

“How to Occupy a School? I Search the Internet!”: participatory politics in public school occupations in Brazil

DOI: 10.1590/1809-5844201726

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Abstract

The movement to occupy public schools in the state of São Paulo, carried out by teenage students at the end of 2015, marked yet another series of protests demanding better teaching conditions in Brazil. Adolescents gained a new voice in these events by using the media as a space of mobilization, creating content that will be analyzed in this paper in the light of the concept of participatory politics (COHEN; KAHNE, 2011; JENKINS, 2016) and its interface with youth and technologies. This proposal includes the systematic analysis of the activists’ production (texts, images and videos) in 42 pages of the Facebook social networking site, with the aim of understanding the use of the media and its role in mobilization. The intersection between popular culture, affective engagement and political struggle, evidenced by the analyses, was one of the main outcomes of the work.

Keywords: Youth. Mobilization. Engagement. Media Activism. Participatory Politics.

Introduction

November 2015 marked the beginning of yet another series of demonstrations organized by Brazilian youth, revealing the strength of new forms of activism (with relevant use of the media) and their remarkable potential for change through intervention in public policies. This time, teenage students, particularly between the ages of 14 and 18, mobilized themselves in a movement to occupy schools, taking over the sites and there remaining for an indefinite period, that is, until their demands were met. The main inspiration came from an analogous movement of Chilean students (the Penguin Revolution) which took place in 2006, especially with regard to mobilization strategies. The Brazilian youngsters adapted a booklet by Chilean and Argentinian students with recommendations on “How to occupy a school,”¹ and one of the catchphrases of their demonstrations in Brazil was: “This will be a new Chile.”

¹ The booklet was produced by the student group *O Mal Educado* (a word play in Portuguese that can mean both The Poorly Educated and The Audacious) and is available from the group’s blog (<https://goo.gl/q0tJRW>). It is interesting to note that the booklet was produced in late 2013, well before the occupations took place.

In the specific case of students from the state of São Paulo in 2015², the movement was triggered by the state government’s announcement of a school reorganization process separating public schools by cycles (elementary education, which includes the first nine years of schooling in Brazil, and the three years of high school) and closing down 93 schools. The government argued that separation by cycles would result in pedagogical improvement in schools. In the students’ view, however, besides not being discussed with society, the reorganization would be detrimental to education, resulting in classroom overcrowding, a reality already experienced by many of them.

Initially, the state government opposed the protests, accusing the students of having “political motivation”³ and suppressing the demonstrations, even with the use of police forces. However, part of the population started supporting the high school students, while the occupations increased daily, as shown in the graph below, whose data source indicates a total of 219 schools occupied in the state of São Paulo by December 4, 2015. The government considered “demoralizing” the student movement by using “guerrilla tactics,” in the words of the education secretary’s chief of staff in a “leaked” meeting audio recorded by an independent media outlet⁴. However, student resistance and popular discontent with the proposal affected the governor’s popularity⁵, prompting him, after successive setbacks, to announce the revocation of the school reorganization plan on December 4, 2015. Following this victory, the students started vacating the schools, a process that lasted until mid-January 2016⁶.

2 The school occupations in São Paulo motivated later action in other Brazilian states. The “occupation” strategy became part of the repertoire of student movements. The scope of this paper is restricted to the 2015 São Paulo case.

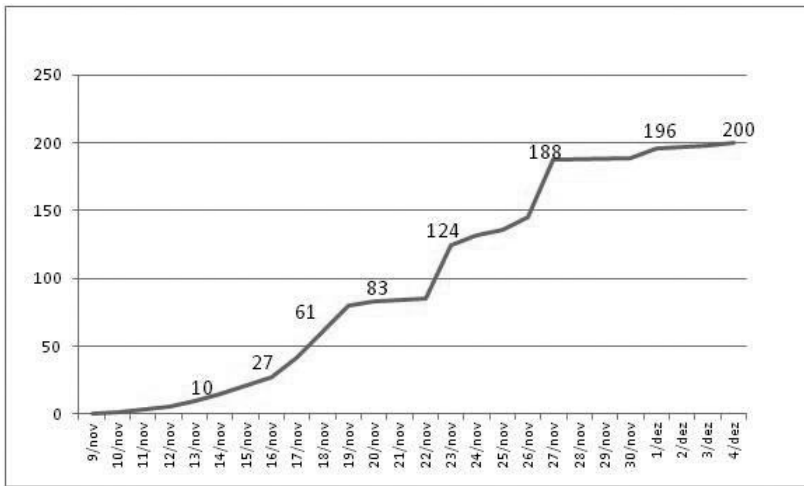
3 “O que querem os alunos nas ocupações das escolas de São Paulo” (*Nexo*, 23 de nov. 2015. Available at: <https://goo.gl/iasX04>. Accessed on: November 18, 2016).

