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Digital Media in Grassroots Anti-Corruption Mobilizations

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Corruption is a global problem that affects millions of people, and since the early 1990s, governmental and financial institutions working at the national and international levels (i.e., the US Agency for International Development, the World Bank, the United Nations) have listed corruption as one of the top priorities to be confronted globally (de Sousa, Larmour, and Hindess 2009). Among others, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2015) estimates that corruption harms economic growth, contributes to increasing social inequalities, damages political institutions through the distortion of political decisions, diminishes citizens' trust in their governments, and plays a part in the rise of other criminal activities.

International organizations are not the only ones referring to corruption as a relevant social problem. Several activists' organizations worldwide also mobilize against corruption, organizing ad hoc campaigns and participating in anti-corruption social movements (Beyerle 2014). These are usually grassroots forms of collective action in which people come together to oppose corruption in its many forms, from political to corporate corruption to the petty corruption of everyday bribes to grand corruption schemes that involve money laundering and organized crime. Of course, since corruption and the related behaviors manifest in different ways in societies, it is impossible to speak about the existence of one general type of anti-corruption movement. The protest targets and forms of anti-corruption mobilization, indeed, might change considerably.

In some cases, street protests erupt in corrupt countries to oppose the corrupted political elites that activists blame for putting their private interests before those of the public. An example of this is the protests that erupted in India in April 2011, after the anti-corruption activist Anna Hazare began a hunger strike in New Delhi (Sengupta 2012). Grassroots opposition against corruption might also be linked to mobilizations on other contentious issues. Anti-austerity protests in Spain blamed the corrupt politicians for the economic and financial crisis that hit the country in 2008 (della Porta 2017). Environmental activists in eastern Europe also bridged their concerns for constructing big infrastructures with corruption in their countries (Torsello 2012).

In other cases, collective actions against corruption do not include public street protests as a reaction to corruption scandals. Instead, they engage in more proactive collective actions that aim at increasing the accountability of those who might engage in corruption due to their positions of power. Activists' might use online petitions, as happened in Italy in 2013 when hundreds of thousands of signatures supported the campaign Senza Corruzione . . . Riparte il Futuro to change an article of the Penal Code on vote-buying (Mattoni 2017). However, social movement organizations might decide to engage in the active monitoring of public authorities and other institutions, including corporations, to detect illicit behaviors. An example is activists who take advantage of freedom of information acts to participate in budget oversight activities (Mungiu-Pippidi 2014).

A recent systematic literature review on strategies to counter corruption in the public sector argues that social media and mobile phones are relevant to empower citizens' monitoring capacity (Inuwa, Kah, and Ononiwu 2019). Similarly, in a review of the relationship between digital media and anti-corruption strategies, Kossow (2020) casts light on the digital media platforms that enhance crowdsourcing and whistle-blowing activities from the grassroots, hence supporting upward transparency. Additionally, he points out that activists might employ digital media in the framework of broad anti-corruption movements. In this regard, amid the COVID-19 pandemic emergency, the U4 Anti-Corruption Research Centre published a report that discusses online collaboration's potential to promote social accountability, stressing that digital platforms might enhance the digital participation of citizens with a watchdog function (Mullard and Aarvik 2020). Non-academic papers on the topic also testify that there is a growing body of grassroots initiatives that employ digital media to sustain anti-corruption efforts worldwide (Chêne 2019; Adam and Fazekas 2018).

This chapter focuses on how digital media entangle grassroots anti-corruption efforts, drawing on several concrete examples from all over the world. Its overall aim is to explain how a wide range of digital media shape people's collective efforts to counter corruption and how a varied ensemble of anti-corruption initiatives appropriate, transform, and structure digital media when employed for specific anti-corruption goals.

The chapter is organized as follows. First, it discusses two leading roles that digital media might have in grassroots anti-corruption struggles, each of them linked to one specific approach to corruption. On the one hand, they are in line with a view of corruption as a principal–agent problem, hence assisting activists in enlarging the monitoring and denouncing of people's capacity concerning corruption. On the other hand, they can sustain a view of corruption as a collective action problem, hence helping activists increase public awareness on corruption to change the normative understanding of what corruption is and does to societies. Second, the chapter addresses digital media as they entangle with big data. While anti-corruption activists have always relied on data of all kinds to support their struggles, this section tackles three specific types of data-related practices (data production, data embedment, and data transformation). It also shows how they are in tune with either the collective action or the principal–agent approach to corruption. Third, the chapter discusses another, more pragmatic, and situated approach to corruption and, in its framework, addresses the potential role of digital media for anti-corruption activists, arguing for the development of comparative studies on the subject matter. Finally, conclusions revisit the previous sections, taking into consideration three main directions toward which research on anti-corruption from the grassroots and its relationship with digital media might develop soon.

