

Possibilities, reality and challenges of citizen communication on the web¹

Possibilidades, realidade e desafios da comunicação cidadã na web

■ CÍCILIA M. KROHLING PERUZZO^a

Universidade Anhembi Morumbi, Faculty of Communication, Graduated Program in Social Communication, São Paulo – SP Brazil

ABSTRACT

Text about the social participation enhanced by online media and networks. The objective is to reflect on the appropriation of cyberspace by popular social movements, as well as paying attention to the contrapositions of the role of online media and networks and their potentiality in the mobilizing articulation. The study starts from a bibliographical research to briefly situate aspects of the theoretical debate on technologies and the internet, and then to reflect on some of the social practices carried out in the relation between popular movements and the Internet. It is considered that the Internet has broadened the possibilities for popular, communitarian and alternative communication, which is renewed in its language, format, importance and scope.

Keywords: Social movements, online social networks, citizen communication

RESUMO

Texto sobre a participação social potencializada pelas mídias e redes sociais digitais. O objetivo é refletir sobre a apropriação do ciberespaço pelos movimentos sociais populares, além de atentar para as contraposições a respeito do papel das mídias e redes online, e para as suas potencialidades na articulação mobilizadora. O estudo parte de pesquisa bibliográfica situa brevemente aspectos do debate teórico sobre tecnologias e internet refletindo em seguida sobre algumas das práticas sociais efetivadas na relação entre movimentos populares e internet. Considera-se que a internet ampliou as possibilidades à comunicação popular, comunitária e alternativa, que se renova em sua linguagem, formatos, importância e alcance.

Palavras-chave: Movimentos sociais, redes sociais online, comunicação cidadã

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^aDoctor in Communication Sciences by the Communication and Arts program of the University of São Paulo (ECA – USP). Graduated Program teacher in Social Communication of the Universidade Anhembi Morumbi. Productivity scholarship of CNPq. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6384-8848>. E-mail: kperuzzo@uol.com.br

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INTRODUCTION

THE EXPRESSION *CITIZEN COMMUNICATION* is very broad and, although used in the sense of *communication of people* in the exercise of its citizenship, can be understood in distinctive ways, from the emancipatory to the conservative. The broadening of the concept occurs especially nowadays, when the internet loses its ambience aura in favor to the citizenship, also revealing itself prone to discriminatory behaviors, insults, circulation of false information, bullying, etc. Although developed by citizens exerting their rights to freedom of speech, these contents distance themselves from the civic communication committed to justice. For this reason, I will focus only in communication within the scope of the popular, collective movements and non-profit organizations working in the popular, communitarian and alternative perspective of communication, once inserted in the dynamics of change and building of citizenship, based on the Brazilian reality.

The objective of the text is to reflect upon the appropriation of cyberspace by the social popular movements differentiating them slightly from the great public manifests and protests, and also to pay attention to the contradictions about the role of the media and digital social networks, and its potentiality on the mobilizing articulation, and as an arena for meetings and debates.

The study part of a bibliographic research briefly establish aspects of the theoretical debate about technology and internet, reflecting right after about some of the social practices effective in the relation of popular movement and cyberspace, within other aspects. The emphasis falls in the general context of the relation between internet and social movements, dimension needed to understand the *communicative concepts and practices from communitarian organizations and social movements in Brazil*, research developed by the author with the support of the National Counseling of Science and Technology (CNPq).

The approach will be developed on three topics, they are: aspects of the theoretical debate about the relation between the internet and social movements; possibilities and reality of cyberspace appropriation by the social movements and congenial popular organization; and challenges to the popular social movements in internet times.

ASPECTS OF THE THEORETICAL DEBATE ABOUT THE RELATION BETWEEN THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THEIR RELATIONS TO SOCIAL PRACTICES

The visions subjacent to any discourse about the role of the internet nowadays are related to the perceptions held of the technique and technology in societies.

As demonstrated Rüdiger (2007), they reveal *Promethean* or *Faustian*² tendencies, that is, those who have a triumphant vision of technology as a corporate value, progress and supremacy factor and, on another perspective, those who fear the power of the machines over cultures and over human beings, as the technique would tend to emancipate from man and dominate him, although developed by him.

Once related to the social movements these visions help to explain the contrasting positions about the importance of technology, more precisely in the current dressing of the social digital media, from the conceptual point of view to the interest of appropriation of technology by themselves. Barranquero (2012), referring to Cornelius Castoriadis and Daniel H. Cabrera, adverts that a line of vision of the representations, affections, desires and fictional refers to certain fetishes about the *technique* and *progress* as a *promise* or *unavoidable destiny* as magical multipliers of knowledge and omnipotence of the artifacts, a type of discourse present since the 17th century related to the technology of that time. As it can be seen, this vision fits into the *Promethean* perspective previously referred to. Authors like Marshall McLuhan, Pierre Lévy, Manuel Castells, Michel Maffesoli and André Lemos, among others, represent this perspective very well. On the other side are the critics of this type of vision discussing the limits, distortions and consequences that certain technological environments contain, amongst them, Jean Baudrillard, Lucien Sfez, Cornelius Castoriadis, Daniel H. Cabrera and Eugênio Trivinho.

The theoretical discourses about the potentialities and the importance of the internet to the social movements, according to Martin Hall (apud Barranquero, 2012: 380), oscillate between the *realistic* and/or *pessimistic* vision - that emphasize the access limitations to the new technology (digital gaps) - and the *optimistic* (without being *utopic*) and its *utilitarian* variants - that enhance its emancipatory potential and agree that the uses of the internet depend on the type of social appropriation, which lead to positive or negative consequences, as well as any technology.

In the *optimistic* view a certain exaggeration in the celebration of potential and the emancipating power of technology can be observed. In it there are fanciful perspectives, that the online social networks are the origins of social movements and public demonstrations, as if they started on Facebook and Twitter. As says Barranquero (2012: 382), certain tags such as “Twitterrevolución”, “revolución Facebook” disseminated in newspaper’s headlines in allusion to the Spanish movement 15-M, for example, and after are reverberated in the academy and “institute the idea that the social networks are the cause, the engine or the last determinant of the protests”³. Something similar can be observed in Brazil, where

² Allusion to the myths Prometheus (from Greek mythology, it refers to resistance, infallibility and improvement to mankind) and Faust (from German mythology, about the search of knowledge, prosperity, power and access to infinity in exchange for benefits, and the price you pay if certain limits are crossed).

