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Let's be careful out there ... : how digital rights advocates educate citizens in the digital age

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ABSTRACT

From the early days of the printed press, citizens have challenged and modified the information environment as constructed by governments and media organizations. In the digital era, this struggle is manifested in the work of civil-society organizations calling to expand the boundaries of digital rights such as access to the internet, freedom of speech, and the right to privacy. Alongside their traditional activity of confronting governments and internet organizations, these bodies have also engaged in educating citizens about their rights. In order to shed light on such educational efforts, I examine the activities of four civil-society organizations operating in three countries (Germany, Israel, and the U.S.) by conducting a content analysis of their websites between 2013 and 2015. The results suggest that the organizations' interactions with the public are guided by three main principles: (1) cultural informational framing: delivering accurate technological and political information, which is framed so as to resonate with the cultural premises and everyday lives of the target audiences; (2) personal activism: propelling citizens toward participation, primarily through political clicktivism and by providing them with technological guidance and tools for digital self-protection; and (3) branding digital rights activism: fostering a unique image for a particular organization's digital rights activism, mostly through selling merchandise to citizens. Using these strategies, the organizations aim to construct the social-political-cultural identity of a generation who are knowledgeable, politically active, and aware of their rights in the digital age. The characteristics of this identity are discussed in the conclusion.

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John Oliver's 1 June 2014, satire show *Last Week Tonight* revolved around the issue of net neutrality, that is, the principle according to which internet service providers and governments are expected to treat all data on the internet the same, regardless of the intended user, content, website, platform, application, and other related factors (Wu, 2003). Insofar as it is anchored in technology, the right to net neutrality has always been considered one of most complicated aspects of digital rights, unlike the right to privacy or freedom of speech. Yet, so clear was Oliver's rendering of the topic that he succeeded in persuading

quite a few U.S. citizens to file an official claim to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in an appeal to preserve net neutrality. The large number of claims sent by Oliver's followers that night caused the official FCC website to crash (Holpuch, 2014). Thus, inadvertently, Oliver joined the ranks of social actors who have achieved success in educating the public to exercise and protect their rights in the digital age. This paper focuses on activities of another such social actor, civil-society organizations that advocate for digital rights at the national level (henceforth, 'the organizations' or 'digital rights advocates' for brevity).

These organizations operate worldwide in different countries. In the U.S., they number the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), the Center for Democracy and Technology, Public Knowledge, and the Electronic Privacy Information Center. In Europe, among the national organizations are Big Brother Watch in the UK, Digitale Gesellschaft (DG) in Germany, and Bits of Freedom in the Netherlands, to name but a few. Though to a lesser extent than in the Global North, organizations advocating for digital rights operate in the Global South as well, for example, in South America (e.g., Derchoes Digitales in Chile and Fundacion via Libre in Argentina), Asia (e.g., Bytes for All in Pakistan), and Africa (African Freedom of Expression Exchange).

Regardless of their geographical location, these organizations champion citizens' digital rights in their respective countries in three main arenas: political, judicial, and public. In the judicial and political arenas, they promote legislative initiatives and file lawsuits against government and internet bodies, when these infringe on or restrict digital rights. In the mediated public sphere, the organizations promote their agenda by influencing public opinion and by instructing citizens how to stand up for their rights online. In analyzing digital rights advocacy, previous studies have focused mainly on the organizations' attempts to change the ICT policy either at the national (Breindl, 2011; Löblich & Wendelin, 2012; Postigo, 2008) or the international level (Hintz, 2009; Raboy & Landry, 2005; Sióchrú, 2004). This study is innovative in this regard, in that it explores another important aspect of their activities – educating the public regarding their rights in the digital age. In so doing, the organizations render the issue of digital rights politically salient and contribute to a meaningful long-term change in the global political landscape of internet governance. Therefore, this aspect of civil-society organizations' works warrants serious and extensive analysis. In order to shed light over the practices and the principles that guide these organizations in their work with the public, I conducted a content analysis of four such organizations' websites between the years 2013 and 2015: the EFF in the U.S., DG and Digital Courage (DC) in Germany, and the Digital Rights Movement (DRM) in Israel.

