

10 Slacktivism or efficiency-increased activism? Online political participation and the Brazilian Ficha Limpa anti-corruption campaign

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Introduction

In recent years there has been an increasing debate on the political role of the Internet and digital media. Communication via the Internet and social networking sites has come to form an inherent part of most political campaigns today. Worldwide, the number of cases of digital activism has grown exponentially since the emergence of Web 2.0 in the mid 2000s and Latin America has not escaped this trend.¹ Yet the potential of online activism to bring about political change remains strongly debated. While advocates insist on its positive contribution to participatory democracy, critics dismiss it as a “slacktivist” activity that carries little societal benefit. Picking up on this debate, this chapter provides an analysis of the Brazilian Clean Record Campaign against Electoral Corruption (Campanha Ficha Limpa), which was primarily promoted through social media channels.

Digital activism: social media for social good or ineffective armchair advocacy?

At the individual level, the debate on the political role of the Internet and digital media that has received most attention in political science literature is whether and how individuals’ uses of digital media affect their political engagement.

Platforms for social networking such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook have exponentially multiplied the possibilities for the retrieval and dissemination of political information, thus affording any Internet user with a variety of supplemental access points to political information and activity that come at little cost in time, money, and effort. The neologism *slacktivism* is a morphem formed out of the words *slacker* and *activism* and is usually used in a pejorative sense to describe civic or political activities that are performed online. Some of these activities mimic traditional forms of offline participation (e.g. signing an e-petition or donating to a cause). Others evolved symbiotically with Web 2.0 technology and are intrinsically linked to certain features of social media platforms. Examples include the quick sharing of approved content over one’s networks by clicking a “Like” button or the copy-pasting of content to one’s social network status in order to raise awareness about a social or political issue.

One of the major criticisms leveled against these online forms of political participation is precisely rooted in the fact that they involve lower transaction costs than their traditional offline counterparts. Here, slacktivism is often equated with “a lazy person’s activism” because it can be interpreted that the user’s wish to make their political efforts more time-efficient reveals them as not really committed to the cause they purport to be supporting. Generally speaking, this critique has been dismissed as somewhat overstated in the context of consolidated democracies. As Svensson (2011) points out, many traditional forms of political participation entail only minimal transaction costs for the participant. Relatedly, in the Western or developed nation context the Internet has become nearly ubiquitous and digital media are all but embedded into most people’s daily lives. Consequently, several scholars have advocated the abandonment of the distinction between technology-related civic engagement and traditional engagement (Bimber and Copeland, 2011; Bimber et al., 2008).

Notwithstanding such appeals, and likely to the disappointment of many researchers working in this area, the impact of digital media use on participation rates at the individual level has remained somewhat unimpressive at first glance. A meta-analysis of 38 studies on the impact of Internet use on civic engagement spanning the period from 1995 to 2005 by Boulianne (2009) confirms a positive but very modest impact of the Internet on political participation. Furthermore, these small positive effects appear to be positively moderated by factors that have long been established as standard predictors of political participation such as social capital (Gibson et al., 2000) and political interest (Xenos and Moy, 2007).

As Bimber et al. (2008) argue, digital media use in general does not necessarily result in higher levels of participation but rather supplements the strategic action repertoire of those individuals who already are interested in politics, and may have negative implications for stronger partisans (Groshek and Dimitrova, 2013). As for the politically apathetic, there is little evidence to suggest that the use of digital media will make them more likely to participate in politics. At best, it appears that the normally politically apathetic are likely to become more engaged in political activities that are exclusively Internet-based (Baumgartner and Morris, 2010). This tendency has raised serious questions about the future of political activism per se. Over the past decade, a growing number of scholars has expressed concerns that the impact of digital media might even be negative, as people increasingly turn away from conventional forms of political participation to embrace more slacktivist forms of civic engagement (Morozov, 2009; Jennings and Zeitner, 2003; Shah et al., 2001a, 2001b).

Nonetheless, at the meso-level of political systems, the Internet has doubtlessly expanded the collective action repertoire of organizational actors such as social movements and grassroots organizations (Geser, 2001; McAdam et al., 2001; van Laer and van Aelst, 2009; see also Burch and León in this volume, Chapter 8). The strategic toolkit of these actors is predominantly composed of actions and tactics that are performed on the non-institutional side of politics and outside the realm of conventional political participation.

More specifically, the decentralized structure of digital networks facilitates innovative forms of campaigning that are based on the parallel activities of independent individuals. The task of information diffusion can easily be delegated to a multitude of members who act as unpaid volunteers by circulating received messages among their personal networks. Thousands of net users can be induced to sign petitions or to send pre-fabricated protest letters to formal decision makers. Consequently, precisely those activities that are labeled as slacktivist have substantially contributed to reduce the costs previously allocated to professional communication (Geser, 2001; Krueger, 2006).

