Too Small to Succeed?

The Case of #NoAlVotoElectrónico and the Limits of Connective Action

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ABSTRACT

The concept of crowd-enabled connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013) is primarily associated with rapid scalability. However, the question of reducibility remains largely unanswered. To what extent are small crowd-enabled networks qualitatively different from their larger counterparts? This research indicates there to be at least one difference: their reduced scale may be an obstacle for the transition of such networks to a new form. The answer is based on the data gathered through a social network mapping of the Twitter hashtag #NoAlVotoElectrónico, and seven qualitative interviews with activists of the campaign against Argentina's electronic voting bill, a rare case of a single-issue network working under the logic of crowd-enabled connective action. Additionally, this study intends to address the research gap that exists about connective action in the region, since in the last four years the concept has been used for conducting 51 case studies in every continent but one: Latin America.

1   INTRODUCTION

Using an electric hand blender to prove that the secrecy of the electronic voting system could be easily tampered with was not the only novelty that the #NoAlVotoElectronico (#NoElectronicVoting, in English) campaign brought to Argentina. The broad network of cybersecurity experts, NGO activists, lawyers, and scholars loosely gathered around a Twitter hashtag to oppose the electronic voting bill is also, as I will argue in this dissertation, the smallest registered experience of a crowd-enabled network working under the logic of connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). This logic has been traditionally associated with rapid scalability and large demonstrations. However, the question about reducibility remains largely unanswered. Evidence gathered for this research suggests that reduced connective action networks can see affected their capacity to transition to a new form for adapting to new political opportunities and threats.

As scholars from communications (Anstead, 2014) and social movement studies (Tarrow, 2014) have pointed out, the concept of connective action has helped to bridge the distance between those two disciplines by providing a common language for studying the impact of digital communications on contentious action. In only four years, Bennett and Segerberg's theories have been widely adopted. According to the literature review conducted for this research, the concept has been used to conduct 51 case studies in every continent but one: Latin America. This fact suggests that the logic of connective action remains understudied in the region. With the objective of starting to bridge this research gap, this study focuses on the #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign through a mixed-method

approach that complements techniques of social network analysis, with seven semi-structured interviews with activists of the campaign.

Analysing how a theory can be used in a context not originally contemplated by its authors can help to build a baseline for building comparative knowledge and conducting transnational studies about connective action. Furthermore, this study also addresses two goals that Bennett and Segerberg (2013) set for future research. The first goal was to complement the quantitative methods of analysis with a fine-grained qualitative approach, which they admitted was impeded by the enormous size of their case studies (p. 76); something that in this case is eased by the relatively small scale of the network. The second goal was to set a benchmark to follow if and how the #NoAlVotoElectrónico crowd-enabled network will transition in a near future, since Argentina's government has already announced that it will persist with the electronic voting bill in 2018 (Página 12, 2017).

For that purpose, this dissertation is structured around five main sections. Firstly, a theoretical chapter presents a literature review of the concepts of collective action, connective action, hybridity, networks, and the Latin American context, which is followed by the statement of both my conceptual framework and research question. The next chapter includes my research strategy, the rationale for the chosen methodology, the sampling method for the interviews through network mapping, the design of the questionnaire for the interviews, and the ethical considerations needed for my approach. Then, the results of the research are presented, including the findings of the network mapping and the interviews, as well as their implications for the logic of connective action. Finally, the conclusion summarises the findings of this study and advances questions for further research.

2 THEORETICAL CHAPTER

This chapter is organised as follows. First, a literature review on the concepts that will structure this research. Then, the statement of the conceptual framework used for this dissertation. Finally, the statement of the main research and of two sub-questions that will guide this work.

2.1 Literature Review

The following section will describe the main points and debates around the concepts used for this research. These concepts are: Collective action, connective action, the different critiques to connective action, hybridity, networks, and some considerations worth taking into account for making a Latin American case study.

2.1.1 The Ongoing Influence of Collective Action

In *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965), Mancur Olson challenges Marxists and Durkheimian theories about social movement studies. Against those models that focus on structural problems and conflicts in society, he took an actor-centred approach. He argues that the most rational option for individuals is not to join a social movement, even if they think they can benefited from it, since it is more cost-efficient not to contribute to a group of people acting together for a common goal, riding free on their efforts, and enjoying the results without collaborating. His analysis shaped the classical formulation of one of the main problems that social movement studies have tried to answer ever since: if a rational individual can benefit from collective action without taking any part in it, why do people still act together for a common goal and how are they convinced to do so? Olson's answer was that organisations had two ways of earning support: either by coercion or by what he calls 'selective incentives', a type of enticement that guarantees that those individuals that do not contribute to the attainment of the group's goal can be treated differently from those who do (1965, p. 51). Both solutions involve organisations with considerable capacities to administer, distribute, and monitor those two measures.

Against the theories that focus on actors' purposes, other scholars have opted to study the role of environmental factors that cannot be shaped by human agency. This shift is known as the Political Opportunity Structure (POS) theory, a framework that has become so popular that it has been defined as the 'hegemonic paradigm among social movement analysts' (Goodwin, *et al.*, 1999, p. 28). In the first edition of *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (1994), Tarrow defines the POS as the 'consistent –but not necessarily formal or permanent– dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure' (p. 85). Gamson and Meyer (1996) consider that, by that time, the term was being used in social sciences 'to explain so much, it may ultimately explain nothing at all' (p. 85). Acknowledging some of the critiques, Tarrow opted to replace the term POS for 'Political Opportunity'. In the second edition of his book he recognised that the use of the word 'structure' could have led to the idea that opportunities did not need to be perceived by individuals in order to act as incentives to action (1998, p. 221). According to his new argument, most political opportunities and constraints are not structural, but 'situational, and cannot compensate for long for weaknesses in cultural, ideological, and organizational resources' (p. 77). Nonetheless, the term POS is still among the most prominent in the social movement literature and has laid the foundations for a new generation of concepts, such as the discursive opportunity structure (Koopmans & Statham, 1999), as well as the networked opportunity structure, the media opportunity structure, and the mediation opportunity structure (Cammaerts, 2012).

Even though Olson's modernist approach has been 'largely dismissed' (Tarrow, 2014, p. 469), Bennett and Segerberg (2013) argue that most of the current social movement theories 'rely on a set of defining assumptions centred on the importance of some degree of formal organization and some degree of collective identity that establishes common bonds among participants' (p. 32). Thus, they consider that most of the previous theories about how social movements work can be grouped under the label of collective action. In their opinion, those concepts fail to grasp the radical novelty of digitally enabled networks. For that reason, they coin the concept of the logic of connective action.

2.1.2 Connective Action and its Limits

The series of protests against the World Trade Organization conference of 1999 held in Seattle – better known as the 'Battle of Seattle' – have been identified as a turning point for the study of contentious action (Kahn & Kellner, 2004). As Tilly and Wood (2012, pp. 113-116) have noted, even if international bonds within social movements can be traced to the transatlantic connections of the abolitionist movement, the 'Battle of Seattle' marks a qualitative shift in the transnational construction of a common 'we'. Demonstrators were no longer protesting for a national issue, but in the name of a transnational movement and against transnational agents.

The rise of transnational contention tends to be immediately associated with globalisation, understood as all the processes by which citizens of the world are incorporated into a single global society (Albrow & King, 1992). However, caution is needed before establishing this link, since the latter is a process that has been developing for more than a century (Rosenau, 1999), while the former is less than twenty years old (Tarrow, 2001, p. 3). Bennett and Segerberg (2013) associate the qualitative shift in contentious politics not so much with globalisation, but with the multi-faceted processes of individualisation (pp. 22-26), and with the ongoing crisis of representative politics (Tormey, 2015). Both have been associated with globalisation (Giddens, 1991) but are considered to be much more recent phenomena (Putnam, 2001). Their main traits are the propensity to develop flexible political identifications based on personal lifestyles (Giddens, 1991), usually negative implications for traditional collective action (della Porta, 2005) and traditional political organisations (Micheletti, 2003), and a tendency among citizens to avoid adopting definitions of their problems that require trading off personal beliefs for more restrictive group identifications (Bennett, 1998).

The topics that this new kind of movement champion might resemble older concerns such as workers' rights or gender equality. Nonetheless, the mechanisms for organising action become in them much more personalised than in traditional movements, where the framing usually revolves around identity, ideology or membership. This qualitative difference lays the foundation for the distinction

that the authors make between their newly coined concept of the logic of connective action and their updated version of Olson's logic of collective action.

The movements in which they focus their analysis are organised by a different principle than their traditional counterparts. Building on the theoretical perspectives that consider communication to be constitutive of organisations (Cooren, *et al.*, 2011), Bennett and Segerberg go one step further and consider large-scale personal-level communication as the organising principle of networks working under the logic of connective action. This logic is also characterised by two other main traits: participants tend to be more individualised and less willing to adopt restrictive group identifications, and technology usually acts as the backbone that structures the densely layered networks of digitally networked action. Movements working under this logic do not need the levels of collective identity framing (Snow & Benford, 1988) nor the organizational resources (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) that used to be identified as key elements for the development of collective action. The aforementioned characteristics are wrapped up in the Bennett and Segerberg's definition of the logic of connective action as digitally networked action that uses broadly inclusive, easily personalised action frames as a basis for generating political engagement through technology-assisted networking (2013, pp. 2-5).

To analyse these phenomena, they propose three ideal types, mere abstractions of traits made from complex realities that cannot be found in such pristine form in society. Used with due care, the distinction is nonetheless useful, especially for analysing digitally enabled forms of action. They suggest thinking about the relation between these ideal types as a spectrum. At one of the extremes they situate organisationally brokered networks, 'coalitions of heavily brokered relations among organizations seeking a common collective action framing' (p. 13), which work under the traditional logic of collective action. At the other side they locate crowd-enabled networks, the most 'pure' ideal type of connective action, defined as 'dense, fine-grained networks of individuals in which digital media platforms are the most visible and integrative organization mechanisms' (p. 13). In the mid-range of the continuum they place the organisationally enabled networks of connective action, a hybrid network type that lies between the two extremes of the spectrum and combines elements of both of them. These hybrid networks are defined by the significant presence of organisations that opt to stay in the background to facilitate that individuals personalise and share their engagement through digital media.

The differences between these three ideal types can be grouped in five traits (pp. 42-52):

The organisational coordination of action: a decrease in the level of organisational coordination of action can be seen when going from the logics of collective to connective action. While organisationally brokered networks tend to show a strong level of coordination, it is rather loose

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among organisationally enabled networks. In crowd-enabled networks there is little or even no organisational coordination of action at all.

