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Internet Use and Protest Participation: How do ICTs affect mobilization?

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Summary (in Dutch)

In vergelijking met andere communicatietechnologieën zoals televisie of de telefoon, is de verspreiding en het gebruik van digitale communicatietechnologieën (ICT's), en met name het Internet, veel sneller gegaan. Nog maar weinig domeinen in onze samenleving zijn er niet door beïnvloed. Ook de politiek niet. Dit laatste heeft er toe geleid dat de introductie van ICT's volgens velen het redmiddel zouden zijn om het algemeen slabakkend politieke engagement naar een hoger niveau te tillen, maar daarbij vooral de toegang tot het democratisch proces zouden verschaffen voor mensen die in het pre-internet tijdperk niet of nauwelijks politiek betrokken waren. De these dat ICT's de mobilisatie en participatie van voorheen ondervertegenwoordigde of traditioneel uitgesloten groepen en individuen aan het politieke proces zouden verhogen, is de 'mobilisatie these'. Dit cyber-optimisme wordt echter door een groeiende groep van cyber-pessimisten tegengesproken. Zijn zien het internet eerder als een solitair instrument en twijfelen aan de capaciteit ervan om de politieke en collectieve mobilisatie te versterken. Bovendien blijken empirische studies aan te geven dat het gebruik van internet net deze groep van mensen bevoordeeld die reeds politiek geïnteresseerd en actief zijn. Deze 'versterkingsthese' stelt dat Internettoegang een voorrecht is voor zij die over voldoende middelen en capaciteiten beschikken (de zogenaamde 'digitale kloof'). Tenslotte, is er ook een duidelijke groep cyber-sceptici. Ze laten het schip nog in het midden, maar twijfelen er sterk aan dat er ooit echt iets zal veranderen. Aanhangers van deze 'geen effect these' zien het internet vooral verworden tot een entertainment-, vrije tijd-, en shopmedium waar geen plaats is voor politieke engagementen.

Tussen deze drie standpunten woedt er een interessant debat dat veelal op niveau van de institutionele politiek werd bekeken. Het domein van de niet-institutionele politiek werd daarbij steeds, gek genoeg, wat over het hoofd gezien. Deze paper wil daar aan tegemoetkomen door na te gaan wat de mogelijkheden en beperkingen zijn van het internet in het licht van het mobiliseren van mensen voor betogingen. In de literatuur worden er drie mechanismen beschreven die ICT's en collectieve actie met elkaar linken: het verlagen van de drempel om te participeren, het creëren van netwerken, en het stimuleren van een collectieve identiteit. Om nu de impact van Internet na te gaan op de mobilisatie van betogers zullen we enerzijds internetgebruikers vergelijken met niet-gebruikers, en anderzijds internetgebruikers die het Net enkel gebruiken voor politieke doeleinden vergelijken met internetgebruikers die dat niet doen. We gaan dus na bij welk mechanisme de impact van Internet het grootst is en of we deze impact kunnen benoemen als *cyber-optimisme, –pessimisme,* dan wel *–scepticisme*.

De resultaten uit de analyses zijn toch enigszins opmerkelijk. Hoewel we te maken hebben met een steekproef van mensen die duidelijk sterker politiek 'gesocialiseerd' zijn dan een gemiddelde burger (ze *zijn* namelijk mee opgestapt in een betoging), blijken er toch bijzonder grote verschillen qua politieke interesse en politiek engagement te bestaan tussen mensen die het internet gebruiken en zij die dat niet doen. Zowel bivariate als multivariate analyses tonen aan dat demonstranten die jonger zijn, hoger opgeleid, (nog) meer politiek geïnteresseerd, en opstapten met vrienden en collega's eerder het internet zullen gebruiken. Omdat bivariate analyses voor het politieke gebruik van internet steeds in dezelfde richting gingen dan die voor het gebruik van het internet *tout court*, kunnen we verwachten dat de conclusies uit de multivariate analyse voor het politieke gebruik van internet gelijkaardige resultaten zal opleveren.

Uit de analyses blijkt heel sterk de bevestiging voor de pessimistische 'versterkingsthese': in de mate dat het internet vandaag inderdaad een belangrijk medium is voor extra-institutionele actoren om mensen te mobiliseren, blijken mensen met een lagere sociale status, met minder politieke ervaring en engagement toch niet makkelijker te worden betrokken.

1. Introduction

Since the 90s digital information and communication technologies (ICTs) are booming, and in barely one decade all kinds of ICTs witnessed an explosive dissemination. The diffusion of ICTs occurred much more rapidly than the spread of previous waves of technological advancement, like the introduction of the telephone or the TV. The ICT-revolution has led to sweeping changes in many spheres of life, including politics (Norris, 2001). At the end of the 90s, the scholarly literature assumed, often on normative basis solely, that the introduction of ICTs (and especially the Internet) would lead to large-scale changes with regard to political participation and political mobilization. However, up till today the impact of ICTs is still controversial and various hypotheses have been formulated. Positive, but often idealistic speculations see the Internet as strengthening civil society and democratic politics more general, as it expands the opportunities for communication and mobilization (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003). This thesis is referred to as the 'mobilization or normalization thesis': ICTs may enhance mobilization and participation among traditional excluded or underrepresented groups and individuals in the political process.

