

Digital Activism in the COVID-19 era

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Abstract

The exploration of the dimensions of digital activism was the objective of this work. A non-experimental study was carried out with a non-probabilistic selection of 150 students, considering their affiliation with student organizations. A four-dimensional structure was established; technological habitus, computational self-efficacy, diffusion of innovations and Internet mobilization that explained 48% of the total variance, although the design limited the results to the research scenario, suggesting the extension of the study and the inclusion of variables such as training, socialization and intention to use the devices and networks.

Keywords: Consumption, Society, Communication, Networks, Internet

1. Introduction

"Mass society" was a preponderant concept to understand the articulated western structures of the 20th century. After the fall of the "Iron Curtain", is it appropriate to apply it in an era characterized by the heterogeneity and predominance of new communication technologies in all human activity.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, virtually all of Europe and the United States were in full consolidation of industrialized production relations (Garcia et al., 2022). The transition from an agricultural to a manufacturing economy and the introduction of unprecedented means of human exchange, such as autonomous vehicles and wire communications, generated transformations in the configuration of social relations that went from being essentially rural to centrally urban; a rampant phenomenon of urbanization begins, which has not stopped to date, because of the first Industrial Revolution.

Already in the twentieth century, irreversibly established the industrial economic model in almost all colonialist nationals, the growth of the cities brought with it a concern about a particular aspect of the new social dynamic: the ubiquity of the crowd, the overcrowding, the approach of the spaces -restricted almost by definition in an environment like the city- by the community (Garcia et al., 2016). It is so serious the reflection on this phenomenon that the thinkers of then they prop it up like "society of masses".

The common man, *mass*, had to take its *natural* place in society, because otherwise all the cultural tradition of the west would rush into the abyss. Minorities, producers of *high culture*, supplement their numerical inferiority with the advantage of being better qualified and must be responsible for maintaining the tradition inherited from the classics (Carreon et al., 2017). Beyond the conservative connotation, the concept was linked to the phenomenon of human agglomeration not only because of the demographic increase concentrated in the urban epicenters of the shining industrialized societies of the 20th century (Carreon et al., 2013). The mass society is considered a quasi-logical consequence of industrialization and in each dimension of social structures of this type there are components that characterize it as a social order.

In the political. The democratization of political life and the concretion of the public through the open participation of the citizenry in inclusive electoral processes, give a popular aspect to the relations between governors and the governed (Garcia, 2019). Political posts and positions, although still filled by elites, need to be legitimized through the involvement of the majority, even if only through universal suffrage.

In the economic. Industrialization brought with it the mass production of consumer goods, which, given their extensive supply, showed lower exchange value, and therefore, were affordable for a greater number of consumers (Garcia et al., 2016). The Fordist production line perfectly exemplifies a system that survived an early crisis and used two world wars to establish itself as hegemonic throughout the Western Hemisphere. Being the United States of America the country with optimal conditions for the development of this productive system, its promotion and economic empowerment was imminent, in addition to inserting into the world's ideology a way of life surpassed by its patterns of consumption and living standards, which it is known as the *american way of life*.

In the social. During the 20th century, human interaction was not only revolutionized by having motorized vehicles (trains, ships, planes, cars) and almost instantaneous means of contact (telegraph, telephone). The scientific inventiveness and its technological application, which usually come hand in hand with the economic growth of any social formation, generated two new means that changed forever the civilizing process: radio and television (Martinez et al., 2019). Thanks to them, the information became mass consumption on a planetary level. The radio broadcasts at first, and television soon after, were positioned as imponderables for the understanding of social reality, because thanks to them the mass could access references and images of anything, from anywhere, almost in any place and at any time. Mass communication, a phenomenon of classic study of the last century, accentuated the homogenous character of industrialized societies, producing their own elements of identity and coexistence common to all.

These conditions, articulated, favored the standardization of society, not only because of their patterns of economic or cultural consumption, but also because of their ideologization (Bustos et al., 2022). It is well known that in the second half of the 20th century, after the defeat of European totalitarian regimes, and as one of the emerging superpowers (the other, the former USSR), the USA was at the head of a world block order, with the hips, the

western one, the civilizer model and the conception of world that in the end would achieve hegemony.

