

Protest logics and the mediation opportunity structure

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Abstract

This article aims to bridge a gap between social movement studies and media and communication studies. A conceptual framework is presented that integrates the political opportunity structure approach and the logics of contentious action with the concept of mediation. The author argues that mediation opportunity structure is a fruitful concept to encompass a wide variety of ways in which media and communication are relevant to protest and social movements. It refers to mainstream media representations of protest and movements, to movements 'becoming the media' and counter-spinning, as well as to media and communication practices that constitute protest and resistance in their own right. The manifold articulations of mediation illustrate that media and communication are not merely relevant to the symbolic and discursive realms in which social movements operate, but that they are also instrumental and material to realizing their immediate goals. Activists are becoming more aware and conscious of the mediation opportunity structure, through their lay-knowledge of how the mainstream media and technologies operate, partially adapting to them or appropriating them. The nature and degree of mediation opportunities for activists and the structural constraints impeding the opportunities varies according to the type of protest logic that is being used.

Keywords

internet, media representation, mediation, protest, social movement theory

If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution. (Alexander Berkman, paraphrasing Emma Goldman [1869–1940])

Introduction

Just as it is useful for social movement scholars to take notice of and incorporate theories and debates in media and communication studies, it also remains fruitful and necessary, I would argue, to draw upon the social movement literature and engage with it with a

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view to understand current trends in the mediation of protest and the media and communication practices of activists, bridging what Downing (2008: 41) has called the persisting divorce between 'media studies research and theory and research by sociologists, political scientists, and historians'. The aim of this article is therefore to conceptually integrate insights from social movement theories with those from media and communication studies through introducing the concept of 'mediation opportunity structure', which empowers activists, but at the same time also constrains them.

Mediation is a useful, but under-used, concept to capture diverging articulations between media, communication, protest and activism (see Martín-Barbero, 1993; Silverstone, 2002). It enables us to link up various ways in which media and communication are relevant to protest and activism: the framing processes in mainstream media and by political elites, the self-representations by activists, the use, appropriation and adaptation of ICTs by activists and citizens to mobilize for and organize direct actions, as well as media and communication practices that constitute mediated resistance in its own right.

While the process of mediation is dialectical – balancing potential opportunities and structural constraints – it is also asymmetrical and uneven; some actors are more equal than others (Silverstone, 2002: 762). Despite this, mediation does attribute a degree of agency to those resisting, to those watching or using – 'meaning making is an open ended, and an ongoing, process' (Thumim, 2009: 619). Here the double articulation of mediation, as put forward by Silverstone (1994), is useful. Processes of mediation apply just as much to media as a material object with reference to technology and the everyday as it does to the symbolic, the discursive, with reference to Gramsci's ideological war of position (Livingstone, 2007). This double articulation of mediation enables us to consider media and the production of content in conjunction with technology as well as communication strategies and media practices of citizens and activists. In doing so, mediation processes challenge and complicate the analytical distinctions public/private and producer/user by introducing processes of self-mediation and co-production.

There is an urgent need to theorize and encompass the various ways in which media and communication are enabling and constraining for activists and activism in the current ultra-saturated media and communication environment. It is being argued here that combining theories of mediation with social movement theories that assess the opportunities and structural constraints for social movements as well as the logics they attribute to their protest actions, is a fruitful way forward in this regard. First, the concept of opportunity structure will be addressed, which will be followed by an analysis of the different repertoires and logics of contentious action. After this, the mediation opportunity structure will be related to these different protest logics and deconstructed as being comprised of a media opportunity structure, a discursive opportunity structure and a networked opportunity structure.

Opportunity structures

In the social movement literature the concept of 'political opportunity structure' is a very prominent one. It refers to the 'Dimensions of the political environment that provide

incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure' (Tarrow, 1994: 85). It attempts to explain which structural aspects of the external world, outside the control of activists, affect the development and success of social movements (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004). Media and communication usually feature as one of the peripheral factors that influence the degree of political opportunity for a social movement to succeed.

However, some social movement scholars, addressing the role of media and of communication strategies for social movements more in-depth, have implied that some opportunities and structural constraints are inherent to media itself. Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) provided some early insights in this regard. They concluded that social movements are dependent on mainstream media for three interrelated purposes; to mobilize political support, to increase the legitimation and validation of their demands and to enable them to widen the scope of conflict beyond the likeminded. The extent to which movements are able to achieve this and get their message across in the mainstream media or not, their degree of cultural influence in the public sphere, which invokes issues of access to the media, could be described as the media opportunity structure.

