



## **The socially mobilizing power of digital communication tools: An analysis of popular demonstrations in Brazil**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Focusing on the demonstrations that occurred in Brazil from 2013 to 2015, this article proposes a reflection on communication platforms used to call these masses. The paper focuses on the analysis of the media that allowed the invitation to these social mobilizations. Through empirical research conducted in the five Brazilian regions (South, Southeast, Midwest, North and Northeast), it was possible to find out what channels followed the invitations to events. Analyzed, where debates and search for information about events and invitations to share with the network contact take place. From these findings, the data analysis dealt with in the theoretical framework was made.

### **KEYWORDS:**

Demonstrations; social mobilization; Internet; Social networks; social stakeholders.

## **O poder de mobilização social das ferramentas de comunicação digital: Uma análise das manifestações populares no Brasil**

### **Resumo:**

Tendo como mote de análise as manifestações populares, que tomaram as ruas do Brasil entre os anos de 2013 e 2015, este artigo se propõe a uma reflexão sobre as plataformas de comunicação utilizadas na convocação dessas massas. O foco aqui está na análise dos suportes comunicacionais que possibilitaram o convite para essas mobilizações sociais. Através de pesquisa empírica, realizada nas cinco regiões brasileiras (sul, sudeste, centro-oeste, norte e nordeste), foi possível descobrir por quais canais aconteceram as convocatórias para as manifestações. Analisamos ainda, por onde ocorrem os debates, buscas de mais informações sobre os eventos e compartilhamento de convites com as redes de contato. A partir dessas

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constatações, realizamos a análise dos dados confrontados com o referencial teórico.

**Palavras-chave:**

Manifestações; Mobilização Social; Internet; Redes Sociais; Atores Sociais.

## **El poder de la movilización social de las herramientas de comunicación digital : Un análisis de las manifestaciones populares en Brasil**

**Resumen:**

Centrándose en las manifestaciones, que salieron a las calles de Brasil entre 2013 y 2015, este artículo propone una reflexión sobre las plataformas de comunicación utilizados para llamar a estas masas. El documento se centra en el análisis de los medios de comunicación que permitió la invitación a estas movilizaciones sociales. A través de la investigación empírica, llevado a cabo en las cinco regiones brasileñas (Sur, Sudeste, Centro-Oeste, Norte y Nordeste ), fue posible averiguar qué canales sucedieron las invitaciones a las manifestaciones. Todavía Analizado, donde los debates, las búsquedas de más información sobre los eventos e invitaciones para compartir con el contacto de las redes se producen. A partir de estos hallazgos, se realizó el análisis de datos se enfrentan con el marco teórico.

**Palabras clave:**

Las manifestaciones; La movilización social; Internet; Redes Sociales; Los actores sociales.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

For proper understanding of this piece of research, we are to start explaining the analytical methods used and some key concepts. First let us define the concept of social mobilization, a central term in this article, next will the methods used for data collection, the observation of results and the formulation of ideas be explained. Finally, we analyze the proposal under research, which are the online tools and platforms used to summon people to the demonstrations.

The term social mobilization is not limited only to public demonstrations, to the crowds or social groups that take up the streets with shouts or banners calling for changes. The concept is deeper. It is related to the discussions, the possible changes in the positions and the actions that occur through the receipt of the information. "Mobilizing means calling wills to act in pursuit of a common goal under an interpretation and a shared sense." (Bull, 1996). This call can be connected to any of

these three fields: reflection, discussion and action; or it can also be related to all of them, in its ideal form.

When we talk about the issue of ideas, reception, interpretation and production of meaning, we are referring to effective communication. Mobilization can be described as an act of efficient communication. Therefore, it is not simply a matter of the mind. The information must be assimilated, a reaction must be prompted. It is something that must take place from the idea that every individual who was summoned by the information.

Post here the definition of what we call social mobilization, we will now get into the methodology used for collecting and analyzing the empirical data of this data study.