Before outlining the structure of this paper, I would like to highlight some of its contributions. To begin with, the paper sheds light on *the modus operandi* of civil-society organizations within the mediated public sphere, thereby adding to the existing body of literature on media literacy, as well as to the growing field of internet governance research. Second, to the extent that the analysis involves organizations from different countries, the study highlights the similarities and differences in their activities, thus contributing to our understanding of the global aspect of digital rights advocacy. Finally, the paper contributes to the existing literature on the role played by civil-society organizations in the construction of the digital sphere.

The paper proceeds as follows. The role of civil-society organizations in today's public arena is elaborated first. Then, the advocacy-related issues are discussed in light of media

policy, followed by an exploration of difficulties and challenges encountered by digital rights advocates in their work. The methodology used to address the research question and the main findings are described next. The conclusion focuses on long-term socio-political implications of the findings.

It's up to us to change the world: the rise of the civil society

The term 'civil society' has been repeatedly defined and redefined beginning with the works of ancient Roman and Greek philosophers (Calabrese, 2004; Carothers, 2000; Gramsci, 1971). Today this concept is used to refer to a discrete socio-political sphere, separate from the realm of the state and market forces, in which citizens and organizations alike can operate in order to shape the rules of social life (Keane, 2003; Mueller, Pagé, & Kuerbis, 2004; Pelczynski, 1988).

When mapping the various organizations within civil society, a distinction can be drawn between two groups. The first includes organizations that are a-political, in that their activities are non-conflictual and carry no explicit political weight. As such, they generally do not pose a threat to the authorities. Organizations that fall under this category include such interest groups as labor unions, professional associations, chambers of commerce, ethnic associations, and cultural organizations, among others. The second group comprises civic organizations which are in a position to initiate resistance to the ruling forces. This category includes all nongovernmental organizations that attempt to shape or challenge existing laws and policies by pressuring the government, usually to achieve what they perceive as the general welfare of society rather than for their own benefit. In addition, these organizations often foster citizen participation and civic education, and encourage young people to become involved in civic life, but not directly by way of the political system (Berry, 1999; Carothers, 2000; Foley & Edwards, 1996).

In the context of media studies, media reform activism aligns with the characteristics of the latter group. It includes all civic activities, on the part of individuals as well as organizations, conducive to changing any aspect of media policy such as media laws, types of ownership, content regulation, and more (Carroll & Hackett, 2006; Pickard, 2015). Yet, while numerous studies have explored the advocacy of such issues as environmentalism, gender, or race, campaigns targeting the media have hardly been analyzed in depth. Two possible explanations for this oversight can be suggested. The first relates to these activities' objectives: anti-media campaigns tend to be perceived as an element (or a byproduct) of wider advocacy efforts promoting other socio-political causes (Calabrese, 2004; Carroll & Hackett, 2006; Pickard, 2015), and therefore not warranting a separate line of investigation. For example, objecting to the misrepresentation of women in the media is considered to be an aspect of the women's liberation movement. The second explanation has to do with activists' motives and interests. Since campaigns targeting media can issue from different political, social, and cultural perspectives and are hence carried out by diverse sectors and groups (Carroll & Hackett, 2006), they often seem to be completely unrelated, and thus fail to be perceived as a unified phenomenon, to be explored as a subject in its own right. Yet, all media reform advocates share something in common; they aim to change the mediated informational and cultural environment in which we live, thereby challenging the status quo as determined by media organizations and governments. Moreover, in their actions, they might even pose an even greater threat to the ruling

powers than any other forms of socio-political advocacy, since they present ‘not just a symbolic challenge to elites but a challenge to the system of symbolic production’ (Carroll & Hackett, 2006, p. 99).

What we are fighting for: access, speech, privacy

In analyzing campaigns vis-à-vis traditional media outlets such as newspapers and electronic media, previous studies distinguished two main targets: structure and content. At the structural level, advocacy is concerned with people’s action against such issues as, *inter alia*, ownership and control of media outlets, influence of commercial and/or political pressures on the conduct of media organizations, and maintenance of public broadcasting (Falaschetti, 2003; Slavin & Pendleton, 1983). At the content level, advocacy campaigns target commercials, news content, and entertainment content, focusing on a range of issues including violations of journalistic norms and rules, the misrepresentation of marginalized groups, content unsuitable for children, controversial artistic choices, and more (Guimary, 1975; Montgomery, 1989).

