

The Rise of Hybrid Public Spaces: How Social Movements Leverage Physical and Digital Realms for Amplified Impact in Socio-Political Movements

Sam Lahoud

Prof. Elie Yazbek

Saint-Joseph University of Beirut - Lebanon

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Abstract

Social movements have historically relied on traditional media and public gatherings to gain traction and effect change. However, the digital age has ushered in a new era of activism, characterized by the emergence of hybrid public spaces. These spaces, where the physical world converges with the digital, empower social movements by offering unique advantages over solely physical or online platforms. This paper explores the concept of hybrid public spaces and their significance for contemporary social movements. It argues that these spaces foster a sense of community and solidarity, provide powerful visuals for traditional media, and enable the rapid dissemination of information through social media. Case studies from the

Arab Spring and the Lebanese Uprising illustrate how protestors strategically transformed neglected public areas into vibrant hubs of dissent, utilizing both physical and digital tools to amplify their message. The paper also acknowledges the challenges associated with hybrid public spaces. This research contributes to the limited scholarship on the intersection of traditional media, digital platforms, and social movements. It offers valuable insights for future research and activism, particularly regarding the strategic use of hybrid public spaces and the need to address the associated challenges.

Keywords: Hybrid public spaces, Social movements, Digital activism, Traditional media, Social media.

*** Introduction**

Background of the Study: -

The landscape of social activism has transformed dramatically over the past few decades, influenced significantly by the rapid evolution of communication technologies. Historically, social movements have relied heavily on traditional media and the physical occupation of public spaces to gain visibility and exert pressure on political and social institutions. Classic examples include the civil rights movement in the United States, which utilized television broadcasts to highlight the injustices faced by African Americans, and the global anti-apartheid movement, which leveraged international media to rally global support against the South African regime (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993).

In the digital age, the paradigm of social activism has shifted with the advent of the internet and social media platforms. These digital tools have introduced new dimensions to how social movements organize, communicate, and sustain themselves. The emergence of hybrid public spaces, where physical and digital realms intersect, has created a dynamic environment that amplifies the impact of social movements. This duality of presence, both on the

ground and online, has empowered activists to mobilize supporters, disseminate information rapidly, and engage in global conversations, transcending traditional geographic and temporal limitations.

Hybrid public spaces offer a unique blend of physical and digital engagement, each complementing the other in various ways. Physical gatherings, such as protests, marches, and sit-ins, create a tangible sense of community and solidarity among participants. These events provide powerful visuals and narratives that can be captured and broadcast by traditional media, thereby reaching a wider audience (Goodall, 2010). At the same time, digital platforms facilitate the rapid and widespread dissemination of information, enabling real-time updates and coordination. Social media, in particular, has become an indispensable tool for activists, allowing them to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and directly reach a global audience (Chen, 2012).

The Arab Spring serves as a seminal example of the power of hybrid public spaces in modern activism. Starting in late 2010, a series of anti-government protests erupted across the Arab world, driven by widespread discontent with authoritarian regimes, economic

hardships, and political corruption. In countries like Lebanon, social media played a crucial role in mobilizing protests and documenting state violence. At the same time, physical spaces like Tahrir Square in Cairo became iconic symbols of resistance (Gerbaudo, 2017). The convergence of digital and physical realms not only amplified the protesters' voices but also drew international attention and support, significantly influencing the political trajectories of these nations.

Similarly, the Lebanese Uprising of 2019-2020 provides a compelling case study in the strategic use of hybrid public spaces to sustain a social movement. Sparked by a proposed tax on WhatsApp calls, the uprising quickly evolved into a widespread protest against political corruption, economic mismanagement, and sectarian governance (BBC, 2019). Protesters across Lebanon transformed public squares, such as Martyrs' Square in Beirut and Al-Nour Square in Tripoli, into vibrant centers of dissent. These physical spaces became hubs of communal gathering, where citizens from diverse backgrounds could unite in a shared demand for systemic change (Ahwach & Farhat, 2021). In Martyrs' Square, the epicenter of the uprising, protesters erected tents and

stages for speeches, concerts, and discussions, turning the area into a symbol of resistance and solidarity. These physical gatherings provided powerful visuals that were widely covered by traditional media, amplifying the movement's visibility both locally and internationally. The physical presence in these squares signified a reclaiming of public space, challenging the status quo and demonstrating the collective power of the people (Ahwach & Farhat, 2021).

