Social Media and Indigenous Protest

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Background to this research

Mobilização Nacional Indígena (Brazil, 2013)

Outline

› Definition of protest

› Methodology

› Interaction Protest and Social Media

› 5 Functions of protest

› Protest as Grievances Mechanisms / Social Media as Stakeholder Engagement

› Conclusion

Why is 'protest' important?

› Protest action can increase the wellbeing, allows participation of communities and tackle possible human rights violations, such as the right to FPIC

› Companies which can achieve a Social Licence to Operate face less protests, thus minimizing the non-technical risk to projects (and to people)

› More projects means more protests (development pressure)

Defining Social Protest

According to Rucht et al. (1999:8), a protest is a "telling indicator for problems which are neither registered nor dealt with in an adequate manner".

Our definition:

strategic forms of political action designed to (ultimately) influence decision-making, potentially by influencing public opinion through the use of media or the internet.

Protests are also important in other countries/contexts

Idle no More (Canada, 2014)

The rise of an international movement

People's Climate March (New York, 2014)

Methodology

Progressive listing (over 6 months) of all forms of social protest action developed from a ongoing process of literature review, internet searches, website monitoring, brainstorming, and reflections on fieldwork (participant observation).

Over 70 forms of protest were listed, most of which can be directly or indirectly related to the use of social media or other ICTs

The International struggle
for Indigenous Peoples
Rights

The Brazilian
Indigenous National
Mobilization (yearly)

3 Day Protest in
Brasília, May 2014

Rallies, blockades...
[for 70 examples,
see table 1]
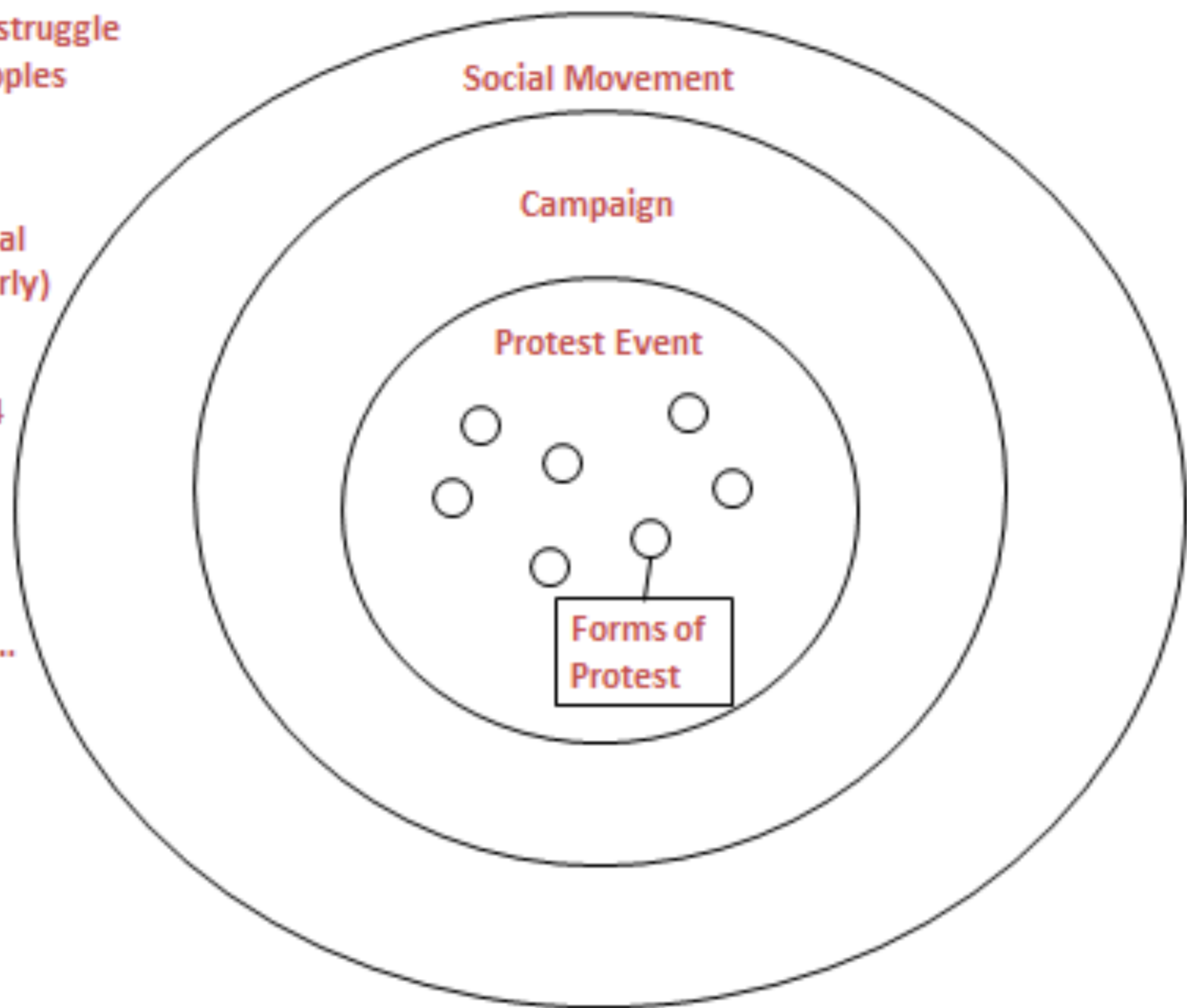
Social Movement