When "we speak of internet users, we make reference to a multimedia agent that reads, hears and combines different materials coming from reading and performances. [...] The world has become more complex and more interconnected" (Canclini, 2008 p. 22 and 23). Next, the also complex and challenging methodological process, which has to be constantly updated through dialogue with the public. It is necessary to empirically know the ways to communicate and give voice to public opinion analyzed per se, and show how it should be observed.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

It was elected as a methodological approach to grounded theory. We left the field without fixed assumptions to guide the method. The idea was to find out, through questionnaires, what the online communication tools used by participants in public demonstrations on the Internet are. In their book for research methods, Frago, Recuero and Amaral (2013) analyze the potential and the barriers to the adoption of this theory in the study of cyberspace. They conclude that, although it is difficult to deal with, it is an interesting method to search the web because, in this field, "there is no wealth of data for collection and a small body of theory "(Frago; Recuero; Amaral, 2013, p. 87).

The Grounded Theory for the analysis of this material has become interesting because it allows a more realistic perspective on the phenomenon, data on involved persons being obtained without the influences from the researcher. "From this perspective, the theory is that the researcher knows his job, but he does not know how it starts" (Pinto, 2014 p.3).

Therefore, there was no prior indication of online demonstrations and communication tools and platforms. The questionnaires were mounted with spaces for responses available to respondents, looking for more information and thus share their views. These questionnaires contained different types of questions and variables in order to capture more information according to each demanded profile. Within these sections, there were from 5 to 20 questions, which open and close in their questions.

The choice was for the distribution of the questionnaires via the Internet, because the public who wanted to hear was made up precisely by Internet users. Questionnaires were housed in the *Survey Monkey*<sup>2</sup>. platform. The choice resulted from the formatting possibilities it offers, for example, pointing to the different questions according to the answers. Instant tabulation and the ability to export data to SPSS tabulating software used in this research.

Because it is an issue with national coverage, it is fair to say that the universe to be studied is the whole country, without focusing on a specific age group or schooling level, or any other crop factor, so we need obtain representative data from several publics who were and are mobilized through the Internet.

For these data that are really reliable and constitute an accurate picture of the Brazilian reality, it was necessary to use statistical calculations of quantitative research. To calculate the sample, the following points were taken into account: the universe, margin of error, reliability level and response rate.

The first point was to have the clarity needed to collect data from all regions of Brazil. From there the adjustments began. The margin of error<sup>3</sup>, what is certain of the level we have, that the answers show the views of the studied population was

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<sup>2</sup> **Survey Monkey:** "the world's leading provider of solutions to Web surveys [...] Our solutions are backed by over 10 years of experience in questionnaire methodology and web technology, and this ensures the reliability of data." MONO, Survey. Everything you wanted to know ... Available at: <https://pt.surveymonkey.com/mp/aboutus/> . Accessed 12 March 2015.

<sup>3</sup> **Margin of error:** error of calculation of the margin Example: "For example, 90% of your sample likes grape chewing gum, a margin of error of 5% would add 5% to both sides of this issue, with the result that, in fact , from 85% to 95% of your sample like grape chewing gum. 5% is the margin of error that is most often used, but you can choose any value between 1% and 10% as the margin of error, depending on your survey. The margin of error is not recommended to be raised above 10%. " MONO Survey. Sample size of the survey. Available at: <https://pt.surveymonkey.com/mp/sample-size/> . Access: March 13, 2015

defined as 4%. The reliability level<sup>4</sup>, which is to ensure that the data we seek are in, the expected error rate was defined as 95%.

The formulas governing these calculations are in the theorems known as the Law of Large Numbers, they are the ones that give mathematical support to the average randomness of a very large population. Therefore, knowing the size of the population under study, the margin of error and the reliability level was possible to apply the following formula, which stems from the theorem of large numbers and is used to calculate the required sample size:

$$n = \frac{N \cdot Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p)}{(N-1) \cdot e^2 + Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p)}$$

**Legend:**

**n = sample size we want to calculate**

**N = universe size**

**Z = is the deviation of the mean value we accept to achieve the desired level of confidence. Depending on the confidence level that we seek, we will use a certain value which is given by the shape of Gaussian distribution. The most common values are:**