The Internet's decentralized communication structures have not only worked to the benefit of established mobilizing agencies, but also led to the establishment of new organizational actors. Over recent years organized lobbying by Internet advocacy groups has become an increasingly visible phenomenon in politics and different online pressure groups such as Avaaz.org, MoveOn.org, Change.org, or GetUp.org are promoting activism on a broad range of policy issues. Typically, these groups create and coordinate targeted online activism by providing technical solutions to facilitate the organization of collective action.

While the cost saving effects of online participation at the meso-level of mobilizing agencies can hardly be denied, its effectiveness at the macro-level of policy making continues to be disputed. The tendency of advocacy groups to emphasize successful campaigns selectively comes as a natural result of their need to convey motivating messages to existing and potential new members. However, and by the same logic, these groups have an incentive to remain silent about the many campaigns that have not met their policy objective. Public relations communications by advocacy groups are hence hardly an appropriate indicator to measure the efficaciousness of online campaigning (Christensen, 2011).

By and large, scholars therefore remain highly skeptical regarding the ability of online advocacy to bring about substantial policy change or even affect the way of thinking of formal decision makers. Critics warn that slacktivism may generate perverse incentives as low cost forms of online participation, such as mass mailings, can eventually lead to a substantial increase of "redundant, and generally insubstantial commenting by the public" (Shulman, 2009). Officials working under significant time and resource constraints may hence be inclined to regard such messages as "spam" and ignore them altogether (Mikheyev, 2004).

That said, both policy makers' perception of online advocacy and its macro-level effects remain under studied. Having summarized the arguments in favor and in opposition to online political activism, in the next sections an analysis of the Brazilian anti-corruption campaign *Ficha Limpa* that carries this debate forward is presented.

Macro- and meso-level effects of digital activism in the Brazilian *Ficha Limpa* Campaign

Internet and social media usage in Brazil is growing at an extremely rapid pace. According to the last representative survey (in 2008) by the Brazilian Institute for

Geography and Statistics (IBGE), 34.8% of Brazilian citizens over the age of 10 had access to the Internet, marking a massive increase from the 20.9% registered in 2005 (IBGE, 2009).

Furthermore, in 2012, Facebook had 65 million users in Brazil, which makes it the social network's second largest market after the US by number of users. By the end of the same year, Brazil had also become the biggest market outside the US by number of unique visitors for Google, calculated as one of YouTube's top five markets by revenue, and had entered Twitter's top five list of most active user groups (Chao, 2013).

Social media executives attribute the popularity of online social networks to Brazil's hyper-social and communicative culture. According to Álvaro Paes de Barros, director of YouTube content partnerships in Latin America, "Brazilians have this passion to share information, to share pictures" (cited in Chao, 2013). This passion for sharing information with others is also reflected by representative survey results on online behavior. For example, 83.2% of Internet users indicate "communication with other persons" as their main motivation for using the Internet, followed by "access to leisure activities" (68.6%). Nonetheless, Brazilians are also increasingly considering the Internet as a political tool, with 71% noting this in the most recent representative poll (IBGE, 2009). Online exposure of corruption and other instances of official wrongdoing, as further indicators, have been a trend on the rise in Brazil over the past years.

Still, structural corruption continues to stand in the way of Brazil's economic development and full democratic consolidation. The country scores 43 on Transparency International's 2012 Corruption Perception Index, where 0 indicates high levels of corruption and 100 low levels. According to the Federation of Industries of São Paulo, corruption costs the country between 1.4% and 2.3% of its GDP each year, roughly US\$ 146 billion (Ernst & Young, 2012). Findings of representative surveys suggest that bribery and vote buying scandals have severely damaged the public image of Brazil's political institutions: According to the 2011 Global Corruption Barometer, 84% of Brazilians think that bribery and corruption happen widely in the country and 64% believe that corruption had increased over the past three years (Transparency International, 2013).

Social media platforms have repeatedly played an important role in aggregating public discontent with state corruption in Brazil.² One vivid illustration of this trend is the political meme "Fora Sarney".³ Motivated by accusations of nepotism leveraged against Senator José Sarney, the hashtag #forasarney first appeared on Twitter on June 2, 2009. By June 29, #forasarney had made it to the list of Twitter's trending topics for Brazil with the volume of messages containing the expression having surpassed 10,000 messages per hour.

As this example indicates, the Brazilian Congress, in particular, has a general reputation of being unruly and corrupt. In 2007, the majority of respondents in a representative poll assessed their legislators as self-serving and dishonest. Two in five Brazilian citizens suggested that democracy would be

better off without Congress (Economist, 2007). Part of the reason for this sentiment is that the Brazilian Constitution grants an extraordinary degree of immunity to its congressional members, which even extends to capital crimes committed outside a parliamentarian's official duties. The institutional concept of path dependency postulates that institutions create groups with a vested interest in preserving the status quo, which can impede institutional change and enable inefficient institutions to persist. This problem is deemed to be particularly severe in the field of electoral reform, where legislation blockage is explained by the self-interest of incumbent legislators (Norris, 2010). In line with that argument, several efforts to reform the Brazilian electoral code had thus far been nullified by a strong legislative "esprit de corps".

