Millennials and politics.

What is the connection between new social movements and youth's political engagement?

MASTER THESIS

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Abstract

Inspired by social movements emerging across the globe such as the Occupy Movement in the United States, this master thesis investigates the influence they have on youth political socialization. Keeping in mind the context of western democracies and the privileged easy access to digital media and social networks, this dissertation investigates the effects of the different aspects of new social movements on youth and to what extend this can influence their participation in the political life. The literature review will go over the following topics composing the theoretical framework of this work: the civil society and public participation in western democracies on a broad level, social movement theory, the role of new social media and digital platforms in politics, and finally an overview of the literature on youth's political participation. In order to investigate the incentives pushing younger demographics to engage in social movements such as the ones previously listed, this thesis will ask the following research question: how technology-enabled youth engage in new social movements?   In attempt to answer this question, I argue that (1) new social movements are mainly structured and organized through digital platforms, using social networks to mobilize more people, and (2) young citizens in western democracies use the internet and digital platforms as an information tool and feel disconnected from the traditional political actors. This thesis will be simply structures: the first chapter will consist of an introduction of the issue addressed here. The second chapter will encompass the literature review, going over the existing literature on the framework mentioned before and the limitations it presents. The third chapter will analyse the effects of civic engagement on youth and will be followed by a case study on Occupy Wall Street, examining the role of youth and technology in that movement. The last chapter will consist of the conclusion.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"2011 was a year of protests, revolutions and political change. It was a year where people all over the world tried to make their dreams of a different society a reality" (Fuchs, 2014: 17). That year, the middle-eastern youth turned against the dictatorships and demanded democracy. Spanish, Greek and Italian citizens turned against their corrupted governments and demanded democracy. Even New Yorkers turned against their government in the heart of Manhattan where the biggest financial institutions are located and demanded democracy.

It comes then as a surprise when a relatively stable and obedient population in a western developed country suddenly turns to mass defiance. Depending on the economic, political or social context, protests often seem unexpected, insignificant, and soon-to-be failures. In some cases, symbolic uprisings can either quickly reach a dead end or shift to sustained mobilizations and the creation of structural change in the political or social establishment. They can even escalate into a large-scale movement spreading globally (Törnberg, 2018: 381). The latter is probably more noticeable nowadays, thanks to social media and other communication technology that quickly spreads information across the globe and enables protests to duplicate at a global level. In some cases, the protestors achieve structural change. Others slowly die out, waiting for the next occasion to rise again.

Participation is at the base of every society. In some way or another, individual interactions are the basis for any sense of community. This is even more true in western countries where democracy is the prevailing political system. The participation of citizens, their engagement in the political life, is what gives democracy legitimacy and vitality, as if it would be pushed by the conscious intentionality of individual's engagement (Dahlgren, 2009: 12). Democracy lays on the foundations for reciprocity and participation: the people elects a government that will work for them. Therefore, participating in politics presupposes engagement: participation of individuals in electoral or non-electoral activities.

Even though governments have failed to properly integrate digital platforms as tools to engage in the democratic life (Dalhgren, 2009: 160), the internet is increasingly used by citizens as a source of information or entertainment, thus shifting away from traditional media. As political and civic cultures seem to operate via the media, this thesis will focus on the ways ICTs can facilitate and/or hinder the youth's civic agency. However, before starting this research, some comments have to be made. First and foremost, it is important to keep in mind that revolutions occurred long before the technology revolution when working in the context of political unrest (Monshipouri, 2016: 13). In that sense, this thesis investigates how technology empowers youth as a political actor to engage in social movements as a shift from conventional politics. Secondly, the access to internet is easily perceived as widely democratised, however, this needs to be put back into the context of developed countries. Indeed, only a minority of the world's population (39%) can be considered as digitally literate, whereas the vast

majority of the population in developed countries has access to the internet[1] (Monshipouri, 2016: 34). And even in developed countries, if the access to technology is easier, it does not mean that everyone makes the same use of it.

Youth is the symbol of the future of society and democracy, it is thus of special concern (Dahlgren, 2011: 11). As Henry Milner states, protecting the environment of the generations to come is reason enough to try to understand their relation to political participation (Milner, 2010: 9). At the same time, because of its rebellious reputation, youth is being continuously depicted as a risk-incentive part of the population, and a threat to societal stability. Yet, when they engage in the political life, they are not taken seriously, they are underrepresented and often disregarded as a potentially active political actor. The youth is also the most technologically enabled demographic, using platforms often disconnected from the political life (Dahlgren, 2011: 11). Even though its regulation has been an increasing topic of debate, the internet is a common feature of how western societies and individuals organize their life in our modern world (Dahlgren, 2009: 150). When looking at broader levels than local, the academic literature studying youth as a relevant actor of the political or societal life thins out. Besides the extensive research that has been done on engagement of youth in local communities – exploring the impact on their way of thinking and the development of their skills – very little has been made on youth's engagement in the civil society.

The literature gap addressed here is dual: on the one hand, the youth as a political actor has not been of major interest in academia, thus neglecting to investigate all aspects of their engagement (in particular in significant social movements); on the other hand, literature on new forms of social movements being not very extensive (mostly because of the recentness), there has been little analysis of the range of roles the different demographics play in such movements. Given the focus of this thesis, I thus emphasize primarily the themes of civic engagement and social movements in particular in an attempt to join both the discussion around youth as an empowered political actor and new social movements as an alternative form of political engagement moving away from traditional structures.

What is the relation between new social movement and millennials' political engagement? Why youth is more likely to engage in new social movements than in traditional political organizations? As these sub-questions have to do with the political socialisation of youth, this thesis will be an attempt at answering the following research question: *How technology-enabled youth engage in new social movements?* In this light, using the Occupy Wall Street movement as a case study will help identify the different features of the engagement of young citizens in new social movements to identify their behaviour towards politics in general, and their role in social movements in particular.

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[1] About 87% of the population of the United States has access to internet, 76,5% for the European Union (Monshipouri, 2016: 34).

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In attempt to answer this question, I argue that

(1) new social movements are mainly structured and organized through digital platforms, using social networks to mobilize more people, and

(2) young citizens in western democracies use the internet and digital platforms as an information tool and feel disconnected from the traditional political actors.

This thesis is structured as follows. The first chapter was comprised in this introduction. The second chapter will encompass the literature review, going over the concepts of participation in democracy, Social Movement Theory and New Social Movements theory. The review will also go over the implication of the societal change to a more digital change for the structure and organization process of social movements. Then it will be followed by an overview of the place of youth in western democracies. The third chapter will consist of the analysis. First, the reasons behind the complicated relationship between youth and politics will be investigated. Then, a case study of the Occupy Wall Street movement will be conducted: it includes an analysis of the demographics of the participants as well as an inquiry on the role of digital media in the movement, in order to understand role of younger participants of Occupy Wall Street and illustrate their engagement in social movements at a broader level. The last chapter will consist of the conclusion.

Chapter 2 Theorizing Social Movements and the Relation of Youth with Politics

- Civic engagement in western democracies

If democracy is characterized by participation of the public (Barber, 2004), another important element is the control of power through structure, institutions and cultural logics (Carpentier, 2011: 16), which can become challenging when the citizens turn away from institutions into a more fluid and horizontal form of protest. By aiming to influence the decisions of other economic, political or social powers, citizens engaged in the civil society aim at affecting the power relations linking the different actors. They are constantly creating alternative discourses, protesting the rationalized and legitimized discourse of the state (or the normative actor at any other level). Regarding public participation and institutionalization, Barber categorizes different levels of democracy: thin versus strong democracy[2]. The former is defined by dominating institutions and a low civic participation in the government's affairs; whereas the latter is defined by high levels of civic engagement, with important participation and deliberation (Berber, 2004: 37). In that sense, one aspect that is worth highlighting is the difference in speed: democracy with high institutionalism and low participation and/or deliberation will run faster than a "strong-er" democracy (Barber, 2004). Looking at the high speed of the development of discussions online (and on social media in particular), this could be an argument supporting the idea that technology is an empowering tool for democracy, as it would allow more deliberation and participation in the discussion for citizens, even in more institutionalized, "thin-er" democracies. However, the limitation to this argumentation lies in the slowness of the structural change to come out of public discussion when they do not take place within the said institutions.

