

Environmental net-activism on the online petition platforms Avaaz.org and Change.org: some observations

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1809-58442023105en>

Myrian Regina Del Vecchio-Limaⁱ

📧 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1833-2332>

Vanessa de Cássia Wistski Colatussoⁱⁱ

📧 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5343-7589>

Débora Anzolin Valginhakⁱⁱ

📧 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1241-3278>

Nataly Bruna Fernandes Airesⁱⁱ

📧 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4735-0089>

ⁱ(Universidade Federal do Paraná, Setor de Artes, Comunicação e Design, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Comunicação. Curitiba – PR, Brazil).

ⁱⁱ(Universidade Federal do Paraná, Pró-Reitoria de Pós-Graduação, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Meio Ambiente e Desenvolvimento. Curitiba – PR, Brazil).

Abstract

The intensive use of the Internet platforms establishes new perspectives on the social and political function of the media. This article focuses on the possibilities of alternative mobilizing actions, involving the participation of citizens around issues related to the conflicts of society and nature. We use the concept of net-activism (DI FELICE, 2012), with its features online network action. The objective is to highlight the role of the online platforms for forwarding public petitions of Avaaz.org and Change.org, the two most accessed platforms in Brazil, around social and environmental claims. After submitting the theoretical frameworks, we described the platforms, and selected 22 campaigns

to perform an interpretative analysis, based on the arguments they use for demands and struggles, followed by a typology proposed by Castells (2018). In the end, it is possible to understand, even partially, the role of this social-environmental activism around online petitions.

Keywords: Net activism. Social and environmental activism. Online petitions. Change.org. Avaaz.org.

Introduction

This paper deals with the theoretical understanding of the net-activism, taking into consideration three reflection aspects: the one of the virtual environment, with the internet being one of the main current communication media, which allows the creation and the symbolic and functional establishing of a sociocultural space in the so-called cyberspace (LÉVY, 1999). In addition, the one of the structural changes of the types of citizenship action in the public sphere in this space. Then, the one of the current and recurring public demands on the internet, among which are the ones of socio-environmental aspect that interest us. To introduce such reflections, it is necessary to mention the digital technological phenomenon in digital networks and its effects in the types of communication in social life.

Castells (2016) recalls that, in the 1960's and 1970's, McLuhan used the term "global village" referring to the relational and belonging characteristics of the modern human being, who already interconnected and communicated with people of different nationalities and cultures, due to the mass electronic technologies in expansion at that time. With the internet, technology integrated in a global net, the virtual world¹ propitiates to the human life potentialized means of communication – instantaneous and interactive –, which configures a scenery in which many people communicate with many others, breaking the notions of time and space (CASTELLS, 2016).

This cyber² dimension allows, among other aspects, that the connected citizens practice "the exchange of knowledge and information through different tools offered on the net" (SCHIECK, 2009, p. 5)³, generating interaction/integration/mobilization, but also tensioning and polarization. The action in the public sphere, through the online digital nets, grants to the citizens the possibility of a more direct social participation, increasing the accountability and reducing the distance between the citizens and the government (LYCARIÃO; SAMPAIO, 2010). The socio-environmental issue, in turn, is an important approach that generates informational interaction and is recurrently debated in the virtual environment.

Broadly, the intention of this paper is to highlight the possibility of alternative mobilizing actions in the virtual net, which involve the participation of the citizens around issues related

1 The virtual world is an integrant part of the real one, with the virtual existing in the practice, although not physically, and the real actually existing, but all lived reality has always been virtual, since it expresses itself through symbols that form the practice. Thus, both concepts do not oppose themselves. (CASTELLS, 2016).

2 An "interaction space created in the flow of digital data in nets of computers; virtual because it is not located in the space, but real in its actions and effects" (FLEW 2008 apud MARTINO, 2014, p. 11).

3 All references written in a foreign language that is used on this article have been translated and revised freely.

to the conflicts of society and nature; for such actions, we used the net-activism concept (DI FELICE, 2012). As a specific objective, we sought to highlight the role of the online platforms for the routing of public petitions – Avaaz.org and Change.org – around the environmental demands. The online public petitions are modern and accessible, different from the traditional ones. In Brazil, the action is provided in the Federal Constitution (article 61, § 2º) as a Popular Initiative and, generally, as a Citizen's Petition to the public power, with legal value if its integrity and authenticity are evidenced (BRASIL, 1988). Even when they do not show legal value, the petitions represent a kind of popular pressure on public agencies that are politically sensitive to the moods of the population, such as the National Congress, and are important tools for the effective and direct democratic participation.

The text brings a short theoretical review on the popular mobilization; characteristics of net-activism; description of the online platforms Avaaz.org and Change.org; quantitative-qualitative methodology, with an analysis of the online petition on environmentalism that are successful and available on a specific date in the platforms being examined. At the end, it is possible to understand how the online petitions mobilize people in order to consider their fights as victorious, assuming that they produce transforming effects in the social sphere.