Despite this difficult institutional setting, between 2008 and 2010, there was a successful citizen initiative campaign in the country, with unprecedented in scope and impact. In April 2008, the Brazilian Movement against Electoral Corruption (MCCE), an umbrella NGO founded in 2002 that coordinates 50 civil society organizations, launched a signature collection in support of a citizen initiative to improve the profile of candidates running for legislative office.

Under the tag line "A vote has no price, it has consequences" the MCCE's *Ficha Limpa* (clean record) bill sought to bar from election persons previously convicted or with pending court proceedings for specific crimes such as murder, drug trafficking, misuse of public funds, and vote buying. However, in view of formal restrictions on citizen-lawmaking in Brazil⁴ the promoters of the campaign were initially pessimistic about their chances of success;⁵ even if they managed to collect the 1.3 million signatures that are necessary to present a bill to Congress. Considering that an estimated 25% of sitting legislators were facing ineligibility under the proposed law (Le Monde, 2010), obtaining the legislative approval necessary for the bill's passage appeared unlikely, given that legislators would have expected to vote against their own self interest. However, the project's fate seemingly changed once the MCCE decided to use online social media platforms to promote the campaign.

In June 2009, the first support group was launched on Facebook.⁶ In addition, several campaign videos were produced and released on YouTube. With the efforts of only three professional campaigners and 10 unpaid volunteers, the MCCE managed to build an online community of roughly 3 million members (Panth, 2011). By February 2010, about 30,000 users were following the campaign on Facebook and 10,000 had signed up to follow campaign news on Twitter, making #fichalimpa the most used hashtag for a given week on Twitter Brazil on several occasions. About 50,000 users downloaded campaign videos from YouTube and smaller campaign communities also formed on Orkut (the major regional social networking site comparable to Facebook in Brazil) and Ning.com, a commercial platform which allows activists to custom tailor campaign specific social networks.

By September 2009, the MCCE had gathered 1.5 million physical signatures, thus exceeding the minimum of signatures required to introduce a citizen law

project to Congress. However, the process of online mobilization did not stop there. In the run up to the bill's voting in Congress, the promoters continued to push the campaign by means of various online-promoted events. In April 2010, over 2 million citizens signed an e-petition calling for the Ficha Limpa bill to be passed by Congress.

The online petition tool was provided and promoted by Avaaz.org,⁷ an advocacy group that promotes civic activism on a broad range of political and social issues via the web. Some 40,000 citizens responded to a follow-up e-mail call by the same organization to flood legislators' inboxes and voicemails with messages to urge them to vote in favour of the bill's passage. Street protest events organized by Avaaz and the MCCE, such as a symbolic clean-up with brooms and buckets performed outside the National Congress, drew several hundred participants and attracted coverage by major television channels and newspapers.⁸ Personal statements by Ficha Limpa campaigners and statistics retrieved from the MCCE's Facebook page (see Figure 10.1) suggest that from that point on, the interaction between social and traditional media created a dynamic in which online activism and classic journalism mutually reinforced each other in creating public awareness:

The mobilization of people on the Internet raised the interest of newspapers, including electronic newspapers, which started to publish on the issue. And we, on our part, benefited from these reports because we could use them to bring ever more information to the Internet users who were following the campaign.⁹

The membership and activity in the Facebook community increased a lot when Ficha Limpa started to be all over the newspapers and TV news.¹⁰

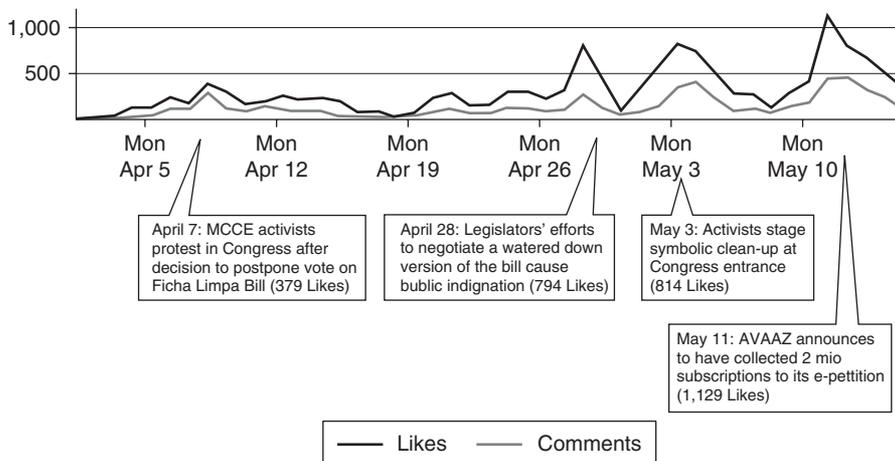


Figure 10.1 Major TV and newspaper reported campaign events and related peaks in Facebook activity, April–May 2010

