

An Empirical Study on Understanding of Hacktivism and Democracy spread through Online Communication

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Abstract

The global communication via internet has been fostering the political participation of the public civil into the world orders through several different ways; include the participation of computer virtuosos, called hackers, who have been sponsored the emergent of a new social movement „hacktivism“ as a new interest phenomena for the media communication and technology field. This article aims to describe the hacktivism movement as one of the ways of civil people to participate into the global politics through the public sphere, communicate their ideas and promote the principles of democracy using the technology of hacking computer. Within this article I focus on several hacktivism activities emergent since 1990s. My findings have revealed that the hacking politics actions and the social-humanity messages were conveyed by the hactivists encouraged the global circumstances for being more aware and concern on the democracy discourses. Hence I shall conclude that in the modern era of communication and technology the hacktivism has been emerging to promote the freedom of people through the internet and distributes the democracy principles into the global world for the global changing.

Keywords: Democracy, Internet Communication, Political Communication, Hacktivism, Public Sphere and Global Changing.

Introduction:

Mansell used the definition from Taylor and Jordan (1999) which hacktivism defined as “the conjunction of hacking techniques with the values communicative strategies of political activism in line with the agendas of new globalized social movement.”

Doroty E. Danning (2001) who concern on the issue of the hacktivism, activis, and cyber-terrorism and their relation with the global changing by focused on the foreign policy analysis stated that:

“In the area of hacktivism, which involves the use of hacking tools and techniques of a disruptive nature, the internet will serve mainly to draw attention to a cause, as such incident are

regularly reported by news media. Whether that attention has the desired effect of changing policy decisions related to the issue at hand is much less certain.”

According to some scholars, hacktivism would be a single politically motivated virtual action of non-state actors in order to gather public attention for a political topic and to express disapproval. For example, as Taylor stated (2005: 4) “it engages with this metasystem directly and, with its close ties to the politics of globalization, marks the beginning of a

significant new chapter in radical technological politics.” Use an explanation of Taylor, furthermore because of the radicalism claim, for the global society the hacktivism is not that quietly accepted, while some scholars even marked this new social movement as a part of criminal actions.

Therefore the hacktivism have been attracted more repulsion than acceptance whereas the motivations behind are not to sabotage, destroy or permanently cripple government operations as what several media ever been published, but more to bring attention to freedom, violations of human rights and to protect the responsible flow of information on the internet. Thus the hacktivism movements stick together with the issue of democracy in the modern era.

This article traces the emergent of hacktivism as a new phenomenon on the study of communication, media and technology in the modern era. As I interest on the distribution process of democratic values through the media of internet, I then attempt to examine my findings on the hacktivism activities, for their roles in conveying several political messages to the global world about their understanding on democracy.

I firstly describing the democracy discourses through the cyberspace, which internet is an effective media for the global communication. I then describe a very brief history about the emergent of hacktivism movements and their ideologies before accommodate those actions with the conception of electronic democracy, democracy deliberation and the role of public sphere. I may focus on the Habermas“ theory about the public sphere and democracy deliberation then use a theory of political communication to bring this issue into the main purpose of this article that is describing the hacktivism as one of the important tools to promote the democracy values through the internet.

Democracy Discourses through Global Communication

Today we are living in the modern era wherein democracy becomes a controversial public debates, especially regarding on the relation between citizens and government. Could citizens control the government as what the democracy ideal is? Or on the contrary the government

serves the citizens by several policies and regulations which control the freedom of citizens. Democracy discourses would never stop to debating the relation between government and citizens since among them emerging the conception of the participation of social order. For this purposes, people would never fed up to communicate each others, talk about democracy and attract many people to participate into this debate.

The global communication has been quietly useful for the debate on democracy discourse, especially to highlight the implementation of democracy while the democracy itself still in the controversial debate circumstances. For taking over this controversial, there is a popular quotation can reflects the meaning of democracy as many scholars often cited, from John Dewey (1999) “democracy is not an end in itself, but a means by which people discover and extend and manifest their fundamental human nature and human rights. Democracy is rooted in freedom, solidarity, a choice of work and the ability to participate in the social order.”

Shall we then conclude that the concept of democracy has been doing an expansion from the traditional old Greek into the modern world? Democracy today does not only seem as what Plato ever described, about the majority and minority. Democracy is the process which all people can participate; include for control the government itself. Thus the public sphere is important for the future of democracy discourses.