Campaign

Protest Event

Forms of
Protest

Internet/social media play a pivotal role in protesting

- Organizing the event

- Promoting the event and mobilizing participants

- Supporting and/or countering mass media reporting of the event/
  movement

- Providing first hand description (or live streaming) of the event,
  protesters performances and demands

- Pressuring companies and governments to comply with
  international standards and/or address (human) rights violations

- Alignment of interests and methods (shared repertoire)

Mechanisms by which protest enable Indigenous peoples to influence decision-makers

Protest Event

Public opinion

Mass Media

Social Media

Decision-makers
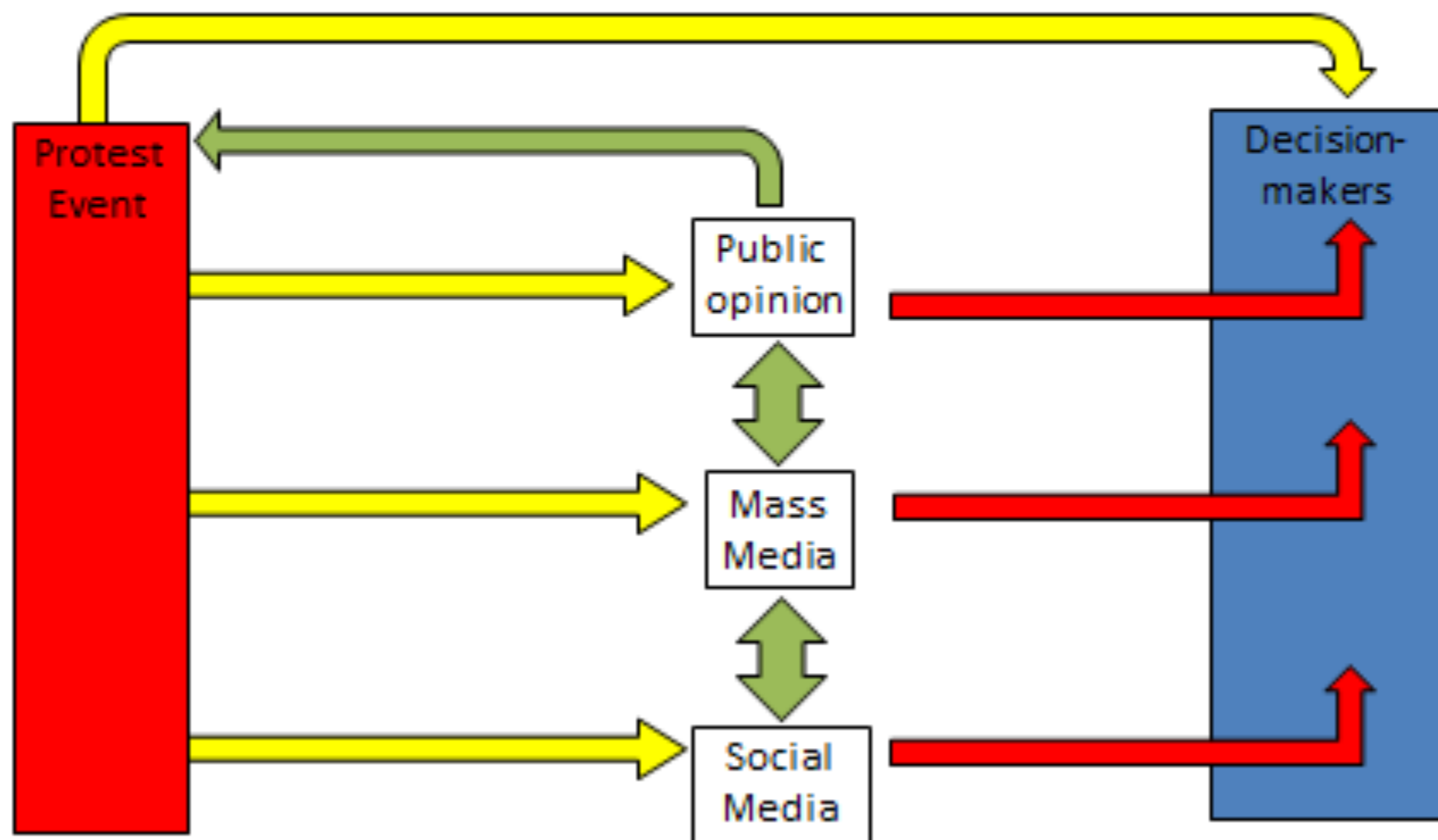
Interaction Protest and Social Media (Digitalization – Realization)