The Multiple Roles of Digital Media in Grassroots Anti-Corruption Efforts

While it is impossible to have a universal interpretation of corruption, each definition of this global problem has a substantial impact on how corruption is measured and how to counter it (Andersson and Heywood 2009). This, of course, also has consequences for digital media's role in countering corruption from the grassroots. For this reason, before exploring what activists do with digital media to face corruption, this section briefly

sketches the two main theoretical approaches to corruption and related anti-corruption strategies.

On the one hand, there is the principal–agent theory, whose framework developed in the 1970s and 1980s and focused on politicians and bureaucrats (Rose-Ackerman 1978). It was then further developed into a principal–client–agent model to include other types of interactions, like those between citizens and politicians (Klitgaard 1988). According to this model, there is an asymmetry of information and incentives between the elected officials (the principal), the citizens who elected them (the clients), and the public servants who provide the public services that the citizens need (the agents). The latter might have more information than the elected officials and the citizens on how the public administration works, hence using this information to serve their private interests. This might be possible not only because there is an asymmetry of information but also because there is a lack of accountability mechanisms that would allow the elected officials and the citizens to monitor what the public servants do. Scholars who employ the principal–agent theory advocate for the use of incremental reforms to curb corruption through two main mechanisms: the reduction of the agents' discretion and the increase of the principals' monitorial ability of the principals (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka 2016).

On the other hand, other scholars suggest that collective action theory is instead the lens to fully grasp how corruption develops and how it can be mitigated. According to this view, and drawing on Olson (1971), corruption emerges in societies due to free-riding: instead of thinking about the protection of collective interests that would render societies better for all its participants, individuals might decide to focus on their interest through corrupt behaviors. In this regard, corrupt behaviors might be found among public servants and citizens and elected officials alike. Scholars who adhere to the collective action theory argue for a "big bang" approach, leading to radical, wide-ranging, and sudden transformations in the whole spectrum of policy (Rothstein 2011; Persson, Rothstein, and Teorell 2013). Furthermore, other scholars suggest focusing on normative rather than legal constraints to curb corruption and see as relevant the active role of civil society organizations and the mainstream press (Mungiu-Pippidi 2013, 2015). Overall, then, increasing the awareness of what corruption is and what it does to society might also be an excellent anti-corruption strategy to avoid free-riding behaviors.

Independently from their overall approach to corruption and anti-corruption— principal–agent versus collective action problem—scholars seem to agree on the relevance of digital media when social movement organizations embrace them (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka 2016; Rotberg 2017; Hough 2017; Mungiu-Pippidi 2015; Johnston 2014). However, it seems that digital media are not always relevant in the same way for grassroots anti-corruption efforts. Activists' use of digital media seems consistent with either the principal–agent or the collective action problem approach, each time enhancing some digital media functions and not others to counter corruption, consistently with the type of approach that the grassroots anti-corruption effort seems to imply. What follows discusses more in-depth the link between the digital media functions that activists employ as leverage when they seek to oppose corruption and the type of approach that activists seem to adhere to when devising their anti-corruption strategies.

Digital Media to Tackle Corruption as a Collective Action Problem

Activists and their grassroots organizations frequently invest their resources in campaigns whose aim is quite expressive. Indeed, through these campaigns, activists attempt to increase people's awareness of corruption, with the ultimate goal of making clear that corruption is a relevant social problem with significant consequences for societies at large. Additionally, they attempt to create shared spaces for critical discussion and the potential creation of shared anti-corruption identities. Digital media play an essential role in this type of campaign, which seems to presuppose that corruption is a collective action problem to be solved by increasing awareness of how corrupt behaviors have negative consequences for societies. As already mentioned, widespread changes at the normative—more than legal—level are considered relevant in this case, with the achievement of public awareness of corruption's adverse effects as one of the critical issues at stake. In turn, this public awareness might be developed thanks to social movement organizations (Mungiu-Pippidi 2013). Digital media, as discussed in what follows, form a crucial component of this process. However, they are so in at least two different ways.

