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Broadcasters and hidden influentials in online protest diffusion

Yamir Moreno, Javier Borge-Holthoefer, Sandra González-Ballón | Social Science Research Network
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This paper explores the growth of online mobilizations using data from the 'indignados' (the 'outraged') movement in Spain, which emerged under the influence of the revolution in Egypt and as a precursor to the global Occupy mobilizations.

Broadcasters and hidden influentials in online protest diffusion

The data tracks Twitter activity around the protests that took place in May 2011, which led to the formation of camp sites in dozens of cities all over the country and massive daily demonstrations during the week prior to the elections of May 22. We reconstruct the network of tens of thousands of users, and monitor their message activity for a month (25 April 2011 to 25 May 2011). Using both the structure of the network and levels of activity in message exchange, we identify four types of users and we analyze their role in the growth of the protest.

Drawing from theories of online collective action and research on information diffusion in networks the paper centers on the following questions: How does protest information spread in online networks? How do different actors contribute to that diffusion? How do mainstream media interact with new media? Do they help amplify protest messages? And what is the role of less popular but far more frequent users in the growth of online mobilizations? This paper aims to inform the theoretical debate on whether digital technologies are changing the logic of collective action, and provide evidence of how new media facilitates the coordination of offline mobilizations.

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