

Contested Hashtags: Blockupy Frankfurt in Social Media

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This research starts from an activist-centric perspective and explores how different actors interfere in activist communication in social media. We pursue this inquiry through a case study of the Blockupy action against the opening of the European Central Bank headquarters in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, on March 18, 2015. The investigation combines an ethnographic inquiry into activists' social media tactics with a social network analysis of Twitter hashtags to explore how these tactics materialize in social media. The inquiry enhances our understanding of the consequences of activists' use of corporate social media by identifying actors, communication, and networks. Moreover, although activists define Twitter hashtags as theirs, our research shows increasing police use of them, hindering activists' attempts to communicate alternative perspectives.

Keywords: ethnography, social network analysis, activism, Twitter, social media

"The police say they have 10,000 police officers. To them, we say, we have 10,000 likes!" These words were triumphantly shouted from the podium at the public assembly of Blockupy in Frankfurt am Main, the day before the protests against the opening of the new European Central Bank (ECB) headquarters on March 18, 2015. This reference to the count of Blockupy's likes on Facebook demonstrates the centrality of social media in political action today and the interdependence of tactics in the street and on the Web. In the case of Blockupy, social media have become integral to the tactics of multiple participants in street action and their struggle against austerity measures, international corporations, financial institutions, and police authority. This case is particularly relevant from a media theoretical perspective because Blockupy drew heavily upon social media for reporting about the protests against the ECB and for voicing their own perspectives on the events.

As a critique of European austerity measures, the Blockupy protest drew heavily upon imagery of crisis movements and the summit protests of the early 2000s, with the words "We are winning" spray painted on a shop window. This slogan refers to the 1999 Battle of Seattle summit protest, in which these

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same words were spray painted on a wall. Unlike in 1999, activists in today's mediated environments report from street protests through social media in combination with mainstream and alternative media. Smartphones have at least partially replaced the tent within which information was formerly uploaded onto the IndyMedia alternative media platform. This alternative reporting takes place within a long history of activist efforts to establish alternative media channels and critical perspectives. Activists have always built their own alternative media to communicate their own points of view (Atton, 2004; Baines, 2015; Couldry & Curran, 2003; Downing, Villarreal, Gil, & Stein, 2001). In today's saturated media environments, images of riots, peaceful protests, artistic action, police, and news media form a mosaic of perspectives in a struggle for attention on social media. Various authors have suggested that activists can build powerful alternative public communication platforms using social media (Castells, 2012; Jenkins, 2008; Shirky, 2008). However, their claims raise questions about how corporate social media and their inherent logics might shape activists' communication (Fuchs, 2012; Poell, 2014; Poell & Borra, 2011; Uldam, 2016; van Dijck, 2013; Youmans & York, 2012).

Following this more complex and critical understanding of social media, this article explores the dual focus of activists' communicative social media tactics and how these materialize as online communicative networks on Twitter. It does so through an ethnographic inquiry into the Blockupy protests against the ECB opening in Frankfurt am Main on March 18, 2015; interviews with activists; and social network analysis of Twitter data. The interviews and the ethnographic inquiry explore activists' communicative social media tactics, following a common approach in studying social movements' deployment of social media (Juris, 2012; Mattoni, 2012; Treré, 2015; Uldam, 2013). The social network analysis of Twitter data, collected using the hashtag announced by activists for reporting on the day of action, allows us to explore how the protest event materializes in online communicative networks on Twitter as the representation of the events from the activists' perspective intertwined with perspectives of other actors and with the social media logic (Bruns, Highfield, & Burgess, 2013; Penney & Dadas, 2014; Poell, 2014). With this dual focus, we argue that activist communication on corporate social media is not only underlain by "techno-commercial processes" (Poell & van Dijck, 2015) but is also vulnerable to interference by other actors, such as authorities and mainstream media, presenting their own (potentially hegemonic) perspectives. These technocommercial processes, combined with interference by potentially hostile authorities, create tensions among activists, as they believe that social media are problematic tools but are also necessary for spreading a message and mobilizing for protest.

Activists and Social Media Tactics

From a critical media theory perspective, scholars have discussed the role of social media in producing alternative activist perspectives to mainstream media (Askanius & Gustafsson, 2010; Lester & Hutchins, 2009; Poell & Borra, 2011). These scholars address activists' social media communication as part of a larger media strategy. The role of Internet platforms in protests has mainly been discussed on the basis of the alternative online media platform IndyMedia (Garcelon, 2006; Pickard, 2006; Pickerill, 2007; Platon & Deuze, 2003). However, there are many challenges to building alternative spaces using corporate social media. Youmans and York (2012) identify two points at which the architecture of corporate social media shapes their use by activists: (a) the programming code that limits and enables social media use, and (b) company policies and terms of use. Media power in corporate social media

environments has shifted to technological and algorithmic selections defined by large media corporations (such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube), shaping activist communication around spectacular, news-oriented reporting while shifting focus from the protest itself (Poell & van Dijck, 2015; Uldam, 2016).

Leistert (2015) notes that corporate social media have become “algorithmic mass media,” using censorship through algorithms as a normalization and standardization tool for activists’ communicative action. Scholars have argued that violent action frames often dominate not only news media but also social media reporting by activists to produce visibility through radicalized media tactics (Cammaerts, 2012; Juris, 2005; Truscillo, 2012). This silencing of critical voices beyond the dominant violent action frames reinforces the neoliberal values in which mainstream and corporate social media are embedded (Couldry, 2010). The Blockupy Frankfurt actions can also be seen as part of antiausterity movements in the Global North, which mobilize in the context of a crisis of neoliberalism (Della Porta, 2015). The corporate social media environment in particular creates contradictions for activists and the collective identity of social movements mobilizing against the capitalist system (Svensson, Neumayer, Banfield-Mumb, & Schossböck, 2015). Self-absorbed and egocentric social media practices can counteract the aims of sustainable activist collectives (Fenton & Barassi, 2011).

