

The potential of new and social media for environmental activism

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Abstract:

In the recent past, many claims of the potential of new and social media to enhance civic engagement have been made. In relation to this potential for pressuring governments, organisations and institutions for enhancing environmental protection and environmental sustainability, the focus of this paper lies on 'digital environmental activism'. Three meta-themes are detected and explored: new and social media as enabling environmental activism, engaging in the environmental activist terrain, and potential constraints to digital environmental activism. It was found that digital environmental activism focused substantially on technologically-informed disasters and protest campaigns. In Australia, the latter include old growth forests, whale hunting, and coal seam gas mining. Potential key constraints to enhanced digital activism include concentration of media ownership, and governmental and economic surveillance. However, concentration of media ownership is challenged by emergent regulation, and a robust competitive field of platforms, which offer a range of differing service catering to changing and evolving user trends and preferences. In conclusion, and informed by new and social media's main conduit of horizontal (or many-to-many) communication, complemented by encryption, and an increasing number of new media platforms offering anti-surveillance techniques for users, we find a robust potential of new and social media to enhance activism tempered by minimising its potential constraints.

Keywords: digital environmental activism, environmental politics, new and social media, surveillance

BIOGRAPHY

Richard Hindmarsh (PhD) is Associate Professor at Griffith School of Environment in environmental politics and policy, and science, technology and society. Cofounder of the Asia-Pacific Science, Technology and Society Network, research interests include new and social media, community engagement, GM crops, wind and nuclear energy, and sustainability. He has produced eight books, including *Edging Towards BioUtopia* (Uni. of Western Australia Press, 2008); *Genetic Suspects* (2010, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, with Barbara Prainsack); *Nuclear Disaster at Fukushima Daiichi: Social, Political and Environmental Issues* (2013), Routledge, NY, and *The Fukushima Effect: A New Geopolitical Terrain* (2016, Routledge NY, with Rebecca Priestley).

Diletta Luna Calibeo is a Griffith School of Environment PhD candidate investigating the potential of new and social media for environmental activism. Diletta graduated with Masters in Law and Economics from LUISS Guido Carli University, Rome. Her thesis was called *Googleopoly: testing competition policy in the digital era*. Before graduating from R. Ruffilli University Forli (Italy) in political science, Diletta received three scholarships, including an Erasmus scholarship with Alma Mater Studiorum Bologna University. Her research interests include social movements and civic engagement, environmental politics and movements, new and social media, antitrust law and regulation, and governance.