Social movements, popular mobilization, and the petitions

Hannigan (1995) explains that an environmental fact becomes a socio-environmental issue when it calls the attention of the means of communication; involves some action of the government and/or demands an institutional decision; is acknowledged by the public as a phenomenon that happens more than once; relates to the interests of an expressive number of citizens. In view of one or all the mentioned criteria, the environmental groups look for the popular support to bring the issue to public knowledge and fight against its causes and effects.

However, it is not enough to let people know what the problem is for an engagement to happen and for a solution to be sought: “Instead, the emergent environmental problems must be legitimized in multiple areas-social communication medias, science, and public.” (HANNIGAN, 1995, p.65), with the use of rhetoric strategies for the convincing in the “arenas of public debate” combined to the legitimization of the facts. One of the ways to publicize a socio-environmental issue is the creation and diffusion of online petitions, mobilizing agents to pressure the authorities to discuss and solve the problems. In a broad sense, this type of popular action may be understood as a process of social mobilization.

Gohn (2010, p. 16), observing some characteristics of the social movements that apply to the processes of social mobilization, says: “Historically, one observes that they have contributed to organize and raise the society's awareness; they present sets of demands via practices of pressure/mobilization; they have a certain continuity and permanence”. In the current social circumstances, mediated by the internet, the traditional forms of confrontation and the new types of social fight are interwoven in different fronts of activism:

The new activists are mobilized to participate in social actions, structured by agents of the so-called Third Sector, or by government agencies, via public policies inductors of the popular organization, such as in the administrative councils; or mobilized by the national, regional, or international thematic forums where the presence of old and new social movements is current (GOHN, 2010, p. 27).

The social mobilization happens in a simple, more flexible and open manner than the social movement, more complex and crystallized. Gohn (2010) highlights that the social movements are not movements reactive to limited and short-lived social crises, but consistent forms of engagement and fight more permanent and organized, with the intension of presenting a collective and educational character. On the other hand, the social mobilization may start from a protest or demonstration, in which people identify banners of fight in common and start the mobilization process, emerging from it “new socio-political subjects in scene, limited by bonds of territorial, ethnic, of gender belonging, etc.” (GOHN, 2010, p. 21). The collective actions of these new politics seek the solution of social problems, such as the petitions.

Toro and Werneck (1996, p. 28) note that the sharing of meanings and interpretations are characteristics of the communication and are expressed in the process of social mobilization. As part of the process of dissemination of the cause, they are indispensable to the propagation and divulging of “discourses, visions and information” so that the individual is moved and, consequently, engages in the fight. In the case of petitions, the communicative manner is perceived through the use of emphatic messages, through which the persons are invited to sign, contribute, replicate, and share results in the digital social media, becoming a net-activist.

Net-activism

The interactivity between humans and technology has reconfigured society involving the social practices in an interface of digital sociability, since the social territoriality has been redesigned according to the technological extensions and its systemic utilization (DI FELICE *et al.* 2012).

More clearly expressed, the new forms of interaction mediated by communication flows in net, in the format “all for all”, contrasting the vertical hierarchy, non-reticular, of sender to many receptors, are defined, according to Di Felice (2012, p.42), by the following statement: “The digital nets produce a hybrid meaning of interaction that unites the organic elements to the inorganic ones, developing symbiotic forms between the technique and the human”.

Latour (2012), in his theory of Actor-Network – known as a “sociology of the associations” – demonstrates the possibility of participation of several actors (human and non-human), allied and trainers of a systemic and reticular net which, based on the established interactions, start to guide a new type of democracy. This new type of democracy has contributed to the production

of a new political activism, new types of sociability and professional performance, and the dissemination of knowledge, as well as accelerated an unprecedented and viral standard of circulation of misinformation, opened up to all types of discourses of hate, intolerance, and discrimination, besides radicalizing scientific and environmental negationism – it must be considered that the advances of the algorithmic manipulations and of Artificial Intelligence (AI) alert to the emerging risks with the hyper valorization of the technologies, for the means and its mediations are increasingly more influent in the hypermediated society.

Under a more optimistic view, the intensification of the interaction in the digital net presents a potential to mobilize worldwide, “favoring the diffusion of a planetary and ecosystemic culture” (DI FELICE *et al.*, 2012, p. 154), by exchanging instantaneous information. For these authors, that contemporary informative and communicative spaces form a large ecosystem in which the human being is part of a systemic network and a global intelligence created by the human society itself. Moreover, the understanding of nature, object of this text, “is today the result of the exchange of information and contents disseminated in the digital nets” (DI FELICE *et al.*, 2012, p. 154).

With regard to the formation of the nets, we can use the concept of “autopoiesis”, of Capra (1996, p. 136), present in several organic and inorganic systems, that understands that the net creates itself, producing its components, and, in turn, is produced by them. Such autonomy would allow to the integrated systems variations and adaptation necessary to a desirable harmonious coexistence in the environment, in the same way as the information nets are updated.