These media theoretical perspectives offer important insight into the many empirical studies based on ethnographic inquiry, often in close cooperation with activist collectives (Gerbaudo, 2012; Juris, 2012; Kavada, 2010; Mattoni, 2012; Treré, 2015). These methods of inquiry are vital: Ethnographic inquiry allows us to draw conclusions about communicative social media tactics that are not publicly visible and available as data. They provide insight into the planning of social media communication and into practices that remain invisible (such as encrypted communication). These insights allow us to contextualize media forms and practices, enabling scholars to consider activists’ tensions and beliefs in their interactions with media technologies. Nevertheless, use of this approach on its own may result in blind spots, as it only provides insight from the activists’ perspective. This study seeks to enhance our understanding of activists’ communicative tactics in social media by combining ethnographic inquiry with a social network analysis of Twitter data to further clarify how the protest event materializes in social media and to illuminate the emerging tensions of activists’ social media use.

Materialization of Activists’ Social Media Tactics on Twitter

In their analysis of activists’ social media communication as alternative media, Poell and Borra (2011) note that although Twitter is the most promising social media platform for crowd-sourcing alternative reporting, the contents of the tweets are framed by mainstream news reporting to produce visibility. Social network analysis of Twitter data has been used as a reference point for understanding the materialization of the communicative practices of activists embedded in the social media logic (Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Bruns, Highfield, & Burgess, 2013; Penney & Dadas, 2014). This has been done with two main aims: First, researchers have analyzed tweets’ flow, volume, and type to understand how this communication evolved during a protest event and how events compare (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2012). Second, they have used tweets, retweets, and replies to identify a communication network (Bruns & Moe, 2013) and to show the underlying social practices within groups of Twitter users (Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Lotan, Graeff, Ananny, Gaffney, & Pearce, 2011; Penney & Dadas, 2014). In both cases, Twitter data have

been interpreted as a sociotechnical space of connected visibility in which coordination of physical actions, remote participation, mobilization, emotional support, and information spreading occur on a continuum (Bajpai & Jaiswal, 2011; Theocharis, Lowe, van Deth, & García-Albacete, 2015). Twitter offers a context in which various social activities and dynamics take place on the same technological platform and thus within the same observable data set.

Most of the studies conducted with Twitter data examine just one aspect of activists' communicative social media tactics. They investigate the outcome of activists' communicative action by analyzing a specific social media platform such as Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube (Penney & Dadas, 2014; Poell, 2014; Segerberg & Bennett, 2011). To gain more insight into activists' motives, user types, and communicative tactics, these methods have been combined with ethnographic inquiry such as interviews (see Bastos & Mercea, 2015). Most of these studies, however, focus on a particular part of the picture, such as the interaction between mainstream media and activists or activists' mobilization and self-mediation. These focus areas are important, but these studies risk missing the relevance of other actors, such as authorities, in the studied protest events. Authorities in protest events are usually considered in relation to police monitoring and surveillance practices (Elmer & Opel, 2008; Neumayer & Stald, 2014), but as our study will show, they have also become increasingly effective at their own social media communication. Social network analysis of Twitter data can render these blind spots visible, and the combination with ethnographic inquiry also renders visible the plans and practices behind the materialization of communicative social media tactics on Twitter.

The Case: Blockupy Frankfurt

On March 18, 2015, around 15,000 participants followed the call for action against the opening of the new ECB headquarters in Frankfurt am Main. The Blockupy alliance's antiausterity protests made the headlines in the international news, mainly because of riots and burning police cars. International news media attention to these forms of action is not surprising and has been observed since Seattle 1999 (Gupta, 2015), which also marked the start of the antiglobalization movement. In the call for action, Blockupy mobilized for blockades around the ECB building throughout the day and for colorful demonstrations in the afternoon of March 18. The Blockupy alliance has mobilized against the European Troika's austerity measures, which have been in place since 2011 in response to the financial crisis. With its slogan "Resistance in the heart of the European crisis regime," Blockupy Frankfurt presents itself as a colorful and broad alliance acting against austerity within the German geographical center of crisis, as represented by the ECB headquarters. On its international website, Blockupy Frankfurt describes itself as follows:

We are various social movement activists, altermondialists, migrants, jobless, precarious and industry workers, party members and unionists and many more from many different European countries, who want to connect our struggles and powers beyond nation-state lines. Together we want to create a common European movement, united in diversity, which can break the rule of austerity and will start to build democracy and solidarity from below. (Blockupy, 2015)

The German Blockupy coalition includes the *Interventionistische Linke*, Attac, Occupy Frankfurt, unions, youth and student associations, the Unemployment Forum Germany (*Erwerbslosen-Forum Deutschland*), the *Die Linke* political party, the peace cooperative (*Friedenskooperative*) network, and the radical left alliance *umsGanze!*. Blockupy is thus a diverse coalition of activists and civil society groups, mobilizing numerous subnetworks with different levels of radicalization, such as the M18 alliance and Europe Commune (<http://www.thecommuneofeurope.org>). Because of harsh police repression in response to actions by Blockupy in 2012 and 2013 and a lack of clarity about Blockupy's collective identity in the European antiausterity movement, the events were mobilized mainly by German activists without sparking broad actions across Europe (Pianta & Gerbaudo, 2015). Nevertheless, activist collectives within the Blockupy network (such as in Italy, Spain, Greece, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden) participated in the blockades and demonstrations on March 18 to support the antiausterity protests.

