ONLINE AND OFFLINE ACTIVISM. LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract. *The article examines the literature regarding the role of the Internet in mobilizing people in protest participation and the link between online activism and offline activism. First, the paper shows the emergence of the media communications as instruments of mobilizing people in social movements. Then, the article reveals a discussion upon the literature reviewed, examining critically the research analysis. The paper is important to promote the relevance of the social movement's studies through the online networks and to show the role of the Internet in mobilizing people. Studying the online networks and their members, how they are recruited and interact online with other members and their participation in offline actions, it is a new way for studies concerning the nature of the protests, how can they emerge and how can they be conducted, if people are participating on these protests guided by masses beliefs and opinions, or being conducted by their interests. Synthesizing the literature regarding social movements, the study opens the way to new researches that can explain better the collective actions.*

Key words*: Social movement; online networks; online activism; offline activism; Internet.*

1. Introduction

There is a whole literature regarding social movements and the influence of the Internet concerning protests participation, and some articles are talking about the contexts created by the Internet (online networks) for protests, signing petitions or boycotting and the role of the Internet in mobilizing especially the young people in protests. The paper regards online activism and the process of the mobilization in demonstrations. It examines the literature describing activism and the researches that examine the association between online activism and offline activism.

The article is important to promote the relevance of the social movement's studies through the online networks and to show the role of the Internet in mobilizing people. Studying the online networks and their members, how they are recruited and interact online with other members and their participation in offline actions, it is a new way for studies concerning the nature of the protests, how can they emerge and how can they be conducted, if people are participating on these protests guided by masses beliefs and opinions, or being conducted by their interests.

It is hypothesized that the Internet has a great role in mobilizing people in protests and the fact that there is a connection between online activism and offline activism.

The paper examines the concepts and the literature about online networks, the role of the online networks to mobilize people in protests and the intersection between online communication and offline participation in protest events.

2. Concepts and literature review

In spite of the accessing and dissemination of the information, the Internet became the most important instrument nowadays for communication and for mobilizing people in protests.

Manuel Castells underlined in 'The Network Society' (2004) that "the Internet is quickly becoming a medium of interactive communication". The important role of the Internet on the processing and dissemination of the information is underlined by the

same author. The Internet provides "a process of production of information, communication, and feedback in real time or chosen time" (Castells, 2001).

The Internet is a source of information, but „also offers another technological medium through which individuals and societies can express themselves and their priorities" (Green, 2010: 1).

The people use for communication on the Internet all kind of online tools for expressing their opinions and affiliations on some groups and networks. As Rheingold said, „the development of communications technologies has vastly transformed the capacity of global civil society to build coalitions and networks" (Rheingold, 2004).

Manuel Castells explained in his book „The Network Society" that „a network is a set of interconnected nodes. A node is the point where the curve intersects itself. A network has no center, just nodes. Nodes may be of varying relevance for the network. Nodes increase their importance for the network by absorbing more relevant information and processing it more efficiently" (Castells, 2004: 7). The power is exercited through networks: each network has programmed goals depending on the power system, „in global capitalism, the global financial market has the last word, and the IMF is its authoritative interpreter for ordinary mortals" (Castells, 2004: 31).

The power of the networks is better conceptualized by David Singh Grewal (2008). It examines globalization from the perspective of the network analysis. The author of the book „Network Power" wrote an article in the same year. It appeared in The Guardian newspaper with the title „ The World is not Flat- It's Networked" . It states that „globalization doesn't 'flatten' the opportunity in the world: rather forcing everyone to comply with the same standards specific to certain privileged nations" (Grewal, 2008). Grewal stated that „the power of the network" is created to describe „the power of a standard". By „the power of the network"the author means „the movement of standards in a world where power is subsumed to other powers embedded in social, technological, global networks" (Ibid.).

In the literature it was introduced the term „network society". Philip Seib differentiates it from that of the organisations. The power is interconnected and subsumed to the networks which, in turn, are also interconnected. The best known researchers on comunication, Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2010) defined social networks as "applications which allow its users to connect through their profiles".