A study on the democracy and public sphere has been done by many different scholars with different backgrounds. But the most popular one may a quotation by Habermas. “The age of the public sphere as face-to-face talk is clearly over: the question of democracy must henceforth take into account new forms of electronically mediated discourse. Poster (Poster,

1995) based on the Habermas“ theory put a question “what are the conditions of democratic speech in the mode of information? What kind of "subject" speaks or writes or communicates in these conditions?” While Cohen (1998) pointed out that freedom of speech is even more crucial to deliberative democracy. He summarizes the arguments that have been made for the importance of freedom of political expression in a democracy:

1. Democracy is based on the principle of popular sovereignty, which demands “free and open discussion among citizens”;
2. Restricting speech creates political inequality between those whose speech is allowed, and those whose speech is restricted;
3. Restricting speech impedes the free flow of information, “perhaps reducing the quality of democratic discussion and decision”, and
4. Restricting speech limits the range of ideas or opinions in a political discussion. (Cohen 1998)

Political Communication, Public Sphere and Internet’s Roles

Monroe Price, a professor and director of the Centre for Global Communication Studies University of Pennsylvania within his interview was asked about the political communication challenges in the 21st century. He stated “we will have new models of politics, new concepts of involvement, new technologies that create these changes, and we may have huge tension in our societies” (Price, 2010: 2).

To describe how the political communication’s works use the internet media as a public sphere let me first put a clear conception about political communication itself. As defined by Graber (2002: 479) political communication is “encompasses the construction, sending, receiving, and processing of messages that potentially have a significant direct or indirect impact on politics.” He then explained that “the key element is that the message has a significant political effect on the thinking, beliefs, and behaviors of individuals, group, institutions, and whole societies and the environments in which they exist.” The question now “how does the internet as an important public sphere work for the political communication?”

According to Brunstibg (2002: 550) the internet is a great tool for generating popular support for activist causes in a non-violent way, as he stated “the internet changes the nature of collective action, but contrary to popular belief, the internet would appear to be especially suited of collective action rather than confrontational action.” Therefore the internet permits an unprecedented empowerment of the individual. Thus through the internet, a political communication which involved public participations and the useful of technology could be describe in several ways, for instance blogger, individual websites, the community joint, responding the online newspaper up to the technical way, hacking computer and many others.

As Danning stated “the internet is clearly changing the landscape of political discourse and advocacy. It offers new and inexpensive methods for collecting and publishing information, for

communicating and coordinating action on a global scale, and for reaching out to policy makers, supports both open and private communication (Danning, 1999: 26). Hence the Internet is not only a welcoming of global communication forum for the free exchange of

views, but it has its own class of warriors dedicated to protecting free speech online.

In the case of Vegh's dissertation, the focus on media coverage of hacktivism is consistent with a theoretical agenda: to demonstrate the internet's challenge to elite control of mass communications. As a communications scholar, Vegh argues that "control of the media is crucial to the hegemony of political and economic elites: media control allows elites to repress alternative narratives of resistance or protest. The agenda of elite control leads mass media to skew their presentation of "counterhegemonic" online activities "toward a perspective that is favorable to the ruling powers, no matter how democratic or socially empowering these activities potentially are" (Vegh 2003).

Therefore the internet as an effective public sphere has provided either activist or common users new opportunities to build networks and to exchange alternative information or distribute counter hegemonic discourses in a more efficient way. And it also provided activists and civil society organizations more control over the content of their message and the tools to independently inform citizens and sympathizers world-wide. They might involve themselves into the political communication process in advance use the internet media for express the consciousness of politics of civil people.

From Hacker to Hacktivists and Ideology

"It is never the technical stuff that gets you in trouble. It is the personalities and the politics." (Rick Cook, Wizardry Compiled)

Considering the media's publications of the hacker's conceptions, firstly I do need to quote a short clear statement "a hack is a net programming trick and a hacker is a computer virtuoso, and it was a hacker that created the technology and computer programs that make up the internet we all take for granted today." (Paul Miller, 2001:4). We might have been found how did the media defined a hacker with a wrong perception, while there are many articles still ongoing published to make a clarification for it. For instance, some scholars even identified hacker as a semi-criminal individual while on the contrary there was no computer innovations either internet revolution without the roles of hacker.

Hacker defines as “someone who enjoys tinkering with computers to find concrete solutions to technical problems” (Taylor, 1999). Hackers believe that they should promote the free flow of information, and causing anything to disrupt, prevent, or retard that flow is improper. Steven Levy (1984) through his famous book “*Hackers: Heroes of the Computer*

Revolution” articulated the hacker tenets:

1. Access to computers should be unlimited and total.
2. All information should be free.
3. Mistrust authority - promote decentralization.
4. Hackers should be judged by their hacking not bogus criteria such as degrees, age, race, or position.
5. You create art and beauty on a computer.
6. Computers can change your life for the better

Table 1
Hacktivism Hacking Techniques

Civil disobedience:	Hacktivism:
Sit-ins	Web site defacements
Barricades	Web site redirects
Political graffiti	Denial-of-service attacks
Wildcat strikes	Information theft
Underground presses	Site parodies
Political theater	Virtual sit-ins
Sabotage	Virtual sabotage
	Software development

Several different techniques on hacktivism (Samuel, Ibid: 8-14)

Site defacements consist of hacking into a web server and replacing a web page with a new page bearing some sort of message.

Site redirects involve hacking into a web server and changing its addressing so that would-be visitors to the site are instead redirected to an alternative site, usually one that is critical of the hacked site.

Denial of service (DoS) attacks are a common and powerful way to wreak online havoc, but

have been only rarely used by hacktivists. A DoS attack is an attack on a computer system or network that causes a loss of service to users, typically the loss of network connectivity. *Information theft* consists of hacking into a private network and stealing information.

