Digital prefigurative participation: The entwinement of online communication and offline participation in protest events

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Abstract

This article reviews the main findings of a three year empirical study that examined the possible contribution of computer-mediated communication (CMC) to participation in offline social movement protest events. Participation was examined as manifest in mobilisation, identity-building and organisational transformation. Digital prefigurative participation is a tentative construct that attempts to capture the CMC aspect of engagement in the three processes. The participatory processes were probed in the contrasting circumstances of high and low risk protest events. This distinction has revealed some important differences in the structural factors that foster participation, primary among which has been organizational affiliation. Yet, it has remained largely unexplored in studies of Internet use in protest politics. Findings from two case studies of environmental protests in Romania and the UK suggest that digital prefigurative participation may be extensive among unaffiliated participants at a low-risk event and the affiliated at a high-risk one.

Keywords

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It was widely anticipated that the Internet would facilitate the diffusion of alternative forms and avenues of political communication (Bimber 2003; Mosca, 2008). It would give people opportunities to communicate with political organisations and take part in political actions outside of mainstream politics. Such expectations have been grounded in empirical findings suggesting that rather than disengaging from politics altogether, citizens in liberal democracies have been making use of alternative avenues for expressing their political grievances (Dalton, 2006; Rodgers, 2003). Indeed, protest continues to be a prominent outlet for the popular articulation of political concerns. In the latest instalments, it has been a response to the handling of the global financial crisis by liberal-democratic institutions illustrated by the student protests in the UK (Lewis and Walker, 2010); or the popular upheaval against long-standing dictatorships in the Middle-East. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been widely viewed as central to the orchestration of these latest protests (Jenkins, 2011; Zhuo et al., 2011) and appears to figure ever larger in the popular reassertion of democratic sovereignty (Castells, 2007, 2009).

How is CMC contributing to participation in protest events run by Social Movement Organisations (SMOs)? This question has been the point of departure for the empirical study reviewed in this article. Analysts have assessed the influence of the Internet on the relationship between social movements and the mass-media (Castells, 1997, 2007); and have considered the scope for alternative self-publication they offer social movements (Atton, 2004; Russell, 2005). Increasingly, social movement organizations

may be in a position where they are able to circumvent the traditional filters of media institutions (Gitlin, 2003). Largely, this has been due to the fact that the Internet has furnished SMOs with a capacity for mass communication rivalled only by broadcast media (Postmes and Brunsting, 2002:294).

Through their Internet use, SMOs may have made their public communication more effective whilst also enhancing their capacity to coordinate collective action (Ayres, 1999; van Aelst and Walgrave, 2002). CMC has concurrently helped diversify their action repertoires (van de Donk et al., 2004) whilst also increasingly blurring notions of what constitutes political activism (McCaughey and Ayers, 2003:5). A gamut of online forms of activism -boycotts, hacktivism, petitions, sit-ins, strikes- have mushroomed and arguably broadened the field of contention to include the digital domain. Moreover, the Internet seems to have allowed SMOs to come into closer contact with participants in their actions, transcending previous spatial, temporal and socio-cultural confines (Castells, 2009; van Laer and van Aelst, 2010; Lievrouw, 2011). In the attempt to continue in this line of research, the current article enquires whether CMC might act as a conduit for the mobilisation of new cohorts into protest events; for those cohorts to build a shared identity online and finally for them to contribute to changes in how the SMOs running the events are organized.

The study's central question was considered on those three distinct levels; *mobilisation, identity-building, organisational transformation*. All three may be viewed as forms of participation: in the physical act of protest, in the interpretation of collective action and finally in the organisation of collective action. They are qualified as participatory processes and as such, manifestations of what will be termed *digital*

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prefigurative participation. The latter concept is built on the recognition that participation in protest events is rooted in a communicative act through which private concerns regarding a public issue are assembled and articulated (Flanagin et al., 2006).

Digital prefigurative participation

Digital prefigurative participation is defined as interaction with either content or individuals through CMC which precedes engagement in offline protest. The concept is put forward as a descriptor for a specific genre of digital participation in activism. Digital prefigurative participation in offline protest events may perhaps be distinguished as active involvement in the online build up -in terms of mobilisation, identity-building and organisation- ahead of a physical protest event. As such, it would stand apart from forms of online activism such as strikes, sit-ins, petitions or varieties of hacktivism (see Vegh, 2003; Della Porta et al., 2006; Jordan, 2008; Mosca, 2008) that are not designed to prefigure participation in offline protest events.