Within the digital sphere such distinction does not exist since the architecture and the content of the internet are intertwined and the advocacy efforts are usually directed to the general issue of human rights, referred to in this context as digital rights. The issue of digital rights dominated the discussions during the 2003 and 2005 phases of the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) (Antonova, 2013). Since then, the approach centering on human rights or digital rights has been steadily gaining ground in internet governance debates, yielding a large number of internet proclamations based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948, for example, declarations, principles, and charters of rights. As a rule, these documents were developed by international organizations or multi-stakeholder coalitions including civil society, the private sector, and the academic and technical communities (Wagner, 2011). Among the examples are the Association for Progressive Communications Internet Rights Charter from 2006, the Global Network Initiative Principles from 2008, the Council of Europe’s Internet Governance Principles from 2011, The Declaration of Internet Freedom from 2012, and finally the Internet Rights and Principles Charter (IRPC) written by the Internet Rights and Principles Dynamic Coalition from 2014. The analyses of these documents – and especially the 2014 IRPC – have revealed a loose tripartite division of these rights: the right to access, freedom of speech, and the right to privacy. A certain degree of overlap notwithstanding, each cluster represents a distinctive aspect of internet rights:

1. Access to the internet (technology and content): Based on Article 19 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR), ‘everyone has the right to ... seek [and] receive ... information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers’. Accordingly, the IRPC stipulates that ‘everyone has the right to access to, and make use of, the Internet ... [T]he Internet shall not be subject to any restrictions except those which are provided by law [or] are necessary in a democratic society to protect national security, public order, public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others’ (2014, 13). Thus, everyone is entitled to access the content on the internet, which should be open and universally available. Moreover, it should be of good quality and free from discriminatory prioritization, filtering, or traffic control on commercial,

political, or other grounds, enabling users to access diverse information and cultural discourse. In this context, any blocking and filtering systems designed to prevent access to content which are not end-user controlled are to be considered as a form of censorship.

2. Freedom of Speech: According to Article 19 of UNDHR, ‘everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression’. In line with this stipulation, the IRPC (2014, 16) declared that ‘freedom of expression is essential in any society for the enjoyment of other human rights and social goods including democracy and human development’. The declaration states that everyone should have the freedom to share and publish information freely on the internet without censorship or other interference. Among the liberties included in this clause are the right to diversity, the right to innovation and creation without disturbance or blockage of new technologies, the right to initiate any assembly or association, the right to work, etc. The restrictions on the users’ freedom are imposed by law, the necessity to respect the rights or reputations of others, as well as by considerations of national security, public order, public health, or morals.
3. Right to privacy: Like the protection of freedom of speech stipulated in Article 19, the right to privacy is assured by Article 12 of UNDHR, which reads: ‘No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honor and reputation.’ Moreover, since the right to privacy stands at the core of many online crimes such as harassment, cyber-stalking, human trafficking, and misuse of one’s digital identity, it is closely related to the right to security. In the digital age, the right to privacy includes, *inter alia*, freedom from surveillance (by governments as well as commercial entities), the right to secure connections to and on the internet, the right to use encryption, the right to online anonymity, the right to data protection, and the right to control over personal data collection, retention, processing, disposal, or disclosure (IRPC, 2014). Similar to the constraints on freedom of speech, any infringement on one’s privacy can be motivated only by legal considerations, the necessity to preserve others’ rights or reputations, or the protection of national security, public order, public health, or morals.

The above formulations leave much room for interpretation regarding the definition and scope of the digital rights and furthermore, to some extent there is an inherent contradiction between these rights. It is not surprising, therefore, that over the years the opinions have differed widely and have often conflicted, giving rise to ongoing deliberation involving different national and international stakeholders, among them governments, internet organizations, and civil-society organizations. Moreover, this lack of consensus also clarifies why digital rights advocates need the support of the public as a social actor in order for them to achieve their goals.

