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Article

Polarization of Deliberative and Participatory Activists on Social Media

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Abstract

The article demonstrates how social media activism polarizes and clusters into distinct deliberative and participatory arenas, using the case study of online activism for justice for Roman Zadorov in Israel. Zadorov was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison. Still, an overwhelming majority of Israelis think he is innocent, with the social media obstruction-of-justice campaign in his support having raised overwhelming exposure and engagement. Theorists distinguish between participatory and deliberative public processes. Supporters of participatory processes advocate for the participation of multiple stakeholders in addressing public concerns. Supporters of deliberative processes advocate for a thorough evaluation of arguments for and against any course of action before decision-making. This study demonstrates how people congregate online and polarize into deliberative and participatory clusters. The “deliberative” cluster is characteristic of groups led by admins who advocate reaching the truth through exposing relevant information and conducting fact-based deliberation. The “participatory” cluster is characteristic of groups led by admins who believe that their activities should aim exclusively at generating more attention and engagement with the general public.

Keywords

activism; deliberation; Israel; obstruction-of-justice campaign; participation; polarization; protest; Roman Zadorov; social media

Issue

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1. Introduction: The Significance of Administrators in Social Media Groups

An extensive literature on online social media activism refers to users as the focus of activity, and to their communities as arenas of “user-generated content,” where the emphasis on creating content and engagement lies on users and not on the “management.”

However, the literature demonstrates that administrators have a significant impact on the discourse in online communities and on their abilities to realize their goals, far more than average members do. Typically, administrators have three main roles:

- 1, Member management: Recruiting members, encouraging members to carry out activities, and removing users.

2. Content management: Overseeing the community’s agenda, encouraging and contributing to discussions, mitigating discussions and preventing quarrels, and removing posts. Managers ensure that the information disseminated is not too much (to prevent “flooding”), and not too little (to avoid the appearance of inactivity). Managers can also produce special events, such as conversations with experts (Gerbaudo, 2017; Lev-On, 2017).
3. Maintaining social conduct: Clarification of existing norms and penalties for deviators, and methods of resolving disputes (Butler et al., 2007; Kim, 2000).

The significance of group admins is manifest in internet-based social movements (Agarwal et al., 2014; Azer et al., 2019; Cortellazzo et al., 2019; Gerbaudo, 2017; Poell

et al., 2016), and in particular in communities protesting against perceived obstruction of justice. For example, Gies' (2017) study on activism on behalf of Amanda Knox and Raffaele Sollecito in Italy demonstrates that managers functioned as "gatekeepers," and that activists close to the community's inner circle were perceived as more important.

The significance of the admins in the groups calling for justice for Roman Zadorov (the research environment, see Section 4) emerges from an analysis conducted with automatic tools, in the largest group calling for justice for Zadorov, from its inception until January 2016. The analysis shows that the group managers published 1,191 posts, constituting 29.8% of all posts. Of the 20 most prolific advertisers, nine were admins. Moreover, posts published by administrators attracted significantly more engagement than posts published by ordinary users (Lev-On & Steinfeld, 2020).

2. Unity and Fragmentation in Online Communities

Online social media opens up possibilities for the organization of activism. But just as online organization is easier to produce than before, so it is easier to dismantle and build new organizations from the fragments. In general, fragmentation in online communities is easier to execute both cognitively and practically than in offline communities. Members of offline communities intersect in many places, and leaving a community may involve significant economic, social, and cultural losses. Therefore, traditional communities may have a significant impact on member behavior. Leaving or non-normative behavior can be devastating. In contrast, online communities are often composed of a collection of people who generally have no circles of reference beyond the common theme around which they have gathered. While leaving the community can exact a certain cost, for most members, it is not a price that is hard to pay. Hence, the online community is much easier to leave, and forming new groups is also easier (Lev-On, 2009; Lev-On & Hardin, 2007; Reinhard, 2018).