Following on from this, the conceptualization of a discursive opportunity structure, analytically semi-separate from the political opportunity structure, has been gaining strength (Ferree et al., 2002). The role of the discursive in protest has been ignored for many years as an important 'medium of social conflict and symbolic struggle' (Koopmans and Statham, 1999: 205). Protest movements are important producers of new ideas and prime agents in contesting old ways of seeing and/or doing things as well as constructing collective identities (Melucci, 1996). A good illustration of the growing importance of discourse in the study of social movements and protest is the increased attention to framing strategies, which are deemed not only relevant for ideological positioning, but also affecting recruitment, mobilization and the degree of action readiness (Benford and Snow, 2000).

Besides this, while not described as such in the literature, we can also discern a networked opportunity structure being invoked since the end of the 1990s. Various studies of political science as well as media and communication scholars, emphasizing the interconnected networked environment in which social movements operate today, addressed the impact of ICTs on the ability of movements to organize and mobilize (transnationally), to recruit, to coordinate actions and to disseminate counter-frames independent from the mainstream media (Bennett et al., 2008; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Surman and Reilly, 2003; van de Donk et al., 2004).

What is being proposed here is to adopt the mediation opportunity structure as an overarching concept, semi-independent from the political opportunity structure, and comprised of the media opportunity structure, the discursive opportunity structure and the networked opportunity structure (see Figure 1). Inevitably the relationship between these three interrelated opportunity structures is circular – they impact on each other in various ways.

The mediation opportunity structure thus allows us to differentiate between different media actors with different forms of organization, adopting various formats and different ideological frames. Furthermore, the mediation opportunity structure is inclusive of

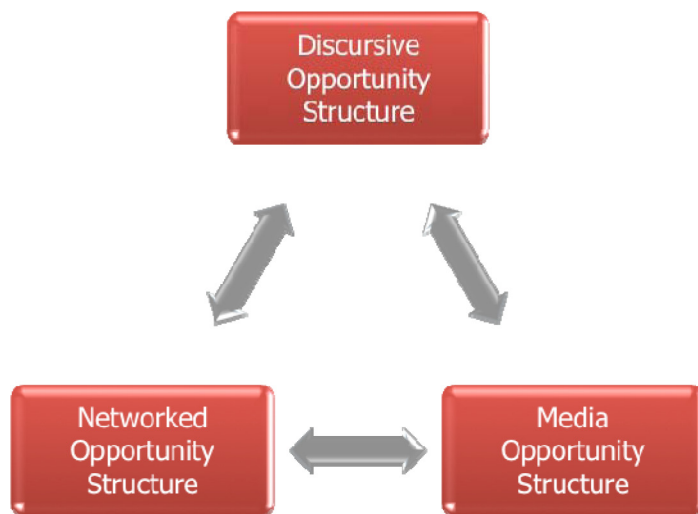


Figure 1. The mediation opportunity structure.

communication strategies of activists in their self-mediation efforts and it also brings the active user and technology as a source of resistance into the picture.

This triad of media and communication related opportunity structures making up the mediation opportunity structure will be fleshed out further by relating mainstream media representation, self-mediation and resistance through technology to the various repertoires and logics of contentious action. First, however, these various repertoires and logics of contentious action will be outlined.

Repertoires and logics of contentious action

Social movement scholars often point out that more political opportunities or legitimacy for certain types of protest leads to activists seizing those opportunities, resulting in an increase in these types of protest (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004). Similarly, it is argued here that activists will assess the mediation opportunity structure in relation to the tactics they employ and to some extent choose a tactic for which the mediation opportunity structure is favourable, or at least consciously choose to contest the limits it imposes. In other words the mediation opportunity structure also has an impact on the available and imaginable repertoire of contentious action, it can even become constitutive of protest.