The networks- online and offline involve relations between people and institutions. Mark Granovetter (1973) was talking about „the strength of weak ties". He was reffering to relations between social networks and groups in online medium. Granovetter reveals the intensity of the social ties and the relations between network anlysis with macro- phenomena aspects such as 'social mobility', 'political organizations' etc (Granovetter, 1973: 1361). The strength of a tie consists in a combination of emotional intensity, intimacy and reciprocal services, underlined the author. Granovetter's theory supports the idea that weak ties depends on the position in the social networks (internal links, between groups, intermediary links, no-group links). Weak ties (relatives or friends who are not so close) are supposed to be a bridge for the dissemination of the information between members of the social networks. So, the online social networks create virtual communities that are not based on spatial proximity, close relations, socio- professional category membership as offline communities did. Online networks emerge from human relationships. A greater number of relations in an online network provides the best chances to inform another people.

Online networks and, in general, online tools „can help social movements find and disseminate information, recruit participants, organize, coordinate, and make decisions” (Joyce, 2010: 101).

There is an association between collective identity and online communication. As Klandermans said, „communication has been described as the fundamental process through which a collective identity may be constructed” (Klandermans, 1997 apud Mercea, 2012). The authors have argued that online communication may „contribute to the formation of a movement identity among activists” (Ayers, 2003,160 apud Mercea, 2012: 423).

Guobing Yang (2009) underlines cultural dimension of online activism. The author says that „online activism is par excellence activism by cultural means” (Yang, 2009). Cultural aspects of social activism mobilize collective actions.

Online activism was seen as an equivalent during the 1990s for the most of the offline collective actions (Postmes , Brunsting., 2002: 292). Web sites became platforms for collective actions. Online forms of writing petitions, lobbying, protesting are more and more practiced. As Postmes and Brunsting (2002) underlined, the Internet is used to support and organize offline actions.

Social networks refer not only to online medium, but to offline medium, too. In spite of the differences between the two, there are many similarities.

There are some studies (Mercea, 2012; Burean and Bădescu, 2014; Della Porta, Mosca, 2005; Hirzalla and van Zoonen, 2009; Summer and Harp, 2011) that show a link between online and offline activism.

Mercea (2012) in his article 'Digital prefigurative participation: the entwinement of online communication and offline participation in protest events' underlined 'the intersection between offline participation and online communication'. His hypothesis was about the importance of the CMC to offline protest participation. The study was conducted on three dimensions: 'mobilization', 'identity- building' and 'organizational transformations' (Mercea, 2012). They are interpreted as forms of participations. He made a research using two case- studies of low and high-risk activism: (FânFest- Rosia Montana, Romania) and (Camp for Climate Action- Kingsnorth, a station in Kent). The author used mixed methods for the study from participatory observation to semi-structured interviews, surveys and research of the digital archive of the Internet from the websites, the FânFest blog and the Climate Camp Facebook page.

The analysis showed that the Internet was very important for the circulation of the ideas about the movements and the most of the participants in the protests were Internet users. The study underlined that 'the affiliated were communicating with friends online about their prospective participation in the protest event' (Mercea, 2012). The article showed that at the Fân Fest- Rosia Montana festival, the unfiliated expressed their intention to participate at the protest, getting informations about the event from the website's forum. They also invited unflliated friends to join the event.

The study revealed that the communication mediated computer developed a movement identity. Mercea (2012) underlined that "organizers' identity narrative' was important in Fân-Fest festival. The narrative for the identity- building in the case of Climate Camp was described as a responsibility shared by the organizers on the website and on the event's group. The article reveals that in the case of the high- risk protest, „a movement identity may be articulated but not constructed through CMC' (Mercea, 2012: 20).

