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Online Networks and the Diffusion of Protests

YAMIR MORENO, Institute for Biocomputation and Physics of Complex Systems, University of Zaragoza

Undoubtedly, online social networks have an enormous impact on opinions and cultural trends. Also, these platforms have revealed as a fundamental organizing mechanism in country-wide social movements. Recent events in the Middle East and North Africa (the wave of protests in the Arab world), across Europe (in the form of anti-cuts demonstrations or riots) and United States (the OWS movement) have generated much discussion on how digital media is connected to the diffusion of protests. In this talk, we investigate the mechanisms driving the emergence, development and stabilization of unrest movements in Spain and the USA by analyzing data from Twitter. Messages related to the protests are analyzed at both static and dynamic levels. We show that the online trace of the protests provides a unique opportunity to tackle central issues like recruitment patterns, information cascades and their spatiotemporal dynamics. Our findings shed light on the connection between online networks and social movements, and offer an empirical test to elusive sociological questions about collective action.