



# CYBER-ACTIVISM WITHIN THE GLOBAL DIGITAL DIVIDE

- A CASE STUDY OF PERU -

## **Master Thesis**

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## **Abstract**

The following thesis wants to explore if and to what extent cyber-activism is possible in a developing country such as Peru, in the context of the global digital divide. In order to do that, it will investigate Peruvians' perception of online activism; it will take into account recent cases of online activism from Peru; and it will put into discussion several concepts such as alternative media, the democratic divide and the global digital divide.

The interest for this subject has emerged from my contact with news regarding the social movements taking place in Peru, in order to protect indigenous communities against resource depletion and exploitation.

In order to conduct the research, I have used qualitative unobtrusive research methods such as media content analysis and netnography.

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# 1. Introduction

Peru, a small country in Latin America which has been dealing with constant social unrest for the past 20 years, is now moving towards a new direction. Since peaceful protests are legally considered acts of civil disobedience<sup>1</sup>, and while protesters and activists who express their grievances in the streets have to face “*death threats, rape threats, smears and stigmatization by the media, confiscation of equipment, electronic and physical surveillance, police using excessive force and arrests*”<sup>2</sup>, the Peruvian activist struggle is now finding refuge in the on-line environment.

This thesis aims to research Peruvian cyber-activism to find out whether the newly established habit regarding Peruvians’ online political participation is changing the face of social movements in developing countries. In the context of an omnipresent discourse surrounding the ‘global digital divide’, activists in developing countries are trying to make their causes known at an international level. On the other side of the barricade, mainstream media channels and outlets are demonizing activists by presenting biased portrayals of their campaigns and efforts. Hence, activists tend to rely on different media – an alternative media on which they can express their grievances, support their causes, communicate, raise international awareness and establish transnational cooperation.

This qualitative research is based on two research methods. The media content analysis is used with the purpose of investigating the alternative media outlets that the Peruvian cyber-activists create and share, as well as mainstream media outlets that describe the activist efforts. This dual approach has the purpose of eliminating any biased opinions that the researcher may have when conducting a qualitative research. Taking into account that this research is mainly based on online material, a netnographic research will be conducted which will provide a wider perspective on the issue, as it will also give multiple angles from which to draw conclusions.

At the theoretical level, the research will first introduce the concept of alternative media as it is necessary to make a clear delimitation from mainstream media, since in the case of Peruvian cyber-activism, these two represent opposing forces. Moreover, having the Internet as a central element on which the research is based, it is important to establish who uses the Internet for activist purposes. The democratic divide will try to reveal patterns in Peruvian Internet activists and it will try

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/peruvian-police-and-soldiers-given-licence-to-kill-protesters-five-years-after-bagua-violence-9574484.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://mic.com/articles/92517/the-one-country-where-environmental-activism-comes-with-a-threat-of-death>

to establish to what extent online activists are willing to translate their efforts into offline activism. To reinforce this idea, the social movement theory of Resource Mobilization will be debated as well. Additionally, the concept of global digital divide will be approached in the theoretical section, as it is necessary to understand the international context in which Peruvian cyber-activism takes place. The chapter concludes with an overview of the potentials and problems that online activism presupposes.

## **Problem formulation**

All the above arguments lead to the following problem formulation:

**How does online activism function in a developing country like Peru, in the context of the global digital divide?**

This issue will mainly be explored with the help of the following research questions:

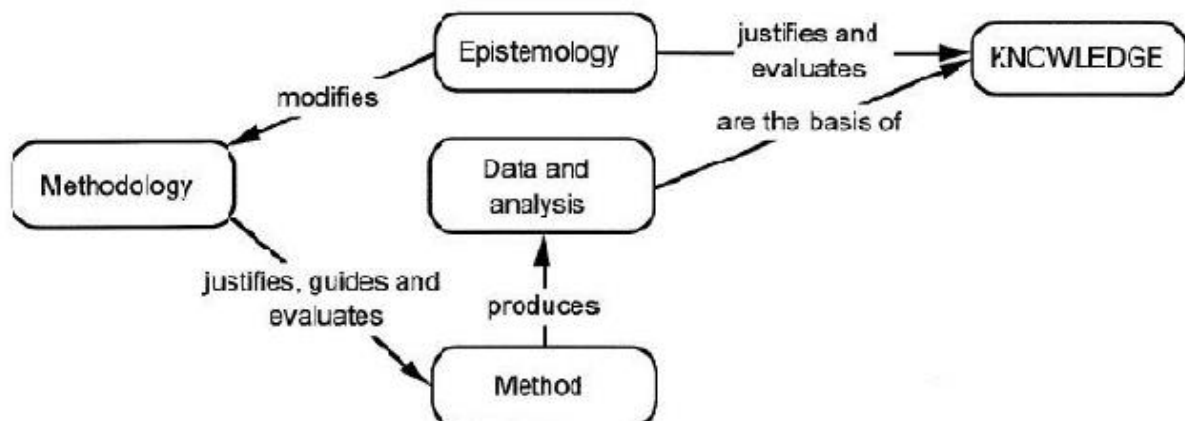
- 1. How do Peruvians perceive Internet activism?*
- 2. How do mainstream media perceive Peruvian activists and what are the effects of this?*
- 3. How does the global digital divide affect cyber-activism in Peru?*
- 4. How has online activism developed so far in Peru?*

## 2. Methodology

In order to provide a thorough answer to the presented problem formulation, it is necessary to first establish the methodological structure that this research entails.

### 2.1. Philosophical considerations

In order to provide the structure for planning, implementing and evaluating the quality of a study, three facets of a research must be discussed and taken into consideration – epistemology, methodology, and method (Carter & Little, 2007). The interconnectivity between these stages of a research can be seen in Figure 1 – while methodology validates the method (which creates data and analyses), and knowledge in its turn is generated from data and analyses, epistemology adjusts the methodology and justifies the knowledge formed (*ibid.*).



*Figure 1: The Simple Relationship between Epistemology Methodology and Method*

Carter & Little (2007: 1317)

#### 2.1.1. Epistemology

Epistemology is “the study of nature of knowledge and justification” (Schwandt, 2001: 1) and epistemological matters are “issues about an adequate theory of knowledge or justificatory strategy” (Harding, 1987: 2). This means that epistemology can be understood as justification of knowledge. Philosophers of science and methodology are interested in the nature of scientific knowledge – the statements made by several empirical disciplines and the manner in which the views of the researchers are formed and sustained (Kitcher, 2002). Epistemology also deals with the techniques

of knowing and the belief system of the researcher regarding the nature of knowledge – for example beliefs about the certainty, structure, complexity and the sources of knowledge (Klenke, 2008). Every researcher bases his research on a set of epistemological assumptions, and it is worthy to take into account that these assumptions have an impact on the way the data is comprehended and interpreted (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, epistemology also handles the relationship between the researcher and the researcher, by emphasizing the placement of the researcher – either separately from what is researched (traditional, usually quantitative research), or interacting with what is researched (naturalistic, qualitative research) (*ibid.*). This thesis is a type of research which can be found in the second category. According to Guba (1990. p.27), “the inquirer and inquired are infused into a single monistic entity. Findings are the creation of the process of interaction between the two”. In this thesis, the inquirer is me as the researcher, and the inquired consists of a mix between the interviewed participants, the data of the netnographic research (which I will discuss later in the methodology section) and the data found in the media. The results, therefore, will be a mutual creation between myself and all these elements that form the inquired.

However, epistemology cannot be discussed without taking into consideration the concept of ontology. Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality in a study. In this study there are “several dynamic realities, which are context dependent and which embrace an ontology that is against the presence of an external reality” (*ibid.*). By external reality, we refer to a reality that exists outside (and autonomous) of our understanding of it – these individual interpretations are profoundly rooted in a rich contextual web that cannot be readily generalized to other sceneries (Searle, 1995). The author of this thesis does not accept that there is a single unitary reality apart from ones awareness and highlights a relativistic ontology, that suggest that there is no objective reality – there are multiple realities, socially constructed by individuals from within their own contextual interpretation (Klenke 2008). By analyzing the opinions of Peruvians, I gain access to each person’s reality and interpretation in the context of the manifestations taking place in Peru. These views, combined with my own, will give a broad overview on the matter, thus giving me a possibility to research it from different perspectives and last but not least, it will give both me and the reader a broader and deeper understanding of it.

Epistemological and ontological conventions are converted into distinct methodologies that try to answer the question – how should we study the world? (*ibid.*). Kaplan (1964, p. 18) defined

methodology as “the study, the description, the explanation and the justification” of methods, and not the methods themselves. Methodology reveals the principles about the knowledge and values characteristic to the paradigm which the study belongs to, and it also indicates a concern and commitment to a specific type of knowledge (Klenke 2008).

