



Full Length Article

Far from reach but near at hand: The role of social media for cross-national mobilization

Hsuan-Ting Chen^{a,*}, Sun Ping^a, Gan Chen^a^a School of Journalism and Communication, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, Hong Kong

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 4 February 2015

Revised 23 April 2015

Accepted 30 May 2015

Available online 23 July 2015

Keywords:

Social media

Personal attitude

Civic attitude

Emotions

Political participation

Survey

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of social media in contributing to participatory democracy in a cross-national context. By examining the Sunflower social movement in Taiwan and targeting a particular subgroup—Taiwanese citizens abroad—this study assesses factors that influence citizens abroad to engage in social media use for social movements as well as how different activities on social media contribute to political participation. The findings show that individual's personal attitude and civic attitude exert a positive influence on political participation through opinion expression and activism on social media. Similarly, negative emotions toward the government's handling of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) also promote political participation through expressing opinion and joining movement-related groups on social media. The paths signify the importance of attitude, emotion, and active use of social media for social movement in cross-national mobilization.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Social movements such as the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and the Indignants Movement in Spain have highlighted the significance of social media in energizing political participation. As Facebook, Twitter, microblogging, and other social media allow citizens to voice their opinions, organize social movements, and promote events, research has consistently showed the potential influence of social media activities on political involvement (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014; Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012). While most studies paid attention to the rise of social media in encouraging general citizens to be active in social movements, the role of social media in social movements also highlights the significance of technologically-mediated diasporas as the mobility of the worldwide population and the development of new media technologies help to facilitate not only the participation of co-located citizens, but also cross-national mobilization (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011; Fogt & Sandvik, 2008; Gajjala, 2006)

Social media have changed the dynamics of social mobilization by introducing speed and interactivity in mobilization and encouraging not only domestic but also international citizens to

participate, such as by following events, joining groups, and engaging in discussions on social media (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). Qualitative studies have documented several cases of social movements in previous literature in which social media provide an ideal venue that enables citizens who are not physically present to still contribute to the movement (e.g., Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). It is therefore important to empirically examine what factors motivate citizens who are not physically present to utilize social media for social movement and what kinds of social media activities citizens abroad can use to contribute to political participation.

This study aims to examine the role of social media use in cross-national mobilization by examining the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan in spring 2014. The Sunflower Movement marks another influential social movement led by students after the Wild Strawberry Movement in 2008 (Ho, 2010). In particular, social media played a greater role in the Sunflower Movement in mobilizing engagement by citizens abroad compared to previous social movements in Taiwan. Thus, this study examines what factors motivated Taiwanese citizens abroad to react to the movement via social media. It also explores how and to what extent Taiwanese citizens abroad employed social media to be involved in movement-related activities online and how these activities contributed to their participation in movement-related political activities.

Much research indicates that frequent social media use leads to information seeking, opinion expression, and political

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +852 3943 5275.

E-mail addresses: htchen@cuhk.edu.hk (H.-T. Chen), sunbuping@163.com (S. Ping), ganchen111@icloud.com (G. Chen).

discussion on social media, resulting in high political involvement (e.g., Valenzuela, 2013). In this study, we question whether the single factor of frequent social media use would lead to political activities on social media as a matter of course. Although social media greatly enhance the opportunities to access mobilizing information, literature suggests that citizens' political participation also depends on whether and how they are motivated to learn about and participate in politics (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Therefore, we argue that other attitudinal and affective factors should serve as significant motivational forces promoting individuals' attention, thought, and action related to the social movement on social media. These factors should be taken into account and examined simultaneously in order to understand the role of social media in social movements more comprehensively. In particular, for citizens who are distant from the location where a social movement is happening, motivation should serve as one of the primary factors in addition to frequency of social media use in prompting individuals' engagement in movement-related activities on social media. Accordingly, we explore the utilization of social media among Taiwanese citizens abroad in a cross-national context by not only examining the frequency of general social media use but also emphasizing individuals' attitude and emotion.

