

#### 4.6. #PRINTEMPSÉRABLE:

#### DIGITAL MEDIA AND MOBILIZATION IN QUEBEC'S STUDENT MOVEMENT

Elizabeth Pis <sup>1</sup>

The recent surge of mass uprisings across the world has led many to contemplate the role of digital media in shaping contemporary social movements. With the development of new Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), it appears as though social movements now have an unprecedented capacity to exploit the Internet, social media applications, and wireless technologies for the purposes of sharing contentious information and mobilizing for political action (Shirky 2011). Today's technologically savvy youth have been credited with using new technologies to coordinate protest activities and spur political change (Theocharis 2012). In particular, the emergence of new student movements – such as those in Austria, Chile, Canada, Greece, the UK, and the US - have provided fertile ground for the study of technology and political mobilization (Maireder and Schwarzenegger 2012; McCarthy 2012; Theocharis 2012; Valenzuela, Arriagada, and Scherman 2012).

While much research has centered on the novel integration of digital media in contemporary student movements, fewer studies have focused on the process of student mobilization from the perspective of participants. What is missing in the literature is a coherent account of how students view the process of mobilization and the role of digital media therein. Quebec's Printemps Érablé movement provides an exceptional case study for investigating the role of digital

---

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Pis is a recent graduate of McGill University in Montreal, Canada. Her research interests include investigating the role of digital media in catalyzing mass protest and political violence as well as exploring the applications of GIS (Geographic Information Systems) to both contemporary and comparative-historical social scientific inquiry. Contact: elizabeth.pis@mail.mcgill.ca.

media in mobilizing protest participation. Several questions guide this qualitative inquiry: What are student-activists' perceptions of digital media as tools for political mobilization? How does the use of digital media affect the process of recruitment into the movement as well as continued mobilization for protest activities? How the movement's symbols, pictures, and videos of protest affect mobilization?

Following a review of the literature on the relationship between digital media and political mobilization, I will provide an overview of the methodology used for this study.<sup>2</sup> Next, I will present the findings of this inquiry as they relate to the process of political mobilization. Finally, I will discuss the findings of this study as they relate to broader theoretical concepts found in the literature and offer some conclusions on the role of digital media in the movement.

### **Linking Digital Media and Mobilization**

A growing field of research has developed concerning the study of digital media as a resource for collective action. Given their ubiquity in modern society and the popular perception of their evolving and critical role in contemporary social movements, digital media and ICTs have recently received much attention as tools for mass political mobilization. Digital media can be defined as the “systems of public communication, the systems of content production and distribution, and the computer and network-based technologies that support and shape them,” comprising “all media that produce, deliver, and package content and communications” (Pavlik 2008:8). As such, the term ‘digital media’ captures both the “traditional media of mass communication” as well the “emerging new media accessed online and through other digital delivery media” (Pavlik 2008:8). While it is debatable whether ‘digital media’ equally encompasses interpersonal or interactive digital media (Pavlik 2008), for the purpose of this

---

<sup>2</sup> While this qualitative inquiry was conducted in the spirit of academic social-scientific research, it should be noted that the primary data collection is limited to in-depth interviews with only nine protest participants. As such, this endeavor conforms to more of a pilot study rather than a complete investigation, and the findings of this study should be considered as only partly representative of movement members' opinions and experiences. However, much of the information elucidated from protest participants, along with the analysis derived from this data, is similar to the primary research findings of other studies concerning contemporary social movements as well as secondary research findings within the field.

analysis it is assumed that digital media and ICTs are interchangeable concepts.<sup>3</sup>

In the spirit of brevity, it will suffice to mention that the debate concerning the relationship between digital media and political mobilization has evolved from its binary origins, pitting “cyber-utopians” against “cyber-realists,” into more nuanced theoretical perspectives and empirical analyses that delve into subtler understandings of how new technologies shape political action (Gladwell and Shirky 2011). In an excellent review of the literature on ICTs and social movements, Garrett (2006) identifies three relevant and interrelated factors in explaining the emergence, development and outcomes of social movements based on a conceptual framework developed by McAdam et al. (1996); these include: mobilizing structures, opportunity structures, and framing processes.