In order to justify the methods used in this thesis, it is necessary to explain the choice of study design. I have opted for a qualitative research, as the goal of this study is to increase the researcher’s understanding of the significance of the phenomena under study, from the angle of the individuals and processes being studied (Murray 1998). Qualitative research is considered to be much more flexible and fluid than quantitative research, because it stresses upon determining innovative and unexpected findings, as it also offers the researcher the option to modify his research approach in case of unforeseen occurrences (Bryman 1984).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), “qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world [...] qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them”. Therefore, as a qualitative researcher, I am interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, in other words, “the way in which people make sense of this world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam 2009, p. 13). Merriam also points out three main characteristics that best explain qualitative research:

- The attention is on process, understanding and significance;
- The researcher is the main instrument of data gathering and analysis;
- The process is inductive.

The first characteristic stresses out that the purposes of qualitative research gravitate around accomplishing an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives and describe how people interpret what they experience (*ibid.*). The focus is on understanding the phenomenon of concern from the perspective of the subjects studied, not the researcher’s.

Qualitative research is a struggle to understand the circumstances in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and a set of interactions. This is why I have opted for analyzing Peruvians’ posts, in order to explore their perspective, as their insight (based on their continuous contact with anti-mining social movements) could provide reliable and revealing information. Considering that



the researcher is the main tool in data gathering and analysis, qualitative research takes the human instrument as being instantly receptive and adapting.

Finally, an inductive process refers to the researcher's ability to gather data, build concepts, hypothesize theories, rather than deductively testing hypothesis as it would happen in a positivist research (*ibid.*).

### **2.1.2. Paradigm**

According to Klenke (2008), ontological and epistemological assumptions are converted into precise methodological strategies. While ontology represents the philosophy of reality and epistemology is interested in how one becomes to distinguish the reality, methodology detects the practices necessary for attaining knowledge of reality. The connections between ontology, epistemology and methodology sum up the core discussions of research paradigms. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), paradigms are a concentration of what we think about the world but cannot demonstrate. Meanwhile, Patton (1978) argues that a paradigm is a world view, a general perspective and a way of deconstructing the complexity of the real world – a paradigm according to him tells the researcher what is imperative, genuine and rational.

The most relevant paradigm for this study is *constructivism*. Constructivism is based on the idea that the human world is different from the natural/physical world and therefore it must be studied in a different way (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Jonassen (1991) argues that constructivism is the mind of the knower, who himself constructs a reality based on his/hers appreciations. Constructivism is also based on how knowledge is being built and created, as opposed to objectivism, where the focus is on the object of knowing (*ibid.*). Guba and Lincoln (1994) believe that the constructivist philosophy is ontologically relativist – this means that realities are seen in the form of various, intangible mental constructions based on interactions and experience, local and explicit in their nature, dependent in their content on the persons (or groups) holding the constructions. As a constructivist I will approach subjectivism in this thesis, as I assume that the investigator and the object of investigation “are interactively linked so that the findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds” (*ibid.*). Subjectivism also suggests that the claims regarding reality and truth are entirely dependent upon the data (Guba 1990).

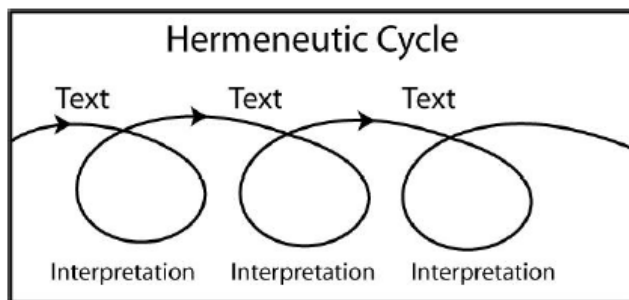
In the current study it is particularly important to understand the phenomena – the online public

perception of (and participation in) cyber-activism in Peru - in its particular environment. Giving importance to the context also entails that statistical generalization is not the principal aim of socially constructed knowledge (*ibid.*).

### 2.1.3. The Hermeneutic Cycle

For a better interpretation of the findings of this research it is required to adopt a humanistic view, by using the hermeneutic circle. Although the investigation can be started off with an uncertain and instinctive understanding of a study, by dividing the text and making sense of lesser fragments at a time, the entire text can be seen from a different point of view. It transforms into a spiral or a cycle of new information, that helps the research gain an even more profound significance into the problem. Furthermore, the learning transforms into a continuing process – which might shed light on new aspects and areas where addition research is required (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008).

The hermeneutic cycle can be applied to the current research the circle of interpretation used in the understanding of knowledge. In this way, the process of understanding and gathering data becomes a cycle of exposure to information (text from interview transcriptions, news-articles, netnographic content, etc.), interpretation and the re-exposure to other texts. Consequent contact with a text is influenced by the interpretation of the prior text.



Source: <http://www.sfu.ca/media-lab/cycle/presentation/design.html>

## 2.2. Research methods

### 2.2.1. Media content analysis

Significant and large scale social movements and campaigns such as the anti-mining movements, have attracted a significant amount of media attention in Peru. This research focuses on alternative and new media (particularly Internet and social media) as a means for political participation,

therefore a media content analysis with data gathered from news articles and online articles which are relevant for this thesis will be conducted.

Media content analysis was first introduced as a systematic technique to study mass media by Harold Lasswell (1927) who originally wanted to study propaganda (Bryant). This research method represents a deconstruction of fragments of media with a direction that could either go towards quantitative or qualitative research (*ibid.*). This thesis, however, focuses on the qualitative aspects of the text – this type of research involves unstructured, open considerations and discussions based on the themes found in the texts.

Qualitative content analysis gives high importance to textual significance, and, in the same time, it is concerned with the means of expression in a text, such as “the context of the text, power relations in a text or the different perspectives in a text” (Ibid., p. 194). Textual analysis is a method through which the researcher can collect information regarding how other human beings understand the world, and by performing a textual analysis on a text the researcher makes an educated guess on the most likely interpretations that can be made of the text (McKee, 2003).

Media content analysis allows the researcher to make use of combined methods for analyzing text or transcripts, therefore it is obvious that this method reaches the principal characteristic of social interaction. Moreover, this method is an unobtrusive way of examining interactions and perceptions, as it offers an insight into intricate models of human thought and language habits.

However, as scholars argue, media content analysis depends deeply on the interpretation of the one that is conducting the research – which means that media content analysis can be very biased and furthermore, it could be significantly different from the understanding of other researchers (*ibid.*). The audience of the messages sent out by media, are usually considered to be passive consumers, which hardly make any efforts to truly interpret the intentions hidden behind a given text. Media content can be misleading, as it can create inaccurate images of the issues in a society. Considering how much media attention social movements attract, and also the fact that a part of social movements is the appearance of alternative media and citizen journalism platforms, it is important to analyze how these articles portray the social movements Peru. Furthermore, alternative media publications were what initially motivated me to start researching this matter, thus analyzing these could come as a supplement for the other methods employed in the study.

### 2.2.2. Netnography

Apart from the analysis of online blogs and publications about the situation in Peru, this thesis will focus on other types of online materials, such as the ones that give internet users the possibility to express biased opinions regarding the matters happening in the country. What is of particular concern are related Youtube videos, Facebook posts, pictures and comments from people that express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction about the mining in their countries. This thesis will be particularly interested to analyze this online material and to qualitatively interpret the communication between users, and find out whether this communication can establish the grounds for a transnational cooperation between movements. Online communication between consumers has been studied by using netnography (Kozinets 2002). Netnography in this case is useful when stressed upon Peruvians opinions, to help the researcher understand their attitudes, insights, imagery and feelings. The Internet offers big opportunities for social group involvement where users form virtual communities and where they can affirm social power, unite and assert symbols and lifestyles that are significant to them and the communities they shape (*ibid.*). Kozinets (2002, p. 62) defines netnography as “*a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study cultures and communities that are emerging through computer mediated communications*”.

Netnography is primarily based on the observation of textual discourse and it uses content analysis in order to faster code and analyze the data. Langer & Beckman (2005) argue that netnographic research (content analysis of online communication) can be placed between discourse analysis, content analysis and ethnography. Content analysis in itself, is today a deep rooted method in communication and media studies, and although it was initially used for traditional mass media text (such as texts and shows present in newspapers, radio or TV), there is no reason not to extend its area for ICTs as well (*ibid.*).

Stempel and Stewart (2000) point out that there are a few differences between the content analysis of conventional mass media and the content analysis of online media communication. One major difference stresses out the fact that mass media is by definition public media. On the internet however, it has to be decided from case to case (from webpage to webpage) whether it is the case of private, semiprivate or public communication (Langer & Beckman 2005). If access is limited (for example with passwords, etc.) and available just for members, it can be considered to be semiprivate communication. If the access to the material is not restricted, it can be considered to be

public communication - where anyone can partake with posting content without any boundaries (*ibid.*).