This prior understanding is fundamental to apprehend Di Felice’s concept of net-activism as being a “new type of digital activism online and in the web” (DI FELICE, 2012, p. 146). In order to this collective network is successful, the individual success of each participant is necessary as an informative and synergy creating ecosystem with the objective of action and activism. Thus, the initiative of creating and sharing an online petition is related to a socio-economic system that is projected as sustainable, providing for actions so that there is no lack of resources for future generations, while offering the satisfaction of resources in the present.

Description of the Avaaz.org and Change.org platforms

The Avaaz.org is an online mobilization network, founded in the United States of America in 2007, which has as its slogan “the world in action”. In 2019, when we started this research, the mobilization had about 51 million members in 194 countries, with about 10 million in Brazil⁴. The non-profit platform has as its mission “to be democratic and to organize citizens of all nations to close the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want” (AVAAZ, 2019a). It deals with different issues: corruption, poverty, social

⁴ In 2023, the platform has around 69 million members, of which a little more than 19 million are Brazilians (AVAAZ.ORG, 2023).

conflicts, climate change. Its petitions cover values and visions of the civil global society to influence political issues (LYCARIÃO; SAMPAIO, 2010).

To create a petition at Avaaz.org it is necessary: (i) to write the title of the petition; (ii) to choose a decision taker; (iii) to explain the problem; and (iv) to register the e-mail or connecting in Facebook. The Avaaz.org presents to the creator of the petition a tutorial to start the process: (i) “describe the people involved and the issue they are facing; it is more probable that the readers act if they understand who is affected”; (ii) “describe the solution: explain what needs to happen and who can make the change. Make clear what happens if you win or lose”; (iii) “set a personal tone: it is more probable that the readers sign the petition if it is clear why you care”; (iv) “respect others: do not use intimidation, discourse of hatred, threat of violence, nor lies” (AVAAZ.ORG, 2019a).

The petitions go through a period of validation and publication. The engagement happens through the sharing by the creator of the petition in the social media. As the number of signatures increases, an automatic objective grows progressively. The users may finance and press forward individual campaigns through the platform. As part of the divulging strategy, the users receive e-mails with information on new and validated campaigns.

The North American platform Change.org was created in 2007 by Ben Rattray, to transform common people in agents of change and mobilization, in favor of good intentions, individual or collective. The platform grew from 289 million members in 2019 to more than 506 million in 196 countries currently (CHANGE.ORG, 2023). In Brazil, since 2012, it has become, in 2016, a non-governmental non-profit organization, financed, in 2019, by about two thousand people with more than 12 million people registered, who create about 200 petitions per week on different subjects (GENTIL, 2018).

The fact that the platform is considered the biggest one in the world with this objective might be due to its simple and easy to interact aesthetic. Its main links are nine: (i) *Start a petition*: it directs to the page of creation of the petition; (ii) *My petitions*: if the account is logged in, it shows the petitions presented by the interagents; if not, it leads to a page or allows the creation of an account and log into it; (iii) *Browse*: it takes the person to a page where it is possible to visualize the highlighted petitions. This session is divided into “Highlights”, “Popular”, “Recent” and “Victories”; (iv) *Donations*: allows people to donate money to the platform; (v) *Search*: allows people to search for petition by the title or key words; (vi) *Log in*: allows people to connect with the platform; if they are already connected, it shows the configurations of the account and the notification on the petitions with which one wants to interact; (vii) *Victories*: it shows the last petitions that have reached their objective; (viii) *Ongoing*: it shows the petitions that have appeared in the press and the highlights of the platform; (ix) *Subjects*: it shows categories that allow find petition by different themes (CHANGE, 2019b). The platform offers notions to help the petitions to be successful, including clues for their creation, the divulging to supporters and to the press, and ways to deliver the product to the recipients. It is possible to update the status of the petitions, allowing the supporters to be informed in all the phases of the process.

A difference between the two platforms is related to the declaration of “victory”. The petitions considered victorious by Avaaz.org come from two fulfilled objectives: number of signatures obtained and amount of money collected. Change.org, on the other hand, acknowledges as “victorious” the petitions in which the member who created the petition declares having reached the objective.

