

Principles of hacktivism and hackers: ignorance and prejudices!

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“If you think that hackers are just a bunch of anarchists ready to put everything on fire because it amuses them, you are wrong at all. We are much worse than that.” (No One Is Innocent)

Reminder of the hackers principles

Before addressing the different forms that hacktivism can currently take, let's go step by step to avoid any misunderstanding. Hacktivism is a portmanteau - a combination of the terms *hack* and *activism*. The hacktivist in the strict sense is closely linked to the notion of hacker.

To get a fair opinion, far away from the usual suspects, first of all let us recall the fundamental principles of hackers.

As they are able to serve as a philosophical framework for hacktivist actions ([slacktivism](#) included) in the reclaiming and exercising a responsible citizen power.

The difference between the “black hat” and “white hat”

In view of too often pejorative use of the term “hacker” let's be precise. It would not be a question of putting in the same basket those who put their technological knowledge to hostile ends the [“black hat” hackers](#), and those who put it at the service of good: the [“white hat”](#).

The hacker ethic and its six principles

The book [Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution](#) was published in 1984 by [Steven Levy](#). It was the first to really focus on hacker culture and its ethical principles. It will be necessary to wait until 2013, to have a French translation under the title [L'Ethique des hackers](#). According to Levy, the ethics of the hacker community follows six principles on which “white hats” do not compromise:

- Access to computers - as well as anything that can help to understand how the world works - must be universal and unlimited. Do not hesitate to roll up your sleeves to overcome difficulties.
- All information must be free.
- Be wary of authority - encourage decentralization.

- Hackers must be judged according to their hacks, not according to false criteria such as diplomas, age, ethnic origin or social rank.
- You can create art and beauty with a computer.
- Computers can improve our lives.

In this ethical framework, hackers are concerned about the interest of the collective. They are also – most of the time – against any form of authority that attacks digital freedom. They fight censorship, illegitimate surveillance. Their actions could be described as technological hacktivism.

More than 30 years later, Levy’s stated principles are still valid. As an illustration, Elliot Alderson warned of the dubious practices of India’s prime minister Narendra Modi, who compromised the personal data of millions of Indians who had downloaded his personal mobile application [NA MO](#). This form of technological hacktivism is the cornerstone of hacktivism for several reasons:

- It ensures that civil society is informed of the drift and technological risks to which it is exposed, whether intentional endangerment or not. It generally invites – prior to any disclosure to the general public – the responsible parties to make the necessary corrections.
- It allows other forms of hacktivism to retain their power to express themselves, like the [Telecomix](#) group, which ensures that states cannot deprive their people of access to the Internet.
- It defines ethical guidelines that make the action credible and legitimate.

But hacker ethics, goes beyond these six principles that define it. It is also a carrier of a major social innovation!

“To think is to say no.” [Alain](#)

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