First, existing social movement organizations employ digital media to further their anti-corruption campaigns, mobilizations, and protest events. In this case, digital media support social movement organizations' quest for visibility beyond the activists' circles that support anti-corruption campaigns. In doing so, social movement organizations employ digital media to share their concerns, spread their demands, and enlarge their mobilizations' social basis. The circulation of news across various digital media types might increase the visibility of anti-corruption initiatives well beyond legacy media like the print press, television news, and radio programs. For instance, digital media had a significant role in the Christian-led anti-corruption campaign EXPOSED 2013 that targeted the G20 for greater transparency in international money flows to combat bribery and tax avoidance. In this case, the movement's strong Christian motivation for justice was certainly coupled with the vast networks of faith organizations behind the campaign, mostly based in the United Kingdom and the United States, and their ability to employ websites, blogs, social media platforms, and emails to spread the message of the campaign virally across the world (Bowers-Du Toit and Forster 2015). In Italy, the anti-corruption campaign Senza Corruzione . . . Riparte il Futuro in 2013 targeted candidates in the general elections, asking them for a public commitment. If elected, they would focus on changing one article of the Italian penal code to broaden vote-buying crime. The social movement organization that supported the campaign, Libera, counted on the social communication company Latte Creative to develop a communication strategy at the center of digital media. The official website of the campaign, coupled with the Facebook page, was particularly relevant in spreading the news about Italy's corruption, often communicating through appealing visualizations of data on its negative consequences. In doing so, activists were also ensuring broader visibility to their campaign, expanding the number of supporters and adherents who joined them in pushing candidates to commit themselves to their primary objective (Mattoni 2017).

Second, concerned citizens come together through digital media to share their views about corruption as a relevant social problem. In this case, digital media function as spaces in which people might raise their voices against corruption, creating a shared sense of belonging that rests on the construction of shared meanings. In other words, activists employ digital media, mainly social media platforms, as a means of expression where shared critical discourses against corruption might emerge from discussions about people

who gather around specific social media pages, profiles, and hashtags. For instance, this happened in Nigeria, where the mainstream media censorship is particularly marked, and people employed social media as spaces for critical voices against corruption (Jimada 2019). Beyond creating public awareness, digital media might also support the emergence of new forms of digital citizenship, opposing the grassroots anti-corruption voices that participate in social media platforms to the corrupted protest targets, as happened in Indonesia (Fauzanafi 2016).

Another telling example is the #Rezist mobilization in Romania. During this protests, people's use of social media was relevant to trigger a public space where participants could construct shared emotions and solidarity ties that were relevant to sustain the campaign in the short term (Adi, Lilleker, and Pekalski 2018). Digital media, on some occasions, might also be combined with more traditional media in a virtuous circle, as happened with the rise of the anti-corruption movement in Guatemala in 2015 that began with the social media hashtag #RenunciaYa, which got favorable mainstream media coverage and culminated with the removal from office of both the president and vice president of the country (Flores 2019).

In short, digital media—and social media platforms, more precisely—might increase public awareness of corruption in two complementary ways. When social movement organizations employ digital media to increase the visibility of their mobilizations, campaigns, and protest events, they use them as collective actors to increase the awareness of individual digital media users, like those who are on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. When, instead, individual digital media users gather around specific anti-corruption hashtags, they create a space for critical discussion on corruption, hence increasing awareness through the exchange of information, opinions, and beliefs on how to fight corruption. In this case, the collective actors in the shape of online communities are an outcome of this process of ongoing public discussion about corruption.