Yet, the enthusiasm of scholars who believed ICTs would foster citizen engagement and herald a new era of deliberative democracy (cfr. Davis & Owen, 1998; Coleman, 1999,2001; Walch, 1999), appears to be fading. More and more sceptical and even pessimistic findings win ground. Some authors predict that the Internet will have a detrimental impact on participation levels, seeing Internet use as a solitary and individual activity that is unlikely to foster collective action or increase the levels of personal trust (one key element in the notion of social capital) required for direct action politics (Dahlgren, 2001; Diani, 2001; Ward *et al.*, 2003). However, growing empirical research suggests Internet does have an impact, but in a way that it actually reinforces existing inequalities with regard to who actually gets politically informed and involved. This 'reinforcement thesis' persists in a more cyber-pessimistic point of view. Access to the Internet is mainly a privilege for those with appropriate skills, and greater preexisting resources like higher occupational status or intellectual luggage (the 'digital divide'). A few untouched citizens may be reached (Di Gennaro & Dutton, 2006), but essentially, traditional political participation patterns will not differ at all (Bennett & Entman, 2001; Norris, 2001; Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Weber *et al.*, 2003; Kavada, 2005). Moreover, institutionalized actors that already dominate the political realm offline will dictate cyberspace in the same way (Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Diani, 2001).

Finally, cyber-sceptics argue that both mobilization and reinforcement thesis are exaggerated. Although normative assumptions of ICT's potential to enrich democratic processes and increase participation are plausible, at this stage, for good or ill, this

potential has not been realized, these authors state. They claim one can only speak at the very most of a limited impact of ICTs on 'politics as usual' ('no-effect thesis') (Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002). Internet is a plastic medium that flows into and adapts to preexisting social molds (Norris, 2001). To the degree that the Internet becomes a social, occupational, shopping, or entertainment medium, it will chiefly serve to diminish involvement with civic matters (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003).

This ongoing debate among cyber-optimists, pessimists, and sceptics has been widely studied in the institutional sphere of politics. The extra-parliamentary realm of politics, however, has been largely forgotten. Which is quite remarkable since, as van de Donk *et al.* (2004: 2) point out, the Internet has been hailed as a medium favouring subversive, extra-institutional and loosely formed groups. In this paper we will therefore unravel the possibilities and constraints of Internet use when it comes to participation and mobilization to street demonstrations. Three possible mechanisms have been described that possibly link ICTs and collective action (Garrett, 2006): reduction of participation costs, creation of networks, and promotion of collective identity. The first mechanism is mainly associated with common temporal and spatial barriers to protest participation, as with publishing and accessing movement information. The second mechanism concerns the creation and maintenance of social networks. The last mechanism is related to the latter and concerns the perception among individuals that they are member of a larger community having similar grievances and causes and sharing a collective identity. By looking specifically at each of these three mechanisms, we can present a comprehensive understanding of the possible impact of Internet use among protest participants. More specifically we will do so at two levels: first, comparing nonusers with users, and second, comparing different users within the online community, namely non-political users, who make use of the Internet, but not for politics; and political users, who make use of the Internet and especially for politics. This way we explicitly take into account all possible concerns and arguments of cyber-optimists, sceptics, as well as pessimists as introduced above. We use data from protest surveys distributed among attendants at six different demonstrations which took place mainly in Brussels, Belgium.

2. Theoretical Framework and Some Hypotheses

Scholars have pointed to the Internet as a key tool for mobilizing protest participants. Some frequently used examples are the recent 'Global Social Justice' mobilizations like in Seattle against the G8 or on February the 15th, 2003, against the imminent war in Iraq, where large numbers of people were successfully mobilized in no time, and worldwide (Eagleton-Pierce, 2001; van de Donk & Foederer, 2001; Alexander, 2003; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2004). Other successful examples of email- and Internet based campaigns are for example the Nike Email Exchange Campaign, which started

with one man e-mailing the Nike Company but eventually generating unexpected media-attention and thousands of other reactions worldwide (Peretti, 2006), or Reclaim the Streets, where people often agree on place and date at online forums and via forwarded e-mails to take the streets and stage a party creating a 'temporary autonomous space'. These and other similar cases have been used to exemplify the possibilities of a new medium to enhance empowerment of small groups and individuals previously disengaged or underrepresented in the democratic process (Clark & Themudo, 2003; Stolle & Micheletti, 2005; Clark & Themudo, 2006). In his perspicuous outline of the literature, which we thankfully extend underneath, Garrett (2006) disentangles at least three mechanisms that potentially link ICTs and political participation: reduction of participation costs, creation of networks, and promotion of collective identity.

2.1. Reduction of Participation Costs

The first mechanism draws on the possible reduction of temporal and spatial barriers that commonly hamper political participation, and which are often related with socio-demographic and economic features like gender, educational level or occupational status. Especially traditional excluded groups like housebound people, those with childcare or elderly may—thanks to the Internet—finally be thrilled to be politically engaged (Green & Kirton, 2003; Ward *et al.*, 2003). As this new technology goes beyond time and space, it facilitates and speeds up information access and publishing opportunities. A broadening pool of potential protest participants can be reached, as activists from the farthest corner of the world can easily be invited via web pages and listservs, blogs or virtual calendars to participate in demonstrations and rallies (van de Donk & Foederer, 2001). We mentioned Global Social Justice protests, but also petitions, political consumerism, alternative lifestyle communities, are a few other examples of political protest activities that are greatly enhanced by the use of ICTs (Ward *et al.*, 2003; Stolle & Micheletti, 2005; Earl, 2006). Often these are new creative and innovative forms of protest participation, attracting a whole new range of people because someone can even accidentally get politically engaged by, for example, donating money via simple 'click-and-give' websites (Garrett, 2006). The easiness by which people can be politically engaged can further facilitate political socialization, which in the end may be converted into real protest participation. This logic of an "activism hierarchy" has been successfully tested by Collom (2003) who found empirical evidence that people engaging in unconventional political activity with high intensity (e.g. demonstrations) were most likely to be engaged in low intensity forms of actions like signing petitions.

Di Genarro & Dutton (2006), who found some evidence that Internet use contributes to a broadening pool of people who could become engaged, also found, however, that "online political participation was reinforcing and in some cases exacerbating some of the existing social inequalities in offline political participation by marginalizing

the less educated and those from lower socioeconomic groups and by increasing involvement online among those who are already engaged offline" (Di Gennaro & Dutton, 2006: 306, 311-12). This means that the Internet, on the one hand, may indeed stimulate traditional excluded groups to be part of the democratic process, but on the other hand, fosters political participation even more among those who are already politically engaged. Norris (2001) calls this the growing 'democratic divide': Civic engagement will be mutually reinforced driven by one's preexisting political attitudes and resources such as political interest, a more liberal conviction, or past engagement experiences. All of this will be accelerated by the use of the Internet since an infinite amount of information has become accessible.