Parallel to the occupation of physical spaces, social media platforms emerged as crucial digital public spaces for the uprising. Platforms like Twitter (X), Facebook, and Instagram were extensively used to share live updates, organize protests, and disseminate information about government corruption and economic issues (Mehanna, 2021). Hashtags such as #LebanonProtests and #Thawra (Revolution) trended globally, facilitating a virtual gathering space where activists could coordinate actions, share personal stories, and rally international support. These digital tools enabled real-time communication and coordination, which were essential for organizing large-scale protests and spontaneous flash mobs (BBC, 2019; Mehanna, 2021). Social media also allowed for the rapid debunking

of misinformation and state propaganda, ensuring that the movement's narrative remained controlled by the protesters themselves. Moreover, platforms like WhatsApp were used for secure, encrypted communication among activists, helping to protect their identities and plans from state surveillance (Glover et al., 202#).

The strategic use of both physical and digital tools in the Lebanese Uprising allowed the movement to maintain momentum and visibility, despite attempts at suppression by state authorities. By effectively leveraging hybrid public spaces, protesters were able to sustain their demands for change and keep the global spotlight on Lebanon's political and economic crises. This dual approach not only amplified the uprising's impact but also set a precedent for future social movements in the digital age (Merhej & Qureshi, 2020). However, the effective utilization of hybrid public spaces is not without challenges. Social movements must continuously adapt to rapidly evolving technologies, ensuring that their strategies remain relevant and effective in a changing digital landscape (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Moreover, the pervasive nature of digital surveillance and

censorship poses significant threats to activists, necessitating sophisticated measures to protect communications and ensure the security of their networks (Gerbaudo, 2017). Additionally, the digital divide remains a persistent issue, with unequal access to technology potentially excluding marginalized communities from participating fully in digital activism (Parks & Burgess, 2003).

Urban planning also plays a crucial role in fostering accessible and inclusive public spaces. Scholars like Blomberg and Burrell (1991) have emphasized the importance of designing urban environments that support social movements and facilitate public gatherings. Ensuring that physical spaces are safe, accessible, and conducive to large-scale activism is essential for the success of hybrid public spaces. Hybrid public spaces represent a significant evolution in the landscape of social activism. By combining the strengths of physical presence and digital outreach, these spaces may empower social movements to create more impactful campaigns, strengthen communities, and amplify their voices on a global scale.

*** Research Aim**

This research aims to contribute to the limited scholarship

on the intersection of traditional media, digital platforms, and social movements, offering valuable insights for future research and activism. By examining the strategic use of hybrid public spaces and addressing the associated challenges, this paper seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of their role in contemporary social movements.

*** Research Question**

To address the study's aim, the following research question is created: -

RQ: How do hybrid public spaces, which integrate physical and digital realms, enhance the effectiveness of contemporary socio-political movements?

*** Relevant Hypothesis**

To answer the research question, the following hypothesis is established: -

H: The use of hybrid public spaces - combining physical gatherings with digital platforms - significantly increases the impact, visibility, and sustainability of socio-political movements compared to physical or digital spaces alone

*** Literature Review**

Hybrid Public Spaces and Social Movements

The concept of hybrid public spaces, an amalgamation of physical

and digital realms, has emerged as a significant development in the landscape of social activism. This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive examination of existing scholarship on this topic, focusing on the interplay between physical and digital environments in fostering social movements. Key themes explored include the evolution of public spaces, the role of digital platforms, community building and solidarity, visual impact, information dissemination, and the challenges associated with hybrid public spaces.

*** Evolution of Public Spaces**

The idea of public spaces has long been a focal point in urban sociology and political science. Traditionally, public spaces are physical locales where citizens gather to express opinions, protest, and engage in communal activities (Hracs & Massam, 2008). Scholars such as Habermas (1991) have emphasized the importance of the public sphere in facilitating democratic discourse. Habermas's work on the bourgeois public sphere underscores the critical role of physical public spaces in enabling civic participation and public debate.