Significant attention seems to have centred on pinning down online activism, its scope or the quality of participation in it (Postmes and Brunstig, 2002; McCaughey and Ayers, 2003; van de Donk et al., 2004; Hayhtio and Rinne, 2008). Concurrently, social movement scholars have looked at the emergent implications of Internet use for extant SMOs and their offline activism (Diani, 2000; Pickerill, 2003; Della Porta et al., 2006). The intersection between offline participation and online communication geared towards augmenting participation is gradually beginning to raise more

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systematic interest (Ayres, 1999; Ayers, 2003; Castells, 2007, 2009; Kavada, 2009). In direct succession to the latter strain, this study is designed to critically examine the prevalence of prefigurative digital participation among participants in offline protest events and its purchase on their involvement in the respective protests without engaging in the more complex discussion on what constitutes online activism.

In considering this topic, an earlier distinction between high and low risk protests was pursued. The decision to dwell on this high/low-risk differential has been informed by scholarship which has indicated that the risk entailed by participation in a protest event is likely to influence who is mobilized and how (McAdam, 1986; Klandermans and Oegema, 1987). In his seminal article, McAdam (1986) suggested that the risk as well as the cost of participation would engender disparate paths of mobilisation into activism. He designated risk to be a collection of 'anticipated dangers…of engaging in an activity' (1986:67). Subsequent research has foregrounded high risk as a key attribute of protests where participants were likely to be both socially and ideologically integrated into activist networks (Klandermans and Oegema, 1987). Close socialisation within activist networks fostered ideological affinities and interpersonal commitments which underpinned high-risk mobilisation.

Through socialization, even individuals not integrated in such networks could end up participating in protest events (McAdam, 1986:68). They would be unaffiliated individuals who were not members of an activist organisation (1986:79). Unaffiliates were more likely to initially participate in instances of low-risk activism before they developed the mindset and the social links that would drive them into high-risk protests. Thus, in this article it is interrogated whether the unaffiliated may have a

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renewed possibility of becoming involved in the three participatory processes through CMC.

Notwithstanding earlier broken expectations for a 'mobilisation effect' (van Laer, 2007) to expand SMO outreach through CMC, there seem to have been new participants brought into offline protest by way of their Internet use. One significant and recent example is that of an emerging constituency of isolated individuals with no personal links to other participants in protest events (Fisher and Boekkooi, 2010:204). This finding was viewed as an impetus to focus on the mobilisation of the unaffiliated through CMC. Structurally, they have fewer opportunities for mobilisation than those closely affiliated to an activist organisation (McAdam, 1986:79).

For the most part, there has been outright scepticism (Diani, 2000) or critical reservation (Della Porta et al., 2006; Mosca, 2008; Pickerill, 2003) about the bearing the Internet may have on mobilisation into offline protest events. According to this prevalent view, CMC has principally reinforced mobilisation through existing social movement networks rather than to extend it beyond them (Diani, 2000; Lusoli and Ward, 2003; van Laer, 2010). A consolidation of extant movement networks was seen as more likely by Diani (2000: 394-95) who posited that Internet use would lead to increases in the efficiency of organizational communication but could hardly be a substitute for the social bonds underpinning participation made through face-to-face interaction (c.f. Wellman et al., 1996). In Diani's account, face-to-face interaction is germane to high levels of trust. CMC was not expected to generate, entirely apart from face-to-face interaction, those high levels of trust that underpin participation in

protest events (2000: 391). Thus, it has been argued that prior integration into a movement network is the principal conduit to mobilization (Pickerill, 2003:84).

More recently, van Laer (2010:405) has pointed out that CMC is largely conducive to the mobilisation of "organizationally embedded activists". Its more likely potential to extend mobilisation may be witnessed in the scope it affords "super-activists" with multiple cross-movement ties to sustain their manifold activist engagements (2010:412). Yet, both van Laer (2010) and other scholars (Lomicky and Hogg, 2010) concede the Internet appears to be a catalyst for mobilization due to the latitude it opens for widespread information dissemination that can purportedly reach beyond activist milieus (Postmes and Brunsting, 2002). What appears to have received little attention even in comparative studies (e.g. van Laer, 2010) is an interest in pursuing a distinction between high and low risk activism as an avenue to gain new insights into the mobilisation of the unaffiliated.

