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INTERNET AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT ACTION REPERTOIRES

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Opportunities and limitations

The Zapatista uprising, which started in 1994, and the 'Battle of Seattle' in 1999 are but two iconic examples that are so often used to illustrate how the internet has shaped and is shaping social movements and the tactics they use to pursue their claims. In this article, the authors present the 'state-of-the-art' literature on action repertoires of social movements in an internet age. The article builds a strong case in favour of the internet as it has given social movements new and improved opportunities to engage in social and political action. At the same time, a naïve internet-optimism is avoided, by pointing out several limitations. There is the 'classical' problem of digital divide. In some cases, the internet has made collective action still not easy enough, while in others it has made it perhaps too easy reducing the final political impact of a certain action. In addition, it seems that the new media are loosing their newness quickly, and more fundamentally are unable to create stable ties between activists that are necessary for sustained collective action. With the internet, social movements have not become a more powerful force in society. But, as political and economical power has gradually moved to the international level, the internet has enabled social movements to follow that transition and operate more globally.

Keywords   internet; social movements; action repertoires

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Introduction

A notable feature of recent public engagements with the internet is its use by a wide range of activists and groups engaging in social and political protest. The internet is not only said to greatly facilitate mobilization and participation in traditional forms of protest, like national street demonstrations, but also to give these protests a more transnational character by effectively and rapidly diffusing communication and mobilization efforts. The uprising of the Zapatista movement

in 1994 is a case in point (see among many others: Cleaver 1998; Ronfeldt & Arquilla 1998; Schulz 1998; Martinez-Torres 2001; Olesen 2004). Started as a local rebellion, struggling for more rights and autonomy for the indigenous people of Chiapas in the rainforest of southern Mexico, their cause rapidly gained momentum thanks to a vast growing, global network of support that successfully linked the local Zapatista rebellion with many other local and international struggles against neoliberal globalization. The internet was decisive to the global diffusion of protest and solidarity. Another frequently used example of how the internet shapes social movement tactics and actions is the anti-WTO mobilizations in Seattle in late 1999 (e.g. Eagleton-Pierce 2001; Smith 2001; Jordan & Taylor 2004; Van Aelst & Walgrave 2004; Juris 2005). By means of the open network of the internet, a diverse range of activists, groups and social movement organizations could loosely knit together and coalesce in coordinated actions against the WTO summit both offline, in the streets, as well as online, in cyberspace.

Although the precise contribution of the internet is hard to establish, these examples show that the internet has given civil society new tools to support their claims. In this article, we will document *how the internet has shaped and is shaping the collective action repertoire of social movements pursuing social and political change*. Two main suggestions can be identified in the literature: on the one hand, internet facilitates and supports (traditional) offline collective action in terms of organization, mobilization and transnationalization and, on the other hand, creates new modes of collective action. The internet has indeed not only supported traditional offline social movement actions such as the classical street demonstrations and made them more transnational, but is also used to set up new forms of online protest activities and to create online modes of existing offline protest actions.[1] By doing so, the internet has expanded *and* complemented today's social movement 'repertoire of collective action' (Tilly 1984; McAdam *et al.* 2001). Virtual activities may range from online petitions and email bombings, virtual sit-ins to hacking the websites of large companies, organizations or governments.

Before we elaborate on the role of the internet, we will define what we mean by social movements and their action repertoire. Social movements, following Diani (1992), can be defined as 'networks of informal interaction between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict on the basis of a shared collective identity' (Diani 1992, p. 13). Their 'repertoire of collective action' is, as Tilly (1984) originally pointed out, the 'set of means that are effectively available to a given set of people' and which they use to act collectively in order to make claims on individuals and groups (see also McAdam *et al.* 2001; Taylor & Van Dyke 2004). The repertoire of actions supported and/or created online, we scrutinize in this article thus are *collective* undertakings, either in terms of participants or in terms of outcome. The action repertoire of social movements is as broad as there are social movements and activists, goals and causes, claims and grievances. Here we explicitly focus

on what has been termed 'unorthodox' or 'unconventional' political behaviour (Marsh 1977; Barnes & Kaase 1979): those actions and tactics that, on the one hand, are 'performed' on the non-institutional side of politics, outside the realm of conventional or orthodox political participation (i.e. voting, being a member of a political party, lobbying), and on the other hand, do not equal severe political crime like terrorism or guerrilla warfare (Marsh 1977, p. 42).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: in the next section, we will elaborate on a typology of the 'new' repertoire of collective action. This section is the largest part of this contribution, since we will extensively illustrate our typology with numerous examples that can be found in the literature. This section thus provides evidence of the actual *possibilities* thanks to the internet. In a subsequent section, we will then discuss important *limitations* about the use of the internet and the impact of this new medium on social movement's action repertoire as well as on its democratizing potential at large. We wrap up with a discussion and conclusion section.

A typology of a new digitalized action repertoire

The typology we present is pretty straightforward and centres around two related dimensions: first of all, there is the distinction between 'real' actions that are supported and facilitated by the internet, and 'virtual' actions that are internet-based (Gurak & Logie 2003; Vegh 2003). Both the 'old' repertoire, supported by the internet, and the 'new' or modified online tactics concatenate in a new 'digitalized' social movement repertoire of collective action. Second, we introduce a classic dimension that makes a distinction between tactics with low and high thresholds and show how the internet may have lowered action-related barriers. Figure 1 presents a broad overview of both dimensions and a selection of different types of actions used or supported by social movements. Before supporting this typology with examples, both dimensions will be discussed within the broader social movement literature.