The role of technology: social technologies have an important role in the three ideal types. Collective action networks are mainly used by organisations to manage participation and coordinate goals. In hybrid networks, organisations tend to be the providers of both custom and commercial social technology outlays. In crowd-enabled networks, a multi-layered network of social technologies provides large-scale personal access for individuals.

The main content of the communications among participants: while communication content in collective action networks is centred on collective action frames, in connective action networks it is centred on inclusive personal action frames. The latter tend to be organisationally generated in hybrid networks and individually generated in crowd-enabled networks.

The role of social networks: while traditional organisations still opt to put more emphasis on interpersonal networks rather than in social networks, hybrid formations tend to adopt some organisational moderation to allow citizens' personal expressions through social networks. These personal expressions are much more frequent in crowd-enabled networks.

The role of organisations: In traditional forms of collective action, organisations are in the foreground, forming coalitions in which differences are bridged through high-resource organisation brokerage. While in hybrid networks they tend to stay in the background, in crowd-enabled networks they might even be shun by participants.

As Tarrow (2014) has noted, the decision to recover the 'largely dismissed Olsonian account' (p. 469) of the logic of connective action to group fifty years of social movement studies appears to be somewhat schematic. Especially considering that the authors attach the use of personalised action frames to the connective action ideal types, when there is significant evidence that personalisation is also an important element of organisationally brokered networks of collective action, such as the feminist or LGBT movements (Lichterman, 2004). Bennett (2014) addresses these critiques conceding that the trend toward personalisation appeared in social movements before connective action. However, he insists on considering digitally networked action as a turning point for contentious politics because it implies a much more granular personalisation than ever before. Evidence gathered in this research supports his idea, and even question the usefulness of traditional concepts such as Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, Commitment (WUNC) (Tilly, 1999) for measuring the effectiveness of some forms of digitally enabled contentious action.

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2.1.3 Critiques to the Concept of Connective Action: Race, Historical Perspective, and Long-Term Sustainability

At least three major trends can be identified when analysing the critiques that *The Logic of Connective Action* has received. Firstly, there are those who question the radical novelty that the authors assign to such networks, and call to put such cases on a historical perspective. Tarrow (2014), for example, has suggested that digital communication should not be seen as a turning point for social movement studies. Instead, he relates it with the effects that other forms of communication had during history, such as the influence that pamphlets had on the American Revolution (Bailyn, 1987), or the movement press on nationalist movements (Anderson, 1990). Bennett (2014) argues that those earlier technologies depended on organisations to set up, circulate, and control their content; while in connective action networks organisations give up to individuals part or all of the control over the message. Although Couldry (2015) considers that Bennett and Segerberg conducted a thorough examination of the conditions under which connective action influences long-term political processes, he also calls to contextualise such analysis with other case studies where digitally networked action was not successful or effective.

A second group, often gathered around the term 'clicktivism' or 'slacktivism' (Morozov, 2009), revolves around the lack of long-term commitment (Karpf, 2010) and sustainability (Pickerill & Krinsky, 2012) of these kinds of networks. Nevertheless, as Cammaerts, *et al*. (2013, p. 14) have pointed out, such forms of mediated resistance allow people, whose daily routines make frequent participation in contentious politics difficult, to legitimate, strengthen, and even fund more engaged activists. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) also recognise that long-term sustainability is one of the main issues of networks working under the logic of connective action – especially those that are crowd-enabled – but, as their case study about the G20 protests in 2009 proves (pp. 55-83), this type of contentious action is capable, under the right circumstances, of going beyond the spontaneous burst of demonstrations.

The alleged attempt of universality of the connective action theory is the target of the third group of criticism. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) strictly state that their conclusions are only valid for 'northern, post-industrial democracies' (p. 12). They also suggest that they might also apply to countries 'where authoritarian rule may result in individualized populations that fall outside of sanctioned civil society organization, yet may have direct or indirect access to communication technologies' (p. 28). Even though Latin America does not answer to neither of those two typologies, campaigns that can be identified as connective action have started to appear in the region, as is the case of the #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico (Treré, 2013), Brazil's 2013 protests (Pischetola, 2016) or the #NoAlVotoElectrónico network.

According to my literature review, out of the 51 case studies concerning connective action published in English or Spanish until June 2017[1], all the continents but Latin America have been covered: 14 were conducted in North America, 13 in Europe, 10 analysed purely online campaigns, 7 were in Asia, 3 in Africa, 3 in Oceania, and only one was a transnational study[2]. What remains understudied are the limits of the concept of connective action for studying the Latin-American context and how these kinds of movements manage to appear in a context not originally predicted by their authors. Bridging that research gap could help build a more rigorous theoretical framework for approaching such cases among the region; while at the same time providing a solid common ground for transnational studies about connective action.

Lichterman (2004) has noted that the allegedly global trend toward individualisation and personalised politics that Bennett and Segerberg use to lay the foundations of their theory might actually be a phenomenon that is predominant only in Western white societies and should not be automatically generalised. Aouragh and Chakravartty (2016) have also questioned the use of the concept of connective action for studying the Arab Uprisings of 2011, which ended up acting as a 'vindication for the universal appeal of Western liberal democracy delivered through the gift of the Internet' (p. 560), where social media is seen as technology that will bring freedom to developing countries. Against such views, Bang (2015) has argued that connective action should not be seen as a mere spawn of neoliberalism that prevents the repoliticization that Stoker (2007) imagined as a way of reverting the on-going 'spiral of cynicism' (Capiella & Jameson, 2010). Instead, he suggests that certain forms of connective action can be the channel for achieving a new form of civic engagement through more personalised, flexible, and thin forms of multi-layered political community and governance.

2.1.4 Hybridity in the Age of the Internet

Although the usefulness of the concept of hybridity for analysing contemporary issues has been contested (Deleuze & Guattari, 2015), it is still the most accurate framework to provide a detailed account of how networks of contentious action mix elements from different repertoires depending on their goals and strategies. Chadwick has noted that the tactics and dynamics of political organisations (2007) and media (2013) are changing due to the rise of the Internet and social media. His analysis

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[1] The research was conducted using the words 'connective action' or - its Spanish version *'acción conectiva'* – in the peer-reviewed journals in English or in Spanish that are indexed by the databases Scopus, Web of Science and SciElO. Only the articles that included any of those words in their title, abstract, or keywords were considered.

[2] For a detailed account of the 51 case studies surveyed for this research, please see the Annex.

provides a much more detailed account of how networks of contentious action utilise elements from different repertoires[3] depending on their goals and strategies to achieve them. Even though the limits separating political parties, interest groups, and social movements were never clearly outlined, they began becoming more blurred than ever since the 1990s, mainly due to the 'processes of hybridization based on the selective transplantation and adaptation of digital network repertoires previously considered typical of social movements' (Chadwick, 2007, p. 283). As a result, new hybrid forms of organisation that blend those tactics appeared in the last two decades, mainly thanks to the flexibility that the Internet allowed through the decrease in bureaucratic structures (Rheingold, 2002).

Brainard and Siplon (2002) proposed an alternative approach to hybridity by suggesting the study of the differences and similarities between the repertoires of interest groups and social movements as a 'generic continuum of organizations that mobilize' (p. 145). Their idea of the continuum resembles certain aspects of the spectrum between connective and collective action proposed by Bennett and Segerberg. However, evidence suggests that organisations tend to grab elements from one repertoire or the other depending on the context and the objectives they want to achieve (Bimber, *et al.*, 2006). Bennett and Segerberg (2013) raise a similar point when they state that it is possible to 'see action formations corresponding to our three [ideal] types side by side in the same action space' (p. 49). Therefore, as this study will argue in the results section, the figure of the continuum might not be the more accurate option to depict that dynamic, since there is no appropriate way of illustrating in it the coexistence of the three repertoires.

2.1.5   Networks: Source of Wealth or Reproducers of Inequality?

Within the network society (Van Dijk, 1991), social structures and activities have been progressively structured around digital information networks (Castells, 2009). Scholars' analyses range from optimistic ones, that consider networks to be a new source of wealth (Benkler, 2006), to pessimistic ones, that see in them a new phase of capitalism that allows the reproduction of inequality through participation (Mejías, 2013). Despite the wide range of studies, Couldry (2015) has noted that 'the larger question of what is a network society remains obscure' (p. 609). Even though there are still many unanswered questions about them and how they work, that networks are pervasive in our everyday lives is hardly contested. Contentious politics is just one of the many fields reached by its influence.

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[3] 'Limited set of routines that are learned, shared and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice' (Tilly, 2012, p. 42).

To lay the foundations for their concept of connective action, Bennett and Segerberg draw on Latour's actor-network theory (2005). Following his work[4], they state that communications technologies should be seen as 'non-human actants' that can be studied as potential network agents that are capable of exerting agency alongside human actors. As such, they are able of establishing relationships, activating participants, channelling resources and even establishing discourses. Latour (2015) has claimed that social sciences should trace again connections and associations of social phenomena instead of focusing on abstract amalgamations that, when studied, quickly lose any sense of dynamism and with it, any reference to its constituent connections. With the purpose of following his call to study 'the social' as an on-going process of binding together, this research will include a social network mapping of Twitter's #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign, its main actors and their associations. Nonetheless, reducing the understanding of a contentious action network to just a collection of human and non-human actors linked through digital communications can be problematic, since online and offline social relations of power might remain out of sight, as Loader (2013) has noted. Following his suggestions, this study will use a mixed methodology that combines some quantitative aspects of network analysis with semi-directed interviews with seven activists of the network. A detailed account about how the process was structured is provided in the Methodology section.

2.1.6   Contextualising the Developing World

Scholars have identified three main factors in northern post-industrial societies (Bennett & Segerberg, 2015), as well as in undemocratic and authoritarian countries (Rennick, 2013) that have eased the appearance of connective action formations: distrust in traditional politics, social fragmentation, and a tendency to engage with politics in a more personalised manner. Although it is possible to study connective action in Latin America without further ado, doing such thing would be implicitly assuming that the concept can be transferred from one context to the other without any cleavage or historical context (Shome & Hedge, 2002). Shigetomi and Makingo (2009) have noted that contextual conditions are especially important when studying the developing world, since constraints on economic resources and political freedom tend to have a bigger impact in such regions than in post-industrial Western societies. Even though the transnational reasons that underpin those three trends also have an impact in Latin America, they are rooted by distinctive regional factors as well. While

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[4] An alternative approach to networks would have been using Castells theories (2009), whose terminology for studying actors, interactions and exclusions within a network might be more accurate for dissecting a campaign based on social media. However, as one of the purposes of this dissertation is to dialogue with other studies about connective action to look for differences and similarities around the world, I will work with Latour's actor-network theory, one of the main pillars of Bennett and Segerberg's theoretical framework.

the process of social fragmentation has also been linked to the last wave of dictatorships of the continent (Lechner, 1992), the distrust in traditional politics and the personalisation of politics have been influenced by the weakly institutionalised parties (Coppedge, 1998), and by the pernicious impact of corruption (Seligson, 2002). In the case of Argentina, this is complemented by the crisis of representation that especially the right wing of the political spectrum suffered in 2001 after Fernando De La Rua's resignation from the Presidency (Torre, 2003). Since the election of Mauricio Macri as President in 2015, that crisis has started to affect the left wing of the spectrum (Torre, 2017).