The present study consequently set out to explore the mobilisation of the unaffiliated by probing whether CMC may contribute to participants' decision to attend the protest events and the development of a sense of trust in the event organizers. In so doing, claims asserting that trust is elemental to mobilisation (Diani, 2000; Pickerill, 2003) were revisited. Further, it was asked whether CMC may contribute to participants' familiarisation with the protest events. It has previously been suggested that CMC has given more people access to pertinent information about participation in protest events (Postmes and Brunsting, 2002). Finally, it was examined whether CMC may become an alternative to mobilisation through movement networks by means of

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interpersonal ties. Interpersonal ties have been described as a key vehicle for connecting prospective protest participants to movement networks (Diani, 2000).

On the second dimension of analysis, the purchase of CMC on the creation and maintenance of a movement identity has been a widely debated topic (among others by Castells, 1997, 2007; Hara and Estrada, 2005; Pickerill, 2003; Postmes and Brunsting, 2002; Rodgers, 2003; Russell, 2005). Movement identities form as groups and individuals develop a sense of a common purpose in collective action directed at effecting social change, despite variations in their ascribed characteristics (e.g. class, gender, race; Jasper, 1997:86). How a movement identity is constructed may be evidenced in the communication between those social actors who appeal or are summoned to take collective action. Communication has been described as the fundamental process through which a collective identity may be constructed (Klandermans, 1997).

Movement identities are seen as a requisite to engagement in collective action (Klandermans, 1997:41). Yet, others have argued that participation in offline protest events has started to depend less on the appropriation of movement identities (Bobel, 2007). Several scholars have suggested that CMC may have little to contribute to the formation of a movement identity among activists (Ayers, 2003:160) and specifically to identity-building in high-risk events run by SMOs (Diani, 2000; Pickerill, 2003). Such scepticism has been premised on the notion that identities are distributed and maintained through social movement networks (Diani, 2000; Jasper, 1997:89-90).

In contrast to this perspective, other authors have asserted that the Internet is an environment where a movement identity can be formed and maintained (Hara and Estrada, 2005:504). Online, an SMO engages in multiple interactions which shape its identity, ultimately 'altering and redirecting the movement as it expands' (Russell, 2005: 562). Moreover, identification with a movement may occur in the absence of face-to-face communication in movement networks when aided by 'media labels and portrayals' (Jasper, 1997:90). Identity-building may now witness a further innovation if one also takes into account the suggestion that the Internet offers SMOs the capacity to independently broadcast their own messages (Atton, 2004).

SMOs produce and circulate movement identities among their support base using such vehicles as online distributed narratives of common purpose (Bennett and Toft, 2008). Bennett and Toft relate how individuals may have a renewed possibility to actively contribute to the distribution as well as the construction of movement identities as these are circulated through CMC. Following their line of argumentation, it may be that an opportunity can arise for the unaffiliated to assume and perhaps also rearticulate a movement identity through CMC so long as the narratives which carry it are circulated outside movement networks (2008:258).

Thirdly, digital prefigurative participation was explored as a possible avenue into organisational decision-making for prospective participants in protest events. Specifically, it was considered whether CMC may be conducive to a democratic transformation of SMO organisational forms. The organisational form of an SMO represents the structure of relations inside it (Clemens, 1996). CMC may be

contributing to changes in people's interaction with collective action organisations (Flanagin et al., 2006).

Many SMOs have been faced with the dilemma of having to reconcile leadership requirements with a moral imperative to make their decision-making democratic (Klandermans, 1997:134). Concurrently, SMOs have been portrayed as harbingers of organisational innovations as early adopters of ICTs (Chadwick, 2007). A democratic transformation of an SMO's organisational form may reflect the purported democratic and collaborative values inherent to the Web 2.0 generation of websites (Chadwick, 2008:14). The use of Web 2.0 platforms may afford SMOs the possibility to collaborate with their audiences, be that on blogs (Pomerantz and Stutzman, 2006) or social network sites (SNSs, Bruns, 2008; Jameson, 2009). Further, there are indications that in as far as participants engage in some form of collaboration on those platforms (such as by reacting to blog posts in a concerted way, boyd, 2005; discussing issues pertaining to the running of an organisation, on a blog, Pomerantz and Stutzman, 2006; or by sharing in the coordination of a collective project through an SNS, Jameson, 2009) they may generate horizontal and inclusive decision-making procedures (Jameson, 2009). Moreover, if SMOs reflexively adapt to the new opportunities for collective action created by ICTs (Flanagin et al., 2006), it may be because they are facing up to gradually more transient involvement in their actions. As a result, organisational boundaries may become increasingly blurred as SMOs may be adapting to a multiplication and diversification of their support base (Flanagin et al., 2006).