Dimension 1: internet-supported versus internet-based

Our first dimension distinguishes between 'old' and 'new' forms of collective action. We call these new forms 'internet-based' because they exist only because of the internet. Internet-supported actions refer to the traditional tools of social movements that have become easier to organize and coordinate thanks to the internet. This *facilitating function*, lowering tactic-related thresholds and making traditional protest action more transnational, will be further discussed as part of the second dimension. This first dimension highlights more the internet's *creative function* of new and modified tactics expanding the action toolkit of social movements. This increase of available tactics online has pushed
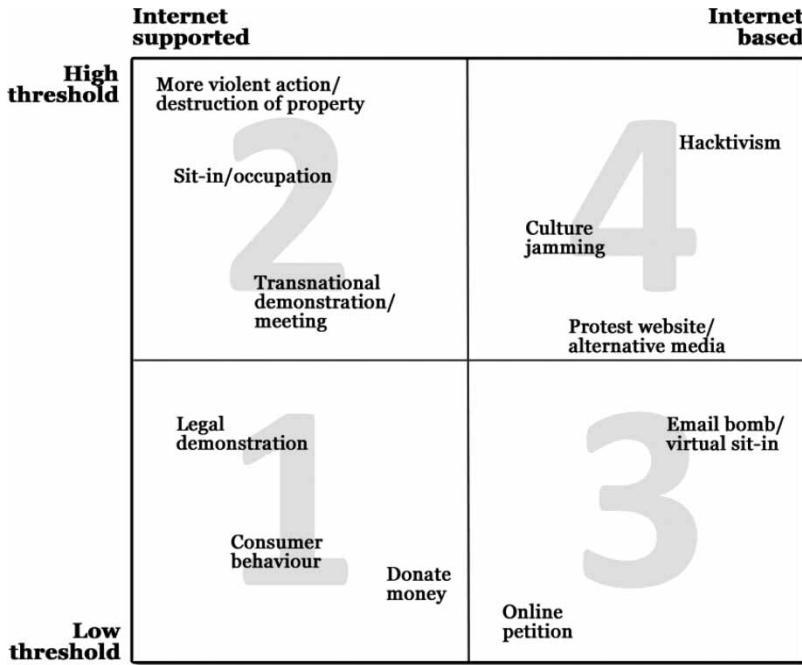
FIGURE 1   A typology of a new digitalized action repertoire.

some scholars to speak of an additional 'repertoire of electronic contention' (Constanza-Chock 2003; Rolfe 2005). These can be tactics, for instance, directed towards the online presence or activities of particular groups, governments or companies pinning down their servers. Some of these tools such as the email petition can be seen as an extension of an existing protest technique, and are therefore placed closer to the 'internet-supported' side of the continuum. The same holds true for other action forms such as culture jamming, which illustrates that the distinction between internet-based and internet-supported actions is subtle and permeable. Moreover, the distinction is further blurred since action groups almost never use just one single tactic, but instead draw on a myriad of tactics both offline and online. The research of Breindl (2010) illustrates that even 'digitally correct activists' (cf. Jordan & Taylor 2004) that fight against limitations of free internet use, sometimes take to the street to support their online actions and show they represent 'real' people. And likewise offline actions today are almost always accompanied with tactics online. Some scholars even make a strong case to completely abandon the sharp distinction between the online and offline worlds, since both spheres are heavily interdependent (Bimber 2000).

The development and expansion of the action repertoire can be seen as a mere result of the technological evolution that has given the civil society more sophisticated opportunities for their actions. However, as Tilly (2004a, p. 104) contends: 'Neither in communications nor in transportation, did the

technological timetable dominate alterations in social movement organization, strategy and practice. Shifts in the political and organizational context impinged far more directly and immediately on how social movements worked than did technological transformations' (Tilly 2004a, p. 104). In the last decades an important 'repertoire shift' occurred from the national to the transnational level provoked by the increased influence that multinational corporations and global trade regimes have over national policy and regulatory decisions (Tilly 2004a; Ayres 2005). An impressive body of literature has started to deal with how the locus of (economic and political) power has shifted to a transnational and even global level, and consequently social movement strategies and actions (e.g. Smith *et al.* 1997; della Porta *et al.* 1999; Clark 2003; Bandy & Smith 2005; della Porta & Tarrow 2005). And a prominent tool in this tactical but necessary reorganization is the internet (Bennett 2003; Ayres 2005). In addition, some scholars point to the transition to a more complex, global information-based society that almost logically shaped the context for new forms of online activism (Jordan & Taylor 2004). Still, the shift towards new internet-based actions and tactics relying on the internet has not resulted in the replacement of the old action forms, but rather complemented them. The existing tools are still used, and probably more than ever, as the internet contributes to lowering participation thresholds. This will be explained in our second dimension.

Dimension 2: low versus high thresholds

Since scholars have started to investigate different forms of actions, they have noticed a 'hierarchy of political participation' (Marsh 1977; Barnes & Kaase 1979; Dalton 1996). Some action forms entail more risk and higher commitment than other tactics, thus providing lower and higher thresholds for people to (consider to) participate (McAdam 1986; Tarrow 1998). Tarrow (1998), for instance, makes a distinction between conventional protest tactics, disruptive tactics and violent tactics. Earlier, Barnes and Kaase (1979) have ranked political actions according to their 'intensity' (moderate versus militant), while Klandermans (1997) made a typology based on 'low effort' and 'high effort'. Asking people how much they approved or disapproved with a certain tactic, Marsh (1977) ranked different social movement tactics with low thresholds (signing petitions, legal demonstrations) to high thresholds (illegal demonstrations, violent action). Collom (2003) has put this logic of an 'activism hierarchy' to the test and found empirical evidence that people engaging in unconventional political activity with higher intensity (e.g. demonstrations) were most likely to have already participated in low-intensity forms of actions, like signing petitions. This 'hierarchy of (offline) political participation' of course can be easily attributed to online tactics as well, with no or marginal thresholds towards signing an online petition and much higher thresholds when dealing with particular forms of online activism, like denial-of-service (DoS) tactics. Postmes and

Brunsting (2002), for instance, made a comparable distinction between 'persuasive' (like email petitions) and 'confrontational' (like virtual sit-ins) online tactics, the latter entailing higher risks and thus higher thresholds.