#### *ICTs and Mobilizing Structures*

Mobilizing structures can be defined as the “mechanisms that enable individuals to organize and engage in collective action, including social structures and tactical repertoires” (Garrett 2006:203). The literature on ICTs and mobilizing structures is further subdivided into how ICTs shape levels of participation, repertoires of contentious activity, and movement organization. Garrett (2006) identifies three mechanisms that theoretically link ICTs and increased participation levels in social movements. These mechanisms include the reduction of costs associated with accessing and publishing information, the creation and maintenance of social networks, and the promotion of collective identity through those networks. Thus, ICTs facilitate the mobilization of both tangible and intangible resources by reducing the costs of communication and coordination (Loudon 2010), while simultaneously reinforcing existing social ties, or “the most important and effective recruitment channels for protest participation” (Van Laer 2007:6).

---

<sup>3</sup> For reference, ICTs can be formally defined as a “converging set of technologies in microelectronics, computing (machines and software), telecommunications/broadcasting, and optoelectronics,” which “include the Internet and social network sites such as Facebook, weblogs, micro-blog sites such as Twitter, user-generated consumer content-driven sites such as Youtube, and mobile phones, laptops, broadband optic fiber cables and WiFi technology” (Castells 1996:30; Duncombe 2011:2).

ICTs can theoretically affect mobilization by shaping repertoires of contentious activity. Given their ability to “accelerate and geographically extend the diffusion of social movement information and of protest,” ICTs can promote contentious activity across space by increasing the salience of issues through information diffusion (Garrett 2006:207). The process of information diffusion and the selectivity of information access over the Internet can also polarize political orientations by allowing users to create a “homogenous information environment” where only certain types of political information are represented (Garrett 2006:208). Furthermore, the evolution of street-protest tactics into rapid “swarm-like” mobilization is, in part, facilitated by the adoption of new ICTs (Garrett 2006:208).

Finally, ICTs affect the organizational structures of mobilization. By providing efficient communication networks, ICTs diminish the need for centralized coordination within social movements, promoting the adoption of non-hierarchical organizational structures (Garrett 2006, Loudon 2007). Furthermore, ICTs facilitate collaboration between movements by allowing for “mesomobilization,” or “the capacity to coordinate actions without an inter-organizational hierarchy” (Garrett 2006:211–212). As Garrett notes, movements can also adopt hybrid organizational forms, where ICTs are utilized to enable “decentralized, collaborative processes” for certain tasks while maintaining hierarchical structures for others (2006).

#### *ICTs and Opportunity Structures*

ICTs also affect opportunity structures, or the environmental factors that shape the activities of social movements (Garrett 2006; Loudon 2007). To the extent that ICTs allow movements to either establish local links with global movements or to communicate in ways that evade state regulation, ICTs shape a movement’s opportunities to affect local political decision-making and to control information flows (Garrett 2006). Although a greater portion of the literature centers on the relationship between social movements and political systems, Loudon argues that broader societal factors equally constitute opportunity structures, and contends that ICTs can be considered as an opportunity structure in themselves (2007). While this view may be criticized as technological determinism, it is important to note that movement outcomes are

sometimes affected by ICT usage (Loudon 2007). Loudon further adds that opportunities afforded by ICTs shape a movement's strategies of response to misrepresentation in mainstream media, arguing that ICTs allow movements to adapt self-representations in a way that attracts mainstream media attention while also allowing movements to produce and disseminate alternative media directly to audiences (2007). For instance, "subversive and shocking" user-generated content representing the movement can potentially travel virally online, reaching mass audiences and attracting the attention of the media (Loudon 2010:1076).

### *ICTs and Framing Processes*

Related to mobilization and opportunity structures are framing processes; these are the "conscious and strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action" (McAdam et al. 1996:6). Given that ICTs enable movements to bypass media representation and provide multiple channels of information dissemination, movements can now realize "new levels of editorial control" with negligible resource requirements (Garrett 2006:214). The proliferation of user-generated content over the Internet can allow movements to disseminate frames of understanding instantly and without barriers to access (Loudon 2007). Ultimately, using ICTs to publish information on the internet contributes to the public legitimacy of the movement as publications are interpreted as "an authentic alternative to the mainstream media" (Garrett 2006:215).

