Making Sense of Democratic Institutions Intertextually

Communication on Social Media as a Civic Literacy Event Preceding Collective Action

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Communication on social media preceding coordinated street demonstrations is assayed for evidence of practice-based informal civic learning about conventional politics and mainstream media. This is done to offset a mounting interest in activist self-organisation and self-reflexivity with a scrutiny of networked communication as a civic literacy event. The article proposes that scepticism and criticality directed at media and political institutions provide fertile justification for their challenge, thereby rendering intertextual informal learning an expedient to collective action.

Key words: informal civic learning, civic literacy, collective action, social movements, social media

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In recent years, street protests have mushroomed across many parts of the world including the European continent. From Greece to Spain, Ukraine to the UK, Etzioni's (1970:4) notion of the demonstration democracy- a polity deeply marked by "public acts designed to call attention to or express a [contentious] position" seems to have been rejuvenated. Among those uprisings, some have sought to contain an increasingly pervasive and democratically unaccountable commercial encroachment on networked digital communication, as witnessed in the 2012 protests against the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (henceforth ACTA)[i]. Such concern for the parameters of networked communication resonates with interdisciplinary scholarship pointing to its increasingly prominent place in both the practice and theory of citizenship (Bennett et al., 2009b:836).

This article builds on recently observed shifts in collective action that encompass the communicative affordances of social media. Specifically, it scrutinizes the networked communication foreshadowing coordinated street demonstrations (Fisher and Boekkooi 2010) against the ratification of the ACTA agreement for evidence of practice-based informal civic learning. On the most abstract plane, the paper surveys the networked communication associated with the Stop ACTA protests for evidence that it may have acted as an expedient for learning about conventional politics. On this terrain of political contestation, the online civic learning schema devised by Bennett et al. (2009a) was deployed and queried with the aim to identify and discuss collective and informal –rather than any organisationally-nurtured– articulations of civic literacies (c.f. Bennett et al., 2009a; Wells, 2013). In this manner, the research grapples anew with the proposition that the digitally-enabled insurgent

politics of late (Castells, 2009) institute a counter-democracy (Rosanvallon and Goldhammer, 2008) of continuous public scrutiny or *publicness* (Habermas, 1989).

More immediately, the article ponders the potential for insurgent politics to generate and circulate caches of knowledge about conventional institutions and organisations, of means and ways of acting on them. It marries ideas from the cognate areas of civic literacy and civic learning to unravel discursive patterns of citizenship (c.f. Lindgren, 2011). At the same time, it seeks to make a timely contribution to the momentum behind the drive to uncover the instantiation and significance of informal civic learning with social media among social movements (c.f. Gleason, 2013[ii]). This is therefore an enquiry into the *civicness* – the preoccupation with political institutions and citizenship (Evers, 2009:242) – of activist networked communication. The study draws on a corpus of Twitter and Facebook data gathered 2 weeks in advance of the pan-European Stop ACTA protest staged on 9 June 2012 (Mercea, 2014).

That protest unfolded against the background of an ostensibly expansive cosmopolitan citizenship, a consequence of neoliberal individualization encroaching on politics globally. Succinctly, according to this perspective, the individual is simultaneously the central subject of unfettered market relations and of a universalising human rights regime (Beck, 2000:83). This cosmopolitan conception of citizenship has fuelled what some have viewed as a deterritorialized democratic political culture (Dahlgren, 2006) variably materializing in contentious collective action. The mobilisation against the transnational treaty on copyright infringement touched on its multiple implications among which for fundamental human rights such as freedom of speech (Losey, 2014). The Stop ACTA movement clamoured an

endemic impingement of corporate interests on democratic decision-making (c.f. Crouch, 2004), berating the opaqueness of the negotiations between these two sides which led to the signing of the agreement. In step with other contemporary movements such as the Indignados or Occupy (della Porta, 2013), Stop ACTA called for the instatement of participatory mechanisms and accountability processes in contemporary transnational policy (Losey, 2014).

Broadly, the opposition to the ACTA agreement seemed to be split along an outsider/insider strategy fault line (Maloney et al., 1994). On the one side, there were advocacy drives directed at corporate and government policy networks championing ACTA. Those pressure campaigns were spearheaded by civil society organisations (Losey, 2014; Mercea, forthcoming). On the other, there were recurrent street protests orchestrated by ad-hoc loose grassroots groupings from across the EU and beyond. This latter set of actors appeared to dominate the communication on social media ahead of the last pan-European demonstration against the agreement which took place in June 2014 (Mercea, forthcoming). That communication is examined below following an overview of the theory and empirical methods at the heart of this enquiry.

Theoretical framework

Civic literacy is the "knowledge and ability of citizens to make sense of their political world" (Milner, 2002:1). Juxtaposing this characterisation to the view that citizenship represents one's "willingness and ability to engage in public discourse and evaluate the performance of those in office" (Galston, 1991:227), it follows that civic literacy is

a nurturing source of democratic citizenship. Yet, proceeding from the foregoing definition of citizenship, it is perhaps surprising that critics of digital activism decry its apparent momentum around the world as citizenship-by-convenience and a fleeting din with little echo in democratic politics (Morozov, 2011). In what follows, a more sanguine alternative to becoming fixated with the 'real' impact of networked communication on the polity is suggested. To that end, the question of the development of civic literacies is visited by observing and unpicking the constitutive elements of civic learning (Bennett et al., 2009, a, b) coupled with reflections on the *democratic person* (Biesta, 2007) articulated in such communication.