As traditional media became more centrally involved through increasing attention and more frequent reporting, the campaign's momentum became irreversible. In June 2010, the Ficha Limpa law was ratified by President Lula da Silva after having been unanimously approved by Congress. Following this outcome, there was widespread consensus among observers of the country's political scene that the bill would not have been successful without the massive online mobilization and that the campaign itself would have a sustainable impact on the political attitudes of Brazilian citizens:

We believe that the success of the Ficha Limpa campaign for anti-corruption legislation in Brazil was only possible with the ad-hoc marriage of traditional and online mobilization.¹¹

As a result, political awareness has increased amongst civil society, and a recent survey showed that 85% of the Brazilian populations now know what Ficha Limpa is.¹²

The brief sketch presented here illustrates that social media intervened in a variety of ways at defining moments of the Ficha Limpa campaign and at all levels of the Brazilian political system.

At the macro-level, online campaigning helped to bring about policy change in a field which had long been particularly resistant to reform. Doubt remains whether this change would have eventually occurred without social media providing a widely accessible platform for organization as well as related online and offline mobilization, but the fact that prior reform efforts that originated from within the formal institutional system without the support of strong civic pressure were unsuccessful suggests that the massive popular backing of the Ficha Limpa bill was a crucial element in tipping the balance towards electoral reform. Importantly, nearly all accounts link the visibility and public engagement with the Ficha Limpa campaign as being facilitated and augmented by social media.

At the meso-political level, the strategic use of online social media clearly increased the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of the MCCES campaign tactics. Throughout the 10 years of its existence the organization had never before managed to achieve similar levels of public mobilization and support for its cause, mainly owing to a lack of resources:

Our budget has always been very tight. We didn't dispose of the necessary resources to finance expensive advertising campaigns in traditional media. [...] Prior to the Ficha Limpa Campaign, when mobilization had to be organized outside of social media networks, phone calls or personal contacts would be realized through the 300 local committees that form part of our country wide network. [...] Social media and the intervention of [the online advocacy group] AVAAZ provided an excellent alternative that enabled us to speak directly to the people without the necessity to pay for publicity. The use of Facebook and Twitter became particularly important in the phase were civic pressure had to be exercised on Congress because it enabled us to transmit information in real time.¹³

Such positive experiences with online campaigning in the context of Ficha Limpa have had a lasting impact on the organization's mobilization strategies. In April 2011, for example, the MCCE launched a new and more encompassing citizen initiative to reform the electoral code. Among the most controversial topics is a change of the electoral system from open to closed party lists: "We've learnt a lot with Ficha Limpa and this time social media were at the core of our campaign strategy right from the start" (Marlón Reis, private communication in March 2013).

On the face of it, at the micro-level of individual participation, the sheer number of citizens who mobilized online to support the campaign is surely impressive, but it remains to be clarified if, how, and to what extent their online behaviour affected their overall political engagement. The overarching research question posited here is: Did online activities of Brazilian citizens' have a measurable impact on their general patterns of political engagement in the context of the Ficha Limpa campaign?

Measuring the relationship between citizens' online behaviour and offline engagement in the Ficha Limpa campaign

Methods

To measure the influence of individuals' online activities on their general participation in the Ficha Limpa campaign, while still accounting for a range of fairly well-accepted predictors of political engagement, an online survey of Brazilian Internet users was circulated between 1 June and 30 August 2011. Participation in the survey was promoted using a respondent-driven "snowball" sampling technique – participants were encouraged not only to complete the survey themselves, but also to forward the invitation to their colleagues, relatives, and friends and to post the survey's URL on their social network profiles.¹⁴ The following three channels were used to promote participation in the survey:

- The survey was advertised as an event in two Facebook groups of the Ficha Limpa campaign¹⁵ and invitations were sent per personal message to the members of these groups.
- Key campaigners placed an invitation to participate on their personal profiles on Facebook, Twitter, and Orkut
- The MCCE placed an invitation to participate in the survey on its website and instructed the leaders of its 50 member associations to circulate the invitation among their members via e-mail. These efforts jointly resulted in a sample of 1,792 respondents who completed the questionnaire.

Variables

At the core of this survey were two batteries of questions to measure the frequency with which participants engaged in activities that could be performed in the context of the Ficha Limpa campaign, online and offline. These questions are matched to five typical categories of cause-related campaign activism (Table 10.1).

