Transnational Networking and Capacity Building for Communication Activism

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Abstract

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) present social movement actors with new opportunities for transnational communication, and for communication capacity building. In his book *Communication Power*, Manuel Castells identifies communication capacity, as well as processes associated with network building, as key contributors to social movement power and influence. However, scholars have yet to investigate these dimensions of communication activism. In order to better understand the processes and challenges associated with transnational communication capacity building, this article examined *10 Tactics for turning information into action,* an initiative designed to promote communication capacity building among social movement actors in the global South. Drawing on Castells' ideas about reprogramming, switching, and connecting the local and global, we trace the networking process undertaken in the project's production, distribution and use. The examination of this case reveals a number of barriers to transnational communication capacity building and identifies dimensions of Castells' networking process that require further development or elaboration, most notably the critical role played by local agents in transnational networking.

Transnational Networking and Capacity Building for Communication Activism

Social movements are networks of social actors who organise and undertake collective action, share common purposes and interests, and challenge existing power relations (Castells, 2001; Tarrow, 2005; Tilly, 1998). Scholars have identified the availability and use of digital media and networks, strategic communication, and the development of communication capacity as increasingly important to social movement actors. The availability of relatively inexpensive digital devices for media production and the ability of digital content to traverse multiple distribution platforms and networks allow social movement actors to produce their own messages, circulate them to local and transnational audiences, extend and deepen strategic relationships, and engage in new and extended forms of collaboration and collective action (Castells, 2009: 55, 302; Meikle, 2002: 24; Owens and Palmer, 2003; Lievrouw, 2011: 4). Moreover, social movement actors are increasingly undertaking strategic interventions and actions aimed at using information, media and communication to effect social change (Boler, 2008a; Carroll and Hackett, 2006: 88; Frey and Carragee, 2007; Hamilton, 2008; Joyce, 2010; Meikle, 2002; Notley and Faith, 2010; Sasaki, 2011). Such interventions, often termed 'communication activism', 'digital activism' of 'information activism' have also focused on increasing the communication capacity of social movement actors. According to Castells (2009), communication capacity, or the ability to establish, access and send messages over communication networks, is critical to social movement power and influence.

Despite a growing recognition of the role communication plays in social movements, much of the current scholarship on movements and their media focuses on whether or not new information and communication technologies (ICTs) create new forms of activism or make traditional movement organisations and practices redundant. While some scholars argue that digital technology reorders social movement organisations and collective action in accord with a network logic propagated or enabled by the technology itself (Bennett, 2003a, 2003b; Juris, 2005; Lievrouw, 2011), others contend that while digital ICTs may permit new modes of collective action, traditional organisations and goals will continue to shape social movement practices, both online and off (Boler, 2008: 19, 24; Della Porta and Diani, 2006: 132). Moreover, these and other studies of ICTs and social change display varying degrees of technology centrism, with the more technology-centric studies examining publicly available data trails taken from media sources (such as website content, functionalities, or linkages). Such studies seldom gather data from human agents about their strategic use of communication and technology across a broader field of online and

offline activism, and questions about the larger contexts and processes surrounding social movement ICT use are therefore sidelined (Atton, 2008; Garrett and Edwards, 2007). Such questions include how social movement actors view ICT use in their work, and how they develop the capacity to exploit digital media and networks for strategic purposes.

This study aims to better understand how social movement actors build communication capacity through an examination of *10 Tactics for turning information into action* (*10 Tactics*), a film and accompanying materials designed to spread stories about information and communication activism primarily among rights advocates in the global South.[1] Our account of this project, which focuses on its production, distribution and use, draws on a range of internal and external documentation provided by the project's producers, including internal memos, grant proposals, distribution data, website content and analytics, and survey data.[2] We also draw on structured interviews with the project's producer (who is also one of the paper's authors) and three of its users. Castells' theory of communication power informs our understanding of communication capacity building and provides the analytical categories (reprogramming, switching and network-making) used to identify and analyse the processes involved.