**Confidence level 90% -> Z = 1,645**

**Confidence level 95% -> Z = 1.96**

**Confidence level 99% -> Z = 2,575**

**e = is the maximum margin of error I want to admit (eg 5%)**

**p = the proportion that is expected to find.**

*Source: MEDINA, Cristina. What is the sample size I need? Available at: <<http://www.netquest.com/blog/br/qual-eo-tamanho-de-amostra-que-preciso/>>. Access: March 13, 2015.*

This formula was the one that gave the supporting calculation. Through it, we found the appropriate number of questionnaires for the public under research. The definition of the population to look for here was 601 questionnaires since the total

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<sup>4</sup> **Reliability level:** Reliability that is an example of the level calculation: "if you choose other 30 samples of the population at random, how many times the results of the first sample would be significantly different from the other 30 samples? A reliability level of 95% means obtaining the same results in 95% of cases." MONO Survey. Sample size of the survey. Available in: <https://pt.surveymonkey.com/mp/sample-size/> . Access: March 13, 2015.

population exceeds 1 million people and we chose the margin of error of 4% with a reliability level of 95%.

In addition to these variables, the distribution by regions had to be observed. How do we choose to get answers across the country?, it would be necessary to resort to IBGE Census to calculate the required percentage of each region of the country. According to the 2010 census, the last one held in Brazil, the population is divided as follows: 42.1% in the Southeast, 27.8% in the Northeast, 14.4% in the South, 8, 3% in the North and 7.4% in the Midwest. This was the proportion of responses used in each region.

The questionnaire was made available to the public on March 16, 2015. The date was chosen strategically, since, on March 13 and 15, 2015, there were two large demonstrations. The first one, in order to support the federal government and the second one was focused on protesting against the government and demanding the removal from office of President Dilma. As these events have been scheduled previously, we chose to wait until the day after the event to send the questionnaires; therefore, it would be possible to have "fresh" information on the minds of respondents.

The questionnaires were available for 6 weeks and they were disseminated via Facebook, email, Twitter, LinkedIn and Whatsapp. We collaborated with a network of contacts for distribution and exchange in each Brazilian state.

### **3. OBJECTIVES**

This study aims to find out what digital communication tools are used to summon to mass demonstrations in Brazil. The paper focuses on the analysis of these media, through empirical research conducted in Brazil.

#### **3.1 Demonstrations**

One of the first questions in the questionnaire was: "Did you participate in any rally from 2013 to 2015?" To this question, 254 people answered yes and 299 people said no. There were also 48 people who did not answer this question. We, from here, only with the answer of the 254 people who participated in the demonstrations.

When asked who participated in demonstrations, they answer freely. There was no indication of events, just 3 blank fields to be filled by respondents. In the total universe of 74 different manifestations appeared.

The most cited expressions were: first, with 51.9%, they participated in the demonstration "of June 2013," which began with claims for adjustment of bus fares, this response was expanded to various applications; second, with 12.24%, the expression "March 15", the main motivation of which was the request for impeachment of President Dilma; and finally, with 7.8%, the demonstration of 13/03,

which aims to support the federal government. These three expressions together represent 82.5% of valid responses.

Identifying the main demonstrations in which respondents participated was important to see the historical context and the time of calls and, later on, empirical calls can be analyzed through social networks, blogs or Youtube.