Table 10.1 Online activities in cause-related campaigning and their offline equivalents

<i>Categories of campaign activities</i>	<i>Online activities for cause-related campaigning</i>	<i>Equivalent offline activities and involvement</i>
1 Consuming campaign information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit campaign websites • Read blog entries or posts social networking platforms • View campaign related pictures or videos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read print media articles • Follow campaign news on TV or radio
2 Circulating campaign material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share campaign content by expressing approval or disapproval (“liking”) • Post links to campaign content to other users’ profiles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute campaign material among friends, family and colleagues
3 Discussing campaign news	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comment on campaign content provided by others • Exchange with others in life chats or discussion groups about campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss campaign face to face or on the phone with friends, relatives or colleagues
4 Protesting or campaign lobbying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join an online petition • Contact an official by e-mail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign a petition • Contact an official by phone or in person • Participate in public protest events
5 Producing campaign material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write campaign related posts or blog entries • Create and upload campaign related pictures and videos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write newspaper articles or letters to the editor • Produce TV or radio features
Observed activities***	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M = 2.55 (SD = 0.71) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M = 1.87 (SD = 0.67)

Note: Both items are composite measures with the same scales that range from “Never” = 1, “Rarely” = 2, “Occasionally” = 3, and “Frequently” = 4. Differences in means of online activities and online engagement is statistically significant. *** $p < .001$

It is understood that not only do some offline activities involve higher transaction costs than their online counterparts but that those transaction costs also vary significantly among the different online activities available. Some of them, for instance expressing approval of content by clicking a “Like” button, hardly involve much time or effort. Others, such as maintaining a campaign blog or creating and uploading visual material such as photos and videos, are more demanding.

In this survey the summed frequency of viewing Ficha Limpa content, expressing approval (“liking”), sharing, chatting, commenting, uploading pictures or videos, and blogging was divided by the number of activities (eight) to maintain a scale with a range where “Never” = 1, “Rarely” = 2, “Occasionally” = 3, and “Frequently” = 4. This combined measure (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.85$) produced an average of 2.55 with 0.71 as a standard deviation (SD). Likewise, all offline activities related to the Ficha Limpa campaign were added together and divided similarly to produce an identical scale with the same range. This index ($\alpha = 0.76$) had a

mean of 1.87 (SD = 0.67) and comprised five measures including discussing Ficha Limpa face to face, distributing campaign materials, attending events, writing articles for traditional media, and making videos for circulation on traditional (offline) media.

Comparatively, the difference between these two variables was statistically significant ($t(859) = 29.06, p < .001$) when analyzed as paired samples. Though the level of online social media activity was relatively higher, both items were positively and significantly correlated ($r = 0.54, p < .001$) to a moderately strong level. This finding makes intuitive sense in conceptualizing that engaging in online activities with higher transaction costs is related to higher degrees of political interest and commitment and should thus contribute more positively towards offline political participation. Overall, it can therefore be advanced that an individual's offline participation in the Ficha Limpa campaign was likely to have been a combined function of their campaign-related online activities and a number of germane characteristics, attitudes, and behaviours, which are summarized below.

Age is frequently employed as a control variable in studies of political participation. Specifically, non-institutionalised or activist forms of participation have long been related to younger age cohorts (Barnes and Kaase, 1979; Watts, 2001, 1999). For the sample of respondents studied here, the mean age was 50.69 years with a SD of 14.34, which makes this sample relatively old compared with the general Brazilian population where in 2008 Internet use was highest among the group of persons aged 15 to 17 years (62.9%) compared with only 11.2% of persons aged 50 years and older (IBGE, 2009). Nonetheless, the age of this sample illustrates how embedded online and social media have become across a wide swath of age groups in Brazil.

Gender is likewise typically included as a control to account for variance in levels of political participation. Previous studies have found that, at least in Western democracies, unconventional political participation is somewhat more frequent among males than females (Jennings and van Deth, 1990). The gender distribution in this study is 62.7% male against 37.6% female, and thus contrasts with statistics of the overall population of Brazilians online where Internet access is relatively evenly split between male (54%) and female users (52%) (European Travel Commission, 2013). Along these lines, one of the most widely documented research findings in political communication is the positive correlation of participation with respondents' educational level (Verba et al., 1995; Gidengil et al., 2004). Here, the highest level of completed education was measured on a scale of 1 (primary school incomplete) to 5 (post-graduate university degree complete). The overall mean value was 3.97 (SD = 0.84), indicating that respondents had, on average, very nearly completed a university Bachelor's degree (college graduate was equal to 4 for this variable). This matches with statistics of the overall population of Brazilians online where Internet use is highest among citizens who completed 15 or more years of formal education (80.4%; IBGE 2009)

Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that an individual's participation in a political campaign will be positively related to their motivation to follow and learn about politics. Hence, a measure ($\alpha = 0.72$) that combined the frequency of generally talking politics face to face, getting (politically) informed, signing petitions, and participating in authorized and unauthorized demonstrations was derived with same four-point "Never" to "Frequently" metric applied for other measures already. In this case, the mean was 2.70 ($SD = 0.65$) in gauging respondents' general political interest.