Repertoires of contentious action are the potential political performances enacted by members of protest movements. It refers as much to the creative imagination of activists and the limitations of the possible at any given moment in time. Tilly (1986: 391–392) delimits two historical periods with distinctly different repertoires of contentious action. The Feudal repertoire of action – prevalent from the mid-17th until the mid-19th century – was characterized by protest actions that were parochial, mocking elite events and often directed at local dignitaries rather than at the higher powers they represented. After that a Modernist repertoire of contentious action emerged, which

was more national in scope and direct actions were organized autonomously from the powers that be (Tilly, 1986: 395). The Modernist repertoire introduced new protest tactics such as strikes, uprisings, riots, rallies, boycotts, sit-ins, marches and mass demonstrations.

Besides identifying further expansions at the level of the available repertoire of contentious action, mainly induced by the networked opportunity structure enabling new forms and a larger scope of resistance, della Porta and Diani (2006: 170) also point to three distinct, but not mutually exclusive, logics that activists ascribe to their protest actions when deciding from the available repertoire of action:

- *Logic of numbers*: mass demonstrations;
- *Logic of damage*: property destruction or large-scale disruptions;
- *Logic of bearing witness*: public performance and civic disobedience.

Mass demonstrations are modes of social performance that, while not being their prime goal, produce a spectacle of numbers – the ‘public space [is] where dissent becomes visible’ (Mitchell and Staeheli, 2005: 798). The 1963 March on Washington DC, the massive anti-nuclear demonstrations in Europe in the 1980s and more recently the 2003 global anti-war demonstrations held simultaneously in over 60 countries with millions of participants, are iconic examples of this.

Mass demonstrations have become highly routinized and police forces have long-standing expertise in managing, disciplining or containing protest events (Mitchell and Staeheli, 2005; Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2001). As predicted by political opportunity theories, the ‘negotiated management model’ (della Porta and Reiter, 1998) referring to states adopting an accommodating strategy towards mass demonstrations within certain limits, has led to an increase in the number of demonstrations in the West in recent decades. For example, Washington DC hosts on average about 1000 demonstrations per year, while Brussels counts between 500 and 600 demonstrations on a yearly basis (Smith et al., 2001; Tormans, 2008).

Despite a strong pacifist non-violent tradition in protest movements, political violence and the logic of damage have historically been instrumental in many struggles for social and cultural change. Democracy itself, it could be argued, is an outcome of sustained political violence by the subordinate classes (Honderich, 1989). The reason for this is that political violence has two interrelated components, its actual use and the threat of its use. The aim of political violence is often to make the threats of violence credible, ultimately pushing elites to implement change (Nieburg, 1962: 865).

While conceptually and morally a clear distinction should be made between violence – directed at people – and damage – directed at property – legally and certainly in its mediated representation and public perception, this distinction is often not made. As a result of this, damage to property is uniformly represented and punished as violence. Keane (2004: 34) calls this ‘the modern bourgeois conviction that violence against things is somehow equivalent to violence against people’. In this article attention will be drawn to political ‘violence’ embedded in a logic of damage to property.

The final protest logic is that of bearing witness to injustice, which ties in more with a Feudal tradition of contentious action focused on the performative, latching onto

elite-staged events or creating your own happening. The non-violent tactic of civic disobedience – ‘knowingly breaking what are considered unjust laws’, consumer ‘buy-cotts’¹ or tactics of ‘symbolic provocation’ – are typical for the logic of bearing witness (della Porta and Diani, 2006: 175). Bearing witness is furthermore relevant as a protest logic in terms of personalizing the political, constructing collective identities and developing bottom-up horizontal structures – semi-autonomous zones to develop alternative lifestyles and values. The logic being that the structural will never change unless the personal changes first.

In what follows, it will become apparent that these three different protest logics – numbers, damage and bearing witness – hold quite distinct opportunities and activists have to overcome different constraints in terms of their mediation opportunity structure.

Protest logics and the mediation opportunity structure

From a mediation perspective, an ultra-saturated media and communication environment provides ample opportunities for activists to resist, to exert their agency, to self-represent themselves and to defy the structural constraints. At the same time, activists also have to take into account these structural constraints inherent to mediation such as a mainly negative bias of mainstream media, a highly volatile public opinion or the limits imposed by technology. At three interlinked levels of analysis the opportunities and constraints in terms of mediation will be explored, each addressing the different logics of action.