Advocating for digital rights: dilemmas and challenges

Working with the public is not an easy task and digital rights advocates all around the world encounter similar problems when they try to recruit people to participate in their activities. The foremost challenge is persuading people to contribute time and money to a political or social cause. As scholars have repeatedly pointed out, recent decades have brought a drop in conventional political participation as well as traditional volunteering

activity (Norris, 2002; Strømsnes, 2009). Most people, even when they sympathize with certain political or social goals, prefer to leave the hard work to others (Oliver, 1984; Walsh & Warland, 1983). The upshot is that for an organization to enlist people to participate in public affairs requires a great deal of effort investment and motivation (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987).

Second, public awareness of the issue of rights in the digital era has been greatly enhanced in recent years by the successful campaigns of Stop Online Piracy Act/PROTECT IP Act (SOPA/PIPA) and net neutrality (Benkler, Roberts, Faris, Solow-Niederman, & Etling, 2013; Hu, 2014; Panigrahi, 2016), on the one hand, and Snowden's revelations (Greenwald, 2014), on the other. Yet, notwithstanding the above developments, most citizens still do not have sufficient knowledge or understanding of this complex area (Livingstone, 2008; Osenga, 2013; Turow, Feldman, & Meltzer, 2005), and might therefore be less motivated to contribute to causes that appear unfamiliar or irrelevant to their lives. Finally, although organizations advocating for digital rights profess to adopt a global frame of reference (Castells, 2008; Kaldor, 2003), their activities are in fact premised on a Western viewpoint (Tăbușcă, 2010). Yet, many of the countries implicated define these rights differently than the West (Kulesza, 2008), so much so that the local societies might deem an organization's agenda hostile. Following Monroe's argument (2015), the organizations can at times be seen as strategic communicators who aim to undermine the autonomy and well-being of the country in question. Thus, in order to achieve their goals, the organizations have to find ways to negotiate with local social actors, and their activities must be adjusted to the local context both ideologically and practically.

These difficulties have informed the research question of this study: What strategies do organizations advocating for digital rights employ in order to involve the public in their cause?

Methodology

To address this question, the study focuses on the operation, during the years 2013–2015, of four organizations from three different countries: the EFF in the U.S., DG and DC from Germany, and the DRM from Israel.¹ These bodies interact with the public through mediated public communication, which includes all forms of media. In the traditional media outlets, these may comprise press releases, advertising, and information campaigns such as radio and television adverts or paid announcements in newspapers, among others (Diani, 2000). The digital media environment incorporates all the materials posted by these organizations in both the open and social media, including their official websites and online activities. The budgets at the disposal of these organizations do not allow for big campaigns via the mass media. Therefore, to reach the public they mostly rely on digital media – in case in point, their websites and social media updates.

The analysis encompasses the pages and links addressing the public on each of the four organizations' websites. On the website of the EFF (<https://www.eff.org>), these links are dispersed, but the entire list also appears on a separate page entitled 'Ways You Can Help EFF': donate, take action, support EFF with your online purchases, follow our work, become a volunteer, and get EFF gear. An additional page on the EFF website features its technological innovations, which are offered to citizens free of charge as a means of digital protection. The DG website (<https://digitalegesellschaft.de>) contains no summary page, but the main page displays several links, each leading to a separate

page: join in, donate, become a supporting member, and shop. The DC website (<https://digitalcourage.de>) contains two main pages displaying links. The first, entitled 'Join in', features the following links: what can I do? become a member, donate, meeting site, submit texts for reading, newsletter, internship, and shop. The second page, entitled 'Support', links the user to technical guidance and support. On the DRM website (<http://www.digitalrights.org.il/>), the links soliciting public participation are dispersed: join in, donation, calls for crowdfunding campaigns, offering legal assistance for Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP) victims, and launching a campaign against the biometric database.

To gain a better perspective of the organizations' activities, the analysis was extended to earlier versions of their websites, from 2013 onward, using a wayback machine. That particular year was chosen for two reasons: in 2012, some of the organizations advocating for digital rights ran a series of successful public campaigns against Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) and SOPA/PIPA in Europe and in the U.S., and in 2013, Snowden's revelations triggered a worldwide discussion concerning digital rights, especially the right to privacy. Both these events became turning points in the global advocacy for digital rights, so that the subsequent years were deemed an auspicious time for the organizations to marshal public support. It could thus be reasonably assumed that, as of 2013 onward, the organizations were willing to invest more resources into public campaigns.