Civic literacy may be instantiated in *literacy events* which are the product of individuals acting socially through text –verbal, visual or written (Barton and Lee, 2013:12). In a civic literacy event, individuals may be able to form shared interpretations of common interests or concerns. To highlight their relevance here, one may regard literacy events as a setting where ideas and orientations towards various aspects of democracy and its operation are pieced together in social interaction. Accordingly, a *democratic subjectivity* espousing the values and beliefs that reproduce democracy can be nurtured through actions wherein these are played out (2007:744). Indeed, it has been contended that "the best way to prepare for democracy is through participation in democratic life itself" (2007:747). Yet, the persistence of a socio-economic gap in civic participation (Best and Krueger, 2005) that marks both the desire and the capacity to be an active citizen (Christensen and Bengtsson, 2011) is well-documented. Notwithstanding this, there has been a documented "activating effect" from networked communication to forms of participation ranging from petitions to demonstrations (2011:906). Together, this

social conception of democracy and the purported activating effect of networked communication have provided the impetus to drill down into informal civic learning.

Networked communication exchanges on social media may be a vehicle for informal civic learning, i.e. for expanding knowledge repertoires and crystalizing the discourses on which people draw in their operations as citizens (c.f. Barton and Lee, 2013:124). In this outlook, civic learning is an upshot of informal conversation that at once aids with the delineation of the individual citizen and of democratic politics (Dewey, 1916 [1957]; Biesta, 2007). Informal civic learning designates a process of acquisition of citizen knowledge, skills, beliefs and values, which is distinguished on two levels, of the environment where it occurs and of the practices whereby one enunciates her/his citizenship.

Firstly, a renewed emphasis on civic learning is premised on observations that canonic civic education centering on the instrumental reproduction of democratic institutions in formal settings such as classrooms is increasingly shadowed by practice-based learning about democratic participation unfolding in extra-curricular activities for which a primary medium is networked communication (Bennett et al., 2009a, b; Wells, 2013). Informal civic learning is performed outside the confines of educational (formal) and social (non-formal) institutions (Schugurensky and Myers, 2008:75). A salient exemplification of investigations into informal civic learning, Schugurensky and Myers's study covered 'mediation spaces' which were conceived as ad-hoc meeting points for local authority and civil society actors (2008:74). According to those authors, mediation spaces form where issues of public concern are mooted in the vein of the public sphere. The gamut of potential mediation spaces has exploded with the diffusion of ICTs. Bennett et al. (2009b) surveyed websites of youth

organisations and online-only youth portals for civic and political engagement whilst inviting further research into the use of social networking services by youth organisations (see also Wells, 2013). In his turn, Lindgren (2011) wrote of the "knowledge communities" ensuing from conversations among commentators of urban free running sport *parkour* on Youtube video blogs (vlogs). In Lindgren's reading, through their exchanges, the postees were producing knowledge about the sport, learning more about it from each other in the process and ultimately expanding their literacy of it.

Secondly, informal civic learning encapsulates an interactive, organic, exchange among participants who are active subjects rather than passive recipients of citizen knowledge, skills, beliefs or values (Bennett et al., 2009b). Its interactivity, mutuality and collaborative nature (c.f. Jenkins, 2006) are marks of its conceptual distinctiveness as an *actualizing* information style that stands in contrast to a *dutiful*, more passive and top down mode of communication exchanges perpetuating extant institutions and attendant social relations (Bennett et al., 2009a: 108; Wells, 2013). Following this line of argumentation, informal civic learning on social media may be defined as 'active participation in social practices' (Barton and Lee, 2013:125) speaking to public concerns, within the confines of a prevailing digital ethos of collaboration (Bruns, 2008).

In the theoretical development of the notion of the actualizing information style, Bennett and his colleagues (2009a) proposed a practice-based learning model associated with self-guided networked communication around issues of direct concern to individuals. It stood in contrast to a dutiful, prescriptive and formal mode of imparting civic information about conventional politics. The parallel existence of

these two modalities, they argue, has brought both the formation and the meaning of citizenship in flux. Equally, it is purported that the actualizing mode does not preclude the acquisition of dutiful understandings (2009a:110). This is the cardinal claim to be systematically verified herein. To this end, the article adopts the classification scheme for dutiful civic information designed by Bennett et al. (2009a) and applies it to the observed participation in the Stop ACTA networked communication.

The Stop ACTA Twitter and Facebook communication were scrutinized for evidence of whether, how and why dutiful civic information may transpire in the digital exchanges between the individuals who became involved in it (Bennett et al., 2009a:110-11). The first of the four types of information, *knowledge*, pertains to user exchanges about national history and the operation of government. *Media literacy* relates to the understanding of contemporary media, the evaluation of their operations, agenda and output. *Organization* designates a cognizance of "the role of parties, interest organisations and civic groups and the reasons and bases for joining them" (2009a:111). *Action/participation* refers to the capacity to tell apart suitable participation routes −voting, petitioning or campaigning− for winning the assent of democratic governments, e.g. for a policy plan. Finally, Bennett et al. (2009a:111) nominated *orientation/attitudes* as the enunciation of a sense of trust, of political efficacy −namely, the ability to get across to government− and justice values.

Civic knowledge, organization and action as well as the orientations expressed in networked communication have been at the forefront of recent scholarship on the deployment of social media in collective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Bennett et al., 2014; Earl et al., 2013; Thorson et al., 2013; Bennett et al., 2014). Furthermore, the scope for activists sidestepping, critiquing or counteracting

mainstream media whilst embracing new media as an avenue for public communication has been a key area of investigation in the literature on alternative media (Meikle, 2002; Atton, 2004; Fenton and Barassi, 2011). The parameters of the relationship between movement actors and mainstream media have been the subject of intricate studies (Gitlin, 2003; Rucht, 2004).

Rucht (2004) has differentiated among activist responses to the media's news values, namely the criteria that shape the selection and reporting of a news story by the media (Ryan, 1991). Activists may adopt four types of responses: abstention, attack, adaptation and alternatives (Rucht, 2004:36-37). Herein, the treatment of media literacy was guided by the aim to both capture knowledge and attitudes towards the media (necessarily stemming from a dutiful comprehension of their workings) and to tie them to any self-actualising visions for countering adverse news values. Consequently, the latter form of response, *alternatives* was actively probed in the empirical study. Alternatives refer to attempts by social movement actors to develop their own means of mass communication so as to compensate for perceived inadequacies or inaccuracies in mainstream coverage. Following a quantitative content analysis, a discursive analysis of media literacy addressed this aim in depth.