The first level of analysis corresponds to the media opportunity structure and relates to the mainstream media representation of protest, focusing on the various ways in which activists attempt to catch the attention of the media mainly by producing spectacle through a show of numbers, through inflicting damage or through bearing witness to injustice. The second level reflects more the discursive opportunity structure and focuses more on strategies of self-mediation geared towards producing counter-narratives and disseminating them independently from the mainstream media organizations. The third and final level that will be addressed here concurs with the networked opportunity structure and addresses resistance practices mediated through technology. This ties the discursive back to action as ICTs increasingly sustain movements, coordinate direct action and have become tools of direct action in their own right.

Media representations

The strategy of accommodation towards mass demonstrations, as briefly described above, is foremost designed to contain and neutralize dissent, leading to the normalization of demonstrations, and ultimately reducing ‘the novelty and disruptiveness of protest’ in general (Oliver and Maney, 2000: 467). The problem for activists, from a mediation perspective, is that ‘as protest becomes less unconventional, it also becomes less noticeable and newsworthy’ (Dalton, 1996: 71). As a result, standard protest and demonstrations receive less and less media attention, unless violence can be reported or when the numbers are really spectacular – hence the frequent contestation of number of protesters between police and organizers.

The type of political violence used by protesters often conforms to the long-standing Anarchist tradition of ‘propaganda by the deed’ (Brousse, 1877). Typically, activists will tend to cosmetically attack symbolic properties and provide spectacle at the fringes of a demonstration. Tilly (2002: 23) denotes this type of public collective violence as ‘dispersed resistance’. By overcoming the fear of state violence, activists enact indirect and small-scale resistance practices geared towards ‘inflicting damage on authorities or inciting violent reprisals from authorities’, and thereby delegitimizing them. A good example of this is the black bloc tactic enacted by militant activists during demonstrations carefully targeting certain brands or interests and provoking violent police reactions (see Figure 2).

Political violence from a mediation perspective is an extreme speech act – a crying out for visibility. Its mediation is inherent to the performativity of resistance without which the political act of damage would have only a minimal impact. It is well documented that the majority of mainstream media, without essentializing them, tend to privilege the frames of the economic and political elites by whom they are owned (Chomsky, 2002; McChesney, 2008). It is being argued that mainstream media uphold liberal and capitalist values and will typically condemn political violence in a democracy. Such a post-Althusserian perspective of the media as being an ideological apparatus dominated by state and capitalist interests and structurally biased against social and protest movements is unsurprisingly also very prevalent in activist circles (McCurdy, 2010). This critique of the ‘biased’ mainstream media concurs with earlier evidence of hostility by the mainstream media towards protest and social movements, certainly when they turn violent.



Figure 2. Black bloc demonstrators at Malcolm X Park, Washington DC, 20 January 2005.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, photo by Ben Schumin.

Halloran et al. (1970) concluded many decades ago that the UK media employ an inferential structure of bias against protest, primarily focusing on incidents of violence rather than on the large majority of peaceful demonstrators, the causes they promote or the messages they try to convey. Gitlin (1980) found similar patterns in the US, as did the Glasgow Media Group in relation to the reporting of UK-based industrial action in the 1980s. Eldridge (1995: 212) argues that what is being presented as neutral reporting is in fact 'an array of codes and practices which effectively rest upon a cultural imperative to hear the causes of disputes in one way rather than another'. Media are, in other words, 'not neutral unselective recorders of events' (Oliver and Maney, 2000: 464).

However, while many mainstream media outlets do conform to the analysis of the critical tradition in media studies, not all mainstream media are at all times docile actors in the service of state and/or capitalist interests, as suggested by the domination and propaganda models. Some mainstream media do at times report favourably on social movements or promote a progressive cause; for example positive representations of the women rights movement or defending an anti-war stance (Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2009; van Zoonen, 1992). Cottle (2008: 855) observes in this regard that:

Much has changed since earlier studies documented how the mainstream news media invariably report protests and demonstrations through a dominant law and (dis)order frame, labelling protesters as deviant, and de-legitimizing their aims and politics by emphasizing drama, spectacle and violence.

The mainstream media are in other words not always exclusively negative towards protest movements and direct action. Furthermore, focusing on the 1999 violent WTO disruption in Seattle, DeLuca and Peeples (2002: 140) even conclude that 'Far from discrediting or drowning out the message of the WTO protesters, the symbolic violence generated extensive media coverage and an airing of the issues.'