Furthermore, when concerned citizens come together through social media platforms around issues like corruption, the emerging online communities might engage in protests that go beyond the online realm and spread into the streets and squares of the cities they live in. In particular, this happens when the initial outrage that spread online can resonate with the concerns, demands, and experience of already existing social movement organizations. For instance, the Facebook page We Are All Khaled Said in Egypt—devoted to the brutal murder of the blogger Khaled Said on June 6, 2010, by the police—rapidly became a public space where people could discuss how to fight police brutality and the widespread corruption in the country (Abdulla et al. 2018). The Facebook page We Are All Khaled Said represented a relevant resource for protesters mobilized in Egypt between the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011. Similarly, activists in Morocco employed social media as a space to develop shared meanings in the framework of the February 20 movement in 2011, which demanded an increase in social justice and aimed at pushing forward more effective anti-corruption measures (Brouwer and Bartels 2014). Along the same line, the use of Facebook in Tunisia was also relevant to sustain the so-called Jasmine Revolution, which blamed President Ben Ali and his government for widespread corruption, among other undemocratic practices (Schraeder and Redissi 2011). In this country, the social media platform is paired with the digital media skills of the social movement organizations, activists, and bloggers (Zayani 2015).

Despite many studies pointing at their potential in supporting anti-corruption from the grassroots, digital media also pose some challenges to activists. Even in cases where grassroots anti-corruption campaigns eventually develop into a more structured social movement against corruption, the heavy reliance of activists on social media and the weak ties that keep together anti-corruption communities online rendered difficult the creation of solid social movements able to attain more long-term political goals. For instance, this happened in Romania's #Rezist mobilizations, where the online anti-corruption community proved fragile and unable to last beyond the initial street protests (Adi, Lilleker, and Pekalski 2018). The public indignation that rises in social media platforms might also find its way elsewhere, as a recent study on two scandals concerning police corruption in Russia explains (Toepfl 2011). In this case, the Russian political powerholders could employ television news programs to effectively redirect the anger toward hostile foreign powers and low-level domestic authorities, hence deflating a potentially widespread social movement against corruption. This example casts light on at least two additional challenges that activists' employment of digital media face in their anti-corruption efforts. First, collective actors do not act in a void. Their attempts to change the normative understanding of corruption in societies through digital media might occur in rather hostile environments, where other types of collective actors work in the opposite direction. Second, digital media position themselves in broad media ecologies, where other media continue to have an essential role in shaping public opinion and political agendas.

Digital Media to Counter Corruption as a Principal–Agent Problem

Beyond the potentially ephemeral nature of many anti-corruption movements and mobilizations, activists' development and employment of digital media might also give rise to other types of practices that increase the level of transparency in societies, rendering visible otherwise hidden corrupted behaviors and their consequences. In this regard, digital media become crucial in sustaining two anti-corruption practices: people's monitoring, from the grassroots, of those who have financial, economic, and political power and people's denouncing of the wrongdoings related to corruption, either at the micro-scale of briberies or at the more macro-scale of grand corruption schemes. In both cases, activists' use of digital media is related to the conception of corruption as a principal–agent problem. Through them, indeed, the people, namely the principal, might exert some pressure on the corrupted agents. Therefore, digital media become relevant for activists because they can support the overall goal of augmenting the transparency of wrongdoings related to corruption.

A recent study on how people monitor political activities argues that digital media platforms increase transparency in several ways (Munoz and Casero-Ripollés 2017). Among other things, digital media platforms might function as aggregators of already existing information that governments and public administrations render available online in the form of open data. In this way, activists might employ open data to foster transparency in public administrations to monitor public servants, elected politicians, and the like. More specifically, open data is particularly relevant for activists who want to discover corrupt behaviors (Damm et al. 2019). Several social movement organizations employ open data as a leverage to create digital platforms that enable people to check how elected members of the parliament (MPs) behave during their mandates about specific bills

and debates, also related to corruption. One of these is the platform OpenPolis in Italy, which gathers, aggregates, and then publishes in a more user-friendly mode already existing information on elected MPs' activities.

However, the presence of such digital media platforms alone cannot ensure reliable and durable monitoring. Most of the time, transparency mechanisms that empower people to control their rulers, also known as "downward transparency mechanisms" (Davies and Fumega 2014), are linked to the availability of data related to the phenomena that citizens and their governments scrutinize: downward transparency is often dependent on the presence of regulations that allow citizens to access data, like the US Freedom of Information Act, or to the creation of open data portals, like USAspending.gov that shows how the public administration allocates the tax dollars of American citizens.