On this theoretical basis, it was explored whether democratic decision making may be a concomitant to the interaction between SMOs and their support base on their Web

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2.0 platforms. Interaction on those platforms, it was postulated, might be conducive to democratic decision-making in as far as both SMOs and their support base actively engage in some form of collaboration and SMOs are reflexive about their organisational forms.

Research cases

Research cases were selected in light of the low/high risk distinction specifically because of the interest to investigate whether CMC may contribute to the activist socialization of unaffiliated participants ahead of protest events. The two research cases in this study were distinguished as instances of low (FânFest) and high-risk (Camp for Climate Action) activism, respectively. FânFest was an environmental protest festival organized by the opposition to the proposed largest gold mine in Europe, at Roşia Montană, in Romania. The Camp for Climate Action was a protest camp aimed at taking direct action against the carbon pollution responsible for global warming. In 2008, Climate Camp took place at Kingsnorth, a coal-fuelled power station in Kent.
FânFest, the Romanian protest festival, was a low risk event although it arguably represented a rare instance of radical activism in Romania. Conversely, the Climate Camp was viewed as a fitting case of a high-risk event for which no equivalent could be found in Romania. It was deemed that a comparison between the two events would be possible if they are considered on a risk continuum. At one end of that continuum would sit the Climate Camp, an example of high-risk direct action while at the other one could locate a protest festival where activism and recreation were blended together. Yet, common to both protests was a vision of instantiating a radical departure from the prevalent forms of environmental activism in their own societies.

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Ultimately, of central concern to this investigation were the social dynamics that McAdam (1986) showed fundamentally underlie participation and not the broader context in which socialization occurs.

An inspection of the differences between those contexts, on which this paper does not expand, showed that each event reflected specific national conditions chiefly among which was a significant tradition of environmental direct action in the UK (Doherty et al., 2000) contrasting starkly with the timidly budding and largely institutionalized environmental movement in Romania (Jancar-Webster, 1998; Parau, 2009). Each protest was designed to respond to their specific wider circumstances such as the low levels of civic engagement in Romania (Odette, 2007) or an apparent necessity to form a radical activist front advancing direct action on climate change in the UK (Larry, 2008).

FânFest was principally directed at boosting civic participation. Levels of civic participation in Romania were four times lower than in the UK around the time of this study (Badescu et al., 2004). The protest festival embodied a drive to introduce a wide and unengaged public audience to environmentalism. On the other hand, the Camp for Climate Action continued in a tradition direct action whose effectiveness had been tried and tested (see Doherty, 2000). As a protest camp, an established form of direct confrontation with a target of contestation (Seel and Plows, 2000), the Climate Camp deployed a panoply of direct action tactics (e.g. lock-ons, blockades, damage to material property) to make its case for the necessity of curbing carbon emissions. The Climate Camp reactivated ties between direct action groups around the UK (Doherty et al., 2007:822). Concurrently, the Camp aimed to extend its mobilisation beyond the

direct action networks from which it emerged. At both events CMC was seen as instrumental to that common end.

The field study for this research drew on a mix of data collection methods -from participant observation to semi-structured interviews, surveys and a digital archive of the Internet outlets maintained by the SMOs, i.e. their websites, the FânFest blog and the Facebook outlets of the Climate Camp. Those methods were deployed to probe into the use of CMC both by the organizers of the protest events and the participants in them. A total number of 40 semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with the hosts and participants in the protest events. Two surveys were conducted on purposive samples (Neuman, 2003:213) of participants at FânFest 2007 and the 2008 Camp for Climate Action[1]. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed among the participants at FânFest in 2007[2]. The response rate was 84% (n=252). Only part of the data collected at FânFest for the project's pilot study could be used in the final analysis. There were 184 questionnaires distributed among the participants at the Camp for Climate Action, with a response rate of 57% (n=105)[3]. Onsite clashes and confrontations between the campers and law enforcement forces (George, 2008) testified to the high-risk character of the protest event while also making data collection more difficult than at FânFest. A comparison between the two samples seemed, nevertheless, appropriate because they represented roughly the same proportion of participants at the two events.

Mobilisation

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Binary logistic regression analysis[4] was run on the survey data collected at the two events using the block entry method, in order to gain an appreciation of who the participants were whose CMC most likely contributed to their mobilisation. The limited space of this article does not allow for a more detailed description of that analysis here. Interview data was deployed to complement and illustrate the survey results. This section discusses the main findings on the contribution of participants' CMC to their decision to attend the protests; their sense of trust in the organisers; their familiarisation with the protests and ultimately whether the Internet may help extend mobilisation beyond social movement networks to include the unaffiliated.