4 “Governo de SP fala em ‘ações de guerra’ contra ocupações em escolas” (*G1*, 30 de nov. 2015. Available at: <https://goo.gl/RRFJ4v>. Accessed on: November 28, 2016).

5 “Popularidade de Alckmin cai e vai a 28%, aponta Datafolha” (*G1*, 4 de dez. 2015. Available at: <https://goo.gl/moKQTD>. Accessed on: November 28, 2016).

6 “Desocupadas as últimas duas escolas estaduais de SP, diz secretaria” (*G1*, 19 de jan. 2016. Available at: <https://goo.gl/b0B0OL>. Accessed on: November 28, 2016).

Graph 1 – Occupation of public schools in São Paulo - 2015*



Source: Developed by the authors from data of Independent Media Center of São Paulo (*Centro de Mídia Independente de São Paulo*)⁷.

*19 schools have no data on when the occupation started.

The school occupations also had several similarities with the movement known as *June Protests* or *Brazilian Spring* in 2013. Among them, we highlight: 1) the somewhat unexpected outbreak; 2) the horizontal nature of the mobilizations, with no predominance of institutional leaders of political parties, or even of the student movement itself; 3) demonstrations called through social media, with the use of online digital tools. Ortellado (2016) argues that the mobilization of high school students was the first effective development of the June protests, noting that the demands were similar in their criticism of the traditional representation model and in the defense of social rights – in the case of the students, those related to education.

Melucci observes that the “antagonism of youth movements is eminently communicative in nature” (2007, p.40). This is accurate regarding the student movement in São Paulo, which involved a great deal of media production before, during and after the occupation of schools by students and individuals who supported the cause. We believe that the analysis of this production can foster an understanding of how young people relate to the media.

Therefore, with the general objective of observing the use of media in the context of the occupations, this paper investigates the media production of the young participants, with a focus on identifying if and to what extent the use of media by students relates to the concept of “participatory politics” (COHEN; KAHNE, 2011; JENKINS, 2016).

⁷ “Escolas Estaduais Ocupadas em SP #OcupaEscola” (Centro de Mídia Independente de São Paulo, 14 de dez. 2015. Available at: <https://goo.gl/WVvga7>. Accessed on: November 28, 2016).

Such a focus is justified by the importance of understanding a contemporary phenomenon with implications that relate to the areas of education and communication policies, as well as citizenship.

Research questions and methodological approach

The work seeks to build knowledge regarding the phenomenon under scrutiny and its main concerns can be synthesized in the following research questions:

- How have media languages (video, image and text) been used by young people? What role do such media play regarding mobilization?
- Is it possible to establish relationships between the use of media by students and the concept of “participatory politics?” If so, which ones?

The students and their supporters used a variety of digital services and technologies (WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram etc.). However, the Facebook social networking site was the main instrument for mobilization, with the development of pages related to general support for the movement, as well as those dedicated specifically to the occupation of a particular school⁸.

In designing the work methodology, we opted for the analysis of quantitative⁹ (posts, page location etc.) and qualitative (posted content) data extracted from the Facebook pages of occupied schools. In addition to these data sources, we used information from a focus group with six female youngsters¹⁰ who took part in the movement in some way, as well as other sources such as press coverage and an audiovisual documentary which provide information on the occupations.

In view of the above, we seek to discuss the issues related to the theme in the following order: 1) exposition of the concept of “participatory politics” and its interface with technology and youth; 2) presentation of the work’s analyses; 3) final remarks.

Internet, youth and participatory politics

Some of the topics highlighted in the literature that addresses the transformations brought about by new means of communication, particularly the Internet, in politics and action by social movements are: 1) Internet use depends on the logics of the groups that use the web and relates to the purposes of the movement for adopting it and the social context in which it is used (MAIA, 2011); 2) digital communication has favored aspects

8 The importance of Facebook is shown in the following post on that site: “On the presence of rede globo (TV network crew) here at the gate: We don’t want any media, the only media we will have is this official page where no one can distort anything we say!” (Escola Emygdio de Barros, 11/25/2015).

