the goal of the present work is to develop an analytical model of digital activism, it is important to discuss the analytical perspective of other authors who have sought to systematize the study of this phenomenon. The present authors searched for models which focused on the tactic dimensions of social movements.

Many authors have proposed different frames to analyze digital activism (Velo and Lopes, 2020). Vegh's (2003) categorization, which has been cited in over 529 publications until June 2021, was highlighted and used as a starting point to establish comparisons. By classifying activists' actions enabled by the internet, Vegh (2003, p. 72) considers both internet-based and internet-enhanced practices, and highlights examples of actions which represent each stage of a movement. This results in three progressive steps from cyberactivism to hacktivism: "awareness/advocacy; organization/mobilization; and action/reaction". In the first category, Vegh focuses on how disseminating information becomes easier on the internet. In the second category, the author describes three different forms of convoking people to an event by using the internet. Finally, the third category "covers online attacks committed by 'hackers'" (Vegh, 2003, p. 75).

After the publication of Vegh's (2003) model, other authors such as van Laer and van Aeslt (2010) and Earl, Kimpoti, Prieto, Rush and Reynoso (2010) developed Vegh's theory. Van Laer and van Aeslt's (2010) and Earl *et al.*'s (2010) studies focused on the differentiation between internet-based and internet-supported actions, which limits their analysis in regard to the use of internet and attributes a higher value to the media used than to the goals and expected results. Categorizations such as Christiansen's (2009) and Sandoval-Almazan and Ramon Gil-Garcia's (2014) describe the

development of social movements according to phases, which might be useful to complement the results of this paper. However, as they do not focus on the tactic dimension of movements, they were not considered for the present paper.

As the focus of this article is to identify the tactics from their purposes, the work of Hanna *et al.* (2016) highly contributes to this objective by presenting a glossary of protest actions which comprises over 200 words which may serve to different purposes. Hanna *et al.* (2016) also suggest that protest actions generally have at least one of the seven purposes: information, fundraising, publicity, mobilization, solidarity building, political pressure and direct action. They cite Vegh's study in order to point out how the aforementioned purposes are related to Vegh's propositions of three categories – awareness/advocacy; organization/mobilization; and action/reaction.

In this paper, the authors seek to contribute to the literature by expanding the relation between Hanna *et al.*'s (2016) glossary and Vegh's (2003) categorization of digital tactics. The relation between the two categorizations is analyzed according to a strategical perspective in order to highlight digital activist tactics according to their purpose. Therefore, the dialogue between the works of Hanna *et al.* (2016) and Vegh (2003) is developed from a content analysis which mapped other purposes beyond those inferred by Hanna *et al.*'s (2016) from Vegh's (2003) work.

In the next section, the methodology employed to the collection and analysis of data will be presented to explain the creation of the analytical model which aims to develop the categorizations found in the literature.

## 5. The methodological path

This paper aimed to systematize scientific studies regarding digital activism to offer social movements and scholars a more objective and preliminary consultation of the possibilities of digitally enabled activism. Instead of merely quantifying the studied phenomenon, the authors adopted a qualitative approach to the object of research, and sought to categorize the actions to create a typology (Gerhardt & Silveira, 2009). It was decided that the analyzed corpus would be composed solely by scientific papers instead of a field study in order to allow for the collection of a larger set of data, which would also be more diverse and not bound to contextual or group limitations.

The method used to select and analyze papers appears to adopt the criteria used in meta-synthesis or qualitative meta-analysis (Zimmer, 2006; Levitt, 2018). Nevertheless, a meta-synthesis aims to conduct a thorough secondary analysis. In the present study, the authors analyzed the “results” section of the selected papers, without attributing much value to the author's interpretation of their meaning. Subsequently, the present authors performed a content analysis in the selected papers in order to apprehend digital activist actions described in their studies (Vergara, 2005).

The authors collected scientific papers from the periodicals portal of Capes, which hosts 130 reference bases and offers access to over 48 thousand national and international journals. This guaranteed a broad range of results to the bibliographical research. The search considered papers in Portuguese, Spanish and English, which allowed for a greater diversity of cases.