For this thesis I will make use of both semi private and public communication. Semi private communication will be present in the shape of material (pictures or videos on which people can comment) from Facebook pages, which you first need an account to access, from certain activist groups which you need to be accepted in as a member, etc. Public communication will be also employed in the form of user communication on public websites such as Youtube or 9gag, where people post songs, recordings, photos of what happened in Peru.

Another significant difference between content analysis in mainstream media as opposed to online media is regarding the honesty and trustworthiness of online communicators (Langer & Beckman 2005). Solomon (1996) argues in favour of this idea saying that “cyberspace appears to be a dark hallway filled with fugitive egos seeking to entrap the vulnerable neophyte”. However he goes on presenting the other side of the coin, arguing that the anonymity of a communicator in an online media could also represent an advantage in terms of trustworthiness – “*from behind their screen identities, respondents are more apt to talk freely about issues that could create inhibitions in a traditional face-to-face group, particularly when discussing sensitive topics*” (*ibid.*). This can be applied to this research as well, as I believe it is easier for people to express their grievances regarding issues that have a widespread social impact, particularly when they have anonymity to protect them and give them a feeling of freedom to say whatever they want, rather than physically facing other people or even participating in a protest.

Netnography enables the researcher to reach interesting and valuable conclusions from a fairly small number of messages, considering that the messages are rich in their description and, in the same time, interpreted with considerable analytic depth and insight (Kozinets 2002, p. 64). This method is not as obtrusive as focus groups or personal interviews, as it is conducted based on the opinions expressed by people in a setting which was not fabricated or pre-determined by the researcher. It is also enabling the research to gather information in a manner that is less expensive and it is opening a window into naturally arising behaviours and discussions regarding the situations of natural resource depletion by companies, to the disadvantage of the state and its citizens.

Netnography however has its limitations, due to its narrow emphasis on online communities, the requirement for interpretative skills on behalf of the researcher, and the absence of informant

identifiers existent in the online framework (that leads to difficulty in generalizing outcomes to groups external the online community sample) (*ibid.*). However, the information gathered through netnography will support and be united with the data received through the other methods involved in the study, helping create a wider, more documented perspective.

### **2.3. Trustworthiness of qualitative research**

Constructivists rely on pluralistic, interpretative, open-ended and contextualized perspectives on reality. According to Seale, “*the trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability*” (Seale 1999, p. 266). The main issue regarding trustworthiness is as follows: “*How can an inquirer persuade his or her audience (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?*” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290).

Constructivism aids to the purpose that Johnson (1995, p.4) sets for qualitative researches – “*to engage in research that probes for a deeper understanding rather than examining surface features*”. Constructivism gives importance to the multiple realities that people have in their minds, therefore, according to Golafshani (2003), it is necessary to apply multiple methods of research. Engaging multiple methods, such as in this case, netnography and media analysis, will lead to further valid, reliable and diverse building of realities (*ibid.*).

The trustworthiness of this study is ensured by trustworthiness and documentation. By transparency I mean that, the online texts that have been selected for the qualitative analysis have been accurately transcribed and translated. Furthermore, the links where the online posts can be found and read will be provided in the bibliography section under “online materials”, so that a proper verification of accuracy can be completed by the readers of the thesis if desired. Documentation stands for a dense portrayal of the phenomenon under inspection. As Shenton (2004) argues, a detailed explanation in the study can be an important provision for encouraging credibility, as it helps to convey the genuine circumstances that are being researched, and also the contexts that frame them. Furthermore, the random sampling of texts selected as data for the study can represent a way for making the outcome of the thesis more credible, as this random selection tactic may contradict any assumption of researcher biasness (*ibid.*).

## **2.4. Limitations**

As an addition to the limitations that have already been mentioned in the methodology chapter, an additional remark needs to be made regarding the approach that entails combining two different research methods of data gathering. I believe that a significant amount of data may have passed unexploited as the volume of data provided by the World Wide Web on Peruvian cyber-activism was considerably big, and it was necessary to use only the most relevant findings for this research. However a thorough analysis of the data was made in order to select the best quotes and Internet material.

My subjectivity can also represent a delimitation of the study as certain aspects of the study had a somewhat emotional impact and could have contributed towards certain biasness. Nevertheless, as I have mentioned previously, this is a characteristic of qualitative research and if it is properly acknowledged and identified, it will not affect the results of the study.

### 3. Theory

Based on alternative media/new media research, social movement theories, and theories of the public sphere to form a theoretical framework, this cross-cultural study examines activists' use of new media to understand the role of the Internet (blogs, social media websites, forums, etc) and how it is used for political participation and activism in Peru. The purpose of this research is to facilitate the understanding of how Peruvians perceive and use the Internet for cyberactivism, and how this new media platform serves to create an alternative public sphere. The aim is also to understand how new media empowers and encourages online activists to participate in offline activities. Such research is particularly important because much is still unknown about new media's impact on mobilization (Wojcieszak 2009). Moreover, cases of online activism from non-Western/underdeveloped countries have received little attention (Nusser & Hamilton 2008).

#### 3.1. Alternative and new media

Scholars of alternative media argue that it is common for activists within social movements to create their own media – an alternative media, with the purpose of countering the hegemonic messages, misinformation and negative portrayals of activism presented by mainstream press (Downing 2001; Rodriguez 2001). According to McLeod & Hertog (1999) and their suggested protest paradigm, traditional media will always negatively cover social movements by delegitimizing them and hurting the activists' mobilization efforts. Therefore, activists' choice of relying on alternative media becomes justifiable. The most widely used platform for activists to create or reproduce content is the Internet. Internet allows social movements to get around traditional gatekeepers, particularly traditional media (such as newspapers, TV and radio), as it offers an alternative viewpoint and empowers activists by giving them a voice. Smith et al. (2001) argue that online alternative media 'allow for a more decentralized channeling of information about public demonstrations than is possible through the mass media outlets' (p. 1418).

The great advantage of the Internet is that it gives 'movements and activists the power of mass communication' (Postmes & Brunsting 2002, p. 294). Moreover, other than transcending the filters and limitations of communication which are imposed by mainstream media, alternative media also functions as a 'counter public sphere' (Fraser 1993). Fraser (1993) gives examples of different alternative public spheres, constructing them as a critique to Habermas' existing notion of public sphere. He argues that these alternative public spheres allow like-minded people to get together and



express their common issues and concerns, and to reinforce their group identity. Social movement actors and activists are likely to be found communicating in and across such spheres, argues Fraser (*ibid.*). The Internet, therefore, can be seen as a subaltern public sphere – a forum in which people can participate, which provides empowerment for groups or individuals as it is a non-censored platform where solidarity is formed and where alternative views are being expressed (Harlow & Harp 2012). As Bennett (2004) said, the Internet allows individuals to join ‘political communities’ that they otherwise would not in everyday life.

A distinct approach to understanding alternative media is its potential for mobilization and prompting collective action (Kessler 1984). Postmes and Brunsting (2002) argue that, when it comes to collective action, the Internet is “*opening up new avenues*” and “*reinforcing existing forms*” – a conclusion based upon research conducted on Dutch environmental activists and non-activists. Their study also underlines that most of the traditional forms of collective action have equivalent Internet versions: e-mails, online petitions, virtual sit-ins and cyber-attacks – a conclusion which strengthens the idea that Internet enhances political activism. However, it is interesting to reflect upon, whether or not these types of alternative media and social networking systems, allow for the occurrence of new types of activism which would otherwise not take place without the existence of Internet. This research examines, qualitatively, if and how activists and non-activists from Peru are harnessing the power of alternative media. The purpose of this research is also to identify whether alternative media is changing activism by trying to underpin more specifically how online and offline activism are linked.

Alternative media has also played a significant part in shifting awareness regarding social movements from the national level to a global one. McAdam et al. (2001) argue that the relational mechanisms, which alter connections among people groups and interpersonal networks, are an essential part of understanding social movement mobilization (along with environmental mechanisms – which represent the externally generated influences on conditions that affect social life, and cognitive mechanisms – which operate through alterations of individual and collective perception). Relational mechanisms encompass the changes in the patterns of connection between people and groups. Edwards (2014) argues that the network of interpersonal relationships between activists – which are created in various ways (for example, by overlapping memberships, cooperation on campaigns or existing family and friendship connections) - play an important role in the creation of an “*infrastructure of communication on which mobilization depends*” (p. 157).

She goes on, arguing that “*globalization has expanded the activist networks considerably by enabling activist to connect beyond their geographical locale*”.