The paper begins by briefly reviewing dominant theoretical perspectives on the role of communication within social movement and communication studies. While these perspectives highlight the importance of symbolic framing and access to resources (potentially including communicative resources), they generally overlook the role of communication capacity and the communicative processes involved in networking. Castells' work calls attention to both of these dimensions of social movement activity. After reviewing Castells' theory of communication power, we consider its explanatory power for the *10 Tactics* project. We examine the ways in which the project engages in reprogramming in its production, and the dynamics of switching, constructing alternative networks and connecting the local and global in its distribution and use. In the final section, we reflect on what this case might contribute to Castells' theory of communication power, paying particular attention to the dynamics and barriers associated with navigating between the global and local, and the key role played by local agents in transnational networking. This article is not an attempt to evaluate the *10 Tactics* project; rather, it focuses on the processes and tensions involved in developing the communication capacity of social movement actors.

Social Movements, Communication and Networks

The activities of social movements increasingly have taken on a communicative dimension (Carroll and Hackett, 2006: 88; Williams, 2004). Social movement scholars (within the field of sociology) have understood this dimension primarily in terms of symbolic framing, which involves the use of language, symbols, and discourses to frame social movement issues and challenge the legitimacy of status quo relations (Cox, 2006; Keck and Sikkink, 1998: Noakes and Johnston, 2005: 5; Tarrow, 2005: 2, 4-5). The other major theoretical approaches in this field – resource mobilisation theory and the political process approach – which focus respectively on the internal resources and external opportunities used to advance collective action, largely fail to incorporate media and ICTs into their frameworks (Van de Donk, et. al., 2004: 6).

Communication scholars, particularly within alternative media studies, have understood social movement communication in terms of attempts of groups to organise themselves and generate power. These scholars have argued that social change media aim to contest and negotiate social and cultural codes, identities, and relationships (Rodríguez, 2001: 20), form oppositional cultures that exist apart from the dominant order (Raboy, 1981: 9), publicly communicate dissident ideas (Kessler, 1984: 14), raise awareness of oppressed and marginalised groups and issues (Gillett, 2003: 621), and articulate and defend alternative interests and identities (Steiner, 1992: 121). Downing describes alternative and social movement media use as expressing opposition by subordinate groups towards a given power structure, engaging in laterally networked communication against dominant policies and powers, and allowing more participation in production than conventional media (Downing, 2001: xi). However, while this literature identifies communication processes as critical to the success of social movements (Atton, 2003: 58; Downing, 2001: 26), it does not pay attention to networking processes or the capacity building activities of social movement actors.

Castells' recent work on communication power identifies the importance of communication capacity building among social movement actors and offers conceptual tools for understanding the networking processes in which they engage. Castells identifies the ability to form, enter and interact with networks that convey messages and values capable of influencing thought, affect, and ultimately action as key social movement activities.[3] These activities are the central means of generating power and counter-power in a global social structure organised around global digital networks. Because digital networks are the key conduits around which the dominant social structure forms and manages power relations, those aiming to contest power must not only create their own communicative networks, but also access and reprogram dominant socio-technical networks. Digitally networked ICTs enable users to become predominant actors in social life and to interact in spatiotemporal formations that are simultaneously local, national, and transnational.

For Castells (2009), the predominant form of power and counter-power in network societies is "network-making power," or the ability to construct, program and connect networks with shared goals, values, interests and resources. Network-making power is generated by two main mechanisms: programs and switches. Network programs are formed and communicated through ideas, images, projects and frames (Castells, 2009: 45-6), and switches act as connecting points or interfaces between different strategic networks which can then cooperate, combine resources, and pursue common goals. Castells (2009: 47, 52-3, 427) theorises switching largely as an activity hinging on the exchange of valued resources or services among power holders seeking to enhance power in their respective domains. The communication capacity of actors, or their "ability to generate, diffuse and affect the discourses that frame human action," conditions their ability to shape human thought and ultimately action (Castells, 2009: 53). Counter-power is generated by communicating alternative interests and values through networks, by disrupting dominant switches that link networks, and by connecting networks organised around social change to each other and to influential communication networks (Castells, 2009: 431). Castells states that scholars can study this process of generating power and counter-power by examining specific networks of actors, interests and values and their

strategies for connecting to dominant global networks, including those of mass communication (Castells, 2009: 430). Castells provides a number of case studies to illustrate his theory of communication power, though these are limited in scope and predominantly US centric. He entreats researchers to further test his theory using case studies related to social movements and political communities.