2. Background and literature review

2.1. The Taiwan Sunflower Movement

The Sunflower Movement is a student-led protest that began with the occupation of Taiwan's legislature in Taipei in March, 2014. The activists were protesting against the passage of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) with the People's Republic of China (PRC) by the Kuomintang, the ruling party in Taiwan. Protesters considered that the agreement would hurt Taiwan's economy and democracy and demanded a clause-by-clause review. It was the first time the legislature had been occupied by citizens in Taiwan, and the protest was widely covered in Taiwanese media. In addition to traditional media, the political issue itself has been a heated topic on social media, which have served as important channels for citizens to engage in the movement. During the protest, social media offered platforms for protesters to share timely information and allowed people to discuss the social movement, receive movement-related information, and voice their opinions. Moreover, Facebook pages supporting and opposing the Sunflower Movement were created to disseminate information and spark discussion. Of particular interest in this study, while the Sunflower Movement was taking place in Taiwan, overseas Taiwanese held rallies in support or against (Pan, 2014). As part of a global networking campaign, demonstrations abroad called attention to not only the effect of social media in a local social movement but also the role of social media in cross-national mobilization, providing an apt opportunity for this study to examine the factors that motivate citizens abroad to be engaged in the movement and the role of social media in encouraging political participation.

2.2. Diaspora, social media use, and social movement

Studies on the role of digital media technologies in facilitating political engagement in diaspora provided the theoretical reasoning for this study of Taiwanese citizens abroad and their use of social media for social movement (e.g., Fogt & Sandvik, 2008; Gajjala, 2006; Hirji, 2006; Ong & Cabañes, 2011). Digital media technologies have fulfilled a critical function of enabling citizens

abroad to maintain ties with their homeland as well as other types of social connectedness in diaspora and to participate in political activities across boundaries of geography and time zones (Hiller & Franz, 2004).

Paddy Scannell (1996) suggested that media serves to "double" reality by presenting public events through a "doubling of place," indicating that public events take place in two places—the place of the event itself and the place it is watched and heard (p. 76). New media technologies provide an ideal venue to enhance this "doubling." Mediating through new media technologies which transcends the boundaries of physical setting, place is "pluralized, not marginalized" (Moore, 2004, p. 21). The doubling of space also strengthens the sense of space by allowing people to access news and current affairs from their country of origin anytime and anywhere (Moore, 2004). Following this line of reasoning, the emergence of social media should exert a greater effect on the doubling of space due to the interactivity it provides users to actively engage in politics and its speed in disseminating information. Thus, scholars argue that social media foster a sense of identity and facilitate community formation for certain events or movements. For example, through interviews and participant observation, Ong and Cabañes (2011) found that Filipino scholars overseas displayed strong political interest in their homeland political issues. Heavy news consumption on the Internet and mediated interpersonal talk functioned as main ways for them to engage with political issues in their home country. Eltantawy and Wiest (2011) documented that messages on social media strengthened the collective identity of Egyptians worldwide as protesters created groups and initiated events on social media to bring Egyptians worldwide together to support and experience the protest in cyberspace. These qualitative studies stress the importance of digital media in cross-national mobilization.

As the literature highlights that cross-national political mobilization is not a marginal phenomenon, but an indispensable part of global political participation in which citizens abroad air their concerns, voice opinions, take actions, and make changes, this study investigates the factors and the consequences of social media use for social movements, using the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan as the case and targeting Taiwanese citizens abroad.

2.3. Frequency of social media use & social media use for social movements

Research on the effects of social media use on political participation can be traced back to the research tradition of the link between digital media use and citizen engagement. One school of thought argued that digital media are mainly consumed as entertainment, which results in less time and energy for citizens to devote themselves to social activities; from this point of view, digital media use is assumed to reduce citizens' social capital and their civic and political engagement (e.g., Popkin, 1991; Putnam, 1995). However, others contended that by providing all sorts of political information such as hard news and campaign information and by promoting online political interactions, digital media use is positively associated with civic and political participation (Hardy & Scheufele, 2005; Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004; Xenos & Moy, 2007). Since Facebook became an open service in 2006 and the so-called Twitter revolutions of 2009 occurred in Moldova and Iran, a flurry of studies have tried to map out the effects of social media use on fueling protests and other forms of political action, and these studies demonstrate that social media play an important role in citizens' political life (Macafee & De Simone, 2012; Tang & Lee, 2013; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Valenzuela, 2013; Valenzuela et al., 2012).

The positive effect of social media on citizens' political participation can be explained by three factors. First, social media serve

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/350119>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/350119>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)