3. Deliberation and Participation in Online Communities

The article demonstrates how social media activism fragments and polarizes into distinct deliberative and participatory arenas. Theorists distinguish two main approaches to involvement in public processes. Some favor participation of as many stakeholders as possible, while others advocate in-depth deliberation for and against suggested courses of action before reaching a decision. Following others, I will label these two approaches: participatory and deliberative, respectively (Chambers, 2009; Florida, 2017; Mendonça & Cunha, 2014; Mutz, 2006).

Participation, online and offline, can come in a variety of shapes and forms such as public expression of opin-

ions, attempts at persuasion, public actions expressing identification or protest, and of course elections for various institutions that influence decision-making (Arnstein, 1969; Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010). The theories that focus on and advocate participation in democratic contexts refer to intrinsic factors such as gains that people have from participation, as well as extrinsic factors such as the quality of decision-making and the legitimacy of the regime (i.e., Mansbridge, 1983).

According to supporters of deliberative democratic ideas, realizing the idea of democracy should be based not only on representation and voting mechanisms, but also on processes including search for information and arguments, and weighing of pros and cons of various opinions and values until reaching informed decisions (Bohman, 2000; Chambers, 2003; Fishkin, 2009; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Mendelberg, 2002). Fishkin (2009) argues that the quality of deliberation is a product of access to relevant and accurate information, participants' ability to respond to arguments they encounter, representation of the major position of the public during the deliberation, sincere weighing of the arguments by participants, and equal consideration of the arguments, independent of the participants who offer them. Such conditions can apply in a variety of arenas, ranging from small-scale committees and think tanks, to newspapers and of course certain online social media platforms, to which large chunks of the public discourse have migrated in recent years (Black, 2011; Roberts, 2004).

Deliberative processes require in-depth knowledge of facts and arguments and therefore seem more appropriate for small groups. As the number of participants in the decision-making process increases, the process almost automatically becomes less deliberation-oriented. Thus, the more deliberation-oriented the processes are, the less participatory they tend to be, and vice versa. Many hoped that the growth of online social media would provide the scaffolding for decision-making processes that are both participatory and deliberative. But as the analysis below demonstrates, a different phenomenon occurs spontaneously—clustering and polarization into two clusters of activists and groups: participatory-oriented or deliberation-oriented (see Buozis, 2019; Gaines & Mondak, 2009; Hedrick et al., 2018; Nekmat & Lee, 2018).

4. Research Environment: Justice for Roman Zadorov Social Media Activism

On December 6, 2006, the 13-year-old Tair Rada was found murdered at her school in Katzrin, Israel. Roman Zadorov, a flooring installer who worked at the school, was arrested six days later, and a week later confessed to the killing. Two days after the reconstruction, he again confessed but then immediately recanted, and has since denied connection to the murder. Ultimately, Zadorov was convicted of murder in 2010 and sentenced to life

in prison. The verdict referred to a “high-quality, dense and real fabric of evidence” (Author, year, page number if applicable) that points to Zadorov, including his confessions to the informant and to police investigators, reconstruction of the murder, and a shoe imprint on the victim’s pants that, according to the police expert, most likely originated from Zadorov’s shoe (Nazareth District Court, 2010, pp. 251–252). Zadorov’s appeal to the Supreme Court was rejected in 2015.

But the firmness of the court’s ruling contradicts the public court of law, with opinion polls repeatedly showing that an overwhelming majority of the public thinks Zadorov is innocent. In 2021, a Supreme Court judge decided to grant Zadorov a retrial (Lev-On, in press).

Already in the period immediately after the murder, the affair attracted the attention of the public, partly because the victim was a young girl murdered in the middle of the day in school. Another source that helped to cast doubt on Roman Zadorov’s involvement in the murder was Tair Rada’s mother. Shortly after Zadorov recounted how the murder was committed, she declared that she doubted whether he was indeed the killer. Over the years, problems in Zadorov’s confession and reconstruction also contributed to these doubts as well as the existence of alternative narratives about the identity of the murderer(s), the manner in which the murder was committed, and the motives behind it.