In order to define more specifically the different terminology where participation takes place, the distinction between social movements and the civil society needs to be underlined. Social movements are part of the broader concept of civil society, where individuals voluntarily gather and organize to reach a collective interest (Hunter & Milofsky, 2007: xii). It is often defined as a process through which individuals are able to act publicly and collectively with or against centres of political or economic power (Kaldor, 2003: 585). It is a form of participation in public affairs, as people mobilize and focus their attention on a particular topic (Dahlgren, 2009: 80). Without developing too much on the history of social movements, there has been an evolution leading to the creation of a system of global governance (Kaldor, 2003: 584). Social movements are in essence linked to politics in a form of contestation and are intimately linked to the concept of democracy. The etymology itself of the word

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[2] A similar kind of categorization has been adopted by Carpentier, when he talks about the minimalist or maximalist dimension in democracy (Carpentier, 2011: 16).

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"civi" implies the engagement in public affairs, with is vital to democracy (Dahlgren, 2009: 58). This is why they can be traces back to ancient Greece, the birthplace of western democracy, and in particular to Aristotle's social contract. Jumping in time, social movements grew in the past centuries with a very specific structure (around political parties, trade unions and such), evolving increasingly against political centres and linked to ideologies (opposing dictatorships, anti-globalization movement, etc..).

- Social Movement Theory vs New Social Movement

In this western digitally-based environment, existing literature theorizing social movement sometimes find it hard to understand and explain innovative and rapid transitions of the fast growing and globally spreading social movements (Törnberg, 2018: 382). This can be explained by the lack of empirical cases outside of recent history, or the lack of developed methodological and/or theoretical frameworks suiting the research. In sociology, Social Movement Theory (SMT) has been mainly developed in the empirical context of western democracy, although there is an increasing of research conducted in other parts of the globe (Ritzer, 2004: 753). SMT analyses social movements and other common forms of protest and has attracted interest since the increase of collective action in the industrial sector with workers organizing in trade unions in the past century (Heery & Noon, 2008; Staggenborg: 2005). This involves key concepts such as movement organization, social psychology, culture and political opportunities and processes (Ritzer, 2004: 753). The main aim of SMT is determining conditions fostering collective action, scholars have identified a pattern leading to the creation of a form of protest[3]. This includes the development of a sense of grievance or injustice, the transfer of that grievance into action, the belief that collective action would be effective, and a pre-existing collective organization with a mobilizing leadership (Heery & Noon, 2008). However, focusing on this determined set of criteria for the emergence of a social movement that was constructed don the model of industrial society is very limiting in the choice of empirical cases and does not age well. For example, the pre-existence of collective organization was a central aspect of the earlier collective behaviour theory, yet this thinking is very limiting when globalization and new media technology are taken into account. Indeed, focusing on protest movements organized by Social Movement Organizations (SMO), such as trade unions or political parties, leaves out all the new social movements that have emerged through social media platforms. More recent research has incorporated a wide range of mobilizing structures, including SMO as well as social media platforms and other alternative structure (Ritzer, 2004: 753). In this manner, even after a period of visible decline, a movement can be sustained through the common culture

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[3] Staggenborg has a very simple definition of SMT: "Social movement theory attempts to explain the origins, growth, decline, and outcomes of social movements." (Staggenborg, 2005: 753).

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developed by the community, or through the networks developed by the inclusion and engagement of different cultural groups, institutions, etc. (ibid.: 754).

To tackle the limitations encountered by SMT, New Social Movements (NSM) have been theorised in the context of emerging new ways of doing politics, in particular through network politics (Monshipouri, 2016: 3). The advancement in post-industrial societies, with the emergence of more complex and blurred divisions of classes and greater interconnectedness, generated new kinds of social movements (Fadaee, 2011: 91). This concept is hence born from the shift from traditional social movements organized through SMO, towards a more network-based organization. Because the mechanisms of interaction are no longer solely based on class division (but affected by a larger set of factors creating a complex organizational system), the control over the information and thus the connections are key in NSM theory (Melucci, 1980: 218). Indeed, NSM focuses more on establishing informal networks of supporters and mobilizing greater masses than recruiting members and creating a fix base of supporters (Monshipouri, 2016). This looseness has been heavily criticized[4], for lacking leadership and an ideological framework, but also for allowing forms of passive engagement to arise (Tarrow, 2011: 135). Because they appear as non-organized, predictions of failure to bring structural change to the political or social structure are common. However, there have been now examples of successful NSM across the globe leading to structural political, economic or social change[5] (ibid.).

Knowing how NSM are organized is crucial to get a grasp at how they interact with the rest of the actors of the societal life. Most of the literature on the most recent social movements that had a large impact (such as the different Occupy movements and similar movements inspired by the Arab Spring) noticed an evolution in the ways social movements grow, organize themselves and operate in the last decades. These movements have a more flexible structure and definitely lean towards horizontality rather than a very hierarchical vertical organizational architecture. Indeed, the literature produced on these movements is often tinted with this underlying idea of a "global civil society" organized in networks, just like Mary Kaldor explains (Kaldor, 2003). The global success of NSM is due to many factors. A very practical one is that non-formal membership is easier and cheaper for participants, since they have less strict obligations (Hirzalla & Zoonen, 2011: 485). Two other important factors explaining the fast-growing capacity of NSM to mobilize crowds has been identified in the literature: the fact that they are mainly basing their structure on networks, and that those networks are virtual (Monshipouri, 2016).

The idea that social movements are organized through networks, just like the rest of society, is more and more common. Networks do not have set boundaries, they are open-ended and expandable. To put it simply, a network is the interconnection between several different nodes, or centres, with flows of

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[4] NSM theory has also been criticised for being a European theory with undeserved universalist claims (Fadaee, 2011).

[5] Analysing these successful social movement through the perspective of Castells' notion of Insurgent Politics is very engaging.

information (Castells, 2009). Networks[6] mostly serve a communication purpose, they are the communicative and cooperative structures between different information sources. Manuel Castells defines networks as "complex structures of communication constructed around a set of goals that simultaneously ensure unity of purpose and flexibility of execution by their adaptability to the operating environment" (ibid.: 21). And that flexibility is the strength[7] of any network-based structure. The claim of universalism of Castells' theory of network society lies on the technology revolution: the potential of a network to turn global, to expand so much it transcends national borders and creates a global society[8], is being digitally-based (Castells, 2009: 25).

- The role of ICT in social movements

The fact that more and more people get their information from traditional media was true 15 years ago. With the democratisation of information and communication technologies (ICT), more and more people have access not only to the technology or its infinite content, but also to the freedom to information and exchange of values and ideas it allows (Monshipouri: 2016; 2). Nowadays, digital media have a greater share as information sources (online newspapers, social media and other digital platforms). This is even more true among younger generations: people under 30 years old do not trust traditional media as the only source of information, they tend to diversify their sources thanks to the diverse online media easily accessible (Castell, 2012; Tarrow, 2011). New media have mostly replaced paper and television in daily use, as predicted by Barber (2004). This shift is impacting the political sphere, since more and more people state that politics take place in the media, no matter what format it has[9] (Dahlgren, 2009: 151).

When it comes to the influence of technology and the increasing importance of social media on the democratic life of a society, the scholarship is divided. Some say that technology is isolating and induces depression (Barber, 2004), while others try to illustrate how internet can be used considered a bonus for deliberative democracy (Dahlgren, 2009: 482). This division is not clear cut, as many of moderate statements come out of the literature. For instance, Kamil Demirhan and Derya Çakır-Demirhan explain that even though social media is a perpetuation of real life discussion (thus duplicating the society and

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[6] In the development of his Network Society, Castells describes networks as a "fundamental pattern of life" (Castells, 2009: 21), they are not specific to the 21st century or even to human life but can be found in any form of life across the universe.

[7] Until a certain point. If the network is too big and/or too much information run through it, then the lack of set of rules and limits.