Within our sample of protest participants, we hypothesize the following: if the Internet indeed reduces participation costs, we expect to find minor significant socio-demographic differentiation between online users and nonusers. Among nonusers, as well as among the protesters using the Internet there should be an equal proportion of traditionally excluded groups like elderly, housewives, etc., thus favouring the mobilization thesis. However, if one does have access to the Internet he or she would probably disproportionably use it for political ends, since our sample of protesters is already highly politically 'socialized', thus, favouring the reinforcement thesis.

2.2. Creation of Networks

The second mechanism concerns the creation and maintenance of social networks. Numerous case studies suggest that ICTs facilitate geographically dispersed face-to-face networks, significantly reinforce existing social ties and allow connections among those who hold yet different point of views (Garrett, 2006). Bennett & Givens (*forthcoming*), for example, found many (and especially GSJ-) activists who rely on digital media to manage, what Bennett & Givens call, their 'complex identity'. These activists have become something of a node in multiple cause networks, engaging in often very different kinds of organizations and voluntary actions, crossing issues without apparent suffering from fragmented identities or political ineffectiveness. They rely on digital media to manage this vast network of personal relationships bridging diverse issues and causes.

This is quite essential as social networks—formal movement networks as well as personal networks of family and friends—are, in any case, assumed to be the most important and effective recruitment channels for protest participation (Walgrave & Verhulst, *forthcoming*). Kavanaugh *et al.* (2005), drawing on Granovetter's (1973) seminal article about 'the strength of weak ties', found considerable evidence that the Internet enhances social relations and information exchange, and increases face-to-face interactions all of which help to build strong and weak ties across diverse cliques, groups and individuals. Especially these 'weak ties' are key in connecting members of different social groups (each of which consist of strong ties) in a larger

social setting. Strong ties are more effective when it comes to activation, but without weak ties information would not travel beyond group boundaries (Walgrave & Klandermans, *forthcoming*). As such, weak ties are important in educating the community as a whole, and in organizing or mobilizing for collective action (Kavanaugh *et al*., 2005). Ward, Gibson & Lusoli (2003) cite scholars that advocate a more sceptical view:

> *"[they] question whether strong or weak ties can really develop online, seeing surfing the Internet as a solitary and individual activity that is unlikely to foster collective action or increase the levels of personal trust required for direct action politics"* (Ward *et al.*, 2003: 655).

According to Diani (2001) electronic interactions are in the first place 'virtual extensions' of existing social ties: It is highly disputable whether Internet based communication may create brand-new social ties where there were none before. In sum we can hypothesize that the Internet first of all increases the potential pool of protest participants as individuals with only weak social ties or even no organizational ties at all are more likely to be swayed through easily approachable electronic communications. In terms of creating networks, we expect to support the mobilization thesis: Internet facilitates participation among those with limited social ties.

2.3. Promotion of Collective Identity

The last mechanism, promotion of collective identity, more or less stems from the previous mechanism. Since the Internet may enhance the creation and maintenance of social networks, corresponding feelings and senses of collective identity can be improved too. This function already has been observed by Park:

> *"not only the formation of collective identity is easier due to the Internet's ability to put [together] people with similar grievances […], but also the diffusion of collective identity is faster and easier"* (Park cited in della Porta & Mosca, 2005: 178).

The promotion of collective identity is about the perception among individuals that they are members of a larger community by virtue of the grievances they share (Garrett, 2006: 205). By putting reports, photographs or video images online, a whole new range of people can share in the excitement in the run-up of an action or after a protest event took place as a result of which support may develop (van de Donk & Foederer, 2001). This has been particularly observed in light of the Global Social Justice (GSJ) movement. Fisher *et al.*, (2005), for example, show that Internet resources are crucial for GSJ activist to stay more closely connected towards their related global causes and be able to engage in a struggle that targets transnational

actors. This proved to be particularly important as they found that global protests—like for instance against the World Bank and IMF in Washington in 2002—do not actually consist of a global protest population. It is rather through electronic resources that concerned participants within nation-states are aware of similar struggles and participate in worldwide actions. Through the Internet activists and groups can learn from each other, observe and validate each others' actions, which then can take place very rapidly, and simultaneously on multiple fronts, and in multiple ways (Lipschutz, 2005). Yet, Diani (2001) among others, observes no major impact of the Internet in terms of identity building or maintenance. As mentioned earlier, electronic interactions to him are rather 'virtual extensions' of existing social ties. In the way van de Donk & Foederer (2001) put it:

> *"will digital demonstrations really be able to replace the thrill of participating in a mass rally?"*

Considering their remarks our last hypothesis is that differences in feelings of collective identity will be equally strong among different kinds of Internet users as well as between Internet users and nonusers. We expect Internet use will have a minor influence on these feelings. The main reason is that we believe respondents are already 'thrilled' by their actual protest presence. In terms of promotion of collective identity we expect to support the no-effect thesis: Internet use will not have any impact on protesters' feelings of collective identity.

3. Data and Measures

Between February 2003 and May 2006, six demonstrations were covered with very similar surveys. Except for one (in Leuven), they all took place in Brussels, Belgium. Each time a large group of interviewers distributed between 700 and 1300 questionnaires together with a postage paid envelop, asking a representative sample of the protesters to send the survey back. Protest participants were picked out according to a carefully designed selection method: a rough estimation of the number of attendants was made, which was then turned into an estimation of demonstration rows. In every n^{th}-row, two attendants from both sides, as well as one in the middle received a questionnaire. A more detailed description of this method can be found in Van Aelst & Walgrave (2001) and Walgrave & Verhulst (2006a). Despite two disappointing response rates, this method was quite successful resulting in a total sample of 1772 protest participants. We provide descriptive figures and facts of each demonstration in Table 3.1.