In recent decades, the advent of digital technology has transformed the concept of public spaces. Digital

platforms such as social media have created new venues for public discourse and collective action. Castells (2009) introduced the notion of "network society," where digital networks facilitate communication and social organization, thereby reshaping the traditional public sphere. This shift from physical to digital spaces, and the subsequent blending of both, has given rise to the concept of hybrid public spaces.

*** The Role of Digital Platforms and Information Flows**

Digital platforms have revolutionized how social movements organize, communicate, and sustain themselves. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) describe "connective action" as a new form of collective action enabled by digital media, characterized by personalized content sharing across social networks. Unlike traditional collective action, which relies on centralized organization and coordination, connective action leverages the decentralized and fluid nature of digital platforms.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and Instagram play crucial roles in hybrid public spaces. These platforms allow activists to mobilize supporters, disseminate information, and coordinate actions in real-time

(Leong et al., 2019). Gerbaudo (2017) highlights the strategic use of social media in the Arab Spring, where activists utilized these platforms to organize protests and communicate their messages to a global audience. Similarly, Tufekci (2017) discusses how social media facilitated the rapid mobilization of protestors during the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Rapid dissemination of information is a hallmark of hybrid public spaces. Digital platforms facilitate the quick spread of information, enabling real-time updates and coordination of actions (Abduraimov, 2024). This immediacy is crucial for maintaining the momentum of social movements and responding to changing circumstances. For example, Chen (2012) discusses how social media platforms like Twitter (X) and Facebook enable activists to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and reach a wide audience directly. This direct communication allows for more dynamic and responsive organizing, essential in fast-moving situations like protests. The Arab Spring is a prime example of how rapid information dissemination can fuel a social movement, with activists using social media to organize

protests and share news in real-time (Gerbaudo, 2017).

*** Community Building, Solidarity, and Visual Impact**

Community building and solidarity are essential elements of successful social movements (McCrea et al., 2017). Physical gatherings in public spaces foster a sense of belonging and collective identity among participants. These face-to-face interactions create strong social bonds and reinforce commitment to the movement's goals (Blomberg & Burrell, 1991). Durkheim's (1915) concept of "collective effervescence" captures the emotional energy generated during such gatherings, which can be a powerful driver of social cohesion and action.

Digital platforms extend the reach of community building beyond geographical boundaries, creating a global network of support. Social media enables activists to connect with like-minded individuals worldwide, share experiences, and build solidarity. Sorce and Dumitrica (2022) argue that digital tools facilitate "transnational activist networks," allowing local struggles to gain international visibility and support. For instance, during the Lebanese Uprising of 2019-2020, activists used social media to engage

with the Lebanese diaspora, garnering international solidarity and support (Chen, 2012).

The visual impact of social movements is also a critical factor in garnering public attention and support. Physical protests provide compelling visuals that can be captured by traditional media and disseminated widely. Goodall (2010) emphasizes the role of visual media in amplifying the message of social movements, noting that powerful images can evoke strong emotional responses and influence public opinion. In hybrid public spaces, the visual power of physical protests is augmented by digital media. Social media platforms enable activists to share real-time images and videos of protests, creating a compelling narrative that can go viral. These digital visuals play a crucial role in shaping public perception and mobilizing support. For example, during the Black Lives Matter protests, videos of police brutality shared on social media sparked widespread outrage and mobilized international support (Cobb, 2020).

*** Challenges of Hybrid Public Spaces**

While hybrid public spaces offer significant advantages for social movements, they also present several challenges. One major challenge is

the need to adapt to evolving technologies continuously. Social movements must stay abreast of technological developments and incorporate new tools and platforms into their strategies (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). This requires not only technical skills but also a deep understanding of how these technologies can be leveraged for activism.

Online surveillance and censorship are significant concerns for digital activists. Governments and other powerful actors often monitor online activities and use various tactics to suppress dissent, including blocking websites, intercepting communications, and launching cyberattacks. Gerbaudo (2017) discusses the tactics used by state actors to disrupt digital activism, emphasizing the need for activists to develop sophisticated measures to protect their communications and ensure the security of their networks.

The digital divide is another critical issue that affects the inclusivity of hybrid public spaces. Access to digital technologies and the internet is unevenly distributed, both globally and within countries (Landers, 2017). Marginalized communities, particularly those in rural or low-income areas, may have limited access to the tools and

platforms that facilitate digital activism. Parks and Burgess (2003) highlight the importance of addressing these disparities to ensure that social movements are inclusive and representative.