Once many nomenclatures are being used to characterize equal or similar concepts (Velooso & Lopes, 2020), the terms which were more aligned to the digital activism cutting were chosen: “ativis\* digital”, “digital activis\*”, “activis\* digital”, ciberativis\*, cyberactivis\*, ciberactivis\*, hacktivis\*, datativis\*, “data ativis\*”, dataactivis\* and “data activis\*”.

The search was limited to peer-reviewed papers published between 2008 and 2018, and the terms were searched within the papers' titles. The total amount of results, without filters, was 221 papers. Three stages of filtering were then carried out: 1) elimination of duplicates; 2) elimination of papers which were not aligned to the research problem. To identify whether they discussed progressive activism tactics, the following stages were carried out: reading of title, key-words and abstract; and 3) selection of case studies and elimination of papers which followed different data collection approaches. This generated 146 pieces from which 105 were discarded. The 41 remaining papers



were published in 36 different journals from the fields of Sociology and Communication. 31 papers were published in 31 different journals, and the remaining 10 papers were evenly distributed among the 5 following journals: *New Media & Society*, *Anuario Electrónico de Estudios en Comunicación Social "Disertaciones"*, *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, *Brazilian Journalism Research*, and *Information, Communication & Society*.

This study aimed to map and systematize digital activist actions identified in case studies, grouping them in categories according to their purpose. This process allowed for the apprehension of typologies – named tactical modalities in the present paper – which diagnose the use of digital technologies. Besides offering this diagnosis, the authors relied on the previous discussions over strategy to propose a model which assists the prognostic of uses which were not observed in the literature.

The *purpose of the tactics* was chosen as the criterion of the search for words and themes which textually represented each category. Consequently, the study was able to demonstrate how the same *purpose* can be attained by different tactics. Besides the criterion of *purpose of the tactics*, the *target audience* and *digital technology employed* were also identified in each case so as to illustrate the elements which comprise the tactics in their context.

To assure that the data collection technique was feasible and fit to answer the research question, some tests were conducted as the following example, highlighted by the present authors. This segment demonstrates actions which have the purpose to organize people to participate in an event.

In this fragment of Sandoval-Almazan and Ramon Gil-Garcia (2014, p. 372), "They sent out ideas and warnings" (*action*) "about the organization of the march" (*purpose*) as the following: "Do not provoke, bring a book under your arm, use social networks to communicate.". According to the authors, the organization of the march was entirely done using mobile devices and web 2.0 platforms (*digital technology deployed*). In this case, the target audience is not explicit, but one can deduce that organizers were targeting participants.

Once the creation and testing of the instrument was finished, all the 265 passages which contained digital activist examples were listed on an Excel spreadsheet. Then, the authors extracted, from the passage or from the context, the criteria of *target audience*, *digital technology employed* and *purpose of action*. The technique was applied to systematically collect actions from all 41 papers.

The actions were categorized into 12 tactical modalities. First, the analytical model aimed to sort activist actions, interpreted within their contextual variations, according to their *purpose*. The element which was highlighted in the previous examples places both actions in one modality.

The modalities are not necessarily attached to one another. There are cases in which two or more modalities can be discerned on the same action. However, if a social challenge demands for a different strategy, different modalities can eventually be combined according to the purpose of the actions.

In a second moment three broad and mutually exclusive categories were built upon Vegh's contributions: sensitization, organization and confrontation. Each modality belongs into one of these categories which are presented and exemplified on the next section and subsequently analyzed in light of the concepts discussed in the theoretical background.

## 6. Results

According to Ferreira, Cardoso, Corrêa and França (2009, pp. 18–19, our translation), a model "implies the idea of the organization and ordering of parts which compose a whole". Therefore, a model "serves as an example or norm in a specific situation".

The present model aims to enable the user to diagnose how one acted in a particular situation and also to foresee how one may act to obtain a different result in a future action. Besides enabling a more precise and pertinent diagnostic which enables the understanding of how digital technologies are

used by activists, the present model intends to allow the reader to make tactical suggestions from a strategic perspective.

In the present paper, the categories of Vegh (2003) are updated: Awareness/Advocacy is similar to what is here called Sensitization; Organization/Mobilization refers to the category Organization; and finally, Action/Reaction is similar to Confrontation. Vegh's (2003) three categories are described and briefly discussed in the description of the three categories of the present model.