## **Investigating the Printemps Érablé**

### *The movement from without*

The case of Quebec's Printemps Érablé was selected for investigation due to its spatial and temporal proximity to the research. The fact that the movement's main protest events occurred within the previous year and the involvement of students drawn from colleges (CEGEPs<sup>4</sup>) and universities

---

<sup>4</sup> Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel, or General and Vocational College.

around Montreal allowed for accessible data collection. Furthermore, this case presents several interesting dynamics for the study of student movements and digital media. Quebec's notable internal division of Anglophone and Francophone communities manifested itself within both the mobilization of student populations and the mainstream media representations of the movement. Additionally, the movement's relationship to other local movements, notably Occupy Montreal and the Casseroles movement, and global movements, such as the alter-global and environmental movements, offers an interesting case for the study of interactions between movements and their implications for political mobilization. Finally, the sustained mobilization of a significant portion of the student population as well as the international attention garnered by the movement suggests that the Printemps Érablé is an appealing case for the study of mobilization strategies and international solidarity.

While a full examination of the origins of the Printemps Érablé movement is beyond the scope of this analysis, a few chronological notes are warranted to provide an overview of the case. The Printemps Érablé movement, or the 2012 student protests, can be contextualized within the historical legacy of student strikes in Quebec. Since Quebec's Quiet Revolution of the 1960's and the creation of the CEGEP system in 1967, students across the province have repeatedly voiced their demands and challenged provincial educational policies through the declaration of general unlimited strikes (Wolfe 2012). The student strike of 2012 represents the ninth instance in which students have utilized strike tactics to exert economic pressure on Quebec's provincial government, with other successful strikes having occurred in 1968, 1974, 1978, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1996, and 2005 (Free Education Montreal 2011:6–7). This series of general unlimited strikes has not only allowed students to achieve policy goals related to the quality and accessibility of education in Quebec, but has also allowed for the maintenance of a network of effective mobilization structures within educational institutions and student associations (Wolfe 2012).

The proximate history of the movement begins in 2010, when the Quebec government announced a planned increase in tuition fees across the province by 75% over five years starting in the fall of 2012 (Sorochan 2012). Faced with consistent refusals from the government to renegotiate the terms of

the tuition increase, student associations around Quebec began planning a student strike to take place in winter 2012, along with organizing demonstrations, rallies, occupations, and petitions starting in winter 2011. After voting in favor of a one-day strike on November 10<sup>th</sup> 2011, students rallied in downtown Montreal, leading to several arrests, the temporary occupation of McGill University Administration offices, and the forceful expulsion of students from McGill Campus by riot police (Hudson and Lukawiecki 2011).

Students from around Quebec voted for a general unlimited strike in February 2012, with several student associations representing students on strike.<sup>5</sup> From February until May, students engaged in several continuous protest activities, including picketing classes, daily demonstrations, and targeted direct-action campaigns. The timeline of the 2012 student protest was further marked by a number of large street-demonstrations, many of which included the participation of Montreal residents outside of the student population and elicited varied local and international responses. Ranging from extensively coordinated and generally peaceful demonstrations, such as the massive street march on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, to riotous and violent encounters with Montreal police, such as the Victoriaville riot on May 6<sup>th</sup>, large protest events garnered international media attention for the student strike and dramatically displayed the extent of student participation in the movement as well as the quality of governmental and police responses to mass mobilization.

The Quebec government introduced Bill 78 (Law 12) in late May 2012, an emergency law that criminalized the student strike and protest activities along with suspending the winter term. After the emergency law was passed, students continued to engage in acts of civil disobedience and garnered increased support from the wider Montreal community. Taking their inspiration from Chile's *cacerolazos*, Montreal residents expressed their support for the student strike with the spin-off "Casseroles" movement, a series of protests that involved banging on pots and pans outdoors at 8 o'clock every night throughout residential areas of the city.

---

<sup>5</sup> The principal student associations include: Fédération Étudiantes Universitaires de Québec (FEUQ), Fédération Étudiantes Collégiales du Québec (FECQ), l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSE). ASSE formed a coalition of radical student groups during the strike, known as Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (CLASSE).



The movement's street demonstrations reached a high point in May 2012 and a general election was called for September. The newly elected PQ government endorsed a moratorium on the tuition hike as well as a reversal of Law 12. Overall, the 2012 student strike attracted some of Quebec's largest protest demonstrations, notably those on March 22<sup>nd</sup> and May 22<sup>nd</sup>, and was the longest student strike in Quebec history.

