



The Status Quo, Problems and Enlightenment of Social Media in Contemporary Social Movements

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Abstract. The role of social media in social movements and political change around the world has attracted considerable attention. This paper takes the social movements at home and abroad in recent years as cases, and from the perspective of combining sociology and communication studies, points out that social media has many kinds, wide application and great influence in contemporary social movements. This paper analyzes the problems such as manipulation of public opinion, aggravation of social unrest and unstable communication effect when social media participates in social movements, and proposes the enlightenment of social media participation in social movements on China's social governance from the perspectives of diplomacy, virtual social governance and public political participation.

Keywords: social media · social movement · virtual society

1 Introduction

The social movement has different definitions in academic circles. By the usual definition: "Social Movements it refers to the extra-institutional political behavior of an organized group of people, under the guidance of a certain ideology, to promote or resist a certain Social Change" [1]. From the development of contemporary social movements, social media plays an increasingly significant role: "In other words, in their application, social media helped both to imagine and (partly) to realise the political community the protestors were striving to achieve; not just with regard to ideas or political vision, but to their very sense of community. Social media thus fulfilled a prefigurative function, in the sense that they did not merely serve as means to an end, but also (partly) embodied the social changes sought." [2]. So, which means social media itself has the attribute of seeking social change and can become an important force to promote the development of social movements. Based on this, this paper sorts out the status quo of social media in contemporary social movements and explains the existing problems in order to promote China's social governance and maintain social stability in the era of social media.

2 The Status Quo of Social Media in Contemporary Social Movements

Social media plays a relatively important role in social movements at this time. From the perspective of the changes of social media, the era of Web1.0 marked by the World Wide Web was officially opened in the early 1990s. Web1.0 era is the Internet in the era of personal computer. Users mainly obtain information one-way through the Internet. Most of them are personal websites with fewer content creators. Therefore, during this period, social media had little influence on the development of social movements. With the continuous development of information technology, the era of Web 2.0 popularized some social media such as Twitter and Facebook, and deeply integrated with social movements. The Twitter revolution in Iran in 2009 is one of the typical cases. During the protests against Iran's presidential election in June 2009, Tehran blocked several websites and cell phone text messages, leaving Twitter as the only way for Iranians to communicate with the outside world. In the meantime, the State Department had hoped that Twitter would postpone a planned repair of its global network, making it an important medium of communication for Iranians. During the Arab Spring in 2010, Facebook and Youtube joined in the resolution, and the relevance of social media to the mechanisms of social movements began to gain attention. Black Lives Are Expensive and the Me Too movement have opened up the age of social media. "BLACK LIVES MATTER" means "Black Lives Matter". Community self-defense patrol officer George Zimmerman after being found not guilty, the topic "Black Lives Matter" has become popular on social media. The "Me Too" movement was launched in response to sexual assault, with an actress calling on all women who have been assaulted to come forward and tell their tragic stories so that the government will take the issue seriously. Tens of thousands of people have weighed in on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook to tell their stories.

It can be seen that social media provides a platform for the public to talk and encourage, especially a place for the vulnerable groups to temporarily get shelter. Nowadays, various social media platforms, such as Tik Tok, YouTube, Instagram, BLM, Twitter and Facebook, have become platforms to promote the generation and development of social movements, and to a certain extent, provide a place for vulnerable groups to protect their rights and interests. Take Twitter as an example. As one of the most used social media platforms, it has the function of spreading information quickly. Through this platform, both the public and the media can get to know the facts and participate in them, helping each other and enhancing the popularity of the topic. While the public has become the main producer of "citizen journalism" with the help of Twitter, the media can also obtain first-hand information through this platform, which forms a new mode of communication. Another example, YouTube. The New York Times published an article titled "How YouTube Radicalized Brazil", describing how YouTube analyzed the topics of interest to users by analyzing the number and duration of their views and promoted them. And this approach will subtly change people's political attitudes, but also in health care, education and other aspects of the impact.