The authors intended to build an initial model to map digital activist tactics. This model is presented in Figure 1, and its categories and tactical modalities are further described in this section.

## 6.1 Sensitization

This category gathers modalities which aim to promote education and awareness regarding an issue according to the movement's or activists' values. Vegh's (2003, pp. 72) category of "Awareness/Advocacy" is similar to this one in that it also describes the use of digital technologies to provide access to information which is relevant to a movement, since "the Internet may serve as an alternative news and information source". The category of Sensitization includes the modality "Building the Movement's Narrative", whose purpose is to guide how participants are informed about an activist group, which is not described in Vegh's category.

### 6.1.1 Educating

*Purpose:* to increase the level of awareness or education regarding an issue.

*Actions:* create informative campaigns, produce and disseminate information, stimulate or initiate debates and continuously post educational information online. This can be done by bringing public attention to an issue, stimulating compassion, breaking the silence on delicate matters, giving voice to marginalized groups which enable activists to advance reflection on dominant ideas and offer an alternative point of view from the one commonly presented by traditional media.

*Target:* in most cases, no target audience. Sometimes, external organizations or individuals, or even the movement's members.

*Technology:* blogs, social media, online forums, electronic mailing services and websites. Activists can also use graphics, maps or websites specifically designed to allow for the secure leaking of documents to display information are also used in some occasions.

*Example:* Núñez Puente (2011, p. 340) describes how feminist digital activists used their blogs to disseminate information regarding gender based violence. These activists aimed to "to raise consciousness and sensitivity so that violence can be recognized and reported", directing themselves "to society at large".

### 6.1.2 Building the Movement's Narrative

*Purpose:* to guide the way the general public is informed about the movement.

*Actions:* describe what the movement is or intends to be, and also state what it denies, sometimes by attempting to change the way the media presents the movement. It is also an attempt to improve the movement's reputation and assert its legitimacy in order to highlight the importance of mobilizing.

*Target:* in most cases, no target audience. Sometimes, the target is the media itself.

*Technology:* mailing lists, websites, blogs, video sharing platforms or social media.

*Other details:* the difference between this and the previous modality is that while **Education** aims to educate and raise awareness regarding a theme, **Building the Movement's Narrative** focuses on describing the movement and affirming their demands.

*Example:* Lindgren and Lundström (2011, p. 1006) studied the case of #Wikileaks showing how user's interactions with the hashtag framed WikiLeaks perspective and political goals in opposition to frequent stigmatization by adopting "political and philosophical slogans and proverbs used to defend free speech and a free press".

## 6.2 Organization

This category clusters modalities which aim to provide the conditions for the effective attainment of movements' and activists' goals, by gathering and mobilizing resources and people. This category is similar to Vegh's (2003) "Organization/Mobilization" as both describe the organization of movements' participants by movement's leaders. However, the present paper goes into further detail as to what "Organization" can mean, advancing Vegh's (2003) model by adding actions of alliance between movements, and the creation of technologies to protect the identity and the security of activists.

### 6.2.1 Building Alliances

*Purpose:* to promote joint action and maintain supportive relationships with organizations which have similar goals.

*Actions:* convoke for events promoted by other groups, publicize their alliance on websites or social media.

*Target:* organizations with similar goals, external individuals (public people) or organizations. Multiple movements may unite around a common cause, but they can also seek the support of a public person or organizations with different goals (such as corporations or NGO).

*Technology:* social media and collective mailing lists.

*Example:* Aguilar-Forero (2017) presents the actions of "H.I.J.O.S. Bogotá", a Colombian organization which demands justice to those who were persecuted during the dictatorship period. H.I.J.O.S. Bogotá joins efforts with other social movements which support broader or similar initiatives in Colombia as well as in other Latin American countries using collective mailing lists and messaging applications to communicate and promote their cause.

### 6.2.2 Solidarity Building

*Purpose:* to build and strengthen solidarity around a common cause, creating a sense of belonging, mutual support and unity inside a group.

*Actions:* exchange information regarding the cause, debate about the movement's characteristics, resolve conflicts and create the collective by means of the collaboration and identification among group members.