*** Case Study: Lebanon**

The Lebanese Uprising of 2019–2020 presents a more recent and contextually distinct application of hybrid public spaces. What began as a protest against a proposed WhatsApp tax quickly evolved into a nationwide movement against corruption, economic collapse, and sectarian politics (BBC, 2019). Protesters physically occupied spaces like Martyrs' Square (Beirut) and Al-Nour Square (Tripoli), transforming them into vibrant forums for cultural expression and civic unity (Makarem, 2020). In parallel, digital platforms such as Instagram, Twitter (X), and WhatsApp enabled real-time updates, encrypted coordination, and narrative control, particularly important in a country where traditional media is highly politicized (Aouragh, 2020). Activists shared live protest coverage, countered state narratives, and mobilized diaspora support, creating a feedback loop between citizen-generated content and mainstream media. Notably, activists employed secure apps (Signal, Telegram) to adapt to surveillance,

while also addressing the digital divide through offline organizing and inclusive messaging (Ahwach & Farhat, 2021).

The Lebanese Uprising of 2019–2020, while it may be inspired in part by the Arab Spring, unfolded within a different media and political ecology. Lebanon features a highly fragmented and politicized media landscape, where mainstream TV stations are often affiliated with sectarian parties, yet enjoy relative freedom and high public trust (Denis et al., 2015).

1- Protesters occupied Martyrs' Square (Beirut), Al-Nour Square (Tripoli), and other central areas, echoing the symbolic logic of Tahrir but with non-violent, festive aesthetics, art, dance, music, and community kitchens, signaling a civic rather than sectarian reclamation of public space.

2- WhatsApp and Instagram were used not only to organize protests but also to build effective solidarity through personalized storytelling, memes, and live streams from the squares.

3- Traditional news media (e.g., Al Jadeed, LBCI) were forced to adapt their coverage due to the viral dominance of digital influencers and citizen journalists. They began integrating user-generated content

into primetime segments, contributing to a fluid hybrid media ecosystem.

What distinguished Lebanon's case was the media interplay, rather than a bypassing of traditional media, activists manipulated its agenda by dominating the digital terrain, pushing slogans like *كلن_يعني_كلن* # "All of them means all of them" into the national conversation through both grassroots platforms and mainstream news.

*** Theoretical Framework**

This study draws on theories of networked publics (Boyd, 2011), communication power and network society (Castells, 2009), and media logic (van der Meulen & Langlois, 2012) to understand how hybrid public spaces emerge at the intersection of physical gatherings and digital platforms. Together, these frameworks highlight how digital technologies reshape collective action, public discourse, and the visibility of socio-political movements. This interdisciplinary lens explains why combining physical presence with digital outreach can amplify the impact and sustainability of contemporary activism.

1- Public Sphere Theory and the Evolution of Space

At the core of hybrid public space theory lies Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere (Habermas, 1991), which defines public spaces as arenas for rational-critical debate among citizens. Traditionally, this was tied to physical locations such as town halls and squares. However, with the rise of digital communication, this concept has expanded into networked publics, as articulated by scholars like Boyd (2011) and Papacharissi (2002), who argue that digital platforms have become alternative venues for political discourse, allowing publics to self-organize and articulate dissent. This transition reflects what Castells (2009) identifies as the emergence of a "network society," where communication power is diffused across horizontal networks. In this context, hybrid public spaces represent a new form of the public sphere, where physical presence (e.g., street protests) is amplified by digital connectivity (e.g., hashtags, live-streaming), creating a dual-layered public engagement mechanism.

2- Media Convergence and Media Logic

Hybrid public spaces function within a hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013), where traditional and digital media interact to influence

public discourse and mobilization. Media convergence theory (Jenkins, 2006) describes how content flows across multiple platforms, reshaping activism through the integration of broadcast media, user-generated content, and social networks. The concept of media logic (Altheide & Snow, 1979) also becomes relevant here, as each media form imposes its logic on how activism is framed and perceived, affecting visibility, credibility, and emotional engagement.