Radical protest coalitions are increasingly aware of the need to cope with and manage the media in some way: have spokespersons, issue statements, concede interviews, grant access to journalists, etc. Activists' websites and social network profiles have also become primary sources for the mainstream media looking for a juicy quote or to find out more about a direct action (Lester and Hutchins, 2009). All this has prompted radical activists to set up counter-spin collectives, as documented by McCurdy (2010) in relation to the 2005 G8 protests in Gleneagles (UK). This strategy of partial adaptation to the media logic inevitably creates tensions within radical networks between those that advocate for complete abstention from an autonomous perspective and those that argue for partial adaptation to increase positive exposure (Hewson, 2005: 147–148; Rucht, 2004).

Finally, the logic of bearing witness is also prevalent in many current activist tactics geared towards receiving media attention. This includes the hijacking of elite-staged media events such as the G8 summits or meetings of the WTO, but also the production of DIY media spectacles. Also relevant in this regard is Debord and Wolman's (1956) influential '*Mode d'emploi du détournement*' and the application of their tactic of serious parody in the 1968 Paris student revolt providing a creative inspiration to the punk

DIY-culture in the 1980s, the early hacking ethos, billboard activists in the 1990s and current culture and political jamming techniques aiming to intrude into the mainstream public sphere (Cammaerts, 2007).

Self-mediation

Besides engaging with or attempting 'to hack' the mainstream media, social movements also invest more resources – human, technological as well as financial – into 'being the media' rather than hating it, to paraphrase a slogan of Indymedia. Many activists are aware that 'in techno-industrial culture media become the ground of Being' (DeLuca and Peeples, 2002: 132). The internet provides them with extensive mediation opportunities to inform independently, to debate internally, to link up directly with those interested in their cause in a cost-efficient way, potentially across the time-space continuum (Cammaerts, 2005). Besides this, community radio stations, often nodal points in social movement networks, also became important actors in countering the mainstream framing of movement messages and protest actions, facilitating the process of self-mediation and thereby giving rise to a third type of media, relatively independent from market and state and embedded in civil society networks (Bailey et al., 2008).

Another important facet of the process of self-mediation relates to the production of protest artefacts, which has become much easier and more cost-efficient due to the pervasiveness of digital photo and video recording devices (Baringhorst, 2008: 82–83). This has led protesters to photograph and film what they are seeing and experiencing, subsequently posting everything on social network platforms, sometimes even in real-time, and thereby producing an ever expanding archive of images and self-representations of protest events. The material and permanent nature of these protest artefacts enables symbols and discourses embedded in them to be culturally transmitted on a long-term basis, feeding the struggle and contributing to the construction of a collective memory of protest. In doing so, they effectively become 'epistemic communities' (Lipschutz, 2005), transferring knowledge and potentially influencing other movements through what is called 'movement spillover' (Meyer and Whittier, 1994). The protests in Tunisia spreading to other Arab countries such as Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria is a vivid and recent illustration of this particular mediation opportunity.

The negative perception in Western public opinion towards (political) violence in combination with the negative framing in the mainstream media of the logic of damage as a legitimate protest tactic does not prevent political violence from happening, as the black bloc or the recent student protests throughout Europe show. But the lack of public support in the West for such tactics is clearly a structural constraint which results in conflicts within protest movements concerning the use of cosmetic symbolic violence (DeLuca and Peeples, 2002; Sullivan, 2005). Those acting from a logic of damage serve, according to some, to discredit the legitimacy of the protest by willingly catering to the violent mob frame the media is looking for and eager to over-expose (Donson et al., 2004).

Those promoting insurrectionary violence, however, would claim that genuine direct action inevitably provokes heavy-handed police intervention, showing the true violent

face of liberal democracy, and that some limited and targeted forms of property damage are indeed legitimate forms of resistance in a democracy (Jazz, 2001; K, 2001). In their self-mediation, radical activists will often echo Galtung's (1969) 'structural violence' thesis, as this blogpost from a radical US activist illustrates:

People seem to be caught up on the damage done by the very few protestors. What about the damage that has been done by the police, the military and the G20 countries that have oppressed people all over the world? The real violence and criminal activity is being perpetrated by those countries whose leaders have to meet behind a police fortress to shield themselves from the rage of the people who they continue to rob and oppress. (txwordpounder, 2010: np)

Symbolic acts of cosmetic violence, such as smashing windows of banks, fast food restaurants, retail chains who do not pay taxes or, as was the case in the UK, forcefully occupying and vandalizing the Conservative Party headquarters in December 2010, concur to some extent with the logic of bearing witness as well; a symbolic public performance against perceived injustice embroiled with discourses of civic disobedience, but not really structurally threatening. A few years ago a radical activist coined this type of disruptive resistance as 'working class art' (Jazz, 2001: 96).