³ From the original: “instaurando la idea de que las redes son la causa, motor o determinante último de las protestas”. This and more translations from the author.

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the media and digital social networks are being appointed as the vector in which characterize as *social movements*, however, in fact, talk about the big public demonstrations of June 2013 and/or the demonstrations and protests against and in favor of Dilma Rousseff's government and the impeachment process in 2015 and 2016, and not the actual social movements. Some approaches are premature and of a sensationalist tendency painting it with "new denominations phenomena of deep historical rooting"⁴ (Ibid.: 382), and not taking into account the organization forms of the social movements outside the media and digital social networks.

⁴From the original: "com denominaciones nuevas fenómenos con una profunda raigambre histórica".

On the other hand, it is still pertinent to make a brief distinction between public demonstration or protest and *social movement*. While the first tend to be more fluid, occasional and transient, the specific social movements, for example, the Landless Workers Movement (MST), the Feminist Movement and the Ecological Movement, are constituted of more solid structures, generally institutionalized, and with a long lasting life cycle. This way, when you attribute to the digital social media the power to fill up the streets and public squares as in the *Journeys of June 2013* and later in the protests of 2015/16, in fact, the direct reference is to the great public demonstration or to the *social movement* in a broad sense.

The potential of the internet and from the media and digital social networks to articulate public demonstrations in the last years is real and of a growing importance, but you cannot consider them pioneers or unique in this type of mobilization. Great public manifestations exist since before the media and digital social network existed, and even the internet, thus the rebellion, marches or historical protests – for example, the movement *Diretas Já* in Brazil, in 1984, when the internet did not even exist – which demonstrate the effectiveness of other forms of communication to mobilize and articulate great public demonstrations.

The *optimistic* vision seems to have two sides. One that has the internet, mainly after the Web 2.0, as libertarian territory, now participating, the big arena to the emancipatory movements, the place of freedom, free demonstrations, stage of democracy – not meaning it is not real, but this vision finds difficult to consider the limits and the growing contradictions as the forms of denial of civic freedom and the existent control. It is symptomatic the appearance of expressions such *autonomy space* (Castells, 2012) and *collective intelligence* (Lévy, 1999), that are interesting, but are not applied in all situations. That is, they make sense in specific contexts, but are not fit for generalizations. The second side would be the *optimistic* not *utopic* in which admits the importance and the power of the media and digital social networks, but without imputing a fetishist character. In this way, this vision is closer to *utilitarian* which defends the appropriation of internet spaces, from the sites to the media and online

social networks in all its potentialities as a way to stamp its presence in the world, give visibility to the political critical positioning and claims, promote articulations, appropriate communicative facilities, and also provide or favor the social relations in different levels.

In the *realistic* and/or *pessimistic* vision scope, is seen access limits, the existent inequality between the segments of the population who has access to the internet and those who cannot use this technology. This distance is verified in many world regions, between countries and inside them, besides the possible negative interference in the values and cultural identities. Deeply, the tendencies are specified in some directions, amongst them there is one which relativize the importance of the internet as a result of its appropriation – a discussion that happened in relation to the other technologies – and their potential to contribute to the empowering of the exercise of citizenship, depending precisely of visions on how they are used. Or still, to their limitations when the approach is centered only in the technological vector (González, 2012), not paying attention to the general conditions to the decision making and the directions of the uses of emancipative collective forms of popular organization. The government programs which emphasize computer distribution and/or promotion of the internet access in telecentres, beyond individualist appropriations, without having technology as a knowledge vector, are targets of this type of critical analysis.

The early studies emphasized limitations and harmful consequences to the excessive exposition of the human being to the internet, such as psychic dependency and the emptying of personal relationships, and risks to personal safety. With time, the internet started to make part of daily life, as well as any other technology, so those questions vanished. Other difficulties become evident like the irregular appropriations, control, and unqualified participation in the virtual spaces, like the posting of information and videos of an ignorant, slanderous or fake content, being or not anonymous (fake profiles). There are those who study the antagonisms of the Web 2.0, like the threat to values, creativity and economy (Keen, 2009) once facilitator of practices such as piracy and plagiarism, and the celebration of the amateurism.

It is not about classifying these visions as mistaken or relevant, but to observe its multiple faces and deep changes that these social historical processes contain. The internet also ends the risk to oppress when being appropriated to pseudo-liberation processes, but the situation is not specific to the digital environment. The oppressions are everywhere and, at a physical level, become real equal or even crueler. By the way, these two worlds do not distinguish from each other very well, as for people who are already connected; they start to make part of the same dynamic.

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The configurations caused by the fast technological development, which have a great impact on life in society, are better understood if taken in the context of the mechanism of international capitalism, which is freely growing, in fact, to oligopolies, service flow controllers, goods and user data from digital platforms.

In the economy universe, the power of the international financial capital in controlling the capital flow and the concentration of properties and business in a few big economical transnational groups in cyberspace also generates other types of contradiction. On one side, the market starts to turn into oligopolies or monopolies, privatizing initially unpretentious and libertarian creations – the start-ups, prone to free access and sharing. Some examples are the buying of YouTube and Waze by Google, Yahoo that bought (and ruined⁵) GeoCities (precursor of online social networks) and Flickr (picture sharing site), and Facebook that bought Whatsapp and Instagram. On the other side these companies tend to harm competition when dominating the markets, besides invading the privacy of the users when they use their data for marketing and political purposes. The company Google, for example, is a target of the processes by the European justice for breaking competition rules⁶ and for violating the privacy of the users⁷. The company Facebook which sells sample of user data from selected profiles with a business purpose, is also involved in the scandal of the Cambridge Analytics⁸ which bought psychometric data from its North-American users to use in Donald Trump's campaign to the Whitehouse, besides the similar process in the case of the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

In synthesis, the existing antagonisms are many, but in a realistic vision – not being pessimistic – it has to be recognized the existence of advantages and disadvantages, and of fantastic advances in everything it touches – communication between people, access to services of public information, access to knowledge, formation of communities and networks, business making (also by small businesses) – which it favors, even having contradictions that result in setbacks, like the ones pointed previously and others to be discussed during this text.