9 For such we used the app online *Facebook Post Browser*, which allows the collection of posts.

10 This group was conducted solely by the female author to facilitate communication with the girls, on November 30, 2016, in São Paulo. The debate was based on the following main themes: motivation and daily routine of the occupations; feminism; and use of media. The outcomes of these debates were used here as support material, being more deeply explored in another work (CASTILHO; ROMANCINI, 2017).

such as the undertaking of campaigns that aim to change social understanding on certain topics, global interaction of activists and production/distribution of alternative and tactical media, which can serve as a counterpoint to the views of the mainstream media and include it in their agenda (MAIA, 2011); 3) similarly, it is necessary to include in the analysis of mobilizations not only the mainstream media, but also the interactions of contemporary movements with the new media (PLEYERS, 2013); 4) the speed of information production and distribution makes the Internet a fundamental public space for social actors to make demands and expand the scope of their action, aggregating dispersed agents (MACHADO, 2007; CASTELLS, 2015); 5) however, such characteristics (dynamism and openness) may paradoxically lead to the swift disappearance of mobilizations; 6) the diffuse identity of individuals in today's society and in networked environments (conducive to anonymity and the multiplicity of identities) may hinder the construction of collective identities delimited for social movements (MACHADO, 2007); 7) age issues related to the greater or lesser use of the web (digital literacy) are linked to Internet use as a medium for activism, as well as the connection infrastructure of societies (MACHADO, 2007); 8) the online and offline worlds are deeply interconnected and cannot be dissociated; the offline world prompts people to intervene in networks and appropriate what happens in them (CASTELLS, 2015); 9) the virtual environment has enhanced trends to set parties apart and eliminate the boundaries between public and private, personal/subjective and collective (SORJ, 2016).

It is also important to note that the social experiences in which political mobilization, youth and digital technologies converge have been around for over twenty years. The pioneering event is the Zapatista uprising, which broke out in Mexico in 1994, led by a former leader of the country's student movement. "The Zapatista uprising, more than weapons, used the new communication technologies to spread its slogans" (PORTILLO et al, 2012, p.140). In other words, ideological dissemination stands out, as occurred in a series of mobilizations around the world, such as the Arab Spring¹¹, the 15M movement in Spain¹² and Occupy¹³.

Regarding their dynamics, these events differ both in geographical context and demands, as well as in the importance of the three elements highlighted above. However, what stands out from the point of view of the Internet is the horizontality of digital communication, according to the logics of these movements, as well as the strategic use of the digital network in their struggles, in which the virtual space interacts organically with the offline world – face-to-face mobilizations called through the Internet, for example.

11 An umbrella term for the series of popular protests and revolts in the Arab world which broke out as of 2011, in response to lack of democracy and economic crisis.

12 Also called the movement of the "Indignants", it occurred in Spain in 2011-2012, bringing together different groups and citizens protesting against the country's economic and political crisis, advocating a re-politicization of citizenship.

13 Also known as Occupy Wall Street, OWS, the movement broke out in the USA in 2011 – inspiring activists in other countries with similar agendas – to protest against social inequality and denounce the influence on government of big corporations, especially from the financial sector.

The actual occurrence or expectation of an association between youth participation and the use of technologies in contemporary social and political movements, such as those mentioned above, can be explained by statistical data showing higher rates of adoption and use of communication technologies by individuals in the age groups associated with *youth*, ages 15 to 29¹⁴, besides the qualitative observation that also highlights the value young people give to technologies. Thus, it is normal for young people to engage in politics at any level to make use of media, especially digital. Martuccelli (2015) notes that although the majority of adolescents and young people do not use the Internet for political purposes, it is in this universe, “sometimes in relation to the means of communication, that their activism and cultural actions are expressed” (p.90).

The increasing proximity between private life and political engagement in contemporary forms of action by young people is observed by Pleyers (2013, p.92), who notes that social networking sites offer the best platform for this significant individualism. In this sense, Melucci (apud BROUGH, SHRESTHOVA, 2012) mentions the importance of *affective engagement*, arguing that mobilization for social change occurs only when affective and communicative needs, as well as the feeling of solidarity, coincide with collective goals, including those of young people. Therefore, these are crucial factors for the development of identity and subsequent collective action.

