Title: The role of social media in major public debates : the case of the 2012 student strike in Quebec

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Abstract

Spring 2012 was marked by a major social crisis in Quebec that stemmed from massive student protests against the provincial government's decision to steeply increase tuition fees. As it happened elsewhere (in Turkey, Brazil, Chile, etc.), the issue complexified from the original students' claims into a substantive social debate on the role of post-secondary education in society. Nicknamed "Maple Spring" (*Printemps érable*), the strong mobilizations challenged the taken-for-granted assumption of Canadian youth's lack of interest for political issues and low political engagement. Some works suggest that social media could have played an important part in that phenomenon. Facebook and Twitter, notably, served as information sources and sharing tools which, while not replacing traditional media, might have been used in a complementary way by young adults to get informed, discuss, and form their opinions.

The paper presents the results of a research we undertook to document those informational practices and to determine to what extent the role of social media in public debates are complementary to the role of traditional media, or whether they reveal emerging informational practices. In particular, and besides the use of social network sites – notably Facebook – as an echo chamber for mainstream media news, we were interested in the phenomenon of spontaneous political conversations that temporarily turn a Facebook post into a microsphere of semi-public debate (with "friends of friends"). Are these practices indicative of a collective appropriation of socio-digital platforms for democratic participation by the so-called "digital generation"? Is this

phenomenon transient and only related to the acuteness of the social issue, one with direct potential consequences on young adults' lives ?

The enquiry is based on a series of semi-structured interviews with young adults (students and non-students, N=30) who were aged 18-25 at the beginning of the academic year 2011-2012. The first part of the interview was conventional, with a series of topics ranging from informational habits to political engagement. The second part took place in front of the computer screen, and consisted in the examination of the participant's Facebook activity log around specific dates, over a whole year period— before, during and after the crisis. The posts, comments, "likes" and other forms of interactions with contents and other users were video-recorded with a dynamic screen-capture software and analyzed along with the participant's comments. This hybrid, "small data" approach allowed us to observe digital practices retrospectively, with the benefit of reflexivity from the subjects themselves.

Title: Storytelling on Twitter: The Occupy Movement and the narratives constructing it

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Abstract

Social Media developed in the 21st century have become tools for people to transmit and express their opinions for the global political scene. At the same time a worldwide recession and financial crisis has led people to make use of these technologies in means that were never intended to when they were launched. Looking specifically at the Occupy movement, and the role of social media, this paper will argue that Twitter cultivated a new public space where the movement was presented as a synergetic construction of events through smaller fragmented narratives. Considering the use of Twitter during a number of protests that adapted the 'Occupy' name, slogans or rationales, incubated in New York and London this presentation will be premised upon the following advances.

First, Twitter is the mechanism via which the story of the Occupy movement becomes publicly broadcasted and knowable. By considering each tweet as a fragment of the larger on-the-ground Occupy story the movement is traceable in a one-time system where the realisation of its existence is portrayed simultaneously *in* the world and *inside* its networks of production, offline and online. However, since Twitter's architecture can be described as having a fragmented bottom-up structure where the text is reshaped with every new tweet, it also sets up a metaphor for the conception of the Occupy narrative as a site of multiple, conflicting and fragmented meanings.

Second, social media storytelling has become a core skill for contemporary activism, affording people with the ability to translate deep social concerns into compelling narratives that help the public frame and act on their understandings of social movements. Here I argue that Twitter's discursive identity appoints an interactive role to the twitterers who use the medium as a tool to synergistically construct the movement's story. Exploring storytelling as a practice that bridges cultural and political engagement, I define social media storytelling as a shared activity in which users contribute to the telling, retelling, and remixing of the Occupy's narratives creating a space where social technology is changing traditional repertoires of contention. By suggesting

narratological theories and conceptual frameworks for the analysis of Occupy's multiple narratives, and offering an exploration into the architectures of the social media story, the aim is to reach to an analysis of the practices and processes through which Twitter becomes the storyteller of social events such as the Occupy movement.

Title: Dissecting the communications ecology behind the anti-National Education movement in Hong Kong

Bio: Shiau Ching Wong, PhD Candidate School of Culture and Communication, The University of Melbourne, Australia (shiauw@student.unimelb.edu.au).

Abstract

This paper examines the changing repertoire of mediated contention in contemporary social movements with the case study of the anti-National Education movement in Hong Kong. The movement was started by a group of secondary school students known as "Scholarism" in May 2011 in response to the government-proposed National Education program which was perceived to contain questionable "brainwashing" content favorable towards the Chinese Communist Party. With limited resources and initial poor media interest in the National Education issue, the activists relied on social media to publicize their claims and activities, and Scholarism's Facebook page became the key information and mobilizing resource for parents, students, civil society groups, mainstream media and other interested publics as the issue gained momentum from July 2012. The subsequent mass mobilization of parents, teachers and students at various high-profile protest events drove the government to make concessions to delay the program implementation, and the subject was eventually withdrawn in October 2012. It could be argued that Scholarism's astute usage of Facebook (Hong Kong's most popular social networking site) has set the modus operandi of online activism for other single-issue movements: the use of attractive and regularly-refreshed graphics; live updates of protest events; and sharing of relevant posts and photos of protesters with symbolic attire, creative placards or body signs.