Describing how the #NoAlVotoElectrónico case is rooted in Argentina's political context allows us to avoid the thin account of the social with which many network analysis work (Couldry, 2015), to have a better understanding of the political opportunities and constraints that open new political opportunities for contention (Tarrow, 1998), and to study why technological innovations that might transform social movements in one sector of a political system may fail to do so in others (Hassanpour, 2014).

Mauricio Macri, by then mayor of Buenos Aires City, propelled an electronic voting bill for the district in 2013 as part of his attempt to present himself as the leader that came to modernise Argentinian politics (Vommaro, *et al.*, 2015). The Unique Electronic Ballot bill (*Boleta Única Electrónica*, in Spanish) was passed before the end of that year without much resistance. The first voices against the bill appeared back then but few paid attention. That was, as four respondents agreed, the seed of the #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign, which grew in size and relevance during 2015, the first time the system was going to be used for the city's elections. A few days before that, Joaquín Sorianello, a member of the loose movement that was starting to gather around the hashtag #NoAlVotoElectrónico, was detained after proving that the system could be easily hacked. Despite the warnings, the voting happened without major issues and Sorianello was released a few days later. After winning the 2015 presidential election, Macri kept his electoral promise and sent a political reform bill to the Congress. The project included extending the system to the whole country, to supposedly end the regular delays in the scrutiny and the frequent stealing of the paper ballots of those political parties that do not have enough people to protect them. The #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign entered to a new phase by then. Tweetstorms[5] were planned, interviews were given, public lectures were organised, and many activists were invited to the Congress' committee hearings to

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[5] Coordinated action by a group of users to publish messages at the same time and with the same hashtag, generating a 'storm' of tweets to position their message among the Trending Topics of the country and reach a larger audience (Digital Activism Tactics, 2017).

explain how nobody could guarantee that the system was not going to be tampered with. After incorporating many changes, the bill was passed by the Lower Chamber on the 20th of October. The Senate was ready to vote for it after agreeing to remove from the ballots the questioned chip, a step that, according to the activists, would not be enough to prevent hackings. However, on the 24th of November, the bill was finally stopped when six governors withdrew their support, since the government refused to grant them a budget increase. The week after the national primary elections held on the 13th of August 2017, Macri announced its intention to insist with the bill on 2018.

2.2   Statement of Conceptual Framework

Even though it is an abstraction that cannot be found in such pure forms in real life, the logic of collective action provides an ideal type with the traits and repertoires that traditionally identify social movements. This gives the background to understanding what is new about connective action, what old traits have been adapted to new hybrid forms, and what the elements that have managed to survive such a transition are.

The logic of connective action is the backbone concept of this work, in which I will study how does a reduced crowd-enabled network of between 30 and 40 activists functions and the differences with its bigger counterparts. I will also argue that Argentina's #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign answers to a rare subtype that has not appeared in the 51 surveyed case studies: a single-issue network that does not work under the usual logic of organisationally enabled connective action, but as a crowd-enabled network. I will suggest in the 'Results' section that this hybrid formation shows the limits of Bennett and Segerberg's model of a continuum (2013) to depict the interactions between traditional contentious politics and movements working under the logic of connective action (*Figure 1*).
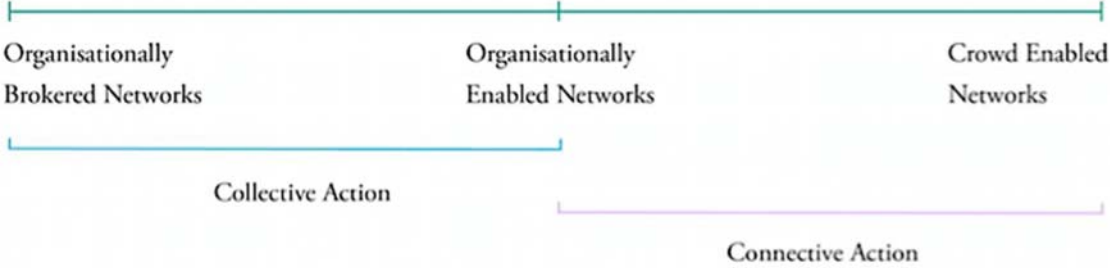

Figure 1: Bennett and Segerberg's Continuum Model

Chadwick's concept of hybridity (2007) provides a way of understanding how the three ideal types interact, overlap and even make a selective transplantation and adaptation of each other's set of repertories. I will operate with it to describe how the crowd-enabled single-issue network subtype draws elements from the three ideal types of contentious action.

Finally, network analysis procures the necessary tools for identifying, mapping, and examining the actors and connections of the #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign. In the 'Methodology' section I will detail why the map cannot be used for a full network analysis, but just for an explorative attempt to study the main nodes of the network and their interactions. Instead of basing the selection of interviewees on intuitions about who was relevant for the campaign, the explorative network map allowed a much more rigorous sampling for that purpose.

2.3   Statement of Research Question

This dissertation is structured around the following research question: *to what extent are small crowd-enabled networks qualitatively different from their larger counterparts?* Due to the characteristics of Argentina's #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign – a network of 36 activists in a context not originally contemplated by Bennett and Segerberg –, the following research sub-questions are also addressed:

How does a crowd-enabled network work when having to adopt the form of a single-issue campaign?

 What considerations should be taken into account to study connective action in a Latin-American country such as Argentina?

3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter is organised as follows: The first section describes the research strategy and rationale for the chosen methodology, the second section details how the network mapping was designed, and the third one reports the design of the interviews, while the last one enumerates the ethical considerations followed for this research.

3.1   Research Strategy and Rationale for the Methodology

This research was designed with a mixed methodology that combined a social network mapping with semi-structured interviews with seven activists that were part of the campaign. The research question was operationalized through the following sub-questions:

- What role did Twitter hashtags play in the campaign?

- How did the interviewees engage with the hashtag?

- Did they have any previous experience in contentious action?

- How did the members of the group engage with each other, and with policy makers?

- Has the campaign changed over time? If it did, how and why?

It would have been possible to draw several interesting conclusions only from conducting a social network analysis of the hashtag. However, such methods do not provide any insight about the relations of power between the online and the offline worlds (Loader, 2013). Therefore, the quantitative approach was complemented with qualitative interviews in which activists were invited to co-construct the findings of this research (Holstein & Gubrum, 1997) in ways that will be detailed further in this section.

Conducting interviews with the members of a loosely bounded movement without any clear leader entails the problem of deciding who is representative of at least one of the communities that coexist within any network. To avoid overseeing hidden groups (Heckathorn, 1997), such decision should not be taken according to the mere impressions of the researcher without any actual data. Thereby, the sampling for choosing the interviewees was made based on a social network mapping conducted on the interactions of the 36 Twitter users identified as key nodes of the network.

3.2   Design of the Network Mapping

Mapping the #NoAlVotoElectrónico network for deciding the interviews' sampling implied three main challenges. The first was how to determine that the network of interactions gathered around the Twitter's hashtag could be considered a valid window into the dynamics of the 'network of networks' (Krzywinski, *et al.*, 2011) of the campaign. The micro-blogging service is the most popular commercial social media among social movements for two reasons: because it allows activists and bystanders to give immediate account of what is happening (Gerbaudo, 2012), and because it is the main crosscutting networking mechanism for coordinating and redirecting resource flows to other resource platforms (Hemsley & Eckert, 2014). Therefore, Twitter can be analysed both as an organising mechanism in complex protest ecologies, and as a window on the wider network of a certain protest space due to its role as a threader of network layers across different platforms (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 92). Since different media present different kind of opportunities and limitations to activists and social movements (Cammaerts, 2012), the purpose of this research is not to study the

social network in itself, but what people do with what the technology enables them to do, and the structure this creates.

Once established that the map is a valid window into the much wider and complex protest ecology of the campaign, the second challenge to tackle was how to conduct the data gathering. Since Twitter's Application Programming Interface (API) limits any data collection to up to a week before the day of the search (Twitter, 2017), a four-step process was designed to getting around that limitation and gathering relevant data following Willis, *et al*.'s (2015) recommendations for mapping networks of influence. The steps were the following:

1. Every week between the months of May and July I collected the tweets of the hashtag #NoAlVotoElectrónico and other four related hashtags (#VotoElectrónico, #BoletaÚnica, #multivoto and #MurióElVotoElectrónico) with the software NodeXL following the steps proposed by Hansen, *et al*. (2011). The tweets of each week were compiled in an Excel dataset, totalling 1,896 messages created by 59 users. Since the electronic voting bill is not expected to be debated this year due to Argentina's mid-term elections, these were months of very low activity for the campaign. The next two steps of the process were then implemented to gather a more representative dataset.

2. The first data collection was complemented with a theoretical sampling (Draucker, *et al.*, 2007) conducted through "manual curation" (Gaffney, 2010) to include those activists that had been relevant for the campaign but did not interact with the hashtags during those three months. To identify them, I listed the names of every person that argued against the bill at the 2016 Congress' hearings, took part in the book published for the campaign (Busaniche, 2017), or who wrote for, or were interviewed by at least one of the three main national newspapers (*Clarín*, *La Nación* and *Página 12*) during that very same period. The list had 29 names in it. Of them, 17 had already appeared in step I. Thus, I looked for the Twitter users of the remaining 12. Five of them did not have an account. Steps I and II provided a list of 83 names.

3. One of the main problems of mapping a network is not leaving out "hidden populations" (Heckathorn, 1997), those groups that are connected with at least some nodes of the network but are not visible at first sight. To detect hard-to-reach individuals within the network, I applied a mixture of snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) and Heckathorn's respondent-driven sampling (1997): I showed the list of 83 names to three interviewees and asked them to think of any person that took part in the campaign and was not being

mentioned. Three names were brought up and included, leading to a final list of 86 people. This approach allowed me to validate and co-construct knowledge with the interviewees (Horner, 2016), as well as to reduce the impact of the researcher's arbitrariness into the sampling (Gile & Handcock, 2010).