Visions like the ones already discussed reflect in the analysis of the great public demonstrations occurred around the world. There are controversies, as besides the realistic conceptions there are the optimistic, those coherent with the reality of the phenomenon as well as those somehow chimerical and with an exaggerated dose of imagination. In this sense, there is a tendency to create an imaginary that simplifies the phenomenon or exaggerates the role of new technologies as if there were not life outside the online connection to all social movements⁸. In the utopic vision there is a certain non-critical celebration of

⁵ See: <<https://goo.gl/YDFyGs>>. Access on: 30 Jun. 2018.

⁶ See: <<https://goo.gl/ECaSwp>>. Access on: 30 Jun. 2018.

⁷ See: <<https://goo.gl/7sZ7EP>> e <<https://goo.gl/dqVrLb>>. Access on: 30 Jun. 2018.

⁸ It should be considered the not yet universal access, but handling difficulties (for the educational and managerial or of aptitude) and also the fact that not all the social movements have an impact in the digital social medias, because of their own characteristics, as an example of the homeless, the rural workers and of the prostitutes movements.

technical instruments in itself, as “carriers of history, class interests or political and geostrategic determinations”⁹ (Mattelart apud Baranquero, 2012: 381).

About the controversies, the first is about the attribution of the occurrence of the great public demonstrations (and called social movements) to the media and digital social networks, in a few words, the power of technology. It is a polemic topic, because, when it seems truthful, also disregards other factors that contribute to its emergency. According to the concepts previously explained, it is celebrated the conviction that “new technologies” would be the “cause or the determinant engine”¹⁰ (Barranquero, 2012) of the emergence and realization of the *social movement*. However, the causes come from somewhere else: from the contradictions wide open in reality, from dissatisfactions, contrapositions and conflicts of class and other interests at stake. The media and digital social networks are environments of interaction and articulation, contribute in the mobilization, but not the determinant cause of the social movement origins and great public demonstrations.

The identification of this controversy does not mean that I do not recognize in the new technology an important mobilization factor. The criticism is about the jingoism and partial visions about its role. The importance of the media and digital social networks, on mobile devices and applications while an environment of diffusion, interaction, articulation and further aspects inherent to them, is indisputable. As an example, this can be observed in the school occupation movement by secondary students, . The Facebook profile was an important space of communication with society, with families and with other occupied schools, but the face-to-face dynamics was the core of the whole movement.

The previously channels referred to characterize themselves as a relations space, content diffusion, discussion arena, identity confront, interests and world visions and they are immersed in a technological context that provides simultaneity and communicative easiness and, in this sense, can be emphasized:

- a. They have the power to multiply shares and generate a viral effect, that is, they amplify the diffusion of posts, which potentiates the visualization numbers, followers, accesses, comments, downloads, shares and likes, giving a new face to the notion of *audience*. However, there is also the inconvenience of a viral content being artificially manipulated (augmented, accelerated) by robot or other means of replication. The basis of evaluation of blogs, posts in the digital networks or presence on networks is precisely the repercussion by these reaction mechanisms of the user, the scenery, when not viewed in its complexity, can motivate conclusions, sometimes partial. It has to be taken

⁹From the original: “son portadores de história, interesses de classe o determinaciones políticas y geo-estratégicas”.

¹⁰From the original: “causa o motor determinante”.

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into account these other factors which interfere in the process, as it was said, linked to fake profiles and fancy gestures (you can *follow* someone or like a post only by clicking without entering the content), besides the targeting conditioned by the algorithms, that is, by machines.

- b. There are digital social networks *plus* the physical and face-to-face. There are many kinds of previous social networks, simultaneous and posterior to the digital networks. And, in general, there are moments in which the face-to-face and other aspects related to it are necessary to the process of mobilization and the actual cyberspace action. The organization of social movements and public demonstrations or protests surpasses the virtual space. In the best structured social movements there are always the physical or face-to-face networks prior to the shaping to the virtual networks or communities in the internet. In Spain, for example, there were many important previous meetings and assemblies to organize the worldwide known demonstration set in 2011, the 15-M (the fifteenth of May), named of the *outraged*, that had housing as a fighting focus. The mobilization followed with activities around areas and regions after a great public demonstration on the day that named the movement. In Brazil, an expressive case about the role of the digital social networks, broadly studied, is the demonstrations of June 2013, as briefly pointed before, which started a series of protests that followed until the second semester of the same year. This experience, contrary to visions firstly externalized by the press and intellectuals during events in universities, did not appear in the internet. The initial motivation was unchained by the Free Pass Movement (MPL – from the Portuguese) in a fight against the bus and metro price rise in São Paulo, even though the media and digital social networks had, in a second instance, channeled the dissatisfaction and mobilization flows. To the MPL was added the *National Articulation of the Popular Committees of the World Cup*¹¹ existent in twelve cities of the country (the first one in Rio de Janeiro, in 2007), in a mobilization process against the imposition of the refurbishment or building of stadiums, resulting in the violation of social rights and in the displacement of segments of the population to prepare the cities for the World Cup of Football in 2014. Documents of the time register the flags raised against the International Federation of Football Association (FIFA) and the use of public resources in the

¹¹From the committees participated representatives of the Homeless Movement, Black Movement, Women Movement, etc. The type of civil construction demanded for the building of stadiums caused problems related to children and teenagers due to the favoring to prostitution, including, child prostitution, took people from their home, harmed the use of public space of collective consumption and so on.

refurbishment and building of stadiums. The Confederations Cup, which preceded the World Cup of Football, was a target of big demonstrations arisen from the same reasons. Other social movements, as the Active Suburbs of the South Side, from São Paulo, women's movement, teacher's movements, etc., were also present in the subsequent moments of June 2013, mainly in specific regions. However, simultaneously to the great street demonstrations of 2013, the specific social movements, when meeting in public squares, merged their brands, constituting in amplitude of flags and generalizing the protests, making the identification of the political forces difficult.

At last, I explain this context to make it clear that there is always something – an organizational praxis – in the physical level, before, during and after the great demonstrations, which means that even the great public demonstrations also require face-to-face actions, even only in the leadership level. Therefore, not everything emerges and/or is realized in the internet. The MPL held its internal meetings face to face and gathered an assembly in a university during the fever pitch of the great public demonstrations of June 2013 to discuss the paths to follow, in a moment when the situation became delicate because of the intense participation of the *Black Blocks*. The MLP appeared 8 years prior to appearing as an initial protagonist of the great public demonstrations of June 2013 and had important fights in previous years in different cities of the country, against fare price rise and in favor of zero tax.