The analysis revealed that at both protests, the largest part of the participants was made up of Internet users. From the respondents at the Climate Camp, 101 (96 %) said they were using the Internet. Slightly more than two thirds from them were heavy users (used it between 21 and 30 days a month). At FânFest, the same proportion of participants (n=242, 96 %) was using the Internet with a larger part -three quarters from them (n=181)- being heavy users. On the other hand, levels of affiliation among respondents at FânFest were low: 10.4% were affiliated to activist organisations or groups and 8.3% were affiliated to an environmental organisation or group. By contrast, at the Climate Camp, 85 of the respondents (86.7 %) were involved in one or more activist organisations, be it an environmentalist, human rights, anti-capitalist or religious one. Slightly more than two thirds (n=65) claimed they were involved in an environmental one. Those results appeared to reinforce the argument that affiliation would be prevalent particularly among participants in high-risk protests (McAdam, 1986).

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CMC may facilitate the mobilisation of unaffiliated individuals in the low-risk protest event. CMC seemed to enable unaffiliates to plan out and organise their future participation ahead of the protest and in the absence of apparent links to activist networks. Unaffiliates sourced the information they needed to organize their participation first and foremost online[5], principally from the festival's website (Lydia, 2007). The digital prefigurative participation of the unaffiliated at FânFest was evidenced in their use of CMC to plan their attendance at the festival (Alex and Georgia, 2008) as well as to invite other unaffiliated friends to accompany them (Lydia, 2007). Alex and Georgia (2008) were an example of how exclusive reliance on the Internet medium enabled participants to become familiar with the protest, to develop an interest in attending it and to accrue the requisite knowledge for that purpose. The couple were two unaffiliated participants who for three years went to the festival on their own and in spite of discouragements from their close friends. They utilized chiefly the festival's website to get practical information as well as the activist narrative on the event, and other online news outlets to gain broader insights into the protest. Ahead of the 2007 protest they went on the website's discussion forum to trade tips and views on the protest event with other prospective participants and they stayed up to date with the yearly preparations for the festival through their subscription to its announcements list.

At the Climate Camp, it was the CMC of the affiliated and not the unaffiliated friends to prepare their participation which contributed to their mobilisation in the protest event (see Table 1). In part, this result supported earlier claims that the Internet would reinforce mobilisation through interpersonal ties within extant activist networks (Diani, 2000; Lusoli and Ward, 2003; van Laer, 2007). At the same time, they revealed perhaps

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two complicating aspects of mobilisation. The unaffiliated seemed to have a sense that using the Internet to prepare for their participation had influenced their decision to attend. With the exception of participants affiliated to environmental organisations or groups, unaffiliated participants were more likely to believe their Internet use had had a bearing on their decision to attend the event than the affiliated. In other words, in as far as self-reported perceptions went, the use of the Internet appeared to also make a difference to the participation of the unaffiliated. Perhaps that contribution to the decision to attend was in the form of the information about the events which they could retrieve online.

Table 1 Here

The unaffiliated were more likely to have used the Internet to glean information about the Climate Camp than the affiliated. Yet, they did not seem to have used it systematically to communicate with their friends or activist organisations about participation. Nonetheless, it was proposed that indirectly CMC may have facilitated the mobilisation of the unaffiliated in both protest events. Unaffiliated participants were most likely to go on the Internet for information about the events. In light of this result, it was submitted that the Internet played a key part in the circulation of information about the events beyond movement networks.

Affiliated participants, on the other hand, appeared more inclined to communicate online with friends about their future participation. Moreover, the finding that the affiliated engaged in such communication seemed to confound earlier assertions that threats intrinsic to CMC, such as that of surveillance, inhibited its use in activist circles; and in particular among the radical flank (Diani, 2000). Closer inspection based on

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qualitative data revealed that the Internet may have not been used to plan specific actions (Larry, 2008). Nevertheless, affiliated participants at the Climate Camp were likely to embrace it as a supplement to their face-to-face communication inside friendship networks; perhaps for other purposes than to plan direct action. A pertinent example might be that of Ed, an affiliated participant at the Climate Camp who described his Internet use ahead of the event as a complement to face-to-face communication he relied upon principally for practical information:

> "I used the Internet to communicate with [the] organizers…I used it to communicate with people in Leeds about coming to the Camp. I used it to find neighbourhood meetings in Leeds… to help prepare to run the neighbourhood in the Camp. And I attended those meetings as well. Ahm, but I knew about them through emails and the Internet. Ah, I used, I used the Internet to find out information from the Camp website both about, ahm, what, what this particular camp was about…and also … about how the setting up was going" (Ed, 2008).