Three principles: What to know? What to do? What to use?

The analysis of the websites shows that the organizations have engaged with the public using three main activities: recruiting non-financial help and support for their goals, especially during public campaigns (62 campaigns all together); requesting money through different channels, such as donations, merchandising, and membership fees; and offering services to the public, for example, in the form of practical advice and technical tips and solutions. These practices appear to be informed by three principles: applying cultural informational framing, encouraging personal activism, and branding digital rights activism. In what follows, these principles, as well as their manifestations in organizations' practices, are elaborated in detail.

Cultural informational framing

Keck and Sikkink (1999) developed a typology of persuasion tactics used by transnational advocacy networks. Two of these strategies are relevant for this study: information politics and symbolic politics. The dynamic of information politics is determined by activists' ability to generate politically relevant information and to move it by the most effective means to the place it will have the most impact at the most critical time. Bennett (2008) elaborated that, in the context of digital rights advocacy, information politics is shaped by activists' claims against intrusive technology. The case is usually made by stressing potential hazardous consequences of such technologies, based on previous experiences involving similar inventions at different times and places, and the discourse is often interspersed with technical jargon. Symbolic politics operates by evoking symbols, actions, and stories so as to invest a situation with a meaning resonating with a particular audience within a particular culture (Keck & Sikkink, 1999). Thus, when conveyed to the public, technical information needs to be presented in a manner that highlights the relevance of technology

to people's everyday experiences and situational context, albeit without detriment to credibility (Hook & Brake, 2009; Osenga, 2013). In other words, information delivered to the public by digital rights advocates must be accurate technologically and politically, and at the same time, it should resonate with the target audiences' cultural premises. The combination of both the above conditions – relating to informational and symbolic politics, respectively – creates what I term cultural informational framing. The organizations use such framing especially when they try to recruit public support for their political campaigns. A salient example in this regard is the case of the DRM's campaign against the biometric database, mandated by the government in 2009, on the grounds that it violates privacy. The campaign aimed to persuade Israeli citizens not to register to the database. The political information the movement supplied to the public in that case elucidated the process and implications of the transition from a 'regular' to smart ID, stressing that this does not necessitate the creation of a database. As a symbolic-political strategy, the movement did not highlight the importance of privacy as a human right, as the Israeli public does not usually respond to this kind of framing (Ribak & Turow, 2003). Instead, the public was reminded of the Israeli government's past failures in securing national secrets (the nuclear reactor, the census) – a theme which resonates well with Israeli citizens' waning faith in their government (Hermann, Heller, Cohen, Be'ery, & Lebel, 2015). Thus, the message implied that the Israeli government could not be trusted with citizens' private information, and people who join the database were dubbed as 'losers' (the word *frayer* in Hebrew denotes a person who knowingly foregoes what he is entitled to and what he rightfully deserves). This choice of framing was motivated by the Israeli cultural bias: to an Israeli being called a 'loser' is the worst possible insult (Yair, 2011). A similar cultural framing is manifested in the EFF initiative concerning what is known as the 'digital first sale doctrine' (Reese, 2003). The campaign was launched in January 2013, in the wake of the *Kirtsaeng v. Wiley* case, which dealt with an individual's rights after purchasing an item under copyright, such as a book or a CD. Does the buyer have the right to re-sell the item at a profit, in violation of the copyright? While the above court case dealt specifically with reselling textbooks, the EFF used this opportunity to raise the awareness of this issue in the digital world by posting the question: What is the meaning of the first-sale doctrine in the digital sphere? That is, if one has legally bought and downloaded a song or a movie, does one have the right to sell, copy, modify, or even distribute it to other people? In terms of information politics, the organization explained the possible dangers arising from end-user license agreements, which preclude users from recycling products such as music, movies and TV series, games, and so forth. In terms of symbolic politics, the EFF framed the debate by means of catchphrases, such as 'you bought it; you own it, you should be able to do what you want with it' or 'you've been owned'. In stressing ownership and property rights, these aphorisms resonate well, not only with the language and premises of the U.S. founding documents (the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights), but also with the U.S. liberal capitalist way of thinking (Hartz, 1955/1991). Overall, the use of this principle presents the issue of digital rights to the public as salient and comprehensible, thereby helping the organization to overcome the obstacles of ignorance and lack of relevance.