4. Finally, I ran a data collection in NodeXL to get the last 3,200 tweets of each of the 86 users. The number of tweets was defined by the limit established by Twitter's API. However, the retrieved messages were in some cases more than 6,000, since that limit does not include retweets or replies. In this way, I was able to gather tweets from 2016 – the most relevant year of the campaign – from 96.51% of the users. Then I conducted a co-link analysis (Rogers, 2004) to only admit a user into the network if it received a reply, was mentioned, and/or retweeted by at least two other accounts of the list. Using the highest standard for network inclusion (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 78) allowed me to narrow the network to its most relevant users. It would have been possible to filter the interactions to only analyse those tweets that included one of the aforementioned hashtags. However, 19.44% of the people identified as key members of the campaign did not used them at all. To make sure that these activists were also included, I filtered the dataset using the following words and hashtags: #NoAlVotoElectrónico, #VotoElectrónico, #multivoto, #BoletaÚnica, '*voto electrónico*', '*boleta única*', and '*multivoto*'. The final version of the dataset included 36 users and 150,350 tweets.

The dataset was then run through the software Gephi (Heymann, 2014) to visualize the network. The map was designed with the ForceAtlas 2 layout (Bastian, *et al.*, 2009), combined with the Eigenvector centrality algorithm (Umadevi, 2013) for measuring and visualising the relevance of each user within the network, and the modularity algorithm (Blondel, *et al.*, 2008) for identifying communities of affinities within the network. Finally, a filter of colours was applied to visualise the 12 different communities that the algorithm identified according to the most frequent interactions between the users.

The results of the mapping confirmed decisions made for picking the first three interviewees for piloting the question guide: the three were among the top ten contributors of the network. For the other four interviews, I chose two other top ten users and two activists that were practically on the margins of the network, but who acted as gatekeepers for reaching communities that would have been otherwise disconnected from rest of the group. To pursue the widest possible range of opinions, I picked respondents with backgrounds as different as possible, such as political scientists, cybersecurity experts, scholars, NGO activists and lawyers. Out of the seven respondents, three are

part of what I will identify as the 'cybersecurity group', three are involved in what I call the community of 'experienced activists', and the remaining individual belongs to the reduced group of people that were mentioned in the interviews as possible brokers for bridging the differences between the two groups.

3.3   Interviews: Design of the Question Guide and the Codebook

The interviews were conversations of around 60 minutes in a semi-structured form, which allowed a predetermined order for the questions but still ensured some flexibility to change on the fly if a relevant topic came up during the conversation (Dunn, 2005). Following Berger's recommendations (1998, p. 58), the questionnaire was organised to move from discussing *what* the activists did to *why* they did it.

Even though it is advisable to always conduct interviews in person (Warren, 2002), the talks for this research were hold either by phone or using the videoconference software Skype due to the researcher's impossibility to travel to Argentina. The precautions suggested by Mann and Stewart (2001) were taken into account for minimising the impact of this decision.

A thematic analysis was designed with a mix of deductive and inductive methods (Flick, 2013, p. 306) to analyse the interviews following Attride-Stirling's six-step method (2001): coding, theme identification, thematic network construction, network description, summary, and pattern interpretation. The software NVivo was used to keep all the transcripts in one place, to draw links across the answers of the respondents, and to check the frequency with which categories and nodes appeared along the seven interviews.

A pilot of three interviews was conducted in April to test the question guide and the codebook. Their final versions were used for the last four interviews, recorded between June and July.

3.4   Ethical considerations

The two methods used for this research implied different methodological considerations. First I will develop the ones concerning the data gathering for social network mapping and how these issues where addressed. Then I will follow the same steps with the interviews. Finally, I will detail how the data of both methods was recorded, handled and stored.

In their guide to conducting ethical social media research, Townsend and Wallace (2016) identify four key areas of concern: issues of privacy, informed consent, anonymity, and the risk of harm to users when data is being collected. The data gathering was conducted following their recommendations.

The only tweets that were collected were those available for every user of the social network to see. Based on Twitter's terms of services (Twitter, 2017), researchers can consider that these messages are public and informed consent has been given (Corti, *et al.*, 2014). Although the argument has been contested (Salmons, 2014), the UK Data Service also suggests following those standards (2017).

Anonymity and the risk of harm were issues to consider not only for the data gathering but also for conducting the interviews. The prosecution of Joaquín Sorianello for having hacked Buenos Aires City's electronic voting system aroused the additional problem of how to design the research without risking the activists' security. Despite justice finding Sorianello 'not guilty' of the crimes he was accused of committing (Ferrari, 2016), I decided to anonymise (Van den Hoonard, 2003) all the data that could lead to any activists being identified, including names of people and organisations, as well as their gender, age, job and any other information that could lead to their identification.

An additional issue aroused during the pilot. After telling one of the interviewees that his name would not appear in this research, he was a bit confused about having to use it for signing a consent form. To avoid this issue, I did not ask the rest of the respondents to sign the document. Instead, I read the form to them before starting the interview and then asked them to give their oral consent on the record, as Warren (2002) has suggested.

All the data gathered for this dissertation was managed according to the UK Data Service's recommendations (2017). My dissertation advisor, Bart Cammaerts, approved on the 29th of March 2017 the measures taken to address the ethical concerns regarding my research.

4 RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter is devoted to analysing the results of the research. For that purpose, it is structured in five different sections. The first section studies how the campaign was structured, the second section details the differences that existed between the activists, the third section describes how the campaign worked and why can be considered to be different to previous case studies, the fourth section analyses the obstacles that the activists faced for being a rather small crowd-enabled network, and the fifth section details the attempts to transition the network losing as few members as possible.

4.1 This Is Not a Movement

The map of the interactions that the 36 key activists of the #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign held on Twitter should not be used for a full network analysis. An in-depth study of such type must contemplate structural properties such as centrality, betweenness, and structural holes (Monge & Contractor, 2006). Even though it would be possible to calculate those measures from the map, the results would not provide valid figures to understand the dynamics of the campaign, since the visualisation is an *ad-hoc* design to go around Twitter's API limitations and identify key activists to achieve a representative sample for the interviews. Such visual representation is also useful to gain some insight into the network's structure and communities (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 156). However, merely tentative interpretations might be derived from it, rather than facts or laws. Only by complementing them with qualitative methods such as interviews is it possible to understand cultural factors that can help to analyse participation, mobilisation and political values (Loader, 2013).

Twitter is just one of the many layers that are part of the 'network of networks' of the #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign. The respondents stated that WhatsApp conversations, email exchanges, public lectures and face-to-face meetings are some of the other types of interactions that shaped the campaign. According to the 'hive plot' model (Krzywinski, *et al*., 2011) for analysing complex large-scale networks, all of those interactions are part of the 'network of networks' formed by only partially intertwined layers, as illustrated in *Figure 2*. Some of those layers might be structured with different and even opposing logics. The activists that are nodes in more than one layer act as threads that underpin the structure. Within such an arrangement, power and recognition tend to be more dispersed, which could explain why some members of the network do not recognise other activists as member of the same campaign – because they are nodes in different layers.
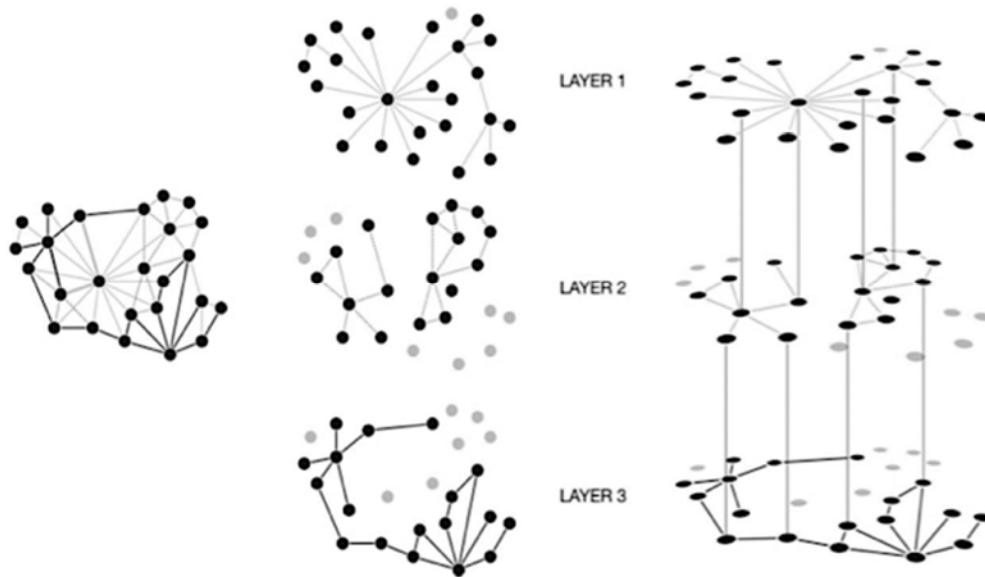
Figure 2: 'Hive plot' model (Krzywinski, *et al*., 2011) for analysing 'networks of networks'. The right view represents how layers can be threaded by various networking connections. The centre view depicts identifiably discrete networks. The left illustrates a look through the layers.

Pischetola (2016) has contested that Twitter plays a prominent role in Latin-American complex protest ecology, since Facebook was the most relevant social media for Brazil's 2013 protests. Even though Facebook is the most popular social network in Argentina (We Are Social, 2017), Calvo's research (2015) suggests that Twitter is still the favourite technology for contentious action in the country. This research points in the same direction as Calvo's, since respondents unanimously agreed that Twitter was the most important platform used for the campaign. Therefore, further research is needed to achieve a more nuanced insight into how activists use each communication technology for digitally networked action in Latin America, if there is any difference with how they are used in the rest of the world, and how the structure of each of those technologies facilitate or obstruct such actions.