[8] Castells sees the limit to this globalism, since not every individual has access to the digital realm. Thus, a transnational society would be more of an accurate term.

[9] Dahlgren opens an engaging discussion on the use of the term "cyberspace" to describe what is perceived as a "non-place" (not physical area where we go online). He approaches it instead through a macro sociological point of view, stating that it is a set of practices using the available technology and its framework (Dahlgren, 2009: 156).

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its hegemonic discourses and traditional power relations), it still has the potential to challenge dominant discourses through its dynamism and diverse public (Demirhan & Çakır-Demirhan, 2015: 308). Some scholars hold a positive stand, seeing ICT as a strong tool enabling youth across the globe, and even more in countries under authoritarian regimes, to voice their discontent with aged power structures (Monshipouri, 2016: 7). Other scholars have a more contrasted point of view, stating that if online activity might have a negative impact on socialization of youth, there are also evidences that ICT have the potential to increase civic participation (Hirzalla & Zoolen, 2011: 483; Strosul, 2014; Tarrow, 2011). This discussion often ends in statements such as the following: "social media constitute a promising but complex setting for democratic participation and deliberation" (Storsul, 2014: 18).

As the ICT are used as a self-information tool, there has been evidence showing that the availability of information online positively impacts the participation of individuals that are already active and engaged in the civil society:

> "Calenda and Mosca (2007), for instance, found that information consumption online among youth is associated with the 'political characteristics of users', that is, whether and how students participate offline. The authors, therefore, concluded that, in this and other regards, the characteristics of offline participation are 'reproduced online''' (Hirzalla & Zoolen, 2011: 487)

Thus, the fact that individuals turn to digital media and digital platforms for an easy access to information is not necessarily a negative sign for civic participation, it shows that, mostly among younger generations, diversifying sources of information can lead to deeper engagement in certain causes. In that light, research on recent social movements has shown evidence that, more than being merely an information tool, social media helped meaningfully connecting different networks active in the civil society (Gerbaudo, 2014: 2).

The fact that social movements use social networks as their main communication channels, both for organization and mobilization purposes can explain the horizontality and flexibility that has been source of criticism. The connection of different actors through the network not only help increase the number of people receiving information, but also the speed to which the information travels. Looking at information diffusion theory, studies found that the networks created by social media platforms are creating a cascade of canals for the information to run through, allowing it to travel much faster than in external sources, which can be of great importance in certain time-restricted situation[10] (Yoo et al., 2016: 131). Since the information reaches a greater portion of the population faster, using ICT helps shrinking physical distances, as well as hierarchical distances: because the access is facilitated by the networks, people can get to information they would not otherwise have access to. The virtual dimension of ICT pushes the limits of time and space by providing an all-time access to a meeting place where individuals

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[10] In this study, they also concluded that the cascade originator is of great importance: the most influence the originator of the information has, and the most visibility the originator gives the information (mainly through repetition), the more people it will reach (Yoo et al., 2016: 131).

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can organize and coordinate, but also maintain or create new connections otherwise not possible (Monshipouri, 2016: 42, Tarrow, 2011: 130).Therefore, there are accumulated evidence that online participation can lead to offline participation, even more since the distinction between on and off line is becoming more blurred (ibid.: 38).

The greater use of ICT also increases the coherence of action within a complex and diffuse grid of groups and allow the create on of a strongly connected protest culture neglecting leadership. In the context of democracy, the different format in which information is diffused in the digital realm are also elements affecting the discourse on either side of the discussion. Because users of social media are not limited to one side of the discussion, online platforms often represent the views held by the different actors[11] and create complex discussions featuring various overlapping topics (Highfield, 2016: 30). "By challenging hierarchical discourse, the new media encourage direct democracy and so, as I suggested fifteen years ago, can be instruments of strong democracy" (Barber, 2004: 42). Thus, the fact that social media platforms are facilitating the creation of a discussion (through commenting and sharing), each action taken in that direction by users, encourages online deliberation.

The discussion about the influence of traditional or new media on democracy is linked to the concept of the public sphere. Media must provide citizens with the information, ideas and debates about current affairs so as to facilitate informed opinion and participation in democratic politics. The public sphere is the space in society where public opinion is formed (Habermas, 1974: 49). There, media is a mean of transport for the information to navigate this space. In a democratic context, the accessibility of information to all[12] is crucial in the sense that it gives power to the public opinion over the political sphere and thus the ability to influence law-making institutions (Harbemas, 1974: 49). Yet, there is an ambiguity, because of public sphere creating the idea of something common comes in conflict with the market forces that influence media (Dahlgren, 2009: 34). Privatization and market forces could potentially endanger the good impact of technology on the democratic discourse (Barber, 2004). This is where the notion of "economism" comes in: because globalization and consumerism increase the feeling of having a choice there are more and more cultural niches and more diversity in the ways of thinking (Dalhgren, 2009: 27). This creates a consumption of politics (what is called "political consumerism") mostly among the higher consumers of social media: the youth. (Hirzalla & Zoolen, 2011: 486).

- The place of youth in western democracies

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[11] However, social media platforms often mirror mainstream media by not representing challenging views because the public is the same (Demirhan, 2015: 310).

[12] As for everything else, there are external factors affecting some part of the population more than others and reducing their access to the information and to the public sphere in general (such as race, gender, sexual orientation, age or religion according to the context). This disharmony impacts the main discourses that are unevenly influenced by the majority of the population that has the easiest access to the public sphere.

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Youth is a very general term that encompasses different generations (millennials, generation Y, generation Z, etc.). Even if this is set in the context of western democratic countries and that globalization tends to universalize practices and behaviours, the youth represents individuals from various economic, social, religious and ethnic backgrounds. As they are not a unified group, an intersectional perspective must be considered here. For instance, one aspect that is should be more acknowledged in the study of youth's relation to politics, is the fact that, if young people in general feel alienated from the political realm or are lacking representation in the media, it is accentuated for minority youth (Kishner, 2009: 415). In addition, when looking at youth organization initiatives, taking into account the different backgrounds helps create better relationships across generations, races, genders and faiths to reach social change (Christens & Dolan, 2011: 538; Buckingham, 2008). Actually, some scholars address the fact that acknowledging the diversity among youth is not only necessary to better represent them, but it would also strengthen the empirical understanding of their political socialisation and development in general by taking into account the different expectations and social pressures they face (Zeldin, 2004: 76).

In that light, the resources used in this thesis present various definition of youth (or worked on specific class ages in specific contexts). Some studies have worked with high school students in a specific city (Christens & Dolan, 2011), others have worked with a wider range of age, or more with minority youth. This variety of sources helps in having a broader view on the matter as not much has been written on this topic. Indeed, defining a particular set of criteria for what is considered as youth here would have greatly limited the available resources, not only because some studies have investigated very specific groups or use definite concepts, but also because most of them are too vague or equivocal. Instead, this thesis will be using Dahlgren's perspective, that sees the term youth[13] as indicating trends and patterns of citizen behaviour, rather than a specific range of age or any set of criteria (Dahlgren, 2011: 12).

A decline in civic participation is frequently asserted in the scholarship. The main factors pointed out are the shift of attention from the serious to the trivial, and the increase focus on the individual instead of the community (Dahlgren, 2009). Those observations are made in particular in western countries (such as the US, the UK or even France), where values and customs appear as deviating from collectivist mindset to a more individualistic, as well as from an idealization to close inspection of political authority (Hirzalla & Zoonen, 2011: 485). Nevertheless, Sörbom (2002) studied the political engagement tendencies of the past decades and found that political commitments at the personal level have grown, only participation to traditional forms of engagement (such as political parties or trade unions) have indeed declined (Dahlgren, 2009: 32). Her research supports the belief that established political

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[13] Youth is not used as a synonym of student as it is sometimes the case. Many studies have been made on student activism in western countries of elsewhere. They are usually very specific and limited to the life of the campus (see Weiss, 2011; Loader et al., 2015).