Still in terms of activism, the use of social media as a tool for political engagement by youth is viewed as an alternative model for the development of broader political processes, a phenomenon which Jenkins (2016) considers a true portrait of democracy in the 21st century. Particularities of the Occupy movement, such as the participation of citizens dressed as zombies, are interpreted as models of *participatory politics* for representing a provocation with predominantly discursive goals, that is, related to political awareness. It is in this sense that the author defines participatory politics as a point of intersection between *participatory culture* (a concept he has developed in other works) and political and civic participation, where political change is promoted through social and cultural mechanisms rather than traditional political institutions (JENKINS, 2016).

At this intersection between popular culture and activism via affective engagement lies participatory politics, i.e., when individuals use culture as a means of mobilization. In the literature review on participatory politics by Brough and Shresthova (2012), the idea of informal and cultural involvement or *cultural citizenship* is strongly linked with youth, as some youngsters become more civically and politically engaged not through

14 Several indicators on the more intense use of digital technologies by youngsters in Brazil appear in surveys of *Núcleo de Informação e Coordenação do Ponto BR* (Coordination and Information Center of the Dot BR), which estimate, for example, that the age group with the greatest share of Internet access (accessed Internet at least once in their lives) is that of individuals aged 16 to 24 (93%), and the higher age groups present a continuous decline, reaching only 20% among people over 60 years of age (NÚCLEO, 2016, p. 328). The age group that corresponds to “youth” may vary according to the understanding regarding this category. However, the Brazilian Youth Statute defines young people as individuals aged 15 to 29 (BRAZIL, 2013).

government organizations, but from interests closer to their daily lives. These modes of political participation are often publicized through informal, non-institutionalized and non-hierarchical networks, and especially through the use of the Internet (BROUGH; SHRESTHOVA, 2012).

Participatory politics is defined by Cohen and Kahne as “interactive, peer-based acts through which individuals and groups seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern” (2011, p. VI). The creation of online groups, blog postings, uploading of humorous videos (parodies, remix etc.) to social networking sites, all with political content, are some examples of participatory politics presented. Among the possibilities of such activities, we can highlight: 1) reaching large audiences and mobilizing new activists through social media fast and cheaply; 2) stimulating creativity and giving voice to young people, with participants producing content via video, images and text; 3) facilitating negotiation with governments; 4) affording greater independence regarding political information by circumventing gatekeepers such as newspaper editors, political parties and interest groups (COHEN; KAHNE, 2011). On the other hand, in terms of limitations to participatory politics, we observe: 1) more favored groups, especially regarding class, race and schooling, are more inclined to get involved; 2) risk of misinformation due to the information sources filtered through social media; 3) only a minority engages in participatory politics, since most young people remain aloof from political issues; 4) risk of the proponents privileging individual expression over collective voice (COHEN; KAHNE, 2011).

Participatory politics may also involve strategies of *transmedia mobilization*, when young activists multiply and diversify messages and communication channels, increasing the potential to spread mobilizing content (JENKINS, 2016). With each platform contributing differently to disseminating messages, young people’s production can be accessed by fairly distinct groups, including those that are hostile to the original intent. Such transmedia mobilization naturally involves co-creation and cooperation among different activists. Therefore, these youth media practices are participative and connected to the movement, of which these media are part.

Below we discuss the validity of the theories presented in the case analysis.

Media content produced by students of the occupations

As already mentioned, the Internet was the main means used by students of the occupations to disclose content; among the 219 occupied schools surveyed by *Centro de Mídia Independente de São Paulo* (Independent Media Center of São Paulo), 50 (23%) created a Facebook page related to the movement. Before describing the nature of the content, it is interesting to show where they originated. Table 1 compares regions of occupied schools and Facebook pages of the occupations.

Table 1 – Occupied schools and Facebook pages of the movement, by region

Region/ Schools-Facebook pages	Capital	Metropolitan area	Inland and coastal areas	Sum
<i>Occupied schools</i>	87 (39.5%)	48 (22%)	84 (38.5%)	219 (100%)
<i>Facebook pages of occupations</i>	29 (58%)	11 (22%)	10 (20%)	50 (100%)

Source: Developed by the authors from data of *Centro de Mídia Independente de São Paulo*.