The reasons why social movements may or may not use a particular action form, or why individual people decide to participate in a particular action form, are manifold. They might feel, for instance, unfamiliar with a specific tactic, or think some kind of action is inefficient to obtain the goals put forward and other means should be used instead. This 'tactical question' is critical for social movements, and entails both instrumental (costs) as well as identity or ideological considerations (Ennis 1987; Jasper 1997). A pacifist group, for instance, will not opt for more violent forms of actions, even as this would be more effective to gain media visibility. One crucial variable we will focus on here, however, is the practical participation costs inherent to a particular action form, thus, the amount of *resources* needed to engage in a particular tactic (e.g. time, money and skills). These costs also refer to *potential* costs, like the costs related to getting arrested. For instance, signing petitions can be considered a tactic entailing negligible costs, because of minimal commitment and risk, thus consisting of a low participation threshold. But in order to participate in a street demonstration, you need some spare time, maybe money to pay your travelling expenses and you might risk a violent confrontation with police forces. Here, thresholds to participate are obviously much higher.

The reason why we focus on these practical participation *costs* is because of the internet's principal potential is to reduce the 'transaction costs' for groups and activists organizing, mobilizing and participating in collective action (Bonchek 1995; Naughton 2001). Technically, with its global architecture, the internet allows for collaboration and participation beyond time and space constraints. As a many-to-many medium it stimulates diffusion of ideas and issues on an unprecedented scale, significantly reducing mobilization costs of social movement actors. Moreover, defining social movements as 'sustained interactions' (see higher) communication is key, which in turn explains the internet's attractiveness as a tool for social movements to overcome often limited available resources (van de Donk *et al.* 2004).

Although the internet can resolve participation thresholds common to particular action forms, it certainly creates new ones too. Especially regarding hacktivist tactics special skills might be acquired to be even able to engage. We will come back to this as we discuss the limitations of internet use on action repertoires. First we illustrate the various possibilities of the internet as a new space for social movement tactics, and lowering participation thresholds of existing tactics.

The 'digitalized' action repertoire: a snapshot of possibilities

In the next section, we will support our typology by giving multiple examples of how the internet created new or facilitated old action forms. The four quadrants depicted in Figure 1 will structure the discussion of these cases.

Quadrant 1: internet-supported action with low thresholds

In almost all Western democracies, traditional forms of collective actions such as legal demonstrations have become quite 'normal' as ever more people participated or used them (Norris *et al.* 2005). This success can be related to their limited thresholds, but as we will show the internet has made them even easier and more accessible. The same holds true for more post-modern forms of 'individualized collective action' such as conscious consumer behaviour.

Donation of money.   Donating money is a way of active participation that involves no risk or commitment, only money (and sometimes even no money at all). Garrett (2006) sees great opportunities with the internet for this particular kind of action. Before the internet, Garrett contends, coordination costs largely outweighed the benefits of small contributions. With the internet, organizations can now 'more effectively pool small-scale acts of support' by using click-and-give websites (Garrett 2006, p. 206). A well-known example is The Hunger Site that initially promoted food programmes by asking people to click on a button and watch a new page with different ads from the site's sponsors. The Hunger Site guarantee that 100 per cent of the money of these sponsors directly goes to their charity partners. So there is not a penny of donation money involved from the participant itself. After two years of operation, the site reached a stunning 198 million donations. The Hunger Site now has several other projects like The Breast Cancer Site, where you can click and give free mammograms, or The Rainforest Site where you can click and protect endangered habitat.

Consumer behaviour.   Consumer behaviour as an action form is today perhaps most strongly related to the Fair Trade Movement although the history of the consumer movement has a much richer history than we can possibly describe here. For these movements, the internet provides important new assets to be exploited. If you intend to boycott certain products or to buy specific food or clothes for ethical or political reasons, you need to be knowledgeable about different alternatives. The internet offers clear advantages in terms of information dissemination. A very young but successful example is the US-based fair trade organization World of Good, Inc. (Krier 2008). It has initiated a web-based tool which allows producers and buyers to calculate a 'fair' minimum wage of their product. Some organizations, like Greenpeace, offer online modules to compare products and producers in terms of sustainability. As such, the internet lowers the thresholds for many potential conscious consumers to effectively buy specific fair trade or ecological products.