The main reason for this is the rise of new media (*ibid.*). The Internet and mobile phones have given activists the ability of instant communication over spatial and temporal distances (Castells et. al, 2006). These elements have also altered the core nature of communication. Information and communication can no longer be controlled ‘top-down’ by the state or mass media as people can now communicate directly with one another via the internet and social media in ways that are instant ( in real-time), interactive and credible (as the messages are personalized and the source is known). They have called this type of communication “*person-to-person, horizontal, mass communication*” (p. 211). Mobile communication (mobile phones and internet – as they converge through wireless technology) plays an increasingly significant role in the mobilization of protest events. This can be seen in the case of ‘*flash mobs*’ where protest events are spontaneously and autonomously organized through text or instant messaging (Rheingold 2002). Mobile phones also allow for communication of different types, as Castells et al. (2006) argue - a feature called ‘multi-modality’ which underlines how mobile phones today can send and receive image, sound and text simultaneously, enabling them to become “*living eyes and ears... to observe events in real time and share them*’ in a communication network which is ‘*always on*’ (*ibid.*, p. 211).

Therefore, actions such as communicating issues and grievances, sharing information and generating an emotional bond between activists, are no longer dependent upon the proximity of face to face encounters. Once these channels of communication have been established via new and alternative media, they can become conduits for the diffusion of ideas and for the organization of events, “*not only from one person to another, but also from one country to another*” (Edwards 2014, p. 158). Edwards’ point reflects on the Internet’s possibility of making a campaign or social issue know at an international level, which is exactly what Peruvian cyber-activists are doing through the use of blogs and social media.

### **3.2. The democratic divide**

A rich body of empirical studies on online transformation of spaces for political activity falls into different categories. The richest category of existing research literature describes a division in the participation of online politics. Researches have called this ‘the democratic divide’ – a concept which refers to an apparent demographic inequality in political participation (Ali 2011). A great deal

of research regarding the democratic divide argues against a so-called cyber-optimistic viewpoint, that the internet has strong political potentials to improve participatory equalization (Sylvester & McGlynn, 2010). As some researchers argue, the internet's potential for transforming participation makes little impact on "*long-standing patterns of participatory inequality*" (Schlozman et al., 2010). Researchers emphasize that socio-demographic patterns of political participation are quite similar between online and offline modes because people with access to conventional resources (money, time, and knowledge), which are required for offline participation, proportionately have access to internet-specific resources (possession of computers, easy access to the internet, and relevant skills for Web usage). The socio-demographic pattern in online participation may reflect further equalization if political participation via the internet were more accessible (chiefly in terms of motivation and participatory competence) and if access was provided to those lacking resources. These ideas are reinforced by researchers who have emphasized the concept of 'the global digital divide', which will be discussed in the next subchapter.

Socio-demographic markers such as age, gender, race, income, and education can also help predict who will participate in online or offline political activities and who will not. These socio-demographic markers can also indicate the level of involvement in participation (Boulianne 2009). Web-based communication facilitates young citizens' political participation online. A research by Shelley, Thrane and Shulman (2006) reported that white young people are more apt to be *e-citizens* involved in political participation online, whereas a different research from Jensen, Danziger and Venkatesh (2007) has revealed that relatively affluent senior citizens are more engaged actively in offline civic activities. However, Best and Krueger (2005) when analyzing representativeness of online political participation, have found out that neither wealth nor age can predict online civic engagement, and they argue that predictors for online participation significantly differ from predictors for offline participation.

### **3.3. The global digital divide**

The global digital divide refers to the unequal distribution of information and communication technology across nations and it is a concept which has become a common political catchphrase, which usually fails to capture all the dimensions of the divide. However, in academic circles, in the same vein as the democratic divide, it is well established that the digital divide encompasses more than physical access to information and communication technologies (ICTs). Scholars agree that the global digital divide is also a question of how ICTs are used. Traditional discourse addressing the

global digital divide is constructed on arguments such as economic integration, access to education and healthcare information.

This paper aims to challenge policy makers and international development organizations to take this understanding of ICTs further, by considering the capacity of Internet, social media and mobile phones to empower individuals in developing nations – such as Peru - to express their grievances, which in many cases means making known human rights abuses that they suffer in their nations.

From 1993 to 1995 the number of internet users grew from ten million to forty million. By 2002 there were 670 million internet users whereas today, the Internet has an estimated 1.97 billion users.<sup>3</sup> However, despite these astonishing numbers, the Internet's growth and benefits have not been equally distributed across nations. In 2007, approx. 67% of people living in the 27 the world's most developed, post-industrial nations – had access to Internet.<sup>4</sup> In comparison, only 24.5 % of the population in Latin America had access to it. Moreover, 96% of the Internet servers in the world were located in high-income OECD countries, even though these countries established all together less than 15% of the world's population.<sup>5</sup> These numbers have led scholars to conclude that a large segment of the world population misses out on the tremendous political, social, economic, education and career opportunities created by the digital revolution. Furthermore, in the context which establishes these networks and equipment as the preferred mode of political participation, lifelong learning, employment and commerce, as well as personal expression, not having access or connection to the Internet becomes synonymous to nonexistence (Hammond 1997). Scholars suggest that the Internet even has the potential to level the playing field between nations and post-industrial societies for a various numbers of reasons: the Internet has the ability to reduce barriers to trade and commerce as it allows small businesses in developing nations to sell products

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<sup>3</sup> World Development Indicators Database, WORLD BANK, <http://databank.worldbank.org/ddp/home.do> [hereinafter World Development Indicators Database] (select “World Development Indicators & Global Development Finance” database and click “Next”; then select “World” aggregate variable and click “Next”; then select “Internet Users” as series variable and click “Next”; then select “1993,” “1995,” and “2002,” as time variable and click “Next”; then, under scale option of Format Report select “Units” and under precision option select “0” and click “View Data”).

<sup>4</sup> World Development Indicators Database, *supra* note 29 (select “World Development Indicators & Global Development Finance” database and click “Next”; then select “High Income: OECD” aggregate variable and click “Next”; then select “Internet Users” and “Population” as series variables and click “Next”; then select “2007,” as time variable and click “Next”; then, under scale option of Format Report select “Units” and under precision option select “0” and click “View Data,” then click “Excel” to calculate percentages).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

to developed countries, the informational capacity of the Internet can play a pivotal role in improving basic services, and most importantly, the internet has independent civic value. As scholars argue, ‘those who have computers and Internet communications find themselves better trained, better informed and better able to participate in democracy’ (Cooper 2002).

However, the digital divide has received a fair amount of criticism as not all agree that it deserves special attention. Some commentators argue that the digital divide is merely a symptom of the economic disparity across nations, and therefore, the lack of access to information technologies in developing nations reflects their impoverishment. Others have challenged the relative significance of the divide, as they emphasize that access to ICTs pales in significance when compared to basic needs of poor nations (such as food, water, education, healthcare, etc). A third wave of criticism to the importance of the global digital divide is based on discourses that challenge the urgency of the digital divide – commentators claim that it is a temporary phenomenon that will disappear over time. This argument however points out the rapidly decreasing cost of ICTs, the increasing quality of service and predicts that developing nations will catch up to developed countries on their own. The first waves of arguments against the significance of the global digital divide have received considerable attention also, as scholars argue that they seem to ignore the possibilities that providing access to information technologies to developing nations, might empower them to solve larger problems. Economic depravity, poor education and deficient healthcare can be addressed on a structural level by providing developing nations with infrastructure and skills to compete in the national economy – for which ICT could be an essential tool. Impoverished nations have a lot to gain from the opportunities that Internet brings.

Closing the digital divide could prove to be beneficial for human rights organizations worldwide. As a matter of fact, scholars have observed that human rights NGOs are some of the main beneficiaries of the ongoing discourse regarding the digital divide. As Metzl (1996) points out ‘accurate and timely information is an indispensable tool and an essential precondition for effective responsive action and the promotion of human rights’. Moreover, human rights NGOs take advantage not only of the ease of communication and information dissemination, but also of the fact that for the state it is difficult to supervise the Internet. This is why ICTs ‘have rapidly become key tools of the human rights movements’ (Brophy & Halpin 1999) and they have ‘enormous consequences for the international human rights movement as an aid to its efforts to collect, interpret, and disseminate information and to push for appropriate action in response to violations’

(Metzl 1996).

Assuming that this gap between accessibility to information and communication technology will solve itself in time, waiting for that to happen is an undesirable solution. The longer developing nations are left out of the divide, the more difficult it will be for them to reintegrate. If ICTs will be meaningfully used in developing nations, the sit-back-and-wait approach is not beneficial as just providing access and affordability to ICTS to developing nations is not enough – the problem also involves overcoming a cultural gap. Although the importance of providing ICT infrastructure should not be discounted, it is important to understand that this step only addresses only one piece of the digital divide. As Mark Warschauer (2003) underlines, ‘for a great number of countries, in order to realize many of the objectives related to the right to development, making more effective use of existing resources may be more important than the additional flow of resources’. As developing nations become more physically connected to the rest of the world, it is essential to consider if and how ICTs are correctly used within those countries.

Although the provision of ICT facilities in community sites takes place, and this means that all individuals living in that community have physical access to that technology, such access is meaningless unless people feel able to make use of these opportunities. This backfires, as Warschauer (2003) emphasizes, as the digital divide overlaps with the concept of socio-economic equality but it is not equivalent to it. In other words, there are many ways that the poor can have fuller participation and inclusion, even if they lack an equal amount of resources.