Method and Data

Following the dual focus of this study, we rely on two sets of complementary data: an ethnographic inquiry and a social network analysis of Twitter data. The ethnographic inquiry's main aim is to identify the social media tactics and practices that activists employed to mobilize for and report from the day of action against the March 18 ECB opening in Frankfurt. It seeks to answer the following questions: Which social media communicative tactics did activists employ to produce visibility in the Blockupy Frankfurt action, and which tensions arose through the technocommercial processes of social media and interference by authorities? The social network analysis of Twitter data addresses the following questions: How did these social media tactics materialize on Twitter during the Blockupy Frankfurt actions? Are other actors, and corresponding tactics, observable in the collapsed communicative space defined by a Twitter hashtag? This set of questions bridges the media theoretical perspectives outlined above because it addresses activists' social media tactics, practices, and beliefs and the resultant materialization in the contested sociotechnical space of visibility on Twitter. By combining these methods in an exploratory approach and focusing on an event following a specific hashtag on the day of action (rather than the Twitter communication by activist collectives' accounts over time), we uncover discrepancies between activists' social media tactics and expectations to produce visibility and these tactics' materialization on Twitter during protest events because of police presence on social media.

The ethnographic inquiry, including observations and interviews with activists before and during Blockupy Frankfurt events, explored the social media tactics and practices to produce mediated visibility. One of the authors participated in the protest events on March 18, 2015, and the activities in Frankfurt for one week leading up to the events (such as assemblies, meetings, smaller demonstrations) and wrote notes about observations and informal conversations with activists. Notes were also written based on observations at assemblies in Denmark and Sweden in the months preceding the protests. Access to the field was granted by the author's work in activist collectives in Sweden and Denmark. Following McCurdy and Uldam (2014), this provided an insider's perspective on the preparation meetings in Sweden and Denmark and an outsider's perspective on the preparation meetings, predemonstrations, and day of action in Germany. Although the participant observation was made overt to members of the activist collectives, it

was not apparent to everyone participating in the day of action and the events leading up to it (see McCurdy & Uldam, 2014).

Moreover, three face-to-face interviews with activists who are members of collectives with different levels of radicalization and from different national contexts (Germany, Denmark, and Sweden) informed the ethnographic inquiry. The three respondents were selected because of their active engagement in activist collectives, their active use of social media tactics, and the different levels of radicalization of the activist collectives they participate in. Our respondents were anonymized and given pseudonyms when quoted from the data, and we do not reveal their individual roles in the activist collectives because of potential security risks. Information from the Blockupy website and its social media mobilization were used to inform the analysis. In a theoretical sampling process suggested by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), data were sampled and coded in a reciprocal process between data and theory until the point of saturation. Although loyalty to activist collectives and previous insight into their practices and tactics gave us advantages in interpreting the data and lowered entrance barriers, the close affiliation to activist collectives might also have created blind spots resulting from political bias (McCurdy & Uldam, 2014). To uncover these blind spots, we combined our analysis with a social network analysis of Twitter data to provide a perspective external to this activist, or insider, perspective.

The second data set is composed of Twitter data, collected using DiscoverText (Shulman, 2011), which uses both REST and STREAM Twitter APIs to gather the data. Following a well-established practice in Twitter research (Lotan et al., 2011; Penney & Dadas, 2014), we collected tweets containing specific hashtags (#blockupy, #M18, #notroika, #destroika) that emerged as relevant in our ethnographic inquiry during the days leading to the event. While we are aware of the possible limitations to not using Twitter Firehose (Morstatter, Pfeffer, Liu, & Carley, 2013), the relatively small size of the event we are describing allows us a high level of confidence regarding data completeness. For the current analysis, we use only the tweets written on the day of the event, from 00:00 on March 18, 2015, to 00:00 on March 19, 2015. This 24-hour dataset of tweets comprises 137,865 messages written by 49,993 unique user accounts. More detailed information about the data set is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Twitter Data.

Unique Users	Tweets	Retweets	Average Tweets per User	External Links
49,993	137,865	110,268	2.75	28,014

As mentioned above, Twitter data were chosen by using a set of event-specific and protest-specific hashtags. Hashtags create a topical space by connecting audiences often not directly connected with one another (Bruns & Moe, 2013). A hashtag enlarges a message's potential audience beyond the network of followers to a community of users interested in a topic or event. Tweets containing hashtags provide a macrolevel of visibility for aggregated communication but also define and identify an intended audience for communicative action. By focusing on the event rather than solely the social media profiles and tactics of activists, we aim to extend research practices concerning social media tactics into their

actual representation within a contested social media space. Visible social media data, besides being produced by a variety of actors, lack insight into activists' planning, motivations, and tactics leading up to this visible representation of the events, which we were able to understand through the ethnographic inquiry.