### 3.2 Calls via the Internet

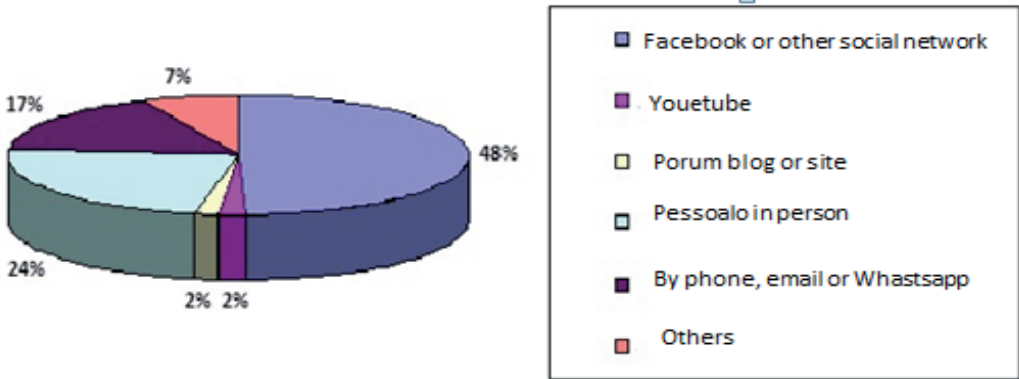
After telling in what demonstrations they participated, respondents answered the question, "How were you invited to join the demonstrations?" This question was structured with closed questions with the possibility of opening, these answers being the following: ... The other network "Facebook or Social" the "Youtube" and for a "blog or site", the "phone, or e Whatsapp -mail ", " personal or in person, "" other (specify).

"The answers were as follows: the "Facebook or another social network," 172 answers; the "Youtube", 7; for "blog or site", 6; by 58 "phone, Whatsapp or email"; "Personal or in person," 82; "Other (specify)", 23 answers.

Among the responses categorized as "Other (specify)" were the following statements: Press (newspapers, radio and television), by audio, brochures, social movements and labor unions, spontaneously and the Church.

The correlation of these numbers with total answers, we have the percentages shown in the following graph:

1. *Graphic communication platforms in which users receive the invitation to demonstrations*



**Chart source:** Search "Leaders and Social Mobilization" by the author.

Looking at the diagram, you can see that most people are summoned to demonstrations through Facebook or another social network, followed by targeted



communication, whether via personal phone or in person, or through Whatsapp or email. Only after blogs, Youtube or another website appear. We can say that social networks, especially Facebook, are the main calls for demonstrations.

### **3.3 Facebook and social networks as the main space for mobilization**

The very structure of social networks makes it easy to understand why they are privileged to use this space for calls for demonstrations. In them, users are grouped by knowledge of people and issues. As defined by Maria Ines Tomaél, "they are environments that allow the formation of interest groups that interact through mutual relations" (TOMAÉL, 2015, p. 96) and Capra (2002) supplement it by stating that "in the era information - in which we live - the roles and social processes are increasingly organized around networks "(Capra, 2002, p 267).

We can understand that social networks mean the structures that provide connection between people or organizations. According to Castells, social networks are "a set of interconnected nodes. Node is the point where a curve is intertwined. Specifically, what a node is depends on the type of concrete networks about which we speak" (Castells, 1999, p .498). This way, the nodes are the actors; and it links the relationship between these components.

Taking these concepts to the reality of this piece of research, we can say that it is the relationships between nodes that mark the invitations to attend events through social networks. They are the connections that promote the notices.

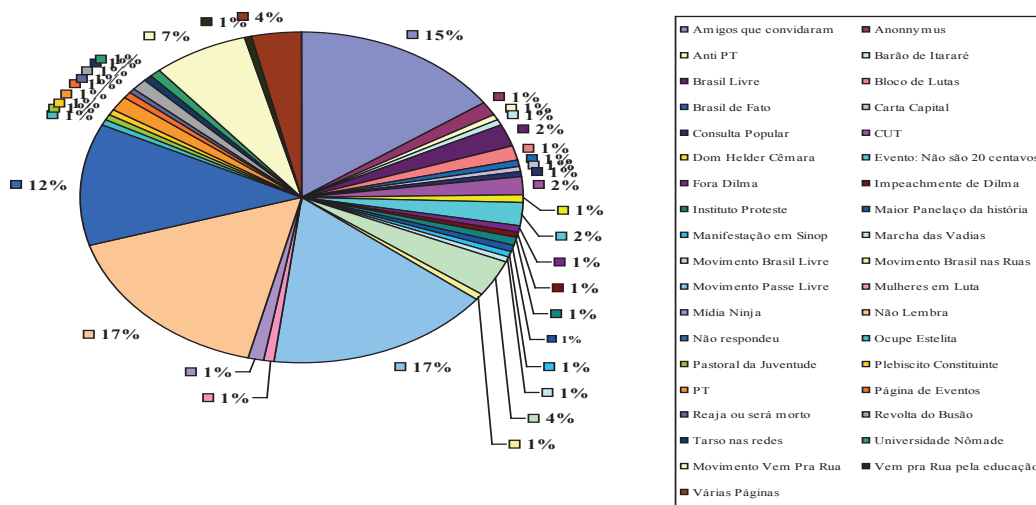
This has happened and is still happening, even outside of Internet social networking, we can say that the big difference here is the type of nodes. Relationships through the internet where social networks not only occur among acquaintances but also with public profiles.".. A profile on Orkut, for example, can be considered to be a representation of a stakeholder. But we know that there are often several stakeholders that are expressed through the same profile The same may be true for a blog" (Fragoso; Recuero; Amaral, 2013 87 p.).

