



The Impact of Social Media on Labor Movements

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Abstract

This paper explores the influence that social media has on labor movements. In historical perspective, labor movement has been aiming to improve workers' lives sustainably by strengthening labor-intensive regulatory networks. The advancement of information and communication technology (ICT) has significantly and globally improved the mobilization and empowerment of individual citizens through social media (William Koen, 2014). The rapid expansion and accessibility of digital platforms have affected various aspects of society, including the way labor activists communicate, organize, and mobilize protests. As a result, more researchers have recently shown interest in simple case studies and theoretical implications about the dual role of social media in labor movements and considered issues such as how platforms of digital have enabled and resisted labor activists and the types of networks being supported, particularly whether gravity-governed risks have been considered. Therefore, the purpose of this essay is to assess the influence of social media on labor movement, drawing on both historical and contemporary perspectives. Given the growing inequality and diminishing labor rights in many economies, it is essential to be fully aware of how social media may empower and potentially harm labor movements. Social media empowers the communication and organization of labor activists. As social media only conceal the initiation costs, it is easier for the organization to spread their thoughts and images around the world. In particular, social media removes the biggest obstacle to traditional media activism through the ability of the exclusive media: its requirement of powerful mediators. In this regard the development of media democratizes the media, making it easier to transmit, receive and distribute. This does not mean that alternative media can easily replace these traditional outlets, since the boundaries between traditional and alternative media are increasingly blurred and the state remains a powerful moderator in the global media arena (Ariana Emanuela, 2018). However, social media is considered to have been much more disruptive because it transforms power relations, expressing it in a secure and interactive way as a decentral loudly disseminated networked-based channel.

Keywords :social media, labor movements, worker empowerment, digital activism, mobilization, inequality, communication networks, media democratization



2. Introduction

There is no question that social media has been transformative and central to the reshaping of contemporary social, political, and economic landscapes; labor movement organizing is no exception. Traditional strikes, worker walkouts, and strong unions remain vital, but maintaining the strength of labor organizing without a comprehensive social communications strategy via social media platforms might begin to feel like trying to fight a modern war with muskets. Without chess hashtagged in all-caps. Social media plays a significant role in how labor organizations choose to communicate with their own members, future members, and the massive audiences that pay attention when large labor actions occur. Rage and desire for action disseminate swiftly thanks to hashtags, tweets, and posts. Like the labor movements it chronicles, research on this topic is far from exhaustive. Specifically, the following tracks are not covered here in much detail: a particular strike, company versus labor sides of a particular event, longitudinal studies, post-Orange Wave and post-2012 election phenomena. And while both those events were indeed watershed moments, this is not intended to serve as an argument for necessary causal relationships.

Historically, labor has been on the losing end of essentially every technological adaptation in the past couple hundred years; their legal and organizing methods are similarly outdated. Now it seems, as social media proceeds to translate its nebulous place in society into something a little more solid, that labor might finally have a chance to run faster alongside tech instead of consistently several paces behind. However, for those reading this over the barrel of labor organization, remember an important question: who controls Twitter? Facebook? Instagram? Print, broadcast, and online media? Digital organization and rapid communication are powerful tools, there is no doubt about it (Ariana Emanuela, 2018). But the ability of capital to



silence these mediums is the exact same reason it will never allow that ability to be democratized by labor.

3. Historical Background of Labor Movements

The advent of the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century marked a historic shift in the history of labor and labor movements. Prior to this era, workers were scattered and people worked primarily in rural settings. Despite the potential for social interaction in the rural work environment, it was difficult to build the kind of rapport between workers necessary for collective action. The Industrial Revolution, however, changed societies forever by concentrating workers in larger numbers in factories or more dense urban areas. Moreover, industrialization created a capitalist class of employers that subdivided and thoroughly organized the labor process so that each worker only performed a limited series of very repetitive tasks. Factory labor caused workers to rely on one another for effective output, creating a new sense of class awareness (Garcia, 2018).