Chasing the Event: #Blockupy on Social Media

Blockupy Frankfurt mobilized extensively through social media. Aims included not only mobilizing a large number of participants for the day of action but also producing positive visibility for the activists' cause and of the Blockupy actions on March 18. The expectations for social media to produce visibility for the counter-protests were high despite concerns about security. Conversations with activists revealed that although activists were concerned about security, they found social media to be necessary tools for mobilizing for mass action:

Blockupy itself is like really, really loud on the social media. It's really like [makes explosion sound]. It can make me a bit worried sometimes because the police can just go onto the website and be like, "There's the map of the blockade, and . . . they put everything online" . . . The main thing for Blockupy is to mobilize a lot of people and then . . . The problem with the police will come later on, but the most important thing is that we're strong together, and we have a loud voice if we're a lot of people. (Susanne, Danish activist, March 3, 2015)

The idea that visibility is more important than security on social media was particularly present within more loosely connected participants on the day of action. Blockupy's low level of radicalization and colorful self-representation went hand in hand with less awareness of surveillance of social media tactics by potentially hostile authorities (see Mercea, 2011; Neumayer & Stald, 2014), as Susanne indicated. In comparison, the more closed and sustainable activist collective M18 displayed more restrictive criteria for being part of the collective: "On Blockupy . . . they can just write and say 'I want to join, I want to do something.' It's not that easy with M18" (Carlos, German activist, March 1, 2015). This group also applied security practices, including encrypted channels (such as encrypted messages on smartphones), to avoid surveillance and repression by authorities. Similarly, international assemblies of the Blockupy alliance used Skype and projected the video conversation onto a wall and used tactics such as collective Facebook actions for international mobilization. M18 relied more on its internal, sustainable collective based on trust and avoided any form of communication that could be traced back to individuals (interview, Carlos, German activist, March 1, 2015), resembling the tactics of other radical activist collectives across Europe (Askanius & Gustafsson, 2010; Mercea, 2011; Svensson et al., 2015). There is a rising tension between the critical social media practices based on trust and security within the collective and the less critical application of social media as mobilization tools.

In general, encrypted and unencrypted e-mail communication, within activist collectives and to a larger external network, and blogs and alternative media platforms for self-representation played important roles for different alliances mobilizing for the events (interviews, Nina, Swedish activist, April 4, 2015; Carlos, German activist, March 1, 2015; see Treré, 2015, for similar results). Moreover, we can

identify different social media tactics because of these media's corporate character, which activists criticize not only because of security issues (interviews, Nina, Swedish activist, April 4, 2015; Carlos, German activist, March 1, 2015; Susanne, Danish activist, March 3, 2015) but also because of the anticapitalist ideals for which they struggle, as "there's a business that makes money on our thoughts and feelings and information" (Nina, Swedish activist, April 4, 2015). That which is visible as an event and traceable through social media data is built upon a complex structure of secure (and invisible) communicative tactics, visible communicative tactics, and activist collectives' underlying beliefs and struggles. Although diverse social media practices and encrypted communication occur beneath the surface of traceable social media data, they are used tactically to produce visibility through acts of civil disobedience. What we can see as a visible representation of the events on Twitter is (as the ethnographic inquiry shows) only a small part of the communicative tactics that activists employ.

To understand the visible Blockupy event on Twitter, we first need to provide a general description of the Twitter activity (see Table 1 for an overview). To do this, it is necessary to consider the tweets produced during the Blockupy event in Frankfurt in light of different types of Twitter data that have been collected over the years. Bruns and Stieglitz (2012) have compared several Twitter hashtags and identified two distinct clusters: media events (e.g., #royalwedding, #eurovision) and crisis events (e.g., #tsunami, #qldflood, #londondriots). The first cluster is characterized by a greater presence of original tweets and fewer URLs linking to external sources to share additional stories about the media events. The second cluster is characterized by a greater presence of retweets and more URLs linking to external sources to share relevant information during crisis events (see Giglietto & Lee, 2015, for explorations of various cases).

When mapped on the same graph (Figure 1), the Blockupy data are substantially different from the two clusters. Although they contain a large number of retweets (even larger than an event belonging to the crisis communication cluster), the number of links to external sources is relatively low (almost at the level of media events). An initial interpretation of this data is that the number of actual sources of information is small (hence the large number of retweets for spreading information) and that these sources provide news and information directly as Twitter messages without linking to external resources. A possible explanation for this difference is the minor role played by traditional news organizations. News organizations primarily use tweets to bring visitors and readers to their websites by integrating Twitter into their existing news cycle (Hermida, 2013), which might explain the large number of retweets that include URLs linking to their own news media websites.