Different types of stakeholders that can trigger information and opinions emerge in this space. These stakeholders are heard as they are connected with users as part of the network. It is worth noting that this connection occurs spontaneously. And where there is spontaneity per connection, there is usually affinity between people and ideas. Here is from where the power to mobilize these even unknown stakeholders comes.

In another interrogation conducted by the survey, which asked "What is the name of the page or profile on Facebook, YouTube, web or blog site that invited you?," had this confirmation, as noted by the following chart:

*Graph 2. pages or profiles through which users are invited*





**Chart**

**source:** Search "Leaders and Social Mobilization" by the author.

As we can see, the highest percentages are answers related to "I don't remember", with 17%; "Free Pass Movement", also with 17%; "Invited friends", with 15%; "He replied," with 12%; "The movement gets to the street", with 7% and Brazil free circulation of 4%.

The high rate of people who do not know or cannot remember precisely indicate that these invitations come so naturally that are dispersed in the network and users of at least wake focus where. They handle the timeline, influence opinions, call, but without a rift or loosening.

Also, stop looking at Figure 2, we see that also three profiles of social movements appeared as conveners for such events. The profiles that are not acquaintances or friends, but the entities that can influence along the network.

We can say, still based on Graph 2, that some of the most common sources of invitations are friends, relatives, acquaintances and friends, among other forms of direct and personal contact, although through the social network remains being one of the most effective ways to influence.

### 3.4 Maintaining individual communications: Phone, email and Whatsapp

On the one hand, we have seen the increase of the connection and the influence of unknown stakeholders, and those involved in the construction of communication and social mobilization through networks, on the other hand, what this piece of research shows is that the public still remains very real indications and information passing through its strong ties.

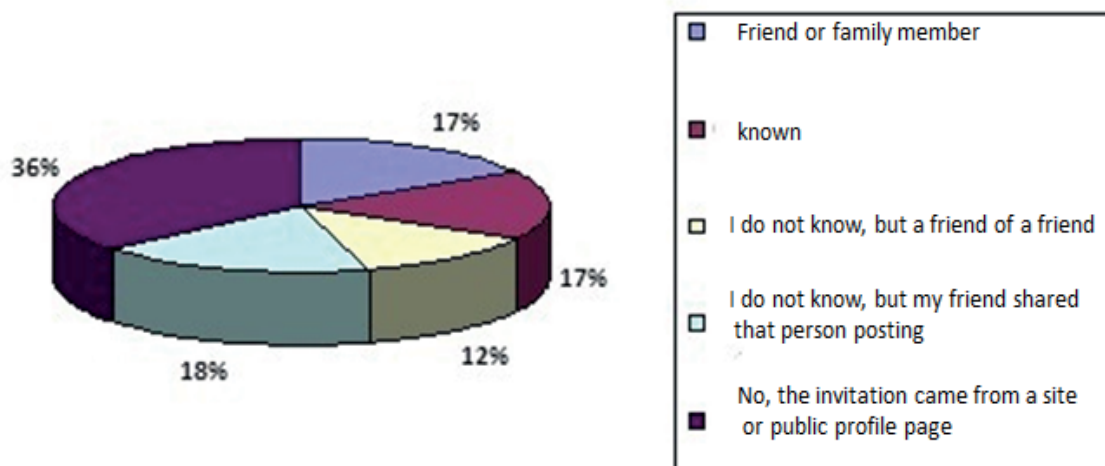
Strong links are those characterized by intimacy, closeness and the intention to create and maintain a connection between two people. Weak bonds, on the

other hand, are characterized by dispersed relationships that do not translate into proximity and privacy. (Recuero, 2015, p. 2).