Other control variables used across several models included contacting official representatives,¹⁶ respondents' views on the state of democracy and the rule of law in Brazil, and respondents' assessment of progress made in combating state corruption in Brazil. Another round of variables measured political attitudes of respondents, such as personal political efficacy and trust in social and political institutions.

Model 1: Offline participation in the Ficha Limpa Campaign

The first model examined the effect of the above variables on respondents' decision to participate in offline activities related to the Ficha Limpa campaign. The dependent variable in this Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model was aggregated from the five offline political activities "discussing the campaign face-to-face"; "distributing campaign material"; "participating in protest events"; "producing print campaign materials"; and "producing audio-visual campaign material". The frequency of each of these activities was measured on a four point scale ranging from never (0) to frequently (3).

In this model (summarized in Table 10.1) it is especially worth noting that the impact of liking campaign content on social networking sites on offline participation is negative and significant ($\beta = -0.248$, $SE = 0.14$, $p < .10$). This finding fits with the general slacktivist argument. The non-significance of other low-effort online activities such as sharing, chatting, and posting comments also seems to confirm the argument that easy-to-perform online activities will not lead to increased offline political engagement. Comparatively, other higher-effort online activities were more likely to predict offline participation in the Ficha Limpa campaign positively. These variables included frequencies of uploading pictures ($\beta = 0.41$, $SE = 0.15$, $p < .01$) and videos ($\beta = 0.33$, $SE = 0.15$, $p < .05$) to social networking sites, as well as writing for blogs or other online outlets ($\beta = 0.56$, $SE = 0.15$, $p < .001$). The frequency of content consumption on social networking sites was also significant and positive ($\beta = 0.55$, $SE = 0.21$, $p < .01$).

In addition, other offline activities helped to explain offline participation in the Ficha Limpa campaign. Being generally more politically active showed a positive association ($\beta = 1.45$, $SE = 0.23$, $p < .001$), as did having signed the official (offline) petition ($\beta = 0.84$, $SE = 0.23$, $p < .001$). Certain attitudes were statistically significant, with the assessment of democraticness being negative ($\beta = -0.24$, $SE = 0.13$, $p < .10$) and the assessment of the rule of law being positive ($\beta = 0.28$, $SE = 0.17$, $p < .10$).

Table 10.2 Model 1: offline participation in the Ficha Limpa Campaign

<i>Variables</i>	β	<i>SE</i>
Contact official	.6588024**	.2516475
Assessment of democraticness	-.241985 [#]	.1255512
Assessment of combating corruption	.0757493	.1590789
Assessment rule of law	.2756998 [#]	.1658081
Political efficacy—say in government	.1109376	.0798998
Political efficacy—voting only way	-.0601739	.0748329
Trust in political parties, congress, and president	.1811638	.2222718
Trust in church, media, military, and police	.1995197	.2052929
Frequency of general Internet use	-.011181	.1425687
Number friends on most important SNS (ln)	-.0103587	.1034933
Frequency of SNS content consumption	.5499362**	.205063
Frequency of liking or disliking on SNS	-.2476422 [#]	.1374
Frequency of sharing on SNS	.1874424	.1634912
Frequency of chatting online	.1615475	.1400689
Frequency of posting comments to SNS	-.2119257	.1612047
Frequency of picture uploads to SNS	.4075953**	.1474739
Frequency of video uploads to SNS	.330526*	.1523663
Frequency of writing for blogs or other online outlet	.5597199***	.1469078
General offline political activity index	1.445946***	.2326174
Participation in AVAAZ electronic petition (0/1)	-.1605059	.2615973
Sign official petition (0/1)	.8365947***	.2343613
Memberships in civil society groups	.1482789	.150801
Vote in 2006 election (0/1)	-.0333005	.3761576
Vote in 2010 election (0/1)	-.1106833	.4766733
Gender (being female)	.0757245	.2395884
Education level	.0226593	.1392618
Age	.00762	.0094579
Constant	-20.62563	18.44067

Note: Coefficients are unstandardized. N = 443. Adjusted R² = 0.476

[#] p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Model 2: Contacting an official representative in the Ficha Limpa Campaign

In this instance, a binary logistic regression was modelled to examine the extent to which online media directly contributed to citizens contacting their elected officials to urge them to vote in favour of the passage of the Ficha Limpa bill. Significant online variables that increased this likelihood were the frequency of posting comments to social networking sites ($\beta = 0.43$, SE = 0.17, $p < .05$) and having participated in the electronic petition by Avaaz ($\beta = 0.84$, SE = 0.29, $p < .01$). Both of these mediated actions were relatively low in effort, but nonetheless increased the likelihood of citizens having contacted a representative by 1.54 and 2.32 times, respectively.