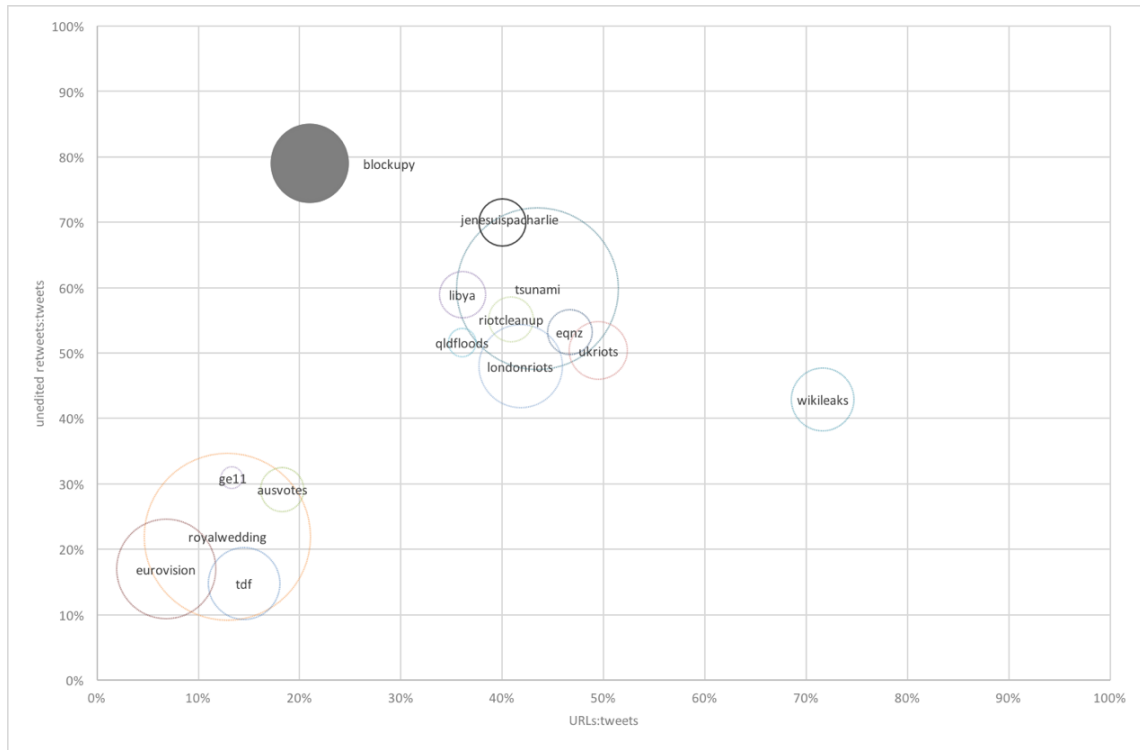


Figure 1. User activity patterns comparing different Twitter hashtags. Size indicates total number of contributors. Blockupy data are highlighted in dark gray.

To understand how the Blockupy day of action on Twitter can be identified with these characteristics, we will further investigate the timeline of Twitter data on March 18. The timeline (Figure 2) shows a temporally bounded event that begins early in the morning, with the first relevant quantity of tweets produced around 08:00; a peak of Twitter activity at 10:00; and then substantial activity at 14:00, 15:00, and from 17:00 to 19:00.

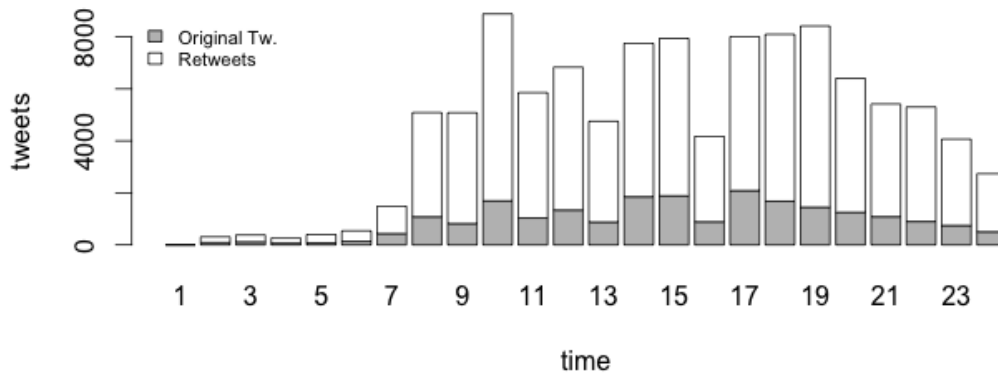


Figure 2. Twitter activity during the day.

On the day of action, Twitter was particularly important for aligning the actions of activists and civil society groups that participated in the demonstration but did not belong to larger activist collectives. In contrast to the secure forms of communication used within activist collectives, Twitter was used to guide participants through “soft leadership” (Gerbaudo, 2012) and to align the actions of those who were otherwise outsiders. This involved, for example, activists outside Germany who did not participate in the events but nevertheless disseminated information that they received from activists in Frankfurt. This increases the tension between critical social media practices of German activist collectives and individual outsiders participating in mass action trying to create visibility. Social media in general and the Blockupy Facebook page and Twitter feed in particular were tools for reaching audiences across the political spectrum by dissemination through likes, shares, posts in personal social networks, and the use of hashtags (interview, Susanne, Danish activist, March 3, 2015; Nina, Swedish activist, April 4, 2015).

Different Actors and Their Social Media Tactics

The actions and social media tactics of Blockupy and its subgroups and subnetworks are diverse and not always aligned. Blockupy’s diverse structure, with different levels of radicalization, is typical of modern social movements and their practices of resistance and movement building (Della Porta, 2015) but can appear disorganized in the self-mediation of the movement’s identity on social media. The diversity of groups thus creates challenges in unifying their appearance on social media. In addition, the more radical groups and sustainable activist collectives, such as M18, clearly differentiate themselves from Blockupy—through critical technical practices and separate social media campaigns but also on the Blockupy website, Facebook page, and Twitter account, in which Blockupy presents itself as one alliance:

I would say Blockupy has a different target group, they are more for everyone, they make posts like the normal people. . . . We have one account, the Interventionistische Linke has access, Die Linke has access, Attac has access, and everyone posts something different. We are going to post a new communist call with a very radical speech and then yeah, Attac is posting something against the bad banks and so on or a lot of these social media campaigns where people should hold up the signs. . . . If you know a bit of the style of the different groups, you can figure out who is posting what. (Carlos, German activist, March 1, 2015)

Through the shared website and social media account, the diverse groups co-construct the Blockupy alliance's publically visible profile, although their interests, ideologies, values, and tactics differ depending on the different editors representing different groups and their intended audiences. Their identities and the different subgroups are visible to insiders, who know the ideological foundations of the various activist collectives, unions, and civil society groups. The different suballiances also use their own mobilization websites and blogs, and M18 has indeed published its own, radicalized version of the call on its website (<http://march18.net/>), Twitter account, and Facebook page. This represents a general tendency for diverse forms of action and social media practices to create factions within a broad activist alliance (see Dahlgren, 2013; Juris, 2012; Neumayer & Stald, 2014; Pianta & Gerbaudo, 2015; Svensson et al., 2015).