Another factor responsible for the overwhelming public interest in the case is the intensive social media activity to promote Zadorov’s innocence. Since 2009, many Facebook groups have been established that deal with this affair. In 2015, after Zadorov’s appeal to the Supreme Court was rejected, the number of members of these groups soared, the largest of which, The Whole Truth About the Murder of the Late Tair Rada, became one of the largest in Israel (Ben-Israel, 2016). The investigation materials were made available on the Truth Today website (from 2016). There are also a number of YouTube channels which include video materials related to the affair (including investigative videos, conversations with the police informer, and the reconstruction).

Apart from its scope, the activity on social media for Zadorov is unique in other aspects (Grossman & Lev-On, in press; Lev-On, in press):

1. The context: The activity takes place in the context of a murder trial and a call for justice for a putative false conviction. In contrast, findings and products of police investigations and legal proceedings are typically far from the public eye.
2. The identity of participants in the discourse: Typically, the participants in the public discourse regarding law and justice are “insiders”—police officers, lawyers, judges, reporters, and legal commentators. In the Zadorov case, however, the involvement of “outsiders” is evident, including activists who are familiar with small and large issues.

3. The activity is also unique in its significant effects; for example, on public opinion of the functioning of the relevant state institutions and Zadorov’s guilt/innocence (Lev-On, in press).

In addition, this activism is unique in how it has led to the many discoveries by activists who pore through the investigation materials, including ones that led to the decision to hold a retrial for Zadorov (Lev-On, in press).

For all these reasons, activism on behalf of Zadorov represents a fascinating case for examining the characteristics and effects of social media activism.

5. Research Method

This study is based on netnographic research. Netnography is a qualitative interpretive research approach to studying the behavioral and communicative patterns of individuals and groups online (Kozinets, 2010; Rageh & Melewar, 2013).

Netnography involves collecting data from various online sources such as social networks, chats, petition sites, and more. Researchers can identify communities, observe and join them, and interview participants. The triangulation of participant observation, interviews, and content analysis enables a comprehensive picture of justice for Zadorov activism. This netnographic study lasted four years, from December 2015 (i.e., the rejection of Zadorov’s appeal to the Supreme Court and resulting intensification of activism) until December 2019, and includes: observations of activism, analysis of content posted on social media groups, and interviews with social media group administrators.

5.1. Observations of Activism

Continuous contacts were established with group administrators and leading activists. Conversations with administrators were also about issues and dilemmas that arose regarding content that emerged in the groups and activities that took place. Netnographic research was particularly helpful in learning about group schisms and activist discoveries.

5.2. Analysis of Content Posted on Social Media Groups

Fifteen active Facebook groups were identified, with more than 300,000 members in total. The accumulation of posts and the responses they elicited were documented in real-time. The more active groups were sampled daily; other groups were sampled weekly.

5.3. Interviews with Social Media Group Administrators

Twenty-five interviews with administrators of the various groups were conducted. These dealt with the general background of the interviewees, perceptions of the goals and impact of activism, questions about

group management, and more. The interviews lasted an hour to an hour-and-a-half and were held in locations amenable to relaxed interactions, such as cafes. They were conducted by four interviewers under the supervision of the lead researcher and were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. The presentation of the findings focuses on the interviews and is supported by excerpts from content posted in the groups.

6. Findings

6.1. General Characteristics of Admins

Participation in social activity is related to a number of characteristics, the first among which are age and income. As a rule of thumb, participants tend to be adults with high socioeconomic status (Schlozman et al., 2010). In recent decades, and as part of the dramatic increase in the use of online social media, this trend has also increased for organizing and participating in social protests. A significant body of research addressing entrepreneurs leading protests centered on social media suggests that they tend to be younger (Coleman, 2014; Cortellazzo et al., 2019) and with higher technological capabilities than the capabilities of leaders of traditional protests, who relied on managerial and social—but not on technological—abilities (Agarwal et al., 2014; Coleman, 2014; Cortellazzo et al., 2019; Gerbaudo, 2017).