Data and methods

Out of the combined Facebook and Twitter dataset, posts were selected from the first two days of the research period (26-27 May) and the day of action (9 June). The rationale for this selection stemmed from the putative distinction between the usage of Facebook and Twitter. The former has arguably been relied upon more extensively

in the run up to protests, by contrast with the concerted use of the latter during a day of action (Earl et al., 2013). Moreover, the same authors submitted that on a day of action, communication particularly on Twitter would centre on developments on the ground (e.g. police actions). Conversely, in the run up to it, especially Facebook would be an instrument to "publicize…and drive participation" (2013:3).

As shown in Author (forthcoming), the Stop ACTA communication did not entirely verify this assessment as both platforms witnessed comparable amounts of interlocution ahead of as well as on 9 June (See Figures 1 and 2). Stacked against the other days in the data corpus, the first two days of the research period saw the lowest levels of communication on both platforms. At the other end, there were relative peaks in activity on both platforms on the day of action with comparable volumes of posts on the days before the protest. This trend was bucked on a single occasion on Twitter where a surge was recorded a week prior to the day of action when news broke and cascaded that the Dutch parliament had voted against ratifying the ACTA agreement.

FIGURE 1 HERE

In the last instance, whilst a random sample of posts would have likely replicated noticeable fluctuations in the level of communication on both platforms (see Author, forthcoming) it would have depleted the resulting data of their intertextuality. The analysed corpus comprised a total of 3170 tweets and 767 Facebook posts from the first two and the final day of the research period. This selection was guided by the question of whether, intertextually, civic information would be differently interwoven on the day of the protest than furthest in advance of it, within the research period.

FIGURE 2 HERE

The research was conducted with a sequential mixed method design (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009:143) whereby initial quantitative content analysis considered the scope and character of the civic information encountered whilst subsequent discourse analysis charted its social construction. The quantitative component of the study was based on the operationalization of civic learning proposed by Bennett and colleagues[iii] further extended to cover *alternatives* to mainstream media into the category for media literacy (c.f. Rucht, 2004). This approach served to delineate an image of the relative prevalence (c.f. Neuendorf, 2002) of civic information thereafter supplemented with a map of patterned relationships among types of civic information rendered with Textometrica, an online academic application for discursive network analysis (Lindgren and Palm, 2011). Those relationships were situated back into their original (con)text so as to interrogate their intertextuality, together with the vernacular discourse on government and media institutions and user epistemic stances (Barton and Lee, 2013) exhibited in the posts.

Briefly, the above aspects of the qualitative analysis are each reviewed in turn. Intertextuality denotes the idea in literary (Kristeva, 1980) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992) that texts are interconnected, mutually inflect on each other and bear marks of competing interpretations in a hegemonic struggle over meaning (1992:136). Parsing texts for intertextual linkages was done with the aim to bring to the fore (dis)connections between the contentious politics of the Stop ACTA movement and the institutions which it contested. Thereby, it was possible to tease out vernacular discourses -"people's own ways of talking" (2013:132)- in Facebook posts and hashtagged tweets. These were examined as potential building-blocks of

civic literacies taking shape in a discursive field of civic information about the ACTA agreement.

A discursive field represents the bounded cultural terrain where "groups construct diagnoses, prognoses and calls to action" (Steinberg, 1999:748). A field is the locus for the expression of epistemic stances, 'the stating of facts, knowledge, or beliefs towards certain stance objects' (Barton and Lee, 2013:92) such as, in this case, public institutions or the minutiae of the ACTA agreement. If results of this textual research are inevitably partial (c.f. Phillipov, 2012), they may nevertheless be an informing starting point for both ethnographic or survey studies bringing user views, experiences and circumstances to bear on patterns of informal civic learning encountered in contentious collective action.

The scope and fabric of intertextual linkages on Facebook and Twitter

All posts were amenable to multiple coding. The first set of reflections below deals with the co-occurrent articulation of civic information on Facebook. Starting with a descriptive overview, it was noted that more than half of the posts registered at least one type of civic information (484 posts); out of that total, nearly half referenced action and participation aspects (249 posts). This finding seemed to reinforce the contention by Wells (2013:629) that civic participation is a prominent topic amidst individuals who congregate in the social media outlets of informal, loosely-coupled civic groupings or organisations.

TABLE 1 HERE

Notwithstanding this result attesting to a readiness among contributors for freewheeled civic action (c.f. Mercea, 2014), evidence was also retrieved of dutiful reflections on the political system. The elicitation of civic knowledge about government in the broad sense of the institutions delegated to rule society was the third most frequent civic activity observed on Facebook. Slightly more frequent were comments associated with the media −either mainstream or activist. Media criticism directed at mainstream organisations was the less frequent of the two (15 posts). When occurring, it conveyed a necessity to grasp the workings of the media as a prerequisite to maximizing the impact of collective action and to combatting negative media spin (c.f. Gitlin, 2003). In a similar vein, self-generated activist media (106 posts about photos, videos and reports produced by activists) were volunteered, being often quoted as fundamental to the maximization of the public impact generated by the protests.

Conversely, references to parties, interest groups or civic organisations were few and far between. However, comments dwelling on organisations cited particularly the bona fide support civic associations and fringe actors such as the Pirate Party would lend to the common cause of preventing the ratification of ACTA, much unlike mainstream political parties. Finally, remarks on orientations and attitudes evoked both positive and negative sentiments stirred by the ACTA agreement and the secretive handling of treaty negotiations by democratic governments. But affective comments were directed at the collective action itself also.