*Target:* members of the same movement or different chapters of the same movement.

*Technology:* social media, collective mailing lists and messaging applications.

*Other details:* this can be done between members of the same movement or between different chapters of the same movement. This modality is different from **Building Alliances** since the former aims to develop alliances with external agents, while **Solidarity Building** focuses on the inside of social movements.

*Example:* in the case of #BoycottAutismSpeaks, Parsloe and Holton (2017, pp. 7-9) identified how members of the group used multiple actions to develop and strengthen a collective identity: they used sarcasm and created inside jokes, "reinforced each other's comments", and "transformed shared 'symptoms' into a source of collective strength" to reinforce the "desirability of identifying with the group".

### 6.2.3 Recruiting

*Purpose:* to increase the base of the movement.

*Actions:* stimulating non-participants to mobilize.

*Target:* non-participants.

*Technology:* social media, blogs, websites and mailing lists.

*Other details:* Recruiting considers all levels of action, since the participant's first contacts with the movement when they start to develop awareness, to the constant, active and sometimes riskier participation as a member of the group. Differently from **Recruiting, Building Alliances** includes the alliance with people who won't necessarily be active in the movement despite supporting it.

*Example:* Dahlberg-Grundberg (2016) pointed out how the collective Telecomix offered no barriers for participation by means of their IRC channel, a space which new members could enter to learn more about the group and how to participate in their actions.

### 6.2.4 Tactical and Strategical Planning

*Purpose:* to plan and organize the progression of events.

*Actions:* creating spaces for the diffusion of information among movement's members and circulating audiovisual, textual and photographic material which assist the organization of the event.

*Target:* varied, since the organization and planning of a group may involve only the movement's members or, in some cases, whole communities.

*Technology:* collective mailing lists, messaging applications, social media, video sharing platforms, online fora, videoconferencing platforms and websites.

*Other details:* this modality creates the conditions to other modalities, such as **Directing Events**, since it involves decision-making and planning the movement's tactics and strategies to attain a goal.

*Example:* When describing the #YoSoy132 movement, Sandoval-Almazan and Ramon Gil-Garcia (2014, p. 373) reveal how "the street protest, the assembly, organization of the presidential debate through YouTube, and media statements were all done using social media tools."

### 6.2.5 Resources Management

*Purpose:* to gather or manage resources, whether they are material (such as medical equipment, clothes), financial or informational resources.

*Actions:* asking for donations or selling products to raise and organize resources or divulging of informational resources such as statistical data or news which are relevant to an ongoing action or matter.

*Target:* members or society in general.

*Technology:* crowdfunding platforms and applications, social media, blog, websites, online forums, collective mailing lists, geolocation software, video sharing platforms, online data bases and online surveys.

*Example:* In their research, Pereira (2013, p. 1869) described how "the Suruí people of the Indigenous Territories Seventh of September" used digital geolocation software tools to map their territories. They "photographed and registered the actions of the deforestation of their lands, providing this information on the Internet and in this way, triggering many governmental and nongovernmental institutions to take action."

### 6.2.6 Directing Events

*Purpose:* to direct and control the progression of events which are external to the movement.

*Actions:* circulating content with more detailed information about an event, orientations on how to participate, encouragement to incentive participation and the transmission of information (be it frequent and systematic or occasional) about an ongoing action.

*Target:* in general, the movement's participants. However, the movement may convoke non-members for an event.

*Technology:* social media, (collective) mailing lists, blogs and text messaging applications, online petitions, websites, video sharing platforms and online fora.

*Other details:* differently from **Building Alliances**, this modality aims at mobilizing participants to attend an event promoted by the group. In **Building Alliances**, the movement intends to mobilize members to attend events promoted exclusively by allied organizations. These events can be workshops, seminars, cultural events, meetings, boycotts or protests.

*Example:* Banks (2010) illustrate the case of a group which structured a campaign to ask for support to their strike. The author reports how activists used e-mail to spread information and mobilize supporters.

### 6.2.7 Infrastructure Development

*Purpose:* to protect the identity and the security of the activists.

*Actions:* developing autonomous hardware and software infrastructure and open source tools.