Nevertheless, existing information provided by public administrations is not the only means to increase downward transparency. Activists also create digital media platforms independently from governmental agencies: in this way, they can gather, order, and visualize information on corruption that would otherwise remain unseen. Although with changing fortunes, in the past few years, activists have attempted to exploit the potential of crowd-reporting platforms in many countries across the world to monitor corruption from below, asking citizens to report the extortion of bribes and similar, small-scale forms of bribery in countries in which this practice is widespread (Zinnbauer 2015). One of the most famous examples is I Paid a Bribe, a platform that the Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy created in India to let people denounce, anonymously, acts of bribery. The result is a living map of the bribes paid in several public offices all over the country, with short tales about what happened and what services the bribe has requested. In short, I Paid a Bribe and similar platforms that developed across the world aim at rendering visible the magnitude of a phenomenon, paying bribes, that would be otherwise difficult to capture. The use of visuals, like maps and related infographics, allows for a rapid and yet robust understanding of what happens in the country daily, almost in real time. I Paid a Bribe casts a new light on bribes in India and renders visible something that usually is not, increasing transparency.

However, the presence of high transparency in highly corrupt countries is not necessarily positive. When people can see how widespread corruption is, indeed, they might think that this is the game they should also play since all the others around them are doing the same. Instead of triggering indignation, then, digital media used to crowdsource information about corruption might lead to a more widespread resignation, which might lead people to decide not to mobilize to address the social problem (Zinnbauer 2015; Bauhr and Grimes 2014). In other words, people might decide that the fight is not worth the effort, feeling disempowered and, actually, even ready to become part of the problem, adjusting their behavior to what they think is an environment of systemic corruption. Another aspect is the problematic link between transparency and accountability since the former does not necessarily lead to the latter. A study on Wikileaks, for instance, concluded that the leaked information needs to be fully understood, scrutinized, and interpreted before people act to make the wrongdoers accountable for their acts (Davis and Meckel 2012). When the literacy to understand the leaked documents is absent, transparency does not necessarily prompt accountability. Even more so, digital media might not be as inclusive as they might seem: there is, for instance, the risk of excluding the most vulnerable parts of the population

who lack the access or the literacy to employ digital media, creating asymmetries in people's participation in social accountability mechanisms (Grandvoinet et al. 2015).

This challenge is even more prominent when digital media substitute mechanisms of social accountability that once relied on face-to-face interactions. Once again, a compelling case comes from India, in the state of Rajasthan. There, a widespread movement to promote the transparency of the public administration was to some extent successful in shaping the agenda and gradually changing how the public administration interacts with people, increasing the accountability of public officials as well as recognizing the right of people to be heard by the government (Agrawal and Nair 2018). However, once the practice of live hearings, also known as Jan Sunwai, became digital, it reshaped the very meaning of people's participation in social accountability. At the same time, this digitalization process created inequalities between those able to go online and those who cannot do this, either for lack of material resources or for lack of digital media literacy (Agrawal and Nair 2018). In short, the literature claims that digital media might foster transparency, but people should embrace them and include them daily. Therefore, the open question is not so much whether digital media are suitable for implementing transparency and reducing corruption. Instead, what is crucial to understand is why specific digital media platforms are successful in including people, and potential users in particular, in all its stages, from planning to creation, from implementation to evaluation (Thomas 2009; Carr and Jago 2014).

Similarly, other studies that deal with accountability mechanisms suggest more cautious interpretations of the potential digital media have in supporting accountability. For instance, a study on water delivery supplies in rural Africa, Asia, and Latin America underlined cultural aspects like the lack of confidence that governments would respond to citizens' voices but also how digital platforms are conceived and designed and why this might be decisive (Welle, Williams, and Pearce 2016). Another investigation on initiatives to improve health systems and services in Africa and Asia claims that digital media do not promote accountability if they are not supported by other offline actions, like developing positive relationships with governmental institutions (Hrynick and Waldman 2017). Additionally, the use of digital media alone might not be enough: desk research on digital media employed in top-down initiatives to curb corruption across the world shows that administrative reforms are also needed to render digital media effective (Grönlund 2010).

A Situated and Pragmatic Outlook on Digital Media in Grassroots Anti-Corruption Struggles

The previous section discussed how digital media entangle with anti-corruption efforts from the grassroots consistently with either the principal-agent or the collective action approach. However, these two approaches to corruption are far from mutually exclusive (Marquette and Peiffer 2015). Numerous times, real-life corruption patterns are intricate, with various types of corruption entangling one another and within the same country. Some scholars go beyond the collective action and the principal–agent approaches to corruption. They suggest that a pragmatic perspective is needed to develop ad hoc anti-corruption strategies depending on specific national contexts (della Porta and Vannucci 2012) and local understanding of corruption (Walton and Jones 2017; Torsello 2016).