The descriptive analysis was the basis for further bivariate tests of association (see Neuendorf, 2002:178) between three types of civic communication and the date

of their publication (Cramer's V=.223, p<.001 for knowledge and date; Cramer's V=.153, p<.001 for organisation and date; and Cramer's V=.101, p<.01 for participation and date of publication). Accounting for differences in the volume of posts, knowledge of government was invoked over 4 times more often on 26-27 May (17% posts) than on 9 June (4% posts); organisation was discussed again 4 times more often ahead of (6%) than on the day of the protest (1.5%). By contrast, participation made up approximately 1/3 of the posts on the day of action and only 1/4 two weeks in advance. These results corroborated with Earl et al.'s (2013) contention that commentary on participation -counting in messages on the action itself- was likely on the day itself albeit not only on Twitter but on Facebook, too.

As to references to the media, these were more prevalent on the day of action (17% posts) than two weeks prior to it (6.5% of posts). This was mainly attributable to a drive to publicize the pan-European demonstration by pushing self-generated content through social media. Finally, orientations towards government and official stances on the ACTA agreement were aired in an equal measure both in advance and on the day of protest (5% of posts). These figures should be interpreted with caution and only as tentative signs of variability in activist communication.

As the quantitative analysis advanced, a noteworthy moderate association was evinced between all the variables of interest and their endorsement with a Facebook 'like' (ranging from Cramer's V =.233 for knowledge and participation, respectively to Cramer's V=.309, p<.001 for orientation). It appeared that partisan comments making clear-cut pronouncements on the egregiousness of the trade agreement were received more favourably by the Facebook group members than any of the other types of posts. Yet, the fact that all other message categories were in the

end endorsed by members alluded to 'likes' being adopted as a technological affordance amenable to consolidating a collective identity through the venting of anger (c.f. Zomeren et al., 2008) the object of which was ACTA and its makers.

Lastly, there were no statistically significant associations among the variables of interest themselves apart from a weak one between knowledge and orientation (Cramer's V =.094, p<.01) which indicated that a small number of messages comprised at the same time commentary on government workings and a value statement relating to them. Notwithstanding the absence of statistical significance, a further exploration of semantic linkages in the expression of civic information was pursued with Textometrica. The software rendered an image of the within-post occurrence of civic information, i.e. the simultaneous referencing of 2 or more types of civic information in a posting.

Figure 3 is a network map of the five types of civic information as automatically calculated by Textometrica. The size of the nodes is a measure of code occurrence whilst the links between the codes are expressed both in absolute figures and, visually, in terms of thickness of edges (ties). This analysis was conducted so as to gain an appreciation of any potential intersections between actualizing and dutiful civic modalities despite earlier non-significant statistical tests. The strongest relationship was found in posts where references to media literacy and civic action/participation co-occurred. As explained, media literacy pivoted on two axes −the critique of the media and the cultivation of self-generated alternative media. Both these themes tied in with civic action/participation. Expressions of disappointment with media coverage were counterweighed by statements encouraging the development of alternative media by Facebook group members. This

observation corroborated the foregoing claim that loosely-coupled networked activism hinges on a personal investment in the definition and staging of collective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). Moreover, the result was indicative of a primacy of self-actualisation over dutiful *civicness* whereby conventional institutions were objects of critical reflection and contestation.

FIGURE 3 HERE

Twitter

The first observation regarding the hashtagged (#ACTA) Twitter communication was that it comprised a high degree of retweeting. This was by no measure a surprise; rather it appeared to fit with a previously recorded secular rise in the use of retweets in activist communication (Poell, 2014:720-1). Approximately two-thirds of the posts were retweets. As on Facebook, the largest numbers of posts comprised information on action and participation (See Table 2). In contrast to Facebook, media literacy was second to the expression of civic knowledge and orientation/attitudes. Thirdly, there was a statistically significant relationship between the date of publication and civic information styles with the strongest link observed for knowledge (Cramer's V=.269, p<.001) followed in descending order by orientation (Cramer's V=.235, p<.001), action/participation (Cramer's V=.267, p<.001), organisation (Cramer's V=.118, p<.001) and lastly, media literacy (Cramer's V=.108, p<.001). On closer inspection of each of these cross-tabulations, it was noted that information relating to civic knowledge, the role of organisations, attitudes and orientations towards government were conveyed proportionally more often in advance of than on the day of action.

This was in contrast to the communication of information about action and participation or media literacy that were more prevalent on the day of protest.

TABLE 2 HERE

A weak measure of association was recorded for action/participation information and retweeting (Cramer's V=.060, p<.001) with all other types of civic exchange exhibiting no significant retweet patterns. In other words, civic self-actualisation –namely through communication pertaining to endogenous collective action and participation therein– seemed to garner the largest amount of interest as measured by the retweets received. Yet, there were stronger associations between the types of civic information, the strongest of which was between civic knowledge and participation (Cramer's V = .286, p <.001) followed by knowledge and media literacy (Cramer's V = .206, p <.001); orientation and media literacy (Cramer's V = .152, p <.001); organisation and knowledge (Spearman's rho = .127, p <.001), orientation and knowledge (Cramer's V = .093, p <.001) and finally, action/participation and organisation (Cramer's V = .071, p <.001). On the most general level, these results suggested an intricately interwoven pattern of civic information combining dutiful and self-actualising content. Thus, learning not only about the intricacies of one's activism (c.f. Gleason, 2013) but also about the dutiful mode of citizenship represented a distinct possibility in informal settings such as the #ACTA communication on Twitter.

Relationships between the types of civic information are outlined in Figure 4 which illustrates both significant and non-significant connections that were not reported in the correlational analysis above. The link between orientation and participation, although non-significant, exhibited the largest number of code co-

occurrences. Similarly, the link between media and participation also became apparent in the co-occurrence map. Moreover, the linkages between knowledge and participation and knowledge and orientation were confirmed. The easiest way to explain the prima facie discrepancies in this as opposed to the correlational analysis was by way of a reminder that the correlations expressed a ratio between the total number of code occurrences and their co-occurrences. Textometrica, on the other hand, captured only code co-occurrences, here expressed in absolute numbers. Ultimately, although the network map did not provide a measure of the degree to which civic information would co-occur, it indicated that Twitter communication touching on action and participation was closely accompanied by information on orientation and attitudes, media and civic knowledge. As is shown in the next section, the identified communication patterns testified both to a fraught relationship with media organisations and political institutions and to the opportunity for users to learn about the intricacies of those relationships.