One need also note that online resources (e.g. websites, Web 2.0 platforms, listservs) were integral to the mobilisation strategies of the SMOs. But appraisals of their contribution to mobilisation differed from one case to the other. At FânFest, they were the main plank of the communication between the coordinators of the protest festival and the participants. The Internet was the principal interface between them unlike at the Climate Camp where it was expected, in the main, to supplement communication through face-to-face interaction. Yet, CMC was valued for an anticipated potential to expediently extend networks outside the activist arena, a key aim in the Camp's mobilisation strategy. Facebook, the social network site, was the centrepiece of such

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appraisals. In the words of one of the administrators of the Climate Camp Facebook outlets, "[Facebook is]… a good way of reaching out to non-activist types because you can easily contact all of your friends regardless of whether or not they're in activist circles" (Rachel, 2008).

Identity-building

In the following step, it was considered whether CMC can contribute to the formation and distribution of a movement identity. The investigation on this dimension of digital prefigurative participation began from the proposition that CMC may enable people not affiliated to an activist organisation to participate in the construction of movement identities. It was consequently first examined what participants believed their Internet use ahead of the protest contributed to their movement identification. Subsequently, it was queried if in their online circulation, movement identities may be rearticlulated by unaffiliates to frame their participation.

CMC did not seem to contribute in a fundamental way to the formation of a movement identity among the participants at either FânFest or the Camp for Climate Action. Ahead of the event, participants at the protest festival used principally its website to garner information about it. Online, the organisers of FânFest circulated an identity narrative that hinged on an understanding that everyone in attendance will be driven by a common purpose to support the 'Save Roşia Montană' campaign and to deepen their engagement in environmental activism. Online and ahead of the protest, FânFest participants may have appropriated elements from a movement identity constructed by the event organizers. The unaffiliated research interviewees talked about retrieving and adopting components from the organizers' identity narrative -

distributed through the festival's website and its announcement lists- designed to code their participation. They recounted acquiring a notion from the website that the purpose of their participation was to bear witness to the public support that existed for the SRM campaign (Antonia, John and Lydia, 2007). Yet, they did not get a sense from the website content that participation would promote them to the status of environmental activists. That status was reserved to the protest coordinators (Lydia, 2007). Ultimately, the interviews revealed that participants perfected their own interpretation for the purpose of participation in face-to-face conversations with friends and family in advance of the protest event (Antonia, John and Lydia, 2007).

At the Climate Camp, the baseline for the identity-building done by the event organizers was a commitment to the hands-on tackling of climate change. That commitment was made explicit in the Camp's call for participation published on its website and distributed online through its announcement list and on Facebook. The call was designed to attract a variety of groups to the event while lending them the latitude to build their own specific identity around it. That identity-building project seemed to appeal primarily to constituencies from the environmental movement.

Having relied on the Internet to prepare for their participation appeared to make the environmentally affiliated believe they were involved in a movement against climate change. CMC may have reinforced a movement identity among the environmentally affiliated (see Table 2). By contrast, the minority of unaffiliates at the Camp who used the Internet to prepare their participation did not seem to believe they were part of a movement on climate change whilst they nevertheless espoused a commitment to

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tackling climate change head on. Fred, one of the interviewees at the Climate Camp illustrated how his Internet use was central to his understanding of participation:

"so I mean, [the Internet] is for me, coming essentially from the outside, didn't know anybody else who's at it before, this was my primary source of information… on which I based my decision to come or not and what I would be experiencing" (Fred, 2008).

Table 2 Here

Particularly in the case of the high-risk protest, analysis gave credence to the contention by Pickerill (2003) that a movement identity may be articulated but not constructed through CMC. Nonetheless, Lydia (2007), one of the unaffiliated interviewees at FânFest alluded that she was able to develop an activist mindset online while searching for festival news or coming across online activist content. In her view the festival could help consolidate that mindset. Ultimately, for the unaffiliated, a movement identity seemed unlikely to be fashioned solely through CMC. At the same time, a movement identity appeared not to be absolutely central to participation in the low-risk event.

