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JAMMING THE POLITICAL WITH “INTERGALACTIC PEACE” – NETWORKED PUBLICS OF ANTI-RACISM

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Introduction

Online environments have offered new ways for citizens to participate in political activities, create collective action, and form social movements. Following Flanagin, Stohl and Bimber (2006) collective action is an inherently *communicative phenomenon* that includes connecting people through their interest in a public good, communicating messages to these people, as well as coordinating, integrating, and synchronizing the contributions of these individuals. Following this proposition, this paper investigates how a social movement is constituted as an organization through communication on digital media platforms.

The study builds on the CCO approach of organizational studies and sees organizations being constituted in communication (Cooren et al., 2011). From this perspective communicative action emerges in conversations and is solidified in texts. As social media platforms allow for more decentralized forms of communication and action, they enforce openness to the process of constitution (Kavada, 2016). Hence, organizations are not only constituted by their internal communication, but also by “a network of relations between organizations and their public sphere” (Raupp, 2011).

To empirically study this co-participative form of communicative constitution we analyze the online presence of a social movement activist group, Loldiers of Odin, an activist group born as a parody to the anti-immigration group Soldiers of Odin. The group makes all their public appearances disguised, dressed as clowns. Using network analysis combined with rhetorical analysis we trace the process of collective agency constituting itself as a collective actor in the digital realm (Kavada, 2016). In particular, we depict the ways how novel, dramatic, and non-institutionalised forms of digital political expression act as constitutive elements for the emerging organization.

Social movements as communicative constitutions

Social movements are a significant social and political force that transform societies through their engagement with new media, thus making communication the essential way of enabling networking, sharing, and mobilization (Benford & Snow, 2000; Kelly Garret, 2006; Loader, 2008), even ideology formation. The strategic use of novel, dramatic, unorthodox, and non-institutionalised forms of political expression to try to shape public opinion and put pressure on those in positions of authority distinguishes social movements from other political actors (Van Laer & Van Alst, 2009).

One such non-institutionalised form of political expression is culture jamming: creating a remix of known content to incorporate critical perspectives (e.g. memes, Wiggins & Bowers, 2015). Consequently, Bart Cammaerts (2007) introduces the concept of *political jamming*, which means “the cultural jamming techniques used by political actors, as well as by citizens, in their political communication within fragmented counter-public spheres, as well as in the mainstream public sphere”. Hence, the focus of the political jam is in politics, and it is directed against policies by governments, or acting against formal political actors, such as political parties, against undesirable behaviour in society.

Our empirical case illustrates the forms of political jamming in the online context. Our primary data consists of all posts and comments published in 2016 on the Loldiers of Odin Facebook page, including posts from both the page and page likers, extracted through the Facebook API. This data set includes 140 posts, with 14212 users liking, commenting, or reacting to those posts a total of 54996 times. The data provides a chronological account to the lifecycle of the group during the first year of its existence, providing links to other relevant media coverage. Following Blaschke et al. (2012) proposition, we use network analysis to study the network of communication episodes, where the vertices of the network represent communication episodes and the edges represent individuals.

Preliminary results

Our preliminary results show how the digital dimensions bring an important aspect to the existence of the Loldiers as a collective actor. The clown-suited activists are only a handful, but their online presence has engaged over 14 000 individual users during the year of 2016. However, the network graph (Fig 1) shows how only a minority of users are connected to several communication episodes, and the vast majority remains as isolates on the border areas of the network, connected through one or two episodes only. Further, from the full amount of activated page users only 1137 users commented on the page. The rest participated using likes and reactions, which is typical for any Facebook page community.

Loldiers extensively use visual modes of communication to communicate their point. Many of their statements are videos and photographs – including the most central episodes identified in the network analysis (Figure 1). In particular, they use memetic content in order to maximise the replication and distribution capabilities of the issues they advocate. The performance of the Loldiers becomes an example of an artefact with

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virtual physicality (Wiggins & Bowers, 2015), a thing existing in the digital environment, in the human mind – but also in the physical realm through their public appearances.

Hence, the group exists both as a material entity and as a digital entity. We argue that in particular the digital performance gives meaning to the group and its activity. The material and physical parts of their political jamming performance take place on the streets and in the demonstrations, but the digital dimension makes the protest more widespread, and allows them to use certain rhetorical elements, narratives, and forms of communication typical to the digital age. Through the communicative episodes the group creates an ongoing digital performance through which the collective constitutes itself, and through which it organizes a wider protest. We argue that the public communication acts publicly performed on Facebook as well as the voices of the supporters recorded as comments open important views to the process where the collective actor of Loldiers is constituted, and where it performs its communication capacities.



Figure 1. Posts on red, commenters on blue, page on black.

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