The percentage drop in inland and coastal areas between schools that organized occupations (38.5%) and those that created pages to publicize them (20%) suggests that issues of connectivity and digital literacy probably affected such figures. This is reinforced by the fact that among public high schools in the state of São Paulo, 85% of those in urban areas have broadband Internet connection, while in rural areas the percentage is 71%¹⁵. Thus, it is observed that students from the capital city, neighboring cities (metropolitan area) and, more specifically, urban areas are more likely to mobilize themselves over the Internet due to greater access.

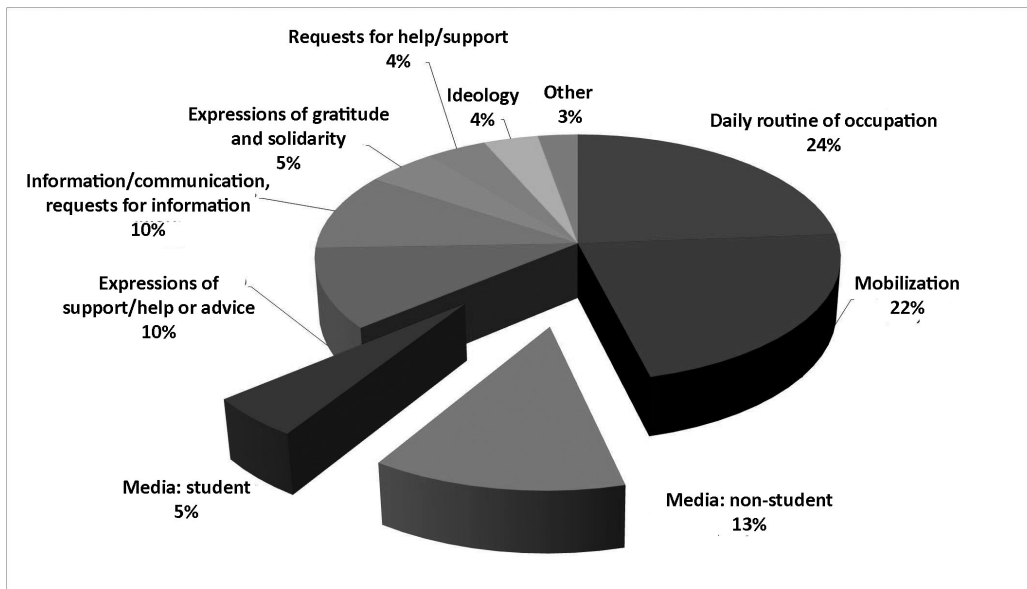
As for content, we collected posts from pages that were active in December 2016, that is, 42, since eight of them were unavailable. Data collection was carried out between November 1, 2015 and January 31, 2016, from shortly before the beginning of the occupations to a little after their end. It was noted that most pages were created specifically for the movement (with names like “School of Struggle”), while others had existed previously and returned to posting regular school information after the occupation.

A total of 4.800 posts was collected with the following percentage shares, according to actual Facebook categories: photos (2.029, 42.5% of the total), text (status) (1.509 – 31.5%), videos (558 – 11.5%), shared links (555 – 11.5%), events (149 – 3%). A diverse use of media languages is noted, with most posts including texts, even when classified in another category. The average was 114 posts per page over the period (about 1.2 post per day), with 248 on the page with most posts. A rough estimate of the reach of these pages (due to the count being made after the event, among other reasons) is the sum of likes of all of them, which added to about 75 thousand, with an average of 1.785 likes for each page. The page with most likes received 12.451.

In classifying the content of the posts into categories, based on the objectives of the study, we came up with the result shown in Graph 2, which shows that three major categories – *Daily routine of occupation*, *Mobilization* and *Media* (subdivided into *Student* and *Non-student*) – accounted for 64% of all posts.

¹⁵ Data of *Censo Escolar* (School Census)/INEP 2015, accessed from the QEdU education database (<http://www.qedu.org.br/>).

Graph 2 – Categories of posts in occupation pages



Source: Developed by the authors.

