

Chapter 15

Rise and Fall of Digital Activism in Mexico From 2000–2019

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ABSTRACT

Political activism is more alive than ever. After the scandal of Facebook and Cambridge Analytica, online social media platforms restricted the distribution of content to privacy laws. But populism disruption in many countries fosters political discontent. Online protests and everyday claims are rising. Add to this context environmental problems and an absence of an ideological framework. All these conditions foster the use of digital activism. But this field of research has studied single cases, losing connections with societies and history. The aim of this chapter is to explain the evolution of digital activism in a long period of time. To achieve such purpose, the author analyzes 11 Mexican events that took place from 2000 to 2019 and provide a classification framework to understand how digital activism transforms over time.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of populism around the world creates new opportunities to use digital networks in order to promote other values and ideas. Donald Trump's victory in 2016 rose a new kind of citizenship in the U.S.; Brexit in the United Kingdom fostered a new kind of polarization and questions about the PM's power. In France, the yellow vest protest is alive without a known leadership and integrates people and groups from different conditions with a common goal and a common tool: social media.

The evolution of political activism in the XXI century is moving fast into an uncertain path. The use of social media in elections has been restricted. The strongest limitation was the European Union GDPR act that enforced all social media platforms to care about personal data and restricted their use. Secondly, Facebook, after the Cambridge Analytics scandal, limited its third-party publication functions and identified bad behavior users restricting them. The same thing happened with WhatsApp and Instagram, which also limited their publication to different groups and users.

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YouTube, Pinterest, and Twitter were also restricted to post messages and the use of privacy policies. All of these tools, regularly used by cyberactivism, are changing. New ways of interaction and engagement need to be built in order to continue with digital activism.

Digital activism is not new in Mexico. The Sub-comandante Marcos, speaker of the Zapatista's Liberation Army (EZLN in Spanish), introduced a novel weapon in the political sphere: the use of Internet. In 1994, just a few years after the world wide web was commercially born, the Zapatista uprising, sent its political manifesto to different newspapers and stream media across the globe using the email (Garrido, & Halavais, 2003). The diffusion of this message and the worldwide attention it caused, created an invisible shield of the movement that allowed it to present its demands and block the Mexican government from sending the military and causing a bath of blood in Chiapas.

Since then, Mexico's cyberactivism has been evolving. This chapter aims to investigate this evolution along with different phases and extract their contribution to build current digital activism. The question that leads this investigation is: How have emerging technologies built digital activism in Mexico since 1994 up to date? In order to answer this question, I stepped into this journey, analyzing eleven different events in the last 25 years.

This chapter contains six sections. The first section includes this introduction; the second one describes a literature review of the evolution of the digital activism concept; the third section presents the used method; the fourth describes events of digital activism from 2000 - 2012; the fifth describes events of digital activism from 2012 - 2019. The last section presents the conclusion.

BACKGROUND

The new political battleground is political activism. Traditional politics on the streets and public buildings are evolving into social media platforms and the more frequent use of YouTube, WhatsApp, or Instagram. The strange combination of politics online and politics offline is changing the scope of political relations around the globe.

At different levels, each country deals with its own political activism. Some are still using stream media; some others prefer social media. The problem of dealing with all of these changes is that they are happening simultaneously and very fast.

The purpose of this section is intended to study the evolution of political activism and cyberactivism through their theoretical frameworks and different scholars. Here we can find three subsections: political activism, slacktivism, and cyberactivism, which transforms into digital activism.

Political Activism

Defining political activism is a challenging task in this era. Activism is usually considered a preliminary step to create social change. It is used to change the world. Activism implies a broad concept and needs to include actions to impede social, economic or environmental change (Internet Activism, 2012). Another concept refers to groups of people acting together to achieve a common goal. Thus, this could be analyzed using the collective action theory by Olson (1971). He stated that people share interests and will act in collaboration to achieve them. Tarrow (2011) considered social movements to become collective actions based on the collective challenge, common purpose, social solidarity, and sustained interactions.

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