*Target:* activists and members of a movement.

*Technology:* Privacy Enhancing Technologies (PET) and strong cryptographic algorithms.

*Other details:* These activities guarantee that activists' communications are safe and able to act according to their principles.

*Example:* In his work, Bodó (2014, p. 5) describes how "Wikileaks hoped to lower the threat of de-anonymisation through the creation of a safe technological space in which the identity of the source is protected by strong cryptographic algorithms, obfuscation and other software and hardware tricks." This way, people were able to denounce anonymously and escape the high risks which are usually involved in leaking confidential information.

## 6.3 Confrontation

This category gathers modalities which aim to jeopardize an organization's or an individual's image or activities, impeding wrongdoings and demanding changes according to the movement's or activists' beliefs. In Vegh's (2003) categorization, "Action/Reaction" covers solely hacktivist attacks which damage or compromise the websites, email boxes and chatrooms of organizations aimed by activists. The present model advances Vegh's theory by adding actions of criticism carried out on other platforms, such as social media.

### 6.3.1 Symbolic Pressure

*Purpose:* to jeopardize an organization's reputation/image.

*Actions:* the coordination of criticism by means of a twitterbombing, an email bombing or the mass posting of photos or videos.

*Target:* an organization or a person (which may be the target itself or their supporters).

*Technology:* online petitions, social media.

*Other details:* This modality demands a change in attitude from individuals or organizations, and creates the need for an answer. It might be the preparation for a future attack which will cause material damage or simply a ploy to create an illusion on the target, and depends on the visibility of the call and mass attending.

*Example:* Parsloe and Holton (2017, p. 8) describe how #BoycottAutismSpeaks members prepared Twitterbombs “to target supporters of Autism Speaks on Twitter and other platforms. A list of corporate sponsors’ Twitter handles was circulated along with encouragement to flood these companies’ Twitter feeds with specific reasons to boycott Autism Speaks.”

### 6.3.2 Material Pressure

*Purpose:* to jeopardize an organization's activities or resources.

*Actions:* sistematically criticizing an organization in order to generate rejection (boycotting); taking down an organization's website; leaking information which is evidence of wrongdoing; impeding the distribution of a material; or making a DDoS attack.

*Target:* an organization or a person.

*Technology:* social media, websites or encrypted platforms designed to allow for the safe leaking of information. In the case of cyberattacks, researchers usually do not inform the technology employed. It can be a botnet or a specific application designed to make such attacks, but it is not common that these details become public.

*Other details:* this modality demands accountability by individuals and organizations for their wrongdoings and generates unexpected costs for the target. This may be accomplished by the interruption of a process, the damaging of infrastructure or the leaking of sensitive information. It can be done by legal or illegal means.

*Example:* in their paper, Mattoni (2017, p. 730) illustrates **Material Pressure** when describing how Spanish activists raised the necessary resources “to begin a criminal proceeding against Rodrigo Rato and other Bankia managers”. According to the author, “they developed two main participatory devices: BuzonX, a platform to securely leak relevant information about the Bankia case, and a call for political crowdfunding on the GoTeo platform.”

## 7. Discussion

In order to test the analytical model proposed in this paper, the authors analyzed the tactical interaction between Anonymous and Wikileaks in Operation Avenge Assange and the Cablegate case.

Anonymous is a collective which advocates for freedom of expression and transparency (Wright, 2012). Wikileaks’ goal is promoting Internet privacy and enforcing accountability of powerful actors (Assange, Applebaum, Müller-Maguhn & Zimmermann, 2013). Wright (2012) points out that Anonymous and Wikileaks share some values, which becomes apparent in this struggle to guarantee freedom of expression and enforce accountability of the US government.

The Cablegate case occurred in 2010, when “over 250.000 diplomatic reports from 274 USA embassies around the world” were published by Wikileaks in their website (Assange *et al.*, 2013, p. 162). The documents, provided to Wikileaks by Chelsea Manning, revealed war crimes occurred during the war on Afghanistan, and proved how US’ soldiers killed civilians in their attacks. After pressure from US authorities to impede the publication of the cables, Wikileaks was a target of a DDoS attack from an unknown source (CBS, 2010 apud Wright, 2012). These attacks paralyzed their webpage, but did not stop the documents from being published, since they had already been shared with news agencies (CBS, 2010 apud Wright, 2012).