Organisational transformation

The examination of interaction on the Web 2.0 outlets of the two SMOs offered several insights into possible transformations of SMO organisational forms. Through

their communication on the blog, the FânFest organizers and prospective participants may have set in motion a new organisational dynamic. Calls made on the blog for involvement in decision-making on the future of the event suggested the platform had become a portal for marginal actors external to the 'Save Roşia Montană' campaign to have their say on the running of the event publicly registered. An illustrative articulation of such a desire to be heard came from one blog reader who took the organisers to task for having changed the format of the protest event from a festival to an activist reunion in 2008: "as a participant [at FânFest] and supporter of the 'Save Roşia Montană' campaign, I believe I am owed an explanation" (Ivan, 2008). Such calls seemed to bring to the fore an organisational periphery which had silently played its part in the campaign by attending the festival.

Climate Camp activists adopted Facebook as a means to extend the Camp's mobilisation potential. The Camp's Facebook following -expected to comprise a good number of unaffiliated prospective participants- was furnished with information and advice on how to self-organize their participation (Rachel, 2008). A transformation of the Camp's organisational form was conceived as a lateral extension of the horizontal organisation already in place, to include self-organized unaffiliates.

One in six participants surveyed during the Climate Camp had used Facebook to plan their participation in the protest event. But the largest number from those users was affiliated to an activist organisation. This result was interpreted as a possible indication that a similar reinforcement effect discussed in relation to mobilisation and identity-building may have been at work on Facebook. Nonetheless, the proportion of

respondents who said they used Facebook represented less than 1% of the Climate Camp's following (over 1500 group members in August 2008) on that platform.

The activists' expectation that the Camp's Facebook outlets would be instrumental to the mobilisation of the unaffiliated was the principal driver for setting up a Climate Camp presence on Facebook and not the postulated desire for closer interaction with the Camp's support base. In light of this finding, further investigation is invited to clarify how an expansion in an SMO's Facebook support base may bear on the offline protest event. One may argue that it amplifies it even though the people who support a protest on Facebook do not attend it when it happens at a physical location. Activists at the Climate Camp explained that public visibility through media coverage as well as online social networking was central to their motivation to organize the protest as well as its expected impact on public opinion (Ivy, 2008; Tom, 2008).

Secondly, the SMOs did not appear prepared to open up decision-making to include communication with prospective participants on their Web 2.0 platforms. Chief among the obstacles that seemed to stand in the way of a possible top-down democratization of decision-making was the absence of trust. On the one hand, there were misgivings about the security of the platform among the Climate Camp activists (Rachel, 2008). On the other, there was scepticism about the commitment of the blog audience to organisational goals, at FânFest (Keira, 2008). At the same time, no bottom-up appeals were made by prospective participants for a formal incorporation of the communication over the Web 2.0 platforms into decision-making.

A key ensuing observation was that in spite of the capacity for interaction intrinsic to both platforms, in good part, they seemed to be employed for the top down distribution of content to their audiences. This was not dissimilar to the deployment of essentially showcase websites by environmental organisations in the United States (Stein, 2009). Nonetheless, through Facebook, the Climate Camp attempted to empower prospects to self-organise and make their own decisions on their involvement in the Camp (Rachel, 2008). This finding may further challenge the notion that CMC would have little to contribute to the communication between prospective participants and organizers of high-risk protest events.

Conclusion

The key rationale for the online presence of the two SMOs was mobilisation. In some respects, CMC contributed to mobilisation but not precisely in the ways it was anticipated at the outset of this study. In particular, the analysis contradicted the initial proposition that CMC would galvanize the mobilisation of unaffiliated participants in a high-risk protest event. Results from the high-risk event partly confirmed the contention that the Internet would reinforce mobilisation through activist networks (Diani, 2000; Lusoli and Ward, 2003; van Laer, 2007, 2010). What seemed to challenge that earlier assertion was the finding that the affiliated were communicating with friends online about their prospective participation in the protest event. This seemed to be in spite of the threats intrinsic to CMC such as that of surveillance (Diani, 2000).

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The analysis revealed a potentially significant contribution of CMC to the mobilisation of the unaffiliated. At the high-risk event, the unaffiliated seemed to have a sense that using the Internet to prepare for their participation had influenced their decision to attend. At the low-risk protest, unaffiliates relied exclusively on the Internet to glean information about the event and interact with the organisers. CMC seemed to afford the unaffiliated immediate access to event organizers, to practical information about the events, as well as to a pool of prospective participants similarly engaged in one or more aspects of digital prefigurative participation. In that way CMC may possibly be an avenue for the induction of unaffiliates into activism as well as a supplement to their face-to-face participation which precedes and augments the latter.