Based on the above influences on the public, social media plays an irreplaceable role in social movements. At first, social media lowers the threshold of participation in social movements, as well as the cost of communication and coordination in the

process of participation. At second, expressing opinions about social movements on social media arouses emotions among people, arouses their sense of justice, and spreads them. At third, this method accelerates and facilitates the diffusion of information, which can promote public opinion in a short period of time and form the phenomenon that everyone can become a participant or supporter of social movements. The new ways in which modern social movements are in sharp contrast to traditional ones. Social media has “personalised” social movements, from those created by organisations and political parties to those created by individuals who can raise public opinion and attract attention. With access to the latest and relevant information simply through mobile electronic devices, it is easier and more active for people to participate in social movements, which may lead to emotional resonance and form a collective identity on certain issues. For example, the “MeToo” event strengthened women’s identity and made women unite to resist unfair treatment. From this point of view, social media has become an important birthplace and fermentation ground of public opinion, providing an excellent platform for the public to spread views and form public opinion to a large extent.

3 The Problem of Social Media in Contemporary Social Movements

Lindsay Ems takes for “Social theorists like Phillip Agre suggest that technologies are simply amplifiers of previously instantiated social forces, orientations and motivations. Political activities, according to this perspective, are embedded in larger social processes and technologies act to change the arena in which social and institutional forces play out while amplifying particular forces unequally.” [3] In other words, social media platforms cannot directly from social movements, but exist as a way to promote social movements. They are only a supplement rather than a key to social movements. The instrumentality of social media means that its position and role in social movements, especially the existing problems, should be treated rationally.

Firstly, as the manipulation of social media by Western countries. Social media is paradoxical, and it also embraces purposeful ideas in giving people a broader platform, for example, according to the article “US Media Expose: US Military ‘Fake Accounts’ manipulate social media public opinion” reported by Overseas website, the cooperation between the US Department of Defense and social networks has lasted for five years. The official will ban the accounts that publish unfavorable comments to the country, and create some fake accounts to support the government’s comments, so as to control the Internet situation and achieve the desired effect. The United States and other Western countries, to some extent, regard social media and other platforms as “weapons of the new Cold War”, making social media a tool for Western countries to overthrow other countries’ governments and guide people’s thoughts.

Secondly, social media may exacerbate social unrest while promoting social change. The surge in the number of users of new media also represents a growing enthusiasm for political participation. On social media, citizens can freely participate in social movements and express their thoughts. However, while social media has increased citizens’ enthusiasm for political participation, it also has certain potential risks. On the one hand, from the perspective of social media, the effect of mass communication has a duality: fragmentation and polarization, which on the one hand weakens the influence of social

control and traditional values; The other is political activism. Some scholars believe that “internet is the largest experiment involving anarchy in history. Hundreds of millions of people are, each minute, creating and consuming an untold amount of digital content in an online world that is not truly bound by terrestrial laws [4]”. On the other hand, from the perspective of the public, the extreme, populism and irrationalization of public opinion caused by the “information cocoon” will make the public tend to browse what they want to see on social media and what makes them feel happy and comfortable. For example, in the “Black Lives Matter” movement, the black man Floyd was crushed to death by the police, which triggered riots and riots across the United States. As the incident unfolded, several instructive videos appeared frequently on social media. Under the influence of these videos, many people’s emotions gradually replaced reason. The movement’s original intention to fight racial discrimination was also distorted, and participants even began to indiscriminately attack the founding leaders of the United States. Black Lives are expensive became politically correct.