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institutions in western democracies are on a downswing because of growing distrust and ambivalence, which leaves spaces to growing new politics and emerging new patterns of civic engagement (ibid.). This supports the belief of the emergence of important new patterns of civic engagement. From this evolution emerges alternatives in the political spectrum that are more personalized, more focused on single issues, rather than the usual ideology-based politics (ibid: 33). This is also part of the evolution of the civil society mentioned earlier: social movements are more specific to certain issues, and a growing number of NGOs absorb individual engagement through their support of specific causes. A source of issue-specificity has been identified in the literature: alternative paths of ideas and deviant social practices that come in opposition to the mainstream normativity (Törnberg, 2018: 383).

When looking at youth, observations of a decline in participation in politics in general, and in civic engagement in particular, is even more present, as young individuals are seen as individualistic, frivolous and immature.

> "Over the past century there has been an ongoing discussion that has pitted the ideals of citizenship against its realities - with citizens, especially younger ones, consistently being berated for their lack of civic responsibility, inadequate levels of political knowledge and unwillingness to get involved in current affairs." (Dahlgren, 2009: 13).

The youth always has had a reputation, no matter what period is looked at. Nowadays, the trend is to selfishness and cynicism (Bennett, 2008; Buckingham, 1999: 171; Wayne et al., 2010: 173). A growing disconnection between the youth and conventional politics has also been observed, not only in the U.S. but also in other western democracies such as the U.K., Sweden or Germany (Bennett, 2008: 1; Revkin, 2016). In the media, this part of the demography is usually addressed as a topic of concern, with coverage on youth deviance and delinquency, even more for minority youth (Buckingham, 2008: 4; Wayne et al., 2010: 101). An alternative explanation for the low level of interest by young people to the political programs can be their cognitive development: because they develop their critical analysis of the information they receive and the motivations of the sources of information, they develop a cynical perspective on the content broadcasted by the media, and thus distance themselves from it (Buckingham, 1999: 176). However, in the last years, an increasing amount of the studies have shifted their angle to examine youth from a societal problem to a potential community asset (Zeldin, 2004). Indeed, young individuals are increasingly active and engaged, which firstly translates by a stronger presence in governance. Shepherd Zeldin found that the growing role of young citizens in governance helps ensuring social justice and increase youth's representation and development (ibid. Zeldin, 2004: 5). Therefore, even though it has been lacking in the past, there is a growing trend within academic research to look at the youth's political socialization, to explain the engagement observed (or lack thereof). Some studies have shown that youth's knowledge on civic and political systems is superficial and not action-oriented (Larson & Hansen, 2005: 330). A growing part of the literature suggests that the political attitudes of the youth is more and more influenced by a trend to reflect on individualism and self-contribution to the

society, which shows a shift from norms of citizenship that usually uses more traditional paths[14] (Loader et al, 2015: 821).

For a long period of time, the civic engagement of youth has been mostly studied at the local level. Focusing on the local level enabled the youth to be perceived as an active participant by having role in their community, however, the literature on their political socialization is still superficial and not action oriented (Larson & Hanser, 2005: 330). Most of the studies justify their engagement by the will to have an impact on their own development as well as on their environment (Christens & Dolan, 2011). For these reasons, the concept of community engagement characterizes the processes through which young individuals get involved and exercise agency within their local community (Christens & Zeldin, 2011: 479). They gain different characteristics by improving their community and working towards institutional change.

In this light, Social Political Development (SPD) has been theorized as "the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, analytical skills, emotional faculties, and the capacity for action in political and social systems necessary to interpret and resist oppression" (Watts et al., 2003). This definition expands on empowerment and similar ideas related to social change and activism in community psychology, and also relates to the feeling of injustice that is at the source of any engagement in the civil society as mentioned previously[15]. SPD then explains the fact that self-awareness and critical consciousness increases among engaged youth, as they embrace causes that concern them directly or indirectly (Watts et al., 2003: 187; Christens & Zeldin, 2011). They are globally empowered with strategy and communication skills and are able to understand different interacting systems and human change, which counters their reputation of individualism and egocentrism (Larson & Hanser, 2005: 346).

Some limitations to the existing literature on SPD and political socialization of youth in general, is the restricting set of criteria from original literature that does not fit the fast-changing society. For example, the main sources of political socialization are limited to the family, school and other community institutions such as religion or local media. However, this is blind to the growing influence of different formats of popular culture as well as social media platforms. Indeed, politics can be found as a sub-theme in everyday topics, that can be more trivial or seem unimportant than how it is usually reported (Highfield, 2016: 44). Popular culture has barely entered the academic world, since it is perceived as trivial or too dismissive for the serious matter of politics (Street et al., 2013). Nonetheless, some studies investigating the impact of popular culture in youth's political socialisation have been published in the

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[14] "A growing literature, largely associated with theorists of late-modernity, has suggested that the political attitudes of young people can increasingly be characterised as reflexive individualism, self-actualizing, expert citizens or 'everyday makers', all of which mark a departure from the traditional dutiful norms of citizenship." (Loader et al, 2015: 821).

[15] "As SPD proceeds, a person becomes increasingly aware of existing social inequities and their history. This includes distinguishing the processes (e.g., policies and practices) and the outcomes (e.g., subjugation, trauma, and social and personal dysfunction) of oppression" (Watts et al., 2003: 187).

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recent years (see Jackson & Jesse, 2009; Street et al., 2013). An even more recent sub-field in academia is also investigating the new communication formats such as tweets, or memes, and how they reflect a new form of political or civic participation (Gerbaudo, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2014; Highfield, 2016).

What we can take from this literature are recurring behaviours of youth regarding their engagement in the civil society. The main impacts of the engagement of youth in these studies are the critical awareness and political knowledge they develop, and the social or political change their action creates in their community (Kirshner, 2007; Christens & Dolan, 2011: 539). Several studies have proven that community engagement results in the formation of new cognitive tools among psychologically empowered young individuals: they develop new modes of thinking, as well as a greater sense of adaptability, commitment, knowledge etc. (Larson & Hansen, 2005: 330; Christens & Zeldin, 2011: 483; Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007: 682). Exercising the right to be represented is also one of the main motives of youth's engagement in community activities, so they can have a say in setting the conditions of their development and counter the powerlessness discussed before (Zeldin, 2004: 76).

As mentioned before, some scholars argue that there is a decline in the engagement of citizens in the public affairs, that people lost their sense of community (Kaldor, 2003). The wariness behind this belief (that if the citizens themselves are not interested in politics, then it is the end of democracy as we know it?) is itself a guideline to explaining partly the evolution of participation, and the main reason of engagement of youth: the affect. The simple fact that engaging in a social movement often comes from a sense of injustice is another evidence of the impact of emotions on action. As Dahlgren states:

> "Engagement in politics involves some kind of passion (...) we would be foolish to deny the indispensable role of the affective side of civic engagement. Motivation without affect would be hard to comprehend" (Dahlgren, 2009: 83).

Indeed, young individuals engage in the civil society to fight for a cause they believe in, or that is in some way linked to them, impacting their community or a part of their identity for example. They engage in such activities is directly or indirectly related to their daily environment – about conditions faced by young people and maintain or improve them in order to exercise agency to reach social or political change. This is easily explained by the fact that the well-being of a person is affected by the well-being of their community (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007: 681). Moreover, their contribution to the improvement of their community helps their development and mental health, thanks to the growing feeling of control and efficacy[16] (Christens & Dolan, 2011: 483; Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007: 683). They also choose issues that are important to them in a collective manner (rather than predetermined by adults) and take the lead on the decision-making process (Christens & Dolan, 2011: 530).

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[16] "A few signs of personal well-being come to the fore for youth: self-determination and a sense of control, self-efficacy, physical and mental health, optimism, meaning, and spirituality. Signs of relational well-being include caring, respect for diversity, reciprocity, nurturance and affection, support, collaboration, and democratic participation in decision making processes" (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007: 682).