The studies of Manuel Castells (2012: 212-213) have demonstrated such aspects in analysis of public demonstrations in Europe since the beginning of this century, drawing attention to the fact that “the use of the internet and mobile communication networks (cellphones) is fundamental, but the connection mode is multimodal”, as it includes a) online and offline networks, and b) existing social networks and others created during the movement.

The second controversy refers to the libertarian sense attributed to the internet, mainly to media and digital social networks, and the foundations of this type of vision have already been explained when we talked about the *Promethean* perspective. Yes, it is libertarian, but what is liberty? There is no doubt that the internet is of utmost importance to the people, to the specific social movements and to the great public demonstrations and protests. It is the arena to the freedom of communication, sharing of content and civil participation (when expressing claims and fights for the rights of citizenship, for example, for a better health system) and civic participation (when the meaning of the social fights move from the individual and focus on the collective, and puts the

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common well-being above the individual interests). It is the case of the fights for the preservation of democracy and of the interests of the nation. For this reason, the internet is conceived as a source of freedom and this theoretical vision has been broadly disseminated, but there is a controversy, because at the same time that the freedom of expression in the media and digital social networks, in the mobile devices and applications are real, it is also involved in manipulations and supervised freedom.

Therefore, some disenchantment appears, as the freedom acquired and broadly celebrated by the internet starts to be monitored, controlled, prevented or used in an anti-ethical¹², anti-civic¹³ manner or deprived of competence¹⁴, besides developing the privatization of what is born and possess the vocation to be public, as it is the case of the own internet and the knowledge generated around it. There are at least three dimensions involved in this question:

¹²Amongst the anti-ethical forms there are the posting of information/fake, racist, and homophobic comments, of an intimate or tendentious nature, the creation of fake profiles used to outrage the image of adversaries, the political ideological judging anticipated by the people, the buying of someone's services to create fake profiles with the intention to robotize viralization of posts or views, post mean comments of political characters or say good things about politicians or companies, products and so on. An example is the contacting of a youtuber by the Temer government to diffuse praises to the teaching reform: <<https://goo.gl/Jsa5J3>>. Access in: 30 jun. 2018.

¹³I refer to the positioning anti-civic character which violates people's rights and the interests of the collectivity and the Nation. It does not matter that in this perspective some post types are done by individuals, even labeled of fools or idiots, strong words that do not translate to what they actually represent: the lack of civility and respect to the maximum interests of the person while humans and a nation walking toward a civilization ruled by equality.

¹⁴See Umberto Eco's indignation that even qualifies some internet users as idiots: <<https://goo.gl/7mpRiK>>. Access in 30 Jun. 2018.

- a. Anti-civility. When the technological devices are appropriated to disseminate prejudicial demonstrations the black, the poor, homosexuals, immigrants, the disabled, women, the elder, etc., to exploit children and teenagers and for the defamation of causes of public interest, it is incorporated the oppression and the affront to the civil rights and the citizenship spirit. Therefore, it is debatable the meaning on how this individual freedom is operated, thus it is not a technology problem but it is of the social actors who handle it. The same way, the conservative ideas (the return of militarism, denial of education freedom, etc.), present in street protests in São Paulo and in other states, supporting the previous and posterior periods of Dilma Rousseff's impeachment process, reflect the lack of civility. The Brazilian nation has already said no to the dictatorship installed in 1964. The recent demonstrations in favor to the violation of the normality of the democratic order are reflexes of opinions mobilized from minority segments of the population. Also, it is not about a phenomenon restricted to the media and digital networks, nor about the street protests. This type of political positioning is in different social groups, has its roots in the culture, and transcends internet social relations.
- b. Privatization. There are more and more privatization – establishing control in a way of a privatized property – technological environments which originally had a free open and universal public access. The institution of the private property of spaces, technological discoveries in hardware and software, the selling of goods and services inherent to

the internet, the demand for the access to newspapers and scientific articles (even of those generated from public financing) etc. changes the logic of gratuity, establishing the logic of profit, appropriated individually, and of the capitalist market. The buying of innovative technology by the companies Google, Facebook and Yahoo, amongst others, and the operation by unleashed actions, commented at the beginning of the text and following exemplify, in part, this question.

- c. Control. It is true that all the accesses to the internet can become emitters and receptors at the same time. Before, the possibilities of accessing the news, historical, artistic contents and so on, as well as to participate as a subject on the emission of their own content and/or from a third part, exchange of ideas and data sharing in real time, have never been so accessible. However, we have never been so watched and controlled, from the political and ideological point of view, as well as personal.

When creating the user profile on Facebook and on and on other social media sites, and navigating the internet, all actions in the media and digital social networks are registered. Control systems never seen before are increasingly being developed. From the institutional security point of view, the possibility of citizen surveillance became broader and easier. From a business point of view, besides the control and appropriation of the psychographic profiles, the privacy is invaded with persuasive messages directed from the *movements* of the user, whose profile is demarcated by Google, amongst others, based on the algorithm. We do not have the right, for example, to open the doors to a certain theme when searching for books or articles, as the results from the search have been selected by the company, which offers a *free* search engine, but is interested in the user's data. Something similar occurs in Facebook which selects the content the user will receive, from previous likes, supposedly those that identify more with the user. The next step is the invasion of publicity advertisements of products and services which access the space of the electronic address and the news pages accessed online – a feature, for example. The ads are directed from previous searches or from the profile, identified by algorithms. If I look for chair models for my dining room, they do not stop to send me offers of this kind of product. If I search for flight tickets somewhere, they want me to go the same place in the following days.

All these types of harassment became possible with the development of Big Data tools based in the algorithm. Google Adwords is a Google advertising tool

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that directs the ads to the internet user from a system that identifies words typed during searches. Thus creating audience segments and selling to advertising companies. There is also the Facebook Ads which identifies and classifies the users in consumer profiles forming groups (clusters) – according to age, sex, personal traits – which are made available to the advertisers within their own advertisement system. In a similar way works the GPS of smartphones and computer IPs, that identifies the potential public and impacts with the ad of some product in the moment it gets physically closer of the selling point. Another example is of the giant bookstore *Amazon*, which developed the *Amazon Anticipatory Shipping* which allows the consumer receive the package minutes after buying from a virtual store. Based on the algorithm they classify the product search history and the shopping cart and send the product to the nearest physical distribution center, even before finalizing the shopping, which allows a fast delivery as soon as the purchase is finalized.