The #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign is such a loose network that even some of its members doubt that they were actually part of one: 71.43% of the respondents stated that they do not consider that the network achieved the status of a coalition, movement or campaign of any type. 'I think we were close but we did not get to be one', said *Respondent 5*. The most pessimistic was maybe *Respondent 2*: 'We are not a coordinated campaign, we are not a movement, we are not a coalition…or at least not in the traditional sense. We are close to nothing'. Diani's (1992) traditional definition of social

movements considers them as 'networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity' (1992, p.13). Nevertheless, the members of this campaign do not share a common identity. It could be argued that they are a coalition, understood as a 'mutual agreement between distinct activist groups to cooperate and work together toward a common goal' (McCammon & Moon, 2015), but the agreement to campaign against the bill was not mutual or explicit. However, the map suggests that the activists are a part of a network of contentious action, even if part of them does not think so. Although Yanacopulos (2005) considers that coalitions imply more value and commitment than regular networks of contentious action, Bennett and Segerberg (2013) consider that there is no real difference between the two of them, since both work according to the same logic. Therefore, the #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign can be considered as a coalition, since it is part of a technology-enabled network functioning under that logic (pp. 88-89).
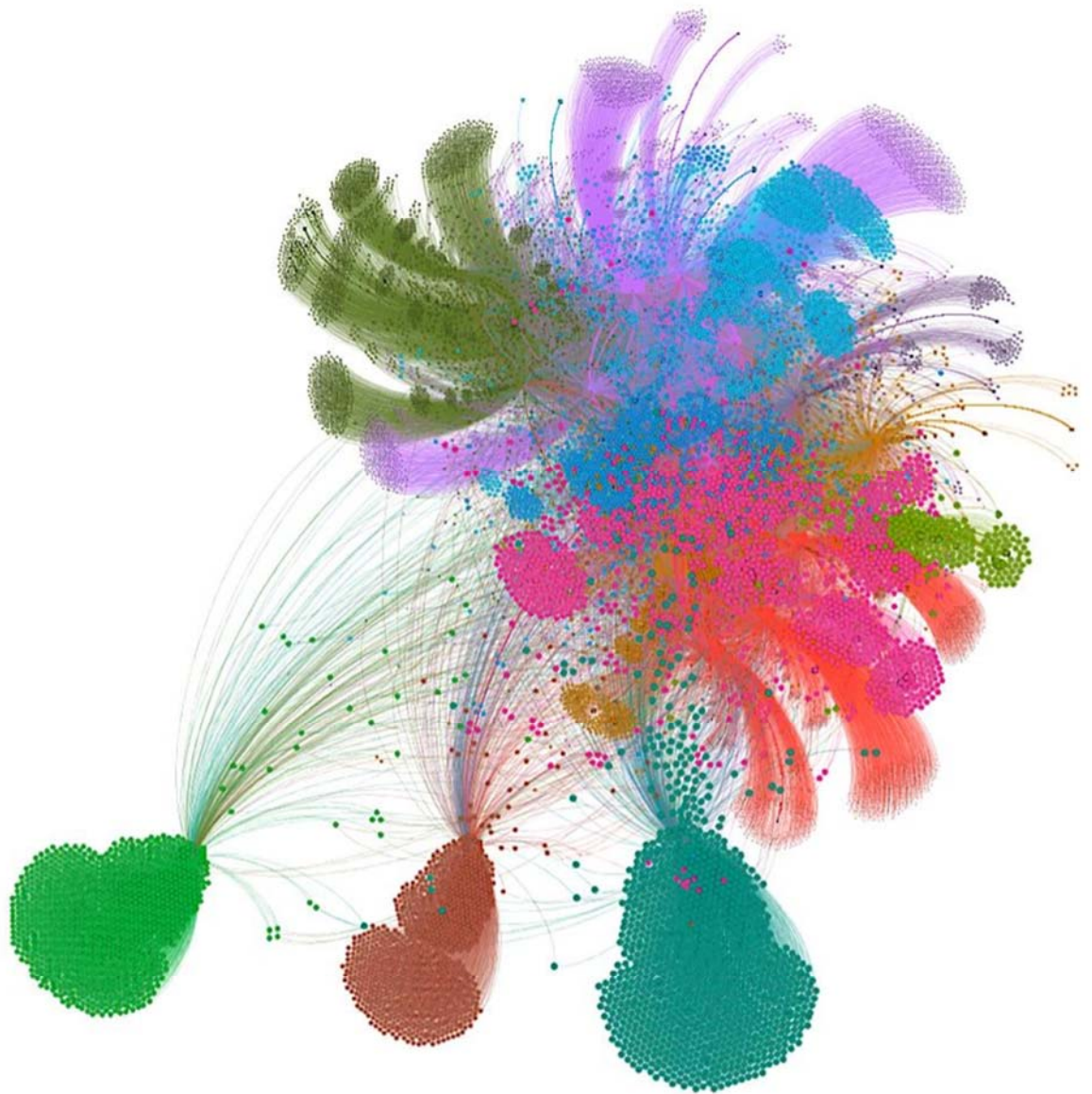
Figure 3. Network map of the interactions of the 36 key activists of the #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign

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4.2   Anarchists, Cyber-libertarians and Experienced Activists

Based on the results of the modularity algorithm, the software identified 12 communities within the network (*Figure 3*). Each of them has a different colour in the graph. The data is consistent with a topic that came up in all the interviews: The existence of two main different groups around which members of the network tend to cluster. Even though the interviewees refer to it with different names, they all agreed that some sort of divide existed. *Respondent 4* expressed it as follows:
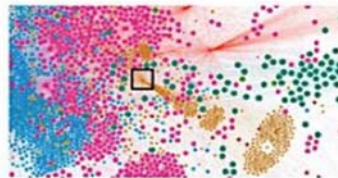
> *The mentality that comes from the hacking culture makes difficult to agree on a common strategy. […] They debate the technical issues and get really angry with those that don't understand certain basic rules of computing. […] And, apart from being excessively centred on the technical issues, there are also certain difficulties to articulate a coherent political message.*

The network data confirmed this hypothesis. On the left side of the visualisation, grouped around the blue colour, there are those who I will refer to as the 'cybersecurity experts', a group of scholars and technicians with the skills to identify and exploit the vulnerabilities of the electronic voting system. They form the second biggest community of the network, with 14.27% of the interactions. On the right side of the network, gathered around the pink colour, are those who I will refer to as the 'experienced activists', a group of people with diverse backgrounds that have some sort of previous experience in activism within political parties, unions, NGOs, universities or other kind of organisations[6]. They are the biggest community, with 15.58% of the interactions. This theoretical grouping was not only ratified by the respondents, but it is also consistent with the already observed differences between experienced activists and newcomers to contentious politics in cases of digitally networked action (Verhulst & Walgrave, 2009). The divide is a theoretical simplification that, as any theorize, does not grasp all the complexity that reality has. The closer a user is to the centre of the network, the blurrier the differences between one group and the other are. Nonetheless, such a divide does exist: the network map, the activists' backgrounds, and the respondents' testimonies give well-grounded reasons to affirm it. Their differences even influence how they perceived the campaign. The five interviewees who thought that they had not reached the status of movement are experienced activists. The only two respondents that considered it a movement were two users of the cybersecurity group who had no previous experience in contentious action.

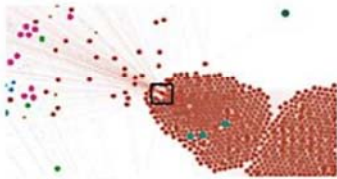[6] The data about the activists' background was manually collected from their CVs, public profiles on Twitter, newspapers articles, and interviews conducted with mainstream media or with the author of this dissertation.
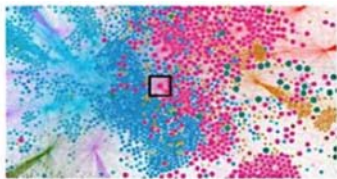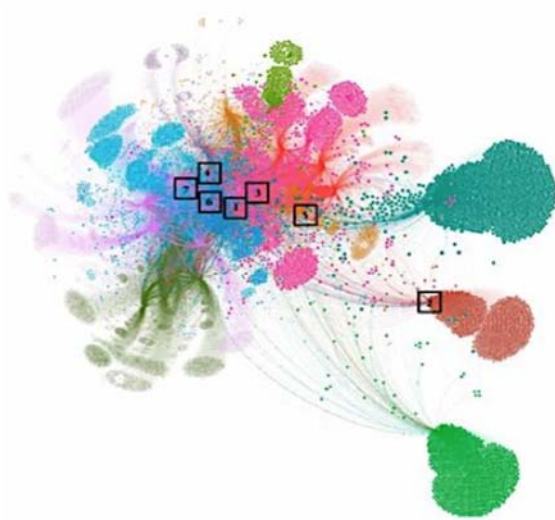
Respondent 1

Respondent 2

Respondent 3

Respondent 4

Respondent 5

Respondent 6

Respondent 7

Figure 4: Location in the network map of the seven respondents chosen for the interviews

Respondent 4 is one of the activists that are trying to bridge the differences between the two groups. His background as an NGO activist and Internet policy expert situates him right in the middle of the two communities. This is consistent with his location in the network map, where he appears close to the centre (*Figure 4*). Even though the frequency of his interactions places him within the cybersecurity community, he admits feeling in between the two groups. He acknowledges that the lack of experience in politics of his peers is one of the main obstacles:

Many of the activists with the most extreme positions are followers of Argentina's eldest hackers, really prestigious people that share the ideology of the fathers of the Internet. [Name of the person], for example, it's a guy that has the same ideology than 'Vint' Cerf, the father of the Internet. They are anarchists and libertarians.

His description is consistent with what Misseri (2015) has defined as cyber-libertarianism: a wide range of political, philosophical and economic beliefs that plead for the State not to interfere in any way with the Internet. The most radical versions, close to anarchist views, would rather not have a State at all. *Respondent 2*, also with a background in activism, defines them as a 'group of extremely skilled and talented people that, because of the nature of their work with computers, sometimes have some trouble leaving their differences behind to pursue a common goal'. When asked about it, *Respondents 3* and *5*, both members of the cybersecurity community, partially agreed with the definition. However, *Respondent 3* added a significant commentary: 'It is not that we are not team players. We usually work in teams in conferences, hackathons or the EkoParty[7]. But it is true that sometimes we can find it a bit more difficult to work side by side with people from different backgrounds'. The problem is consistent with the different expectations that newcomers and experienced activists tend to have in a new campaign (Verhulst & Walgrave, 2009). This difference also appeared in the interviews. While those with a background in cybersecurity admitted being profoundly disappointed by the rather low impact of their findings about the vulnerabilities of the electronic voting system, those with some experience in politics were more optimistic about the outcome: the consensus built in the Congress around the electronic voting system was broken, a few mainstream media outlets reported about the dangers of the system, and the bill was finally not voted.