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The community engagement of youth also has impacts on the community itself and the civil society in general. First, it demonstrates the capability of youth as a proactive participant of the societal life, regardless of the division lines, and thus challenges the public's perception of youth as individualistic and disengaged (Christens & Dolan, 2011: 544). Because the youth is then seen in a different light, it also facilitates collaboration and understanding between generations (ibid. Christens & Dolan, 2011: 544). The creation of multigenerational relations strengthens the impact of civic engagement in general, as engaged youth is likely to continue its involvement as adults (Christens & Zeldin, 2011: 479). There is a growing literature focusing solely on how young citizens use ICT, viewing youth as a community asset more than a societal problem (Storsul, 2014: 18; Kirshner, 2009: 415; Dahlgren, 2009: 159; Zeldin, 2004: 75), however it is still limited to a few authors on specific perspectives. The most recent literature looks at how technology is used to engage the youth and blur the line between online and off-line participation, based on the opinion that young citizens lack such civic engagement (Dahlgren, 2011: 15).

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Chapter 3 Analysing youth's political engagement

- Process tracing, operationalisation and research limitations

In the previous chapter, the development civic engagement in western democracies has been situated. The increasing use of ICT by most recent social movements and their organization through networks has been highlighted by the most recent literature tackling the new forms of civic or political engagement. This overview of the academic literature showed that new social movements are organized, operate and mobilize masses mainly through digital platforms, using networks of information and technology to as an efficient and fast tool. Leading to the question of the role of youth in this new approach to civic engagement, the academic literature on this topic is quite limited. From a broader angle, the youth is believed to be disinterested from politics in general and is not perceived as an active participant of the political life outside of the community level. Yet, when their political engagement is investigated, it appears that they are often driven by the affect and that community engagement has long term consequences on both their cognitive development and their civic participation.

Understanding the youth's relation to politics in general helps to have a better understanding of the reasons that can push a young citizen to enter a new social movement rather than a more conventional political organization. In this aim, the method of process tracing is helpful as it not only attempts to establish the causal mechanism between different the factors involved, but also examines the context and forms in which this link evolves. Indeed, process tracing is defined as "the analysis of evidence on processes, sequences and conjunctures of events within a case for the purpose of either developing or testing hypotheses about casual mechanisms that might causally explain the case" (Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 7). Thus, the analysis is not only about whether or not it happened, rather than how and why it did. This analysis will use both primary and secondary sources.

This argumentation is believed to nicely complement two topics that are increasingly studied in academia: firstly, the operation and mobilization capacity of new social movements (Barber, 2004; Monshipouri, 2016; Dahlgren, 2009; Bennett, 2008); and secondly, the alternatives to political engagement of the youth (Zeldin, 2004; Christens & Dolan, 2011; Christens & Zeldin, 2011; Street et al., 2013; Jackson & Jesse, 2009; Wayne et al., 2010). Indeed, those topics are of growing interest as they are relevant of the current political state in most of western democratic states: demonstrations based on or inspired by movements such as Occupy Wall Street or the Indignados are recurrent, they are believed to be led by a frustrated youth fighting for social justice and moving away from conventional politics (Strauss, 2011).

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Choosing Occupy Wall Street as a case study was mostly driven different factors. Similar protest movements occupying squares in the capitals and major cities of developed countries emerged in large number in the following months or years and were based on the same model (Fuchs, 2012, Fiegerman, 2011). Among the similar cases of new social movements in western democracies using the Occupy "banding", Occupy Wall Street had the most spotlight for different reasons (Smith et al. 2015). Firstly, it was one of the first movements of the type, after the Arab Spring in the Middle-East and the Indignant Movement in Spain, that attracted the attention of the media across the world. The fact that it took place in one of the major cities of the United States (U.S.) not only played a role in attracting a lot of attention in the media, it also increased the interest of academia. Finally, the fact that there is evidence of both a considerable presence of young individuals among the participants, the ample online presence the movement had, and the fact that it created discussions (and new protests) across the globe (Smith et al., 2015: 819), provided a significant, relevant and international source of data for the analysis. These characteristics also responded to the academic gap mentioned in the introduction that this thesis attempts to clarify.

The first part of the analysis will constitute of an evaluation of the relation of youth and politics in western democracies: what role are they given (if any), what is their relation to the rest of the political actors, how do they usually engage in political context. As announced before, the second part of the analysis in the next chapter will constitute of a case study of the Occupy Wall Street movement that took place in New York (U.S.) in 2011.

- Youth's relation to politics

In order to introduce the part of this chapter about youth's reputation and representation in the public mind, there is a compelling example illustrating the disconnection between the youth and the rest of society. Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell start their piece about young people and new media technologies by mentioning the cartoon of "a baby popping out of the womb with a cell phone in one hand, a computer mouse in the other, and an iPod plugged into his or her ears" (Weber & Mitchell, 2008: 25). This example is very relevant here since it pictures several points that are going to be mentioned later. This picture represents the incomprehension from the adult point of view of youth's growing use of social platforms as a new communication chain. First and foremost, the fact that youth is represented – not as itself, a young human being but – as a baby is an attempt at erasing the different stages of life before becoming an adult and creates a clear separation between adults and whatever is there before. Childhood and teenagerhood are just blurred into one big baby, oversharing his very short life experience online and being unable to contribute to society because it's only a baby. From pre-schoolers telling their parents to read their blogs to know the answer to "how was school today?", to unborn foetuses

surrounded by screens while still in the womb or new-borns holding a digital representation of a rattle, images, such as this one, are becoming a common place when older generations try to understand the younger ones. They caricature of the disconnect (pun intended) between adults and youth's use of new media technology is a clumsy attempt at illustrating the wonder of the impact of technology on youth and to a broader sense, on society in general.

In order to investigate the distance between youth and the political realm, more and more studies have shown that there is a will to exercise the right to be represented among this part of the demography, which is an important element of building civil society (Zeldin, 2004: 75). Indeed, a large part of the work done interviewing young individuals in different countries and at different ages, have come to the same conclusion: the distance between them and politics is not only due to a growing selfishness, but to a lack of representation regardless of their background (Wayne et al., 2010: 99). In that sense, the lowering interest shown by youth in politics is just a rational response to their feeling of powerlessness (Buckingham, 1999: 171). Research showed that young people do not relate to the topics tackled by political programs broadcasted in the media, but also that youth's perspective on current affairs is lacking greatly (Wayne et al., 2010). Most importantly, young individuals that have been interviewed did not find a voting choice that reflects their ideas or concerns (Ibid.: 42). Hence, the lack of representation is not only media-related, but also anchored in the traditional political structures. This also explains the ever-decreasing voting rates among the younger parts of the demography of western countries: they do not engage or lose interest in politics because they cannot relate or cannot find proper representation offered by the current political party system (Levine, 2008: 128).

From the youth's perspective, they believe not to be taken seriously. Because of their age, they often have a feeling to engage against the adults in power (Christens & Dolan, 2011: 535). As mentioned before, politics is considered a serious matter, this is how political affairs are presented in the traditional media. And young people are aware of older generation's perception of them and their lower status within their different communities (Christens & Zeldin, 2011: 485). The sometimes ageist[17] behaviour of broadcaster or adults in general is thus influencing negatively the decision of younger people to engage in debates or in actions, which is then perceived as a lack of interest. This can explain the impression of decrease engagement of youth in political matters, even though they are not actually necessarily disinterested. Instead, they turn their interest to alternatives available to them or new forms of political engagement (Wayne et al., 2010: 42).

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[17] Ageism is "the unfair treatment of people because of their age" according to the Cambridge Dictionnary's website definition. See https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/ageism

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Studies have also been made regarding the impact of the media on youth's identity building. The media is a major source of symbolic resources of expression of identity for the youth[18] (Buckingham, 2008: 5). Identity itself is complex to define, as it is very fluid (ibid. Buckingham, 2008). Because the youth is lacking representation in the media in general, minority youth is also lacking resources for identity building as well. Thus, they often turn to the internet to find sources and contacts helping them to develop a sense of pride and belonging that they would not find in traditional media (Montgomery, 2008: 28).