As can be observed, these big transnational companies, which I quote as an example of corporations which increasingly perfect themselves in the control of user's data, who end up giving away their information, generally without knowing, in awe of the easiness that modern technology provides. This data is a source of revenue and is negotiated (manipulated in researches and sold to advertisers and electoral and commercial marketing companies, for example) by these virtual corporations in their economic transactions.

Added to the component previously mentioned when I spoke about the privatization of the internet and some scientific discoveries related to it – which are born with the vocation to the open access -, the gains about users actions and the private appropriation of personal data and social groups should, at least, be transparent and financially compensated – if they should be stored – from its use and according to percentage on visualization clicks and profit, for example.

In this context, in the face of the high technology of production and services in all economic sectors of society, of the private appropriation of the knowledge of information and communication technology, the data of internet users and their creations, there should be ways to reimburse society for all this wealth generated collectively. A mechanism could be the compulsoriness of the companies to destine resources (profit percentage) to a public fund of *universal basic income*. If the employment and working conditions are reduced, increasing the contingent of the poor, the technological development that contributes to entail these contradictions also points to a need to find exits to the inequality situation around the world.

The idea of the guarantee of basic income to all is a theme of “thinkers for more than five hundred years and returned now, given the preoccupation

with lifestyles erosion, with wealth concentration and with possible mass unemployment due to the technological changes” (Thornhill, 2017: A.14). But even Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, admitted this idea when discoursing in a graduation at the University of Harvard, United States, in July 2017, defending the universal basic income and saying: “It is time our generation defined a new social contract. We should explore ideas such as the universal basic income to guarantee all have safety to test new ideas” (In Harvard..., 2017).

The destiny of percentage over profits to a fund of universal basic income by big companies, as an example Google and Facebook and all those which benefited of the discoveries of Silicone Valley, can still become an topic of State politics. But, as says Thornhill (2017: A.14), “seems fair that Facebook gives a bigger contribution, for profiting so much with this valuable resource which was generated collectively [...]. The users would continue to exchange kitten pictures, but knowing that each click contributes to a higher social well-being”, even if the shareholders hated the idea.

The third controversy: public demonstration without a leader, so the demonstrators would convene themselves. In first place, of course the manifestations and protests of broad magnitude are free and that there is a dialectic process of interaction and mobilization oriented horizontally and not controllable in the digital social networks Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc., and even the consequence of the previously commented mechanisms. But it is known the existence of fake profiles and robot manipulated working for determined groups – mentors and those interested in certain advancements – besides the initial call from some social movement, entity, political group, or the occurrence of some happening that motivates the gathering of people, and becomes led by groups. This way, there are distinctions between the processes of calling and mobilization in favor of the great public demonstrations, those initiated and materialized in public concrete spaces. In this second aspect, the situation and the happenings of the moment are associated to the *crowd effect* (reciprocal influence according to the heat of the moment) in the context of direct and dispersing action. Anyway, in both processes there are the influences from the relations in the Web and WhatsApp networks as well as the content broadcasted by the great conventional means of communication.

About the starting point, the calling, it tends to become diffused when confronted in a public space, which can extract the control of its idealizers and precursors becoming unpredictable. The (MPL), even though initiating the calling for demonstrations on streets and public squares in June 2013, lost the control during the process. The *Brazil Free Movement* (MBL – from the Portuguese)¹⁵, amongst other actors such as *Vem Pra Rua* (*Come Outside*), headed the calling

¹⁵Entity created in 2014 and led, amongst others, by Renan Antônio Ferreira dos Santos and Fernando Holiday, the later currently a congressman by the DEM (Democrats Party) in São Paulo. About Renan´s profile, see: <<https://goo.gl/5AzErj>> e <<https://goo.gl/25zmfG>>. Access in: 30 jun. 2018.

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¹⁶See: <<https://goo.gl/vJnZpo>>. Access in: 30 jun. 2018.

¹⁷See: <<https://goo.gl/5jUoWV>>. Access in: 30 jun. 2018.

¹⁸From the original: "las tecnologías digitales como factor determinante de la existencia".

of the protests of 2015 and 2016 supporting the impeachment of the elected president. On the other side the Front *Povo sem Medo (Fearless People)*¹⁶, which aggregates around thirty organizations, and the *Frente Brasil Popular (Popular Brazil Front)*¹⁷ – composed by around eighty social movements and entities – called for protests in favor of the democratic order and against the deposition of Dilma Rousseff.

At last, these nuances indicate to be frightening to consider “the digital technologies as the determinant factor of existence”¹⁸ (Barranquero, 2012: 381) of the *social movements*, even though, from my point of view, they play a central role in the calling, interaction and mobilization to the great *demonstrations*, rallies or *public protests*, such as the 15-M (Spain), the Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall Street (United States), the Occupy London (England), #YoSoy132 (Mexico), Journeys in 2013, and all other public demonstrations in 2015 and 2016 in Brazil, amongst others. Especially the media and online networks, WhatsApp networks and other applications are important for the diffusion of information, for debates and as mobilization channels to occupy the streets and assemblies. They represent a horizontality factor in the communication among people (interaction, interactivity, persuasion) instant and universal. Other technologies have had and have their importance, but the internet potential is incomparable. An example is the World Social forum – an event of an international magnitude which happens physically in different countries – has also become so expressive due to the communicative factor enabled by the internet, which does not mean that it is the reason of its existence and of the existence of the many demonstrations of a highly mobilizing power. The reason is prior to that and it is based on structural causes, which generate dissatisfaction and provoke the social organization to face them. If there were no internet, other forms of interaction would be used, as other large sized demonstrations have previously demonstrated.

It should still be noted that the great public demonstrations, walks, rallies and protests only happened in the concrete, urban or rural, space. The movement of people and ideas is made from interactions amongst the flowing spaces of the internet, the communication networks and the presence in public spaces and occupied symbolic buildings (Castells, 2012).