Realization: The use of digital activism to bring effects in the real world -
e.g. most recent events are organized in the digital world, with many people confirming attendance in Facebook – the higher the attendance in the digital world, the higher the chance of having a big event in the real world, thus bringing the digital to the real

Digitalization: Bringing real events or situations to the digital world. This transforms a one-time physical event in something permanent and shareable in the digital world, thus bringing the real to the digital – e.g. protests are photographed and filmed by many activists, who later share their materials in social media websites, which includes an increasingly use of live broadcasting.

Functions of Protest
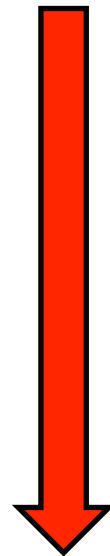
1. Information

2. Fundraising

3. Mobilization

4. Political pressure

5. Direct action

Functions of Protest

1. Information – activities primarily focused on informing the public about of the protest cause or demands (and therefore influencing public opinion).

Example: Informational activist websites

Functions of Protest

1. Information – activities primarily focused on informing the public about of the protest cause or demands (and therefore influencing public opinion).

Example: Creating a Facebook fan page or Twitter profile.

Functions of Protest

2. Fundraising – Activities conducted with the main purpose of raising funds for the protest/cause.

Example: Crowdfunding for a protest action

Functions of Protest

2. Fundraising – Activities conducted with the main purpose of raising funds for the protest/cause.

Example: Donating for a protest campaign / organization

Functions of Protest

3. Mobilization – Activities conducted with the goal of raising the number of supporters/participants of the protest/cause.

Example: Creating a Facebook event, likely to be "attended" by a large number of people

Functions of Protest

4. Political pressure – activities directly target on authorities or decision-makers regarding their action/decision on an specific issue.

Example: Mass letter/email writing to target decision-makers; petitions

Functions of Protest

5. Direct action – Activities with direct impact for the protest goals or target project.

Example: Sabotage, blockades (also possible in the digital world)

Protest is not only crisis, but also an opportunity

› Impacts, when not properly addressed, are frequently posted directly to companies social media profiles (twitter, facebook)
› Companies can use such input as a valuable dialogue tool with impacted communities
› Protest as an unofficial form of grievances mechanisms

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Conclusion

> Protest are a form of participation and grievances mechanisms

> Protest is an ongoing process, not just a single action

> Protests tend to escalate from more conventional forms to more unconventional and disruptive forms

> Digital forms of protest are becoming standard and they can constitute a high risk to projects

> Social media is being used by impacted communities to inform a broader audience about the social and environmental impacts of projects and to mobilize them into the protest process to gain leverage against companies and governments

> Protests against proponents usually happen because of a lack of dialogue or FPIC with local communities

> Social media can be used by companies to engage meaningfully with local stakeholders

> Protest is not only crisis but also an opportunity

Thank you!

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