3- Social Movement Theory and Collective Action Frames

Social movement theory provides a framework to understand how collective identities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes shape protest behavior (Snow & Benford, 1988; Tarrow, 2011). Hybrid public spaces enable both collective identity formation in physical gatherings and frame alignment through digital storytelling (Gerbaudo, 2017). The spatial convergence strengthens group solidarity (Blomberg & Burrell, 1991), while digital tools facilitate connective action, a decentralized form of activism defined by Bennett and Segerberg (2012). Hybrid spaces allow movements to amplify "master frames" (Benford & Snow, 2000), such as anti-corruption or anti-

sectarianism, as seen in both the Arab Spring and the Lebanese Uprising. Protesters shape a shared narrative through both placards in public squares and trending hashtags online, offering multiple entry points for public participation and resonance.

4- Agenda-Setting and Framing Theories

Agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) helps explain how hybrid spaces influence what the public thinks about. Lebanese protesters successfully bypassed the editorial agendas of politicized news channels by using digital platforms to reframe dominant narratives. Social media enabled activists to set alternative agendas, highlighting corruption, economic injustice, and sectarianism, while mainstream media circulated visuals of mass protests, reinforcing public salience of the issues. This dual presence allowed activists to control framing more effectively, a concept elaborated by Entman (1993), by influencing not only what the public discusses but also how the issues are interpreted.

* **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative case study methodology, integrating empirical findings from the doctoral research on the October 2019 Uprising in Lebanon, to analyze the

strategic use of hybrid public spaces in socio-political movements. The methodology draws on case study analysis, discourse analysis, and in-depth interviews to explore how physical and digital public realms intersect to enhance the visibility, coordination, and impact of social movements.

* **Research Design and Rationale**

A comparative case study approach is employed to examine two pivotal movements in the Arab region: the Arab Spring and the Lebanese Uprising of 2019–2020. These cases offer rich empirical ground to understand the emergence of hybrid public spaces, where physical protest sites and digital communication platforms converge to form a new model of resistance. The Lebanese case is explored in greater depth through original research conducted by the author for a PhD dissertation, which examined the synergistic relationship between traditional and digital media during the uprising. The inclusion of this research adds empirical weight and local specificity to the broader conceptual analysis of hybrid spaces (Amaral, 2022).

* **Interviews Analysis**

A total of nine interviews were conducted with journalists, editors, and media influencers directly

involved in the October 2019 Uprising. These include chief editors from major Lebanese TV stations (MTV, LBC, Al Jadeed), as well as frontline reporters and digital influencers such as Jad Ghosn, Riad Kobeissy, and Yazbeck Wehbe. The interviews offer deep insight into how media actors navigated and shaped the hybrid media environment during the protests.

The study uses a triangulated analytical framework, as the Arab Spring provides a broader regional lens for understanding how hybrid spaces emerged as a strategic tool for mobilization. At the same time, the Lebanese Uprising serves as a detailed case that illustrates the operational dynamics of these spaces in practice.

*** Case Selection and Justification**

The Arab Spring (2010–2011) and the Lebanese Uprising (2019–2020) were selected for their shared characteristics: -

- 1- Both movements were leaderless, decentralized, and driven by youth.
- 2- Both utilized digital platforms to bypass traditional media and state censorship.
- 3- Both transformed urban public spaces (e.g., Tahrir Square, Martyrs' Square) into hubs of protest, culture, and information exchange.

However, the Lebanese Uprising is uniquely situated within a media-saturated, confessional political system, where mainstream media are largely owned by sectarian political elites. This creates a unique dynamic for hybrid public spaces, where citizen-generated content and alternative digital media often challenge the framing of politically affiliated news channels.

*** Limitations**

The study is limited by its reliance on retrospective data from 2019–2020, which may not fully capture evolving tactics in hybrid activism post-COVID-19 or post-2023 regional conflicts. Additionally, while the case of Lebanon provides rich depth, generalizing findings to contexts with lower internet penetration or tighter censorship (e.g., Iran, Syria) requires caution. Add to that, the article remains predominantly qualitative in focus.

*** Interview Findings**

The nine interviews conducted during the author's PhD research offer critical insights into how mainstream and digital media converged to create hybrid public spaces during the October 2019 Uprising in Lebanon. These hybrid spaces—spanning occupied public squares and digital platforms—formed an interdependent system that

allowed protesters to communicate, organize, and challenge dominant political narratives.