The first finding that emerges from the interviews is the significant variance across managers, expressed in age, occupation, and more. Regarding age, about two-thirds of the interviewees are between the ages of 30 and 40. The group admins also include young people in their early 20s, along with older ones in their 40s and 50s. Regarding gender, about two-thirds of the respondents are men, and the rest are women. This finding is interesting because the activity includes exposure to severe violence, which is generally associated with “masculinity” and much less with “femininity.” Still, the place of women stands out among the principals. In contrast, in other communities calling for justice for wrongly convicted women is absent (Gies, 2017).

I have also found a wide range of occupations among managers. Most of the leading admins are involved in computers and high-tech. Some have studied law. The vast majority of admins have academic degrees and seem to have well-earning jobs. Most interviewees are skilled in operating Facebook groups, although some have little knowledge in the field. The latter were asked to join the management due to their familiarity with the affair, even though, on a daily basis, they are less active on social media.

6.2. Fragmentation Into Many Groups

As mentioned earlier, online social media opens up many possibilities for protest organization. But just as online

communities are easier to establish, so they are easier to dismantle and build new communities from the fragments. This phenomenon is evident in the groups calling for justice for Zadorov. Although the vast majority of activists agree that the purpose of this activism is to reveal the truth and gain justice for Zadorov, they differ in their opinions about the culprits in the murder, the motives for it, and the chain of events that led to it. These differences, in addition to personal controversies that intensified over the years, caused the activism to polarize and split into many groups.

The groups differ in the number of members, the volume of activity, the character of the content, and the prevailing norms and ideas. But there is almost no dispute among the activists that Roman Zadorov is innocent.

The personal disputes and debates between group leaders have spilled over into many posts that have included personal slander where some admins are portrayed as collaborators of the establishment, while others are portrayed as delusional, locked in their conceptions, and harmful to the overarching goal.

Yet, most admins claim that they are happy with the multiplicity of groups, as this way everyone can find the group that suits them and promotes the narrative they believe in, where they can express themselves freely without blockages and deletions: “There is disagreement between the groups....We are the only group that strives to find justice, there are those who are less so” (Interviewee 25).

Some interviewees said that they found it necessary to promote, as managers, certain norms and values, which could only be done when they were in control:

I agree that it would have been best if there was one group. But when there is only one group then everyone wants to run it according to their worldview....For example, there are those who after I tell them to make accurate allegations say that the police are lying so why shouldn't we? With arguments like this, activism loses its purpose for me...so in my opinion the multiplicity of groups is a necessary evil. (Interviewee 4)

6.3. Deliberation-Oriented Versus Participation-Oriented Managers

Earlier, I demonstrated that justice for Zadorov activism split into a large number of groups. I will now present an interesting finding, according to which the groups converge into two polarized clusters.

As mentioned earlier, theorists distinguish between two main approaches to involvement in public processes. Some favor participation of as many stakeholders as possible, while others advocate for in-depth deliberation for and against any course of action before making a decision. I label these clusters participatory and deliberative, respectively (Chambers, 2009; Florida, 2017; Mendonça & Cunha, 2014; Mutz, 2006).

Many hoped that the growth of online media would support the decision-making process that incorporates both the participatory and the deliberative aspects. However, as this analysis demonstrates, a different phenomenon has occurred—clustering and polarization into two clusters of activists and groups: participatory-oriented or deliberation-oriented (see Buozis, 2019; Gaines & Mondak, 2009; Hedrick et al., 2018; Nekmat & Lee, 2018).