With the InBev demonstration we have an example of a typical 'old social movement' event staged by trade unions. The *Sans papiers* demonstration is an example of a typical 'new social movement event', such as the antiwar protests. With the March for

Table 3.1. Descriptive figures and facts for six demonstrations

Name	Iraq 2003	Iraq 2004	Sans Papiers	Iraq 2006	Inbev	March for Joe	Total
Type	New left	New left	New left	New left	Old left	New emotional	
Place	Brussels	Brussels	Brussels	Brussels	Leuven	Brussels	
Date	Feb 15 2003	Mar 20 2004	Feb 25 2006	Mar 19 2006	Mar 28 2006	Apr 23 2006	
Aim	Stop imminent war in Iraq	Against war and occupation in Iraq	Rights and respect illegal immigrants	Against war and occupation in Iraq	Against reorganisation InBev beer multinational	Against violence + in memoriam Joe Van Holsbeeck	
Organizers							
Unions	-	-	-	-	++	-	
SMOs	++	++	++	++	-	-	
Others	-	-	-	-	-	Parents of victim	
# participants	75,000	7,000	10,000	5,000	2,000	80,000	
Questionnaires							
Distributed	1230	700	858	915	722	1018	5443
Completed	510	262	149	316	98	437	1772
Response (%)	42	37	17	35	14	43	33

Joe, we add a typical 'new emotional movement event' (see Walgrave & Verhulst, 2006a, 2006b for detailed elaboration). We supplement this set with three other demonstrations against the war and occupation in Iraq: the first (and very first) on February 15th, 2003, the second on March 20th, 2004 to 'celebrate' one year of occupation, the third on March 19th, 2006 to 'celebrate' three years of occupation. So, we have a sample of quite different protest events attracting different kinds of people. This makes for a robust test for any general theory and propositions about how ICTs affect political mobilization.

We construct two pairs of types of Internet users in order to grasp at two levels (between online users and nonusers, and among online users) the different theses (mobilization, reinforcement and no-effect) on how ICTs may affect mobilization among protesters. First, the nonuser makes no use of the Internet and/or email, whilst the online user apparently does. Second, the nonpolitical user makes use of the Internet but not for political ends, whereas the political user makes use of the Internet and for political ends. We use two different questions to construct these two pairs. With regard to the first pair we use the simple question "Do you use the Internet and/or email?" (with 0='no' and 1='yes'). The second pair of Internet users is based on a similar binary measure questioning respondents as to whether or not he/she uses the Internet for engaging in social change. The forms of social change range from contacting a politician or civil servant, and signing a petition to engaging in violent protest. Because some questions were not asked in the earliest version of our questionnaire and some questions were not asked anymore in later versions, we actually use two kinds of samples of protesters throughout this first section, as shown in the frequency table below (Table 3.2) to make maximal use of our dataset.

Table 3.2: Frequency table for type of Internet user across manifestation (in %)

	Nonuser	Online user	N	Nonpolitical user	Political user	N
Antiwar 2003	-	-		49.8	50.2	510
Antiwar 2004	-	-		37.0	63.0	262
Sans Papiers	17.0	83.0	147	47.6	52.4	124
Antiwar 2006	9.0	91.0	311	26.4	73.6	288
InBev	12.5	87.5	96	64.0	36.0	86
March for Joe	17.8	82.2	426	-	-	
Total	14.4	85.6	981	42.6	57.4	1270

General figures of Internet use are high: 85.6% of the protesters does use the Internet or email. A huge difference compared to only 51.7% of the Belgian population online

in 2004[1]. Within two years many things have changed with regard to the spread and use of the Internet, and probably general online figures of the Belgian population are slightly higher today. Nonetheless it is rather inconceivable that the gap we found here is closed. We can assume that, still today, Belgian protesters are in general disproportional Internet users compared to the average Belgian citizen. As we would expect among respondents who are already engaged in a political (protest) activity, nearly 60% has used the Internet already for engaging in social change. Among the largest group of Internet users and political Internet users, we find mainly attendants of the Antiwar demonstrations. Participants from the March for Joe, and InBev demonstrators show the lowest average figures for Internet use and political Internet use respectively.

4. The Impact of ICT on Protest Participation: Analyses and Results

To gauge the impact of Internet use among protest participants we use our two pairs of Internet users and draw on the three mechanisms that possibly link ICTs and protest participation. As outlined in the theoretical section, Garrett (2006) successively describes reduction of participation costs, creation of networks, and promotion of collective identity. In the following three sections we separately explore each link in detail. Using bivariate analyses we assess either the 'mobilization thesis'—the Internet diminish inequalities, empowering the resource poor—either the 'reinforcement thesis'—the Internet reinforces and even exacerbates existing inequalities—or the 'no-effect thesis'—the Internet has no dramatic impact, for good or ill, it is politics as usual. In a last section we present a comprehensive logistic regression model explaining Internet use while controlling for host of socio-demographic variables as well as variables related to each of the three mechanisms that link ICTs and protest participation.

4.1. Bivariate Analyses

4.1.1. Reduction of Participation Costs

With regard to the first mechanism the optimistic idea is mainly that certain socio-demographic and economic thresholds like education, sex, occupational status, etc. no longer exist thanks to the use of the Internet and its democratizing capabilities.

[1] Figures adopted from the European Social Survey, round 2 for the Belgian population (N=1776).