Methodology

The initial step of the research was to verify the highest number possible of petitions in the platforms examined, selected for being the most accessed ones in the country. As they are online products, and, consequently, frequently modified, we used the materials collected in a specific date, May 5th, 2019, compiling the following data:

- i. The Avaaz.org platform highlights the petitions that have had the highest engaging as victorious, in the tab “victories” in the site. The themes are filtered by subjects and the results are shown by date. We filtered the petitions inserted in “Natural World”, disregarding the ones that referred exclusively to animal well-being and that not took into consideration the involved social relationships, since the focus was in the socio-environmental claims. Of the 18 petitions listed, we selected 12 petitions, 2 of 2011, 1 of 2012, 2 of 2013, 2 of 2014, 3 of 2015, and 2 of 2016. The selection criteria considered the “victories” in relation to the number of signatures achieved and the intention of resolution of the problems by the governmental instance, discarding the ones considered victorious by monetary collection.
- ii. In the platform Change.org, on the collection date, 150 victorious petitions were available. The themes were varied: the search for urban improvement, individual issues (e.g. subsidies for the purchasing of medicine), public policies defending animals, and the socio-environmental issues that were selected. The latter totaled 11 “victorious” documents, in the period from 2013 to 2019.
- iii. The petitions on socio-environmental issues were sub classified into five recurrent themes: Climate Changes, Oceans/Trash in the Oceans, Pesticides, Forests and Cities, so that the analyses were performed.

During the pre-analysis (BARDIN, 2011), we considered the theoretical inputs by Di Felice (2012) and Di Felice *et al.*, (2012) on the characteristics of the net-activism, to understand the potentialities of the digital architecture of the platforms that denote collaborative, interactive, and reticular actions, to set an example, according to the authors, of a space of environmental cyber activism. The floating and intuitive reading, open to the natural emergence of reflections and hypotheses in a non-systemized manner (BARDIN, 2011), resulted in the creation of categories for the interpretative analysis of the texts. These converge with the characteristics of the environmental movements related by Castells (2018, p. 224), which, facing the social and cultural diversities “aim to correct the destructive forms of relationship between the man and

his natural environment, contradicting the current institutional structural logic”. Such influence is perceived in the approaches of the petitions, resulting in the categories *nature, engaging, urgency, and risks*.

- i. As “nature”, the natural environment, or socio-environmental portrayed in the petitions. They are environments that have suffered an interference of the human action and show a potential for reconstitution and natural auto-regulation (BERGER, 1964). It is also possible to observe a tone of conservationism and of love for nature.
- ii. By “engagement”, we consider the process of formation of a critical awareness for the overcoming of alienation (LEFF, 1994) facing the socio-environmental problems, to unfold the actions of capitalism, in terms of work, and the means of producing. It is understood that “the legacy of a social movement consists of the cultural change that it has produced with its action” (CASTELLS, 2017, p. 242), seeking new forms of democracy which aim the opposite of what is denounced. We perceive in the category the influence of the “green policy” (CASTELLS, 2018, p. 226), with citizens concerned with the nonpartisan environmental protection.
- iii. As “urgency”, we take into consideration the perspective of time in a postmodern context, in which we can identify the issues of immediatism linked to the technologies that surpass the geopolitical barriers and that try to solve local problems globally in the least time possible (CASTELLS, 2018).
- iv. We understand “risks”, as a social perception (VEYRET, 2007), the conditions of tensions facing the perception of changes in the environment. According to Santos (1994), the mediatic environmental discourse may produce a sensation of fear, which is reflected in a radical intonation inherited from the more conservative ecologist groups.

Analyzing the content of the petitions and its communicational potential, we identified the characteristics indicated by Castells (2018), resulting in a quantitative and relational analysis of the following aspects: (i) quantity of signatures; (ii) identified environmental themes; (iii) scale of the problematics; (iv) identity of the passive pole of the petitions; (v) characteristics of the mobilization networks in the petitions; (vi) identity of the active pole of the petitions; and (vii) identity of the adversary of the petitions.

Online analysis of the socio-environmental petitions

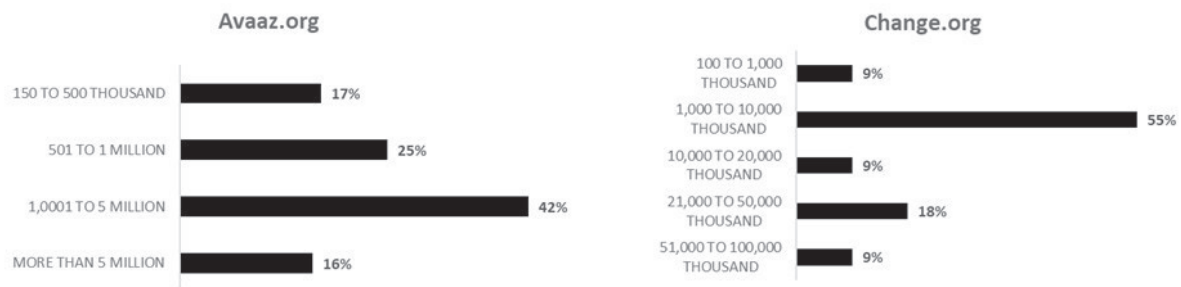
A macro observation shows the motivations of each platform and how they influence the range and direction of the petitions, even if this is not published in the description of its policies. While on Change.org there is a higher focus in the resolution of local/regional problems and of emergency character, on Avaaz.org, the petitions try, in their majority, to solve bigger problems that generate global engagement, even by the definition of the goals, which is related to the environmental locus of the causes, according to Castells (2018).