Other significant factors included offline participation in the Ficha Limpa campaign ($\beta = 0.68$, SE = 0.28, $p < .05$), as well as a positive assessment on progress made in combating corruption ($\beta = 0.34$, SE = 0.17, $p < .05$) and having signed the official petition ($\beta = 0.41$, SE = 0.25, $p < .10$).

Table 10.3 Model 2: contacting an official representative in the Ficha Limpa Campaign (logistic)

<i>Variables</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(β)</i>
Offline participation index	.6838964*	.2757863	1.982
Assessment of democraticness	.0670656	.1389456	1.069
Assessment of combating corruption	.3384878*	.1731867	1.403
Assessment rule of law	-.151125	.1835962	0.860
Political efficacy—say in government	.0274498	.0864955	1.028
Political efficacy—voting only way	.0229996	.080767	1.023
Trust in political parties, congress, and president	-.2287485	.2431379	0.796
Trust in church, media, military, and police	-.0915452	.2193524	0.913
Frequency of general Internet use	-.1567784	.1564693	0.855
Number friends on most important SNS (ln)	.1120816	.1112531	1.119
Frequency of SNS content consumption	.0868063	.2206945	1.091
Frequency of liking or disliking on SNS	.131697	.150619	1.141
Frequency of sharing on SNS	.0124089	.1809949	1.012
Frequency of chatting online	.1707778	.1493479	1.186
Frequency of posting comments to SNS	.4320578*	.1737753	1.540
Frequency of picture uploads to SNS	-.0417738	.1584865	0.959
Frequency of video uploads to SNS	-.0139632	.1595776	0.986
Frequency of writing for blogs or other online outlet	.0537262	.1558451	1.055
General offline political activity index	.2008663	.267209	1.222
Participation in AVAAZ electronic petition (0/1)	.8403497**	.2905756	2.317
Sign official petition (0/1)	.4085715 [#]	.2513799	1.505
Memberships in civil society groups	.1611509	.164144	1.175
Vote in 2006 election (0/1)	-.1043287	.4245876	0.901
Vote in 2010 election (0/1)	-.175271	.5191077	0.839
Gender (being female)	-.5406731*	.2659258	0.582
Education level	.0158552	.1512639	1.016
Age	.0182527 [#]	.0100427	1.018
Constant	-41.19656*	19.62771	0.000

Note: Coefficients are unstandardized. N = 443. Pseudo R² = 0.233

[#] p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Conclusions

The case of the Brazilian Ficha Limpa campaign provides several interesting lessons for the ongoing debate on the potential of the Internet in general, and social media in particular, to increase political participation and to add to the effectiveness of political campaigning.

At the macro-level of policy change, the campaign clearly constitutes a success story of Web 2.0. As previous attempts to tackle electoral corruption in Brazil that went unaccompanied by major civic pressure were unsuccessful, it is reasonable to assume that the massive online support of the Ficha Limpa Bill was a central element in bringing about electoral reform. However, the observed dynamic interaction between campaign events that were reported on by traditional mainstream media and activities in the campaign's support group on Facebook also suggests that much of the public pressure in

the context of this campaign resulted from cross-fertilization between online and offline media.

At the meso-level of social organization, the strategy to promote the campaign via online social networks significantly increased the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of the MCCE's mobilization efforts. The fact that ten thousands of individual users shared information about the campaign on Facebook and other social networks enabled the organization to reach out to an unprecedented number of citizens. At the same time, and maybe even more importantly, it also helped the MCCE to extend mobilization beyond the boundaries of its traditional networks.

Another crucial element in the online campaign was the intervention of the online advocacy group Avaaz, whose e-petition to solicit legislative support for the Ficha Limpa was endorsed by more than 2 million Internet users. The petition's success, which was widely reported on by traditional media, generated a level of public awareness and pressure that made it almost impossible for the Brazilian Congress to reject the Ficha Limpa bill without risking a significant damage to its already tarnished reputation.

At the micro-level of individual participation, and concerning the question whether engagement in online activism effectively impacted Brazilians' general patterns of political behaviour, the results are more complex. The analysis of survey evidence presented in this chapter suggests that professional e-advocacy networks may be more effective in generating effective individual participation than entertainment-orientated social networking sites.

The first statistical model analyzed the relationship between various online activities with offline activities in the context of the Ficha Limpa campaign. Here, it was observed that relatively low-effort online activities such as liking or sharing content, which constitute the core offer of social networking sites oriented towards entertainment and the cultivation of personal relationships such as Facebook, (Quan-Haase and Young, 2010), were ineffective in contributing to offline political engagement. By contrast, activities that involved higher transaction costs such as uploading campaign videos or writing for blogs or other online outlets had a positive significant impact on offline engagement. This partially confirms the slacktivism argument according to which comfortable one-click activities that require little personal effort will have little or no practical political effect.