Likewise, the Internet may facilitate certain political attitudes and behaviours, which in turn alter further political socialization. Di Gennaro & Dutton (2006) for instance found increased political participation among Internet users who normally would not be engage in conventional forms of protest activities. Any skewed diffusion of the technology with regard to these different characteristics is just a transitional stage as ICT use eventually will 'trickle down' and affect all citizens. Pessimists and sceptics however do not believe in any 'normalization' or 'equalization' effect. Having only cross-sectional data we cannot test for any such evolution, rather we compare each pair of Internet types and look for significant differences across these types. In Table 4.1 and Table 4.3 we introduce traditional socio-demographic and economic variables as well as political attitudinal and behavioural characteristics, like political interest, efficacy, trust, engagement in certain political actions, voting behaviour, etc. If Internet use indeed reduces participation costs for traditional excluded groups like elderly or housewives, we expect to find rather minor differences in terms of socio-demographic and economic features among the different pairs of Internet users (counting for a mobilization effect). However, we expect rather major differences concerning political attitudes and behaviours (counting for a reinforcement effect).

It is important to note that some of these political characteristics are often assumed to be key determinants of protest participation. Political interest, political knowledge, a sense of political efficacy, but also low levels of trust in the government or satisfaction with the functioning of democracy, should increase individuals' likelihood of protesting. As this has proved to be true for political interest, results remain muddled about the other attitudinal measures (Collom, 2003; Schussman & Soule, 2005). Norris, Walgrave & Van Aelst (2005) elucidate: they found no evidence that being a protester coincide with low levels of satisfaction of democracy, senses of external political efficacy (how far government and politicians are responsive to their needs), or general trust in government institutions. Considering these findings then, we can expect generally mixed levels on different attitudinal and behavioural scales, but as suggested by research of Norris (2001) or Jennings & Zeitner (2003), political Internet users would systematically take the lead on nonpolitical Internet users, and nonusers respectively: they will be more political interested, and political active.

A first glimpse in Table 4.1 does suspect a sheer digital divide among different types of Internet users in our sample of protesters, even though a gender bias is not strikingly present. Any difference among the two pairs of Internet types is in favour of male protesters, but is never significant. Age and education, on the other hand, are significantly associated with the two pairs of types: younger and higher educated protesters rather tend to use the Internet and use it for political ends. Differences in occupational status are also quite remarkable and in line with pessimist assumptions about Internet diffusion. Traditionally excluded groups like unemployed, retired and housebound people are significantly underrepresented online. Looking at the figures in Table 4.1 we can hardly assume that there is any mobilization effect, on the

contrary. Comparing Belgian data from the European Social Survey round 2 in Table 4.2., inequalities are strikingly comparable.

Table 4.1. Socio-demographic and economic features among diverse Internet users and nonusers

Socio-demographics	Nonuser	Online user	Chi² Sig.	Nonpolitical user	Political user	Chi² Sig.
Gender (% male)	47.9	52.8	.270	52.8	57.9	.072
Age (mean)	54.1	39.9	.000	41.8	36.3	.000
Education (mean)	2.91	3.93	.000	3.88	4.23	.000
Occupational status (%)						
Student	2.1	16.8		18.3	26.3	
Employed	31.2	61.1		56.1	58.3	
Unemployed	17.0	8.3		7.6	6.2	
Retired	36.9	10.0		13.1	7.4	
Housewife/husband	9.2	1.9		2.4	1.2	
Missing	3.5	1.8		2.4	.6	
Total	100.0	100.0		100.0	100.0	
N	*141*	*840*		*540*	*727*	

Note: Measures used are *gender* (male, female); *age* (in years); *educational level* (0='None', 1='Primary', 2='Lower secondary', 3='Higher secondary', 4='Higher non-university', 5='University')

Table 4.2. Socio-demographic and economic features among nonusers and online users across the general Belgian population in 2004

Socio-demographics	Nonuser	Online user	Chi² Sig.
Gender (% male)	43.2	54.7	.000
Age (mean)	56.7	38.1	.000
Education (mean)	1.84	3.93	.000
Occupational status (%)			
Student	1.2	13.5	
Employed	33.4	60.8	
Unemployed	10.9	8.8	
Retired	36.5	4.9	
Housewife/husband	14.1	5.8	
Missing	4.0	6.9	
Total	100.0	100.0	
N	*857*	*919*	

Note: figures are adopted form the European Social Survey (ESS), round 2, Belgian data only

Certain, yet important, socio-demographic and economic differences within the online community point to the existence of persistent socio-demographic and economic thresholds with regard to the use of the Internet use for political ends.

Moreover, if we look at different political attitudes and behaviours (Table 4.3), prior political interests, feelings of (internal and external) political efficacy, and past political participation experiences are significantly higher among Internet users. Protesters using the Internet feel they are better informed and capable of influencing politics and they significantly more confident about the responsiveness of politics and politicians to their needs. However, they show lower expectations about the actual demonstration's effectiveness. This seems like a contradiction: in general the online protesters feel they have a great deal of influence on politics, but not via street demonstrations? It reflects some sort of 'sophistication' of the protester: being online—still today unfortunately—generally coincides with higher levels of education and a higher levels of political engagement. Most likely, these results point towards a more realistic attitude than a pessimistic one.

These associations we found among nonusers and online users are also very much present among the nonpolitical and political Internet users. This indicates a widening political involvement gap. In terms of Norris (2001): a growing 'democratic divide'. Protesters who make use of the Internet and especially make use of it for political ends systematically show higher figures for political interest, internal and external political efficacy, past protest attendance, and engagement in political actions for social change—like contacting a politician, signing a petition, donating money, etc. In line with Jennings & Zeitner (2003) political trust seems not much associated with Internet use.