### *The movement from within*

Data was collected using the qualitative research method of semi-structured interviews, including both individual (in-depth) and focus group discussions with protest participants. According to Blee and Taylor, semi-structured interviews are particularly useful for "understanding social movement mobilization from the perspective of movement actors" (2002:92). While individual in-depth discussions are valuable for probing the meaning of participants' verbally expressed opinions and experiences, focus groups allow for the observation of "group interactions that underlie the construction of collective identity, collective actions frames, and the emotional dynamics involved in the creation of oppositional communities" (Blee and Taylor 2002:93, 109).

Students were sampled for interviews using a snowball sampling technique and were selected based on several criteria, including participation in the movement, university affiliation, and level of involvement. The overall sample consisted of five individual in-depth discussions and one focus group comprising four participants. To preserve anonymity, members of the sample are described and quoted using pseudonyms.

The individual interviewees varied in terms of the extent of their participation in the movement. Ronnie is a 22 year-old McGill graduate; he assisted in the student strike at McGill and also participated in large street demonstrations and direct-action protests. Chloe is a 23 year-old student at McGill; she is from Quebec and participated in several large street marches. Shandra is a 25 year-old masters student at Concordia University; she became involved in the movement in 2010 and acted as a mobilizer and spokesperson for the student strike, along with regularly attending ASSE meetings and street



demonstrations. Kevin is a 22 year-old student at McGill; he was very involved in the mobilization effort at McGill and participated in strike activities around Montreal along with regularly participating in demonstrations and direct-action protests. Clemence is a 21 year-old student at UQAM; she is from Quebec and regularly participated in both large and small street demonstrations.

The four focus group participants know each other well and regularly participated in strike activities and street demonstrations together. Three of them – Ley, Mercedes, and Athena – are 22 years old and studied together at McGill. Zara, the final focus group participant, is 21 years old and started her first semester at Concordia in the winter of 2012.

### **Digital Media and the Printemps Érablé**

The findings of this qualitative inquiry are presented in terms of three substantive areas that roughly correspond to the research questions outlined above. The first area relates to how participants define the student movement and mobilization, highlighting where the participants' perspectives coalesce or diverge with regards to defining the nature of the movement itself as well as the meaning of political mobilization. Aside from addressing these definitional questions, the first section also elucidates the similar experiences of participants in terms of the process of mobilization, including how participants were recruited into the movement and how they mobilized others for participation in protest activities. A primary finding included in this section is the participants' emphasis on the role of friendship ties and face-to-face interactions in catalyzing involvement in the student movement, calling attention to the limitations of digital media as direct instruments of mass mobilization for collective action.

The second substantive area considers the role of digital media with regards to observed patterns of logistical and organizational coordination within the movement. This section of the research findings addresses how new technologies facilitate the spread of and access to information that is necessary for coordinating protest activities as well as managing personal and group safety. Perhaps the greatest testament to the ubiquity of digital media, at least

in contemporary student movements, is that their coordinative functions and usefulness as information-sharing platforms are taken as given by protest participants – there is no question among participants as to the value of digital media for interpersonal and mass communication. However, a singular finding of this research suggests that information-sharing through digital media conditions and contributes to a participant's sense of involvement in the movement, where greater access and attentiveness to information relating to protest activities implies a greater connection to the movement as a whole. Aside from overt coordination, the particular use of digital media platforms for preserving anonymity in a networked structure of organization reveals the value of ICTs for maintaining the security of individual protest events as well as continued participation. Finally, the findings included in this section suggest that the extent to which digital media play a role in fostering a virtual public sphere is a function of the changing legality of protest events or the magnitude of repressive responses by the state.

The third area of the research findings addresses how ICTs affect participants' strategies of media representation. This section underscores several cleavages in the way the student movement is represented, notably: the differences between French and English-language mainstream media depictions, the perceived value of alternate or independent media sources as opposed to mainstream ones that are viewed as being subject to the influence of the state/political right, and finally the significance of accessing and producing media representations that reflect the shared experience of participation in protest events. While the findings related to the first two cleavages highlight the resourcefulness of participants in reproducing a common framing process for the movement, the findings related to the third cleavage elucidate a subtler interaction between the evidentiary locus of media reporting and the reinforcing value of shared experience for sustaining mobilization. The role of digital media in shaping contemporary student movements is perhaps most powerful when considering how the constant intake and diffusion of participant-generated information has the potential to encourage the continued mobilization of movement members.

