AMCIS 2022 Proceedings

SIG SI - Social Inclusion and Socio-Technical Issues

Aug 10th, 12:00 AM

From Hashtags to Movements: A Framing Perspective of The Role of Social Media in the Emergence and Development of Impactful Social Movements

Fatima Mohammed
University of North Carolina at Greensboro, f_mohammed@uncg.edu

Hamid R. Nemati
UNCG, hrnemati@uncg.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2022

From Hashtags to Movements: A Framing Perspective of The Role of Social Media in the Emergence and Development of Impactful Social Movements

Emergent Research Forum (ERF) Papers

Fatima Mohammed
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Bryan School of Business and Economics
f_mohammed@uncg.edu

Hamid Nemati
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Bryan School of Business and Economics
hrnemati@uncg.edu

Abstract

Social media plays a critical role in social movement activities. This study takes a framing perspective to investigate how social media affordances support the process of creation, communication, and negotiation of frames and assess the impact of the framing process on social movement outcomes.

Keywords

Social movements, framing, social media, social justice.

Introduction

There is no doubt that social media has changed how social movements emerge and operate. The recent proliferation of research on social media and social movements highlights the critical role digital technologies play in collective actions. Yet the phenomenon of social movement activities on digital platforms remains puzzling. Most scholarly research on digital technologies and social movements has been directed toward understanding the role of social media in mobilizing related resources (Sæbø et al., 2020). As such existing studies have drawn from multiple theoretical lenses, especially affordance theory and resource mobilization theory, to highlight the important role of social media in collective activities, e.g., supporting the circulation of information, decision making, aiding the organization of CA (Karahanna et al., 2018; Zheng & Yu, 2016).

Notwithstanding these contributions, important opportunities for research remain. First, there is relatively scant explanation of the discursive interaction process between social media users in the context of social movements and the subsequent effect of different processes on social movement outcomes. Delving deep into the interactive process of social movements clarifies how actors communicate about reality regarding social issues on social media. Secondly, most studies on this phenomenon have concentrated on analyzing the dynamics of specific successful movements, e.g., the Arab Springs. As such, there are limited generalizable conclusions regarding online social activities. To broaden the understanding the role of social media in social movement activities, it is imperative to understand the dynamics of communication and meaning-making among organizations, groups, and individuals. Adding to the call for IS researchers to contribute to theoretical and empirical evidence of the complex roles of digital technologies and social justice issues (Aanestad et al., 2021), this study seeks to extend IS and social movement literature by understanding the important interaction processes that affect the success of online movements in addressing social justice issues.

This paper aims to examine how social media affordances support the process of creation, communication, and negotiation of frames and assess the impact of the framing process on movement outcomes. The framing process encompasses how a set of interactive messages are presented to the audience, which

influences the choices that people make in processing that information. As such, this study seeks to analyze how social media aid the negotiation of shared meaning and the impact of this process on social movement outcomes. Specifically, we aim to examine the nature and purpose of social movement frames and the use of component IT artifacts such as hashtags and comments to facilitate the framing process towards addressing social justice issues on social network platforms. The processes in which users derive and align with meanings are very pertinent as it provides insight into how social media is used to incite movement activities and change. Therefore, understanding the process of meaning-making on social media is relevant to understanding the central role of social media in building or constraining movements.

The paper advances as follows. We begin by proving the important theoretical literature underpinning the study. We then propose and describe elements of the theoretical model and conclude with a brief future research plan and conclusion.

Theoretical Underpinning

Social Movements

Social movements are grounded in collective identity and are defined as "action systems comprised of mobilized networks of individuals, groups, and organizations which, based on a shared collective identity, attempt to achieve or prevent social change, predominantly by means of collective protest" (Rucht, 1999; 207). Movements emerge based on the need for change (Turner & Killian, 1957). According to McAdam et al. (1996), scholarly work on social movements points to three broad sets of factors to explain the emergence and development of social movements: (1) mobilizing structures, (2) political opportunity structures, (3) framing processes. Mobilizing structures is concerned with resource construction pertinent for mobilizing people for collective activities, while political opportunity focuses on the contextual opportunities and constraints that affect collective activities. On the other hand, framing processes conceptualize the construction of shared meaning and collective understanding of the goals and purpose of CA (McAdam et al. 1996).

Most studies on the role of digital technologies in social movement activities have focused on the affordance of resource mobilization from the resource mobilization theory. This perspective, while essential, assumes the ubiquity of grievances and takes a static view towards participation, ignoring the various interactive and communicative processes of mobilization (Snow et al., 1986) and studying mobilization and participation from a frame analysis perspective addresses these concerns. Focusing on framing complements existing studies to provide a more comprehensive view of online social movement activities.

Framing and Frame Analysis

Over the past several decades, framing has been extensively used to explain how individuals analyze and identify norms and social events they should follow and actions to take in a given situation (Benford & Snow, 2000). Bateson first posited the concept of framing and defined psychological frames as a "spatial and temporary bounding of set of interactive messages" (Bateson, 1972: 197) that operates as a form of metacommunication (Hallahan, 2008). Framing revolves around "meaning" that motivates action and the process of meaning-making (Gamson, 1995). According to Snow et al. (1986), frames render events or occurrences meaningful and such functions to organize experiences and guide action, whether individual or collective. The concept of framing has been widely used in sociology research to study social movements and collective actions. Framing processes are relevant and regarded as a central dynamic in understanding the character and course of social movement (Benford & Snow, 2000). Frame analysis has also been used in mass-media communication research to show how media packages and present events and issues to the public (Gamson, 1995; Scheufele, 1999).