Castells also suggests that social movement actors face certain challenges in their attempts to interact with digital communication networks in ways that generate power. First, many global networks bypass people, places and activities that lack value within their predominant structuring logic, which is most commonly oriented towards commercialism or state control. Exclusion from global networks, and global communication systems in particular, prevents local actors from communicating their messages, interests and values within these spheres. Gaining inclusion requires the deliberate construction of alternative global networks by social movements (Castells, 2009: 27). Second, social movement actors must find ways to bridge the local and the global. As Castells (2009: 52) states, "How to reach the global from the local, through networking with other localities- how to 'grassroot' the space of flows – becomes the key strategic question for the social movements of our age." The space of flows is the organisation of simultaneous communication at a distance through ICTs and their systems. Castells asserts that this process involves finding common frames of discourse around shared interests despite cultural diversity, but he does not elaborate on whether other functions are required, how these might be achieved or the difficulties involved.

The following sections describe the production, distribution and use of *10 Tactics*, a project designed to build communication capacity among grassroots rights advocates working mainly in the global South. We draw on Castells' theory to explain how this notable project engaged in transnational networking as a means of generating communication power. Specifically, the project sought to reprogram discourses around the use of ICTs and information in rights advocacy, act as a "switch" between different networks of actors, construct alternative networks, and negotiate between the local and global during the processes of production, distribution and use.

10 Tactics' Production

Tactical Tech, a nonprofit organisation that seeks "to advance the skills, tools and techniques" employed by rights advocates around the use of ICTs, produced *10 Tactics for turning information into action* in 2009 (Tactical Tech, What We Do, 2011). [4] *10 Tactics* is a 55-minute film in English featuring stories from scores of local rights advocates about information activism involving digital technologies. Tactical Tech uses the term "information activism" to emphasise the centrality of information over technology in rights advocacy work and to convey that even those with minimal access to ICTs can use information to advance their social change goals (Notley, 2010, Personal Communication). In making *10 Tactics,* Tactical Tech sought to increase the communication capacity of activists and interject ideas and perspectives from the global South into transnational dialogues about communication activism. The film provided a vehicle for rights advocates in the global South to share their stories about feasible and effective uses of ICTs in their local contexts. Tactical Tech felt that such stories seldom circulated among transnational rights advocacy networks, which they saw as largely dominated by activists in Northern hemisphere countries, who often have greater access to ICTs. Tactical Tech also thought that contemporary stories about the opportunities and risks accompanying activist technology use in the global South would serve as a counterpoint to celebratory technological discourses espoused by activists working in the lower risk contexts of the global North. Finally, they hoped the film and materials would help activists assess risks and make decisions about whether and how to employ various technological tools and platforms (Notley, 2011, Personal Communication).

A transnational network of activists and technologists assembled by Tactical Tech collaborated in creating the content of the *10 Tactics* film and cards. The film made use of interviews with rights advocates who had attended Tactical Tech's 2009 "Info-activism camp" in Bangalore, India. More than 100 people at the camp had already engaged in grassroots communication activism; 35 of these, representing different regions, movement contexts and resource levels, were asked to give on-camera interviews about their successful, strategic and problematic uses of digital technology. After transcribing the footage, the program lead wrote the script, which grouped interviewees' stories into segments organised around the tactics employed. These included: mobilise people, witness and record, visualise your message, amplify personal stories, add humor, manage your contacts, use complex data, use collective intelligence, let people ask questions, and investigate and expose. A set of cards packaged with the film offered advice, tips, and case studies designed to help groups carry out each of the tactics, as well as basic factors to consider when planning information-based campaigns. Tactical Tech called on its extended network of camp participants, and other experts and consultants working with digital technology and rights advocates in the global South, to advise them on the content of the cards. Over a nine-month period, numerous people both inside and outside the organisation worked part-time on the project, and two staff members continue to handle distribution and outreach. Tactical Tech's budget for the project, including printing and distribution of the first 2,000 copies of the package, was approximately 30,000 Euros.

By focusing on tactics over technology, the film sought to frame ICT use as a means to an end. Some tactics center on the use of images, ideas and frames, such as visualising messages to address sensitive and complex topics, telling personal stories in order to make abstract issues more accessible, and using humor to criticise or mock prevailing power. Others focus on accessing and exploiting cheap and available devices, technologies and platforms to carry out "old fashioned activism," including: using social network sites for mobilising large numbers and courting mainstream media attention; recording rights abuses on small, cheap recording devices such as mobile phones and publishing these recordings on blogs and video sharing platforms; and engaging in real time, collective knowledge formation utilising micro-blogging, text messaging, mapping, and open source software.