A week later, PayPal, Visa and MasterCard halted donations to Wikileaks. This triggered multiple DDoS attacks by Anonymous, in a campaign which became known as “Operation Avenge Assange” (Assange *et al.*, 2013; Coleman, 2014). In a second wave of attacks, Anonymous disabled Visa and MasterCard websites, which caused PayPal to unfreeze the donations to Wikileaks on the next day. When justifying the DDoS attacks to these pages, Anonymous provided the following statement: “Anonymous is supporting WikiLeaks not because we agree or disagree with the data that is being sent out, but we disagree with any form of censorship on the internet” (Addley & Halliday, 2010).

According to the model presented in this paper, it is possible to analyze Anonymous' and Wikileaks' strategies and identify the tactics used by the group in this case. The purpose of leaking documents may be pressuring a target, if the movement's strategy consists of confronting a threatening actor; or to educate society in general, if the movement's objective is to sensitize people over an issue. In the Cablegate case, the leak was done by Wikileaks, an organization which aims to guarantee global access to information that would otherwise be unavailable. This is, therefore, an action of **Education**.

Looking at the statements provided by an Anon in 2010, right after the DDoS attacks performed against Visa's, PayPal's and MasterCard's websites, it is possible to observe that the collective acted according to their principles. They used **Material Pressure** to force these organizations to reconsider their participation in censoring Wikileaks, which can be deduced once the attack impeded commercial transactions (the organization's main activities) from happening.

When studying the actions of a group, it becomes clear that some actions have more than one result, which may lead the observer to conclude that the movement might have had more than one goal. However, this is not necessarily true, since, according to Mintzberg and Waters (1985), the realized strategy is different from the intended strategy.

When analyzing strategy as a pattern (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Mintzberg, 1987), one can also find other elements which characterize a strategy, such as the surprise effect, the effective use of resources and the presence of an architecture of actions. In this case, the architecture of actions chosen by Anonymous was the use of DDoS attacks, executed by thousands of computers managed by skilled participants, which gives a hint of the movement's use of their resources, to intimidate MasterCard, Visa and PayPal. In the bold tactical choice against such powerful corporations, it is possible to identify the element of surprise.

Considering the interactions among these actions, one can comprehend the purpose of an action, which could have an entirely different purpose in a different context. Only when analyzing a group's strategy, does it become possible to prognosticate. The present model would not be able to diagnose and prognosticate if it was focused on actions. Considering multiple purposes within their context is necessary to identify modalities, propose creative changes, combinations of the modalities and different aims, targets and technologies employed in an action.

From the statements provided by Anonymous after Operation Avenge Assange, one can deduce that the movement is also **Building their Narrative** when defending their actions. They state: "we disagree with any form of censorship on the internet". In this sentence, the principles which guide their actions become apparent.

However momentary, the support given by Anonymous to Wikileaks was not limited to the DDoS attacks. In a flyer distributed by the group on the occasion (Correll, 2010), it is possible to identify the **Direction of Events** by Anonymous when they give clear instructions for anyone who wishes to support Wikileaks. In this flyer, Anonymous provides a large set of actions which can be carried out by Wikileaks supporters, varying from actions of **Resources Management** ("spread the currently leaked cables [...]. Save them to hard drives, distribute them on CD's, mirror them to websites and seed them on torrents") and **Education** ("make sure everyone you know is aware of what is happening") to **Symbolic Pressure** ("complain to your local MP, mayor or whichever political figure you can contact"; "send around petitions"). Moreover, Anonymous is once more **Building the movement's Narrative** in the first lines of the flyer: "Julian Assange deifies everything we hold dear. He despises and fights censorship constantly [...]"

All these actions suggested by Anonymous aim to defend freedom of expression on the internet, transparency, accountability of the actors responsible for criminal acts, consequently generating support to Wikileaks. Therefore, Anonymous' strategy is based on a multiplicity of actions with the same goal, which is in consonance with the values defended by both groups.