Personal activism

As elucidated above, in the organizations' work with the public, the first step is to supply accurate and pertinent information. This is followed by an attempt to get the public more active in changing the situation either via the political framework or in the private domestic sphere. Within the political domain, the focus is on recruiting people for a certain political public activity which is often structured and circumscribed as clicktivism (Harlow & Gue, 2014; Karpf, 2010). For example, as part of their political campaigns, both the EFF and DG have asked citizens either to sign a petition or to send an email or tweet to their elected representatives, pressuring them to vote in favor of the proposed initiatives. Thus, in 2012–2013 the EFF ran a campaign urging the Congress to update the 1986 Electronic Communications Privacy Act. A similar campaign, dealing with data protection regulation, was launched in 2013 by DG, urging citizens to exhort their members of parliament to vote in defense of existing data protection rights. In both campaigns, contacting the representatives did not require much effort on the part of the citizens. In the U.S. case, the EFF simply asked people to enter their address or zip code, thereby automatically creating an email and sending it to a representative at a pre-programmed address. In the German campaign, the organization directed the citizens to a website titled *nakedcitizens.eu*, which instructed them how to make a postcard and send it to their members of parliament in Brussels – the entire process involving but a few clicks.

In addition, as part of their political activism, the organizations are also looking for people willing to share their knowledge of political campaigns or to contribute written texts, graphics, videos, and other material to the campaigns. The organizations also arrange public political events and activities. For example, DG and DC hold monthly meetings for people who are willing to become more involved, while the EFF encourages volunteers to coordinate public events and demonstrations. Yet, paradoxically, their websites provide hardly any information about these initiatives to the public.

While the kind of political involvement solicited and promoted by the organizations is all but effortless, much more active participation in defense of digital rights is encouraged when it comes to the domestic sphere, that is, in people's homes and private lives. To this end, the organizations provide the public with tools for digital self-protection – akin to other public bodies such as 'Common Sense Media' or 'Parents Television Council', which advise parents concerning children's media literacy (Hobbs, 2010). For example, DC and the EFF offer the public technical advice as to their digital rights and solutions to problems. In particular, the EFF has developed the so-called privacy badger, a browser add-on that stops advertisers and other third-party trackers from locating surfers. Similarly, DC has created a 24-piece guide in the form of a Christmas advent calendar, where every day a person can open a door and find a piece of advice or a useful tip. For example, the ninth day addressed navigation apps and showed how to switch from Google Maps to the open-source software of OpenStreetMap; the door that opened on the 21 day revealed information how to encrypt emails in order to protect one's privacy.

In addition, both these organizations advertise and sell items for the purposes of self-protection. For example, DC offers the Privacy Dongle, a device which allows people to surf without leaving a trace on the network. The EFF promotes a blue pocket-size LED flashlight key ring which exposes printer dot tracking on documents printed both at home and at work. Through their brands, the organizations obtain an additional

opportunity to further their agenda, as will be elaborated in the next section. Furthermore, similar to the activity within the political sphere, citizens are also asked to share their knowledge and expertise online, to the benefit of everyone, including the organizations. Thus the EFF, DG, and DC encourage users to develop applications that will help to uphold digital rights. By and large, neither the political nor the domestic action described above requires considerable effort investment, thereby bypassing the obstacle of reluctance people generally exhibit when asked to devote time and money to a public cause.

Branding digital rights activism

Insofar as a large number of civil-society organizations solicit public participation in the advocacy for digital rights (Chouliaraki, 2013), they endeavor to brand themselves in a way that appeals to their target audiences. Successful branding compels people not only to identify and bond with a product or service, but also to ally with the social and cultural principles associated with or championed by a particular brand (Ghodeswar, 2008; Klein, 1999; Weilbacher, 1995).