The diversity of user accounts on Twitter suggests that the diversity of actors on Twitter within the hashtag announced by the Blockupy activist alliance for the events goes beyond a diversity of participants in the protests against the opening of the ECB headquarters. Table 2 shows the most active user accounts (according to the number of original tweets during the day), and Table 3 shows the most retweeted user accounts. Tables 2 and 3 indicate the different dynamics taking place when comparing the production of original content and the content shared through retweets. The user account types were identified based on the user accounts' self-descriptions. Retweets were mainly defined by an explicit willingness to share relevant information (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2012). Although perceptions of relevance can differ by actor, official Twitter accounts (such as user accounts of activist collectives; interview, Carlos, German activist, March 1, 2015) tend to receive more retweets even if they are not particularly active in their original content production. The international account, 15MBcn_int, of the 15M movement, which began in Spain in 2011, had few original tweets (it is not present in Table 1) but received many retweets (Table 2). A surprising aspect of the two tables is the presence of accounts from the police (Polizei_Ffm) and the fire department (feuerwehrffm) in Frankfurt am Main alongside the expected news organizations (such as RT and BBC). These accounts might be deemed more reliable by citizens than by activists.

Table 2. Most Active User Accounts (Original Tweets).

Username	Tweets	User Account Type
mehrwortwert	165	Journalist
ThomasOccupy	124	Activist
news_reich	118	Account suspended
Polizei_Ffm	116	Police
Muschelschloss	108	Blogger
rightnowio_feed	95	Account suspended
Blockupy_Ticker	89	Activist account
2ndDemocracy	77	Activist account
TrendieDE	62	Trend aggregator
Blockupy	60	Activist account

Table 3. Most Retweeted User Accounts.

Username	Retweets Received	User type
Polizei_Ffm	5406	Police
15Mbcn_int	2478	Activist account
Blockupy	2069	Activist account
RT_com	1418	News media
ThomasOccupy	1146	Activist
feuerwehrrfm	1093	Fire brigade
oguzkocaman3	932	NA
BBCBreaking	910	News media
RTerdog4n	884	Account suspended
ReporteYa	835	News media

The presence of law enforcement agencies and (local) news organizations might have occurred primarily because of the public attention that the protest received after riots took place on the morning of March 18. When riots broke out and police cars were set on fire between 06:00 and 09:00, many activists called someone or looked up information on their phones but refrained from taking pictures because of Blockupy's request not to spread images of violent action. This request was rooted in security issues and in a desire to maintain Blockupy's nonviolent self-representation on social media. Police, on the other hand, shared images and videos of the burning police cars (parked in front of the police station), which were shared widely through social media and news media. This supports Poell and van Dijck's (2015) observation that violent action frames produce visibility not only in news media but also on social media.

Nevertheless, for police, firefighters, and news organizations to be present in our data, they needed to explicitly add to their messages at least one hashtag previously selected by the activist groups. Generally, civil society, NGOs, and social movements are very active on Twitter despite a generally low number of Twitter users (11%) in Germany, according to Netzpolitik.org (Dobusch, 2014). The use of one or more specific hashtags is aimed not only at enlarging the potential readership of a specific message but also at identifying an audience that the authors of the tweets intend to reach. The hashtags in our case study thus have different functions for the three clusters of actors represented in the data set: First, for activists, the hashtag defined the borders of a potentially interested community of actors willing to support their action. Second, for news organizations, the hashtag represented a means of identifying and describing the news connecting them to the existing stream of tweets. Third, for the Frankfurt am Main police, the hashtag represented a technical strategy for engaging with a specific audience that evolved over the course of the event. Use of the hashtag thus came down to different tactics and produced different meanings within contested social media.

Activists and Police: A Tale of Two Networks

The visualization of the network of interactions based on replies and retweets among user accounts (Figure 3) shows three clusters. First, the interaction (replies and retweets) of the police account (Polizei_Ffm) comprises the largest cluster within the network. Second, we can identify two clusters surrounding activists-related accounts (Blockupy, 15MBcn_int) and can identify two quasi-isolated clusters aggregated around ReporterYA and RTerdog4n, which are activist accounts located in different geographical and language contexts. The more fragmented and diverse activist clusters map the diversity of groups and subgroups loosely connected through the Blockupy alliance. This diversity is expressed both in different levels of radicalization and political agendas and in the different geographical contexts in which the various groups operate (interview, Carlos, German activist, March 1, 2015). Third, we can identify a news media cluster, dominated by RT_com, which plays a central role and is positioned equally close to both the activist and police clusters.