Legal protest demonstrations.   Social movement organizations wanting to mobilize for a mass street demonstration make extensive use of the internet

to enhance coordination and mobilization efforts (Van Laer 2010). This concerns mainly the distribution of information, both about the reasons and goals of the action, as more strategic information concerning the action itself. Via the internet, organizations provide detailed information on time, place and perhaps even a practical field guide for activists to 'inform people on how to organize, on their rights and how to protect themselves from harm' as was the case during the FTAA (Free Trade Agreement of the Americas) protests in Quebec city, 2001. This lengthy document took activists by the hand and guided them through all the obstacles to effective participation (Van Aelst & Walgrave 2004). During the Seattle WTO protests, a main rallying point was the StopW-TORound distribution list, which enabled subscribers to receive detailed information on different aspects of the WTO (George 2000). A recent study among diverse types of demonstrations (like trade unions, anti-war, immigrant rights, but also right-wing mobilizations) showed how activists use the internet to cross movement and protest issue boundaries thereby significantly increasing their mobilization potential (Walgrave et al. 2008). The processes of 'brokerage' and 'diffusion' these authors describe are important mechanisms that in cyberspace do not stop at national boundaries either, making every mobilization call in theory inherently transnational. Carty's (2002) account of various anti-sweatshop movements offers a good example. She describes how groups like the NGO Global Exchange provide complete campaign starter kits via their website to organize rallies and demonstrations. In October 1997, this strategy resulted in more than 84 communities in 12 different countries demonstrating simultaneously outside of Nike retailers (Carty 2002, p. 135). These several 'national' demonstrations are thus transnationally linked via their similar cause and tactical choice. In another study, Fisher et al. (2005) show how, in the case of five Global Justice demonstrations (mostly directed against the powerful economic institutions such as the World Bank and the G8), the internet was successfully used by social movement organizations to connect domestically grounded activists to transnational struggles, thereby spurring local, large-scale protest events. For the UK anti-war movement, Gillan (2009) even found that only on the internet there was something of a 'transnational experience', while the movement's offline reality was more internally divided because of its political diversity as well as restricted to the national level. We provide a more extensive discussion about the internet's transnationalization function in the following section on transnational social movement demonstrations and meetings.

Quadrant 2: internet-supported action with high threshold

In this second quadrant, we discuss action forms that have been used before but have far higher thresholds, both legally and practically. It concerns transnational demonstrations and meetings, and more obstructive action forms such as

sit-ins and (street) blockades. Again we believe the internet can lower the practical barriers by facilitating the organization and coordination of these events.

Transnational demonstrations.   We started this article with reference to the Zapatista movement and the so-called 'Battle of Seattle', two well-known moments of transnational mobilization. A more recent example was the worldwide protest against the imminent war in Iraq on February 15, 2003. On that day, several million people took to the streets in more than 60 different countries around the world. Several authors have shown that this protest event would not likely have been as massive and diverse without the coordinating and mobilizing capacity of the internet (Vasi 2006; Bennett *et al.* 2008; Gillan *et al.* 2008; Verhulst 2010). Van Laer (2009) contends that the internet was especially conducive in terms of 'mesomobilization', which is the efforts of groups and organizations to coordinate and integrate other groups, organizations and networks for protest activities (Gerhards & Rucht 1992, p. 558). In a historical comparison of three eras of peace and anti-war mobilization, his research showed how several face-to-face international meetings each time served as the principal basis for coordination and collaboration, but that on the advent of the second war in Iraq in 2003, the internet was fundamental in 'spreading the fire', bringing the call for a global day of action on an unprecedented worldwide scale, among hundreds of other national anti-war networks and social movement organizations, with a speed and efficiency that was not possible before (Van Laer 2009).

However, we should notice that this event was transnational because all around the world people took the streets for the same reasons, but that the event was hardly transnational on the individual level (see further). Perhaps this might be one reason that 'global days of actions' appear to be on the rise as a tactic of transnational activists (Tilly 2004a). Thanks to internet technology activists who do not need to be in the same geographical location to protest against, for instance, climate change, but can link their dispersed protest actions effectively online. This may well lead to Wellman's (2002) the so-called 'glocalization' of communities, meaning the combination of intense local and extensive global interaction.

Transnational meetings.   Instrumental advantages of the internet have also been well documented in the case of transnational social movement meetings and summits, especially those of the Global Justice Movement. Recurrent key events of the Global Justice Movement, for instance, are the various Social Forums they organize both on a global level (the World Social Forum), the regional level (e.g. European Social Forum) and even the national and local level. In his study on the second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (Brazil), Schönleitner (2003) found that the internet was a major tool for mobilization and organization for this kind of event: the registration of the delegates and

the planning of workshops were achieved through the web; email bulletins keep delegates and others updated; and almost all internal communication and external liaison has been done via the internet and mobile phones. Without the internet, the WSF would hardly be possible in its current form (Schönleitner 2003, p. 130). Kavada (2006) showed how the use of mailing lists contributed to an effective division of labour, spurring deliberative coordination and discussion on the advent of the third European Social Forum in London. Finally, a study by Van Laer (2007) empirically addressed the importance of the internet as a tool that allowed activists participating in the fourth European Social Forum in Athens to contact fellow participants from other organizations and countries before the summit in order to meet each other and exchange experiences and information at the Forum itself.

Sit-in/occupations and more radical forms of protest.   McPhail and McCarthy (2005) contend that the internet is also changing the way in which anarchistic groups like the 'Black Bloc' are engaged in more confrontational protest actions by providing access to schedules of meetings and marshal training sessions, information about protection against tear gas as well as legal information about rights of assembly. Especially, as McPhail and McCarthy (2005) argue, the internet allows for the quick dissemination of messages about time and place of extra-legal and illegal activities, thereby significantly reducing the possibility of surveillance by the police and other opponents,[7] and – during a protest event – internet and other communication technology makes it possible to continuously document activists 'on the spot' about actions and interaction with the police. During the Seattle protests, protesters made extensive use of internet technology to tactically relocate groups of activists according to police locations. In the advent of the G8 protests in Genoa, July 2001, the organizers electronically distributed detailed city maps that indicated the different thematic areas where the different networks assembled (della Porta *et al.* 2006).