The study shows that online activism for justice for Zadorov polarizes into two clusters. The first, “deliberative,” is typical of groups led by admins who insist that the pursuit of truth is accomplished through the disclosure of information, the creation of knowledge, and administrating fact-based deliberation. The insights of the deliberation should be conveyed to decision makers (such as defense attorneys and the court), so they should be as accurate as possible, and certainly not based on rumors and lies. Dissemination of fake news is harmful, as it presents the activists as less serious. The accuracy of the information is more significant than the number of group members. Therefore, recruiting activists at any cost is not desirable. In addition, discussions with people who hold opposing views are welcome because they allow participants to understand the situation correctly and to deal better with criticisms.

The second cluster, “participation-oriented,” is typical of groups whose admins think they will not be taken seriously by decision-makers anyway, and therefore focus on raising public awareness. In these groups, inaccurate and even false content, which may attract public attention, can be found. This cluster is characterized by support for recruiting many group members, even without their knowledge. Opposing views are often treated with disrespect and sometimes with censorship.

Activists from both clusters do not always live in peace with each other as demonstrated in Figure 1, where the author, one of the group admins, points out that there is a distinction between “good and smart people who work behind the scenes” and “charlatans and attention junkies who...quite easily succeeded to take over the struggle.”

Table 1 summarizes seven criteria for the differences between the two clusters of activists and groups: strategic differences that relate to differences in the perception of the character of the activity (its goals, orientation, and the importance of recruiting activists) and practical differences, which refer to the manner in which the strategy is implemented, i.e., manner of activist recruitment, level of adherence to reliable source of the content, level of adherence to accurate information, and manner of addressing opposing views.

6.4. Strategic Differences Between the Two Clusters

6.4.1. Goals of the Activity: To Spread Awareness or Create Deliberation

An important distinction between the two clusters concerns the perception of the goals of the activity. After years of activity, the “participation-oriented” activists have realized that the establishment doors are closed to them, and their arguments are not taken seriously. Hence, the purpose of the activity should mainly be to maintain awareness of the affair: “The goal is to talk about it and hear it” (Interviewee 22); “Our goal is basically to reach the general public...we are not limiting ourselves to academics or knowledgeable people” (Interviewee 21).

On the other hand, the group of “deliberation-oriented” activists directs its activities to the public interested in the details of the affair, and even to the establishment. The purpose is to discover new information and generate new insights: “The main goal [is to bring] those who demand knowledge to a place where they have enough knowledge to understand what happened” (Interviewee 10).

6.4.2. Orientation of the Activity: Outwards or Inwards

The orientation of the activity is derived from its goals. “Participation-oriented” activists emphasize the importance of directing the activity “outwards” and making it accessible to the general public. One of the

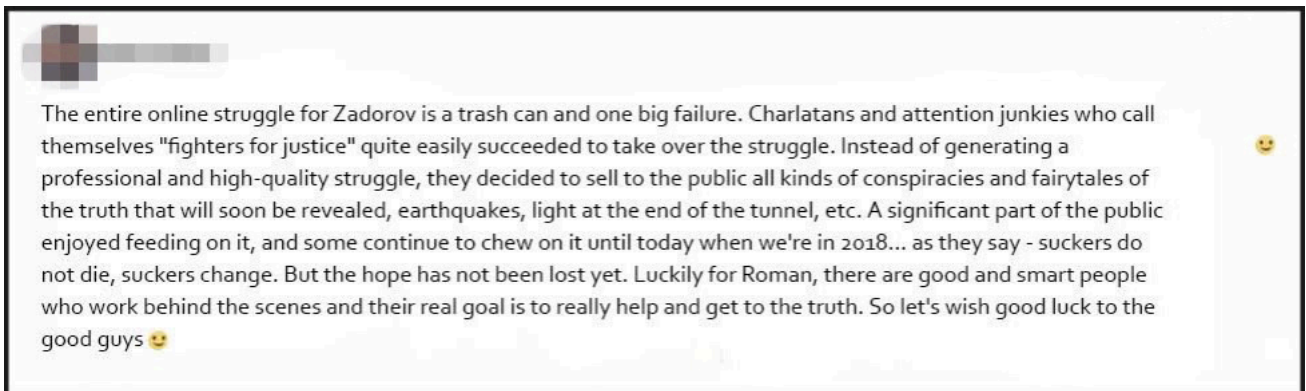


Figure 1. Good and bad activists.