In the period of tension between these blocks (Cold War), within the social structures, the population was led, from the discourse of the rulers through the mass media, with ideals of freedom and progress, which rounded the conception of a world "equal" as the universality of the westernized vision, in which the individual only has value if it is inserted or is driven by the above-mentioned consumption patterns.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, although mass society was at a peak, derived from the period of economic boom and relative political stability, the capitalist model begins to experience economic crises and changes in the factors of its relations with production (highlight of the scientific-technological development). Likewise, the debacle of the block headed by the Former Soviet Union (Garcia, 2021). All these variables detonated radical and deep changes within social structures. In such a way that one could ask if this category would still apply to the new type of interaction and social order that emerged from the ruins of the Capitalism-Socialism dichotomy.

If we look at the conditions of our present time, described and conceptualized by many analysts and social theorists, we will find that all agree that, from the end of the Cold War and the supremacy of capitalism as a civilizational model in its stage of globalization, economic, diplomatic, sociocultural and even interpersonal relationships are framed in immediacy, fluidity, connectivity and dependence, particularly technological means (Bustos et al., 2021). Unlike the emerging world of the postwar period, loaded with solid parameters, the globalized today has a diversity of referents, meanings and interdependencies that lead us to think that the standardization of mass society could have vanished in the air.

There is, however, a constant that mass society of the twentieth century inherits from global social structures: its technological consumption, the prevalence of images and as opposed to discourses and reasoning (Sanchez et al., 2022). If mass society was typified by the annulment of the individual before the crowd and the latent function of the *mass media* to disseminate the hegemonic ideology, how far are we away from it in a fragmented world, but perennially connected thanks to new technologies.

2. Literature Review

It is evident that the mass has not disappeared, it is still there and has a much greater technological offer, especially resources that allow it to consume information and manifest itself without necessarily implying a face-to-face action, but through virtual spaces (Molina et al., 2021). According to the Organization of the United Nations, the number of people with regular access to the so-called "information superhighway" was estimated, towards the end of 2014, at 3000 million of which most use or have an account on social networks. The cases of the two most popular are paradigmatic:

- a) Facebook was launched in 2004 and by the year 2012 it had 1,000 million users. It is estimated that by 2016 the figure is 1600 million users.

- b) Twitter appeared in July 2006, and although it has fewer users than other networks, its impact is sometimes greater than 320 million subscribers.
- c) There are other types of resources that allow immediate communication and exchange of data and information: image and video platforms (YouTube, Dailymotion, Instagram), messaging (WhatsApp, Telegram) and computer systems of search engines; Google, Yahoo, Bing.

Despite the severe computer gaps derived from the levels of development between countries and regions, all virtual social networks are accessible from a laptop or a smartphone, which is no less; When considering those users who only access the networks from a mobile device, regardless of the source of Internet connection, the total number of people connected is 3700 million of 7,300 million inhabitants of the Earth, as reported by the World Bank (Garcia, 2019). These data suggest the transition from a standardized, agglutinated and doctrinally mass society to a society of atomized masses, but in a network. Current social structures have not ceased to be multitudinous or consumerist, m to s interaction contexts, communication processes, including the exercise of power are no longer predominantly tangible; as we live it daily, the spheres that require computer and digital mediations in our individual life and in the relationships that connect us to the world are extended, with networks being more than determining factors.

The historical process of evolution of capitalism has allowed it to advance to its last stage of expansion, which is that of *intangible capitalism*, where productivity depends increasingly on the information and telecommunications sector, and not on other traditional productive sectors (Garcia et al., 2019). While social interaction occurs progressively by way systems virtual networks and not by other conventional forms of human interaction. It is nonsense to suggest opposing massive, structural societies based on their technological resources, interconnected thanks to digital virtual networks. This is a given reality. Rather it would be worth recovering a democratic, plural and civilized use of the technologies we use, it is that we will find the meaning of its usefulness. The opposite is due to the interests of hegemonic classes.