**Educating** people in regard to the Cablegate case is important to make them aware of how significant the actions of the US government were in the war against Afghanistan. Besides, the

**Symbolic Pressure** generated by many actors who seek the support of authorities against such crimes reinforces the **Material Pressure** produced by the more technically-skilled hacktivists. That way, a larger contingent of people can get involved in the actions to defend Wikileaks.

When considering the modalities which were not deployed by Anonymous to stand up for Wikileaks, it is possible to make a few assumptions and suggestions. “A spokesperson for WikiLeaks, Kristinn Hrafnsson, told the press that Anonymous had acted independently” (Wright, 2012, p. 28), meaning that there was no communication or preparation on the part of Anonymous related to a possible alliance with Wikileaks before the attack. Considering this position from both organizations, it is possible to deduce that they have no long-term strategy as allies. Even though **Building an Alliance** would be possible due to the values they share, according to Coleman (2014), it is possible to notice that Anonymous’ organizational structure does not stimulate **Building Alliances** in the long-term, since the collective is more reactive than proactive.

Coleman (2014) also presents some internal discussions on Anonymous’ IRC channels showing the **Tactical Planning** which took place before the DDoS attacks. The author’s description indicates a limitation derived from the group’s organizational structure: despite offering great results when it comes to the surprise effect of their actions, Anonymous does not have enough time to plan the best use of their scarce resources. This becomes apparent when Coleman (2014) highlights that, during the attacks, several Anons were not aware of the architecture of the actions chosen by the collective to deal with the Cablegate case.

Turning to other categorizations and how they can be compared to the present model, Vegh’s (2003) work focuses on the activist actions and how the internet facilitates already existing actions. The author classifies their categories in a *crescendo* towards hacktivism. This is different from our model since the actions of **Confrontation** are not necessarily hacktivist. In the previously discussed case, Anonymous convokes individuals to actions of **Symbolic Pressure** which do not depend on hacker knowledge.

As for the work of Hanna *et al.* (2016), the authors identify seven purposes which can be seen in the modalities proposed in the present work. Information is contained in the **Education** modality. Fundraising, in **Resources Management**. Publicity is similar to **Building the Movement’s Narrative**, but the purpose of gaining publicity is not explicit and seems variable. Mobilization is a specific point in the modality of **Directing Events**, which considers a broader range of tactics. In the case of **Solidarity Building**, Hanna *et al.*’s (2016) nomenclature was maintained in our homonymous modality. Finally, Political Pressure and Direct Action are respectively related to **Symbolic Pressure** and **Material Pressure**, even though the differentiation of Hanna *et al.*’s (2016) is not as precise as the present one due to the fact that they encompass both online and offline activist actions.

## 8. Final Considerations

This research aimed to map actions of digital activism and categorize them according to their purpose, elaborating a model to demonstrate how the same purpose can be achieved through different actions. Previous literature has produced similar categorizations, such as Vegh’s (2003) model; and described a detailed list of activist actions, as in Hanna *et al.* (2016). In order to complement these works, the present model established a dialogue with their categories and, based on a literature review, raised its own categorization to generate a model based on the purpose of actions. Ultimately, this research should facilitate the strategical planning of activist groups by providing a summary of what has been done, with what intention and using which tools, so that they can optimize their planning and become more efficient.

This model highlights the importance of digital media as a means for activist action in the contemporary world. In spite of that, the use of digital technologies doesn’t replace the need for organization and political engagement, especially due to their focus on the role of individuals



(Alcântara, 2016). It is important that activists make a wise use of technology so as to strengthen, and not weaken, their actions.

It should be emphasized that the model did not aim to exhaust the subject, and future works, with other theoretical and epistemological bases, should complement and contribute to the analysis which was proposed here. The selection of other keywords and different methodological designs, including empirical studies which contemplate field knowledge, are strongly suggested to foster the contributions offered by this paper. It is also worth noticing that this paper is time-limited, and the case studies analyzed were published between 2008 and 2018. The swift changes in the digital environment will certainly open space for innovations in activist practices, which, from a strategic perspective, are of high importance due to the surprise-effect they might generate. These innovations could not be mapped in this paper, but should be carefully observed by activists and further explored in future studies.

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