Table 1. Two clusters of admins and groups.

	Deliberation-oriented	Participation-oriented
Strategic differences		
1. Goal of the activity: Is the activity aimed at the general public or also at the establishment?	To the public and the establishment	For the public
2. Orientation of the activity: Is the activity directed “outside” to reach as many recipients as possible, or “inside,” and its main purpose is to brainstorm and reach the truth?	Mainly inside	Mainly outside
3. Importance in recruiting activists: Should the emphasis be on the quantity or quality of the activists?	Quality	Quantity
Practical differences		
4. How to recruit activists: Should people be recruited even without asking for consent?	Voluntary only	Non-voluntary, members are also attached without consent
5. Source of content: Should an effort be made to rely on reliable sources?	Qualified sources	False and rumored content can be found
6. Accuracy of information: Should content known to be inaccurate also be distributed?	Purely accurate	Inaccurate as well
7. Opposing views—Should they be allowed and even encouraged or attacked and rejected?	Allowed and even encouraged	Attacked and rejected

managers who retired from it criticizes this orientation: “One of the ways...that the ‘big [participation-oriented] group’ tries to keep the flame going is to generate a false impression...that some kind of earthquake is going to happen...and something is going to be discovered” (Interviewee 1).

In contrast, the focus of the “deliberation-oriented” activists is more on “in-house” activity. They are not trying to reach out to the general public, but rather to people interested in the affair who seek information and insights.

6.4.3. The Importance of Recruiting Activists

Another strategic question concerns the importance of recruiting activists. Is quantity more important or quality? The issue of “quantity vs. quality” also has technical implications. Facebook’s algorithm, which is responsible for exposing the content in the groups, prioritizes large groups. Therefore, activity in large groups may reach a wider audience than activity in small groups.

Among the “participation-oriented” activists, the widespread perception is that the number of activists is important, and therefore as many people as possible must be reached. The information should be made accessible to them, and they should be recruited: “The scope of knowledge does not matter so much, quantity, on the other hand, has great significance. Today we are 250,000 people, if we become half a million or four million people, it could start to tickle someone...” (Interviewee 23); “I have no problem with people join-

ing even if their interest is low and even if they talk nonsense” (Interviewee 26).

On the other hand, admins of “deliberation-oriented” groups claim that the number of members in the group is less important. Some believe that it is better for the number of members not to be large, in order to “filter” people who do not know the affair in depth and whose fingers are light on the keyboard—and to remain within a limited circle of knowledgeable and interested people. Other interviewees argue that the problem is not the size of the group per se but its unwillingness to compromise on the quality of the deliberation. If it were possible to maintain the quality of deliberation with many activists, it would be a winning combination. But since they claim this is not the case, they prefer a smaller group: “I prefer a small group that is of better quality...but I wish I could have both—a huge and high-quality large group” (Interviewee 6); “I would die to have a quarter of a million people in the group but every time I see the quality of the deliberation in the ‘big group’ I am happy for my part” (Interviewee 14).

6.5. “Practical” Differences Between the Two Clusters

The three differences between the groups I have reviewed so far have been “strategic”: the goal and orientation of the activity, and the decision between the number of activists vis-a-vis quality of discussion. In addition to the strategic differences, the interviews also revealed a number of “practical” differences that relate to the ways in which managers think that group activities

should be conducted on a regular basis: how activists are recruited, the source of content in the groups, ensuring content accuracy, and references to opposing views.