The film also foregrounds some challenges of digital network use for rights advocates, including the lack of control, security, anonymity, and privacy on commercial platforms and the potential loss of access to the network. Two of the opening stories

illustrate the drawbacks of using Facebook to mobilise. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights advocates in Lebanon use Facebook to advertise their website, but not to build their network, since membership in their Facebook group would inevitably expose members' LGBT orientations. The Pink Chaddi Campaign in India found that Facebook administrators removed the group's page in the middle of their campaign, and did not respond to requests to reinstate it for several months. The film asserts that while online communication can attract attention from mainstream media, it can also put both rights advocates and victims of rights abuses at greater risk for repression and retaliation. The film cautions those interested in recording and exposing rights abuses that many of the bloggers in Burma's "Saffron Revolution" were arrested and given lengthy jail sentences, and that human rights victims should be permitted to give their informed consent or request that their voice or image be disguised before they are interviewed and exposed. Finally, the film reminds rights advocates that they are continually at risk of having their access to digital networks cut off by repressive governments.

The *10 Tactics* production brought together a transnational network of rights advocates to convey stories and ideas about communication activism. Although these stories promote the use of ICTs and networks in communication activism, they also frame communication goals and strategies as more important than technology and call attention to the particular risks involved for actors working in global South countries. In the next section, we look at the alternative distribution network along which the film and tactics were disseminated.

10 Tactics' Distribution and Use

Tactical Tech had several strategies for distributing the materials transnationally to grassroots users. These strategies included using a Creative Commons license to encourage remix and adaptation, encouraging translation into multiple languages using a free online translation platform, packaging the materials for offline distribution, developing a website for online distribution, disseminating copies among their existing network, and undertaking additional outreach to rights advocates in the global South. *10 Tactics* materials were copyrighted under a Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike license. Using this license, Tactical Tech collaborated with at least twenty-five organisations and small groups that voluntarily translated the materials into their own languages. They also partnered with organisations and activists in Mexico, Belarus and Burma that either replicated, adapted or extended the project for their local contexts. As of June 2011, in a period of 18 months, Tactical Tech had distributed over 5,000 hard copies of the film to recipients in 86 countries, with about 3,500 going to rights advocates in the global South. Moreover, 220 public screenings in 65 countries had by this time been reported to Tactical Tech via email or the project website (http://archive.informationactivism.org/)[5] . Web analytics tools showed that at this time more than 50,000 unique visitors from 198 countries had visited the website. However, because Tactical Tech encourages rights advocates to copy and share these materials freely, both online and offline, their knowledge of the project's distribution patterns remain partial and incomplete.

Our account of *10 Tactics* use draws on the results of an email and online survey designed by Tactical Tech that included closed and open-ended questions. Of the approximately one thousand people who received an invitation to take a survey, ninety-six responded. Respondents came from diverse regions, including Asia (35), North America (26), Europe (24), Africa (23), Latin America and the Caribbean (11), Oceania (9), and the Middle East and North Africa (3). Seventeen worked for large organisations (30+ people); 12, for medium-sized organisations (16-30 people); 29 for small organisations (less than 16 people); and 9, for themselves. The survey asked respondents about themselves and their organisations, the usability of the materials, how they or their constituents had used the materials, how they could be improved, and whether the materials increased their knowledge about using digital media for rights advocacy.

In order to develop a more fine-grained understanding of the capacity building process, we also conducted one to two hour interviews with six survey respondents from different countries and movement contexts. Administered by graduate student researchers, the interviews addressed recipients' general impressions of these materials, how the materials were used in their work, whether their use led to implementation of any of the tactics, and whether they encountered any barriers to use. We report here on the three interviewees whose organisations made the most extensive use of the materials. Researchers spoke with Beran Djemal in Cyprus and Nicholás Lopez in Mexico at the end of 2010, and Babul Gogoi in India in 2011. In reviewing the surveys and interviews, our aim was not to evaluate the project, but to gain a broader understanding of the process of communication capacity building, including the alternative networks along which *10 Tactics* travelled (including who used the materials and how), whether *10 Tactics* facilitated the diffusion of communication skills and resources, and what barriers prevented the use of the materials among local activists.