### *Defining the Movement and Mobilization*

When asked whether they felt as though they were part of a social movement, participants' answers tended to differ according to their respective levels of participation. Shandra viewed the movement in terms of strategic planning:

It isn't the same thing that happened in Tunisia. It didn't start with an incident, something happened and everybody joined. What happened here in Quebec was kinda a step-by-step process where everybody was consciously involved, consciously planning, and when it took the shape it did there was everybody there.

For Ronnie, the movement was a "great conversation" of smaller movements willing to "compromise" with one another due to the excitement of having a "large mobilized population."

Furthermore, participants equally perceived the movement as a localized manifestation of a broader struggle made up of connected contemporary movements. Kevin pointed to the movement as "an incident in the broader fight against capitalism." Athena elaborated on the nature of the struggle as a constellation of movements: "It's going on right now, look at Spain and Greece, it could be to different ends, but I think it all ends up being part of the same principles." Even Shandra emphasized that the movement developed into a "popular struggle," one that is happening everywhere in localized challenges to "the order;" this movement was prompted by "a collective conscience" that was coordinated but not led by particular individuals.

Moving towards the process of mobilization, participants differed with regards to conceiving mobilization as a physical or ideological commitment. For Clemence, involvement in the movement is predicated upon belief in the cause, and mobilization is just an individual call to protest attendance. For Kevin, mobilization involves active participation and going on strike was a "sign of people's mobilization." Shandra, on the other hand, stressed that active participation was secondary to ideological commitment, where "a mobilized individual is a person who understands the issue at hand." However, all participants indicated that face-to-face interactions were the best means to get others involved in the movement. Kevin described the mobilization effort as a

“really tiring process of having really long and really frustrating conversations with people.” Ley’s response is telling with regards to the usefulness of digital media:

I feel like the response ‘oh Facebook, MobSquad’ was only that small community. When we tried to get other people involved, face-to-face, handing out pamphlets, trying to have conversations, funny stunts, we had a play – I think trying to humanize it. (...) Having very good, productive talks. That’s where I think social media is maybe not the best means of mobilization because its very in-your-community, you can’t really get out of it, you can’t add a bunch of strangers on Facebook. (...) When you’re on the street or on campus, you can walk up to anyone, you don’t know what their affiliation is, and you just try to have a conversation with them. Face to face.

In fact, even those who did not consider themselves part of the formal mobilization effort, such as Ronnie or Clemence, stressed face-to-face interactions where their means of getting potential participants involved in the movement. As Shandra noted, the movement’s mass participation and continued mobilization was largely brought about by traditional grassroots mobilization efforts. This is a notable point of tactical deviation between the Printemps Érablé movement and most other contemporary student-led movements and is, according to Shandra, partly the reason why student-activists from around the world came to Montreal to learn about the movement.

When asked how they learned about and became initially involved in the movement, all participants suggested that friendship ties were an important part of their recruitment. For instance, when prompted about their first street demonstration attendance, most participants’ implied that their immediate friend communities were aware of and planning to attend the event. Ronnie’s response is typical: “I know that I knew a lot of people who knew about it, so it was kind of one of those things that’s just in conversation, everyone knows its going on.” Furthermore, every participant mentioned that they had a group of friends that they would regularly attend protests with, either friends they knew before the strike or, as Kevin stated, “friendship networks built out of necessity.” The common experience of having “protest buddies” suggests that protest events themselves provide a space for forming new social ties and these were essential for regular involvement in protest activities.

