THE MEDIATIZATION OF LEADERSHIP: GRASSROOTS DIGITAL FACILITATORS AS ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS

Mylynn Felt
University of Calgary

Maria Bakardjieva
University of Calgary

Delia Dumitrica
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Scholars of both resource mobilization theory and new social movement theory recognize leadership as integral to traditional social movements (McCarthy and Zald, 1987; Melucci, 1989; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004). For Staggenborg, "movements need leadership and vision in order to create the collective action frames, organizational vehicles, and strategies and tactics necessary for ongoing and effective campaigns" (2012, p. 187).

Following global protest movements of 2011, some now characterize movements relying on social media as horizontal and leaderless (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2012). Does leadership in social media activism indeed disappear or does it take on new characteristics? Gerbaudo (2012) suggests that the current protest cycle is characterized by 'soft leadership' in which certain participants play a key role in producing a 'choreography of assembly'.

Whether due to an organizational shift to networks over bureaucracies or due to a change in values, many social movements in the current protest cycle are not characterized by visible leadership. This is not a novel, social-media related development. Melucci writes of this as early as 1996 "The formal roles of leadership within an organizational structure in recent movements has been at least partially delegitimized" (1996, p. 344). This creates a dilemma for participants. There is a need

for leadership to sustain action but since leadership is devalued, it can create interpersonal tension. Melucci sees the "relationship with power and asymmetry" as a major challenge to contemporary movements and one that is "not easily solved." This tendency is further exacerbated in the current cycle of contention where the initiation, framing and coordination of collective action have relied heavily on digital and social media. It appears that organizational hierarchies have transformed into flat networks, and the media infrastructure has taken over much of the work of leadership.

Where have all the leaders of collective action gone in the digital age? This paper seeks to intervene in current debates by closely analyzing three different cases of civic mobilization and collective action in Canada that have employed social media as key instruments. In each case study we ask the questions whether any manifestations of leadership can be found, and if so, what are the characteristics and typical practices of leaders operating in the digital media environment. As activists increasingly organize through social media, do these movements truly flatten to horizontal organizations? If, on the other hand, contemporary movements continue to rely on some forms of leadership, what is its nature?

This paper undertakes an in-depth analysis of data obtained through interviews, event observations and analysis of media content related to three Canadian cases of civic mobilization of different scale, all of which strategically employed social media: the provincial MLA Playdate, the national Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women campaign, and the Canadian response to the international Refugees Welcome movement. What attributes, competencies, skills, and practices distinguished the individuals and groups that played key roles in the inception and ongoing organization of these movements? How can their role (or roles) be defined, if not as traditional organizational leadership? The paper uses Gramsci's notion of the "organic intellectual" and Bourdieu's (1991) model of the "political field" to propose a conceptual framework for understanding the role of these organizers as political discourse-producers, sociometric stars and organic intellectuals.

Unlike traditional, professional intellectuals such as lawyers, teachers, doctors, etc., organic intellectuals emerge from within communities with grievances (Strine, 1991). Consequently, they are better positioned to make counter-hegemonic claims with their personal experience and connections to the groups asserting collective action. As parents of school-aged children, as Indigenous women and relatives to murder victims, as immigrants and the children of immigrants, many of the grassroots facilitators of local mobilizations for these cases fit the criteria of Gramsci's organic intellectual. These leaders acted strategically to make claims and were personally accountable for generating the necessary material and human resources. Even when tied to larger, formalized organizations for coordination, they worked autonomously as impactful grassroots organizers with the unique knowledge background of their impacted community and thus acted with greater affective resonance in making claims and mobilizing constituents.

In the digital media environment, these organic intellectuals were not only able to articulate ideas adequately capturing the social situation and the position of the disaffected; they also acted as experienced and competent navigators of the expressive

and disseminative possibilities afforded by the communication apparatus. They were able to effectively target their messages and elicit a powerful response. Their status in the digitally enabled social networks was that of sociometric stars and critical nodes in which numerous connections among actors, both inside and outside the movement, intersected.

Ultimately, the organizers of the mobilizations under study were successful in infiltrating the political field, typically the domain of institutional players, with discourses collaboratively produced in the exchanges among grassroots citizens.
By looking closely at the three cases through the lenses offered by these concepts, we identify the specific competencies, strategies and styles that characterize mediatized civic leadership.

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