FIGURE 4 HERE

Intertextual civic discourse on Facebook

Here, we take account of the intertextuality amidst the civic information encountered and illustrate it. The observed nexus of self-actualising and dutiful civic information on both Facebook and Twitter pointed to complex literacy events whilst arguably revealing the coordinates of the Stop ACTA discursive field. That interconnection appeared as a moving equilibrium between three discursive objects: first, a preoccupation with action and participation; second, the exchange of civic knowledge

that anchored the communication in its institutional context whilst concurrently often taking a critical stance towards it; and third, commentary on the activist relationship with the mainstream media and the necessity of its self-generated media output to maximize the public impact of the collective action.

First, a vivid co-articulation of civic knowledge and a critique of the media was apparent on Facebook in a post taking aim at the manner in which the German public broadcaster ARD covered the Stop ACTA campaign. The postee clamoured the channel's prejudiced portrayal of the opposition to the agreement as uninformed. The person contended that the partial characterisation revealed an *ad hominem* attack on the members of the democratic, extra-parliamentarian opposition, as well as the unwillingness of the said media organisation to engage with the substantive issue of copyright protection. Conversely, an ample conversation thread was retrieved which instantiated the self-actualising link between participation and media literacy. The two types of civic information were fused together in a practice aimed at firming up the visibility of the 9 June protests. Contributors to the thread reflected on their participation and traded opinions and advice on writing and disseminating a blog post summarizing the day of action. More widely, the same aim was pursued with calls to advertise video streams of the day of action or photo galleries and to ensure the systematic interlinking of the self-produced media content.

Resting on Facebook, knowledge and participation were connected in a post proposing a reflexive revisitation of fundamental principles seemingly eroded by mainstream politics. As a redress, inter alia, the person called for collective action to reassert popular referenda as a participatory institution of contemporary democracy. Finally, the post displayed a vernacular discourse imbricating dutiful and actualising information in order to voice a critical stance on mainstream politics.

> ‘We must FIGHT for FREEDOM…freedom to cut the wages of our elected representatives, to call for referenda to impeach any politician who goes against the rights of the people… Freedom to live and not just to eke out a living”…

Despite striking a critical note against political institutions and the media, the above post and all others in the same vein remained within the bounds of civicness. No instance was found of explicit calls to abandon extant democratic politics and *exit* its institutional framework (c.f. Hirschman, 1970) among the posts on either Facebook or Twitter. Nonetheless, either overtly or in more implicit ways, several posts depicted a retrenchment within the boundaries of the democratic nation state as a failsafe solution to ACTA and similar encroachments of an international neoliberal regime.

More complex linkages were identified combining traces of civic knowledge, with commentary on participation and civic organisations such as in a post against the European INDECT project. INDECT was a research project seeking to develop intelligent security systems for use by law enforcement agencies. The post identified the civic problem posed by the project −a direct threat to online privacy− and suggested collective action as a civic response to it, steered by the Anonymous organisation. By contrast with the previous example, it offered a vision of cross-national mobilisation premised on ostensibly universal values.

> “The INDECT project is a platform for global monitoring sitting on the collection and analysis of information. This project seriously undermines our privacy and completely neutralizes the free internet. In short, everything you do on your

computer (and even elsewhere) will be monitored, all your actions will be controlled and censored without that you have no way to prevent. This project is clearly unconstitutional and goes against Human Rights and two fundamental rights: freedom of expression and the right to respect for private life. Together, unite to nullify this project!".

Separately, participation and organisation were invoked together to signal civic initiatives, e.g. dedicated to advocating a parliamentary rebuttal to the ACTA treaty instigated through collective action. In addition to that, the grassroots Stop ACTA mobilisation provided the ferment for the creation of a civic organisation to defend the cause of the opposition to the agreement and use the day of action as a stage for membership recruitment. The post below provided an opportunity for intertextual civic learning as it built a bridge linking the more familiar terrain of the planned protest on 9 June with follow up actions designed to maintain pressure on government institutions on the topic of the ACTA agreement.

"On June 9, the CSFA association will be there in Paris to demonstrate against ACTA. In the near future our newly established association (see our statute here) will seek to have delegates in all the departments together with action groups all across France. We therefore invite you to get in touch with us to talk about the different possibilities and projects we envisage."

Finally, we spotlight evidence alluding to a close enmeshment of participation, attitude and knowledge whereby contributors presented what was viewed as a troubling state of affairs whilst inciting a collective response to it. In the example below, the three types of civic information were referenced in an epistemic stance berating a narrow focus of the oppositional discourse on the detrimental effect of the

ACTA agreement on the Internet to the exclusion of equally if not more deleterious consequences. The postee reviewed the expected negative consequences, described a desirable attitude to be adopted by its opposers -informed scepticism- and a necessary course of action they would have to take to tackle them all, i.e. collective action.

> 'Well, if you think that ACTA is just about the Internet, you can be quite wrong… the price for medicine, food, operations, technology in general is going to be more expensive [because of] acta. [It is] possible that 19> 21% [is] but a fraction [of the price hike] ... M., [this is] what we know now huh ;) (for we never read the documents directly from the EU site. Indeed, M., why respond to someone who has not signed up and will never read [the documentation]…T [stressed] the fact that we are incredibly besides sitting [on our hands] and he is absolutely right. Thnx)'.