Drawing from interpretative analysis of mainstream media coverage, Scholarism's social media content and interviews with the key activists, this paper analyzes the activists' tactical use of social media and media-oriented tactics, which contributed towards the success of the movement. In dissecting the "repertoire of communication" (Mattoni, 2013) used in the movement, the paper considers the strengths and limitations of the "mediation opportunity structure" proposed by Cammaerts (2012). The three-pronged framework of "media opportunity", "discursive opportunity" and "network opportunity" structures, provides a multi-

level examination of the openings and constraints for social movements via the interplay of mainstream media representations, self-representations from the activists' media channels, and technology-enabled collective action and communication, but lacks articulation of how the inter-interactions could impact the trajectory of the movement (Cammaerts, 2012). As this case study suggests, the gap lies in understanding the agency of the activists, mainstream media journalists, and mobilized local and overseas groups in their respective mediated representations, and how these forms of repertoire interacted and converged into a cohesive oppositional frame of "anti-brainwashing education" that rendered no other viable option for the authorities than to call off the program.

Title: Communication and Sustainability: Exploring nonprofit environmental groups use of social media

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Abstract

Environmental groups once relied on local campaigns and traditional media to broadcast their messages. Now social media has become a vehicle for their conservation and activism campaigns. This pilot study conducted a survey of five nonprofit environmental organizations (NPOs) and collected qualitative data from seven local chapters examining the use, measurement, and results with this growing mode of communication. The findings document the existence of a new type of activist communication – one that is reliant on a technological logic, rather than the standard mass communication network. Results indicate disparities between usage and analytics, suggesting this tech-organizational communication is embraced, but not managed structurally. Successful activist campaigns such as Facebook's Beyond Coal offer visible results in spurring online activism leading to the closure of 150 coal-fired plants. Other activism campaigns, whether responding to a crisis like Superstorm Sandy or a planned effort, such as river clean-up, require the same thoughtful, careful, and persistent social media presence and management of the communications. However, the findings illuminate an interesting dynamic in the use of social media in campaigns. A key finding suggests a gap between the managers of this communication tool and the executors of this tool, with knowledge of the results and the desired outcomes seldom shared. The goal is to extend the network, but measurement is not occurring, so ROI comparison is not possible. Yet, the users have a sense of which tool yields better reception, conducting most business at home, reporting a need for technical guidance from younger family members. The managers report that usage of social media tools allows creation of animage of

'being green' as it gives an appearance of using fewer resources. Prior research agrees nonprofit environmental groups routinely are under close scrutiny for spending and resource utilization in communication. Because of the gaps in staff structure and because communication officers and offices lack roadmaps for using social media, studying these communication practices requires a mix of methods. As prior literature has examined use of Internet, this study attempts to assess infrastructure among nonprofit environmental groups and research those who choose, use, and measure the tools social media offers. This study offers a valid first step in establishing a method for documenting these activist communication efforts and their results in the arena of nonprofit organizations and other like populations.

Title: Twitter and campaign spreading around the 5th IPCC report

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Abstract

Twitter enables rapid communications, information sharing and organization of activist groups and campaigns (Jansen/Zhang/Sobel/Chowdury, 2009). The 140 character long messages have proved to be efficient tools in spreading of campaign messages, in the context of political elections (e.g. Vergeer/Hermans/Sams, 2011) and activism (e.g. Bennett/Segerberg, 2011), for instance. Our aim is to discuss Twitter as a space for campaign spreading.

Around the publication of the 5th IPCC (Intergovernmental-Panel-for-Climate-Change) Assessment Report of the WorkingGroup 1 in September 2013 climate change in general and the IPCC report in particular were hotly debated topics on Twitter. Among these conversations and messages were tweets that were part of a campaign to "*drown out the phony propaganda and make sure the scientists' global wake up call is on the front pages [of major newspapers]*" (www.avaaz.org). Avaaz identifies itself as "*a global web movement to bring people-powered politics to decision-making*" and serves as a virtual space that contributes to community building (Kavada, 2012). Around the publication of the IPCC report in September 2013, Avaaz encouraged visitors to their website to send a tweet to an editor of a media organization and demand that they put the IPCC report on the front page and acknowledge that climate change is real and manmade: *.@[…] @nytimes Put the #IPCC report as front page news! Climate change is real and urgent #debateisover* http://www.avaaz.org/en/ipcc_media_hub_us/

In this paper, we will discuss findings of two recent case studies on Twitter communities (Pearce/Holmberg/Hellsten/Nerlich, in prep.) and the content in these communities

(Hellsten/Holmberg, 2014) and focus on the tweets that were part of the Avaaz campaign to put pressure on media organizations. Our main focus here is on Twitter as providing an online platform for campaigns targeting the media, and in particular the interaction between the tweeters and the spreading of the campaign message over time.

We collected the tweets containing the acronym IPCC around the publication of the report and coded them according to the tweeters' stance towards anthropogenic climate change as convinced of anthropogenic reasons for climate change, neutrals and skeptics (Pearce/Holmberg/Hellsten/Nerlich. in prep.). The tweet content within each of the three communities was analysed to detect which types of words functioned as integrating meanings across the communities and which words as differentiating such meanings (Hellsten/Holmberg, 2014). Using network analysis techniques we traced the spread of the Avaaz campaign tweets in the context of providing a virtual space for interactions and activism.