And if at other times in human history, in search of a more equitable social order, the masses with organizational capacity, social networks and computer resources, ethically directed, can be a virtual Trojan Horse that allows us to enter the bowels of power relations to eradicate them (Garcia et al., 2016). In such a scenario, digital activism emerges as a result of the fusion of social movements and collective mobilization with respect to the emergence of electronic technologies, devices and networks. It is a process in which the complaint, protest and demand is transferred from the streets to electronic networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snap Chat, YouTube, WhatsApp and Periscope.

Measuring electronic activism, it has been established from the theories of technological *habitus*, diffusion of innovations, computational self-efficacy and mobilization Internet user (Garcia, 2019). In the first case, the motivational variable of achievement has predicted electronic activism, but the technological *habitus* associated with motivation for mobilization has shown that activism is for Internet users specialized in

the diffusion of innovations and with computational self-efficacy. The instruments developed to measure digital activism have established values of reliability and validity close to, 700 but with high correlations between the factors that suppose a problem of collinearity due to the number of indicators.

3. Research Method

A non-experimental study was carried out with a non-probabilistic selection of 150 students ($M = 23.24$ $SD = 1.40$ age and $M = 6'893.24$ $SD = 234.56$ monthly income) from a public university in the center of Mexico, considering his participation in the organization of student representatives.

The short version of the Activism Scale Internaut (ASI-16) of Carreon (2016) was used, which measures the technological *habitus* ("I will send messages to the mail of an authority to press their resignation"), the dissemination of innovations ("I will messages abuses of authority"), computational self-efficacy ("I will elaborate slayers to spread our demands") and Internet mobilization ("I will block the propaganda of the authorities"). Each item is answered with any of the options ranging from 0 = "not likely" to 5 = "quite likely".

Students were surveyed in the facilities of their university, previous guarantee of anonymity, confidentiality and not affecting the results to their academic status. The information was processed in the statistical analysis package for social sciences (SPSS by its acronym in English, version 23.0).

We estimated parameters that show the normal distribution; mean, deviation, bias and kurtosis; adequacy and sphericity with KMO and Bartlett test, validity for the case of factorial weights, adjustment for the goodness coefficients CFI, GFI and residual RMSEA with the purpose of testing the null hypothesis of the significant differences between the theoretical relationships and the structural model.

4. Results and Discussion

The descriptive values of the parameters that indicate the normality, adequacy, sphericity and validity of the construct related to electronic activism. The general scale and the subscales reached alpha values above the indispensable minimum of 700 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Indirect effects

					95% Confidence Interval	
		Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p	Lower Upper
Habitus → Efficacy	→ Mobilization	-6.181e - 4	0.006	- 0.095	0.924	-0.013 0.012

Table 1. Indirect effects

	Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Habitus → Innovations → Mobilization	3.205e -4	0.002	0.167	0.867	-0.003	0.004

Note. Delta method standard errors, normal theory confidence intervals, ML estimator.

Source: Elaborated with data study

Adequacy (KMO =, 761), Sphericity [$\chi^2 = 32.3$ (14gl) $p < , 01$] Method: Main Axes, Rotation: Promax. F1 = Technological *Habitus* (18% of the total variance explained), F2 = Dissemination of Innovations (14% of the total variance explained), F3 = Computational Self-efficacy (10% of the variance to t explained), F4 = Mobilization Internet user (6% of the total variance explained). Once the four factors that explain 48% of the total variance explained were established, we proceeded to observe their relationship structure among the factors to infer the emergence of a second order factor common to the four first order factors. Once the factorial structure and relations between the variables were established, the structure of trajectories of relationships among the factors was estimated in order to observe the composition of the model and to warn of the emergence of a factor common to the four dimensions and 16 indicators (see Figure 1).