With respect to who used the materials, both the interviews and surveys suggest that users came predominantly from the nonprofit sector. Survey respondents identified their work sector as NGOs (62), education (14), independent media (8), governmental (1), and other (11). Nearly all of these respondents reported that they had already used *10 Tactics* in their work (54) or planned to use it (38). Respondents also reported working across a range of nonexclusive focus areas including human rights (47), education (45), access to information (31), the environment (29), access to technology (27) and women's empowerment (22). Our interviewees were typical of the dominant user group in that they came from the NGO sector and worked across several areas of rights advocacy. Djemal worked an Officer for the Turkish Cypriot Community at the Cyprus Community Media Center, an organisation with six staff located in the buffer zone between Greek and Turkish Cypriot whose members include civil society organisations from both sides of the island. The Center aims to increase the visibility of civil society groups in Cyprus by gaining media coverage for their perspectives, helping them develop stronger relationships with mass media, and increasing their own capacity to produce media (Cyprus Community Media Center, FAQ, 2010). Lopez served as media coordinator of the Self-Managed Popular Research and Education organisation (Investigacion y Educacion Popular Autogestiva, n.d.), a group with eighteen staff members located in Southeast Mexico. The group's mission is to protect and defend indigenous children's rights in the region, through food distribution, disaster management, informal education, media training, and other activities (Investigacion y Educacion Popular Autogestiva, n.d.). Gogoi co-founded the Foundation for

People Empowerment (www.fpe.net.in), a seven-person, voluntary organisation in Manipur, India, that provides community journalism and technology training and support and manages the *Assam Times* (www.Assamtimes.org), an online platform for citizen journalism. FPE's mission is to educate people in technology use and to promote citizen journalism in regions of Northeast India subject to human rights abuses and police corruption (FPE, 2011).

Survey respondents offered details about how they had used, or planned to use, *10 Tactics* in response to two open-ended questions. Respondents reported that they screened or planned to screen *10 Tactics* mainly for members of other small NGOs, for activists, and for students. Additionally, they used the materials primarily to raise awareness about activist uses of ICTs, to conduct trainings and workshops among activists, to plan campaigns and advocacy work, and to facilitate classroom education. The more than sixty screening stories posted on the *10 Tactics* website suggest that such uses may have been fairly typical around the world (see http://archive.informationactivism.org/en/listpage/Screening stories). Likewise, our interviewees shared *10 Tactics* with the same kinds of audiences for the same kinds of purposes. Gogoi reported screening the film in Northeast India to hundreds of workshop participants from a variety of backgrounds, including activists, technologists, journalists, students, and development workers. He said he has used *10 Tactics* in order to train his staff to give citizen journalism workshops and in his own workshops in order to quickly introduce audiences to a wide range of ideas about what technology can do. Djemal said the CCMC has used *10 Tactics* to train their staff to give workshops to other organisations and to expand their own technology uses. CCMC staff used the film in several training sessions, including workshops on guerilla media making that drew over a hundred civil society activists from around Cyprus. Likewise, Lopez reported that the IEPAAC in Mexico sponsored a series of public screenings for local area activists, university students, and participants in a community program for uneducated and unemployed youth. Their aim was to introduce their constituencies to activist uses of familiar technologies.

Our interviewees also reported tailoring their use of *10 Tactics* for particular audiences. Gogoi reported screening segments of the film in approximately twenty workshops and trainings. He often customised the workshop agendas, and the use of 10 *Tactics*, according to the needs and interests of participants. For example, at a workshop for activists in Manipur, Gogoi screened selected segments in *10 Tactics* in order to demonstrate how to use Google Maps and to encourage viewers to collaboratively plot incidents of police abuse. Djemal also said that *10 Tactics* gave his organisation material they could use selectively with different members. For instance, he indicated that *10 Tactics* was used in some workshops to focus on activists' uses of mobile phones and Google maps, and in others to address making videos and promoting them through content sharing sites. The project's modular presentation of tactics facilitated such uses.