Another, less confrontational example, is that of the Harvard Progressive Student Labor Movement at Harvard College, in the United States, demanding higher living wages for the institution's security guards, janitors and dining-room workers. In 2001, this movement started with the occupation of several university administrative offices. Eventually the 'real-life' sit-in at Harvard College was accompanied with a 'virtual sit-in' in order to boost media attention and to increase the pressure on administration officials (Constanza-Chock 2003; Biddix & Park 2008).

Quadrant 3: internet-based action with low threshold

In this section, we discuss actions that are solely performed online: online petitions, email bombs and virtual sit-ins. The examples here clearly illustrate the

advantages of the internet in terms of mobilization and reduction of participation thresholds.

Online petition.   In a study among global justice activists, della Porta and Mosca (2005) found that online email petitions were the most widespread form of action that was used online. Earl (2006) makes a distinction between online petitions that are performed by social movements themselves, and petitions that are centralized on a specialized 'warehouse site', like *thepetitionsite.com* or *MoveOn.org. MoveOn.org* became widely known as the petition site opposing the impeachment of Bill Clinton in 1998 and the war in Iraq in 2003 (Earl 2006) and eventually became much more than a simple petition site, but incarnated as a distinct movement appealing to a new generation of American politically engaged citizens (Pickard 2008). These warehouse sites illustrate how the internet can reduce costs of setting up or participating in an online petition. With little knowledge of html, any activist group can start its own online petition. In May 2006, for instance, a union of French wine farmers in the region of Margaux quickly started with a blog and an online petition against a possible new highway across their precious vineyards. Also, the internet, as a medium that neatly integrates different kinds of media forms, offers new possibilities for doing petitions, like, for example, the visual petition a 'Million Faces' initiated by the international campaign *Control Arms.* People sign this petition against the spread of arms around the world by uploading a picture of themselves optionally displaying a personal message. In July 2007, *Friends of the Earth* in the UK launched its 'Big Ask online march', a video wall of 'filmed signatures' to lobby for a climate change bill.

Today, popular social network sites like Facebook are extensively used to do similar things. Anyone with a Facebook profile can form a group against/or in favour of a particular cause and invite other members to 'sign' this cause by becoming member of this group. One such group 'Hey, Facebook breastfeeding is not obscene' was set up to protest against the network site itself, asking to allow breastfeeding pictures. Dubbed as the Mothers International Lactation Campaign, they also organized a virtual 'nurse-in' asking Facebook members to change their profile picture into a breastfeeding one. In January 2008, Colombian engineer Oscar Morales Guevara created a Facebook group 'Un Million De Voces Contra La FARC' (One Million Voices Against the FARC), opposing president Chavez's request to the European Union to remove the FARC of the list of terrorist organizations. Within hours several thousand people had subscribed to this new group. This Facebook petition eventually resulted in a global day of action on 4 February 2008 against the FARC with over four million people protesting in dozens Colombian cities and other cities worldwide (Vargas Llosa 2008).

Email bomb and virtual sit-in.   A more disruptive form of the online petition is the email bomb, which comprises of large amounts of emails sent to an email account of, for instance, a minister or corporate CEO, or to a target system,

in order to pin down the targeted mailing server, demonstrating the extent of support for a specific cause. A very similar tactic is that of the virtual sit-in. Here people do not send an email, but instead ask (simultaneously) for information from a website but in such numbers that the server cannot deal with the amount of requests and eventually crashes. In fact, these tactics can be seen as forms of mass action hacktivism (Jordan & Taylor 2004). The central feature of this type of hacktivism is that it involves a large number of people who need little digital resources or know-how. Because of the simple nature of the online action (sending an email or requesting information), we believe this tactic is a collective action form still entailing lower thresholds than other kind of hacktivist tactics, like more specialized actions altering website source codes (see below), although the outcome (DoS) indeed might be the same. On 30 November 1999, the day the WTO summit started in Seattle, several thousand activists requested information from the WTO website at the same time, which caused a crash of the WTO server. An early example of the use of email bombing is, for instance, *Workers Online*, the web zine of an Australian labour organization, which organized in July 2001 a massive email jam session in response to legislation on workers' compensation. Within hours, a reported 13,000 emails were sent to the government (Meikle 2002, p. 163).

Quadrant 4: internet-based action with high threshold

In the last section, we discuss actions that are made possible largely or totally thanks to the internet, but demand more resources than signing a petition or sending an email. We will discuss examples of protest websites, alternative media sites, culture jamming and hacktivism. It is important to note that culture jamming is not a totally new technique, as it origins can be traced to the 1960s, nor is it totally internet-based, as it has offline versions. However, as it is grown together with the internet and has its main features online, we discuss it in this section.

Protest websites.   Protests websites are closely related to what Clark and Themudo (2003, p. 110) have termed 'internet-based dot causes', which can apply to any social movement or citizen group that 'promotes social causes and chiefly mobilizes support through its website'. One of the earliest examples of a 'dot cause' is perhaps the Free Burma Campaign. Its website, initially created by exiled Burmese graduate student Zar Ni, generated unprecedented global attention to the Burmese military junta, worldwide support from scholars and activists, and even the withdrawal of global firms such as Levi Strauss and Texaco out of Burma (O'Neill 1999; Danitz & Strobel 2001). Another example is the McSpotlight campaign, also claiming to be among the first to exploit the potential of the internet for a successful grassroots advocacy campaign against fast food giant McDonalds (Meikle 2002, p. 85). The heart of

McSpotlight was its website which was launched in 1996 following a trial of McDonalds against two individuals who had distributed leaflets accusing McDonalds of socially and environmentally harmful practices. The McSpotlight campaign offers a great example of how cyberspace acts as a new arena of contention: in order to avoid censorship mirrors of the McSpotlight site were created in Chicago, London, Auckland and Helsinki, making it very difficult if not impossible for McDonalds to start legal action co-ordinated across a number of different legal systems and jurisdictions against the McSpotlight website (O'Neill 1999). Rosenkrands (2004) provides an extensive list of different web-based movements encompassing a wide range of different causes, like for instance *No Logo.com*, a website to support the movement against big brands and corporate globalization launched by *No Logo* author Naomi Klein and a few other activists. Other examples include *CorpWatch.org*, *Nike Watch*, or *CokeSpotlight*, just to name a few.