The period following industrialization marked the start of a tumultuous and often violent history for labor. This era also gave rise to modern day labor unions. The clamor for dignity, rights and recognition from workers resulted in organizations and agitations by workers that collectively came to be known as labor movements. Initially characterized by disorganized and anarchic protests, labor movements evolved into large and complex entities that used various methods to fight for the just treatment of workers. The progress of labor groups has been fraught with struggles that have marked significant events in history. These struggles, which at times are fraught with violence, have also yielded moments of courage, fortitude, and humanity. Labor laws, social policy and the overarching issue of labor rights have evolved from these struggles. The advent of globalization shifted the tectonics of labor movements once again as industries moved along with jobs from high-wage countries to low-wage ones (Edmund, 2017).



4. The Rise of Social Media in Labor Activism

Social media, be it Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or other platforms, have become not only a tool in our daily lives, but also an entity of total influence in the stream of labor activism. As a form of social media, different from traditional media, the essence of social media is based on social interaction, democratization and openness, which provide a response and dialogue platform for consumers and creators of information. The results show the rise and transformation of new social media form, the speed and frame of reference to describe and comment current affairs events, the attraction of expressive ways and interest hub of events, the direct search and follow-up of information prompted by events, but also understands the person, time and social situation factors of participating in network public opinion, the contribution and attributed network public opinion.

First of all, the emergence of social media has overturned the past impression that labor activism is relatively distant and simple. In contemporary labor activism, the biggest difference between the past is the rise of marginalized groups in economic globalization, such as temporary workers, contract workers, female workers and migrant workers. These groups are marginalized in the labor market, living in marginalized urban and rural areas, and their actions in life, life rhythm and cultural habits do not necessarily match the format of street protests. The controversy itself, as well as the strategy and the imbalance of power, also leads to a disadvantage in the traditional practice of trade union events. While the basic economic structure of changing this inequality is not expected to fundamentally improve in the short term, new strategies and publicity methods are urgently needed to extend labor activism from the past grounding and unity to various situations and scenarios to form public opinion support as much as possible. Thereby creating social pressure and allowing targeted companies or individuals to bear reputation costs or responsibilities (Wang, 2019).



5. Case Studies of Successful Labor Movements Empowered by Social Media

The intent of this text is to strategically examine possible manifestations of social media activism in labor movements. This text does not seek to endorse these movements or the tactics of the activists, but rather to analyze the legal implications of their social media activism. By analyzing examples of both successful and unsuccessful movements, this text dissects the intersection of legal and social media to offer a roadmap for legal practitioners hoping to consult with labor activist clients. A great many other workers who are not union members but wish to be home-care workers have organized similar initiatives through channels such as social media sites and this has been prompting similarly active responses from patient health care recipients.

Examples of different social media-enabled labor movements are (1) the launching of a protest by one DMV quit; (2) activists' reconciliation with, followed by systematic targeting of, influential young bloggers and other tweeting celebrities; (3) the campaign to broadly publicize and pressure local businesses on violation of minimum wage laws and the labor rights of workers, focusing particularly on network cafe-chains; (4) social media campaigns targeting corporations—as well as those in their fans or otherwise affiliated—urging them to divest from predatory rival businesses engaging in unjust labor practices; (5) pressuring artists, once complicit in public promotion of discriminatory labor practices in their industry, to reform; and (6) the issuing and echoing of online public pleas to the ruling establishment to address systematic issues of worker exploitation and regulate labor practices in the industry. (Lamdan, 2022)

6. Challenges and Limitations in Utilizing Social Media for Labor Movements

Social media platforms have garnered considerable attention for their potential to reshape contemporary labor movements. Connected by digital social networks,



workers are seemingly empowered to engage in collective action. Concurrently, analysts have proposed that increased viewership on social media translates into success for labor movements. Nevertheless, such a body of work fails to account for the challenges and limitations that these movements necessarily face. This narrative endeavors to generate understanding of the drawbacks involved in using social media as a tool for labor activism (Janice Klekamp, 2012).