Intertextual civic discourse on Twitter

On Twitter, the most frequent binary intertextual linkage −orientation and participation− connoted a more rhetorical tone. Often starting from a diagnosis of an ACTA attack on shared democratic values, posts would avow the necessity of the collective action (c.f. Author, 2014), instigating participation in it:

> "Stop Internet #Censorship! Sign the urgent global petition @Avaaz urging the EU Parliament to reject #ACTA… '2.8 million signatures against #ACTA... You can't censor that… London rally."

Similarly, the entwinement of civic knowledge and orientation evoked an unprincipled departure of mainstream institutions from their core values: '#acta privacy, data protection, together with freedom of expression have always been considered as core elements of the European model'. Thereby, dutiful civic knowledge seemed to be a cornerstone of the civic literacy occasioned by the Stop ACTA mobilisation whilst at the same time being a central plank of the rationale for the collective action.

Further, dutiful civic knowledge fed into the choice of protest tactics and action strategies which combined indirect pressure tactics, namely demonstrations, with more conventional means of addressing political representatives directly such as petitions. In this line, one postee pleaded: "Let us ask the @ EU_Commission to tell the European Court to halt the # ACTA and protect our rights. Signature Now!". Likewise, knowledge of organisations were displayed to indicate that actions by interest groups (e.g. French consumer protection group UFC Que Choisir) fit into a wider tapestry of action designed to pressure authorities into rescinding the ACTA agreement: "RT @Torrent_News: The UFC Que Choisir denounces # ACTA and contacts MEPs that have reject it| @Torrent_News". On the other, references to political parties were by-and-large derogatory apart from those to the Pirate and the Green parties regarded as supportive of the collective action who were refreshing alternatives to the entrenched political actors: "European protests #ACTA on June 9 http://t.co/QU274qjk Find your demonstration, join in. #EGP has been a strong voice of opposition to ACTA".

The intertextual linkage of media literacy and participation tied together commentary on the necessity and significance of the Stop ACTA protest with an imperative to lend a hand to its diffusion. The tweet "RT @Anon_Central: Today is the

global protest day against #ACTA and Internet #censorship. Share your events, pictures and videos with us. #June9" emphasized the significance of the day for the campaign to prevent the ratification of the ACTA agreement, inviting people to contribute with testimonies from public demonstrations in their own locales. This variety of posts was the obverse to posts exuding scepticism about mainstream media. Whilst one postee remarked disparagingly, 'Somehow I have the feeling that you hardly reported today about the demonstrations against # ACTA ... # media', others urged self-publication: 'broadcast with the mouse!' Plz remember: Pics or it didn´t happen'. Thus, an attacking stance on the media did not amount to a rejection of its utility, suggesting that alternative media would simultaneously compensate for perceived shortcomings and aid in extending mainstream coverage (c.f. Rucht, 2004). The significance of the entire set of findings is weighed in the final paragraphs below.

Discussion and conclusions

The key proposition of this article is that the networked uprisings such as Stop ACTA but also the Occupy mobilisation that fed into it (Occupy Wall Street, 2012) were anchored in and represented active reflections of their institutional settings. Further to the concern for the fundamental human right that is freedom of speech (Losey, 2014) -a guiding principle of cosmopolitan citizenship- this research testified to a preoccupation within the loose grassroots of the Stop ACTA with mainstream political institutions- both national and of the European Union- and their reform. Indeed, the US Occupy movement which did not concentrate so narrowly on a single policy issue seemed to give voice to an ample institutional critique on social media platforms (c.f. Thorson et al., 2013:440). Perhaps together, these insights may constitute at least

modest grounds for continuing to dispute a notion that prefigurative protest communication is primarily instrumental, being fundamentally geared towards mobilisation (c.f. Juris, 2012).

At the same time, this article evinces anew that the networked protests of late generate discourse which instigates concrete changes (2012:273) to both policy and institutional order (inter alia, by endeavouring to refocus public attention on inequality, poverty or unemployment in the case of Occupy, 2012:273; or on the accountability of public officials and due parliamentary process in that of Stop ACTA). In addition, discursive patterns were retrieved encompassing a high measure of both emotional and cognitive investment in the description and evaluation of mainstream politics and the media doubled by reflections on hands-on modalities to counter their actions.

The observation that mainstream parties and interest groups were either marginally invoked (on Twitter, and there largely as an object of criticism) or completely disregarded (on Facebook) arguably attested to a post-materialist dissolution of participant ties with traditional interest-based organisations (c.f. Theocharis, 2012). As to the relative dearth of critical reflection on the media coverage of the demonstrations, it seemed amply compensated for by appeals to users to generate their own media. In this manner, the Stop ACTA activists were continuing the practice of producing self-generated content to countervail media accounts of rolling protests (Segerberg and Bennett, 2011; Poell, 2014:721). Finally, whilst Earl et al.'s (2013) argument that information on action and participation would dominate on the day of action was corroborated, discourse pertaining to media literacy was a close companion to it on action day. Moreover, this notion appeared to hold for both Twitter and Facebook.

Thirdly, the high incidence of posts seeking to foster wider participation in embodied collective action alludes to attempts at a dissociation of vernacular civic discourses on social media from everyday civic practices beyond the 'screen' as likely being misguided (see Bakardjieva, 2012). As in other instances (Robles et al., 2013), a significant share of the communication probed in this research was directed at facilitating the participation of social media users in collective action, here against the ACTA agreement. Having accounted for the stance taken in those messages, it seems reasonable to infer that such communication would enable the enactment of civic participation in everyday life.

To recall, stance-taking has been described as a pivotal resource for inter-textual learning whereby one can apply a familiar practice (e.g. to snap photos with a mobile phone) to an unfamiliar context such as a political demonstration (c.f. Barton and Lee, 2013:127), thereby developing an appreciation of the latter. Inevitably, the conversion rate from vernacular civic discourses to embodied participation would be influenced by other determinant factors (c.f. Enjolras et al., 2012) or the usage of particular social media platforms (Hughes et al., 2012). Crucially, however, the intertextual linkage of self-actualising and dutiful information may be viewed as an intermediary stage in this ostensible conversion process. Dutiful information exchanged in the run up to a protest may fuel a more sustained interest in institutional politics. To test this inference time-series analysis pooling together social media and panel data comprehending in-depth interviews with postees may prove fruitful.