Moreover, researchers underline that central to encouraging the adoption of Internet in developing countries, is also ensuring that the content useful to the people in that country is easily accessible. They emphasize four significant barriers to Internet adoption: lack of local information, literacy barriers, language barriers and lack of cultural diversity of content (Lazarus & Mora 2000). Those who studied the success of ICTs in developing nations have emphasized the need to involve local communities in the design process – so that ICTs can provide solutions to specific needs (which are unique to those communities) and keep the content relevant to local concerns.

Language disparity is one of the main issues regarding the difficulties for adopting new media in developing countries. A report by the World Economic Forum shows that three quarters of all

websites are in English, which makes the Internet more accessible for English speaking people.<sup>6</sup> In addition to this, communities are reluctant to embrace the Internet as an English dominant technology. The reasons for this are plenty – probably the most important being that people in these communities do not understand English. People will not use the Internet if they cannot understand its content and research shows that even people who are able to understand other languages would much rather prefer to use the Internet in their native tongue. Even though there have been initiatives involving strategies to translate content to a community’s native tongue (such as Google Translate), ‘the experience of surfing the web by relying on automatic translators is still suboptimal. There are still many inaccuracies in these services and many concepts (culturally relevant to the communities in developing nations) are lost in translation’ (Ali 2010).

Another reason for why communities can be reluctant to embrace Internet as an English dominated technology is that they see English as a threat to their local culture – a major trend in Islamic countries where although there is a rich communications infrastructure, development of the Internet has been difficult. Cultural relevance is also one of the main problems for implementing ICTs in developing countries. Due to the fact that today the Internet traffic is highly concentrated on a small number of websites, private companies, which create and sort much of the content which can be found on the Internet, target their content at a particular audience. As a result, the interests of communities from developing nations, which usually do not provide attractive markets, go unheard – even with physical access to ICT, they do not have access to content relevant for their lives. These approaches underline the necessity for language implementation of ICTs and also for the creation and development of content culturally relevant for the communities which, although may have physical access, cannot find what they need.

### **3.4. Potentials and problems of online activism**

Since the Internet started developing outside scientific and military communities, it has been embraced by political activists as a means to promote causes but also to ensure internal communication and solidarity. At this stage, two events highlight how political activism and online technologies can be used together: the Zapatista movement in Mexico where, in 1994, the Zapatistas used the Internet to mobilize international support against the Mexican state (Clever

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<sup>6</sup> World Economic Forum, ANNUAL REPORT OF THE GLOBAL DIGITAL DIVIDE INITIATIVE 36 (2002), available at: [http://www.weforum.org/pdf/Initiatives/Digital\\_Divide\\_Report\\_2001\\_2002.pdf](http://www.weforum.org/pdf/Initiatives/Digital_Divide_Report_2001_2002.pdf).

1999); and the anti-capitalistic “*Beatle of Seattle*” where protesters used the Internet to “*foster affiliations and stage events*” (Kahn and Kellner, 2004). These early events have highlighted the Internet’s potential for political activism and NGO activity: 1) The production and dissemination of media information to a wider audience is cheap, fast and global; 2) external supporters are easy to reach and mobilize; 3) it is easier to boost solidarity amongst internal members; 4) activities can be coordinated with a small amount of effort; 5) direct individual participation and interaction among activists is ensured (although they can be in different geographic regions) (Fenton 2008; Jenkins 2006; Pickerill 2001).

According to Jenkins (2006), concepts such as ‘*participatory culture*’ and ‘*media convergence*’ are essential for understanding the broader media cultural context of contemporary online activism. Jenkins considers that the world is shifting towards a media cultural trend of co-production and participation, technological developments facilitating the dissemination and production of media material by any individual with access to the Internet, to a wide audience. The technological precondition for this participation is called by Jenkins ‘*media convergence*’, and it refers to intertwining different media on a cultural level. Cultural media convergence refers to how the ability of moving material from different media platforms to others has created a new type of cultural situation - where more people participate in the production, evaluation and distribution of media material.

Jenkins is cyber-optimistic regarding the democratic potential of convergence culture as, according to his arguments, it enables participation in political activities, mobilization of the youth, and it gives the economically less privileged a possibility for raising awareness to their issues. Some scholars however, are less optimistic in this regard, and they stress three major problems:

- 1) The possibility of creating an online environment for every type of activist project could end up tapping social movements for their collective power;
- 2) The energy of participation in political activities is misdirected towards smaller interest groups and hardly toward larger media platforms where matters of common interest are being discussed;
- 3) The new political groups on the Internet may never have any effect outside the media environment and the followers using it. Natalie Fenton stresses that the basic question for evaluating the potential of online activism is: Does the online activist group have the ability to



create a solid movement and foster social change, or does it function as a ‘radical ghetto’(Fenton 2008, p. 238)? Is the online environment just a platform for quick uprisings of energy and indignation that will not affect the broader social structure of society?

### **3.5. Resource Mobilization Theory**

As pointed out by a significant number of scholars of social movements, anger, frustration and passion do not make for a protest or social movement on their own. Aggrieved groups need more than their feelings, dispositions and inclinations to act collectively in order to change things. The Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) in the study of social movements, stresses that these groups need the means to act as well. RMT pushes the the social movement analysis beyond the ‘*hearts and minds*’ approach of collective behavior (Leites and Wolf, 1970). Regardless of how upset or angry people are, they vary in their ability to launch collective action in response to their grievances. RMT argues that an explanation of social movements should concentrate on how resources are successfully mobilized rather than why people are aggrieved (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Jenkins, 1983). Grievances are ‘*necessary but insufficient*’ explanations for collective behavior (*ibid.*). Moreover, they are secondary factors when explaining collective action, because according to RMT, they are a relatively constant aspect of life (Jenkins and Perrow, 1977). While structural functionalists saw conflict as a rare occurrence of crisis in smooth-running social systems, RMT adopts a conflictual approach, pointing that inequalities and diverging interest built in to social systems are constant sources of conflict. Wilson (1973) argues that there does not need to be a breakdown in order for social conflicts to arise because they are normal and frequent occurrences. The question of why people are aggrieved does not hold much analytical research. According to RMT, the understanding of a social movement is based on an acknowledgement that most of the time society is ridden with enough conflict to supply people with grievances – however, the availability of resources required for collective action should hold a primary focus when studying a social movement. Thus, the emergence of social movements and protest are better explained by the changes in the availability of these resources (on the personal and societal level) and not in terms of strains, social problems and grievances.

Freeman (1979) has therefore divided the resources required for collective action in two categories – ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’.

Tangible resources can be: money (which could be used to purchase campaign materials, to pay

staff, hire facilities, travel, etc.); participants (who offer their involvement and labor); organization and communication infrastructure (used to coordinate action and expand the area of interest of a social movement); leaders (who can both administer the tasks of a movement and articulate its cause for a wider public)

Intangible resources include: skills and know-how (to set up campaigns and make them successful, and interact with the public and media); public support (to provide the group and its cause with legitimacy and status).

Both categories of resources will be discussed in the analysis section, when analyzing the cyberactivism taking place in Peru, to establish the efficiency and success of movements in relation to the resources they have managed to mobilize. The main focus however will be the communication infrastructure and considering that all these resources are interconnected, it will serve to establish whether or not alternative media and ICTs have the ability to significantly alter the resource mobilization to the extent that a movement can indeed be successful and achieve its purpose.

## 4. Analysis

The qualitative analysis of data and findings from online publications regarding activism and political participation online will be structured in three sections. The first section makes an overview of Peruvians' approach towards activism on the Internet, as to facilitate the understanding of the Peruvian perspective on cyber-activism. The second section presents an overview of cyber-activist causes in Peru's recent history as to familiarize the reader with the context in which the online participation is being discussed. The third section will contain discussions based on the findings from the previous two sections and an analysis of if and how alternative media, the democratic divide and the global digital divide affect and can be applied to Peruvian cyber-activism.

### 4.1. Internet and Activism (The Peruvian Approach)

Peruvian internauts and society have much to benefit from cyberactivism, according to bloggers from all around Peru. According to the blog *Peruanista*<sup>7</sup>, Peruvian bloggers build one of the most flourishing blogospheres in Latin America, with more than 10,000 active blogs. Nevertheless the number of activist bloggers is very restricted when reported to the total number of blogs in existence on the Peruvian Internet domain.