More specifically, some scholars suggest looking at corruption not just as a widespread problem that societies must face but instead as an ensemble of situated practices that people engage with because they offer solutions to some problems they face in their daily lives (Marquette and Peiffer 2015). Therefore, understanding what corruption is in a specific situation is the first relevant step to crafting substantial anti-corruption measures. From this perspective, one way to tackle corruption is to intervene on the causes of such challenges instead of tackling corruption directly. Social movement organizations and the individual citizens involved in them seem to be particularly well equipped to understand what corruption means for the people who live with it day after day. It is the reason why they might also imagine and then create digitally mediated solutions that are not universal but tied to specific contexts. Indeed, these actors usually organize and mobilize people outside institutional politics, often at the margins of societies. Consequently, their perspective is precious because it considers, from a pragmatic viewpoint, the situation in which anti-corruption strategies should be developed.

However, a further reflection needs to be done, again from a situated and pragmatic perspective and looking at the digital media that these political actors might use to oppose corrupt behaviors. Like corruption, digital media should be considered situated: the situations in which activists imagine, develop, and then employ them are multiple, different from the others, and tied to various corruption scenarios. Even more than this, while we often speak about digital media as a harmonious ensemble for conciseness, when we look at how anti-corruption movements employ them, we can see how internally diversified they are. Any specific type of digital media that activists employ to struggle against corruption is involved in the broader communicative ecology of which other digital media are also part. It is not just because we live in a media-saturated world where digital media live side by side with other media types. Also, activists actively combine them: social movements rely on multifaceted "repertoires of communication" (Mattoni 2016) from which activists select the most appropriate types of media, according to their needs and skills. Anti-corruption movements are not an exception in this regard. They, too, display high levels of communicative hybridity when it comes to digital media. It happens either because they combine several types of digital media or because they insert digital media into sophisticated communication strategies.

However, the point is not so much to establish the presence and degree of such communicative hybridity. Instead, it is a question of understanding the consequences of this for the anti-corruption movements and the activists engaged in them. To reach this objective, though, it would be necessary neither to look at the overall diffusion of internet connection across a country population nor to focus on how activists employed one type of digital media platform to oppose corruption from the grassroots. However, there still is a lot to know about how anti-corruption efforts entangle digital media in their many forms. Studies based on fieldwork are still rare, except for some works on specific platforms like Facebook (i.e., Jha and Sarangi 2017; Demirhan and Çakir-Demirhan 2017; Fauzanafi 2016) or devices like mobile phones (Zanello and Maassen 2011).

Therefore, it would be fruitful to develop a comparative approach that contrasts different anti-corruption campaigns within the same country and across different countries. One way to do this is to consider the whole repertoire of communication in which activists also include digital media: despite some few exceptions (Bosch, Wasserman, and Chuma 2018; Mattoni 2017; Tufte 2014), scholars seldom have investigated the use of digital

media for grassroots anti-corruption going beyond specific digital devices or services. Such a comparative approach should aim at developing knowledge on the mechanisms that characterize the connection between distinct forms of digital media, services, and devices and different types of corruption. This concept risks remaining empty when the corruption practices remain aggregated in an abstract whole (Heywood 2017). While activists might attempt to tackle petty corruption through online crowdsourcing platforms, they might best counter systematic political corruption through whistle-blowing websites that employ highly secure protocols. However, in both cases, the connection between the type of digital media and the type of corruption would not tell the full story. The types of collective actors are also relevant. A radical collective of techies spread across the globe working together toward an anti-corruption digital platform would foster a completely different understanding of the fight against corruption for the members of a local anti-corruption association that is employing Facebook to promote its activities. Even more, the two types of collective actors would also have different types of digital media literacy, expectations toward what digital media can do for them, and inferences of what digital media are in connection to anti-corruption. Transferring a digital media platform to counter corruption from the grassroots from one country to another, for instance, might be problematic precisely because of the different situations in which social movement organizations and individual activists experience it. This is the case, for instance, of the failed attempt to transfer I Paid a Bribe from India to China (Ang 2014).