Further evidence of the performative nature of the violence is provided from within the social justice movement where the status of radicals, the distinct dress code and the tendency of some radical activists to move through a crowd en bloc are appropriated by other groups without being violent and thus internally subverting the black bloc's public performance. A prime example of this is the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA), founded in 2003 to 'welcome' George W Bush Jr to the UK, but there are



Figure 3. G8 protester in Rostock (2007) asks German police: 'Where is your heart?'

Source: Wikimedia Commons, photo by Salvatore Barbera.

others as well such as the pink fairies or the Tute Bianchi/WOMBLES² movement (Sullivan, 2005). By dressing up as clowns in army uniforms, as fairies or in white overalls, they not only take the performativity of protest to the extreme, but also critique the performative nature of the elite meetings and of the police deployment that accompanies them (see Routledge, 2005; and Figure 3).

In doing so, groups like CIRCA also aim to 'bring the personal back into the centre of radical political action' (Kolonel Klepto and Major Up Evil, 2005: 247). They deploy a strategy called tactical frivolity, which according to *Rhythms of Resistance*, a samba band responsible for providing a party atmosphere at many demonstrations, 'exists in the gap between total compliance and violent confrontation'³ through symbolic provocation.

The mediation of tactical frivolity and bearing witness often depends more on self-mediation through movement media, on alternative lifestyles and on the construction of collective identities than it does on mainstream media exposure, which as argued earlier tends to focus on the spectacular symbolic acts of violence and those that act from a logic of damage.

Resistance through technology

As pointed out earlier, various studies concluded that the internet as an information and communication infrastructure produced an impetus in terms of facilitating the organization of and mobilization for protest, especially at a transnational level. An over-emphasis on the internet as a platform, however, tends to obscure the importance and increased use of mobile technologies and text messaging to facilitate, organize and coordinate protest (Hermanns, 2008).

In recent years, market-based social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have emerged as powerful tools for activists and movements to distribute counter-narratives and to facilitate mass mobilization; a potent example of the social shaping of technology (Kavada, 2010). During the UK student protests of 2010, commercial platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Google Maps were used extensively by protesters to mobilize and to keep track of police movements and to avoid being 'kettled' or contained (see Gardham, 2010; and Figure 4).

The pervasiveness of handheld cameras in the hands of protesters also enables so-called *sousveillance* tactics – surveilling the surveillers or bottom-up surveillance by the citizen/activist on the state or public figures. *Sousveillance* is the result of what Mathiesen (1997) calls the synoptic viewer society, the many watching the few. Filming and photographing police behaviour during demonstrations is mainly employed as a counter-tactic to expose police violence, as was the case in the wake of the 2010 student protests in London when footage emerged of unnecessary police brutality towards Jodi McIntyre, a protester who got pulled out of his wheel chair twice. In this regard, YouTube is used extensively by protesters to post their own visual narratives.⁴

Communication practices by activists are, however, not merely limited to the use of media and communication as discursive weapons, nor can the use of ICTs by activists be reduced to mere facilitators of protest in the offline world, ICTs have also become instruments of direct action in their own right, as hactivist tactics or even the Free and Open