Alternative media sites.   A little bit different from the sites we described in the previous section, but taking advantage of the same possibilities of the new internet space to publish and disseminate alternative points of view about political and cultural struggles, are those sites from of alternative media (activist) groups, such as Indymedia. The internet provides activists and social movements with alternative channels for the production of media, thereby circumventing mainstream media channels. The first independent media centre (IMC), Indymedia, was set up in the wake of the Seattle WTO protests in 1999, and soon after dozens of other IMCs were set up creating a worldwide network of radical social movement publics for the circulation of alternative news and information (Kidd 2003; Juris 2005). The ideas behind these alternative media sites are closely related to the open source movement that in turn very much intermingles with the global justice movement and its process of archiving and systematizing their work and actions in 'memory-projects' like *Euromovements.info*. From another point of view, these alternative media sites are also struggling with information monopolization and the production of meaning. And the latter is where we enter the field of culture jamming.

Culture jamming.   Culture jamming 'changes the meaning of corporate advertising through artistic techniques that alter corporate logos visually and by giving marketing slogans new meaning' (Stolle *et al.* 2005, p. 10). Culture jammers make use of techniques such as appropriation, collage, ironic inversion and juxtaposition through diverse tactics like billboard pirating, physical and virtual graffiti and website alteration (Meikle 2002; Juris 2008). This action form is perhaps most vividly exemplified by the *Nike Email Exchange Campaign*, which started with one MIT graduate student emailing the Nike Company about printing the word 'sweatshop' on his personalized Nike shoes, but eventually generating unexpected media-attention and thousands of other reactions

worldwide (Peretti 2006).[3] Humour, satire and irony are very important and powerful features of culture jam-like tactics.

Pinning down the roots of culture jamming is almost impossible, foremost because many of the groups involved in this kind of cultural production predate the internet-era as well as the techniques they use (Klein 2002). Well-known groups like Adbusters (notorious for their 'uncommercials' or 'subvertisement'), the Yes Man, or ®^{tm}ark, however, all credit the internet for making the creation of ad parodies immeasurably easier and providing a platform to take their campaigns and artistic productions to a much wider and international audience (Klein 2002; Meikle 2002). By their online presence, they are able to spur local offline action too, like for instance in the following example. Although initially the idea to alter the voices of typical girls and boys toys was posted by ®^{tm}ark on its website, it was a handful of war-veterans that made the culture jamming more concrete: Only days from Christmas Eve, The Barbie Liberation Organization bought several hundred Barbie and G. I. Joe dolls, changed the voice boxes, and put them back on the shelves. You can imagine the surprising faces of parents and kids finding their Barbie saying 'Dead man tell no lies' or G. I. Joe suggesting 'Wanna go shopping?' (Rosenkrands 2004, pp. 57–58).

Next to the alteration of specific ads online and offline, there is another often-used online technique of creating 'spoof sites'. These are clones of existing sites of, for instance, multinational corporations or politicians, that are created to parody or provoke the initiators. During the WTO protests in Seattle, 1999, the group ®^{tm}ark set up a spoof site www.gatt.org, cloning the WTO/GATT home page with mock stories and quotes from WTO officials provided with 'helpful commentary' in an often ironic or cynical sense (Jordan & Taylor 2004, pp. 85–86; Meikle 2002, p. 118).

Hacktivism.   Finally, the internet has also created a new space for confrontational activities like DoS attacks via automated email floods, website defacements altering the source code of targeted websites, or the use of malicious software like viruses and worms. These are all actions that touch the boundary of what is seen or held as legal and what as illegal. Depending on the point of view, these tactics are than labelled as 'electronic civil disobedience', 'hacktivism' or as 'cyberterrorism' (Denning 2001; Vegh 2003). Digital activism pioneers as the Critical Art Ensemble prefer the term electronic civil disobedience because hacktivism is often used to refer to unpopular actions as for instance the violation of the privacy of a celebrity by exposing his or her email traffic. But also many of the pure political actions of hacktivists are contested within the broader hacktivist community (cf. Jordan & Taylor 2004).

Well documented is one of the first (mass action) hacktivist groups: the Electronic Disturbance Theatre (EDT), which became active in response to the solidarity call of the Zapatista movement in Mexico (Meikle 2002; Jordan & Taylor 2004). Via a Java applet called *Floodnet* they initiated several automated 'virtual

sit-ins' against, among others, President Zedillo of Mexico's home page, and the Pentagon site. The Floodnet software makes use of the server and bandwidth of individual participants that downloaded and activated the software on their computers. This kind of software is used to perform a DoS attack forcing a website to shut down or a server system inoperative, or to leave political tinted messages onto the server logs. Another tactic is to alter the source code of a particular website in order to reroute visitors to another website. In July 1998, a group of international hackers succeeded in probably the largest homepage takeover ever (Denning 2001, p. 273). They changed over 300 websites, redirecting possible visitors to their own site greeting them with a message protesting against the nuclear arms race. A tactic that was used also extensively during the WTO protests in Seattle. Another often-used tactic is more like 'cybergraffiti' (Vegh 2003). By hacking into a website's source code, a hacker changes the homepage or leave a 'statement' (a slogan or picture) on the original homepage. F-Secure Corp., a Finnish internet security firm, reported in 2003 that over 10,000 websites had been marred with digital graffiti by protesters and supporters of the US-led war in Iraq (Krebs 2003).