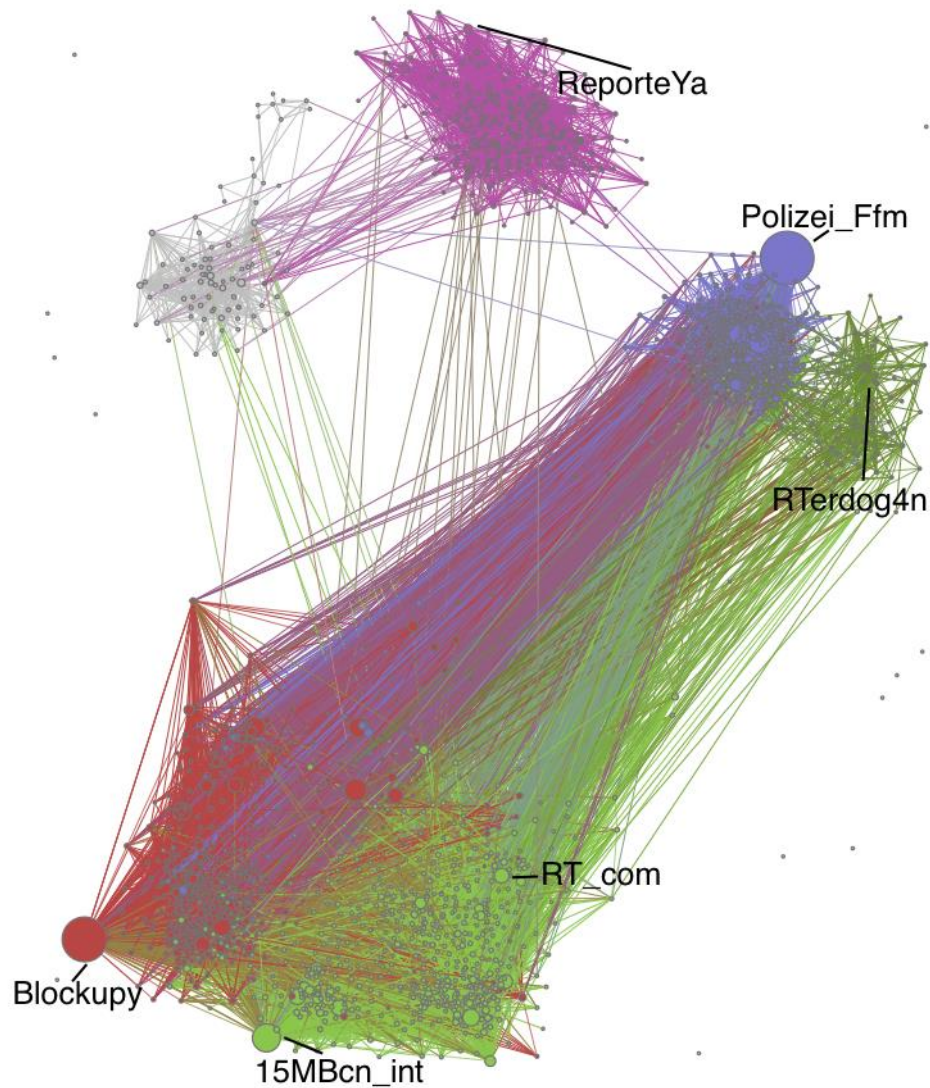


Figure 3. Interaction network of Twitter data (Giant component).

On the basis of our ethnographic inquiry, it seems that the Blockupy alliance did not anticipate the high police presence in its social media interactions. Conversely, Blockupy sought to avoid public communication on social media with authorities, mainly because of security issues, as activists are generally aware that police observe their public social media communication (interviews Carlos, German activist, March 1, 2015; Susanne, Danish activist, March 3, 2015; see Neumayer & Stald, 2014, for similar results). Nevertheless, even though the hashtags were clearly defined and proclaimed by activists, police used them to interfere in the street protest information stream on Twitter. This became particularly clear when the police replied directly to activist accounts, stating that the activists' actions were illegal:

We talked inside the group about how to deal with stuff like that, but we just decided to not answer them and not talk to them and just do our work. It was definitely the right decision to buy an old phone and post on Twitter for the group and not in your name. The police post "what you are doing is illegal" because maybe they can be repressive to you. They see, okay, this guy has the phone for illegal action. (Carlos, German activist, March 1, 2015)

This shows a clear strategy within the activist collective of avoiding monitoring by potentially hostile authorities and the tactics developed to carry it out. The interviewees also noted that they sought to avoid visible interaction with police because of the collectives' beliefs and that they had developed tactics to do so (such as not responding to police). The Twitter data, however, shows that the police developed their own tactics for entering the Twitter stream about the events, in this case by using the protest hashtags announced by activists. We will now compare the different communicative behaviors of two organizationally and ideologically divergent clusters, activists and police.

The communicative behaviors of the two clusters produce different communication patterns that result in different network structures. We have isolated two subgraphs from the larger communication network and have compared descriptive metrics to interpret the behavior of the user accounts more directly connected with the three actors. Because of the complexity of identifying subgraphs of users, we defined them conservatively by starting with their key actors: *Police_Network* was defined by extracting all of the edges between the accounts connected to the Twitter accounts of the Frankfurt police or the Frankfurt fire department. *Blockupy_Network* was defined by extracting all of the edges between the accounts connected to the Twitter account of Blockupy or 15MBcn_int. Our approach includes within the subgraphs all of the user accounts that interacted at least once with the key actors of each group. The groups are thus not mutually exclusive, allowing for the possibility of the same account belonging to more than one group if it interacted with more than one key actor. Although mutually exclusive methods, such as modularity (Clauset, Newman, & Moore, 2004), are possible, they risk missing the level of detail that we seek when using this particular procedure.

In Table 4, we can observe that despite the relatively comparable size of *Police_Net* and *Blockupy_Net*, these two networks present different characteristics. The average retweet rate of the *Police_Net* network is lower than the average retweet rate of the *Blockupy* network, suggesting less intense information propagation activity. The density of the *Blockupy* network is remarkably higher than the other network. *Density* is the ratio between the number of existing connections and the number of possible connections (in our case, retweets and replies among user accounts), which suggests a tighter network of retweets and replies within *Blockupy* than within the police network.

Table 4. Descriptive Metrics of the Two Analyzed Subgraphs.