In addition, it should be considered that the social movements, public manifestations, virtual communities and digital social networks are not untouchable spaces. On one side, the conventional media penetrate with their versions and visions, helping to form opinions and to mobilize those who participate and those who do not participate of these forums. They inform, show gatherings, indicate places, shape news features according to outside perceptions, class visions and their own editorial politics. They tend to disqualify

demonstrations when they *do not have a defined political tendency* (June 2013) and are left-winged (demonstrations pro-Dilma in 2015 and 2016). Those of a conservative tendency in favor of the impeachment of president elected by the people were praised by the great Brazilian media. In any situation of immediate loss of control jargons such as *badgers, vandals, insignificant groups* and so on appear in order to disqualify the demonstration. The origins and reasons of the demonstrations are either superficially treated or not treated at all. There is a search for the unusual and tragic, as the news covering of the great press is impregnated in sensationalism. If it were not for the alternative media and online networks Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc. we would not know about the real faces of these public demonstrations, facing the so common editing tendencies of the mass media. All the means of communication edit – cut, trim, give meanings –, there is a good reason to have a diversity of them, including the alternative media. It is one of the reasons of the democratization of communication and freedom of expression. Only the amplitude of TV and communication channels can help the diverse circulation of information and take care of the many dimensions that the great public manifestations contain.

On the other side, the personal means such as cellphones and smartphones, filming, photographing and posting on networks, added to the action technically more qualified of the alternative media, also interfere in the motivations and visions about the facts, enabling the overview and the knowledge of events and their versions, that do not appear in the great conventional means of communication. Besides the interest to identify the despised or negatively manipulated aspects by the great media, there is the factor of insertion that better qualifies the news covering. The protagonists of these contents are inserted, participating, seeing what occurs on the inside, and not only *covering*, in order to account for an *agenda*, as it happens with professional reporters.

POSSIBILITIES AND THE REALITY OF THE APPROPRIATION OF THE CYBERSPACE BY THE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND CONGENIAL POPULAR ORGANIZATIONS

Having as a basis the potentialities already mentioned and discussed one cannot disregard, that the citizen spaces created in the internet are important forums, windows and participation places, even with antagonisms and distortions. There is no directional unanimity, but *citizen spaces* from different nuances. Society is like that, blurred, contradictory, multifaceted and permeated in ideological and political conflicts.

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In contrast the risk of individual participation so famous (and important), but which tend to exert the extended *freedom* as an individual autonomy, that justifies even anti-civic positions (personal offenses, rights violation, discrimination, wrong political positions, fake news, etc.), the communitarian collectives, non-governmental organizations, popular social movements, virtual communities, alternative media, and some online networks, amongst other actors, externalize in the internet the civic spirit that moves them. As some authors remind us, the cyberspace and the online networks are spaces of participation and of other ways of relations (Frey, 2003). They transcend the face-to-face. They eliminate borders and distances (Scherer-Warren, 2005). They contribute to settle common milestones of meanings and feelings of belongings and collective identity; they are fundamental in the calling to mobilization; the *campaign*, even without being self-generated, the caller loses control over it because of the interaction associated to the direct action and the co-presence; the network philosophy serves as new informative possibilities to new social movements (Barranquero, 2012). To these aspects, it is worth adding that the cyberspace and the online networks help with the public visibility. They are the basis of documentation. They favor communication *inside* the popular social movement, when favoring interaction and debate, and when forming virtual communities. They also help to qualify the communication of the movement *outside* (before society) when introducing themselves and when having a public position. They enable the realization of the communicative howto, with an investment less costly of financial resources. They favor yet the social movement communication and its sympathizers (followers¹⁹), as well as the broadening of international and transnational relations. Ultimately, the digital social networks are nowadays important forums for mobilization, articulation, exchange of knowledge, content sharing and coordination of actions, the core of communicative expression.

¹⁹The follower is not always a sympathizer, though. He can be an observer, an infiltrated *detective*, or the *Follow* click could mean no more than a number when counting followers, that is, the person adhere, but does not follow, in fact, that blog or profile. Or even follows, not necessarily to like, but to snoop around or spy on the adversary.

However, the type of internet presence and if it is more or less effective is part of the strategy of consolidated specific social movement, for example, the Hit by Dams Movement (MAB – from the Portuguese). Not always it is ok to them to externalize all of their decisions and tactics, as a matter of security and of action focus (depending on the type of recipient and its actions), and even to avoid stigmatizations.

In the context provided by cyberspace possibilities to the popular, communitarian and alternative communication have been broadened, once conceived as the essence of communication of the popular social movements, that is, of the sub alternated segments organized by the population. This one has been renewed in its language, format, importance and reach. It goes through

an intrinsic process of re-elaboration, including the empowerment of the communication and information technology within its reach.

It is still timid the internet presence – in the sense of a full use of hypertext resources, interactive channels, updating, easiness of navigation and instantaneous dialog – of the popular social movements, known here as a form of organization of civil societies constituted autonomously and in a horizontal way with the goal of adding forces, create awareness and fight for the rights of segment of the population. However, empowerment is growing – appropriation with conscience and power of autonomous direction – from sites, pages, blogs, collaborative platforms, profiles in media sites and digital networks, creation of WebTVs, YouTube channels and online radios, network creation in WhatsApp and so on, establishing communicative processes in the cyberspace for the movement and civic collectives purposes. Profiles are created, virtual communities and social networks are formed from collectives, associations and communitarian movements, e-mail lists and WhatsApp networks proliferate, leadership and militant training are taught, for there is a worry about helping in web pages creation, converting a text document into HTML, the appropriate use of Twitter and Facebook and so on.

A study of the *Slum Observatory* from Rio de Janeiro (Braga; Ansel; Moisés, 2014: 11, 19, 20, 24) mapped 118 initiatives of alternative, popular and communitarian media in the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro, between 2013 and 2014, from which seventy answered a questionnaire, that allowed to trace some of its characteristics. In 2011 there was a balanced distribution amongst the different media operated by the seventy respondents, that is, 23 blogs, eighteen small newspapers, twelve radios and ten sites. The digital means represented 55% of the total against 45% of press media, radio and audiovisuals. Now in 2014, the proportion was 74%. Were included WebTV, WebRadio, online networks, and there was still the increase of blogs and sites. In 2011, only 15% percent also had digital means, besides the main ones (newspapers, radio...); in 2014 the percentage increased to 81%.