The decrease of engagement in western countries regarding traditional political institutions such as parties and trade unions is amplified among younger individuals that have access to alternatives (ibid Dahlgren, 2011: 16). The main sources of political socialization for teenagers and youth are usually listed as family, school and community (Street et al, 2013), however this list is not sufficient anymore to discuss the general apathy of the youth in regard to politics (Loader et al., 2015: 837). For example, as mentioned previously, the influence of popular culture on youth's political orientation is understudied (Street et al, 2013; Jackson & Jesse, 2009), as well as new forms of content shared on social media platforms (tweets, memes or short instantaneous videos). In that sense, looking at youth's political engagement in a new perspective is necessary: since they are highly involved in ICT usage and consumption of online media, social media platforms constitute a new source of political socialization (Storsul, 2014: 18).

As mentioned before, the use of technology by the youth is over the charts. The fact that they have an increasingly easy access to digital platforms also means that online activities are easier and sometimes even more accessible to them than offline activities. In politics, the lack of the youth's perspective in the traditional media also favours the fact that they turn to the internet. Indeed, the content they find is not restricted by neither their parents, school or their financial resources (Hirzalla & Zoolen, 2011: 484). As discussed previously, the youth does not relate to the format in which political information is presented traditionally in the media. There is a dual consumption of media content by the youth. Indeed, even if there is a decreasing trend, young individuals still rely somewhat on political content in traditional formats as a reliable source of information that they can use in interpersonal discussions (Nisbett & Harvell, 2008: 101). This explains the data showing that they consume more and more of late night shows or other entertainment media tackling political topics (Wenos & Foot, 2008: 54).

Because they feel alienated from traditional media, young individuals turn to alternatives easily available to them: digital media. ICT in general enables them to share personal opinion and go beyond conventional agendas selecting news they do not relate to. In that sense, digital platforms such as social networks, blogs, or forums, allow the users to have their ideas and opinions acknowledged by peers, and

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[18] The fact that the media is a source of symbols of identity for the youth is problematic in itself, since it generates a narrative influenced by relations of power and hierarchy. Thus, some youth would create an identity based on the ideas of others, which jeopardize their ability to self-determination (Buckingham, 2008: 7).

develop them through interaction (Van Cauwenberge et al. 2013: 370). Regarding the influence social media on their political socialization, youth use the digital platforms mainly as entertainment[19]. They are weary of the accuracy of the information published on forums or blogs, and sometimes consider them as extreme or unreliable[20] (ibid. Van Cauwenberge et al. 2013: 379). There is a growing tendency to fact checking, and digital platforms are increasingly used to diversify their information sources to get different perspectives on a certain topic in order to build their own balanced view point on the matter. For example, YouTube is a growing source for viewing electoral content, rather than political blogs or even candidate websites (Rickie, 2014). The initiative also comes from a wider public. Indeed, in order to respond to the large use of online sources by youth, studies have shown that civic websites have been created especially targeting youth, or even specific ethnic or gender youth minority groups so they could take advantage of the internet to develop their civic knowledge. (Montgomety, 2008: 28).

Another aspect that explain the increase of online activities is that they do not require an official membership, they do not have strict or formal obligations towards a movement or a group, and thus are cheaper (Hirzalla & Zoolen, 2011: 485). Finally, the blurring of distances (physical and hierarchical) on the internet is encouraging to counter the usual distance youth feel when it comes to the political realm (Storsul, 2014: 19).

The fact that the youth is not fully integrated in the political life also means that there is a lack of communication between young citizens and political actors. Because they feel alienated and use alternative sources of information and engagement, the youth does not have access to communicative links with the ones in power. This needs to be reviewed in order to sustain their political or civic engagement (Dahlgren, 2011: 15). If their political participation is increasingly digital, in an increasingly digital world, then the political and civic actors and institutions should also enter the democratic participation going on online. As Dahlgren states: "Civic agency-citizens' participation in politics-cannot be enacted in a vacuum; it must be supported by and integrated with a larger cultural milieu that has relevance for politics and enables participation. (...) Civic cultures comprise those cultural resources that citizens can draw upon for participation because they are available to them in their everyday lives." (Dahlgren, 2011: 18). Indeed, as discussed previously, social movements and the civil society at a broader level use ICTs as their main network. The fact that the governments in western democracies failed to create a discussion space online affect both their ability to communicate with the youth, but also with other actors on currents issues (Dahlgren, 2009: 160). This

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[19] Social media networks such as Facebook, appear as a meeting point between interpersonal discussion and entertainment, since traditional media can publish content as well as anyone's problematic distant relative (Nisbett & Harvell, 2008: 101).

[20] Although this largely depends on the personal opinion of what information is objective or not. Anything could be fake news these days.

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can explain the fact that the youth's engagement is growing closer to the civil society than from conventional political actors, because they are more easily accessible through technology and the internet.

- Case study: Occupy Wall Street

"Political rationality, if not fear, may well make elites more responsive. Rumblings on the Right are not the only noises emanating from Europe. The sparks that set Occupy on fire fell on inflammable tinder, and this is how history goes: one spark, then another, ignites a whole landscape." (Gitlin, 2014)

The Occupy Wall Street movement started in September 2011, with the idea from Kalle Lasn and Micah White[21] to create a sedentary protest in the financial district of New York City. The unrest came as a response to social and economic injustice and aimed to replace corporatocracy by real democracy (Fuchs, 2014). The occupation of Zuccotti park starts on the 17th of September 2011 and ended with the police raid on November 15th of the same year (Anon, 2016; Fuchs, 2014: 20). However, the movement did not end, thanks to social media.

It appeared as a surprise, seeing a rather obedient population happily swimming in the waters of the biggest capitalist economy suddenly turn around and say stop. The younger generations shifted from consensus-seeking and calm "to more angry and more engaged" (Stillman, 2011). Yet, looking at the the youth's employment rate[22], such an unrest is not that much of a surprise: 3 years after the economic crash, the youth unemployment is twice the national rate in the U.S, with consequences on future salary for the unemployed youth, without mentioning the crawling debt and the lack of social security (Downie, 2011). Many scholars now see Occupy Wall street as the ignition of a new kind of protest emerging in the context of "the big crisis" (Fuchs, 2014: 20). This situation is similar for youth around the world: "The unemployment rate for 15- to 24-year-olds worldwide is expected to decline by an ever-so-slight 0.1% this year to 12.6%, but only after having shot up to 12.7% in 2009 and remaining stuck at that rate in 2010, according to a new report from the International Labour Organization." (Fiegerman 2011). Hence, the educated youth began to feel similar economic, social and even political pressures such as poverty and marginalisation (Strauss, 2011).

In that light, even if Occupy Wall Street is the most well know, it is far from being the only movement of the sort. Indeed, many similar "occupy" movements started in various countries around the world, mostly in what are considered to be western developed countries[23] (Roger, 2011; Fuchs, 2014). Youth

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[21] Both worked as co-editors for Adbusters Magazine, based in Vancouver. They sent the call for occupation through their subscribers' database (Fuchs, 2014: 20). They also created the website occupywallstreet.org and the trending hashtag #occupywallstreet (Smith et al., 2015).

[22] Around 18% at the time (Downie, 2011; Fiegerman, 2011).

[23] A map with all the "occupy" movements indexed is available online (Simon, 2011).

with similar growing pressures protested in countries such as Greece or Italy (Fiegerman, 2011). For that matter, 2011 was a very significant year for political unrest, starting with the revolutions in the middle east (Gitlin, 2014; Fuchs, 2014). The Arab Spring, even though the political context is very different from the occupy movement, was one of its inspirations, as it proved that youth can mobilize itself and create collective action on political ground (Anon, 2016). They also took inspiration from the many other squares we occupied that year, such as the Maidan square in Kiev, Ukraine, or the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, Spain (Gitlin, 2014; Fuchs 2014: 20). For each case, the economic, social or political context might differ slightly, nonetheless, these movements are similar in their capacity to mobilize youth around social injustice and the will for democracy.