To a certain extent, these first three categories – which will be the only ones detailed, due to the study characteristics – are often interrelated and the classification of a post in a single category, according to the method used, is mainly justified in terms of exposure. Classifying content into different categories could be unnecessarily complex in view of the objectives of the study. It can be said that the occupation pages as a *whole* are mobilizing and distrustful of the interest of mainstream media outlets to portray the movement accurately. As we have seen in the theoretical discussion, the idea that the digital media produced by activists is a potential counterpoint to the mainstream media is a characteristic of movements such as that of high school students of São Paulo.

Thus, we were able to group under *Daily routine of occupation* the largest number of posts, which aim to show that the occupations were conducted by young people concerned with their schools and with education, and not “troublemakers” as certain critics tried to characterize them. As stated by one of the students in the discussion group, the mainstream media tended to “Make your parents believe that you were messing about in the school.” The contents in the *Daily routine of occupation* category include descriptions and statements about daily life in the occupations (including conflicts with the police and school administrators), with a large number of posts related to students cleaning and renovating the school, as well as the organization, dissemination and response to the various educational, cultural and sports activities promoted by them during this period.

The *Mobilization* category grouped posts aimed at encouraging engagement, adhesion, enthusiasm for the struggle and a sense of pride at participating. Thus, it is characterized by catchphrases – “Occupy, Resist and Evolve!!!” (Emydgio de Barros School, 11/26/2015), “An occupied school is an enchanted school!” (Caetano de Campos School – Consolação, 11/19/2015) – associated or not with photographs (in this case, as shown in Figure 2), and by calls to the movement’s representative acts.

Figure 1 – Example of post of the *Daily routine of occupation* category¹⁶



Source: <https://goo.gl/ykL3f7>.

Figure 2 – Examples of posts of the *Mobilization* category¹⁷



Source: <https://goo.gl/Cn1832> and <https://goo.gl/0LStIb>.

¹⁶ Text on the post: “Boys cleaning up and wiping graffiti off the walls!”.

¹⁷ Texts on the posts: “A STRUGGLE ALWAYS COMES TO AN END, BUT NOT A WAR!” / “NOT ONLY ON FACEBOOK [WE ARE IN THE STREETS]” (left image); “STUDENT STRUGGLE! / OCCUPIED SCHOOL - STUDENT STRUGGLE” (right image).

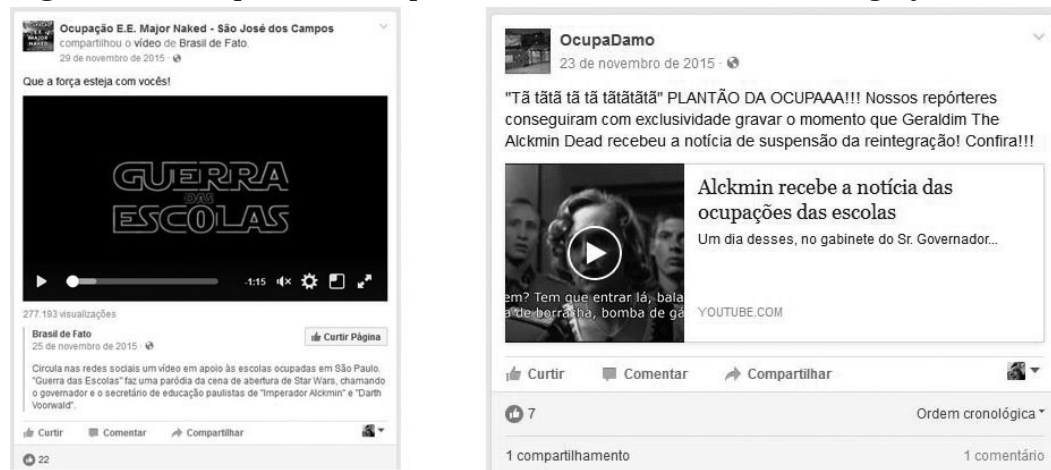
Regarding the *Media* category, with the *Non-student* and *Student* subcategories, the former refers to sharing and commenting news and other content (text, video, etc.) produced by large media companies (e.g., mainstream newspapers and websites) and also by smaller outlets (targeted newsletters, like those of neighborhoods, political parties, among others), but with no direct association between the students and the producers of such materials. The *Media: student* subcategory, in turn, is characterized by the posting in Facebook pages of content produced by the actual students of the occupied schools or by groups helping to organize the movement. In the latter case, two pages stand out: *Não fechem minha escola* (Don't close down my school), created in October 2015 by high school students linked to a popular educational network, and *O Mal Educado* (a word play in Portuguese that can mean both The Poorly Educated and The Audacious), of the eponymous collective founded in 2012 by youngsters with experience in secondary school mobilizations. Both pages shared content produced by the occupied schools – serving as network “nodes” – and also posted content of their own, which was shared by the students.