Table 4.3. Political and behavioural features among divers Internet users and nonusers

	Nonuser	Online User	Chi² Sig.	N	Non political user	Political user	Chi² Sig.	N
Attitudes (mean)								
Interest in politics	**2.07**	**2.58**	.000	963	**2.49**	**2.87**	.000	1254
Political trust[a]	3.64	3.97	.280	422	3.97	3.89	.489	1024
Internal political efficacy[a]	**5.51**	**6.26**	.005	439	**5.01**	**5.56**	.000	1156
External political efficacy[a]	**3.87**	**4.76**	.003	435	4.96	4.99	.753	1154
Satisfaction with democracy[b]	1.15	1.31	.150	526	**1.50**	**1.34**	.004	1209
Protest efficacy	**6.43**	**5.98**	.019	943	4.44	4.62	.237	973

Table continued on page 15

	Nonuser	Online User	Chi² Sig.	N	Non political user	Political user	Chi² Sig.	N
Behaviours (% yes)								
Contact politician[b]	35.4	47.2	.072	554	**23.1**	**44.9**	.000	1270
Petition signed	**70.9**	**91.4**	.000	981	**76.7**	**96.2**	.000	1270
Donation[b]	**55.4**	**77.5**	.000	554	**54.5**	**78.7**	.000	1270
Strike	**34.0**	**45.4**	.012	981	**23.3**	**32.5**	.000	1270
Voted in past elections[b]	63.1	73.4	.080	554	**76.4**	**82.1**	.014	1230
Left/right scale (mean)	3.47	3.01	.056	846	**2.84**	**2.02**	.000	1131
Protest frequency (past 5 years) (mean)	**0.94**	**1.45**	.000	813	**1.32**	**1.99**	.000	1208

Note. Measures used are *political interest*=5-point scale (0 'Not interested at all' and 4 'Very much interested'); *Political trust* in four government institutions= national government, national parliament, political parties, and the civil service (11-point scale, with 0 'no trust in none institution' and 10 'a lot of trust in every institution'); Scale *internal political efficacy*=11-point scale of three questions: "people like me do influence the government", "to me, politics are too complicated, you nearly need to be a specialist to understand (reversed)", "I think I am better informed about politics than most other people"; Scale *external political efficacy*=11-point scale of five questions: "voting is useless, political parties do whatever they like (reversed)", "politicians promise a lot, but do nothing (reversed)", "political parties only care about my vote, not my opinion (reversed)", "most politicians are competent and know what to do", "when I show my opinions, politicians do consider them"; *Satisfaction with democracy*=4-point scale (0 'no satisfaction' and 3 'very much satisfied'); Scale *protest efficacy*=11-point scale of two questions: "this manifestation raises public opinion for our demands", "political leaders consider the demands of this demonstration"; *Left/right scale*=11-point scale (0=left, 10=right); *Protest frequency*=5-point scale (0='first time', 1='2-5', 2='6-10', 3='11-20', and 4= '+20')

[a]Number of respondents for these four measures is actually much lower than indicated above, due to a cut in length of our questionnaire. Respondents of the InBev event and March for Joe fall out.

[b]See note [a]: Only respondents of the March for Joe fall out.

In sum, our figures provide strong evidence for the reinforcement thesis. In other words, Internet use does not 'normalize' protest attendance among traditional excluded groups (unemployed, elderly, and housebound people) (the mobilization thesis). First of all this specific group of protesters seems underrepresented at the protest event in absolute numbers. Second, as figures in Table 4.1 point out, there are huge differences in terms of representation in our 'offline' and 'online' protest population: we find relatively much more unemployed, retired and housewives/-man who do not make use of the Internet. And these differences are significant. Finally, looking specifically to the online protest population, we found considerable evidence that those protesters who make use of the Internet for political ends (to engage in social change), are more experienced activists compared to those who are online but not for political matters: they systematically show higher figures on diverse political behaviours (contacting politicians, signing petitions, engaging in a strike or demonstrations) and subjective feelings of being capable of influencing politics (internal political efficacy). Again, these results confirm the reinforcement thesis.

4.1.2. Creation of Networks

As outlined in the theoretical section, the second potential mechanism linking ICT and protest participation concerns the creation and maintenance of social networks, understood as the possible facilitation of geographically dispersed face-to-face networks, as a result of which existing social ties can be reinforced. The hypothesis is that the Internet increases the potential pool of protest participants as strong organizational embeddedness is no longer an absolute mobilization precondition since also individuals with only weak social ties or even no organizational ties at all are now likely to be swayed via the Internet. Via forwarded emails, appealing announcements on diverse websites a whole new 'community' may be informed and mobilized through extensive yet fluid electronic social ties. As a result, protesters who do not use the Internet may prove to display stronger social ties than those who do make use of the Internet, since the first are still mobilized via "old fashion" manners, like organizational meetings or personal contacts.

We construct several measures that count for the extent protesters are linked to the organization(s) that staged the protest event (the 'organizational circle'). First, we asked our respondents whether they knew someone who was a member of the organization that staged the demonstration, whether they were a member themselves. Second, we use an indicator of the strength of ties based on Walgrave & Klandermans (*forthcoming*). Respondents were asked how they maintained contact with the staging organization—indirectly through such media as the Internet or newsletters or directly by attending meetings. Five levels of strength are then distinguished: weak ties imply that someone only *knows* people who are member of a movement organization. Moderate, strong, and very strong ties imply an increasingly dense combination of knowing someone, being a member oneself, and maintaining contact with these movement organizations. Finally, we add a variable that counts for social ties at the event itself. Respondents were asked with whom they attended the demonstration, alone, with close relatives, colleagues or co-members of any kind of organization.

Table 4.4 illuminates some unexpected results. Protesters linked to the organizational circle are very much likely to be online users. Moreover, the more one is linked to an organization, and maintains contact with this organization through a variety of manners (in other words, the more a person's ties with the organization gets stronger), the more he or she uses the Internet. These results are strikingly reflected within our measure of 'protest companion': people who showed up at the protest event with their fellow organization comrades, are significantly more online. As opposed to what we expected, Internet mostly seems to be used by people who are linked and even strongly linked to an organization. Amongst our sample of protesters we find only limited indications that the Internet indeed facilitates mobilization among citizens with rather weak social ties, and who are not linked to an organization. In sum, 'offline' protesters do not show stronger social ties at all, on the contrary. The Internet

rather seems to be used by organizations in a purely instrumental manner: to keep in touch with their members. Some of these discrepancies are invigorated and maybe exacerbated when one uses the Internet for political ends. At this point we can hardly support the mobilization thesis. Like Diani (2001) already indicated, the Internet rather extends and reinforces existing social ties, than building new ones.