Big Data and Small Data in Anti-Corruption from the Grassroots

The development of a situated and pragmatic approach to the use of digital media is even more relevant when thinking about the increasingly important role that big data play in the framework of anti-corruption tactics and strategies, including those that activists conceive outside institutions. This type of data emerged from some recent interconnected technological innovations in digital media (Kitchin 2014, 98). A wide range of digital media platforms, including social media, contribute to producing big data. Although they come in many forms and shapes, they share some key features that render them different from other data types. According to Kitchin (2013, 262), big data are enormous in volume, high in velocity, diverse in variety, exhaustive in scope, fine-grained in resolution, relational in nature, and flexible. Social movement organizations engage with big data either to resist the governments' and corporations' extraction of data on what people do in their daily lives or to employ it as an additional tool in the activists' repertoire of contention to sustain their mobilizations (Milan 2018). Anti-corruption social movement organizations also enthusiastically embraced the potential of big data: among other roles, indeed, big data might have the ability to sustain both accountability and transparency mechanisms (Taylor et al. 2014).

Truth be told, though, big data is not the first and the only type of data that activists employ in their anti-corruption campaigns. Many of them usually rely on what we might name "small data," which might not share the same features of what we usually refer to as big data while being, in any case, of great importance for the activists who manage it. One of the recurrent themes of anti-corruption mobilizations, campaigns, and initiatives is gathering and spreading information on corruption, its consequences, and how people might hinder it through their collective efforts. As such, activists need data on which to

base their concerns, mobilize people, and formulate their demands. Transparency International, a leading nongovernmental organization, regularly assembles data on the perception of corruption worldwide that converges in the Perception of Corruption Index. The related report, then, annually ranks countries across the world according to their index scores. In Brazil, instead, activists created an algorithm that interrogates the expenditures of elected MPs and makes them publicly available to show whether the expenses are justified or indicate a suspicious transaction. When the algorithm, whose name is Rosie, detects unclear expenses, a bot publishes this information on Twitter, asking people to provide more information on the said payments (Mattoni 2020). In short, when activists employ data—either big or small—produced through digital platforms, they are further enriching their communicative potential. Their repertoire of communication becomes an even more complex ensemble spanning from the interaction with legacy media professionals to the development of ad hoc algorithms to track corrupt behaviors.

Seen from another perspective, anti-corruption activists, who frequently put data at the center of their mobilizations, campaigns, and initiatives, could be considered one specific type of data activism, defined as an ensemble of "sociotechnical practices of engagement with data . . . or the encounter of data and data-based narratives and tactics with collective action" (Gutiérrez and Milan 2018). While activists might use data in different ways in their mobilizations, three data-related practices seem particularly relevant to understand the role that data has for social movements in fighting corruption: data creation, data usages, and data transformation. While the first two practices seem to be more in line with a principal–agent approach to corruption, the latter is instead more in tune with a collective action approach to corruption.

Activists create data to be used in their collective actions. On some occasions, they can contribute to data production on corruption that does not yet exist, often through the development of dedicated apps. Other times, they can compile new data sets that are already available to the public or even access and unveil data that already exists but is secret. An example of this is the platform Buzon X. The grassroots organization XNet, based in Barcelona, created this secure whistle-blowing platform to gather data on potential corruption scandals from anonymous sources (Mattoni 2017). Data creation practices allow for widespread monitoring of corruption, empowering people to denounce otherwise hidden corruption behaviors. From this viewpoint, data creation practices are consistent with a principal–agent approach to corruption. They enhance the monitoring and denouncing ability of activists asking to make public otherwise confidential data through the activists' digital media platforms.

Activists, then, perform practices that imply the embedment of data into their repertoire of contention. On the one hand, they can do so to sustain some moments of their collective action. For instance, data can become a trigger for public indignation and subsequent collective actions. A telling example is the already mentioned Perception of Corruption Index that Transparency International produces each year. Far from being a simple picture of the perception of corruption across the world, the compilation and spreading of such data have a performative function. The index seeks to make people aware of what their fellow citizens think about corruption in their respective countries. With this regard, including the Perception of Corruption Index in the repertoire of contention of Transparency International might be in line with a collective action approach to corruption, when activists attempt to use it to change the overall view of corruption among the general

public. However, the practice of data embedment might also be more in line with a principal–agent approach to corruption when it becomes one of the central pillars of grassroots anti-corruption efforts. An example of this is the Twitter bot that employs the data produced through the software Rosie that detects Brazilian MPs' suspicious expenses. While the software gathers and produces such data, the bot uses them to foster the widespread monitoring of its Twitter followers on any MPs who might have employed public money to sustain misbehavior related to corruption.