Quantitative analysis of the socio-environmental petitions of Avaaz.org and Change.org

Quantity of signatures

The main characteristic of Avaaz.org is to shed light on the problems and their territories, trying to engage and receive support from citizens of different nationalities. The majority of the “victories” declared by the institution relates to the socio-environmental issues, of which 12 were selected. Of these, 42% became “victorious” with the collecting of 1,001 to 5 million signatures. The socio-environmental petitions of Change.org are more localized, with 55% of the petitions classified as “victorious” collecting from 1 thousand to 10 thousand signatures. This characteristic is related to the action of looking for mobilization actions and engagement of local popular players (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Quantity of signatures



Source: prepared by the authors.

Identified environmental topics

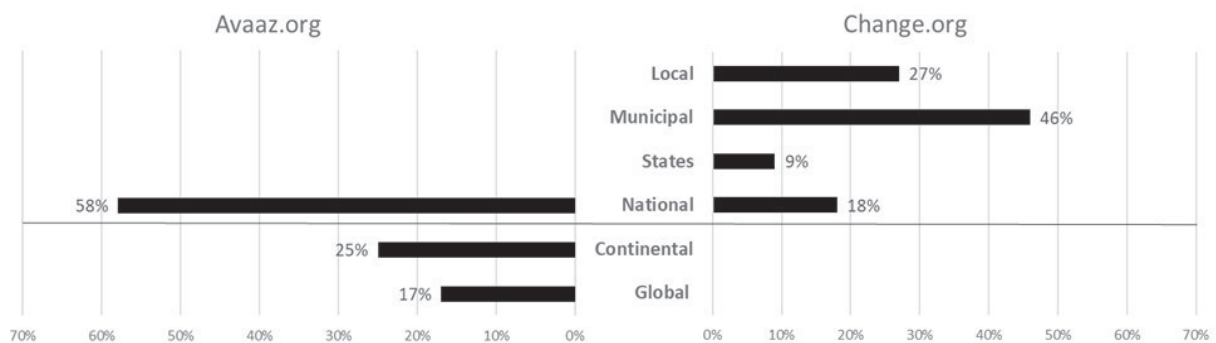
Of the analyzed petitions in Avaaz.org, there are expressive “victories” in the ocean environment theme, with demands for improvements in the preservation of the coastal zones. In this regard, 42% of the themes correspond to “oceans”, followed to “forests” (33%), “pesticides” (17%) and “climate changes” (8%). Of the themes analyzed in Change.org, the highlights are “forests”, with 45%. The great majority related to the popular demands against deforestation, followed of petitions related to the urban environment (36%), and oceans (19%). The fact that Avaaz.org deals with comprehensive themes – such as “agrochemicals” and “climate changes” – that require the implementation of changes in the national and international public policy agendas – makes that the platform be requested for reports and quest for measures that require large popular support.

The scales of the socio-environmental issues

Change.org, which gathers petitions with themes such as “forests” (green areas of the urban environment), issues of sanitation and basic structures and the need for urban equipment,

emphasizes environmental issues that require the attention of local authorities for the resolution of specific problems. Thus, the motivation of the causes starts from a smaller scale to the global one, according to each platform. On Avaaz.org, the dimension of the action favors the national scale (58%) over the continental (25%) and global (17%) amplitudes. On Change.org, the emphasis is on localized environmental issues (27%), such as problems in urban neighborhoods. The vast majority of the petitions analyzed as victorious on Change.org addresses municipal environmental issues (46%) (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Scale of the environmental issues



Source: prepared by the authors.

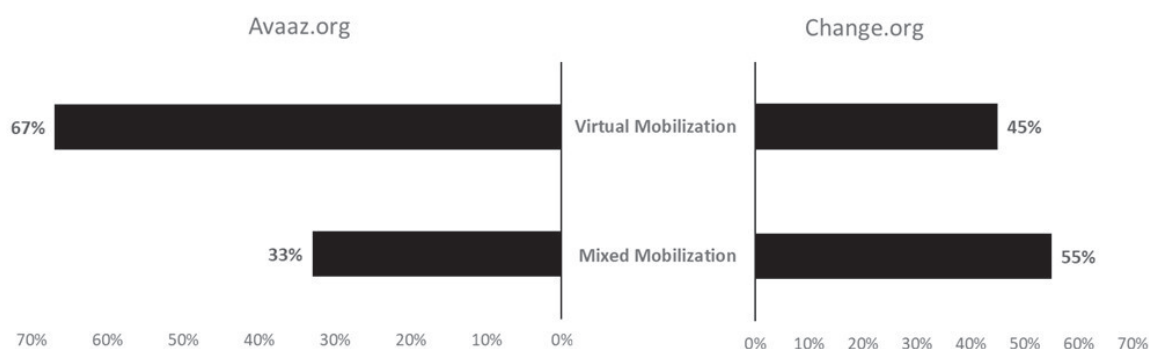
Identity of the passive pole of the socio-environmental petitions

The “victorious” petitions analyzed in the platforms indicate as “Passive Pole” the governmental leaderships. On Avaaz.org, national authorities, such as presidents and ministers are visualized with higher frequency. On the platform Change.org, however, the environment demands directed to governors, directors of public organs, secretaries, and city halls are more visualized.