It may have been that in the end digital prefigurative participation was primarily the prerogative of the environmentally affiliated at the high-risk Climate Camp. CMC may have helped mobilise the affiliated as well as contributed to bolstering a movement identity among environmentally affiliated participants. Indeed, it seemed unlikely that the unaffiliated would come to identify with the Camp's burgeoning movement through their CMC. Thus, the idea of questioning the bearing of a movement identity for involvement in activism (Bobel, 2007), and in particular of the unaffiliated, is perhaps encouraged by the present analysis.

The present analysis also suggests that it may be increasingly untenable to argue that offline participation has complete precedence over digital prefigurative participation and perhaps increasingly less over other forms of online activism (c.f. Mosca, 2008). This article supports the contention that mobilisation into activism and the formation of a movement identity may largely hinge on unmediated socialization. Yet, how

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sociality may be maintained or expanded through digital prefigurative participation is still an open question; and in particular in relation to increasingly popular Web 2.0 platforms such as Facebook. Specifically, that question may challenge a notion of insular activist communities that are somehow reluctant to spread beyond face-to-face networks.

A further examination of how risk shapes digital prefigurative participation may deepen the present examination of the entwinement of online communication and offline participation in protest events. This study points to a complex use of the Internet by SMOs at both high and low risk protest events; principally for the mobilisation and activation of unaffiliated people. The majority of the unaffiliated were young, online and had the capacity to self-organize with the technology. For many of them, digital prefigurative participation may have been a primary route into onsite protest. It gave them both a stake and a voice in the events. Although this article did not consider the possible implication of digital prefigurative participation for the longer-term commitment of the unaffiliated to activism, perhaps future studies could take a longitudinal approach to this question and assay whether such communication can fuel commitment as well as maintain it particularly in the fast-developing age of Web 2.0 sociality.

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Table 1

Significant predictors for Internet as primary source of Information about the Climate Camp		
Variable	Logistic regression coefficient (b)	Adjusted Odds Ratio [Exp(B)]
Non-affiliation to environmental organisation/group	-1.548*	.213*
Non-affiliation to activist organisation/group	1.936*	6.928*
R^2 = .288 (Nagelkerke) and the model chi square was 19.87 significant at p< .05; * p<.05. Sig : *.05, **.01, *** .001		
Significant predictors for the influence of CMC on the decision to attend the Climate Camp		
Variable	Logistic regression coefficient (b)	Adjusted Odds Ratio [Exp(B)]
Non-affiliation to activist organisation/group	3.273**	.039**

	Logistic regression coefficient (b)	Adjusted Odds Ratio [Exp(B)]
Non-participation at previous Climate Camp	7.147**	9.49**

R^2 = .402 (Nagelkerke) and the model chi square was 27.426 significant at p< .01; * p<.05, ** p<.01. Sig : *.05, **.01, *** .001

Significant predictors for CMC with friends about attendance at the Climate Camp

Variable	Logistic regression coefficient (b)	Adjusted Odds Ratio [Exp(B)]
Non-affiliation to activist organisation/group	-2.098*	.123*

R^2 = .281 (Nagelkerke) and the model chi square was 20.14 significant at p< .05; * p<.05. Sig : *.05, **.01, *** .001

Table 2

Significant predictors for the influence of CMC on identification with movement against climate change

Variable	Logistic regression coefficient (b)	Adjusted Odds Ratio [Exp(B)]
Non-affiliation to an environmental organisation/group	-1.746*	.175*

The overall model was not statistically significant; * p<.05. Sig : *.05, **.01, *** .001

Bio

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[1]That sampling strategy was chosen because no sampling frame (De Vaus, 2002) was available for drawing a probabilistic sample. In line with Goss (2004), a sampling strategy accounting for the socio-spatial distribution of the participants at different times of the day was devised to attain randomness and representativity at both events.

[2] The media reported the figure of 6,000 participants at FânFest for the three days of the festival, in 2007 (Biro, 2007).

[3] The total number of participants for the entire week of the event was reported to have reached around 1,500 participants (George, 2008).

[4] The logistic regression model was a composite of predictors shown to have a bearing on participation in offline protest, i.e. organisational affiliation (McAdam, 1986), participatory experience (Mosca, 2008), perceptions of the necessity and effectiveness of participation, movement identification (Postmes and Brunsting, 2002) and finally, the ability and experience with using the Internet (Krueger, 2002). The regression was run using the block entry method.

[5] The most popular source of information about the event was the Internet (196 respondents, 89.7 %).

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