There is no particular definition of cyberactivism, just as there is not simply one form of offline activism. What all categories of cyberactivism have in common however, is that they all focus on socio-political and cultural transformation. A three-fold typology suggested by Vegh (2003) classifies activism into: (1) awareness and advocacy - consolidating and implementing actions; (2) organisation and mobilization - which is a plea for action; and (3) action-reaction - which can similarly be called hacktivism. Nonetheless, no matter what sort of cyberactivism is in discussion, online activism is described as an action with a very determined objective. Since the common protests have stereotyped the formal networks, all these goals can be accomplished through the means of the internet, concentrating of course on the implementation and outcome. Consequently, do the activities that took place in Peru through the means of blogs and social networks qualify as activism?

The blog carnival "*Festival de blogs:*" organized by *Global Voices*<sup>8</sup>, consists of a virtual event where a blogging host (in this case *Global Voices*) requires other blogs to write about a particular

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<sup>7</sup> [www.peruanista.blogspot.dk](http://www.peruanista.blogspot.dk)

<sup>8</sup> [www.globalvoicesonline.org](http://www.globalvoicesonline.org)

topic. The theme of this fourth edition was “*Internet and activism*” (*Internet y activismo*) and a substantial number of bloggers have written their opinions concerning online activism and how it has influenced Peru. I have collected the most significant of these posts in a compilation that will reveal Peruvians’ understanding of cyberactivism and which will optimistically show to what extent Peruvians use the Internet for activist objectives or political involvement.

I am beginning the set of posts sent to the carnival with Gabriela García Calderón’s text from the blog *Seis de enero*<sup>9</sup> (*January 6*). In her post “*Blog carnival: My little grain of sand*”<sup>10</sup> [es], she confesses to not knowing too much about the topic of cyberactivism, but nevertheless she is aware of its importance. And it is for this motive that I am selecting her post as an opening point as people who are constantly online tend to overlook matters such as the digital divide, poor quality connections and the little attention many people give to things that can be done inside the “digital bubble”:

*“I think that it’s the first time that I have publically admitted not even having the vaguest idea about what Web 2.0 is. I don’t know what open source programmes are. I don’t know what an RSS feed or a podcast is. What’s more, I’m not on Facebook....or Twitter. Despite my ignorance about the topic, I realize that none of this would be possible if these mechanisms and their operation of which I know nothing. And I praise the value that the average man on the street has to one day decide that it’s the time to say ENOUGH! Very often they put themselves on the line with the decision to not turn into a cyberactivist”.*

Writing from the city of Arequipa, Carol, author of the blog *La literatura es la sensibilidad del alma*<sup>11</sup> (*Literature is the sensitivity of the soul*) has submitted the post “*Making the most of technology*”<sup>12</sup> [es] in which apart from clarifying how the Internet and its tools can develop our quality of life, also brings forward some questions focusing upon the manner we use them and to the information it provides us with, in order to lastly point out:

*“Internet activism is a frequently used term, which gives rise to a series of understandings that refer to different activities that can be carried out within a different and changing context, to express different points of view about various subjects, where opinions that issue a verdict, reflection or*

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<sup>9</sup> <http://seisdeenero.blogspot.dk/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://seisdeenero.blogspot.dk/2010/11/festival-de-blogs-mi-granito-de-arena.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://laliteraturaeslasensibilidaddelalma.blogspot.dk/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://laliteraturaeslasensibilidaddelalma.blogspot.dk/2010/11/herramientas-tecnologicas.html>

*behaviour, reveal the attempt by improving on established issues. These initiatives give us a favourable indication in the safeguard of users and diverse options”.*

Valvanera, author of the blog *Vive Simple* (Live Simple), uses her post “*What am I doing writing a blog?*” [es], to remind us that in these eras of social networking, the blog format yet has much to say and that in a certain way can be used as a personal propaganda instrument (and this is cyberactivism for oneself):

*“In a blog ideas can be aired and introduced to other people. Before you had to wait to write a book (it’s coming now!), or for a newspaper to publish your article (I accept all kinds of offers) and not even thinking about working in radio or television. No matter how much it sounds like a cliché, now it’s much easier, thanks to Internet and through a medium like a blog, you can do it all on your own. You don’t need anything or anybody (and I have always wanted to be self-sufficient, despite my father saying that if I’m like that, no one will want to marry me :))”.*

Nearly as a confirmation of the preceding statements, comes the experience that Rafael Delgado Pacheco reveals in his blog *Holy Trinity School*<sup>13</sup>, a blog generated as a historical databank with stories of a school, until one day the management group declared that they would be selling it, and regardless of the promises to display the accounts and describe the motives behind a hypothetical financial collapse, they chosen silence, hostility, threats and abuses in reaction to demands for transparency.

*“This blog then passed from being a vehicle for COMPLAINT and MISDEEDS and IRREGULARITIES in ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL HANDLING. It’s worth mentioning that our complaints were the fruit of an exhaustive investigation, verification of sources and with CONVINCING AND IRREFUTABLE EVIDENCE OF CRIMINAL OFFENCES, we made a criminal complaint that has just been formalised by the holder of the 27 Provincial Public Prosecutor’s Office in Lima...One of the offenders in question has tried to silence this humble blog by taking out a LAWSUIT for alleged libel....but she was not successful because having an opinion is no crime, there is nothing wrong in formulating complaints based on irrefutable evidence.”*

La piñata, in the post “*(Cyber) Active*”<sup>14</sup> [es], from the blog *Break the piñata*<sup>15</sup>, besides launching

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<sup>13</sup> <http://holytrinityschoolperu.blogspot.dk/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://rompelapinata.blogspot.dk/2010/11/ciber-activos.html>

<sup>15</sup> <http://rompelapinata.blogspot.dk/>

some stimulating thoughts upon cyberactivism on a global level, he also creates a concise analysis of the blogging and cyberactivism scenery in Peru:

*“Peru is not only open to changes in other countries, but is also involved in an attempt to Peruvianise the [web] 2.0. Have we achieved it, or are we merely copying other more developed countries? In the past few months the campaign VPeru has been formed, based on the American playwright Eve Ensler. This is a campaign to raise awareness regarding the subject of violence against women....But in our country, not only do we use activism as a way of increasing awareness, but also cyberspace can be a way to reflect the enterprising nature of Peruvians.....the Peruvian version of 2.0 web is a form of advertising where, by being a fan of a company, the user can see what is being offered.”*

Troba from the blog *Trobando voy*, states in his post “*Long live the rag*”<sup>16</sup> [es] a sequence of dichotomies that are interesting to investigate, such as being a volunteer and individualism, activism and the opportunist, solidarity and egoism:

*“It is difficult to be an activist when, since school, you have been made to feel the need to become a leader and to find success. It’s essential to go against the norm and to separate yourself from this way of thinking about yourself and to focus on your neighbour, to trust him/her and to actively support his causes.*

*The activist and the opportunist can agree and both get involved. How can we differentiate between them, whether in the flesh or virtually? You only see the opportunist defending his “visible” rights – people with a certain status – but then becomes quiet when it comes to defending “the invisible” – the anonymous – when from them you can gain very little or nothing”.*

Francisco Canaza, writer of the blog called *Apuntes Peruanos*<sup>17</sup>, provides a historical description of cyberactivism in Peru in his post “*Cyber Activism?*”<sup>18</sup> [es] and raises awareness upon the outcomes achieved, as well as the difficulties faced in this type of action:

*“...we should differentiate between cyberactivism and versión 2.0 campaigning, this use of ways and methods for activism but whose only objective seems to be the campaign in itself and not the*

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<sup>16</sup> <http://trobandovoy.blogspot.dk/2010/11/viva-el-harapo-senor.html>

<sup>17</sup> <http://apuntesperuanos.com/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://apuntesperuanos.com/2010/11/ciber-activismo/>

*result, that uses the social network as a stage but is not articulated in a plurality of nodes, but in groups of users and identifiable, well-defined interests.*

*The ethical dilemma has now been looked into many times by lively bloggers: themes such as conflict of interests and deontological debates among others have served to dissect and understand the majority of campaigns carried out.”*

One more critical vision on cyberactivism comes from Isabel Guerra, on the blog *Las Burbujas Recargadas*<sup>19</sup> (Refilled Bubbles) in “*Reflections on cyberactivism in Peru*”<sup>20</sup> [es]. Among her thoughts is the following statement:

*“There are people who benefit from a cause which is perceived as just for, as one says, to gain indulgence through Ave Mariás....I have lost my faith in the system, and I am extremely sceptical about the use of “pleasant” campaigns. The fact is that people normally adopt a “pleasant” cause to which nobody can oppose, in order to push other things, even very specific interests and very often it is just media exploitation. I have lost even more faith in campaigns that are born from a particular discontent about something or as a complaint for outbursts of personal freedom, because they are not marketers by nature. And because in general, as they’re normally systematically ignored or silenced by authorities, governments and/or press, they effectively have to make use of their own resources and find ways to break this fence, so that the message gets to where it should be. This is genuine activism.”*

Aware of nearly all that has been pointed out by now, John Espinal of the blog *Muladar News*<sup>21</sup> reports in his post “*Citizen Participation 2.0*”<sup>22</sup> [es], how the growth of information has directed us towards social networks, thus making citizens’ actions easier. He positively concludes:

*“Cyberactivism with all its errors and accuracies, with its excesses and ambitions, is a valid tool to propose ideas, to transmit our messages in a task that we want to undertake. Nobody should feel left out, everyone of us is the man in the street, we are all potential activists, we should be aware that we are primordial instruments on an adventure to build a better world, it’s not enough to just accept information and discuss them in our own internal environment, participative people are needed,*

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<sup>19</sup> <http://burbujasreloaded.wordpress.com/>

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<http://burbujasreloaded.wordpress.com/2010/11/13/festival-de-blogs-reflexiones-sobre-el-ciberactivismo-en-peru/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://muladarnews.com/>

<sup>22</sup> <http://muladarnews.com/2010/11/participacion-ciudadana-2-0/>

*those who are ready to offer their lives in a testament of continual protest to award as an inheritance this society that we so have so much demanded.”*

#### **4.2. Peruvian cases of cyber-activism and online movements**

Since 2007, there have been various campaigns in Peru, called “initiatives” and many agree that Peruvian experience is singular. A variety of campaigns took place on blogs and social media, although not all have had the same internet origins. Actually, the biggest campaign (known online as “adopt a congressman”) was born as an initiative launched by a TV-show hostess. It went from the mass-media to the blogs, only to return to mass-media. The campaign, however, didn’t achieve too much: those who took the idea of the TV-hostess as their own and translated it on their blogs and social networks, ended up abandoning the ship. The campaign was shut down soon, without any results. The original argument behind the campaign - “public supervision” of the costs made by the congressmen - did not end with a tangible result. On the contrary, the way the subject was treated, without any means or methods, led only to an ever harder evaluation of the expenses of the Congress, making the real control more difficult.

Going through the mass-media to the social networks is also the case of Paola Vargas, a sad story that was used for a “*slacktivism*” campaign – the search for a virtual solidarity with the deceased – a campaign executed by the news-papers, brought to the social media, referenced in the media and terminated when the origin of the campaign was discovered. “*Slacktivism is a word that best describes the situation in Peru*” argues blogger Francisco Canaza (*Apuntes Peruanos*). By pointing out the existence of solidarity, bouncing a tweet or joining a virtual group is incredibly comfortable and as you see, may even sound good to have thousands of followers but in most cases it is of no great significance. “*In times of slacktivism, a 2.0 guru can dare to connect millions of followers on a social network with millions in the stock market, so the guru 2.0 will be able to see the people who establish legitimacy and support a specific message*”. The reality, unfortunately, is constantly striving to prove the opposite. As a consequence, several initiatives took place on social networks or blogs in order to show solidarity with the defendant of defamation, initiatives that brought adhesion into the virtual world. However, convoking a solidarity reunion in real life ended up by being very weak.

In other cases of virtually conducted campaigns, the promoters made a clear distinction between “slacktivism” and activism in the real world. *Animal Defenders* made a social media campaign



against animals being held in circuses and, in parallel, executed an effective lobbying campaign in the Peruvian Congress to start discussions and promotion of the bill on the subject.

Thus, we differentiate the cyberactivism of certain campaigns, the use of forms and modes of activism but whose sole purpose seem to be the campaign itself and not the result, using the social web as not as a stage articulated in a plurality of connections, but as a group of users with identifiable and well-defined interests.

The *Animal Defenders* campaign was, as said before, a campaign that before entering the social networks, had already managed to promote and lobby its ideas in the official channels. At the moment, this seems to be the only activism campaign with social networking that can call itself truly effective.

The results of “*Adopt a congressman*” did not exist. The goal, to control, was never accomplished and a continuation of the subject never existed: at one point the actual TV presenter, mother of the whole idea, announced that she had certain data against the Congress, something that has never been verified or approved of. As already mentioned, the result of the campaign was that the control of the public expenses – the main point of the campaign – became even more obscure and hidden from the public eye, which made it not to be considered as a negative consequence, but as an exit from some of the organizers of the campaign.

There are examples of campaigns that come closer to negative propaganda than to the real activism. The subject not only caught the attention of the press, especially on stories such as *Nextel – Telefónica*, another virtual campaign that became suspicious. “*Nextel – Telefónica*” was a campaign that included a viral video as well. Over time, various sources stated that the complaint itself was in a conflict of interest: the complainant pointed out the poor service of a telecommunications company while maintaining business relationships with another company.

The ethical dilemma has been reviewed several times in the blog movements: subjects like the conflict of interests, deontological matters, among other issues, have served to dissect and understand the majority of the campaigns that took place.

Perhaps the most important social online activism Peruvian campaign ever to be organized is concerning the indigenous struggle. Since April 9 2009, about 50,000 Amazonian Indigenous people from regions all over Peru have been on strike to protest against trade laws subsequent from

the US-Peru Trade Promotion Agreement. These decrees, advocated by Peruvian President Alan García, wish to open up Indigenous inherited territories to exploitation by international extractive industries such as oil, gas, lumber and mining. In May, one month after the strikes began, President García confirmed a state of emergency in an effort to suppress blockades and protests. In the region of Bagua, approximately 2,500 Indigenous people had been blocking a street for 56 days when, on June 5, police were sent to empty the way equipped with weapons, helicopters, tanks, and tear gas bombs. Violent battles led to deaths on both parts, although the official number of fatalities still remains uncertain, as eyewitnesses have blamed police of disposing of bodies.

According to independent news, mainstream media has revealed signs of racism, misinformation and even terrorist describing when reporting on the Indigenous fight. For example, Peruvian national newspaper *El Comercio* named Indigenous protestors "savages" and advised they should be blown-up with napalm. The government moreover suspended 7 Indigenous Congress members for participating in protests, including Congresswoman Hilaria Supa Huamán. Furthermore, independent radio station La Voz de Bagua was closed once it offered care to wounded protestors and permitted citizens to make declarations about the assaults on air.

Even a few years ago, the government's struggles to silence rebellion or to contain freedom of information could have successfully cut off communication about an incident like this from the rest of the world. On the other hand, in today's present media environment, governments' efforts to sideswipe the rights of Indigenous people are turning out to be gradually challenging. The distribution of information regarding the "Bagua massacre" (as it has been named) is one example of how Indigenous activists are making use social media and online tools to spread the word about human rights abuses.

From the launch of García's distribution of Amazonian lands for development, activists in Peru and outside the country have been using video, social media and online activism to disseminate information. YouTube, blogs and Twitter have made it possible to reveal eyewitness accounts and videos of the attacks, as well as declarations by human rights activists.

According to a recent report on *Global Voices*, two popular Peruvian bloggers - Carlos Quiróz of *Peruanista* and Francisco Canaza of *Apuntes Peruanos* - had their blogs or YouTube channels removed after the Bagua attacks for motives that are disbelieving but still uncertain. Bloggers have struggled against this by reposting content, improving their security precautions, and

producing reflective vlogs and posts.

Twitter has also played a part in constructing global unity, which reinforces the promise for effective campaigning. For example, the organisation *On Q-Initiative* (started by Hollywood actor Q'orianka Kilcher<sup>23</sup>, of Quechua and Swiss heritage) has gathered support on Twitter for its new *Youth For Truth* campaign, which makes video equipment, media education and editing technology accessible to young Amazonian Indians in Peru. Q'orianka's Twitter campaign is productive and widespread within the Indigenous Twitter community, with thousands of re-tweets by supporters and activists. Most popular hashtags include: #bagua #peru #indigenous.

Since the Bagua conflicts, solidarity marches have been organized all around the world and have been mapped by Chilean indigenous think-tank CEPPDI. In a comment<sup>24</sup> on the Indigenous media page of Witness Hub, Carlos from *DigiActive* newly discussed the potential of geo-mapping for Indigenous struggles:

*"I think it is a great idea to increase the use of maps, a lot of the issues for indigenous causes seeking solidarity to their struggles are due to the lack of geographic information: people in other places have no way of relating spatially to the causes because many times general purpose maps ignore remote areas where many of these struggles happen. Mapping is central to educating and gathering support."*

Video and social/online media has allowed Indigenous activists and campaigners to turn the world's attention upon the violence in Bagua and Peruvian Indigenous. As a consequence, people are watching, and President García is currently facing colossal pressure.

According to the North American Congress on Latin America, a survey in July specified that 92% of the population in Peru support the Indigenous fight. On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, the UN issued a declaration criticizing Peru's failure to acquire approval from Indigenous people for development projects.

The Indigenous people that have been opposing the projects have had certain recent victories: in July, the government stated a 90-day suspension of the Amazon decrees; in September, a commission was founded to inspect the Bagua clashes and Indigenous rights group AIDSESEP is

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<sup>23</sup> <http://qonq.org/>

<sup>24</sup> <http://hub.witness.org/en/IndigenousMedia#comment-4632>

now passing a legal prerogative before the country's Constitutional Tribunal.