4.3   Crowd-Enabled Advocacy

Bennett and Segerberg (2013) define single-issue networks as coalitions that engage people to support causes outside of event-centred contention acts such as campaigns or protests (pp. 45-46). They tend

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[7] Biggest cybersecurity conference in Latin America.

to be organisationally brokered networks of collective action or organisationally enabled networks of connective action. Among them, a recurring organisational signature is NGOs and other civil society organisations joining loosely together to provide some form of networking backbone for the campaign (p. 51). Such an organisational signature was barely visible in the #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign during 2016. If we filter the tweets of the dataset just to map the interactions held in that year, 11 out of the 16 NGOs, universities and other non-profit organisations that are part of the campaign fall off the map for not achieving the co-link threshold (Rogers, 2014). That pattern started to change in 2017, which suggests that the network is transitioning to a new form to adapt to the new scenario.

As it was mentioned in the literature review, five traits identify the three ideal types of contentious politics (organisationally brokered networks, organisationally enabled networks, and crowd-enabled networks) created by Bennett and Segerberg (2013): coordination of action, role of technology, main content of the communications among participants, role of social networks, and role of organisations. If the #NoAlVotoElectrónico coalition answered to Bennett and Segerberg's models, most of their traits should correspond to the first two types. However, both the interviews and the network map indicate that the campaign had in 2016 at least three traits of a crowd-enabled network: the minimum organisational coordination of action; the large-scale personal access to multi-layered social technologies; and the use of social networks to share personal action frames. The remaining two traits are hybrid forms. While the content of the communications during the campaign varied between collective action frames and inclusive personal action frames, the role of organisations transitioned from being practically irrelevant (a trait of crowd-enabled networks), to now being pointed out as the only ones capable of bridging the differences between the groups through high-resource organisation brokerage (a trait of organisationally brokered networks).

This model – to which I will refer to as a 'crowd-enabled single-issue network' subtype – has not appeared before in the works about connective action. Even though Bennett and Segerberg (2013) never mentioned the possibility of such a subtype, they did state that it is conceivable to 'see action formations corresponding to our three types side by side in the same action space' (p. 49). Nevertheless, their proposed model of a continuum that ranges from organisationally brokered collective action to crowd-enabled connective action (*Figure 1*) is not the most appropriate way of depicting the interactions between the three ideal types. According to their characterisation, the crowd-enabled single-issue network subtype should be somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. However, the authors clearly state that such a place corresponds to the 'hybrid form of organizationally enabled connective action [that] sits in the mid-range of our continuum' (2013, p. 45). For avoiding misinterpretations, I propose replacing the continuum model for a Venn diagram (*Figure*

4). Such a model can help clarify the different forms of hybridity that might take place between the three ideal types, since it has an exclusive area where the three might concur, as well as other three sections to depict how only two of them may overlap.

A. Organisationally Brokered Networks
B. Organisationally Enabled Networks
C. Crowd-Enabled Networks
D. Crowd-Enabled Single-Issue Sub-Type
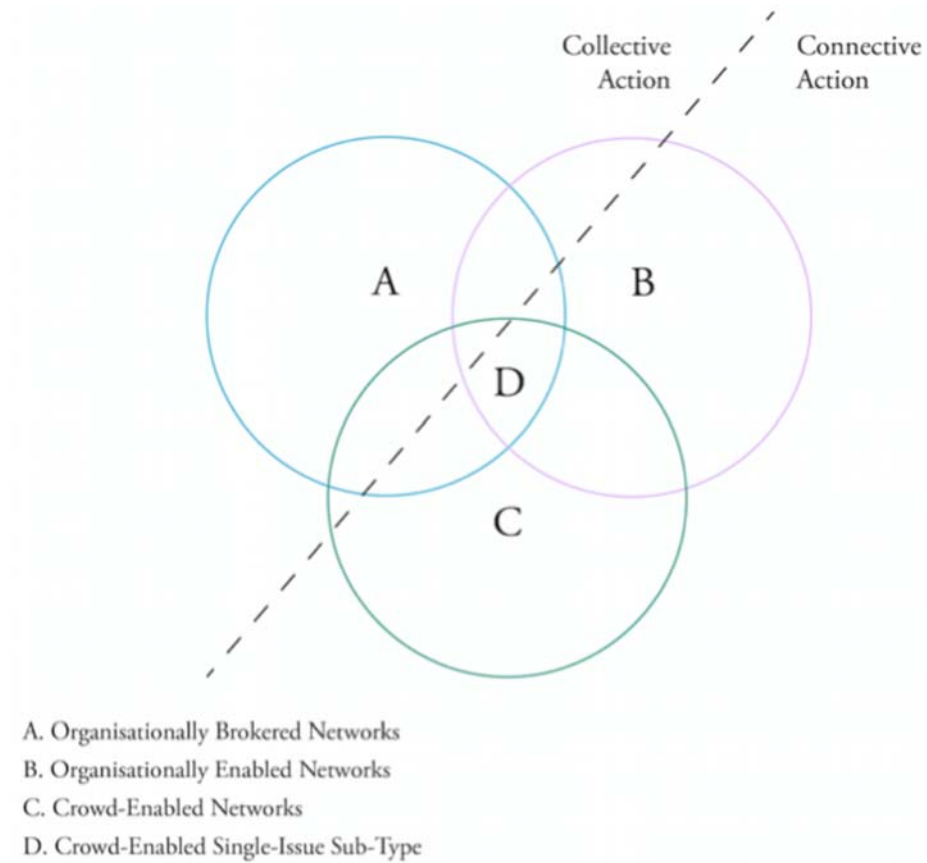
Figure 5: Venn Diagram Alternative for Depicting Bennett and Segerberg's Three Ideal Types

4.4   Too Small to Succeed?

The difficulty for scaling up in size is another peculiarity that distinguishes the network formed for the #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign from the cases of crowd-enabled connective action that have been studied until now. Bennett and Segerberg identify this trait as one of the main features of such networks. However, a question that did not arise is what happens when the numbers are nowhere near the hundreds or even thousands mobilised in those cases. Does the scale of the network change how this logic works? When does connective action stops being connective action? The evidence

gathered for this research suggests that connective action can still function according to its main traits in a network of between 30 and 40 people. Nonetheless, its relatively small scale appears to be an obstacle in transitioning to a new form as a response to political opportunities and threats. Although in every transition crowd-enabled networks loose part of the communities that helped shaped it to evolve to a more compact form (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), such a movement is more strenuous when the network only has a handful of key nodes. Losing some of them in the transition might irremediably cripple the campaign, since many nodes act as gatekeepers for reaching whole communities, as is the case of *Respondent 2* (*Figure 4*). That is why bridging the differences between the two groups is so important; to make the transition to the new form with as many key nodes as possible.

Studying the cases that did not succeed enables us to achieve a better understanding of how networks working under the logic of connective action, react to different threats and opportunities, and transition over time (Couldry, 2015). But can it be said that the #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign did not succeed, as the two of the cybersecurity group considered? If we turn to the literature for more precise measures of success and effectiveness, the ability of a movement to display WUNC (Tilly, 1999) is one of the most common instruments used for such purpose. Despite the concept being originally put forward for analysing traditional movements, Freelon (2016) has provided a model for evaluating cases of digitally networked action with it. Even though he recognises that the Worthiness element cannot be measured in a quantitative form, he provides clear parameters for measuring the other three.

For Unity, he suggests considering the usage of a small number of hashtags as an indicator of a unified message. Just taking that parameter into account would indicate that the #NoAlVotoElectrónico network has unity, since the campaign was centred on that hashtag. Nevertheless, that measure alone is not completely accurate to study what Tilly (1999) originally defined as 'wearing or bearing of common symbols, [and/or] direct affirmation of a common program or identity' (p. 261). The dataset compiled for this research shows that 19.44% of the key users of the campaign did not use the main hashtag at all. When asked about it, interviewees gave different reasons for not doing so. While *Respondent 3* argued that he would rather not use hashtags because it is a 'fad' that prevents 'critical thinking', *Respondent 5* stated that he had never realised that he was not using them: 'If I have to be honest, I never noticed it. That's just another piece of evidence about how disorganised the campaign was. I should have definitely used it'. This fact, together with the existence of two very different communities within the network, confirms that only the use of hashtags should not be considered as a valid measure of unity for digitally networked action.

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For Numbers, Freelon (2016) recommends counting the users that post a certain hashtag or keyword, as well as the number of users associated with each community to the conversation. Even though the campaign did not show the rapid scalability of other crowd-enabled networks, the dataset of 150,350 tweets and the network map hint toward the conclusion that it achieved 'numerical support' (Tilly, 1999, p. 261). That the hashtag was a Trending Topic in Argentina at least ten times in 2016 points toward the same idea (Trendinalia, 2017).

For measuring Commitment, Freelon (2006) advises disaggregating a social media conversation into multiple communities and then determining how committed each one of them remains between two sequential points in time. Comparing the interactions held in the months of November 2016 and June 2017 shows that only one out of the twelve communities is not in the network anymore. Although that figure might give the idea that the network has remained relatively stable along time, that conclusion is altered when analysing the nodes' behaviour, because 30.56% of the 36 key users do not appear in the network in June 2017 (*Figure 6*). This does not necessarily imply that they have left the campaign, as Freelon states. Chadwick (2007) has argued that one of the main characteristics of hybrid digital networks is their use of 'sedimentary digital structures': email lists, social media contacts or other types of technologies that can be reactivated or redirected for future actions. Precisely this happened in August, a few days before the end of this research, when the network against the electronic voting system in Argentina was reactivated after the Electoral Court Justice announced that a biometric system of identification was going to be tested during the national primary elections of 13th of August[8].