Characteristics of the mobilization networks for the socio-environmental petitions

The online petition mobilization rises from the reality of the physical world. The hybridization characteristic among collective activist actions (marches, movements, physical petitions and other manifestations) of the physical world and of the virtual activism. In this regard, it was possible to categorize the mobilization in social networks as virtual or mixed (with physical and virtual manifestations) (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Characteristic of the mobilizations



Source: prepared by the authors.

The virtual mobilization (67%) of Avaaz.org is more expressive than the mobilizations of mixed character (33%), due to the institutional nature of the platform, which aims for a mobilization in a global net. On Change.org, it is possible to observe that the mobilization nets are presented evenly mixed (55%), that is, collective actions are identified around the environmental issue addressed, involving marches, physical petitions, projects of laws, and other physical manifestations that gain virtual dimensions.

Identity of the active pole of the socio-environmental petitions

In percentage terms, Avaaz.org (42%) as well as Change.org (45%) have “victorious” petitions with the support of constituted social groups. The support of the organized civil society (citizens, government, and global support) is only observed in Avaaz.org.

Identity of the opponent of the socio-environmental petitions

In the analysis, it was possible to identify the figure of the opponent, indispensable in the social and collective movements of action (CASTELLS, 2018), on which the complaints and textual claims are addressed to the passive pole, cited as threats (Chart 1).

Chart 1 – Identity of the opponent

Platforms	Identity of the socio-environmental opponents	
Avaaz.Org	Fishing industry	23%
	Logging and agriculture and cattle raising exploration	23%
	Oil companies	15%
	Chemical industries	15%
	Government action plans: road construction	8%
	Mining companies	8%
	Tourism and real estate exploration	8%

Platforms	Identity of the socio-environmental opponents	
Change.Org	Real estate speculation/Building of enterprises	25%
	Government action plans: restructuring of streets/zoning	17%
	Agribusiness	17%
	Pollution caused by common individuals (sound; garbage; air)	17%
	Irregular or unsatisfactory sewage service	17%
	Land invaders	7%

Source: prepared by the authors (2019).

Quantitative analysis of the socio-environmental petition of Avaaz.org and Change.org

The online petitions either are forms of individual demands or start from social organizations formed by groups. They express wishes and principles to promote the public engagement in the short run. The choice of the analysis categories, in this paper, happened by the understanding that the petitions either follow a script, directed in part by the tutorial of the platforms, or by the logic sequence of the texts when proposing the appeal and exposing the fact, evidencing the categories described.

- i. *Nature*: the texts that compose the petitions of the Avaaz.org and Change.org platforms bring superficial descriptions of the involved environments, whether urban, forestry or costal. Due to this, the reader has a limited understanding of the dimension and complexity of the causes and effects of the described problems. Example:

The Australian government just announced that it will create the marine reserve of the world (AVAAZ.ORG, 2019b).

We are against the cutting and deforestation of an area of the Atlantic Rain Forest [...], in Águas de Lindóia (SP), for the construction of five buildings. The region has a large environmental value (acknowledged by the Ministry of Environment) as well as landscaping value of great relevance for a tourist municipality such as ours. (CHANGE.ORG, 2019b)

- ii. *Engagement*: according to Corner, Markowitz and Pidgeon (2014), there is evidence that our deliberative processes provide higher altruism, highlighting that the people involved in collective issues look for effective changes of behavior. The petitions suggest that these changes may happen with the involvement of the biggest number possible of people:

We delivered today more than 235,000 signatures to the Minister of Environment in the last day of the public consultation. We will keep on delivering all the messages to the Minister and pressure for a positive response to this massive manifestation of public support for the creation of the marine park (AVAAZ.ORG, 2019c).

We ask for the cooperation and support of all who identify themselves with our cause, considering its importance for future generations. It is necessary to preserve the fauna, flora, the hydric and mineral resources, the geologic stability and the biodiversity (CHANGE.ORG, 2019c).

- iii. *Urgency*: the petitions call the attention of the readers to the deadlines and goals to be reached, pointing at a situation of fight against the celerity of time:

In 24 hours, Australia may save a million square kilometers of ocean forever, creating the biggest marine reserve of the world and preserving thousands of delicate species (AVAAZ.ORG, 2019c).

The interest of a few people should not dominate the common good... And your signature is URGENT and essential!!! #ampliaveadeiros. Brazil can cause a MAJOR IMPACT to increase the representativity of the *Cerrados* toward CDB, announcing the expansion of the *Chapada dos Veadeiros*, the HEART of the Brazilian *Cerrado*. So, please sign NOW.... (CHANGE.ORG, 2019c).