The interviewees also addressed how they themselves and others adopted or planned to adopt skills and resources shown in the film. Gogoi noted that FPE had begun to use the mobile phone software (Frontline SMS) featured in the film to publicise workshops and communicate with workshop participants, and in one instance, after screening the film in Tripura, right to information activists told Gogoi that they planned to use video to document and publicise government threats they were receiving. Djemal told us that the CCMC also implemented several tactics themselves, such as using Twitter, Facebook and email to post announcements and creating an interactive map that located and profiled themselves and their member organisations. He also said that after one screening feminist activists from Northern Cyprus adopted tactics recounted in the film by an organiser of the Pink Chaddi campaign in India that protested against the violent repression of women [The Hindi word Chaddi translates to 'underwear']. The Cypriot activists used images of women's underwear, a Facebook page, flyers and billboards to promote a demonstration against sex slavery and draw mainstream media attention to their cause. In this case, both the use of social networks to "mobilise people" and the framing of the campaign itself were adapted from the film. After viewing the film, Lopez's group also adopted some of the highlighted tactics, including using YouTube to promote its videos and starting a Facebook page to organise events. Lopez says that while staff already had access to the Internet and moderate knowledge of technology, *10 Tactics* helped them apply these resources to activist uses.

The barriers identified by users provide some insight into the challenges involved in developing communication capacity transnationally and in connecting the local and the global. Survey respondents cited a number of factors preventing them from using *10 Tactics* in their work, including a lack of time (23), funding (23), technical experience (19), support (14), computer/equipment access (9), Internet access (11), and other issues (6). Gogoi and Djemal likewise reported that a lack of access to technology, including computers and computer networks, limited the value of these materials for rights advocates in India and Mexico. Moreover, both survey and interview respondents suggested that three additional barriers to capacity building were language, uncertainties about local relevance, and uncertainties about local application. All of the interviewees and several survey respondents thought that the materials should be available in more languages. Although the materials had been subtitled in different languages, they were not available in Turkish or in some Indian languages, limiting their usefulness for both Djemal and Gogoi. Although Djemal performed live translation of the narration at some screenings, he noted that because of language barriers, Turkish audiences could not further disseminate these materials among their own organisations or members, thus limiting their circulation among local activist communities. In addition, our interviewees would have preferred that the translation be dubbed, rather than subtitled, so that they could show the film to audiences with no or low literacy skills. Many users also felt that more stories from their regions of the world would give the materials greater resonance with their viewers. Several of the survey respondents wanted the materials to incorporate stories from a greater variety of regions and movement contexts including their own. Lopez said that Mexican viewers wanted to see more examples from their regions and suggested that a "regionalising" of the content and cases, including a Spanish language version featuring examples from Latin America and Mexico, would make the content more relevant to Mexican audiences.[6]   Survey respondents also wanted additional guidance, information and support for groups seeking to apply the materials in their local contexts. One respondent noted, "The first level is telling people what is out there (which is what *10 Tactics* is about). The second level, and more difficult one, is working with organisations to try and adopt it into their way of working" (R18). Even Djemal's Center in Cyprus, which had already adopted several of the tactics featured in *10 Tactics*, planned to consult technology experts to help them implement some additional tools and technologies.

Reprogramming, Switching, and Connecting the Local and Global

Castells' theory illuminates many dimensions of network building. In the production, distribution and use of *10 Tactics*, Tactical Tech aimed to reprogram and switch several networks, and to create transnational materials for local use in order to build communication capacity. For Castells, reprogramming involves challenging dominant ideas, discourses, images and frames. Tactical Tech sought to reprogram discourses about technology use circulating in rights advocacy networks. Reprogramming in this case involved interjecting activism stories from the global South and ideas about information activism, which de-center technology and foreground activist strategies and tactics, into local and transnational conversations about social movement media use. In contrast to celebratory discourses of technology and social change, the materials also raised concerns about risks surrounding the use of digital ICTs. *10 Tactics* highlighted both how rights advocates could exploit digital ICTs and how dominant powers might operate through networks to create obstacles that activists could potentially anticipate and avoid. Activists then utilised *10 Tactics* to introduce these ideas to different constituencies.