Group initiatives, collectives, associations and social movements are the ones that conjugate concrete social-communitarian activities when passing or being present on the internet. The acting and the importance of this presence depend on each concrete reality. To the family farmers social movement of the Union Center of Borborema, in the state of Paraíba – as well as the settlement of farmer´s families connected to Landless Workers Movement (MST), to the Cooperative of Farming Production Vitória, in Parana, and the communitarian movement of Heliópolis, articulated from the Core Union, Associations and the Society of Residents of Heliópolis and Area, in the capital São Paulo – the dialogic

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and face-to-face human communication is still the flagship of the articulation, organization and coordinated action processes. There are places in which the speaker still is the most viable and important communication channel, while in others the community radio broadcasting is more adequate. But there are cases in which a Twitter network or a Facebook, Instagram profile, etc. become alternative media. Even the communication through WhatsApp networks substitutes phone calls and gives potential to simultaneity when exchanging messages by text or voice, and the communitarian and alternative communication.

This way, the empowerment, used in the sense of *giving power* and, generally, present in the programs of communitarian development support – when talking about empowerment of communication means and cyberspace environments it is always an strategic question that comes from *appropriation* with own capacities and purposes. I am talking about empowerment in the sense proposed by Paulo Freire when discussing the emancipation from people's changing capacity, in their conscientious and active relation with the world. That is, overcoming in the sense of *giving power* to someone, to individuals – to the configuration of a collective invention of the exercising of power and with autonomy. As he says (1986: 138),

The matter of empowerment of the social class involves the question of how the workers class, through their own experiences, their own culture constructions, commit to the acquiring of political power. This makes empowerment a lot more than just an individual or psychological invention. Indicates a political process from the dominated classes in search of their own freedom of domination, a long historical process in which education is a fighting front.

In the scope of social movements, it is not about appropriation or empowerment in an individual level, but such transformation happens according to the need to communicate and to be of service for the collective *howto*. This is the reason it can be said that the level of channel appropriation and the quality of the communicational processes set in place depend on the conditions and circumstances, the goals and the types of public with who the communitarian organizations and popular movements relate to and to whom their work is directed to. It is important to recognize the differences and the various forms of being on the internet and its functionalities.

There are hundreds of collectives and correlated initiatives organized in each state of Brazil that prioritize the popular, communitarian and alternative traditional means of communication and/or cyber activism (depending on the broadband access conditions) in its action mode aiming the citizen emancipation

of social segments in a vulnerable situation. They are in general initiatives in which communication is only one of the fronts of social-educative work, that is, it facilitates processes of social exchange and citizenship development.

As mentioned, there are 118 collectives only in the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro. In the south zone of São Paulo it is heard of the existence of hundreds of them. In the case of Rio we can cite as examples initiatives like *Favela em Foco* (works with films, videos and photographs as an educative instrument), *Ocupa Alemão* (Promotes debates, demonstrations, cultural events), *Cafuné na Laje* (independent production company), *Onlaje* (Virtual platform of the *Popular School of Critical Communication* from *Observatório de Favelas*), Amongst many.

Summarizing, besides the face-to-face dialogical communication that always permeates the communication processes and communitarian education are also created traditional means and sites facilitator of information diffusion and/or communication such as: small newspapers, radio stations, sites, portals, blogs, virtual communities, groups and profiles in social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, collaborative platforms, cellphone WebTV productions which are posted on digital platforms, WebRadios, WhatsApp networks, live coverage of activities and actions of popular movements and posterior productions of documentaries by the alternative media, as example of *Midia Ninja*²⁰ and *Jornalistas Livres* and so on.

This text emphasizes the channels and forms of communication in the scope of popular social movements in the emancipatory work of a civic-communitarian character. However, there are other forms of civic acts more characteristic of the alternative means of communication in cyber activism. It is the case of the production and divulgation of the alternative visions and facts, covering themes not dealt by the great media, deep analysis of political and economic questions, diffusion of stealthy documents, like, for example, the *Global Voices*, *Pillku Magazine*, *Media Leaks*, *Midia Ninja*, collectives in slums and hundreds of other experiences around the world. There are also the media activism practices adept to protests and bad mouthing characteristic from the tactical media and of the Hacker activism (*Anonymous*, etc.). All together, they are initiatives that help forming a scenario of deep citizen involvement in humanitarian and civic causes.

It should still be noted that the advances do not exhaust themselves in means, channels, media activism and direct communicative processes. There is also the development of technologies – applications, platforms, hardware, social software, etc. – of their own and prone to the communitarian movements and to the liberating citizen communication.

The researcher Arthur William, from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, created an application for the community radio – which broadcast

²⁰Independent Narrative Journalism and Action, communication sector of the *Collective Out of the Axis*.

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from the local to the communitarian – capable of amplifying the reach of the broadcasting, with the argument that “all local culture, voices and ideals should be valued, and go even further” (Researcher...; 2013). This technology has versions for the Web, Android and Iphone and is being used by more than 64 radios in seventeen countries.

In Mexico, a *Rhizomatic*²¹ Network of communitarian cellular telephones has been developed in the Sierra Norte area, in Oaxaca, a region previously without mobile cellular telephone signal because the great Telecommunication companies were not interested in investing in infrastructure in these rural areas of indigenous population. Based on free hardware and software – as if it was radio –, the Rhizomatic appeared in 2013 in Villa Tallea de Castro, 120 kilometers from Oaxaca. At the beginning it served 33 communities, but nowadays the networks have a range of more than 356 counties in five states (Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla e Veracruz (Rhizomatica..., 2015; La Emancipación..., 2016).

The project part of the initiative of collectives, universities, civil society organizations, and indigenous means of communication, belonging to the *National Congress of Indigenous Communication*, committed to the exercise of indigenous people's rights to acquire, administrate and operate their own means of communication, as says the constitutional text. The initiative tried to identify the technical, economic and judicial conditions so the indigenous communities who cannot count on cellular telephony could have it. Based on the public politics recommendations from the program *Connect a School – Connect a Community from the Unión Internacional de Telecomunicaciones (UIT)*, we structured a service provision scheme based in collaboration, economies of traditional system and scales of an indigenous organization, feasible to the service provision. This way the community operates an internal network of internet service. [...] A community of *Talea de Castro* decided to pioneer this scheme and in this case, was installed in an internal cellular base radio that operates in a 900 MHz frequency band free to use in Mexico, that is, a private network (nonprofit) that does not even require permission ou concession; connects to an internet provider that counts with a VoIP operator²². (Comunicado, 2013: 1-2)

The Rhizomatic is legally constituted, from all the gaps discovered in legislation and approved by the Telecommunications Federal Commission. The technological knowledge of people aligns to the civic character and to the participation of communities with collective management practices and the creation of a communal resources fund. The system is administrated in the same ways of the communitarian radios facing all their local cellular telephony needs.