#### *Patterns of Logistical and Organizational Coordination*



Digital media becomes more apparent and influential when examining how participants would receive information about protest activities and coordinate their actions. ICTs played a prominent role in the dissemination of information about individual protest events. More specifically, most participants accessed information about the details of protest events either through text-messages from their friends or on Facebook event pages. For instance, even though Chloe would coordinate attending protests with her friends in person and “everybody would know that there was a protest Tuesday afternoon,” she would access certain Facebook groups where “the itinerary was given, at least the departure point and time.” Ronnie exemplifies the immediacy of information access and diffusion surrounding protest events in response to a question regarding his growing level of involvement:

[I was] more involved over time but in the sense that I was more tapped into different email listserves, so I would know very quickly what protests were going on. And I would spread word too, if I found out about a protest, I'd txt a whole bunch of people or I'd email a whole bunch of people, but I never organized a protest or helped organize a protest.

For some participants, being able to access more information about protest activities through the use of ICTs reinforced the sense of involvement in the movement and spurred continued diffusion of information. Access to information during protest events, usually through text messages from friends or searching Twitter on smartphones, was equally important for safety. As Mercedes and Zara recounted, having access to Twitter (or being near someone with a Twitter-enabled phone) would allow participants to follow the official Montreal police Twitter-feed in order to know when street demonstrations became illegal, or to search for certain hashtags in order to establish the details of demonstrations while searching for missing friends.

Participants also reported adapting their use of digital media with regards to managing the security of contentious information at the organizational level. Kevin outlined several mechanisms through which participants would alter their use of ICTs to preserve individual and group anonymity in the face of police incursions; these ranged from individual measures such as changing Facebook names, using different email accounts, being deliberately vague in Facebook

posts, or turning off one's phone during illegal protest events to much more coordinated efforts such as using privacy-guaranteed listserves (RiseUp), establishing broadcast text-messaging accounts, or setting up limited Facebook groups with only peer-vouched access. Furthermore, criminalized protest activities often benefitted from their loose network structures. Kevin recounts how participants in direct-action events around McGill Campus were able to evade being targeted by the administration by establishing temporary coalitions through the MobSquad listserve where "whoever wanted to be involved, whether it was an occupation or whatever, would just get together." According to Kevin, the lack of clear leadership in direct-action campaigns would confuse members of the administration since "they couldn't negotiate an agreement with one person and then have everyone behave by that." According to Shandra, even student associations, who had relied on General Assemblies to continue mobilization and protest activities, moved their organizational discussions to Facebook after being criminalized by Bill 78.

#### *Strategies of Media Representation*

Every participant claimed to have relied minimally on mainstream media for accurate representations of the movement and for coverage of protest events; according to Ronnie "there was a constant sense of 'we're not getting our fair voice in the media'." Notably, several participants would exclusively refer to mainstream Francophone media, claiming that Francophone media would provide "actual analysis" of the movement (Ronnie), while Anglophone media would provide "ridiculous" coverage of student demonstrations (Zara). Kevin described the difference between his experiences of protest events and mainstream media coverage as "crazy-making" due to the media's tendency of "minimizing and histericizing" acts of political subversion on the part of students.

Instead of relying on mainstream media, participants would frequently turn to alternative media sources that were accessed, for the most part, online. Participants regularly relied on alternative media sites, such as [rabble.ca](http://rabble.ca), [montreal.mediacoop.ca](http://montreal.mediacoop.ca), or [openfile.ca](http://openfile.ca) for news sources that have the "freedom to criticize the state" (Mercedes). Furthermore, during the course of the protests, several sites were created with the express purpose of collecting translations of mainstream and alternative Francophone media into English.

Most of these, like Translating the Printemps Érablé ([quebecprotest.com](http://quebecprotest.com)), rely on volunteered translations of Francophone media; participants reported either using these for their own purposes or referring Anglophone friends to these sites for news about the movement.

However, participants tended to point out that the best types of media reporting on the movement were those sources that captured the shared experience of protest events. Sometimes, these media would be received in print format during actual demonstrations. For Zara, publications handed out at demonstrations were not only transparent, but were trusted as sources of shared experience that could not be captured by mass media or alternative media sites:

There's something really real and insanely difficult to account for about those protests if you have not been to one. And the people who are writing those things, they may have really different politics than me, and I didn't absolutely agree with everything that was being said in them – but I knew that it was coming from a place of shared experience that the Gazette could never touch on. Or even different – adBusters, which is hugely left-wing, but it wasn't the same thing as people who were there that night with you, that gave you something at the next demo.