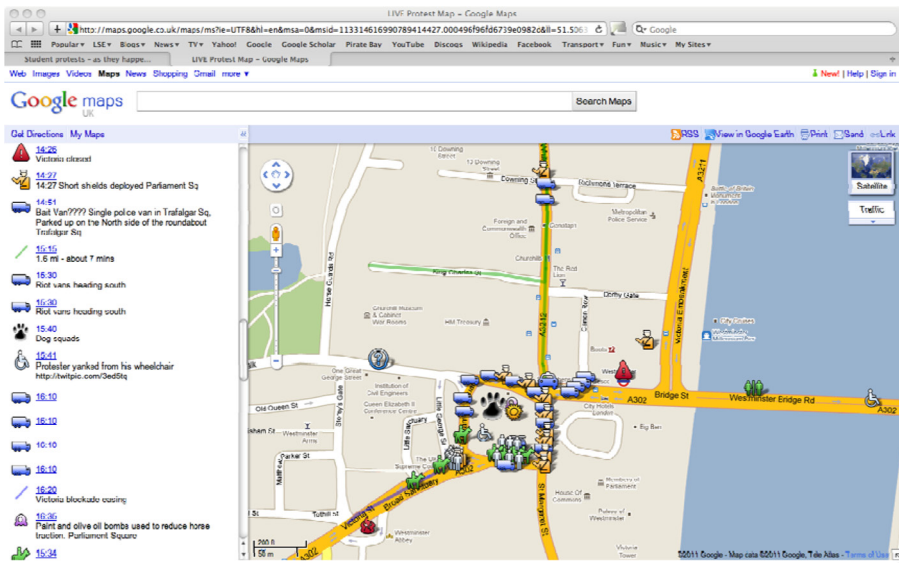


Figure 4. Live protest map on Google Maps, 9 December 2010.

Source: Google Maps.

Source Movement demonstrate (Jordan and Taylor, 2004; Söderberg, 2007). The hacker collective Anonymous is a very recent example of this. Through 'Distributed Denial of Service' (DDoS) attacks they targeted organizations such as the Church of Scientology, but also state and corporate actors to protest against the clampdown on WikiLeaks (BBC, 2010). Twitter recently closed the account of Anonymous called #Anon_Operation.⁵ Hence, the WikiLeaks/Anonymous case also exposes serious structural constraints to the over-reliance of (radical) protest movements on market-based internet or mobile platforms. These platforms are not secure and the companies that run them can for whatever reason decide to close down an account, delete the content, withhold funds and/or violate the privacy of their users.

While some of these ICT-mediated resistance practices clearly pertain to the logic of damage, others can also be situated in the logic of bearing witness. For example, some internet-mediated mobilization practices enable more passive forms of engagement and participation, which some critique as click- or slacktivism (Morozov, 2009). The organization Avaaz.org is such an example, mobilizing millions of global citizens around a variety of causes. Similarly, Facebook's iLike option is also increasingly used by social movements to garner support, construct collective identities and connect directly with potential sympathizers (Kavada, 2010).

These forms of internet-mediated participation through organizations such as Avaaz.org or the iLike button in Facebook could be seen as insignificant or as a too easy way of pledging support for something without actually engaging actively. Despite this, clicktivism is highly relevant in terms of mediation and seems to resonate with many citizens who often fail to make time in their everyday lives for 'active' activism. From this perspective, such forms of internet-mediated resistance bearing witness to injustice do contribute to the building of collective identities and global awareness.

Conclusion

The mediation opportunity structure for protest movements and activists cannot be separated from the wider political and economic opportunity structures – they are clearly enmeshed with each other, but there certainly is a case to be made for the distinct nature of the mediation opportunity structure as not only facilitative or instrumental, but also constitutive of direct action. It both enables and closes down opportunities for resistance and activists increasingly take this into account when surveying their repertoire of contentious action. In Table 1 an overview is provided of the opportunities and constraints identified in the analysis above.

Table 1. The mediation opportunity structure and protest logics.

	Numbers	Damage	Witnessing
Media representation	<i>Opportunities:</i> The spectacle of numbers Media management <i>Constraints:</i> Normalization Lack of media interest Internal resistance against media	<i>Opportunities:</i> Attracts media attention A demonstration of seriousness <i>Constraints:</i> Liberal condemnation Loss of public support	<i>Opportunities:</i> Producing media spectacles Invading the media structures <i>Constraints:</i> Ritualistic Becoming part of the elite event Co-optation
Self-mediation	<i>Opportunities:</i> Producing counter-narratives and -frames Archiving protest artefacts Potential for movement spillover <i>Constraints:</i> Lack of resonance of counter-frames Speaking to public sphericules	<i>Opportunities:</i> Deeds that speak Making resistance real and credible <i>Constraints:</i> Internal conflicts Risk of repression and escalation	<i>Opportunities:</i> Mocking elites and elite spectacles Constructing collective identities Promoting alternative lifestyles <i>Constraints:</i> Inward-looking Little direct engagement with formal politics
Resistance through technology	<i>Opportunities:</i> Recruitment Mobilization <i>Constraints:</i> Digital and skills divides Transferring online to offline	<i>Opportunities:</i> Hacking Coordination of militant action <i>Constraints:</i> Dependency on market-based online platforms Digital footprints	<i>Opportunities:</i> Sousveillance Clicktivism <i>Constraints:</i> Contributing to the panopticism of society Minimal participation Weak ties