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[8] Since such events occurred after I put an end to the data collection for this research, those tweets have not been included in the dataset used for this dissertation.
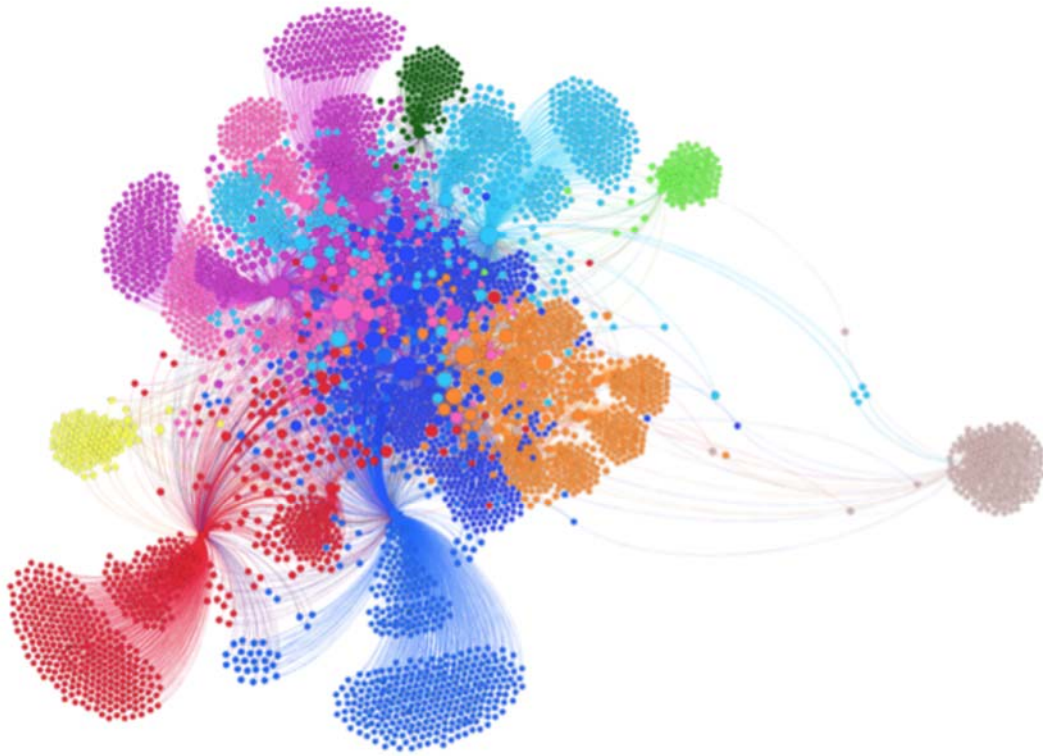
Figure 6: Network map of the interactions within the #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign on June 2017

If there is no clear way of measuring Worthiness in a quantitative way, and the proposed methods for doing it with Unity and Commitment have proved to be inaccurate; can WUNC still be considered a measure of effectiveness for digitally networked action? Even though Bennett and Segerberg use it for evaluating connective action campaigns (2013, p. 20-22), evidence suggests that Freelon's version of Tilly's concept might not be the most appropriate way of doing it, at least with some crowd-enabled campaigns such as #NoAlVotoElectrónico.

An alternative way of determining to what extent the campaign was effective is using the three criteria proposed by Bennett and Segerberg (2013) for evaluating single-issue networks: achievement of their goals; media coverage of the issue; and the elite's uptake of their discourse. Measured by those

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parameters, the campaign should be considered a success, since the bill was not voted in 2016[9], a few mainstream media outlets started to report on the objections to the system after Sorianello's arrest (Aguerre, 2017), and even some congressmen and women ended up changing their minds about the bill. That was the case of Margarita Stolbizer, who voted for the project, then admitted having reservations about it, and ended up calling for the Senate to modify the bill (Mendoza, 2016). According to Aguerre (2017), the campaign even had an impact on public opinion, since the polling company Ágora detected that the positive image of the electronic voting system suffered a ten-percent point drop between October and November 2016.

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[9] Most of the interviewees considered that the failure of the negotiations of the ruling party with the opposition's governors was the main reason why the bill was not voted, and not the #NoAlVotoElectrónico coalition. Measuring such thing goes beyond the purpose of this research, but the fulfilment of the other two criteria for evaluating single-issue networks suggest that the campaign contributed to build the political opportunity for that to happen.
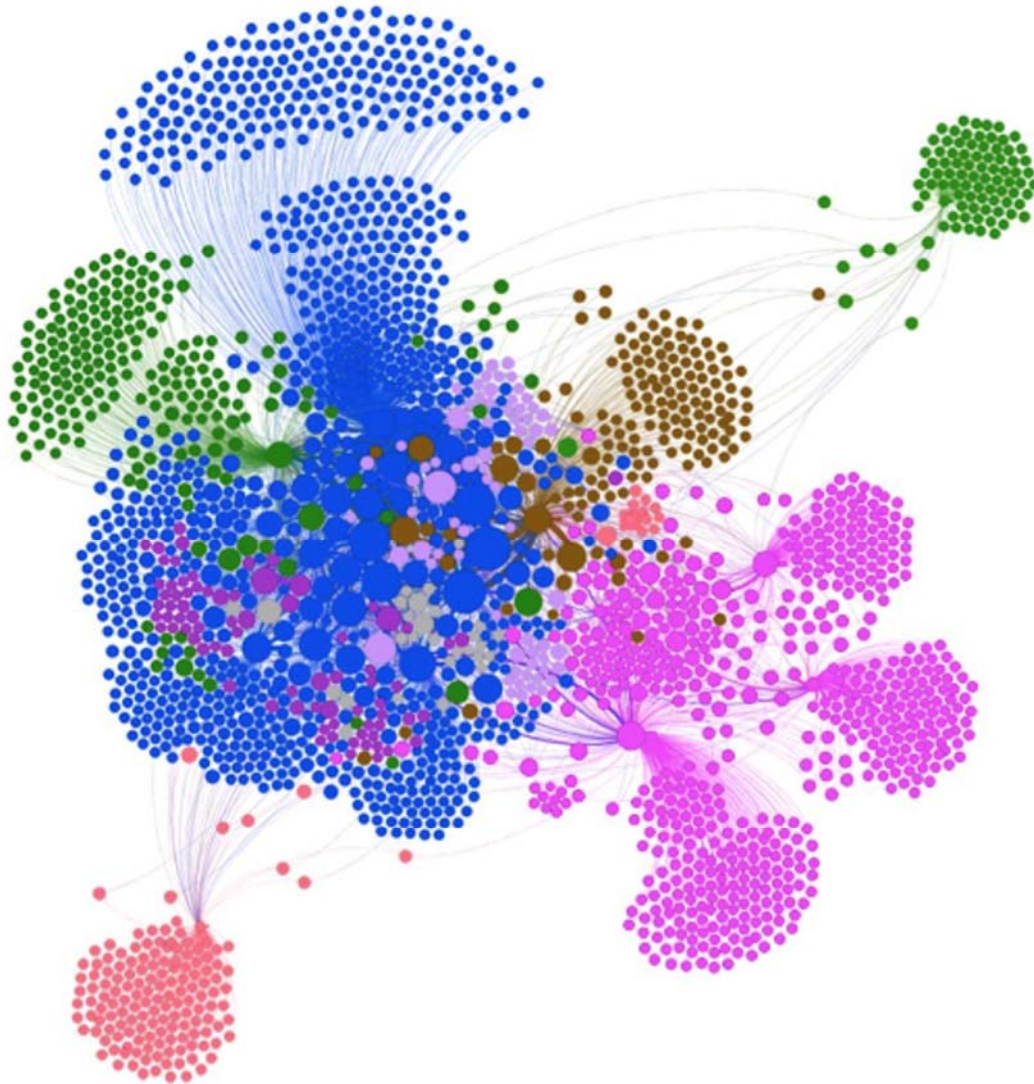
Figure 7: Network map of the interactions within the #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign on November 2016

4.5   How to Transition Without Being Crippled

One of the main observations that scholars have made about connective action is that the movements working under this logic show several difficulties in sustaining their activities in the long term (Dolata

& Schrape, 2015). The few available researches (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Toepfl, 2017) about crowd-enabled networks that have successfully passed the test of time show a common pattern – all of them successfully transitioned to a more compact form after traditional organisations stepped up, leaving the background of the network and assuming a much relevant role in the preparation, coordination and execution of activities. It is still too soon to determine if the #NoAlVotoElectrónico coalition will follow that path. Only next year, if the government finally decides to persist with the electronic voting bill, it will be possible to clearly state if the network was transformed and how. However, there are enough hints to show that it is currently shifting. To check if there have been significant changes in the network's backbone during the last year, the dataset was filtered just to map two sequential points in time (Freelon, 2016): June 2017 and November 2016, the month in which the bill was debated and finally stopped. The analysis of those two moments (*Figures 6* and *7*) provides three facts that underpin the idea that the network is going through a transition. Firstly, 30.56% of the key nodes are either in a latent state (Chadwick, 2007) or have completely left the campaign, a typical reaction within movements that are losing steam after a first wave of enthusiasm (Toepfl, 2017). Secondly, an analysis of the tweets of each period shows a significant decrease in the number of messages (19,173 in November 2016 and 6,846 in June 2017) and a slight increase in the amount of messages that include links to external websites (23.12% in November and 27.71% in June), a frequent behaviour of networks that enter a "resource-seeking phase" and start pointing to places where they can find new assets to stabilise or even enlarge the network (Starbird, *et al.*, 2012). Thirdly, there is a 116% increase in the number of NGOs' Twitter accounts[10] that surpassed the co-link threshold (Rogers, 2004) and made it to the network map. These findings are consistent with the testimonies of the interviewees, since *Respondents 4, 5* and *6* confirmed that there are informal conversations via email lists and WhatsApp groups, as well as some face-to-face meetings about how to go have a more structured organisation for next year's campaign. For *Respondent 4*, the biggest dilemma is now whether to try to establish an alliance with at least part of the opposition parties or to persist campaigning alone:

Those who identify with those [cyber-utopian] movements tend to be mathematicians or logical thinkers. They see everything as a true or false, yes or no, black or white. For them, there's nothing to negotiate […] [But] life is in colours and politics has even more colours than life. You have to be willing to negotiate everything, because the only truth [in politics] is the truth reached through a consensus. But well… they have another vision.

The fact that the #NoAlVotoElectrónico coalition is evolving to a new form provides a significant opportunity to test Bennett and Segerberg's theories and gather evidence to address one of the main

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[10] Six accounts were present in the network in November 2016. The number soared to 13 in June 2017.

questions that they proposed for further research: how crowd-enabled networks negotiate transitions over time in response to different external opportunities and threats (2013, p. 18). Whether they achieve their goals or not, tracking the development of the campaign from now on can provide relevant insights on how the differences between diverse communities of a network are brokered (or not); helping to study if there is any difference on how newcomers and experienced activists deal with changes over time; analysing the interaction with other layers of the network such as face-to-face interactions, emails or SMS/WhatsApp messages; and trying to understand what impact the Latin-American context has overall.

5 CONCLUSION

Bennett and Segerberg (2013) have established a three ideal type model for studying digitally networked action: organisationally brokered collective action, organisationally enabled connective action, and crowd-enabled connective action. This last ideal type has garnered a great deal of attention for analysing movements such as Occupy (Bennett, *et al.*, 2014), the *indignados* in Spain (Anduiza, *et al.*, 2013), or the 'Arab Uprisings' in Africa (Rennick, 2013), among other events. Since one of the main traits of this ideal type is the rapid scalability with which large demonstrations can be achieved in reduced time frames, most of the case studies have focused in protests that attracted tens or hundreds of thousands. However, the question about connective action's reducibility is not present in the 51 surveyed case studies, which led to the inquiry that structures this research: *to what extent are small crowd-enabled networks qualitatively different from their larger counterparts?* Evidence gathered from the #NoAlVotoElectrónico case confirms that, although a network of between 30 and 40 people can still work according to the main traits of connective action, its size affects the possibilities of transitioning to a new form as a result of new political opportunities and threats. If large crowd-enabled networks tend to leave out entire communities when switching to a more compact form (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), their smaller counterparts cannot afford that luxury, since losing some of their key nodes carries the risk of irremediably crippling the campaign.