Strong links are still responsible for most of the writing and mobilizing skills. The strong links that have always been a source of mobilization gained even more power with online tools. This is because they allow easy use, even if only for ideas, much more consistently and more permanently.

Through online tools of known and interconnected people, it occurs much longer, exchanging more ideas, dialogue, and they explain and reflect on most issues, and mobilize and summon.

Another answered question is that we can see the answers in relation to the type of connection to who invited the respondent to the event, as in the table below.



*Figure 3. Answers to the question "What is your relationship with the profile that invited to the demonstrations?"*

As shown in Figure 3, most calls were to public profiles. But if we add the answers "friends, family" to "acquaintance", this percentage is equal to public profiles. Also, you can see a representative portion of validation of a friend who received and shared information.

#### **4. FINAL REMARKS**

We can conclude, therefore, that the calls for demonstrations remain being most of the time from friends, acquaintances of the family. The Internet, with its platforms and networks that came to reinforce this interaction among people. The ties in the online environment continue to occur as happened elsewhere. Acquaintances or

relatives remain being the strongest ties, and the others, whether leaders of social movements, labor unions, churches, journalists, commentators and other leaders, remain being the weakest links.

Strong links are responsible for increased skills in development and mobilization. These relations, which have always been the source of mobilization, gained even more power with online tools. This power is related to the possibility of further interaction (via Internet, to be always connected), even if such interaction is published only for ideas and messages sent without physical contact. These are the online tools where acquaintances remain interlinked and therefore the dialogue, the call and mobilize.

But when we look at the weak links, we can see that the highest percentages of notices are related to the answers "I don't remember" and "No Answer". These answers may be an indication that the online invitations come so naturally that they are dispersed in the network and users, at least, get rid of the source. These calls take over the timeline (timeline) and influence the opinions, they call without a rift or loosening of the idea.

Moreover, ultimately, social stakeholders are defined as the weak links (leaders of all sectors of society). Here it is worth noting that they can contact people in the digital environment more easily than in other areas, because they are linked to it, either directly or indirectly (through the profiles of friends in social networks, or through whom we call friends of friends).

We can say that these actors are heard by just being connected with users as part of the network. It is pertinent to recall that this connection occurs spontaneously. And when there is spontaneity per connection, there is usually affinity between people and ideas. This is where the power to mobilize these even unknown stakeholders comes. Therefore, we conclude that people still tend to follow what their peers indicate, either directly or by receiving invitations to read these invitations in peer publications.

Finally, we reach the point where it is possible to say that individuals are summoned at all times by social stakeholders, whether they are known or physically unknown. This occurs mainly through social media and direct contact with technological tools such as email and Whatsapp.

In the social networks of the Internet, there is a number of calls for discussion. These discussions are conducted in many different ways. Through messages, comments (public or private), actions or by sending direct statements (email and Whatsapp).

And this environment, which seemed to be asleep, became part of everyday life. Public demonstrations, taken on the streets, has been driven by digital networks. It is

the virtual urging for discussions, expand consensus and the collective will to act. The Internet calls individuals more easily.

It supports today's virtual communities to a dialogue that was never before provided by other means. Public opinion is formed in the network and is available for everyone's access. As a result, many people who would otherwise not be involved in the discussions can just now express their stances and may even become one of the leaders of the public-opinion-arousing process.

In this context, the ordinary people get adjusted to the Internet leaders by posting information on the Internet, they become social stakeholders. They distribute its contents among themselves, gain followers and take a leading stance. And so, they raise debates about public issues in a public space on the Internet, and then an opinion-arousing process begins. Those who see it are also involved in the process, they see the content, interacting with the leader and with others who are following this discussion.

But the concept of the Internet leaders called digital Prince is still under study. It is an offshoot of this piece of research reviewed here.

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