Castells describes "switches" as connections involving an exchange of valued resources among participant networks seeking to increase their respective fields of power. *10 Tactics* acted as a "switch" between several types of actors and networks. In production, it brought together rights activists and advocacy groups with technologists and designers. These geographically distanced and diverse actors were connected through camp sessions, email lists, and social media, and through the creation and distribution of *10 Tactics*, which conveyed their ideas and perspectives. Second, *10 Tactics* aimed to connect local activist networks around the world to one another. The film and cards served as a transnational counter-public sphere of communication linking local rights advocates in the global South to each other, and to those in the global North. Third, *10 Tactics* strove to act as a "switch" between rights advocates and digital ICTs. Strategies for linking rights advocates with digital ICTs included telling stories about how some activists had already used these resources and opportunities, documenting how activists in different movement contexts and countries performed a range of actions involving technology, emphasising available technological resources and opportunities that require little time or money to use, and implementing an inclusive distribution process that involved making multiple translations, disseminating the materials both online and offline, and reaching out to groups in marginalised regions.

Our research also revealed that some local users were a critical component in the "switching" process. Local users initiated presentations of *10 Tactics* to various constituencies, tailored their presentations to local needs and interests, translated and subtitled materials into different languages, and adapted and expanded materials for their local regions. Thus, local users appear to be a critical link in the switching process not discussed by Castells. Moreover, they did more than merely connect networks. These agents were involved in processes of adaptation, modification, customisation and translation that served to localise information, ideas and knowledge taken from other contexts. These activities were key to the process of "grassrooting" (i.e. reaching the local through networking with other localities) activist knowledge around communication activism.

Tactical Tech aimed to create grassroots media with a global reach. They hoped that by sharing information, knowledge, experiences, resources and tactics from grassroots activists working in different geographical, political and movement contexts, they would enable groups in other localities to engage these tactics and technologies. Strategies for negotiating between the local and transnational included collaborating in production and distribution, sharing local stories transnationally, utilising creative commons licenses, employing an online translation platform, and distributing materials online and in hard copy. *10 Tactics* helped spread ideas about information activism emanating from the global South. Many of the project's users reported that they found the stories of information activism from other Southern hemisphere countries "inspiring," and some had adopted some of the tactics highlighted. In this sense, *10 Tactics* helped actors normally peripheral to global information flows speak to each other. And to the extent that these materials reached social movement activists in developed countries, *10 Tactics* reversed the dominant direction of transnational communication from the periphery to the center.

At the same time, the project faced some challenges in its efforts to increase communication capacity at the grassroots. The most obvious challenge was language. Although the online film and prepackaged DVD have subtitle options available in more than twenty languages, the survey and interviews indicated that these options did not entirely overcome issues of language and literacy. As others have noted, activist content flowing over transnational networks often face barriers of linguistic accessibility (Ekine, 2010; Lebert, 2003, p. 225). Making content available in local and spoken languages may be a necessary precondition for reaching certain audiences. Another challenge was the uncertainty some groups felt about the relevance of specific tactics to their local contexts. Survey respondents and interviewees cited different degrees of access to technology, skills and other resources, as well as different situational contexts, as barriers to the effective use of *10 Tactics*. This challenge is consistent with observations that the transnational diffusion of social movement tactics may depend on the subjective recognition of circumstantial, geographical or cultural similarities between settings (Chabot & Duyvendak, 2002; Della Porta and Diani, 2006: 219). In other words, activists were unsure whether equivalent political opportunities would support the use of these tactics and technologies in their own contexts. Lastly, many users wanted more guidance on how to strategically apply the tactics and technologies to further their organisation's goals. The film presented information about new technology applications and discrete tactics, but did not comprehensively address larger questions about how to integrate these tools and tactics into organisational strategies and campaigns. However, the answers to such questions would require more detailed knowledge about local issues, campaigns, contexts, and target audiences (Lebert, 2003; Meikle, 2002; Schultz & Jungherr, 2010). These barriers suggest the need to tailor activist media to local contexts and conditions and highlight the limits of information flows alone to engender action.[7]

In the context of transnational social movement communication, the *10 Tactics* case suggests that switching may involve more than the connection of social change networks. Specifically, it may both involve a dimension of adaptation and encounter a number of quotidian obstacles. Moreover, successful transnational communication may require multiple "switchers" who

anticipate and respond to differences in local needs and contexts (including those of language, literacy, skills and knowledge, and technology access, as well as cultural, social and political realities) in order to effectively "grassroot" global information flows. Since these myriad local needs are difficult, if not impossible, to anticipate at the transnational level, local switchers are critical to the networking process. This finding accords with Chabot and Duyvendak's (2002) insight that deterritorialised information flows are insufficient catalysts for the transnational adoption of activist tactics. Rather, adoption requires networks of critical citizens who can negotiate difference and likeness between contexts, dislocate tactics from one setting and experimentally relocate them in another, broker links between those transmitting and receiving tactical information, and facilitate the collective appropriation of tactics into the strategies and identities of different activist communities.