6.5.1. Manner of Activist Recruitment

Facebook group members have the option to add their friends, even without their knowledge and consent. In this context, the difference between the two types of groups focuses on the question: Is it appropriate to make an effort and recruit as many activists as possible, even without their consent, or should the group include only activists who consented to join?

Among the “participation-oriented” activists, there is an effort to recruit activists at all costs, and, to that end, they use all the means at their disposal, from advertising the group everywhere to joining all the Facebook friends of the activists. A preferred practice for many of the participation-oriented groups is the automatic addition (without asking those added) of Facebook users. In Figure 2, the group’s administrator thanks an activist who added 200 members to the group, claiming that “every additional member is an auxiliary force in a war that is so just.”

Compared to the “participation-oriented” groups, where the emphasis is on adding members, in the “deliberation—oriented” groups, the emphasis is on the quality of the deliberation and not on the number of members, so there is no special effort to add members to the group: “I do not add people, whoever it interested should be there....I cannot force anyone to join” (Interviewee 2).

6.5.2. Adherence to Reliable Sources

The next difference between the clusters concerns the source of the content that the administrators approve. Do admins make sure the sources are qualified and trusted? Managers who advocate a participatory approach exercise less discretion in the context of the source of the content, and often do not hesitate to publish content whose origin is unknown and even false: “There were times when [one of the managers] would send me a message that he was uploading content that

he knew was not correct just for the sake of provocation” (Interviewee 3).

In contrast, the admins of “deliberation-oriented” groups clearly emphasize that posts should come from trusted and secure sources and are careful not to publish content whose origin is unknown.

6.5.3. Ensuring the Accuracy of the Information

The admins of participation-oriented groups are criticized for not being careful about the accuracy of the content that emerges in the group. For example:

There are many admins who have a simple goal of increasing circulation so that as many as possible will enter....Accuracy is less important to them, and against this background, they post content that they know is inaccurate....When it’s made clear to them in detail that it was inaccurate, they say “never mind.” (Interviewee 3)

Managers of the “deliberation-oriented” groups do not only criticize the source of the content, but also the content itself, with the intention that when the information reaches the establishment, it will be taken seriously:

Objective people who come to read things look at the [lack of] proficiency, understand that these are not serious guys, and then that’s what they think—“They are delusional, they are conspirators”....This claim is true, unfortunately, it is true, yes. A lot of people, in this case, I would not go out to battle with them. (Interviewee 1)

Just an example, Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked, we are burned in her eyes, why? Because people started posting on her wall that the hairs on the palm of Tair’s hand belong to her killer. So, she says, “I checked it out, found out they all belong to her.” That’s on!! From this moment, we are discredited with her—No one can talk to her anymore about the affair. She says, “all these conspirators....” That’s why I say the importance of accuracy is inescapable. (Interviewee 3)

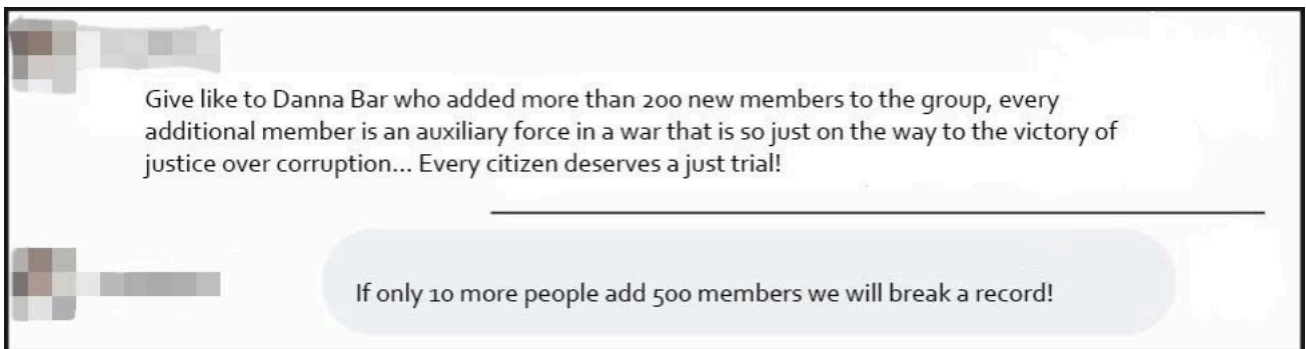


Figure 2. Adding members.