As the network map hinted and the interviews confirmed, the campaign against the electronic voting bill in Argentina is also a rare case of a single-issue network that does not work under the usual logic of organisationally enabled connective action, but as a crowd-enabled network. Describing such hybrid subtype allowed to shed light on the limits of the continuum model proposed by Bennett and Segerberg (2013) to depict their three ideal types. As it was argued, using a Venn diagram instead can provide a more accurate way of portraying the interactions between the three of them.

The implications of this study are also relevant for traditional social movement studies. Tarrow (2014) has argued that the impact that digital communication technologies have had for contentious action should not be seen as a turning point for the field. Instead, he suggests relating it with the influence that other technologies had, as it's the case of pamphlets and the American Revolution (Bailyn, 1987) or of the printing press and nationalist movements (Anderson, 1990). However, as Bennett (2014) has noted, the difference is qualitative: while those earlier technologies still depended on organisations that acted as a backbone of the movement and controlled the communications' content, connective action networks tend to be structured around digital communication technologies, through which organisations give up to their members part or all of the control over the message. Evidence gathered in this study backs Bennett's position, since Tilly's traditional concept of WUNC (1999) proved to be an inadequate instrument for measuring the #NoAlVotoElectrónico campaign's effectiveness.

One of the main purposes of this research was to give a first step toward bridging the research gap about connective action that exists between Latin America and the rest of the world. Even though the region does not answer to neither of the two typologies proposed by Bennett and Segerberg (2013), three possible cleavages were proposed to link to the continent the worldwide trends of social fragmentation, distrust in traditional politics, and personalisation of politics: the last wave of dictatorships in Latin America, the impact of corruption, and the weakness of institutions. In addition to that, the on-going crisis of representation (Torre, 2003, 2017) must be considered when addressing cases in Argentina. Although further research is needed to confirm the link between these issues and the appearance of connective action in the region, confirming that the concept can be used in a context not originally contemplated by its authors contributes to setting the foundations for further transnational studies that address the differences and similarities of connective action between different regions of the world. Until now, such research has only been conducted among English-speaking countries (Vromen, *et al.*, 2014).

As it was argued in this study, the #NoAlVotoElectrónico coalition is currently transitioning to a new form as a result of the government's intention of persisting with the electronic voting bill in 2018. Its reduced scale provides a valuable opportunity to conduct further fine-grained research to know more about how crowd-enabled networks negotiate transitions, how newcomers to contentious politics and experienced activists react to that process, and what role the same technology that enabled the rapid rise of such network has now that the campaign is trying to adapt to a new context.

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5.1 APPENDIX: Literature Review About Connective Action, Classified By Continent

North America – 14 case studies

	Country	Year	Author	Title
1.	USA	2014	Bennett, W., Segerberg, A. & Walker, S.	Organization in the crowd: peer production in large-scale networked protests.
2.	USA	2014	Papacharissi, Z.	Affective Demands and the New Political
3.	USA	2014	Boler, M., Macdonald, A., Nitsou, C. & Harris, A.	Connective labor and social media
4.	USA	2014	Bennett, W., Segerberg, A., & Walker, S.	Organization in the crowd: peer production in large-scale networked protests
5.	USA	2014	Boler, M., & Nitsou, C.	Women activists of occupy wall street: Consciousness-raising and connective action in hybrid social movements
6.	USA	2014	Boler, M., Macdonald, A., Nitsou, C., & Harris, A.	Connective labor and social media: Women's roles in the 'leaderless' Occupy movement
7.	USA	2015	Caraway, B.	OUR Walmart: a case study of connective action
8.	USA	2015	Hodges, H. & Stocking, G.	A pipeline of tweets: environmental movements' use of Twitter in response to the Keystone XL pipeline
9.	USA	2016	Wang, R., Liu, W. & Gao, S.	Hashtags and information virality in networked social movement
10.	USA	2016	Hemsley, J.	Studying the viral growth of a connective action network using information event signatures

	Country	Year	Author	Title
11.	USA	2016	Clark, L.	Participants on the margins: #BlackLivesMatter and the role that shared artifacts of engagement played among minoritized political newcomers on Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter
12.	USA	2017	Penney, J.	Social Media and Citizen Participation in "Official" and "Unofficial" Electoral Promotion: A Structural Analysis of the 2016 Bernie Sanders Digital Campaign
13.	USA	2017	Vigil-Hayes, M., Duarte, M., Parkhurst, N.,& Belding, E.	#Indigenous: Tracking the connective actions of Native American advocates on Twitter
14.	USA	2017	McNeill, J. & Thornton, T.	Pipelines, Petitions, and Protests in the Internet Age: Exploring the Human Geographies of Online Petitions Challenging Proposed Transcontinental Alberta Oil Sands Pipelines

Online – 10 case studies

	Country	Year	Author	Title
15.	-	2008	Shumat, M. & Lipp, J.	Connective collective action online: An examination of the hyperlink network structure of an NGO issue network
16.	-	2015	McDonald, K.	From Indymedia to Anonymous: rethinking action and identity in digital cultures
17.	-	2015	Mortensen, M.	Connective witnessing: Reconfiguring the relationship between the individual and the collective

		Year	Author	Title
18.	-	2016	Vicari, S. & Cappai, F.	Health activism and the logic of connective action. A case study of rare disease patient organisations
19.	-	2016	Hogan, A.	#tellPearson: the activist 'public education' network
20.	-	2016	Sparke, M.	Situated Cyborg Knowledge in Not so Borderless Online Global Education: Mapping the Geosocial Landscape of a MOOC
21.	-	2017	Ingrams, A.	Connective action and the echo chamber of ideology: Testing a model of social media use and attitudes toward the role of government
22.	-	2017	Parsloe, S. & Holton, A.	#Boycottautismspeaks: communicating a counternarrative through cyberactivism and connective action
23.	-	2017	Bouko, C.	Youth's civic awareness through selfies : fun performances in the logic of "Connective actions"
24.	-	2016	Dahlberg-Grundberg, M., Lundström, R., & Lindgren, S.	Social media and the transnationalization of mass activism: Twitter and the labour movement

Western Europe – 9 case studies

	Country	Year	Author	Title
25.	Spain	2013	Anduiza, E., Cristancho, C. & Sabucedo, J.	Mobilization through online social networks: the political protest of the indignados in Spain
26.	(Multiple)	2014	Mercea, D. & Funk, A.	The social media overture of the pan-European Stop-ACTA protest

	Country	Year	Author	Title
27.	Denmark and UK	2015	Bang, H.	Between Democracy and Governance
28.	UK	2015	Wright, S.	Populism and Downing Street E-petitions: Connective Action, Hybridity, and the Changing Nature of Organizing
29.	UK	2015	Zavos, J.	Digital media and networks of Hindu activism in the UK
30.	Ciprus	2015	Triga, V. & Papa, V.	'The poor have been raped': An analysis of politicised collective identity in facebook groups against the financial crisis in Cyprus
31.	Spain	2015	Subirats, J.	Todo se mueve. Acción colectiva, acción conectiva. Movimientos, partidos e instituciones
32.	UK	2016	Hensby, A.	Open networks and secret Facebook groups: exploring cycle effects on activists' social media use in the 2010/11 UK student protests
33.	Spain	2016	Casas, A., Davesa, F., & Congosto, M.	La cobertura mediática de una acción «conectiva»: la interacción entre el movimiento 15-M y los medios de comunicación

Asia – 7 case studies

	Country	Year	Author	Title
34.	Azerbaijan	2014	Pearce, K. (2014)	Two can Play at that Game: Social Media Opportunities in Azerbaijan for Government and Opposition
35.	China	2015	Lee, F. & Chan, J.	Digital media activities and mode of participation in a protest campaign: a study of the Umbrella Movement

36.	Turkey	2016	Organ, C. & Varol, O.	What is gained and what is left to be done when content analysis is added to network analysis in the study of a social movement: Twitter use during Gezi Park
37.	Turkey	2016	Halupka, M.	The rise of information activism: how to bridge dualisms and reconceptualise political participation
38.	China	2016	Heberer, T. & Heberer, F.	Fifty Years On: The 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution' in the Age of the Internet
39.	Turkey	2017	Chrona, S. & Bee, C.	Right to public space and right to democracy: The role of social media in Gezi Park
40.	Hong Kong	2017	Lee, F., Chen, H. & Chan, M.	Social media use and university students' participation in a large-scale protest campaign: The case of Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement

Eastern Europe – 4 case studies

	Country	Year	Author	Title
41.	Czech Republic	2014	Hrdina, M., & Karaščáková, Z.	Parties, pirates and politicians: The 2014 European Parliamentary elections on Czech Twitter
42.	Romania	2014	Mercea, D.	Towards a Conceptualization of Casual Protest Participation
43.	Hungary	2016	Dessewffy, T., & Nagy, Z.	Born in Facebook: The Refugee Crisis and Grassroots Connective Action in Hungary
44.	Russia	2017	Toepfl, F.	From connective to collective action: internet elections as a digital tool to centralize and formalize protest in Russia.

Africa – 3 case studies

	Country	Year	Author	Title
45.	(Multiple)	2013	Rennick, S.	Personal grievance sharing, frame alignment, and hybrid organisational structures: the role of social media in North Africa's 2011 uprisings.
46.	Tunisia	2013	Lim, M.	Framing Bouazizi: 'White lies', hybrid network, and collective/connective action in the 2010–11 Tunisian uprising
47.	(Multiple)	2016	Aouragh & Chakravartty	Infrastructures of empire: towards a critical geopolitics of media and information studies

Oceania – 3 case studies

	Country	Year	Author	Title
48.	Australia	2013	Ganesh, S. & Stohl, C.	From Wall Street to Wellington: Protests in an Era of Digital Ubiquity
49.	Australia	2016	Bailo & Vromen	Hybrid social and news media protest events: from #MarchinMarch to #BusttheBudget in Australia
50.	Australia	2017	Rowe, P.	Beyond Uber and Airbnb: The Social Economy of Collaborative Consumption

Transnational studies – 1 case study

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