The content classified under the *Media: non-student* subcategory is linked to sharing news related to the occupations, with post comments often criticizing alleged bias. There are also forms of sharing that reveal pride, when informative or opinion pieces contain complimentary remarks. On the other hand, materials classified under *Media: student* relate to more elaborate and diversified forms of media usage (news, information and music videos, memes, strategic action manuals¹⁸) than those of other postings, often dialoguing with the repertoire of mass popular culture that permeates the daily life of youth, which potentially favors the communication and transmission of messages. As pointed out above, the mechanisms of participatory politics, such as the production and circulation of media content on the Internet, empowers citizens to express their political concerns in a much more accessible way.

In this sense there are two examples of very significant videos, both of them parodies. The first case involves the opening of the movie *Star Wars* with a text associating the governor (“Emperor Alckmin”) and the education secretary (“Darth Voorwald”) with the villains of the movie, called *School Wars* in the video. In the second video, Hitler’s famous rant in the movie *Downfall* is given fictional captions, as if the dictator represented the state governor receiving news about the school occupations (Figure 3). It is hard to know whether these materials were produced by students, as they have no credits; however, they were posted on the pages of the occupations, exemplifying strategies of the use of media as a tool of participatory politics.

18 One of such manuals explained “How to film police violence at demonstrations,” produced by human rights organizations.

Figure 3 – Examples of video posts of the *Media: student* subcategory¹⁹



Source: <https://goo.gl/kZpYj4> and <https://goo.gl/nDPJSw>.

The students’ symbolic production was often conceived in terms of media and digital possibilities. Thus, Campos et al (2016) consider that the first artistic intervention in the struggle against the reorganization was a video in which students from the Antonio Viana de Souza school, seated blindfolded at the classroom desks, sing the song *Cálice* by Chico Buarque and Gilberto Gil²⁰. When the song is over, one student removes her blindfold and delivers a speech against the reorganization. Then, all the other students take off their blindfolds and sing part of another protest song. This video was rapidly shared over the Internet and is available at different online addresses, reaching almost 135 thousand views on one of them.²¹

Transmedia mobilization thus proves to be a particular media strategy of networked social movements that allows content flowing through digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to be strategically spread and coordinated by activists, such as the circulation of videos and memes in dispersed networks aimed at dramatizing political narratives, motivating not only the participants of the movements, but also potential supporters. In the case of the São Paulo movement, the concept of “participatory politics” also emerges in the dialog of the students’ media productions with elements of comedy or pop culture, as shown in the memes in Figure 4.

19 Texts on the posts: “May the force be with you!” / “SCHOOL WARS” (left image); “OCCUPATION BREAKING NEWS! Our reporters have obtained exclusive footage of the exact moment Geraldim The Alckmin Dead received news of the suspended repossession order! Check it out!” / “Alckmin receives news of school occupations / One fine day, in the Governor’s Office...” (right image).

20 *Cálice* was released in 1978, times when Brazil endured the Military Dictatorship implemented through a coup d’état. The song lyrics are about struggle and about being silenced and repressed, in an allusion to Jesus Christ’s suffering when crucified. The song name, *Cálice*, means both “goblet”, which is filled with Jesus’ (or the resistance militants’) blood and, in a word play in Portuguese, “shut up”.

21 See: <<https://goo.gl/c0dbvV>>. Accessed on: August 4, 2017.

Figure 4 – Examples of meme posts of the *Media: student* subcategory²²



Source: <https://goo.gl/QBRRPf>, <https://goo.gl/yuvVvu> and <https://goo.gl/rtw4IU>.

The offline and virtual worlds intersect in media usage and production. This was evident in a teenager’s statement during the discussion group. She mentioned that her involvement with the mobilization grew through contact with the Occupied Schools Command, “which was a space where occupied schools and some other schools [...] would meet to discuss what was happening and how to proceed with the struggle, and that helped us expand our communication network.” What clearly evidenced the blurring of boundaries between online and offline was that she later explained that “space” referred to the Command’s Facebook page. As for symbolic production, the aforementioned feature can be perceived in the song *Escola de Luta (School of Struggle)*, a version of the funk hit *Baile de Favela (Slum Ball)*, written by the duo MC Foice and Martelo (MC Hammer and Sickle), supporters of the movement. Published online and replicated in the pages of the occupations, the song was sung at demonstrations, with students substituting the name of their own school for those cited in the lyrics, reinforcing its identity as a *school of struggle*.