Conclusion

Castells' work suggests that social movements seek access to social and technological networks that convey, amplify and extend messages and values. Generating counter-power requires the communication capacity to program global networks and the ability to connect social movements to other networks, particularly digital communication networks. In addition, network-making requires that social movements build transnational bridges between grassroots interests, values and projects. Though often overlooked in social movement studies, these activities are vital aspects of social movement communication. Focusing on the processes involved in networking and communication capacity building also helps highlight the agency of social movement actors and the larger communicative field in which they operate, particularly in the global South where access to advanced technologies is limited.

This study has described how one set of actors sought to increase the communication capacity of grassroots rights advocates using a film that focused on strategy-centric (rather than technology-centric) accounts of activism and warnings and advice about the risks involved in using ICTs. It has also shown how in the process of producing, distributing and using this project, rights advocates activated switches between a number of actors and networks, including: rights advocates, designers and technologists; local and global rights advocates; and rights advocates and digital technologies. However, capacity building in the context of transnational social movement communication also involved processes of adaptation by those acting as "switches" between socio-technical networks and social movement actors. These local actors played a critical role in networking between the local and global by adapting, customising and modifying the materials for local viewers and addressing local obstacles, including language barriers and perceptions of relevance. Although not specifically considered by Castells, local agents performed a variety of functions that were key to the process "grassrooting" the global in the case of *10 Tactics*. Further investigations of transnational social movement communication may produce analytic generalisations around these insights by more fully specifying the range of the strategies, functions, processes and obstacles involved in communicating to and from specific localities.

This case study suggests that social movement actors are thinking strategically about when to use digital technologies, how to develop and share communication capacity, and how transnational communication might serve to connect the local and global. This study does not speak to how successful this project was in reprogramming dominant discourses circulating in transnational advocacy networks or generating decisive counter-power around local issues or struggles. Such effects are unlikely to occur in the short term or to be traced directly to one initiative. Nevertheless, *10 Tactics* does offer a window into the processes and challenges involved in attempts to increase communication capacity and counter-power of social movement actors through the strategic use of digital media and networks.

Footnotes

1. The term global South refers here to Southern Hemisphere countries with low to medium scores on the human development index used by the United Nations Development Program. Regions falling in this category in 2010 include the Arab States, East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa (United Nations Development Programme, 2010).

2. Tactical Technology Collective, the project's producers, administered the surveys as part of their internal documentation and evaluation of this project. The organisation also mapped screenings of the film as reported by users, maintained data on the film's hard copy distribution, collected web analytics on the project's website usage, and invited users to submit stories about film screenings which they published online. They generously shared their data with the authors of this paper.

3. Perhaps in response to earlier criticisms that his work was technologically deterministic (Garnham, 2004; Webster, 2002), Castells (2009) is careful to situate the use of digital networks as separate from and contingent on extant social structures, which in turn are reliant on the individual and collective actions of social actors.

4. Tactical Tech can be classified as a professional or service organisation within the social movement field. As a professional organisation, it employs staff to work on movement issues, garners resources primarily from foundations, and does not have a membership base (Della Porta and Diani, 2006). Rather than attempt to speak for a constituency or influence policy, Tactical Tech aims to build the communicative capacity of other rights advocacy groups.

5. This project now has a second iteration or version available at the original project site web address: https://informationactivism.org/

6. Shortly after this interview, Tactical Tech and the Mexican NGO, REDDES, collaboratively launched a Spanish *10 Tactics* project profiling more stories from the region (Tactical Technology Collective, 2011, 10 Tácticas in Latin America).

7. In response to some of these problems, Tactical Tech has been developing the concept of a "Pop-up Institute in Evidence-based Campaigning." The Institute is a mobile and temporary learning center and working lab that brings together

technologists, designers, data specialists and seasoned activists with local groups wanting to implement information based campaigns in specific contexts.

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