Others also reported looking to first-hand accounts posted online for accurate information about protest events. According to Kevin, “often you'd actually learn significant amounts from the very unreliable form of first person accounts of people actually writing ‘this is what the fuck happened to my friend in Victoria Ville next to me,’ and people would post that on the group or it would get circulated.” Significantly, every participant mentioned turning to CUTV's (Concordia TV) live feed of protest events as an important source of news. As Kevin noted, “no one who's an impartial observer is actually seeing everything that's happening;” where CUTV's coverage differed from mainstream media broadcasts of street demonstrations was in actually participating in the events and reflecting the experience of protestors. According to Shandra, some of the most accurate CUTV coverage was that which represented the negative experiences of the street demonstrations, since “sometimes they were affected by things, they were pepper sprayed, one guy got arrested.” Not only did this live coverage make news of protest events more “tangible” (Kevin), it also



credited with transparency since the “there was no premeditation involved...Just live” (Clemence).

Most participants did not seek out alternative or first-hand accounts independently; instead they relied on accessing relevant news online through mediated sources, such as Facebook, Twitter, or email listserves. For instance, participants would often access news articles about the movement by either seeking out specific friends’ Facebook posts, important group posts, or just from watching their Facebook feed. According to Athena, the process of selecting news articles from Facebook posts was dependent on “trust in who you’re getting the links from,” because “certain people end up being mouthpieces to find particular articles, and you’re like ‘ok, I have an interest in reading this,’ they become a media source or filter.” Some participants would equally contribute content to the news-stream in the form of “sharing” or re-posting. As Shandra mentioned, “I’m in a demo and I diffuse, it’s like I want people to know what is going on.” For her, publishing chants or pictures of banners would serve to “add something positive, so if somebody is looking at this stuff, at least they hear my point of view.” For Ley, re-posting pictures and videos of demonstrations was “a way of continuing mobilization, continuing the ideas, having it all be in this collective consciousness.”

The proliferation of pictures and videos, and especially user-generated content, within participant’s news-streams had reinforcing effects on participation. Ronnie noted that pictures taken by protestors from within the crowd were far more powerful than those taken from the journalistic sidelines and produced a “much more visceral reaction.” Kevin credited particularly violent footage of protests with having a “reaffirming and sustaining power” because they revealed what mainstream media would often conceal. For Zara, pictures of non-violent street demonstrations captured the fun and “carnavalesque” of protest attendance. Interestingly, when asked what specific pictures or videos they remembered from the protests, participants’ answers coalesced around three images: the image of Francois Grenier after losing his eye due to shrapnel from a sound-grenade, images and videos from the violent Victoria Ville protests, and aerial footage of the crowd from the street demonstration on March 22<sup>nd</sup>. Furthermore, as Ley noted, positive media

representations of the movement were not confined to students in Quebec, participants frequently described receiving pictures of students from around the world wearing the red square in a show of solidarity. For participants, these images tended to carry similar meanings, notably the motivating and solidarity-inspiring aspects of seeing the expansive mass or the call to resistance incited by evidence of police violence.

### **Mobilizing the Movement in Perspective**

The findings of this study are similar to those of several other analyses of contemporary student movements and mass mobilizations. Like Guzman-Concha's findings for the case of the Chilean student movement, the Printemps Érablé movement resembles more of a 'classic' social movement rather than a 'occupy' protest given the role student organizations in coordinating the protests and the movement's grassroots mobilization process (Guzman-Concha 2012). However, considering the recurrence of smaller, more diffuse direct-action campaigns, it can be argued that the Printemps Érablé movement represents Garrett's (2006) hybrid organizational structure. Furthermore, as the findings suggest and as Ibrahim argues for the case of the UK student revolts, participants' initial involvement in the movement can be traced to campus ecology, where the development of social networks facilitates the "emergence of trust, solidarity, support, incentives, identities, and situational definitions" that enable rapid collective action (2011:419).

Where digital media do appear to play a prominent role in the Quebec student movement is in facilitating the coordination of protest activities and shaping self-reinforcing framing processes. To a large extent, the access to information about movement activities afforded by ICTs enabled participants to continually mobilize for collective action. As Theocharis finds in his study of student occupations in the UK, social media and micro-blogging applications served both mobilizing and demonstrational purposes for the Quebec student movement, allowing participants to rapidly access and diffuse information related to the cause of the movement as well as the organization of contentious activities (2012). This equally captures Kwon et al.'s concept of levels of coordinative participation, where individuals participate in online communities to

“become informed about action strategies,” and complete participation through “continuous conversation in the field” (2011:387).