So far, scholars have focused mostly on the use of branding by big companies to expand and maintain their customer base. Yet, in recent years, non-profit organizations have also begun to use branding techniques (Kylander & Stone, 2012), including digital rights advocates. The branding strategies employed by the organizations investigated here are manifested in their logos (each organization has its own unique logo) and graphics, but also – and the most clearly – in merchandising. The logos of the EFF and DG appear on various products such as t-shirts, sweatshirts, stickers, or caps that these organizations offer for sale to the public. These items are sold on the organizations' websites, and the images are accompanied by an annotation. For example, this is how the EFF promotes a sweatshirt on its website:

'Electric Fist Hooded Sweatshirt – Digital freedom supporters unite! The back features a bold glow-in-the-dark design representing our pledge to defend online rights together. The arm shows EFF's three strategies: technology development and research, participatory activism campaigns, and public interest litigation. Thanks for standing with us! These sleek, athletic fit zip-up hoodies look great on women and men. Soft, mid-weight poly/cotton blend with minimal shrinkage after washing'.

The use of emotive phraseology – 'electric fist', 'supporters unite!', 'glow in the dark', 'our pledge to defend online rights together', and 'thanks for standing with us!' – implies a struggle for a noble cause and fosters the feeling of camaraderie: by purchasing a sweatshirt, not only does one take part in a campaign to uphold digital rights, but one is also assured that one is not alone in this fight. The product's appeal is enhanced through imagery and effective descriptions such as 'sleek', 'athletic', and 'look great'. Finally, the words 'tech', 'activism', and 'law' allude to the EFF's agenda and create the impression that anyone who wears the shirt can rightfully consider him/herself a fully modern and technologically savvy political activist.

DG likewise uses rhetoric to persuade people to buy their products, but their branding process differs from the EFF's. DG's slogan is, 'The battle for basic digital rights does not suit everyone. It suits you!' Inasmuch as the organization promotes mostly t-shirts and sweatshirts, the word 'suits' is likely to be perceived as equivocation, referring to an

item of clothes which suits the wearer and to the exclusivity of the circles working for digital rights. Like the EFF, DG also stresses the quality and style of their products through well-chosen phraseology: ‘top quality’, ‘perfect fit’, ‘ensuring warmth and comfort’, and ‘look good’. Echoing the tacit understanding that digital rights advocacy is an exclusive realm, reserved for the chosen few, some of the organization’s merchandise bears only the logo, with no text, thus contributing to the sense of enigma and enhancing the wearer’s prestige.

Despite the different promotional tactics, both the EFF and DG pursue the same goal – to transform digital rights activism into an appealing and desirable brand. This principle not only makes donating an easy and pleasurable activity, but also renders digital rights a nifty and salient topic.

Concluding remarks: Are we witness to the birth of a new social identity?

This study investigates the principles that guide digital rights advocates’ work with the public. Three such approaches have emerged from the analysis of the mediated public sphere carried out in this research: cultural informational framing, personal activism, and digital rights branding. By employing these strategies, the organizations provide citizens with the knowledge and the skills to protect themselves in the socio-political reality of the digital age. Thus, it seems that the organizations take upon themselves the role of educators, a role which was conventionally associated in the past with the state. However, unlike media-literacy programs initiated by the state or by government-affiliated bodies (Livingstone, 2008), the thrust of these organizations’ effort is to encourage a more critical socio-political outlook and in what follows I will address the characteristics of the media-literacy skills these organizations provide to the citizens.

Previous studies have conceptualized media literacy – also termed ‘information literacy’ or ‘technology literacy’ – as encompassing three dimensions: having access to technology, understating the advantages and disadvantages of technology, and having the ability to use technology creatively (Livingstone, Bober, & Helsper, 2005). Applying this definition to digital rights advocacy means that the public should have access to information about digital rights issues, understand the different aspects of the topic, and finally have the ability to act upon this information.

In accordance with this definition, the organizations educate people regarding the implications of both technological inventions and technology-related judicial and political initiatives, and in light of this understanding, instruct them how to engage in digital self-protection in the political and the domestic spheres. In addition, the public is also guided to apply the online knowledge and skills thus acquired in the offline world, for example, through using the merchandise promoted by a given organization. Thus, the organizations have enriched the construct of media literacy with another dimension, namely, the performativity of media-literacy skills since by using these products, the citizens are displaying their knowledge and capabilities. Moreover, adding the performativity dimension to the concept of media literacy brings the organizations a palpable political gain: not only do they transform citizens into their walking, talking ambassadors, but they enable the creation of an actual connection among the different individuals who buy the organizations’

merchandise, use them in the offline world, and thus can recognize one another as ‘brothers in arms’ taking part in the same fight.