Limitations of the internet and the action repertoire of social movements

The numerous examples discussed in the previous section are anecdotal, yet they show that the internet has improved and broadened the toolkit of social activists. However, we should not be blind to the limitations that accompany these new technological opportunities. There is the 'classical' problem related to unequal internet access, also referred to as the digital divide. Other shortcomings are more directed to social movements and their particular use of actions. In some cases, the internet has made collective action still not easy enough, while in others it has made it perhaps too easy. Finally, we will argue that the new media seem to loose their newness quickly and more fundamentally are unable to create stable ties between activists that are necessary for sustained collective action.

Still a digital divide

The term *digital divide* refers in the first place to the inequality in internet access between the rich industrialized countries and the developing countries in the South (Norris 2001). According to recent estimates around 75 per cent of the people living in North America can be considered as internet users, while this percentage drops to hardly five in Africa.[4] Besides the clear geographical variation also within (Western) societies, certain people remain behind in the digital evolution, not only because of the absence of a computer or internet

access, but also because they lack the skills to use the new media technology. In that respect, social movement actions may fail to reach the socially weaker groups in society if they would rely too much on the new media to organize their protest events, which is even more the case for pure internet-based action forms. The digital divide argument goes to the core of many socially movements as it weakens their democratic potential (Tilly 2004b). And this is even more apparent in light of the global digital divide, which seriously endangers the representation of a 'global civil society' in the repertoire shift from the national to the transnational level.

There is also a digital divide within cyberspace, what Norris (2001) has termed the 'democratic divide' between those who use the internet for political aims and those who do not. In this sense, the internet will chiefly serve those activists and groups that are already active, thus reinforcing existing patterns of political participation in society. In this sense, the early 'cyber-enthusiasm' of the internet's potential to reinvigorate democracy (see, e.g. Rheingold 1993; Coleman 1999) has gradually been replaced by more skeptic and even pessimistic accounts of the internet's democratizing potential (see, e.g. Hill & Hughes 1998; Margolis & Resnick 2000; Scheufele & Nisbet 2002).

Internet makes it not easy enough

As mentioned before, 'real' transnational demonstrations, getting people from different part of the world to protest against International institutions and world leaders has remained difficult. Most international protests are in fact overwhelmingly local, or at best national demonstrations (Fisher *et al.* 2005). For instance, a survey among the participants of different anti-Iraq-war demonstrations revealed that only a handful of demonstrators travelled more than 200 kilometres to participate in a protest march, even in large countries like the UK, Germany and the United States (Verhulst 2010). The barriers for people to participate in an event abroad remain high and difficult to overcome. In their efforts to get people from around the world to an international summit social movements have used the internet to distribute useful information on how to travel or where to sleep (Ayres 2005), but often that has proved to be insufficient and significantly lower than the practical thresholds (Lichbach & de Vries 2004; Fisher *et al.* 2005; Walgrave & Van Laer 2010). And in the rare cases that protests were able to get an international diverse public to the streets, it was not so much because of the internet but rather because of 'stronger' mobilizing factors. These can be resources such as time (to travel) or free transportation (provided by an organization involved) (Bédoyan *et al.* 2004). The fact that information on these events is distributed easily and rapidly is certainly helpful, but often not enough that lower the practical barriers significantly.

As indicated, the internet certainly creates new thresholds too. Meikle (2002) noticed how the EDT explicitly warned potential participants for possible

risks in a virtual sit-in, which they organized to raise awareness about the Zapatista struggle in Mexico:

> Where met with a set of instructions [. . .] and warnings: 'This is a protest, not a game, it may have personal consequences as in any off-line political manifestation on the street'. We're warned that our computer's IP addresses will be collected by 'the government', in the same way that our pictures might be taken during a street action. We're warned of possible damage to our computers, in the same way that 'in a street action the police may come and hurt you'. (Meikle 2002, p. 144)

Finally, although the bits and bytes are hard to repress in cyberspace, in some cases the use of the internet seems futile in light of enduring barriers related to political constraints. Earlier we gave the example of the exiled Burmese people protesting against the military junta in their home country. However, despite raising global awareness, it became very clear that in late 2007 nothing fundamentally had changed. Thousands of people, among many Buddhist monks, took to the streets again in the Saffron Revolution (referring to the colour of the monk's habits). The junta's first reaction was to block any possible internet traffic in the country, making it impossible to blog about the demonstrations and the way the junta repressed them. During the recent Iranian post-election protests, internet and online network tools like Twitter were of great value for activists expressing themselves, especially to the international community. But, while these communication technologies were extremely relevant, it seems that police repression and control of technological infrastructure and internet networks by the regime at the same time strongly contributed to depress citizen mobilization.

Internet makes it too easy

As some action forms still demand high efforts from participants, the opposite argument can be made for some new online tactics. At first glance, the email petition seems a brilliant continuation for its offline predecessor since it is a familiar tactic, can be easily used, set up and quickly forwarded to an infinite amount of people across time and geographical boundaries. Yet, decision-makers are likely to be 'unimpressed by a haphazard list of names that arrives piecemeal, with repeated signatures or pseudonyms from people well outside their jurisdiction' (Meikle 2002, p. 25). Power holders do not believe that a hardly personalized email shows the same commitment as a handwritten letter. Because of this lack of impact also potential subscribers might feel that this kind of tactic is not appropriate. More in general, this kind of 'keyboard activism' may go at the expense of real actions that demand a higher commitment. People might not feel motivated to engage in higher threshold actions as they can more easily pursue social and political change by clicking on a button and watching some

ads. As these online versions of traditional actions have a smaller impact on decision-makers this evolution might damage the policy impact of civil society.