The interviewees are divided into two main groups: -

1- Mainstream media editors: Walid Abboud (MTV), Lara Zalloum (LBCI), Mariam Al Bassam (Al Jadeed), and Jerry Maher (SBI).

2- Field reporters and influencers: Jad Ghosn, Riad Kobeissy, Yazbeck Wehbe, Rachel Karam, and Nawal Berri.

1- Physical Spaces as Symbolic Hubs of Resistance

All interviewees acknowledged the importance of physical public spaces, especially Martyrs' Square (Beirut) and Al-Nour Square (Tripoli), as centers of resistance. These locations were not merely logistical gathering points but symbolized spontaneity, unity, and reclaiming the public sphere.

Yazbeck Wehbe and Nawal Berri emphasized that the live coverage of mass gatherings by mainstream TV provided compelling visuals that reinforced the movement's legitimacy and widened its support base.

Rachel Karam noted that the physical protest spaces also created organic stages for "citizen performances", speeches, music, and street art, that offered emotional

resonance for both local and diaspora audiences.

These insights validate Goodall's (2010) argument that physical gatherings provide powerful visuals and experiential solidarity, while simultaneously feeding the digital cycle of visibility.

2- Digital Platforms as Real-Time Arenas of Coordination and Framing
The majority of the journalists and influencers underscored how Twitter (X), WhatsApp, and Instagram played a pivotal role in disseminating updates, coordinating actions, and bypassing censorship.

Jerry Maher and Jad Ghosn described social media as a "parallel newsroom," where activists fact-checked state media and reframed the narrative before it reached traditional outlets.

Paula Yacoubian and Dima Sadek, while not among the interviewees but repeatedly cited by them, were portrayed as bridging figures, leveraging their mainstream visibility to amplify digital calls to action.

This affirms the concept of networked publics (Boyd, 2011) and connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), where activists rely on digital networks to coordinate decentralized participation without hierarchical leadership.

3- The Synergy between Traditional and Digital Media

Several interviewees spoke directly to the interplay between mainstream and digital spheres, identifying a new media ecosystem that blurred the lines between institutional journalism and grassroots content creation.

Lara Zalloum (LBCI) discussed how her team monitored social media hashtags and live streams to complement field reporting, creating a looped feedback system between physical events and digital interpretation.

Walid Abboud (MTV) noted that while traditional media maintained the production standards and broad reach, digital media provided immediacy, agility, and pluralistic voices, especially among youth.

Riad Kobeissy emphasized how investigative journalists at Al Jadeed integrated user-generated content and live feeds into prime-time reporting, creating what he called a "shared broadcast space" between professionals and citizens.

This synergistic logic reflects Chadwick's (2013) Hybrid Media System, where traditional and digital actors co-produce political narratives in real time.

4- Narrative Control and Counter-

Propaganda

Interviewees were particularly attuned to the battles over narrative and agenda-setting. Given Lebanon's media ownership structure, where most outlets are politically affiliated, many journalists saw digital platforms as necessary correctives to editorial constraints.

Jad Ghosn reflected on his departure from LBCI about his criticism of the ruling class, stressing that only on digital platforms could he retain "editorial sovereignty."

Mariam Al Bassam (Al Jadeed) highlighted the power of hashtags like #كلن_يعني_كلن as both a framing device and a moral stance that traditional media initially hesitated to adopt but eventually echoed due to its virality.

Riad Kobeissy explained how digital exposure often forced mainstream stations to adjust their coverage to remain credible with younger audiences.

These findings support McCombs and Shaw's (1972) agenda-setting theory and Entman's (1993) framing theory, demonstrating how digital platforms not only supplemented but at times subverted traditional media's role as gatekeepers.

5- Hybrid Public Spaces as Tools for Inclusion and Resistance

Finally, the interviews affirm that hybrid public spaces enabled greater inclusion and resilience: -

Rachel Karam described how women and marginalized groups found space, both literally in the streets and metaphorically on social media, to voice their demands and challenge traditional hierarchies.

Walid Abboud acknowledged that the Lebanese Uprising, in contrast to past movements, displayed a non-sectarian visual and digital grammar that reflected and reinforced a shared civic identity.

Multiple interviewees noted how WhatsApp groups, live streams, and diaspora engagements made the movement borderless, engaging communities in Montreal, Paris, and Sydney simultaneously.