Final remarks

Torres and Costa (2012), in a study analyzing Fotolog posts made by the Chilean students of the 2006 Penguin Revolution, suggest that these digital spaces served as tools of action and organization for the movement. Based on our analysis, we can say the same regarding the Facebook pages of the occupations. With different objectives compared to ours, in categorizing the Fotolog posts, those authors point out that the *Identity* category, that is, messages expressing adhesion and a sense of belonging to the movement, was the one with the most content. They attribute this to the specific condition of adolescents and the need of

22 Texts on the posts: “A little humor, please.” / “I PHONED THE SCHOOLS TO SAY I CALLED OFF THE REORGANIZATION - THE LINE WAS OCCUPIED” (left image); “Occupation is for loafers.” (center image); “We’ve won!” / “And next time, go shut down your grandma’s school.” (right image).

individuals of this age group to find spaces where they can debate with their peers and develop identification. We could say that, at different levels, the three main categories analyzed above also have this element of identity construction by the participants of the movement.

The statement given by a student in the documentary film *Lute como uma menina* (Fight Like a Girl, 2016) is significant: “When we decided to take to the streets, I said: Let’s go [...]. What shall we take there? Whistles, horns, balloons... We didn’t know what to take. How to march in the streets? It was like... google it: How to plan a street protest?” In other words, technologies provided access to knowledge and contact with people who could speed up the process of building an activist identity. This is particularly important for young people who do not have a family cultural background that favors political engagement, as was observed in the discussion group, where adolescents with a history of militancy in the family valued technologies less than others.

However, it is possible to make progress, noting that, in the case of the school occupations in São Paulo, the media allowed students to be rapidly *socialized* as activists, learning how to act as militants engaged in a cause with which they could strongly relate. In fact, affection ends up being crucial to the process of changing society’s values, beliefs and cultural patterns, just as social change involves struggles between cultural codes, through which social meaning is produced, maintained or altered (MELUCCI apud BROUGH; SHRESTHOVA, 2012).

Although popular culture codes cannot always play an effective role in mobilizations, they can help draw attention to certain movement campaigns, driving the development of youth collective identity through shared social meanings. Many of the young media producers were able, as we have seen, to bring their cultural interests closer to the student movement, which allows us to conclude that *participatory politics* is, after all, an important and appropriate concept to understanding mobilization.

This can be reinforced by going back to the possibilities and limitations of participatory politics discussed by Cohen and Kahne (2011). Thus, regarding the possibilities observed in the case of school occupations in São Paulo, one can say that the following was achieved, to different degrees: reaching social groups that would not be aware of the movement without such a strategy (or might have information about it, but not of the kind desired by students); mobilization of new activists (which explains the movement’s gradual growth); development of media and political creativity, as the productions cited in this paper show; the possibility of circumventing and confronting information produced by hegemonic groups, in this case the mainstream press and the government. This set of factors enabled the students to succeed in their main claim: the cancellation of the “school reorganization,” which occurred following attempts at negotiation which the government only proposed after the student movement had already been reinforced.

We will know in the future whether the school occupation movement was able to arouse and strengthen interest in civic and political participation among part of the youth, which may be expressed, for example, in the wider use of strategies of participatory politics in other social dimensions. Or even in the continuity of student movements, perhaps less intense or combative, but which are able, among other concerns, to give greater political and assertive power to the demands that emerged over the period studied – for example, the democratization of the school environment.

In fact, one can speculate that it is only by adopting a superior democratic concept that the education system as a whole will be able to stimulate and promote participatory politics among young people, which can occur through teaching practices and curricular structures. The dialogue of schools with this form of participation would be important to qualify them, avoiding potential limitations and risks, such as their exclusive appropriation by students of socially and economically privileged groups, as well as their use for the manifestation of juvenile narcissism – including the expression of incoherent ideas or political discourses of hate.

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Received on: 03.06.2017

Accepted on: 07.05.2017