Finally, networked engagement with media representations of the movement serve to propagate and reinforce frames of understanding. Accessing media representations of the movement is largely mediated by social networks and presented in the form of a data-stream, or what Maireder and Schwarzenegger call the “social stream” of messages that allow participants to maintain awareness of news developments (2012:184). The accessibility of user-generated content combined with the low costs of content publication, in large part facilitated by technological convergence, allows individuals to engage in a self-reinforcing framing process (Kwon et al. 2011). Mobilization is continually reinforced and facilitated by transparent representations of shared experience that are perceived as contextualized with reference to the movement’s cause. Thus, digital media facilitate continued mobilization by providing participants with novel participatory roles in both coordinating actions and accessing/diffusing information about the movement.

## Bibliography

- Blee, Kathleen M., and Verta Taylor. 2002. “Semi-Structured Interviewing in Social Movement Research.” in *Methods of Social Movement Research*, vol. 16, *Social Movements, Protest, and Contention*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Castells, Manuel. 1996. *The rise of the network society*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers.
- Duncombe, Constance. 2011. *THE TWITTER REVOLUTION? SOCIAL MEDIA, REPRESENTATION AND CRISIS IN IRAN AND LIBYA*. Australian Policy Online.
- Free Education Montreal. 2011. *WHY SHOULD WE STRIKE? 23 Answers for Students*. Montreal.

- Garrett, R. Kelly. 2006. "Protest in an Information Society: A review of literature on social movements and new ICTs." *Information, Communication & Society* 9(2):202–24.
- Gladwell, Malcolm, and Clay Shirky. 2011. "From Innovation to Revolution." *Foreign Affairs*.
- Guzman-Concha, Cesar. 2012. "The Students' Rebellion In Chile: Occupy Protest or Classic Social Movement?" *Social Movement Studies* 11(3-4):408–15.
- Hudson, Erin, and Jessica Lukawiecki. 2011. "McGill students violently forced off campus." *The McGill Daily*, November 10.
- Ibrahim, Joseph. 2011. "The New Toll on Higher Education and the UK Student Revolts of 2010-2011." *Social Movement Studies* 10(4):415–21.
- Kwon, Hazel K., Yoonjae Nam, and Derek Lackaff. 2011. "Wireless Proteters Move Around: Information and Coordinative use of Information and Communication Technologies for Protest Politics." *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 8:383–89.
- Van Laer, Jeroen. 2007. *Internet Use and Protest Participation: How do ICTs affect mobilization?* Universiteit Antwerpen: Faculteit Politieke en Sociale Wetenschappen.
- Loudon, Melissa. 2010. "ICTs as an Opportunity Structure in Southern Social Movements: A case study of the Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa." *Information, Communication & Society* 13(8):1069–98.
- Maireder, Axel, and Christian Schwarzenegger. 2012. "A Movement of Connected Individuals: Social Media in the Austrian Student protests 2009." *Information, Communication & Society* 15(2):171–95.
- McAdam, D., J. D. McCarthy, and M. N. Zald. 1996. *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, Michael A. 2012. "Occupying Higher Education: The Revival of the Student Movement." *New Labor Forum* 21(2):50–55.
- Pavlik, John Vernon. 2008. *Media in the Digital Age*. Columbia University Press.
- Shirky, Clay. 2011. "The Political Power of Social Media: technology, the Public Sphere and Political Change." *Foreign Affairs* 90(28):28–41.
- Sorochan, Cayley. 2012. "The Quebec Student Strike – A Chronology." *Theory & Event* 15(3).
- Theocharis, Yannis. 2012. "Cuts, Tweets, Solidarity and Mobilization: How the Internet Shaped the Student Occupations." *Parliamentary Affairs* 65:162–94.

Valenzuela, Sebastian, Arturo Arriagada, and Andres Scherman. 2012. "The Social Media Basis of Youth Protest Behavior: The Case of Chile." *Journal of Communication* 62:299–314.

Wolfe, Danie. 2012. "Collective means, collective futures." *The McGill Daily*, January 30.