The hallucinatory and conspiratorial do serious damage and are a distraction of Roman Zadorov's accusers. (Interviewee 6)

6.5.4. Attitude to Opposing Views

Finally, I will examine how managers respond to opinions that are contrary to the prevailing opinion in the group: Do they encourage, or oppose, the expression of opposing views? According to the interviews, the "participation-oriented" managers focus their efforts on conceptual unity. Disagreements regarding the narrative that prevails in the group can, they claim, impair the group's cohesion and its ability to move toward the goal. Therefore, expressing opposing views, and especially those claiming that Zadorov is the killer, is perceived as problematic.

According to some admins, the default in the group is that Zadorov is innocent and whoever thinks otherwise should be removed from the group. The perception of some of the interviewees is that investing time and thought in such reactions is a waste of time. These admins see themselves as "action group" executives and not as someone whose job it is to deliberate and persuade people who think differently:

The group deals with "Roman Zadorov did not murder," each from his own point of view....We are not a deliberation group. We are an action group....We do demonstrations, we consult what you think should be done next, we give people emails so that they can distribute them by themselves. An action group. (Interviewee 26)

In contrast, among the "deliberation-oriented" managers there is usually no opposition to opposing views, and some welcome them. The reasons for this are varied, from the fact that some of them changed their minds about the identity of the killer and the chain of events themselves—which created a sensitivity in them to the different opinions. Ultimately, they think that it enriches the discourse and even strengthens and sharpens the arguments of the group when they are put to the test in the face of opposing arguments: "People who think differently get full attention....I sometimes come across people whose questions are relevant, and I respond wholeheartedly. Different and opposing views are perfectly fine" (Interviewee 10); "Supporters of conviction? I hug them warmly, give them the whole stage. Very satisfied about them coming to my group" (Interviewee 14).

7. Discussion and Conclusions

Online social media opens up many possibilities for the organization of activism. But just as online organization is easier to produce than in the past, so it is also easier to dismantle and build new organizations from the fragments. Conflicts that seem insignificant lead to the fragmentation of the activity into many spheres, and some-

times to bitter disagreements among activists striving for similar goals.

This article demonstrates how social media activism fragments, polarizes, and clusters into distinct deliberative and participatory arenas, by using the case study of online activism for justice for Roman Zadorov in Israel.

Theorists distinguish between participatory and deliberative public processes. Supporters of participatory processes advocate the participation of multiple stakeholders in addressing public concerns. Supporters of deliberative processes advocate a thorough evaluation of arguments for and against any course of action before decision-making.

Many hoped that online social media would facilitate decision-making processes that are both participatory and deliberative. By contrast, the study demonstrates how people congregate and polarize into either deliberative or participatory clusters. The "deliberative" cluster is characteristic of groups led by admins who advocate reaching the truth through exposing relevant information and conducting fact-based deliberation. Typically, the precision of information is considered more important than the number of discussants. It is crucial that the information is reliable and spreading fake news is considered harmful.

On the other hand, the "participatory" cluster is characteristic of groups led by admins who believe that their activities should aim exclusively at generating more attention and engagement with the general public. In such groups, one can regularly find inaccurate and even fake content.

This article, then, demonstrates that online activism for a certain cause is not a unitary phenomenon, but rather a multi-faceted one composed of a fragmented, clustered, and polarized landscape of social media groups. Future studies should continue and explore the polarization of deliberative or participatory clusters in additional online activist environments, possibly using quantitative tools (for example, quantitative content analysis), to provide further support and elaboration for this significant insight.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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