This finding aligns with Tufekci (2017) and Castells (2009) on the globalized nature of digitally-mediated protest, where local struggles resonate transnationally via hybrid platforms.

*** Summary of Findings**

The nine interviews provide robust qualitative evidence that supports the article's hypothesis: hybrid public spaces, composed of both physical protest sites and digital platforms, are essential to the success and sustainability of modern social movements. These spaces foster real-

time coordination, amplify visibility through visual and narrative tools, and create a participatory media environment where activists challenge institutional power, build community, and control their stories.

*** Discussion**

The convergence of traditional media, digital platforms, and social movements has created a multifaceted and evolving landscape for contemporary activism. Hybrid public spaces, which merge physical and digital realms, provide novel avenues for social movements to amplify their voices and effect significant change. However, to leverage these spaces effectively, activists must navigate various challenges and remain committed to inclusivity and adaptability. This discussion delves into the complexities of hybrid public spaces, drawing insights from case studies like the Arab Spring and the Lebanese Uprising, to illustrate their transformative potential and the intricacies involved in harnessing their power.

*** The Dynamic Landscape of Hybrid Public Spaces**

Hybrid public spaces are characterized by the intersection of physical gatherings and digital activism. This duality enables social movements to capitalize on the

strengths of both realms: the immediacy and widespread reach of digital platforms, and the palpable solidarity and visibility of physical protests. The interplay between these spaces can create a powerful synergy that enhances the impact of social movements.

For instance, during the Arab Spring, activists used social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (X) to organize protests, share real-time updates, and communicate with both local and international audiences. The physical occupation of spaces provided compelling visuals and a sense of unity among protesters, which traditional media outlets broadcast globally (Gerbaudo, 2017). This combination of digital coordination and physical presence helped sustain the momentum of the movement and amplify its message.

*** Opportunities in Hybrid Public Spaces**

Hybrid public spaces offer unique opportunities for social movements to reach broader audiences, mobilize resources, and sustain long-term engagement. The rapid dissemination of information through digital platforms allows activists to coordinate actions efficiently and respond swiftly to changing circumstances. This real-

time communication is crucial for maintaining the momentum of protests and ensuring that participants remain informed and engaged.

The Lebanese Uprising of 2019-2020 exemplifies the potential of hybrid public spaces to transform social movements. Protesters used digital tools to document demonstrations, share live updates, and mobilize support both locally and internationally. Social media platforms enabled them to bypass traditional media gatekeeping, allowing for direct communication with the public and control over the movement's narrative. In the Lebanese Uprising, journalists like Ghosn and Maher described digital platforms as essential tools to frame narratives independently from sectarian mainstream outlets (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Entman, 1993). This strategic use of digital media helped highlight issues of corruption, economic mismanagement, and political ineptitude, maintaining global attention on Lebanon's struggles (Chen, 2012; Aouragh, 2020).

Moreover, the visual impact of hybrid public spaces can be profound. The powerful images and videos shared on social media can evoke strong emotional responses and galvanize public opinion. The

international dissemination of these visuals through traditional media further amplifies their reach and impact. As noted by interviewees like Wehbe and Karam, compelling visuals from Martyrs' Square reinforced legitimacy and widened support (Goodall, 2010).

*** Challenges in Leveraging Hybrid Public Spaces**

Despite the advantages, effectively leveraging hybrid public spaces requires addressing several challenges. One major challenge is the need to adapt to evolving technologies continuously. The digital landscape is ever-changing, with new platforms, tools, and algorithms emerging regularly. Activists must stay informed about these changes and develop the technical skills necessary to utilize new technologies effectively (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Another significant challenge is online surveillance and censorship. Digital activism is vulnerable to monitoring and suppression by state and non-state actors. Governments often deploy sophisticated surveillance techniques to track activists' online activities and disrupt their communication networks. To counter these threats, activists must employ robust security measures, such as encrypted messaging apps

and virtual private networks (VPNs), to protect their communications and maintain the integrity of their networks (Zuckerman, 2014).

Inclusivity and the digital divide also pose considerable challenges. Access to digital technologies and the internet is unevenly distributed, which can exclude marginalized communities from participating in digital activism. Ensuring that social movements are inclusive requires addressing these disparities and finding ways to engage those without internet access or digital literacy (Parks & Burgess, 2003). Activists must combine digital and traditional methods of communication to reach a broader audience and ensure that their movements represent diverse voices.