Finally, through their media-literacy work, the organizations aim to create what can be best described as a *digital rights identity*, which is anchored in one’s *awareness of one’s individual rights*. That is, they encourage and guide everyone to understand his or her social, political, and cultural prerogatives in the digital sphere. So, to conclude, I would like to address the characteristics of such identity based on the analysis undertaken here:

1. Creating a glocal citizen-consumer identity: The identity fomented by the organizations advocating for digital rights is hybrid, in that it is situated within two coordinates, the citizen-consumer and the global-local. With regard to the first axis, the organizations do not distinguish between individuals’ rights as consumers and as citizens: both aspects are to be respected and preserved. In addition, no qualitative difference is drawn between various ways of expressing a political stand: conventional civic participation such as sending an e-mail to one’s representative is treated on a par with engaging in consumerism; both these actions are considered to be a form of political activism. This attitude serves to strengthen the social phenomenon of the citizen-consumer, which has been previously identified by scholars in other areas of social life (Cho, Keum, & Shah, 2015). In respect of the second axis, scholars have suggested that the organizations foster ‘the global citizen’ (Benedek, 2008) – but this conclusion has not been supported by the results of the present study. Rather, it is argued here that a more accurate characterization of the organization’s aim is to create ‘the glocal citizen’. The compound term ‘glocalization’, coined in Japan during the 1980s (Lee & Barton, 2011), was popularized in academia by Robertson (1995) as an optimal designation for the current trend whereby local and global cultures are being hybridized. In the context of the present research, this term succinctly and accurately describes an individual who is aware of his/her rights globally but focuses on understanding and applying them within the local context – and thus also the kind of identity that is currently cultivated by the organizations investigated here.
2. Creating a humanistic-technology identity: The organizations studied in this paper familiarize people with technological innovations and their implications (albeit often at a superficial level), and offer technological solutions. Accordingly, they can be said to demystify and humanize technology, presenting it to the public as part of social relations and as a means to initiate and maintain interpersonal connections (Mackay, 1992). Overall, it can be plausibly claimed that the organizations promote technological literacy.

Indeed, people who take part in the organizations’ activities learn to regard technology, not as an abstract notion or, conversely, as a threatening physical presence that influences and dominates their lives arbitrarily, but as an instrument that different social and political actors can use to further their respective interests. As such, technology also comes to be seen as a tool to counter any infringement of individual rights – political, social, or cultural. This outlook gives people incentives to become competent, savvy, and skillful users who know how to use technology for their own interests.

3. Creating a serious–ludic political identity: The organizations foster a hybrid political identity, serious and ludic at the same time. On the one hand, people are encouraged to become seriously informed and politically active as far as digital rights are

concerned. At the same time, the organizations' campaigns include light and pleasurable activities such as participating in funny campaigns, and buying merchandising. The resulting political identity resembles the complex nature of popular-culture fans, whose devotion to various public personae is combined with serious civic engagement. Among the examples are the socially active Harry Potter Alliance (Hinck, 2012) and the fans of the TV show *Firefly*, who used to engage in charity work for Equality Now (Can't Stop The Serenity, 2016).

Just like environmental movements, which endeavor to create a coterie of staunch supporters of their cause, organizations advocating for digital rights have been working to nurture a distinct socio-political identity of *digital rights identity*. By and large, the environmental movements started gaining ground several decades ago, transforming environmental concerns into a socio-political issue of immediate urgency (Wappner, 1996) and spawning a generation of adherents known as 'greenies'. Digital rights advocates have only recently appeared on the scene, so their public activities have not yet been extensively investigated. The robustness, sphere of influence, and long-term ramifications of the new identity cultivated by these organizations are the topics to be explored by future research.

Note

1. The EFF is a US-based organization formed in 1990; the DRM in Israel was established in 2009; DG was established in 2010; and DC (formerly known as FoeBuD) was founded in 1987.

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