²¹Rhizomatica. Redes por la Diversidad, Equidad y Sustentabilidad A.C.

²²From the original: “El proyecto parte de la iniciativa de colectivos, universidades, organizaciones de la sociedad civil y medios de comunicación indígena, pertenecientes al Congreso Nacional de Comunicación Indígena, comprometidos con el ejercicio del derecho de los pueblos indígenas a adquirir, administrar y operar sus propios medios de comunicación, como lo marca el texto constitucional. La iniciativa buscó identificar las condiciones técnicas, económicas y jurídicas para que las comunidades indígenas que no cuentan con telefonía celular, pudieran hacerlo. Con base en las recomendaciones de política pública del programa Connect a School - Connect a Community de la Unión Internacional de Telecomunicaciones (UIT), estructuramos un esquema de prestación de servicio basado en la colaboración, en economías de escala y sistemas tradicionales de organización indígena, que hiciera viable la prestación del servicio. Así, la comunidad opera una red interna al servicio de internet. [...] La comunidad de Talea de Castro decidió ser pionera en este esquema y en el caso, se ha instalado una radiobase celular interna que opera en banca de 900 MHz de uso libre en México, es decir, una red privada [sin fines de lucro] que no requiere permiso o concesión; que se conecta a un proveedor de internet y que cuenta con un operador VoIP [...]”.

CHALLENGES TO THE POPULAR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INTERNET TIMES

The first challenge is to qualify the social fights to guarantee that the technological development and, the internet with all its power to facilitate the universal access to information and to enable sharing contents, are primarily placed to serve the common wellbeing, once maintained the public sense of the generation of technological knowledge. This would be a basic clue to constitute an economy guided by the service to the human being, and not only developed as a capital and profit generator business privately appropriated by the capitalist corporation owners. In this challenge is embedded the notion of the urgency to broaden the fight for the full access of all the citizens to the technological development benefits of their time, in conditions of equality.

A second challenge, regarding to channels and means of communication, is to care for the value of diversity and the coexistence of the dialogue communication with the traditional and modern technologies, as part of a communicational complex of the movements and nonprofit social organization. The blind race for the social digital networks can disregard the importance of direct and dialogue face-to-face communication as an effective force of awareness and of lasting collective attitudes, besides the press, the radio and television as channels and languages of importance in determined realities. In this context, at the same time should be considered the centrality of the internet and its infinite stable sites and participation temporary spaces contributing to citizen communication, facilitate access to knowledge, favor culture diffusion and popular knowledge, provide visibility to emancipatory initiatives, provoke mobilization and establish link between people viewing coordinated actions, even with a limited duration, as in the case of the great manifestations and public protests. It is an indispensable level to the development of citizen rights. However, without disregarding the differences: the technological abilities are more developed in some movements (and people) than others and homogenization is not applicable.

There are other subjacent challenges, as a third, to overcome the public political premises based in mere digital *inclusion* strategies. It should be incorporated information and communication information as knowledge platforms to develop cultures of information, communication and knowledge, in the cyber culture perspective (cibercultur@) defended by Jorge A. González (2012), allowing the strengthening of autonomy and the re-energizing of socio communitarian structures. The fourth challenge: to create and strengthen virtual and face-to-face communities, beyond the social networks Facebook or WhatsApp. Communities presuppose the existence of thicker and more durable links, purpose affinities and the sharing of benefits coming from modes

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²³There is a tendency that the most able when handling the techniques anticipate the collective *howto* in the elaboration and posting of contents in the media and online networks related to the movement they represent, which can be harmful to the participative process and shared decision.

of collective action. And a fifth would be to overcome the tendency to the individualism and to the personalism²³, by the individuals in their uses of internet sites as well as leadership of social and communitarian movements, which means the development of the collective sense, the *us*, the common, the cooperation and the education to the civic spirit.

They are visions which are lodged in a development conception, the *participative development*, or even the *Buen Viver*, if understood as a superior stage to the developmentalist model based in the diffusionist progress predominantly in force in Brazil and around the world. A debate about which development is ongoing and about other type of possible development is being fought in the editions of the World Social Forum. But there is a paradox, the World Economic Forum, which impregnates the world with visions, politics and practices giving primacy to the capital interests.

Thus, the challenges grow, and it is worth the de-colonizing of the minds, in a way to deconstruct the consumerism culture and the western way of life as a standard to all the peoples which, in fact, sound just like mirages to the vast majority of poor people in the planet.

The construction of a society globalized in civism inherent to the ontological vocation of the human to humanization (Freire, 1997) is the subjacent challenge to all others.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The incessant technological advancements show new faces to the development of the information technologies and communication when providing discoveries and appropriations in multiple directions, in both liberating and oppressive sense. There are emancipatory initiatives as mentioned before, but also the contrary. The anonymity possible behind masks, the post-fact, post-truth or fake news (what actually happens or happened does not matter, and something become news even before checking the veracity of it.), the bullying, the disrespect to the ethnical, social, genre, educational, of precedence and physical differences, among others, confront people's rights and oppress human dignity. In other terms, in the internet there are space favorable to civility, but there are other that cultivate defamation and hate. It is the arena of freedom of expression – individualist or collectivist – being at the same time, a control stage of the people who expose themselves or are exposed in it. The dominance of the algorithm mechanisms is an immeasurable matter of importance. It represents the cunning of the capital and of the State to the control of people and of the social groups; to satisfy the strategies of capitalist companies, of political parties segments and of the forces

of state power exercise (political and repressor) and the denial of freedom and autonomy of the citizens. This domain enables the total control of everything seen, searched and done in computers, cellphones and similar devices connected to the internet. Someone's life can be mapped to be used in anyway by the data holders, which can be for both political-ideological and political-party interests as well as for the marketplace.

However, there is also another strong paradox: there are a thousand and one forms to resistant to all the mechanisms of oppression and social manipulation. Many different actors, committed with social justice and the building of an egalitarian society, star in numerous initiatives (forming communities, networks – face-to-face and digital, blogging, posting pictures, podcasts, videos with alternative information – other view of society – all around the world) capable of, little by little, educate about citizenship, uncover the visions and unfavorable actions of public interest, reduce inequality (many conjugate action in the internet and concrete reality) and to influence the civilizing character of each nation. ■

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