Urban planning and the accessibility of physical public spaces are also critical factors. The design and maintenance of public spaces can significantly impact the ability of social movements to organize and sustain protests. Accessible, safe, and well-designed public spaces can enhance the effectiveness of physical gatherings, while symbolic locations can amplify the impact of protests (Blomberg & Burrell, 1991). However, state authorities often implement measures to control or restrict access to these

spaces, posing additional challenges for activists.

*** Hypothesis Validation**

The integration of physical and digital spheres into hybrid public spaces demonstrably enhances the effectiveness of social movements in several ways: -

- 1- It fosters community, solidarity, and emotional energy through physical presence;
- 2- It enables real-time communication, rapid mobilization, and narrative control via digital platforms;
- 3- It amplifies visibility by bridging grassroots visuals and mainstream coverage;
- 4- It creates adaptive infrastructures that sustain movements under pressure.

Therefore, the hypothesis is strongly validated by the multi-method research conducted across the case study of Lebanon, as well as through the triangulation of in-depth interviews, media discourse, and digital ethnographic analysis. The findings demonstrate that hybrid public spaces do not merely coexist with traditional activism; they are transformative, generative, and essential to modern protest ecologies. This model of activism is not only effective; it is increasingly indispensable in the digital age.

*** Conclusion and Future Research Directions**

*** Conclusion**

In conclusion, the findings strongly validate the hypothesis that hybrid public spaces amplify the impact, visibility, and sustainability of social movements by synergizing the embodied solidarity of physical gatherings with the immediacy and scalability of digital activism. In physical public squares, protesters form a community, create visual narratives, and reclaim civic space; in digital spheres, they coordinate, broadcast, and reframe narratives in real time. Together, these realms create a recursive feedback loop that sustains civic energy and challenges hegemonic media and political structures.

The case study of Lebanese reveals that the strategic use of hybrid public spaces consistently empowers movements to reclaim the narrative, mobilize across geographic boundaries, and include diverse actors, including women, youth, and diaspora communities. In Lebanon, the uprising showcased a mature and innovative use of hybrid spaces to navigate a fragmented media environment, reinforcing the potential of such models in complex political systems.

Theoretically, the study reinforces and extends key frameworks in public sphere theory (Habermas, Castells), agenda-setting and framing (McCombs & Shaw, Entman), connective action (Bennett & Segerberg), and hybrid media systems (Chadwick). Empirically, it demonstrates how activists creatively manipulate both digital tools and urban geography to foster participation, counter disinformation, and maintain visibility even in hostile environments.

In conclusion, hybrid public spaces represent a significant advancement in the toolkit of modern activism. By effectively combining the physical and digital realms, social movements can harness the power of both to create more impactful and inclusive campaigns. However, realizing the full potential of hybrid public spaces requires a nuanced understanding of the associated challenges and a commitment to continuous adaptation and inclusivity. As the landscape of social activism continues to evolve, hybrid public spaces will undoubtedly play a crucial role in shaping the future of collective action and social change.

*** Future Research Directions**

Moving forward, one critical area is technological adaptation and innovation, understanding how

activists incorporate emerging tools such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, or decentralized platforms into their practices. Additionally, security and privacy remain pressing concerns, especially in repressive contexts. Research on the effectiveness of encryption, cybersecurity practices, and counter-surveillance strategies can offer practical guidance.

Inclusivity and the digital divide are another essential area, particularly regarding access for marginalized communities. Studies on digital literacy and inclusive communication strategies can help ensure broader participation. Similarly, the role of urban planning and public space design needs further examination to understand how accessibility, symbolism, and spatial control influence protest success.

The media dynamics of hybrid activism, how traditional and digital media interact, and how activists can effectively frame their messages, also warrant attention. Moreover, questions around the sustainability and long-term impact of movements remain. Longitudinal studies can help assess how hybrid protests transition from street mobilization to policy change and sustained civic engagement.

Ultimately, hybrid public spaces represent a transformative evolution in activism. They offer new possibilities but also demand strategic thinking, inclusivity, and adaptability. Future research must address these challenges to strengthen the effectiveness and resilience of social movements in an increasingly digital world.

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