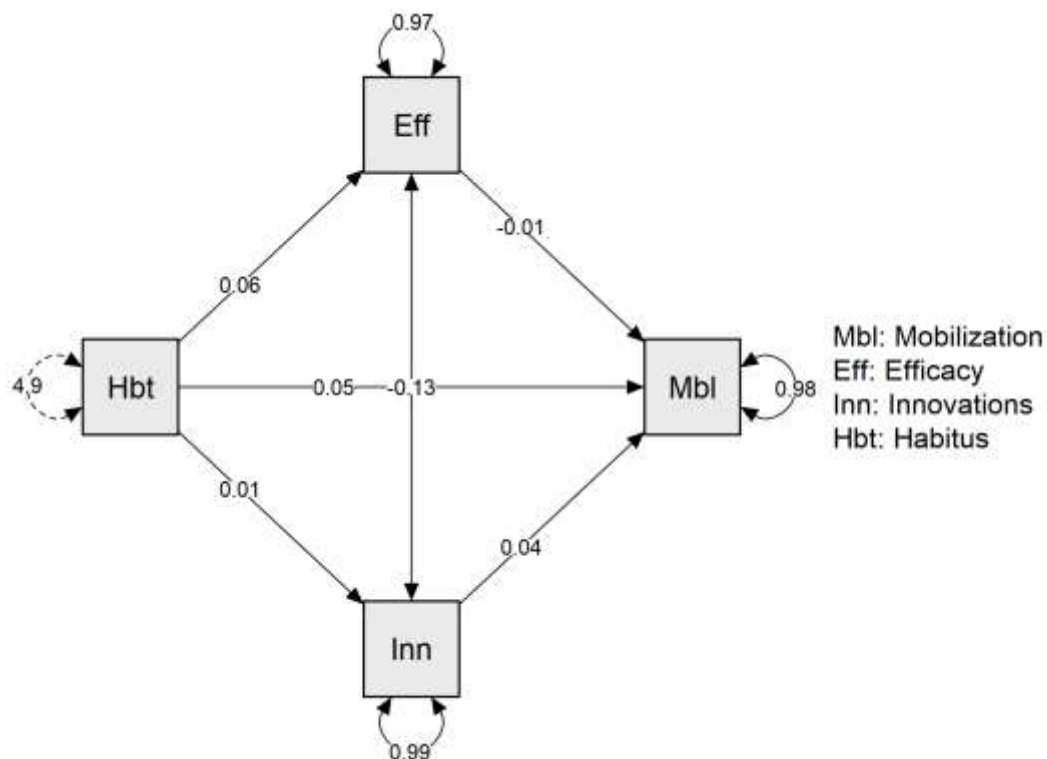


Figure 1. Structural equation modelling

Source: Elaborated with data study

The adjustment and residual parameters [$\chi^2 = 67.4$ (56 gl) $p < .01$; GFI = .997; CFI = .990; RNSEA = .007] suggest the non-rejection of the null hypothesis relative to the significant differences between the trajectories of theoretical relationships with respect to the structural model of reflective associations.

Conclusion

The contribution of the present work to the state of the question lies in the establishment of the reliability and validity of an instrument that measured electronic activism, considering a review of the literature, as well as the theoretical and conceptual frameworks related to the technological *habitus*, the diffusion of innovations, computational self-efficacy and Internet mobilization, but the type of design limited the findings to the research scenario, suggesting the extension of the model to increase the percentage of variance explained and the predictive power of the model of structural equations allusive to trajectories reflective factors and indicators.

Computational skills precede the formation of expert groups in the processing and dissemination of information, suggesting the study of positive dispositions towards the intensive use of technologies, devices, and electronic networks. In the present work it was found that computational self-efficacy is associated with the diffusion of innovations and the technological *habitus* that, in relation to a fourth factor related to the mobilization of the Internet, explain even more the percentage of total variance. Informational capitalism where data and images on the speeches and arguments prevail, socialization is oriented toward the immediacy of the contents without questioning the influence of the same in the decisions of Internet users. In the present study it was demonstrated that the computational self-efficacy associated to the diffusion of innovations and the technological *habitus* explains the emergence of the Internet user mobilization, but not as a rational action, even though those who participate in the events have specialized knowledge and skills, these are manifestations of dissatisfaction, fear or outrage at the risks posed by the rector of the State on the Internet.

Cyberese's develop intentions of intensive use of data and images insofar as they consider an achievement feasible. In the present work it was found that Internet mobilization, in addition, depends on the knowledge and skill, as well as the motivation to carry out an action or protest in the electronic networks that are complemented with the diffusion of contents or messages in favor of activism. Lines of research concerning Internet user training, technological socialization and the intention of intensive use of digital networks will allow to increase the percentage of the total variance, the explanatory and predictive power of the model for the study of activism in electronic media.

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