One projection is that social media have allowed for the disaggregation of the public sphere and the sharing of false information. A digitally literate analyst can generalize about the demise of “real” journalism, corporate consolidation, the emergence of alternative media, and the impact of hashtags, with a particular focus on controversies with potentially dangerous health implications. Concerns can be articulated about the spreading of deceptive content and the potency of this content in changing public opinion. While some of this information is no doubt designed to mislead, maliciously generated disinformation is not the only substantial threat. Indeed, in dismantling the expert-driven traditional media, social media have made “The people formerly known as the audience” both producers and consumers of news. Many online “citizen journalists” sincerely believe the information they discover, especially when that information contradicts established narratives. While not demonstrably dishonest, bigoted, or a product of fantasy, this information can still have damaging effects. Similar to the credence that Asian “Yellow Peril” stories contributed to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, modern fake news can be used as propaganda to undermine the credibility of the World Health Organization and downplay COVID-19 (Ferrara, 2015). Nevertheless, false information is not the only risk entailed in social media activism. Analogous to how brutal repression against the streets of Ferguson, Missouri led to the emergence of the Twitter hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, in the United States, similar events in Egypt gave birth to “Kazeboon,” Arabic for “Liars,” which records police violence and disseminates the footage through social networking sites. Law enforcement became more broadly aware of and responded to this campaign by sending agents to monitor cinemas where Kazeboon screenings were held and to shut down unregistered screenings. Too successful a social media campaign can lead to oppressive backlash. To avoid the real world risks entailed in



building a Facebook page, some labor movements have faced coordinated hacking and spam attacks after the formation of related groups. Feminist activists need to be particularly wary of engaging online as social media have become a significant new arena for persecuting women.

7. The Future of Labor Movements in the Digital Age

In 2020, the mismanagement of the COVID-19 crisis has made it even clearer how the failure in protecting labor rights affects millions of workers worldwide. However, labor movements have proven to be adaptable and to overcome obstacles for centuries. As long as there is paid labor, there will be exploitation, and as long as there will be exploitation, there will be workers struggling against it. The current digital age is rapidly changing, so will the ways labor movements adapt to it (Jetha et al., 2021).

Most workers today were born into a different world before the Internet became mainstream, and the workforce was already transformed by the time they reached working age. In a world of a rapidly increasing speed of change, it is important to see what the future of work may look like, how will the formation of worker identities evolve and how will labor movements adapt to these changes. This essay will explore three paths labor movements might head towards in the digital age, building both on recent developments and on predictions of future ones. The framework discussed will be mostly relevant to the Western world, however, it points to more general trends and to already prominent initiatives that have also had a global impact.

8. Conclusion

The Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and Chinese construction workers. When discussing the interplay of social media and labor activism, these movements often come to mind. Literature presented in this review sought to gather insights from these movements to collectively answer the inquiry: How do social media platforms influence labor movements and vice versa? It is found that social media platforms give activists the ability to exert more power and can reach a wider audience, providing workers with more information about labor movements and “what’s really happening.” However social media contains privacy and surveillance implications.



Regardless of the cautionary aspects that social media technologies bring, every respondent agreed that they are in favor of continuing to use these platforms as a secondary resource for organizing when used carefully (Van Den Bergh, 2016), yet none felt comfortable with it being the main source.

It is argued that as expectations of privacy start being legally integrated into the online space, the benefits of democratic privacy will safeguard activism. Although evidence is shown how the concepts of Broader approach to collective action and Intangibles can still lend themselves to the analysis of more reclusive movements, in the context of the Chinese movement social media couldn't empower the workers in the same ways that it empowered activists because the channel of communication was too public. Labor activists are advised to look to historical labor movements and movements in politically similar nations to understand the manner capital and the state will approach potential activism in their country, or to garner other insights. Lastly, caution is urged researching a topic where the population under study is suspicious of surveilling researchers. More oversight and transparency are required by social media corporations. This essay encourages more discussion and research into understanding the implications social media technologies have for labor rights and the efficacy of current labor organizing practices. On a hopeful note, this technology has improved communication and the sharing of information, skills, and best practices across space. A rising awareness of abusive systems might provoke a groundswell of change in the future. Human rights legislation is hopefully not far off in the ever-evolving political machine.

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