Although the battle for Indigenous rights in Peru is still being fought, video and online technologies have made it much tougher for governments to act without earning consent and cover their tracks.

### **4.3. Discussions**

In order to obtain a thorough answer for the elaborated problem formulation, it is important to elaborate discussions, based on the virtual testimonies presented earlier and the facts which can be taken into consideration, connected to the theories presented in the third chapter.

#### **4.3.1. Peruvians and alternative media**

As mentioned in the theory section, it is particularly common for activists to create their own media in order to counter the usual demonization of activism present in the mainstream media. This process of creating an alternative media starts from the assumption that traditional media will always present an activist campaign in a negative light, thus hurting the activists' mobilization efforts. As I have previously mentioned, there has been a significant number of cases in Peru's activist history where the mainstream media is biased when presenting activist struggles. One example of this is the *El Correo* newspaper which called the indigenous activists of Bagua "savages", and which argued they should be bombed with napalm for not accepting mining in their region. Moreover, Peruvians themselves have argued that media is "outrageously biased"<sup>25</sup> and is using hegemonic messages which undermine the power of activist actions. In this sense, the Peruvian activists' efforts of resorting to an alternative media represent a normal step in the process of online political participation. Although some mainstream media channels (such as the radio The Voice of Bagua) try to help the activists and try to present events in a non-biased and non-demonizing way, they are quickly being shut down or penalized by the state. Therefore, Peruvian activists use alternative media and citizen journalism accounts (through the Internet) as the only means for getting accurate descriptions of events and non-biased news.

Another reason for the activists' tendency to use alternative media platforms is the possibility that these platforms offer for mass communication. As mentioned in the theory section, the Internet allows cyber-activists to communicate as it empowers them to have a voice and an opinion. Most of the cyber-activists presented earlier have anonymous blogs and hide their real identity under

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<sup>25</sup> <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2011/05/11/peru-the-medias-role-during-the-presidential-elections/>

pseudonyms or nick-names. The anonymity in this case represents a mask which they can use in order to speak their opinions freely without fearing the sanctions that might be imposed on to them as it has happened to other media channels. Even so, some of them have their blogs or Youtube channels reported and shut down. Nevertheless, the Internet is used by these activists as the counter public sphere that Harlow & Harp (2012) have described – a forum in which everyone can and is encouraged to participate, a non-censored platform of alternative views, a place where solidarity is formed and reinforced.

Probably the most significant use of the Internet for activist purposes by Peruvians, is made in order to expand the awareness regarding an activist struggle from the national level to a world-wide level. This happens in several ways – either through international human rights platforms (such as Amnesty), either with the help of famous people (Q'orianka Kilcher and her ON-Q Initiative), etc.

Using the Internet for cyber-activism, international awareness of activist struggles, a means of communication between activist groups and individuals, and also as an alternative media platform that counters the hegemonic messages presented by mainstream media, is undoubtedly describing the situation in Peru.

#### **4.3.2. The Democratic Divide in Peru**

In the theory section I have presented the premises for the democratic divide identifiable in online political participation. The democratic divide presupposes that there is a division in the participation in online politics based on socio-demographic markers such as age, gender, race, income etc. Furthermore, some researchers argue that the Internet has the potential to improve the political participation online while others argue against this, as they say that the Internet can make little impact on some long-standing patterns of participatory inequality.

First of all, the Peruvian case is indeed characterized by online political participation based on socio-demographic markers. Based on how they describe themselves in the <About me> section of their blogs, the average Peruvian cyber-activist, Youtube account owner, Twitter account owner and who constantly posts activist campaigns is young, under 35, with a higher education and who lives in an urban area. However, when it comes to offline activism, the patterns that Boulianne (2009) was talking about are not to be identified in Peru. Whereas Boulianne argued that usually senior citizens are more inclined towards political participation offline, in Peru both senior citizens as well

as young citizens are participating in street demonstrations, activist campaigns, flash mobs, etc. Furthermore, other socio-demographic markers such as income, level of education or race, are not elements that can establish patterns for political participation.

#### 4.3.3. Peru in the Global Digital Divide

The Global Digital Divide entails that a significant segment of the world population is missing out on political, social, economic and education opportunities do to the lack of a digitalized infrastructure. In other words, not having access to the Internet can be synonymous with non-existence, as some researchers suggest that the Internet has the potential to level the differences between developed and developing nations. The most important characteristic that needs to be taken into account when discussing this is that the Internet has independent civic value, which allows citizens to become “better able to participate in democracy”.

In Peru, users access the Internet via ‘cabinas publicas de Internet’, access points across the country that have emerged without any support from the state (Ali 2011). The cabinas were originally conceived of by a Peruvian journalist who came up with a profitable model for operating Internet access points and taught people how to open them (*ibid.*). Over 100,000 people attended his classes, and “any attendee who could afford the capital expenses and could arrange for the DSL lines could start one”<sup>26</sup>. Today, these cabinas “are available all along Peru, even in small towns in the Andes and the Amazon region”.<sup>27</sup> In 2005, Organismo Supervisor de Inversion Privada en Telecomunicaciones, a Peruvian regulatory authority, estimated that there were 33,635 cabinas across Peru<sup>28</sup>. More than eighty-five percent of users in Peru access the Internet in cabinas and World Bank officials have deemed the Peruvian model to be the most efficient way of gaining access to the Internet in developing countries<sup>29</sup>. The cabinas cater to various audiences. Unlike the traditional cybercafés found in other developing countries, the cabinas are largely a center for domestic consumers, primarily young adults who use the Internet that the cabinas provide for social networking. Ali (2011) describes the situation - “*Since the development of the cabinas in Peru, the use of computers and Internet in schools has become common and has been credited for improving*

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<sup>26</sup> Tony Salvadore & John Sherry, Taking the Internet to the People, IEEE SPECTRUM (Oct. 2005), <http://spectrum.ieee.org/computing/hardware/taking-the-internet-to-the-people/0>

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Peru technology: Overview of e-commerce, ECONOMIST INTELLIGENCE UNIT (July 21, 2006), <http://www.ebusinessforum.com/index.asp> (search “Peru technology”).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

*the quality of education. Additionally, Peruvians are much better connected to the outside world, and the cabinas have evolved into community centers that offer training and other important services, such as tax payment assistance”.*

Although still a developing country in terms of Internet use and infrastructure, Peru is growing rapidly in this sense and this can be observed in terms of cyber-activism as well. As mentioned previously, the Peruvian blogosphere is one of the most thriving in Latin America and the improvements in the educational system that the Internet has brought, now enables Peruvians participate politically online. Moreover, as the Digital Divide is closing upon the Peruvian case, accurate and timely information is being spread on the internet by activists, which, according to Metzl (1996), *“is an indispensable tool for the responsive action and promotion of human rights”.*

## 5. Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the development of online activism in a developing country, in the context of the global digital divide. After the analysis and discussions, a few conclusions can be drawn.

First of all, Peruvians have mixed feelings regarding Internet activism. While some of them feel strongly for the possibility of fighting for a cause through online means, others are more skeptical, raising questions of biasness and hidden intentions with online activism struggles and campaigns. Moreover, some of them are lacking any belief in the Internet's possibility for public mobilization in Peru, as they believe that online activism hardly translates into offline activism – hence they call it “slacktivism”. This sum of mixed feelings, contributes to, and reflects the underdevelopment of the online political participation in the Peruvian society.

In addition to this, mainstream media's discourse surrounding activists tends to either stick only to the official data, either is biased to the disadvantage of the activists. The few media channels that seem to support activist causes are quickly suppressed by the state, in the effort to contend the development of any social movements as quickly as possible.

However, this reinforces the theory of alternative media that can easily be proved in Peru's case (based on the number of blogs and citizen journalism accounts), that people are using Internet as a means for reliable information and communication without constraints. It is to this extent that the Internet becomes the main tool for Peruvians for making activist causes, human rights violations, indigenous struggles, and so on, known at a global level.

Although considered a developing country in the context of the global digital divide, the Peruvian Internet infrastructure is developing rapidly. Researchers believe the Peruvian model for Internet access (using cabinas) to be one of the most efficient in Latin America. Improving the Internet connection of Peruvians could have significant effects not only on cyber activism, but on online political participation in general. Therefore, we can conclude that Peruvian society has the possibility of becoming more involved in building a participatory democracy as well as making their grievances heard at an international level. Using video and online technologies, cyber activists have made it much harder for governments to take decisions that lack transparency.

The current study could represent the basis for a further, much wider study regarding cyber-activism



in developing countries. For example, an interesting approach would be to analyze whether online activism paves the way for new activist methods of protesting which could otherwise not be practiced in an on offline environment. Another approach could be to conduct interviews with activists or to compare the activist network in one developing country with an activist network from a developed Western country and stress out the similarities and differences.

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