The second statistical model examined the extent to which the use of different online media contributed to citizens' decision to contact a legislator in order to convince them to vote in favour of the Ficha Limpa anti-corruption bill. It was established that those citizens who had previously participated in an e-petition organized by the e-advocacy group Avaaz were most likely to contact their legislator. Other activities such as posting comments on campaign content on social networking sites also positively contributed to contacting a legislator, although to a lesser extent.

In 2012, the Ficha Limpa bill against electoral corruption obtained constitutional status¹⁷ and will doubtlessly impact Brazilian politics in the years to come. For the MCCE, an organization with over 10 years of experience in civil society

campaigning, the bill's passage constitutes the preliminary culmination of its struggle against electoral corruption. MCCE leaders are convinced that their strategic decision to "go online" was the crucial key to success, given that it enabled the organization to achieve a maximum level of mobilization with a minimum investment in advertising and communication costs.

Even if good portions of that mobilization remained exclusively Internet-based, in the course of the campaign a larger number of Brazilian citizens than ever before engaged in a process of public discussion and protest related to political reform.¹⁸ If participation is a core feature of democracy, as many classic definitions postulate (Dahl 1998; Diamond, 1996), such an increase of public participation in policy making might be considered as a democratic achievement per se – regardless of how and at what effort it came about. This general finding is all the more pertinent for Latin America as a region, where in many countries the process of full democratic consolidation is hampered by political apathy that is engendered by corruption and the resulting lack of trust in political institutions.

Notes

- 1 According to the Global Digital Activism Data Set, a Washington-based research initiative that tracks incidents of civic activism promoted by digital media, out of 1,465 cases worldwide between 1990 and 2012, 99 were registered in the region.
- 2 The Global Digital Activism Dataset registered 38 cases of digital activism in Brazil between 1999 and 2011. The data show a clear upward trend in digital activism. While only two events were registered in 2006 and three in 2007, 15 events occurred in 2009. Online activism in Brazil mainly targets political causes with "freedom of information" being the dominant issue (11 cases), followed by "democratic rights and freedoms" such as free, fair, and transparent elections, accountable officials and government accountability (6 cases).
- 3 "Out with Sarney."
- 4 Different from direct democratic procedures elsewhere, where having met a specified signature target automatically qualifies a citizen-proposed bill for popular vote, in Brazil, the decision to approve, reject, or amend a citizen proposed bill is reserved to Congress. Whether civil society groups succeed or fail in their endeavour to influence national political decision making will hence not only depend on their mobilization capacity but also to a considerable degree on congressional good will.
- 5 Private communication with Marlón Reis, Judge, Supreme Electoral Tribunal of Brazil and Director of the MCCE.
- 6 The first group was launched as an open group on Facebook under <https://www.facebook.com/groups/91633340771/>. In January 2010 the MCCE launched a second Facebook presence, this time opting for the format of an organization page; see <https://www.facebook.com/MCCEFichaLimpa?fref=ts>.
- 7 The name Avaaz is derived from the Persian word for 'voice' (آواز).
- 8 Rede Globo; see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1Bqyg4lqmI>, retrieved 1 June 2011.
- 9 Marlón Reis, MCCE Director, private communication, March 2012.
- 10 Isabela Calmon Nogueira, voluntary MCCE activist, private communication, December 2011.
- 11 Catholic Overseas Development Agency (2011).
- 12 UKAID (2011).
- 13 Marlón Reis, MCCE Director, private communication, March 2012.
- 14 While the "pass-along effect" Norman and Russell (2006) involved with this technique is helpful in increasing sample size and reducing the transaction cost of response collection,

it is often criticized because respondents are not randomly selected from a known sample frame and this limitation risks biasing the sample and diminishing the generalizability of inferential statistical tests. While acknowledging that these threats are real, as the online population has grown and the Internet has become more embedded in everyday life, it has become increasingly common for social scientific inquiries to proceed with samples derived through this process Kaye and Johnson (1999).

- 15 See <http://www.facebook.com/MCCEFichaLimpa> and <http://www.facebook.com/groups/91633340771/>.
- 16 A binary variable that measured if, during the Ficha Limpa campaign, respondents contacted their Congressional representative or Senator to urge him or her to vote in favor of the Ficha Limpa bill.
- 17 On 16 February 2012, a majority of seven of Brazil's eleven Supreme Court Ministers voted on the constitutionality of the Ficha Limpa electoral law.
- 18 To give an approximate idea of the compared levels of general participation in offline protest and online protest in the Ficha Limpa campaign: Bruhn (2008), who analyses urban protest in Brazil, registered 2,304 events of street protest in Sao Paolo during the period between 1989 and 2002, with an average attendance of 4,886 protesters. In comparison, over the month of June 2011 alone the Facebook page of the MCCE received 33,038 likes by users residing inside Brazil, 16,920 of whom were residents of Sao Paolo.

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