Another research about civic participation, using a case study from Romania was a recent one, developed by Toma Burean and Gabriel Bădescu (2014). The authors underline in their article „Student protest participation in Romania” the effect of the

Internet on the protests. The authors wanted to know if the Internet produces a suitable environment for protest mobilization (Burean and Bădescu, 2014). They obtained data from a 2012 student survey and made a comparison with 2011 EVS Survey. The research revealed the fact that online activism is correlated with protest participation, unconventional participation, conventional participation, organizational membership, institutional trust and ideological orientation. As the authors suggested, the Internet is „a catalyst for protesting", is a medium where people interact and share their ideas, increasing the potential for engagement in protests.

The authors sustained that online activism „was computed from two variables: internet political participation that is measured by asking students whether they have used the internet for any of the reported political participation practices and the frequency of posting social and political texts or topics on Facebook" (Burean and Bădescu, 2014: 7). The article is relevant for the study of the online activism of the young people and their mobilization in protest participation, showing the relevant role of the Internet and online networks for protest actions.

The importance of the Internet in mobilization was underlined in Donatella Della Porta and Lorenzo Mosca's article „Global-net for Global Movements? A Network of Networks for a Movement of Movements" (2005). The research started from the hypotheses concerning the importance of using the Internet in mobilizing people, the role of the membership in past or present social movements in extending Internet acces, and the fact that those engaged in political activities are encouraged to use CMC (Computer-mediated communication) (Della Porta, Mosca, 2005). The data were collected from two protests events using semi-structured questionnaires: anti-G8 protest in Genoa in July 2001 and the European Social Forum (ESF) in Florence in November 2002. The authors studied the websites of the organisations and took the interviews from the activists. In Genoa, the interviews were taken only from Italian participants, in Florence were included also non- Italians. The paper discussed the instrumental function of the Internet, the authors considering it as „an instrument of protest" (Della Porta, Mosca, 2005), the symbolic function of the Internet and the cognitive function of the Internet.

The research revealed the fact that the Internet are used more frequently by the activits who are members of the movement's networks. Activists use Computer-mediated communication to share the information and attract other people to protests, they are participating in online survey and in signing petitions. An important observation exposed by the authors was that „online activism can replace offline activism, thus becoming just a simulacrum of real protest" (Della Porta, Mosca, 2005: 174-177). The paper underlined that online and offline protests are associated, 'online petitioners being also offline petitioners and boycotters while netstrikers have a more varied (mainly unconventional and radical) offline repertoire of action' (Della Porta, Mosca, 2005: 177).

Another study that showed the correspondence between online and offline activism is Harlow Summer and Dustin Harp's (2011) research about „Collective action on the web". The article „Collective action on the web: A cross-cultural study of social networking sites and online and offline activism in the United States and Latin America" revealed the importance of the SNS (Social networking sites), how activists use SNS for encouraging people to participate in online and offline actions. The study used both quantitatively and qualitatively methods to demonstrate how activists in the United States and Latin America were using SNS and if they were engaging in online and offline activism. The results revealed the fact that SNS are important for informing and mobilizing activists. Most respondents from the two regions used SNS (especially

Facebook and Twitter) to mobilize participants to demonstrations. The research succeeded to demonstrate the importance of the social networking sites and their role for mobilizing online activists in offline actions. Activist's responses revealed the fact that „mostly online activists participate in offline activist actions just as often as those who said their activism occurs mostly offline" (Summer and Harp, 2011: 209) and that online activism must be accompanied by offline activism. The researchers considered that the limitations of the study consist in the fact that „the survey sample is not representative" and the results of the study cannot be generalized. Another observations underlined by the authors were that the future research should be applied for other regions and to be examined a particular activist group and its activism on the SNS, its implications in online and offline activist actions.

In the article „Beyond the online/ offline divide: how youths online and offline civic activities converge", Hirzalla and van Zoonen (2009) tried to investigate how online and offline civic activities coincide in „participation modes". For Hirzalla, participation modes mean activities that complement each other. The hypotheses used in the study refered to the fact that online and offline activities are significant to all age group, but most relevant to young people and young people use the Internet more than older people. The research was based on survey data participation of Dutch youth (15 to 25 years). The analysis were made using online survey managed in October and November 2007 among Dutch youth. The study revealed the fact that youth's offline and online participation correlate and that „online participation is a reflection of offline participation". For the future researches, Hirzalla and van Zoonen proposed an extrapolation of the reasearch to other categories rather than young people.