Table 4.4. The strenth of social ties among divers Internet users and nonusers

	Nonuser	Online user	Chi² Sig.	N	Non political user	Political user	Chi² Sig.	N
Relation to organizational circle (% yes)								
No member	65.4	49.3			43.8	27.4		
Know member	13.2	20.8			24.2	31.2		
Member	21.3	29.9			31.9	41.5		
Total	100.0	100.0	.002	931	100.0	100.0	.000	1229
Ties to staging organization (mean)[b]	.73	1.23	.016	519	1.18	1.54	.000	897
Protest companion (% yes)								
Alone	31.6	16.2	.001		10.3	7.8	.373	
Family	21.8	20.6	.598		26.5	20.6	.211	
Friends	23.3	29.0	.019		33.0	32.1	.058	
Colleagues	9.8	12.7	.131		12.5	12.9	.148	
Co-members	13.5	21.6	.004		17.7	26.6	.000	
N	133	932			690	1080		

Note. Measures used: *Organizational circle* (0='no member', 1='know member', 2='member'); *Ties to staging organization*=5-point scale (0='No ties', 1='Weak ties', 2='Moderate ties', 3='Strong ties', 4='Very strong ties')

[b] Information of the protesters present at the March for Joe is not available

4.1.3. Promotion of Collective Identity

Finally, the last mechanism, promotion of collective identity, is about the perception among individuals that they are members of a larger community by virtue of the grievances they share (Garrett, 2006: 205). Although scholars are very optimistic with regard to this function, some authors doubt that Internet interactions will ever be able to replace the thrills and excitement gathered on real-life protest attendance. Our last hypothesis is that differences in feelings of collective identity will be equally strong among different kinds of Internet users as well as between Internet users and nonusers. We expect the Internet to have minor impact since all respondents *are* actually protest participants, most likely and already be 'thrilled' by their protest experience.

To count for these feelings, we asked three different questions about their perceived senses of collective identity. By means of digest we combine these three questions in one collective identity scale which ranges from 0 (no feelings of identification at all) to 6 (very strong feelings of identification). Looking at Table 4.5 we find surprisingly stronger feelings of collective identity among nonusers compared to online users and nonpolitical compared to political Internet users. The first is all the more remarkable since our previous findings suggest yet stronger social ties among Internet users as well as among political Internet users. How can we explain these results? A first explanation can be found in della Porta & Mosca's (2005) investigation of activists at a European Social Forum. They discovered that the Internet has an influence in the identification process with a specific organization, or an organizational sector, but not in the identification process with the movement (the Global Justice Movement) in general. On the other hand, as we already indicated above, our findings may suggest that political Internet users represent the more 'sophisticated' protester. Nonusers, being then less 'sophisticated' somehow appear to be more 'naïve' with regard to the means and goals of the demonstration they have attended. In Table 4.3 (pp.14) we found nonusers to be the protesters who mostly believe that the demonstration will help to attain its goals. This was certainly the case with the *Sans papiers* demonstration where a lot of illegal immigrants, with no access to the Internet, were present.

With regard to the 'promotion of identity' we expected Internet to have no major impact. However, given the figures in Table 4.5, we can neither confirm, nor can we disaffirm the no-effect thesis. Since all significant differences between nonusers and online users, or nonpolitical and political users, rather stem from the clear-cut digital divide we established previously (cf. Table 4.1), thus again confirming the reinforcement thesis.

Table 4.5. Different identity measures among diverse Internet users and nonusers

	Nonuser	Online user	Chi² Sig.	N	Nonpolitical user	Political user	Chi² Sig.	N
I have a lot in common with the other people present	**2.87**	**2.67**	.000	948	**3.03**	**2.86**	.000	482
I strongly identify with the other people present	**3.00**	**2.38**	.000	953	**2.83**	**2.46**	.000	484
I enjoy being part of this group	**3.09**	**2.74**	.001	939	**2.97**	**2.90**	.000	479
Identity scale	**7.12**	**6.41**	.000	963	**7.24**	**6.98**	.001	485

Note. All three measures range from 0 'Completely disagree' to 4 'Completely agree'. The *Identity scale* is a summation of the three measures, rescaled from 0 to 10. These questions were not asked at the Antiwar demonstration of 2003 and 2004

4.2. Multi-variate Analysis: The Determinants of Using the Internet

To explain Internet use in more profound and comprehensive manner we bring all previous findings together in a logistic regression model. On the preceding pages we established important differences among diverse kinds of Internet users and nonusers concerning socio-demographic and economic characteristics, political attitudes and behaviours, and different social network and collective identity measures. However, since all the above associations go in the same direction with nonusers more/less than Internet users, and with nonpolitical users more/less than political users, a comparison of nonusers and Internet users in general would lead to very similar conclusions as would a comparison of nonpolitical and political users. In the further course of this section we therefore stick to a comparison of nonusers and Internet users. That way we can work with the most diverse sample of respondents coming from the four protest events in 2006 leaving, however, both the Antiwar demonstration in 2003 and 2004 out of the picture (cf. pp.10). The maximum number of protesters is then 1000. Yet, as a result of using a logistic procedure excluding missing values listwise, this number decreases until 678.

Based on weighted data (each demonstration gets equal weight), Table 4.6 presents four logistic regression models. The first model (Model 0) only includes the demonstration variable in order to gauge for significant differences across the four protest sites, regardless of other possible determinants. Model 1, 2 and 3 successively add variables that correspond with the three links between ICT and protest participation outlined above: reduction of participation costs (socio-demographic, economic and a few political attitudinal variables), creation of networks (being or knowing a member of the organizational circle, and protest companion), and promotion of collective identity. By differentiating according to these three mechanisms we can gauge the impact of each set of variables separately and assess which mechanism counts the most in explaining differential Internet use.