Virtual sit-ins get hundreds, thousands, or even hundreds of thousands of protesters to rapidly reload web pages on targeted servers, overloading them with traffic until they slow down or crash.

Hactivism, Democracy Discourses and Global Changing

“An international protest movement surfaced in resistance to neo-liberal institutions and their related globalization policies, while democracy, social justice, and a better world were championed. Since then, broad-based, populist political spectacles have become the norm, thanks to an evolving sense of the way in which the internet may be deployed in a democratic and emancipatory manner by a growing planetary citizenry that is using the new media to become informed, to inform others and to construct new social and political relations.” (Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner)

The Internet’s hospitality towards free speech is one of the reasons that democratic theorists often see it as a promising home for deliberative democracy. I prefer to quote a statement by Ranario (1998) “as global politics continue to endure a turbulent and complex time in history, an awareness of the hacktivism will continue expanding and evolving.” Vegh within his desertation has concludes that:

“Articles on hackers and hacking increasingly use sensationalist tone and language, motivations are not discussed in news articles about hacking, the discourse is shifting from hackers as criminals to hackers as cyberterrorists, there is a larger focus on cyberterrorism now, even if it has not yet happened, the language of the media blurs the differences between hacktivism and cyberterrorism. True political dissent online is delegitimized by public opinion driven by the peculiar framing of media reports, which presents favorable conditions for passing laws and regulations that limit not only this mode of having alternative voices heard, but also other ways of conduct otherwise protected by the civil liberties and democratic principles.” (Vegh 2003)

The hacktivism movement has been attracted different perceptions of public society. Some accepted it as a new phenomenon of political participation and communication in the modern era; hence the hacktivism movement could be one of the ways of democracy expansion while some rejected and uncompromised by the legal hacking computer methods build by the hacker-activists.

In other way, based on the Samuel's argument the hacktivism movement has raises questions about the way that free speech and anonymity have been formulated by theorists of deliberative democracy, and it also poses a larger problem for would-be discursive

democrats. She mentioned that "hacktivism illustrates the challenge of enforcing any rules of deliberative discourse; without enforceable rules, the proceduralist vision of deliberative democracy may have to give way to a more amorphous form of online deliberation." According to Samuel "hacktivists can elude the mechanisms that allow states to enforce policy, pursuing policy circumvention rather than policy change. Also the keys are the characteristics that go along with hacktivism's digital nature: like most forms of Internet communication it can be anonymous, trans- and multinational, and take advantage of many-to-many and one-to many communications" (Samuel, 2007: 27).

Conclusion

"The government of the world must be entrusted to satisfied nations, who wished nothing more for themselves than what they had. If the world-government were in the hands of hungry nations, there would always be danger. But none of us had any reason to seek for anything more. The peace would be kept by peoples who lived in their own way and were not ambitious. Our power placed us above the rest. We were like rich men dwelling at peace within their habitations." (Winston Churchill)

The quotation from Churchill above gives a message that between the government and the citizens should be appeared the balance role of state control. While government does their role, citizens monitor the processes and this method could be implemented by the political communication among. A political communication which involved public civil and the useful of technology could be described in several ways, and the internet works for the implementation of it.

Through the internet, the amounts of cyber activists who concern with the democracy discourses have been arising with the new social movement „hacktivism“ . The hacktivism is the combination of hacking techniques with political activism, struggling for the principle of freedom and promote the values of democracy through the internet. The hacktivits involve the

technology hacking computer to convey their beliefs on politics and global world which the issues include human rights, global justice, freedom on internet, free flow of information, and free speech.

For this closing statement I like to reveal Taylor's conclusion regarding on the hacktivism movement "whatever the philosophical and practical differences may be between hacking and hacktivism, the key significance of hacktivism is the way in which it has produced a political strategy that is faithful to the combination of hacking's previously identified love of abstract systems as well as its commitment to the reappropriation and subversion of the original purposes of specific technological artefacts. (Taylor, Ibid: 9)

We are expecting for the implementation of the open society, the open government, and the open global communication in the modern era. Hence we want democracy to be implemented without making any deal with the authoritarian of any arbiters. While the hacktivism has promoted itself as a non-violent and accessible way for citizens to protest violations of our freedoms of information, as well as a wide variety of human rights injustices we can make some expectation about the global changing.

Finally I conclude that, as typically, hacktivism is a political participation in one hand, which civil people express their ideas about world politics and involve themselves into the political changing. In another hand, hacktivism is the way of political communication that benefited the internet media for share ideas, beliefs and conviction on politics, human rights among

others within the global society. Thus in the study of media communication and technology, the way of internet can be use for the global changing exactly important nowadays. The global changing has emerging as fast as the technology development expanding itself to the whole of the world, making easier the way of people to communicate and participate into politics. This the way of communication, media, technology and politics will always synergy to explain the world phenomenon and shall be very interesting for the study of global changing, especially the way of democracy could be implemented.

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