If Harlow Summer and Dustin Harp reffered mostly to online and offline activism and Hirzalla and van Zoonen (2009) invoked online and offlne activities, Jeroen Van Laer (2010) examined in his article, „Activists online and offline: the Internet as an information channel for protest demonstration" the difference between online and offline activists. The author tried in his research to compare „activists using the Internet and activists not using the Internet as an information channel about an upcoming demonstration" (Van Laer, 2010: 405). The hypotheses used by the author: the difference between online and offline activists, Internet use might depeen the inequalities among activists, activists who participates to protests differ in the way that they found out about uncoming protests, the presence of the activists in formal and informal networks, a positive association between motivational aspects and using the internet. Jeroen Van Laer used „individual-level protest surveys" at the demonstrations that took place in Belgium between February 2006 and December 2007.

The results from the research revealed the fact that is no gender differences regarding the use of the Internet, the activists who found about the demonstration from the Internet are „more highly educated, have more general interest in politics, and have more experience in previous demonstrations" (Van Laer, 2010), the Internet are used by the people who are tied to an organization.

According to the study's results, when someone is 'younger, better educated, is a student or has a job, is more interested in politics, and has more experience in previous demonstrations' (Van Laer, 2010), the probability of consulting the Internet about the future demonstrations increases.

If Jeroen Van Laer's study was about the difference between „online activists" and „offline activists", using a social-psychological perspective, Tom Postmes and Suzzanne Brunsting (2002) examined the influence of the Internet on activism. The authors underlined that „the Internet influences the ability to express behavior and (social) identities by reducing the accountability of users" (Postmes and Brunsting,

2002: 295). The article examined the role of the Internet in activism and concluded that the Internet had a considerable role for collective actions. An interesting remark was that the Internet could „alter the motives of collective actions" (Tom Postmes and Suzzanne Brunsting, 2002) and could alter the social movements because of the „peripheral group members and nonactivists due to the lower thresholds of participation in online actions" (ibidem). Besides the fact that the Internet has a considerable influence on collective actions, especially for those who ideologicaly sympathise with the causes from the Internet like globalization, freedom of speech, climate causes etc., Internet is a forum for debates, creating „communities of thought".

4. Conclusions and discussions

The literature reviewed above answered through different studies to the hypothesis regarding the role of the Internet in mobilizing people in protests. All the researches mentioned in the article underlined the importance of the Internet in the collective actions. The authors cited above demonstrated in their researches that participants in the protest actions were Internet users and, in this way, the Internet has a great influence upon offline actions.

Regarding the connection between online and offline activism, the literature reviewed underlined the association between the two, showing that affiliated people in online networks were also involved in offline protest actions, as Mercea (2012) claimed, the online activities converge with offline activities, as suggested Hirzalla and van Zoonen (2009) or that online activism is a precursor of offline activism, as Harlow Summer and Dustin Harp (2011) concluded. Related to online and offline activism, Jeroen Van Laer's (2010) study and Tom Postmes and Suzzanne Brunsting (2002) research revealed the difference between 'online activists' and 'offline activists' concerning socio-demographic and political attributes, network membership and motivational aspects and the motivations of the activists and nonactivists in online and offline actions.

The studies are interesting, but a dimension less studied is the way online activism emerged (the describing of the social networking sites, the members of the online networks and how these networks are distributed etc.). The distribution of the online networks could show the distribution of protests.

In spite of the well documented researches, the studies are limited to the analyses of the interviews, surveys, websites, ethnographic data, but more studies on the behaviours and perceptions of the activists and their involvment in online medium, but in the same time in physical mobilization remained unexamined topics.

For the future research, it would be interesting to study in what way the collective actions could transform online activism, a reverse study to show if offline activism could influence online activism.

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