The new media lost their newness

When social movements as 'early adopters' started to use the internet more than a decade ago their opponents were taken off guard. Some people indicate the failure of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) on free trade as the first example of a new style of internet-based contentious politics (Ayres 1999, p. 133). Yet, whether this first, obvious success indeed heralded a new era of activist repertoire is not clear. The example of the MAI may well illustrate how politicians and negotiators were overwhelmed and surprised by the enormous attention to the MAI and the rapid diffusion of critical and substantial information about the exact content of the agreements. Today, more than 10 years later after the MAI, the internet is widely used in all kinds of different life spheres, and new opponents are probably not so easily taken by surprise anymore. Furthermore, targeted companies or authorities do not passively wait for future online hacktivist actions, but proactively invest in software to hinder new attacks. This means social activists are forced to renew their action repertoire only to spark the same amount of public attention or political pressure.

The internet only creates weak ties

The internet is a 'weak-tie instrument' *par excellence* (Kavanaugh *et al.* 2005), as such it is able to attract easily and rapidly a large number of people to join an action or event. Walgrave *et al.* (2008) have pointed to weak ties crossing movement and issue boundaries as an important asset for social movement actors expanding their mobilization potential. However, critics have noticed that this growth in support is often followed by an even faster decline in support. Earl and Shussman (2003) noticed that in the rising era of e-activism 'members' have become 'users', who after the action they supported often chose to move on and do not feel a need to get permanently engaged. According to several scholars, the internet is unable to create the necessary trust and strong ties that are necessary to build a sustainable network of activists (Diani 2000; Clark & Themudo 2003; Tilly 2004b). For protest actions with low thresholds, this might be less problematic, but for actions that include higher costs such as plausible police retribution, trust among activist is probably a necessary prerequisite (Gerbaudo 2009).

Conclusion

In this article, we focused on how the internet has changed the action repertoire of social movements in two fundamental ways. First, by facilitating the existing

action forms making it possible to reach more people, more easily, in a time-span that was unthinkable before. Second, by creating new (or adapted) tools for activism. We tried to capture this 'double impact' in a typology of collective action with two dimensions. The creation of new e-tools for activism was represented in the first dimension ranging from internet-supported to internet-based actions. The second dimension referred to the (practical) thresholds that have been lowered, but not broken down, by the internet. On the basis of these two dimensions, four quadrants of activism were discussed and illustrated with numerous examples. However, the dimensions should not be seen as clear and stable division between the different forms of activism but rather as fluid lines that are permanently redefined by technological innovations and the creativity of activists.

In our discussion of the typology, we tried to build a strong case in favour of the internet as it has given social movements new and improved opportunities to engage in social and political action. At the same time, we avoided a naïve internet-optimism, by pointing out several limitations. These restrictions make clear that even a wide digital action repertoire will not, and probably never will, be able to replace traditional forms of activism and face-to-face communication. However, those limitations do not outweigh the advantages, as we believe the overall balance is positive. This does not mean that social movements have suddenly become a more powerful force in society or that the power balance has shifted in their direction. As mentioned before, political and economical power has gradually moved to the international level. The internet enables social movements to follow that transition and operate more globally. One could state that the internet has made it possible to maintain the status quo, but not to change it. What did change is that powerful actors as multinationals, governments or supranational institutions can be held accountable at any time. Civic groups with little resources can mobilize support and public attention against a far more powerful competitor more easily and independently than in the past. Although Goliath can use the internet as well, the relative advantage of this new technology is bigger for David. Several authors have indeed shown that social movements, being networks of diverse groups and activists, are especially keen on using the internet because of its fluid, non-hierarchical structure, which 'matches' their ideological and organizational needs (Klein 2001; Bennett 2003; van de Donk et al. 2004). This is far less the case for organizations or actors that have a more hierarchical and formal structure, where the internet is often seen more as a threat and less an opportunity.

In this article, we have tried to explain and illustrate how the internet has changed the action repertoire of social movements. By focusing on the action repertoire we have not been able to discuss the much broader consequences of the use of electronic media for civil society. As stated by McCaughey and Ayers (2003, pp. 1–2): 'Activists have not only incorporated the internet into their repertoire, but also [...] have changed substantially what counts as

activism, what counts as community, collective identity, democratic space and political strategy'. As such, activists and social movements have now often found straightforward ways to reconnect with ordinary citizens, and especially with youngsters, in the face of apparently ever-increasing public disengagement from formal political institutions and processes (cf. Dalton 2008). For social movement scholars, this might offer a fruitful and dynamic area for empirical research, but at the same time demands for theoretic frameworks that should help us to make sense of the (permanent) new developments in the internet age.

Notes

1 In this article, we thus focus on the internet as a means for protest action. We do not focus on the internet as a contested 'space'. The latter refers to what Jordan and Taylor (2004) have termed 'digitally correct hacktivism' which principally defends the free flows of information on the internet.

2 Not everybody would agree, though, and some scholars in fact argue that the internet now gives police and authorities plenty of opportunities to increase social control (cf. Lyon 2005). We will come back to that in our section on limitations.

3 By adding the word sweatshop to his shoes Peretti wanted to address the issue of child labour. The complete correspondence between Peretti and Nike can be read at http://www.shey.net/niked.html (see also McCaughey & Ayres 2003).

4 http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm

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