Regarding the motivations for the movement to emerge, the famous slogan of Occupy Wall Street "We are the 99%" is quite self-explanatory. This democratic awakening came from a frustrated youth wanting to redress the overwhelming economic inequalities[24] (Smith et al., 2015: 819). Even if the movement did not have an official set of demands, or even a manifesto, the main aim was to reform the financial sector (thus explaining choosing Wall Street as a target). On a broader level, the movement is explicitly a protest against the pressures that neo-liberalism and capitalism put on individuals, in particular the younger ones[25] (Reimer, 2012: 8). As mentioned previously, the youth unemployment rate was on an ever high, and opportunities on an ever low. The increasing social insecurity was pushing educated youth towards poverty, the general population was seeing the gap between rich and poor grow and the marginalised populations were even more alienated (Strauss, 2011).

Regardless of the specific demands from the occupiers in New York, the fact that the movement did not have a unified front is common to most of the similar movements that followed. Indeed, occupy is more of an "umbrella movement" that draws its strength from the diversity of demands (Smith et al., 2015). Besides the call for action text, posts published online, and the signs used in the protests, no specific list of demands, no manifesto, was ever officially published by the movement because of the variety of the demands voices by the participants. Instead, they created spaces of debates and discussions, during the events and online, so that everyone could express their concerns, voice their opinion, or get informed on certain topics. Thanks to their non-hierarchical structure, they were able to create an inclusive public sphere.

The results gathered from the research will be presented in the following layout: first, there will be an analysis of the demographics of the movement (looking at age, but not only), and then looking at the structure and organization of the protests through digital platforms. The aim here is to take down the

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[24] The main demand coming from the founders of the movement was to revoke corporate personhood (Smith et al. 2015). They wanted President Obama to take action to separate money from the politics in order to live in a society where the political system is not under the influence of the market (Fuchs, 2014: 20).
[25] "If we understand the Occupy movement as a youth movement, is it possible to think of the Occupations as young people's responses to—and perhaps refusals of—the contemporary cultural imperative to "go homeless"?" (Reimer, 2012: 8).

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public belief that all participants were "mostly young, urban, multiracial, anarchist, libertarian and sometimes reformist folk, mostly in the more prosperous (though reeling) countries" (Gitlin, 2014) and only capable of clicktivism.

- Demography of occupiers: It's the kids who made it happen (Reimer, 2012).

> *"voices of occupy activists - On activism: "My impression is that the growing population of young (20-30) people with very dissatisfying life situation (e.g. little work/ debt), the increasingly disturbing political/ social climate combined to create this new form of action" (Fuchs, 2014: 1).*

Usually, looking at the leadership of a movement or any organization tells a lot. Yet, Occupy Wall Street had intentionally no official leader(s) and a very horizontal structure (Brisbane, 2011). For that reason, it appears as a very grassroot and inclusive movement, as it is meant to represent the 99% of the population.

In the traditional media, reports from this movement was often characterized by the "us" vs. "them" dichotomy, the adults versus the youth: the adults wondering about the motives of such a rebellious youth (Stillman, 2011; Reimer, 2012: 3). Habitually perpetuating the idea that the youth is a disposable part of the population, that they are lazy and self-centred (Strauss, 2011; Dahlgren, 2009: 13), the media's reaction reflected the surprise reactions of those on the other side of the separation between youth and the rest of the population. The fact that they standardized the occupiers by addressing all of them as being part of the youth, was not only easy to recreate the structural division, it also helps explain the high digital connectivity of occupiers, and the movement's claim on the future (Reimer, 2012: 2). In this context, being "young" is not much about a number but resembles more of a signifier that categorizes the individual on one side of the story (Reimer, 2012).

Even if this generalisation is not reflective of the entire population of protesters, the youth did play an important role in the movement. One of the founders was quoted stating that the youth was at the forefront of the movement because of their practical knowledge and experience of internet and social media (Reimer, 2012: 2). Different surveys were published after the end of the occupation, giving different numbers about the chronological age of the people involved in Occupy Wall Street. Because the surveys were made in different contexts (some through audit of the visitors of the website occupywallstreet.org, others through live surveys during marches or protests), and because they used different criteria, it is difficult to agree on a number for the part of youth in the movement. Nevertheless, most surveys agree on the fact that at least half of the participants were under 35 years old (Captain, 2011; Staff, 2011a). This number not only confirms the fact that Occupy Wall Street was in majority composed of frustrated youth, it also proves that young citizens are not passive, that they engage in political affairs.

Regarding other important characteristics of the demography of occupiers, these surveys also revealed the disparity in educational backgrounds (Captain, 2011) and even the wide range of income among the occupiers: only 13% were unemployed (which is not far above the U.S. national unemployment rate that was slightly under 10%) and around a third earn above $50,000 a year, which is not considered poor in the U.S. (Captain, 2011).

The diversity does not only come from the occupier's personal characteristics, but also from their different forms and levels of involvement in the movement, which explains to some extent the fluidity of the movement. Indeed, the bigger half (57.6%) had a low to medium intensity rate of involvement in the occupation, meaning that they only participated to some offline actions (Fuchs, 2014: 48). At first glance, this diversity in involvement can be explained by the horizontal and highly digital structure, which reduces the obligations and makes participation less formal than in conventional social movements.

One criticism that has arisen from the media coverage during and after the occupation is the predominance of white people among the most active protestors[26]: they were white, highly educated and employed (Berman, 2013). When looking at the participant's backgrounds, the movement was not very reflective of New York's highly cosmopolitan demography. For instance, regarding nationality only, 55% of occupiers were from the U.S., and 81.4% were either from the U.S., the U.K., Australia or Canada (Fuchs, 2014: 47). A survey of a joint May Day and Occupy rally in New York also found that two thirds of the "actively involved" participants were white (Berman, 2013). In that sense, the most involved part of the occupiers was not very representative of the 99% of the population regarding ethnicity or nationality.

- Occupy Wall Street's structure through social media

As mentioned before, Occupy Wall Street started through the spread of a call for occupation online. Unlike conventional social movements, the movement's protests were backed by a very strong online presence, which not only helped the movement survive after the shutdown of the occupation of Zuccotti Park, but also helped it grow during and after the occupation. Because not everyone could participate in the different actions, some people helped by spreading awareness through social media platforms, to engage more people: online operated thus as a starting point for most of the protestors (Fuchs, 2014: 1). And even after the police raid and the end of the occupation of the Zuccotti Park, the movement had still an online presence.

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[26] At first, some explained the lack of ethnic diversity by the fact that inclusivity takes time (Strauss, 2011). Others reported a lack of LGBTQ+ representation (Gollo & Scholl, 2011).

A vast majority of the people involved actually started by coming across the message spread on different platforms, on forums, blogs or via email (Fuchs, 2014). Before making the effort to go out to take part in a march or occupation site, individuals would try to get informed on the movements. The success of their arisen awareness would then lead to their physical involvement in collective action (Monshipouri, 2016: 38). It all began with the initiators using networks of activists and social media platforms to mobilize as many people as possible: these already existing networks of activists were able to diffuse the information very fast and to a wider range of people to insure a maximum participation on the first day of the occupation of the square. Indeed, research found that the occupy movement websites and emails were top sources of information and mobilization for the participants (Gamson et al. 2013), which can be explained by the fact that the movement started with those two ways of communication. Throughout the period of occupation, the fact that some protests or occupations on different sites were repressed, not only encouraged protesters to continue their actions both online and offline[27] (Harcourt, 2012), but also fostered the development of new social media accounts relating the different cases online, and thus helped the spread of the movement across the country as well as abroad (Suh et al., 2017: 290). Social media acting as a discussion space, people would share and exchange on such experiences. These platforms thus also acted as a moderator on the implications and consequences of repression on occupation sites or marches (ibid. Suh et al., 2017: 290).

It is important to underline that in the case of Occupy Wall Street, social media platforms were not only used for mobilization purposes, but also as informational tools. For instance, Facebook and Twitter were widely used to share information (Suh et al., 2017: 284). Facebook was also used to organize meetings or events, and Twitter to coordinate actions (Anon, 2016). When looking at other digital means used in Occupy, the movement uses the tree dimensions known for cyber protest and uses commercial (such as Facebook, Twitter, or Reddit) as well as non-profit media (such as TheGlobalSquare or Diaspora) (Fuchs, 2014: 25).