There are other constrictions inherent to the present investigation. Namely, the breadth of time it covers; the single case study design and its exploratory remit were aspects visited in the methodology. The above findings are best viewed as an

attempt at a theoretical elaboration on discursive linkages between the nominated types of civic information. The results were conceived of as a stepping stone towards generalizable studies testing and finessing interpretations of user-generated informal civic learning occasioned by collective action; or critical studies disputing their formulation.

The ample description of the witnessed intertextual linkages was warranted by the aim to unpick discursive patterns of citizenship and sketch out how dutiful civic information may seep into, qualify and most importantly add to a collective stock of knowledge (c.f. Gleason, 2013) used to justify the self-actualising communication and civic action of the Stop ACTA movement. In the end, the democratic person encountered in the parsed networked communication was sceptical of government and the media but not oblivious of them; (s)he was immersed in an environment that can enhance an understanding of dutiful citizenship through an institutional critique of mainstream politics and the media. This prospect does not amount to a full refutation of slacktivism, whose staunch asserters decry the short-sightedness of the self-selected networked activist demographic absorbed in opinionated chatter unlikely to feed into far-reaching collective action (Morozov, 2011:186).

Contrariwise, the cognitive field of contention to which the evidenced intertextuality may be subsumed is a necessary and potent vehicle with which movements set out on the course to collective action (Eyerman and Jamieson, 1991).In the last instance, at stake for activists and the democratic person more broadly may be an ability to grasp and maximize meanings forged through intertextual linkages in networked communication. This analytical quest already impels the owners of the commercial platforms studied here (c.f. Poell, 2014) as well as insidious government surveillance (Fuchs, 2013).

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[i] ACTA was an international treaty on the standardization of intellectual property rights which was signed by 31 national governments. They came in for heavy public criticism for the lack of public involvement in the negotiation process (see Author, forthcoming).

[ii] Gleason has studied informal learning bearing on the internal organisation of the Occupy movement rather than in relation to mainstream political institutions and organisations.

[iii] Both the provision and requests for civic information were designated as code occurrences because the two types of actions were viewed as complementary sides of informal learning.

Figure 1: Facebook ACTA posts (26 May-9 June 2012)

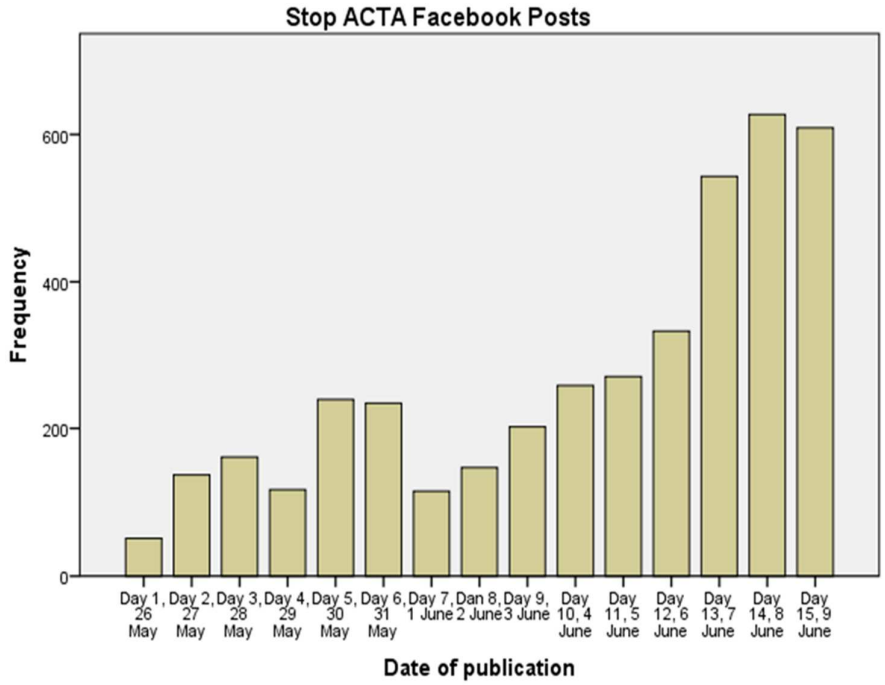

Figure 2: #ACTA Twitter communication (26 May to 9 June 2012)

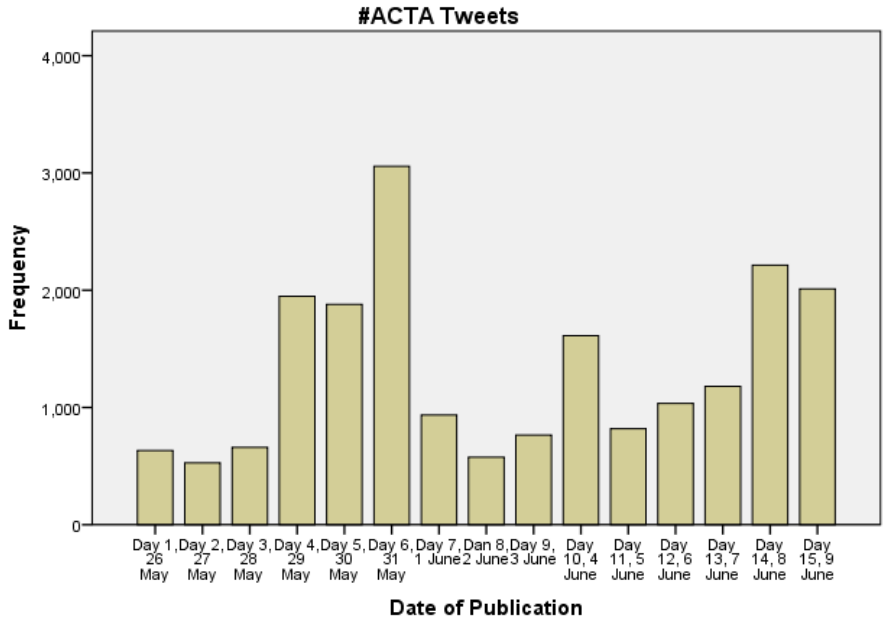

Figure 3: Facebook Code Co-occurrence Map (N=767)