Network	Users	Avg Retweets	Density	Transitivity	Centralization
Police_Net	3497	6.451	0.0009	0.003	0.774
Blockupy_Net	2744	9.252	0.0016	0.011	0.451

To better understand this difference, we can compare the values of transitivity and centralization. *Transitivity* is the probability that the nodes adjacent to a node are themselves connected. In our network, this can be illustrated as follows: Given User A, who retweeted @Blockupy, and User B, who also retweeted @Blockupy, transitivity is the probability that User B and User C will also have retweeted each other. In our study, transitivity can indicate the degree to which nodes are tightly connected with each other in small groups and the size of these groups compared to the network as a whole. This measure has previously been used to describe whether hashtag-based conversations in Twitter generate structures based on many-to-many interactions, with multiple actors actively involved in providing information, or based on one-to-many interactions, with a central source propagating information with little or no interaction among those receiving it (Doughty, Rowland, & Lawson, 2012). The higher transitivity and density within the Blockupy network suggests that communication and interaction among Blockupy supporters is higher than within the police network. This hypothesis is also supported by the centralization value. *Centralization* (here computed on the degree value) measures the extent to which a network is organized around a single hypercentral actor (e.g., a starlike network with a single clearly identifiable center and numerous satellites) or has a more equally distributed structure with no center. We see the presence of central actors in both networks, but their degrees of centralization differ: The police network shows a significantly more centralized structure. Although police traditionally show a top-down organizational structure more than dispersed activist collectives, this structure is surprising, as it comprises a retweet structure based on other user accounts retweeting the police's tweets rather than the internal organizational structure.

The metrics presented in Table 4 indicate a clear and consistent difference between the two analyzed networks. The police network shows a broadcast structure, with a single hyperpopular center and multiple subjects lightly involved in the communication network. The Blockupy network shows a structure in which a clear center is accompanied by numerous actors producing, propagating, and exchanging information. These two patterns of interaction coexist within the same hashtag space, demonstrating that Twitter communication originally planned as part of the Blockupy activity was also subject to involvement by the police, which used a different network configuration that reflected its generally more hierarchical organizational structure. Differences in communication strategies and goals produced different network structures: Blockupy used its pre-existing network of activists to share and propagate messages (thereby producing a network more densely connected and less centralized), whereas the police used Twitter to reach out to citizens and activists and relied on unconnected Twitter users to spread its messages. Although it is always hard to evaluate the final impact of social media communication, Table 3 suggests that the Twitter strategy adopted by the Frankfurt police paid off in visibility and retweets.

Conclusions

As corporate social media have become increasingly central to activists' communicative action, it is important to understand the tensions in their social media practices. These tensions might increase as reporting from street protest becomes embedded within a larger antagonistic event, with authorities becoming increasingly skilled at navigating social media logics. This goes beyond mere surveillance of activists' social media communication and includes the active dissemination of a police perspective on events. This study's dual focus has shown that activists' communicative social media tactics in Blockupy Frankfurt represent a diverse interplay of visible and encrypted invisible communication. The tensions between the critical social media practices of activist collectives and the uncritical use of social media as tools by more loosely connected protest event participants may be reinforced by the increasing police presence. Carefully planned tactics and critical social media practices stressing the avoidance of police interference only partially materialized on social media, as shown by the social network analysis of Twitter data. The various network structures of Twitter communicative behavior by police and activists shed light on the antagonistic character of protest and its reproduction on social media.

Authorities' power in social media has been studied mainly in terms of the surveillance and monitoring of activists, but this study has shown a need for further investigation into the police's public interaction and self-representation on social media (Crump, 2011), particularly during protests and riots (Denef, Bayerl, & Kaptein, 2013; Schneider, 2014). It is also necessary to study how the technocommercial processes of social media (which support the disseminative, hierarchical centralized, and egocentric social media use by police) increase tensions for activist collectives. The more centralized police network clusters and the fragmented network clusters of diverse activist collectives form different communicative patterns correlate differently with the social media logics. While the police displayed more centralized and dissemination-focused communicative behavior on Twitter, they also adhered to the social media logic embedded in the political economy of attention and visibility. Their strategic dissemination of images following the riots gained attention in the international news media. Blockupy's pursuit of a peaceful and colorful protest sought to render these images invisible to ensure a positive media representation of the counter-protests. A systematic investigation of activists' and police's communicative patterns across various social media platforms is needed to further understand how both antagonistic actors produce visibility within the diverse logics of social media platforms.

Perhaps most crucially, it is necessary to ask whether the police's increasingly effective navigation of social media logics for its own positive self-representation pushes activists' issues further into the background. How can activists claim social media for communicating their protest issues away from the spectacle created by news media? How can activists and police alike develop tactics that go beyond antagonizing the other through violent imagery? How do activist collectives react to the tensions arising from increasing police presence in social media while avoiding domination of their social media practices by technocommercial processes? It is necessary to continue undertaking thorough ethnographic inquiries and analyses of social media data, but we must also combine and transcend these narrow perspectives to understand the complex logics of contested social media, the diversity of actors, and social media tactics in protest events beyond their materialization on Twitter. If activists are to shift media power, they too must move beyond merely reproducing mainstream media reporting strategies, yet

scholars and activists alike should be aware that the police too are increasingly employing the advantages of speedy communication and production of visibility, even if they do so within different organizational structures, hierarchies, and ideologies.

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5576 Christina Neumayer, Luca Rossi, & Björn Karlsson International Journal of Communication 10(2016)

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5578 Christina Neumayer, Luca Rossi, & Björn Karlsson *International Journal of Communication* 10(2016)

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