Another very important factor that needs to be taken into account here is the creation of the movement's own information tools. As mentioned before, the founders had created a website (occupywallstreet.org), that turned into one of the main information tools for participants as well as outsiders. That website allowed conversations to start online through the comment sections of the posts or live chats, they also provided numerous forms of informational content such as live streamed videos, documents, documentaries, etc. (Fuchs, 2014: 28). In this manner, any visitor of the website had easy and instantaneous access to all the information they needed and more, which facilitates greatly the transition from online to offline action, and thus helps mobilize a wider public. The website even has a "occupy together meetup" setting, designed to easily connect all the organizing happening at a local level into

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[27] Forced evictions of the occupation sites was not limited to New York, but also happened in other cities (Harcourt, 2012; Suh et al., 2017: 284). In all cases, the use of disproportionate force against a peaceful protest was received as an unfair reaction of the government and generated critics questioning the political freedom of speech (Harcourt, 2012).

something bigger (ibid. Fuchs, 2014: 32). To facilitate the spread of similar protest, the occupiers also made available online a guide with various movement practices and strategies in different languages and kept track through a map of the occupations' locations (ibid.). This not only enabled the duplication of occupation sites at the local level to strengthen the movement, it also allowed the rapid and wide spread of similar occupations at the national and international level.

- Discussion

In a world that is always changing, we cannot expect the approach to politics to remain intact. The general feeling of depoliticization of the population in western democracies is a misperception of an occurring shift from traditional politics towards new forms of engagement. In that sense, the youth is not completely isolated from the political realm (intentionally or not), it is only applying a different approach to current affairs that does not correspond to what is widely accepted as the norm when it comes to politics, but rather in a way that they know and where they control their representation. This case study contributes to the understanding of collective action in our highly digital word by emphasizing the capacity of ICT to accelerate and increase the mobilization and representation of social movements, in particular when it concerns youth. In order to respond to the two arguments of this thesis states previously, this discussion part will go over the four main points drawn from the results of the research, followed by an acknowledgement of remaining gaps or limitations.

The Occupy Wall Street movement started because youth was not feeling represented. The alienation of the youth from the political discussion in the economic and political context at the time facilitated the increase of social insecurity, notably for educated youth (Reimer, 2012). The feeling of injustice is at the base of any engagement because it has to do with the affect (Dahlgren, 2009: 83). They got involved on a topic that had to do with their daily lives, on a topic that they were familiar with (like SMT and SPD explained in the literature). Moreover, the general lack of perspective from the youth and political content addressed to the youth reflecting their problems and the pressures and expectations they were facing in the U.S. and in other countries is also an indirect reason leading to the creation of the movement. The youth chose this alternative to make their voices heard because there was nowhere else to do it and they did it the ways they knew how to: by organizing, spreading and mobilizing through social media platforms and by using other technological tools.

The fact that the youth is alienated not only by the conventional media from the discussion, but also by the entire political and economic system in the first world economy and a country that is supposed to be an example for democracy, is reason enough to make that part of the population the focus of more research and policy-making (Strauss, 2011). The distance between that portion of a population and the political discussion needs to decrease so that structural change can happen. In that regards, using digital

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platforms and social movement to address political affairs does not guarantee an easy access to direct political debate with governmental actors leading to social, economic or political change. Actually, if youth is absent (intentionally or not) from the traditional political discussion (as they are neither represented in the media or in the institutions), the government and other political institutions are also absent from the political discussions happening online (Dahlgren, 2009: 160). In order to close down some of that gap between the "adult's politics" and the youth, the practices of political interaction are in great need to attune.

In this case study, some compelling evidence demonstrate the fact that technology and social media allows a more fluid form of protest and blurs the lines between online and offline activity. Most of the occupiers started being involved in the movement by being part of the network of information (sharing). The fact that every demonstration, occupation or other forms of physical protest had a strong online presence as back up made them easier to access, and it allows people to slowly get engaged, not only with Occupy, but also with other organisations present (Fuchs, 2014).

The strong online presence and the fact that the movement started through an existing network of activists (Fuchs, 2014) also greatly helped grow the numbers of participants at all levels and the spread of the movement outside of New York. Here, Information Diffusion Theory clearly applies. All the information and content made available online facilitated the sharing, and thus allowed it to travel faster and further, allowing people who would not normally have access to this information to get involved, and more occupations appeared.

Occupy Wall Street is a clear example of empowerment by a population through technology. The fact that the activity online and offline fostered democratic discussion and helped marginalised populations to enter a more inclusive public sphere is important. However, the results of those discussions did not translate into significative structural change: the partition between the financial sector and the political affairs did not happen at any level, and no other major political outcome came from this movement in particular. In that sense, there is still some room for questioning the real impact of Occupy Wall Street and other new social movements on the society. Another aspect that is worth investigating would be the limits in which such a movement can create actual change in the globalized and consumerist world we live and evaluating the impact of the market forces on it. For instance, commercial platforms (such as Twitter or Facebook) were widely used by the occupiers, as well as curious individuals, in organisational or informational purposes. However, we don't know what impact the market forces behind these platforms had on the diffusion of the information used had on the movement, or what kind of consequences the movement had on the companies owning these platforms.

Another unforeseen limitation that is worth more examination is the access to detailed data of the demographics of the occupiers. The inclusivity issue was meant to be addressed in more details, but the lack of data available is restraining the possibilities of analysis. The extent to which the population of occupiers was representative of the youth in general remains unclear. However, it is still necessary to

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keep in mind that the youth is not a unified group, just like occupiers were not. In that sense, the movement responding to increased social pressures might only be the tip of the iceberg, since minority youth face different social pressures. In order to tackle this topic, more time and resources would be needed to conduct a comprehensive research.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

A definition of politics cannot be limited to certain institutions, issues or formats (Carpentier, 2011: 18), just as the access to the political debate cannot be restricted to certain actors if the context is democratic. The evidence brought to light here show that the youth is capable of political or civic engagement. The fact that politics is perceived as an "adults' thing" created an important generational gap and structural division between the youth and politics. This contributed to the distance perceived as a disengagement of young citizens. However, technology and the increased use of digital platforms as communication and informational tools helps to bring down that distance. Indeed, it shows a shift in the forms of political engagement from the traditional party/trade union membership to a more fluid form. By providing an easy access to a wide range of sources of information on any topic and the possibility to create discussions, exchange opinions and share ideas, the internet creates an accessible and inclusive public sphere. In that way, the online activity revolving around societal, political or economic issues at stake can be an introduction to political or civic actions, and thus play the role of an initiation to engagement for passive citizens, young ones in particular.

This represents a valuable alternative for youth to start discussions on current affairs that impact their development and opportunities (Buckingham, 2008). Their alienation from political discussion happening in the traditional media forces them to explore different media formats and use them to give their own perspective on the issues they believe are important. The fact that traditional political actors do not have a strong online presence is revealing to the hierarchical and structural gap mentioned previously. In comparison, digital platforms and technology is used more by alternative politics (Dahlgren, 2009). These platforms also allow minority youth to access more diverse sources of knowledge to build their identity (Bennett, 2008). Moreover, they allow a horizontal participation, meaning that everyone has the opportunity to engage in an equal manner (Monshipouri, 2016: 77). In this sense, a wider range of alternative discourses to the main narrative can be found online, as well as new formats of communication that are either more understandable to a wider public, or to a very specific part of the population.

Nonetheless, even though technology and digital platforms represent a great opportunity for youth to engage in political or civic life and make they concerns heard in a way they could not before, it does not mean that their engagement translates into structural change. In the case of Occupy movements, both online and offline activities made a lot of noise and created opportunities for youth across the world to be visible at the political level (Gitlin, 2014); however, the movements did not always bring concrete policy solutions or allowed the youth to have a say in the policy-making process (Cai, 2017). In that light, the gap between youth and politics remains wide because of the differing conceptions of interactions with the other actors: the youth's lack of access to the traditional medium for political

discussion and the lack of political or governmental institutions online presence is not a fruitful context to reach social or political change. Since the internet has such potential to establish significant inclusive discussion, a convergence of the technological and political practices would offer the possibility to bridge the generational gap between the youth and the rest of the political realm.

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