Finally, “viral transmission” leads to unstable transmission effect. “Viral communication” refers to the mode of communication that “enables the audience to benefit from participating in the production and transmission of information, enables the information recipient to become both the publisher and the forwarding of information, and utilizes the power of the public to carry information and spread rapidly in the mode of interpersonal circle sweeping [5]”. The secrecy of users’ identities and freedom of expression, coupled with a lack of restraint and oversight, make social media a “home to whoppers and malicious slander.” For example, the young man who set himself on fire during the Arab Spring, was portrayed as a “martyr”, but later investigations revealed that he was not an honest peddler but an ex-convict loafer. All his falsified information is directed by various organizations and groups to achieve their own political purposes in the name of “human rights”. Which means, as changing public opinion is something that can be done easily at home with a mobile phone or computer, social media has become a platform that is prone to fabricating lies due to its diminishing credibility. And these manufactured lies spread like a virus to all regions. When false information takes the upper hand and dominates public opinion, the network social movements lose its meaning. During the streets of Iran during the 2009 elections, tendentious photos and texts were taken and posted online by people with political motives. This behavior stirred up the emotions of many people who did not know the truth and made them participate in it, forming a huge vortex of public opinion, forming pressure on the authorities and achieving the political goals of the agitators. There is a psychological assumption that most people try to avoid the isolation that comes from holding certain attitudes and beliefs alone, creating what is known as The Spiral of Silence. Base on this. we find that people will participate in the discussion in order to be gregarious and not unusual, which increases the visibility and fluidity of the topic and thus accelerates the formation of public opinion and social movements.

4 The Enlightenment of Social Media in Contemporary Social Movements

Social media is no longer just a platform for communication or relaxation, as it once was. It becomes the starting point of a vicious cycle through which someone can quickly and efficiently achieve their own goals or gain profits. First of all, social media has become an indispensable part of social movements. The country needs to be vigilant and guard against infiltration, sabotage and subversive activities by foreign forces through social media. It should pay attention to the influence of social media on international public opinion and formulate corresponding policies and strategies, so as to reasonably and effectively deal with the pressure and trends brought by online public opinion. Social media is increasingly important in the age of digital diplomacy. Therefore, we should improve the external public opinion influence, cultural appeal, diplomatic persuasion, international credibility and the right of speech and other soft power.

Secondly, we should pay attention to the status of social media in social development and strengthen the governance of virtual society. The virtual society is the extension of the real society in the network world and the reflection of the real society. Therefore, we should focus on solving real problems and leveraging the role of social media channels. At first, in the aspect of system, the government should improve the control of virtual society, strengthen the dreading of social contradictions, reduce social contradictions at the same time, ease the network social conflicts accordingly, change the direction of public opinion. At second, at the technical level, we should strengthen the research and development of network information technology, improve our information level, and improve the governance system of virtual society through technology. For example, network technology can be used to strengthen the supervision and screening of network information, filter out some information that affects the order of network society and the development of network morality, and promote the sound operation and development of network virtual society. At third, at the level of values, we should attach importance to the psychological characteristics and development situation of the people, actively use socialist core values to educate and guide the people, and fundamentally solve the problem. It is important to note that guiding people to the right ideas is not about depriving them of their freedom of speech, but about making them less susceptible to extremist ideas.

Finally, we should pay attention to the influence of social media on the public and guide the public to participate in social movements in an orderly manner. Objectively speaking, social movements is a way for people to participate in social governance. Therefore, the government should not completely prohibit people from participating in social movements because of negative public opinion caused by using social media to participate in social movements. On the contrary, the government should optimize the order of participation, urge the public to participate rationally and express their views reasonably, such as posting problems that cannot be solved in the real society on social platforms. Therefore, the government should be familiar with the psychological characteristics and rules of people's participation in social movements, and conduct channeling and optimization of social movements on the network in a strategic way, so as to broaden and smooth the channels of people's political expression and demands.

5 Conclusion

To sum up, I think the application of social media in contemporary society is characterized by variety, wide application and great influence. At the same time, social media is prone to spreading lies and forming wrong public opinions when participating in contemporary social movements. For China's social governance, social media's participation in contemporary social movements can enlighten us that we should attach importance to the indispensable status of social media in social development, and be alert to the negative impact of social media on social movements, so as to better solve the problems existing in the real society.

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