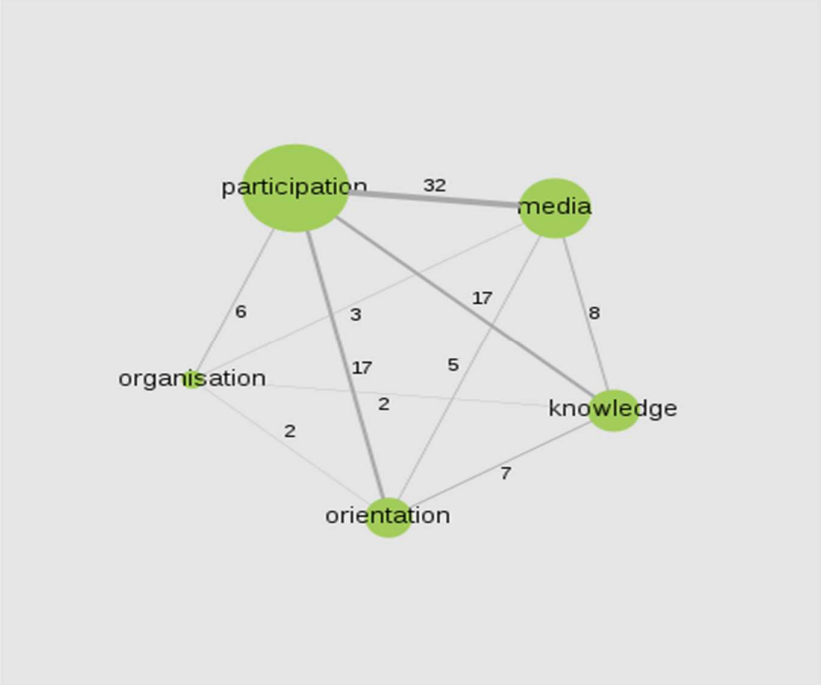

Figure 4: Twitter Code Co-occurrence Map (N=3190)

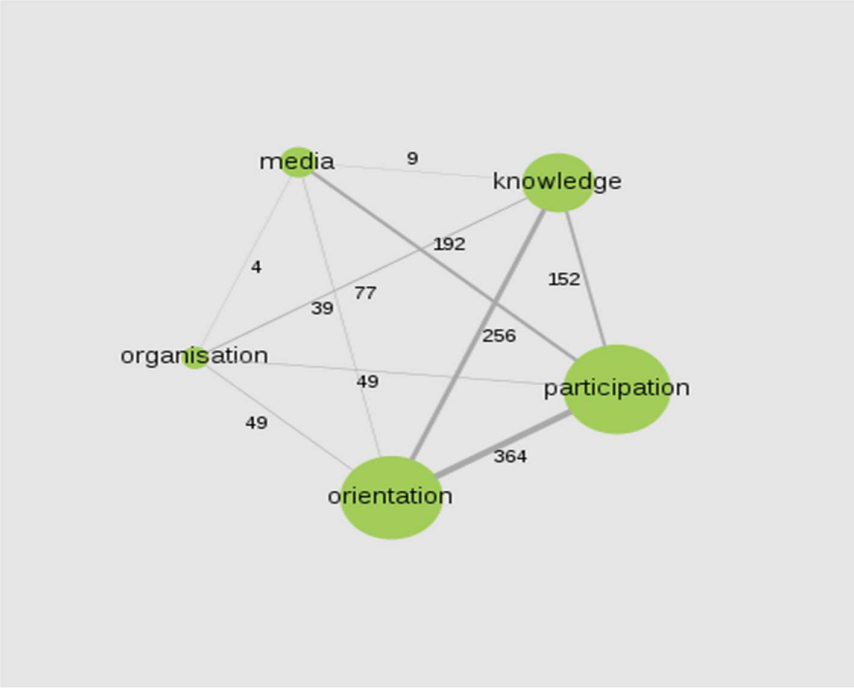

Table 1: Facebook Coding Results* (N=767)

Code	Total Posts (N/%)		Posts (N/%) 26-27 May		Posts (N/%) 9 June		Krippendorf Alpha
Civic Knowledge	55	*7%*	30	*17%*	25	*4%*	.67
Media Literacy	121	*16%*	22	*12%*	99	*17%*	1
Organisation and membership	19	*2%*	11	*6%*	8	*1%*	.92
Action and participation	249	*32%*	44	*25%*	205	*35%*	.97
Orientation and attitudes	40	*5%*	9	*5%*	31	*5%*	.74
*Rates vary from 100% because the text units (posts) were amenable to multiple coding. This is true also for the day counts because the proportions express a ratio of code occurrence out of the total units on the day.							

Table 2: Civic information in tweets* (N=3190)

Code	Frequency (N/%)		Tweets (N/%) 26-27 May		Tweets (N/%) 9 June		Krippendorf Alpha
Civic Knowledge	769	*24%*	431	*38%*	333	*17%*	.97
Media Literacy	425	*13%*	100	*9%*	323	*16%*	1
Organisation and membership	162	*5%*	89	*8%*	72	*4%*	.87
Action and participation	1439	*45%*	416	*35%*	1009	*50%*	.97
Orientation and attitudes	836	*26%*	451	*40%*	381	*19%*	.80
*Rates vary from 100% because the text units (tweets) were amenable to multiple coding. This is true also for the day counts because the proportions express a ratio of code occurrence out of the total units on the day.							