- iv. *Risks*: Of the 23 petitions analyzed, 20 presented sentences of catastrophic intonation to call attention for possible risks. This strategy tries to warn the public through the valorization of the impact on the environment and/or health.

Save our planet from death (AVAAZ.ORG, 2019c).

We are facing an extreme and irreversible environmental and health disaster in the Mediterranean Sea, with serious implications for the coastal inhabitants [...]. The oil and gas platform is about to be built using outdated technology, which will release huge amounts of toxic and cancerous material into the air and sea (AVAAZ.ORG, 2019b).

The analysis of the petitions by the adopted method opens possibilities of study to understand the approach used in the platforms, since other categories of analysis may be adopted. In this first survey, we observed the interpellation proposed by the petitions that derive from

values that influence the way the information can be perceived by the public, getting people to accept or reject the need for a higher engagement and action.

We can perceive in the petitions, propelled by the priorities and principles of large socio-environmental organization, such as Greenpeace, a significant number of messages of appeal that tend to emphasize auto-transcendent aspects (CORNER; MARKOWITZ; PIDGEON, 2014) in the challenge to changes. They are approaches that include problems in the scope of social justice or quality of consumption. Approaching the socio-environmental issues in this manner tends to associate the problems to certain cultural values.

Final considerations

It is possible to affirm that the online petition platforms allow another form of net-activism to the social actors connected in the cyberspace in relation to the traditional forms of integrating petitions. There is a predilection for the choice of these platforms in the majority of the current civic initiatives, due to the ease of creation of demanding texts, with the support of a virtual architecture that makes the massive sharing of petitions feasible, as well as the accessibility to the information, reaching a large number of people of different places.

It is important to understand that the online petition generates an effect similar to the traditional petition in the physical world, but with higher power and dynamicity. It allows establishing a goal and direction for the transformation or implementation of public policies, seeking effects and pressure in terms of political mobilization, creating a history of broad visibility of victories of public uproar in face of instances of power.

As for the online petitions analyzed in this paper, we verified that four key components in their contents mark the intonation of the text: the presence of the dimension of the threatened natural environment; the incitement to the collective engagement; the sense of urgency; and the explanation of the risk. The texts corroborate the dissemination of information, even if they have a synthetic manner and lack detailing. Characteristics stemming from environmentalist movements are also highlighted.

Avaaz.org is the identity of the active pole of the petitions, since it claims for itself large socio-environmental causes that appear from member citizens, with the eventual support of social movements, NGOs, and governments. However, in its majority, the active pole of the petitions of Change.org is the common citizen, who petitions local causes and demands actions from the authorities towards the problem presented. We found that the platforms present government leaders as passive poles, represented by presidents, prime ministers, directors of public bodies, governors or mayors.

This research intended to indicate how the net-activism, mainly the environmental, produces arrangements through the online petition platforms. The coexistence and hybridization of the mobilization networks today, of physical and virtual character, is one of the more important characteristics in the analysis of the citizen action in the public sphere,

which starts in the physical world and is manifested in the virtual one, creating conditions of real social changes.

We acknowledge that we still need to amplify the results of this research, since it was restricted to a *corpus* of petitions related to the visualization of only one day – an observation during longer periods may bring other interpretations, even taking into consideration the long permanence of the publications in the platforms. Despite this reservation, it is possible to assert that the online petitions may be important supporters in the process of pro-environmental net-activism in the democracies, for it allows the citizens to be informed on global and local issues in the area and to mobilize for a collective cause, contributing to the confrontation of socio-environmental problems.

References

- AVAAZ.ORG. Como criar uma petição. Available at: https://avaaz.org/po/petition/start_a_petition/. Accessed on: 9 jun. 2019a.
- AVAAZ.ORG. Quem somos. Available at: <https://secure.avaaz.org/page/po/about/>. Accessed on: 9 jun. 2019b.
- AVAAZ.ORG. Vitórias. Available at: <https://secure.avaaz.org/page/po/about/>. Accessed on: 9 jun. 2019c.
- AVAAZ.ORG. Home. Available at: <https://secure.avaaz.org/page/po>. Accessed on: 25 may. 2023.
- BARDIN, L. **Análise de conteúdo**. São Paulo: Edições 70, 2011.
- BERGER, G. **Phénoménologie du temps et prospective**. Paris: PUF, 1964.
- BRASIL. Constituição Federal de 1988. Available at: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/constituicao.htm. Accessed on: 13 jun. 2019.
- CAPRA, F. **A teia da vida: uma nova compreensão científica dos sistemas vivos**. São Paulo: Editora Cultrix, 1996.
- CASTELLS, M. **Sociedade em rede**. A Era da Informação: Economia, Sociedade e Cultura. v. 1. 17. ed. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2016.
- CASTELLS, M. **Redes de indignação e esperança: movimentos sociais na era da internet**. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2017.
- CASTELLS, M. **O poder da Identidade**. A Era da Informação: Economia, Sociedade e Cultura. v. 2. 9. ed. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2018.
- CHANGE.ORG. Impacto. Available at: <https://www.change.org/impact>. Accessed on: 19 may 2019a.
- CHANGE.ORG. Como usar a Change.org. Available at: <http://www.comousarachange.org>. Accessed on: 19 may 2019b.
- CHANGE.ORG. Vitórias. Available at: <https://www.change.org/petitions?selected=victories>. Accessed on: 09 jun. 2019c.
- CHANGE.ORG. Home. Available at: <https://www.change.org/>. Accessed on: 25 may 2023.
- CORNER, A.; MARKOWITZ, E.; PIDGEON, N. Public engagement with climate change: the role of human values. **WIREs Climate Change**, v. 5, n. 3, p. 411-422, 2014.
- DI FELICE, M. Net-ativismo: novos aspectos da opinião pública em contextos digitais. **Revista Famecos**, v. 19, n. 1, p.27-45, 2012.