Model 0 illuminates limited variation across protest issues. Being an antiwar protest participant significantly raises the chances one uses the Internet compared to being a protest attendant at the March for Joe. But once controlling for a host of other variables, this effect totally disappears. Model 1 presents statistically significant results for age, educational level and interest in politics, meaning the probability of using the Internet increases when one is younger, better educated and more interested in politics. Especially the educational level is a very strong determinant which most persistently points towards the 'digital divide' as highlighted above. Other determinants like sex, occupational status, past protest experience, or left/right placement appear not to be important in explaining Internet use. Model 2 adds two different measures for 'community creation': the link with the organizational circle of the event (no member, knowing or being a member), and protest companion. The probability of using the Internet strongly increases if one showed up at the protest event with co-members of an organization. Organizational linkage however is, in

terms of being a member, a significant determinant. It looks like the Internet is a much used medium to agree on participation (how and when) among participants, rather than on the organization of the protest event itself. This might explain why "knowing a member" does result in a significant effect. Finally, Model 3 adds the collective identity measures, but this reveals no additional information.

Table 4.6. Binary Logistic Regression model, explaining Internet use

	Model 0	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Manifestation *(ref=March for Joe)*				
Sans papiers	1.057	1.180	.739	.810
Antiwar 2006	**2.188****	.692	.416	.390
InBev	1.516	.866	.678	.667
Sex		.926	.908	.851
Age		**.922***(1.085)**	**.919***(1.088)**	**.922***(1.085)**
Educational level		**2.231*****	**2.481*****	**2.336*****
Occupation *(ref=housewife/-husband)*				
Student		4.749	3.269	3.278
Employed		4.285	3.193	3.375
Unemployed		.952	.784	.751
Retired		1.889	1.626	1.789
Interest in politics		**1.613****	**1.459***	1.436
Protest efficacy		.938	.933	.966
Signed petition		**2.679***	2.413	2.330
Left/right scale		1.123	1.161	1.160
Protest frequency		1.179	1.030	1.094
Organizational circle *(ref=no member)*				
Know member			**3.148***	**3.778***
Member			1.063	1.082
Protest companion				
Alone			1.762	1.569
Family			.909	.864
Friends			1.499	1.608
Colleagues			.769	.777
Co-members			**3.522****	**3.350****
Identity scale				.949
(Constant)	**4.618*****	1.267	1.315	1.761
Nagelkerke R^2	.024	.385	.408	.403
Predicted correctly (%)	85.6	89.9	90.7	91.0
N	981	717	682	678

Note. Measures used: see higher. Figures are odds-ratio's from a binary logistic regression explaining Internet use (0='no' and 1='yes'), based on weighted data

5. Conclusion

In this paper we set out whether ICT would foster participation among traditional excluded or underrepresented groups and individuals, whether ICT would reinforce existing inequalities or make actually no difference at all. Exploring three mechanisms that potentially link ICTs and protest participation, we found results confirming the reinforcement thesis. Socio-demographic and economic characteristics of both offline and online protesters did reveal considerable and significant differentiation. The few protesters who do not make use of the Internet tend to be of lower educational and occupational status. Moreover, they appear less politically active and politically interested. In terms of Norris (2001), Internet here seems to invigorate a 'virtuous circle', which suggest there is a process of mutually reinforcing interaction in digital politics. In this account, the most motivated and experienced protesters could be expected to prove most likely to use the political opportunities on the Internet driven by their prior interests, attitudes, and resources. Subsequently, the more political information acquired, the more networks contacted, the greater awareness of current affairs, the lower the costs of becoming further involved in the democratic process (Norris, 2001: 230).

These are somewhat remarkable results, since we are dealing with a quite specific sample of respondents who are already highly politically socialized, at least given their indisputable presence at one of the demonstrations. Yet, even among this specific sample of politically active citizens, political engagement patterns vary significantly comparing online users and nonusers. Our data show strong and pessimistic conclusions with respect to a persistent and maybe widening digital (democratic) divide. The first bivariate analysis was further elaborated using a logistic regression analysis explaining Internet use controlling for a host of variables: protest issue, socio-demographic, economic and political attitudinal determinants, and social network and collective identity measures. Important and statistically significant coefficients are in line with previous bivariate findings: if protesters are younger, have higher educational levels, are more politically interested, and showed up at the demonstration with co-members of an organization, the likelihood of using the Internet increases significantly. To the extent that the Internet is a very important medium to recruit protest participants, today people with lower social status, who are less politically experienced, and politically engaged, are still not more easily involved. One obvious reason is that they simply can not use the Internet. But, in addition, it seems that, even when eventually Internet use would have affected all social layers, still the already engaged and interested citizens, with greater social and intellectual resources, always will be just one step ahead. To end with yet a positive note: there are still opportunities left, especially for the organizations itself that stage a demonstration. Like della Porta & Mosca (2005) already highlighted, organizations can have a huge 'socializing' function in making people familiar with the use of new communication technology. Our findings suggest that, by doing so, there potential pool of sympathisers clearly expands: if someone knows a member of the organizing

organization, the likelihood of using the Internet increases significantly. Bennett (cf. Bennett, 2003; Bennett & Givens, 2007; Bennett *et al., forthcoming*) has point to this by introducing the concept of "complex identities", which refers to the conclusion that activists with an increasing dense pattern of commitments and communication networks will need digital media to 'manage' this properly without little apparent conflict of commitment or fragmented identities. It is however unclear to what extent new communication technologies are indeed employed to explicitly connect the strong and weak ties, new organizations and loose individuals. This should definitely be elaborated in further research.

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