Finally, anti-corruption activists also perform practices related to the transformation of data. Since data often does not speak for itself, especially when it comes in relevant quantities, anti-corruption activists need to rearrange data into information that can be more accessible to the broader public, transforming the data (Milan 2018; Schrock 2016). Activists can operate simple transformations, like the common visualization of data through infographic communication, and more complex forms of remediation, according to which the data also leaves the digital realm and becomes part of other media format genres. A relevant example in this regard is the 15MParato campaign in Spain. Through the whistle-blowing platform Buzon X, activists collected a batch of thousands of emails about a corruption scandal that involved Bankia's top managers. Beyond polishing and organizing them into a public, searchable database, activists involved in the campaign also used part of the emails to write down, and then perform, a theatrical piece on the corruption scandal. In this case, data from the digital environment was transformed and then transferred into the physical space of theaters and actors' performances (Mattoni 2017). In this case, data transformation practices resonate with a collective action approach to corruption: the processing of data that would otherwise be difficult to understand at first glance allows activists to increase the public awareness of corruption.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a critical literature review of the current studies on digital media in the framework of anti-corruption problems. More specifically, it sought to establish a connection between corruption scholarship and the different ways it interprets corruption, with the flourishing research that focuses on how social movements employ digital media and the consequences. What emerges is that the theoretical framework used to explain corruption and how to counter it also resonates with how we can understand, from the sociology of media viewpoint, the role that digital media might have—and might not have—in countering corruption from the grassroots.

First, consistently with studies that frame corruption as a collective action problem, activists might employ digital media as a powerful means of expression that can create collective spaces for discussion, indignation, and the creation of movements. Second, in line with research that looks at corruption as a principal–agent problem, the chapter discussed how activists might employ digital media to enhance people's ability to monitor, denounce, and hold accountable those in power who engage in corrupted practices. These two approaches and activists' real-life usages of digital media bring to light one of the tensions that characterize contemporary social movements more generally when they embed digital media—and social media platforms in particular—into their mobilizations.

The chapter then presented a third approach to digital media study in the framework of grassroots anti-corruption efforts which look at both corruption phenomena and

activists' digital media usages from a pragmatic and situated perspective. Such an approach would be able to grasp at least three broad research questions, which are also linked to the increasingly important role that big data, algorithmic automation, and machine learning have in the framework of struggles against corruption from the grassroots. Even more importantly, such an approach makes visible three directions along which research on digital media and anti-corruption from the grassroots might develop soon.

First, it would be relevant to map which types of digital media configurations activists employ and why they select some digital media, leaving others in their campaigns' background. In this way, furthermore, the use of big and small data in anti-corruption struggles would also be understood as something that combines with the activists' repertoire of communication. Indeed, data-related practices should not be considered separate from the activists' overall communication strategy. It is only looking at big and small data from this perspective that it would be possible to understand the actual influence it has on anti-corruption from the grassroots, activists' agency in such struggles and their ability to reframe their collective efforts in the light of the newest technological developments.

Second, a pragmatic and situated approach might help to explain how activists embed digital media in already existing anti-corruption practices and which practices instead emerge that were not there before as a result of digital media employment. A mutual shaping of digital media and anti-corruption practices would allow us to weigh the activists' agency vis-à-vis social media, crowdsourcing, and other digital platforms. While activists imagine, design, and create these platforms in some cases, in other cases, they use already existing ones that have been developed, often with commercial purposes, to fulfill other functions. Even more, scholars might understand how certain practices related to anti-corruption can shape, or not, how activists design or appropriate digital media.

Third, such an approach might support examining the consequences of digital media use not so much at the level of the effective reduction of corruption but rather for the anti-corruption movements themselves—in other words, to look at how activists might shift their priorities as a result of technological innovation. This would also lead to an understanding of how digital media's presence might push forward supplementary understandings of what anti-corruption from the grassroots is, what it entails, and what it means to be a good citizen opposed to corruption.

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