Regarding mainstream media, the mediation opportunity structure is to a large extent determined by the degree of openness or hostility of the mainstream media towards a protest movement. Mainstream media predominantly tend to focus on violence and on the spectacular rather than the message that is being conveyed, such as the structural journalistic routines (DeLuca and Peeples, 2002; Donson et al., 2004). Activists and movements, however, do not remain passive to this structural impediment, but actively develop strategies of agency, drawing upon their lay-knowledge of how the media operate and how technology can be appropriated; they 'counter-spin' (McCurdy, 2010). Others will take this even further and attempt to hack into or permeate the mainstream media sphere. The structural constraints here are manifold and vary; they include a lack of media interest because of the normalization of protest and a too exclusive focus on violent direct action, resulting in a loss of public support. Internally there is the danger of conflicts regarding the use of violence and the degree of accommodation to the media logic.

Lay-knowledge of how the media operate and (new) media savvy also serve to distribute oppositional discourses through independent channels of communication, activating processes of self-mediation. This is most apparent in the self-representations of protesters, producing counter-narratives to mainstream representations, contributing to a global archive of protest artefacts and constructing collective identities through connecting the personal to the political. Processes of self-mediation tend to be more inward looking, providing justification for certain actions and celebrating resistance. Here the main structural constraint situates itself in the danger of communicating to a small and marginalized public without paying any attention to foster upward channels of communication to the formal democratic system (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993: 116).

However, the networked opportunity structure has greatly enhanced the opportunities for activists to communicate beyond the likeminded, not only in terms of distributing alternative discourses and thus contributing to the construction of (global) collective identities, but also in facilitating offline protest and building offline networks and connections. Mobile technologies and the internet, including commercial social networking platforms, have become potent tools in the mobilization for and organization of offline protest. Besides this, the tactic of *sousveillance* as well as disruptive hacktivist strategies aimed at market-actors, political elites and the mainstream media represent forms of ICT-mediated resistance that constitute in themselves a form of direct action. Some of these mediated resistance practices also enable publics that are not that politically active or much engaged in offline direct actions to express their support or donate money.

The constraints here evidently relate to the many divides in access to the internet and social networking sites, and to divides in media/digital literacies. There are also challenges in terms of transferring online engagement into offline action. Furthermore, as recent cases like WikiLeaks and Anonymous show there is an inherent danger to an over-reliance on commercial online platforms, certainly for those actors within protest movements that adopt the logic of damage or at least a confrontational attitude towards capitalism and elite power. Resistance through technology also potentially contributes to the expansion of the surveillance society whereby everybody is watching everybody and it may also seem to promote minimal forms of political participation without many political consequences.

It is not possible to unpack all the intricacies of the mediation opportunity structure model in the scope of one article. As such, this is also an invitation to build on this and deepen this concept further. It is, for instance, not entirely clear what an ultra-saturated media and communication environment is doing to activist identities, to their understanding of what their repertoire for contentious action is, and it is also inconclusive what the precise consequences of all this are for democratic and participatory civic cultures (Dahlgren, 2009). Furthermore, one crucial aspect of mediation is under-developed and needs to be articulated further, namely the relationship between the mediation of protest performances and audiences/publics. We urgently need a more detailed understanding of how protest and its mediation is received and decoded in different ways by increasingly fragmented populations; those in whose name protest is often staged. As Silverstone (2006: 42) put it, mediation is,

... not just a matter of what appears on the screen, but is actually constituted in the practices of those who produce the sounds and images, the narratives and the spectacles, as well as, crucially, those who receive them.

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Notes

1. Examples of this are fair trade products or product Red addressing AIDS, see: www.fairtrade.org.uk/ and www.joinred.com/red/ (accessed 25 May 2011).
2. White Overalls Movement Building Libertarian Effective Struggles.
3. See: www.rhythmsofresistance.co.uk/?lid=116 (accessed 25 May 2011).
4. Foreexamples from the 2010 UK student protests, see: www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUHzSQgayXY or www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCFRGXQoqY (accessed 25 May 2011).
5. See: twitter.com/#!/Anon_Operation (suspended on 8 December 2010).

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