- DI FELICE, M.; TORRES, J.; YANAZE, L. **Redes digitais e sustentabilidade**: as interações com o meio ambiente na era da informação. São Paulo: Annablume, 2012.
- GENTIL, C. Como a rede de abaixo-assinados Change.org Brasil ganhou 12 milhões de usuários e se tornou sustentável. São Paulo, 24 maio 2018. Available at: <https://projetodraft.com/como-a-rede-de-abaixo-assinados-change-brasil-ganhou-12-milhoes-de-usuarios-e-se-tornou-sustentavel/>. Accessed on: 19 may 2019.
- GOHN, M. G. **Novas teorias dos movimentos sociais**. São Paulo: Loyola, 2010.
- HANNIGAN, J. A. **Sociologia ambiental**. Lisboa: Instituto Piaget, 1995.
- LATOURET, B. **Reagregando o social**: uma introdução à teoria do ator-rede. Salvador: Edufba; Bauru, SP: Edusc, 2012.
- LEFF, E. **Aventuras da epistemologia ambiental**: da articulação das ciências ao diálogo de saberes. São Paulo: Cortez, 2012.
- LÉVY, P. **Cibercultura**. São Paulo: Editora 34, 1999.
- LYCARIÃO, D.; SAMPAIO, R. C. Sociedade civil online: diferentes usos da internet para fomentar a participação política. **Estudos da Comunicação**, v.11, n. 25, 2010.
- MARTINO, L. M. S. **Teoria das mídias digitais**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2014.
- SANTOS, M. **Técnica espaço tempo**: globalização e meio técnico-científico informacional. São Paulo: EDUSP, 1994.
- SCHIECK, M. Ciberativismo: um olhar sobre as petições online. **Biblioteca On-line de Ciências da Comunicação**, 2009.
- TORO, J. B.; WERNECK, N. M. D. **Mobilização social**: um modo de construir a democracia e a participação. Brasil: Editora Autêntica, 1996.
- VEYRET, Y. **Os riscos**: o homem como agressor e vítima do meio ambiente. São Paulo: Contexto, 2007.

About the authors

Myrian Regina Del Vecchio-Lima

Journalist. Professor of the Post-Graduation Program in Communication of the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR). PhD in Environment and Development (UFPR), post-doctor studies in Digital Journalism (Université Lyon 2, France). Master in Communication by the Universidade Metodista de São Paulo. Leader of the Research Group Communication and Cyber Culture of PPGCom/UFPR. E-mail: myriandel@gmail.com.

Vanessa Witski Colatusso

PhD in Environment and Development (UFPR). Master in Communication and Languages (Universidade Tuiuti do Paraná). Bachelor in Social Communication – Publicity and Advertising. Professor of Business Management – marketing planning, digital media, and publicity planning. E-mail: vawitzki@gmail.com.

Débora Anzolin Valginhak

Master in Environment and Development (UFPR). E-mail: davalginhak@gmail.com.

Nataly Fernandes Aires

Master in Environment and Development (UFPR). Specialist in Environmental Management (UFPR). Bachelor in Administration by the Faculdade da Indústria (2016). Specialization at the Flacso- Argentina in the area of Spanish teaching. Experienced in the area of Solid Waste and Environmental Education the in the Latin American context. Email address: educacao.natalyaires@gmail.com.

Authors' contribution

Del Vecchio-Lima, M. R.: conceptualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing; Colatusso, V. W.: conceptualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing – original draft; Valginhak, D. A.: conceptualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing – original draft; Aires, N. F conceptualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing – original draft.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the authors upon request.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Editorial data

Received on: 12/20/2019

Accepted on: 03/24/2023

Editor: Maria Ataide Malcher

Editorial assistant: Weverton Raiol

This article is published in Open Access under the **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY)**. The authors retain all copyrights, transferring to Intercom: Revista Brasileira de Ciências da Comunicação the right to carry out the original publication and keep it always updated.