In IS studies, framing has been used to investigate stakeholder motivation in IS projects, and norm formation in online communities (Ivaturi & Chua, 2019; Khoo & Chua, 2009). In the social movement context, Sæbø et al. (2020) provided evidence to support the importance of social media affordance in the framing process of social action activities. They identified that some affordances of social media are actualized to support the process of creation, communication, and negotiation of frames. Venkatesan et al. (2021) have also used framing analysis to characterize protest activities during the Egyptian Evolution in

2011. Yet, there is limited information about framing processes on social media and hence its analysis in social movement research.

This study takes a discourse route as it seeks to understand how social movement frames are created, communicated, and negotiated and the effect of the framing process on users' participation and successful movements activities on social media. Given the central role those digital platforms play in social movements, understanding how meaning is constructed to legitimize collective activities and actions becomes essential and provides vital insights into how SMOs and related organizations can utilize social media in organizing effective movements.

Theoretical Model Development

Framing as Meaning Construction: Frame Construction and Core Framing Task

In social movements, activists can be viewed as "signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for movement supporters, constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers" (Benford & Snow, 2000: 613). Activists, therefore, have an essential task in communicating toward social movement outcomes. Prior studies have identified three core framing tasks characterized as diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing. Diagnostic framing concerns the identification of a problem often by identifying its causes and assigning blame. Prognostic framing is concerned with the suggestion of solutions, strategies, and tactics to the problem. While motivational framing serves as a call to arms or rationale for action (Snow & Benford, 1988). Diagnostic and prognostic framing are directed towards consensus mobilization, while motivational framing results in action mobilization. Consensus mobilization is the process of creating shared understanding in interpretation, while action mobilization is the process in which consensus turns into action. The degree to which activists attend to these tasks will determine the success of participant mobilization. All things being equal, the more the tasks are robust or richly developed and interconnected, the more successful mobilization efforts are (Snow & Benford, 1988). We propose that social movement frames that are diagnostic and prognostic influence consensus mobilization online, while motivational framing results in online action mobilization.
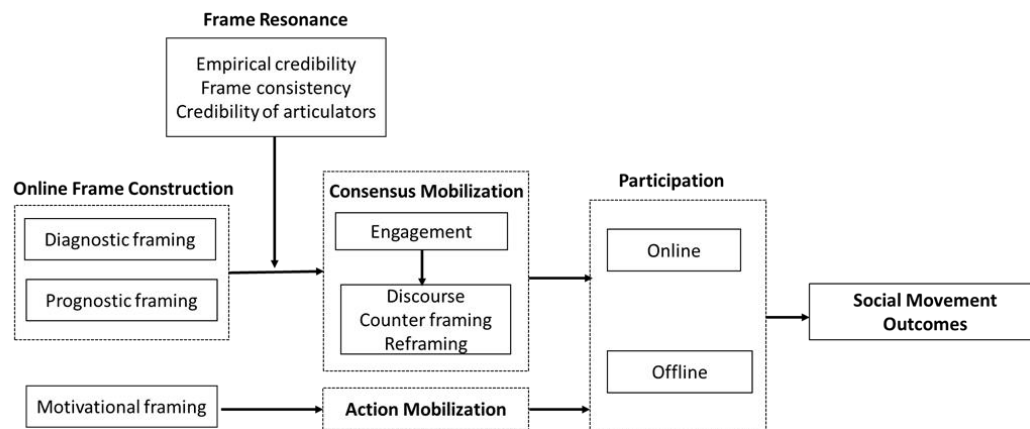
Proposed Theoretical Model

Figure 1. Theoretical Model of Online Social Movement Framing

Frame Resonance

For framing efforts to be effective, there needs to be a synergy between the properties of the frames and the characteristics of the broader cultural environment in which collective action framing takes place (Benford & Snow, 2000; McCammon, 2013). The credibility of a frame is an important factor accounting for the degree of resonance of the frame. The credibility of any framing is a function of three factors: frame consistency, empirical credibility, and credibility of the frame articulators. A frame is consistent when there is consistency among the articulator's beliefs, claims, and actions. Empirical credibility relates to the extent

to which the contents of the frame fit real-world happenings. Lastly, the credibility of the frame articulators is an important factor in achieving resonance, as credibility has been associated with persuasiveness (Benford & Snow, 2000). As such, we propose that the degree of credibility of the frame affects the effectiveness of frames in the mobilization of social movements.

Engagement and participation on social media

Contextually, user engagement is an ongoing discursive process in which users interact with a particular content or information on social media. User engagement is measured through platform functionalities such as commenting, "retweeting," sharing, liking, and disliking posts. Continued engagement on social media can be attributed to the action and participation that social media features afford (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2016). Social media engagement allows people to clarify their identity (bios), follow opinions, share experiences, debate and counter opinions, and hence facilitate the process of frame alignment. According to Snow et al. (1986), frame alignment is necessary for movement participation, whether by nature or intensity. Therefore, we propose that engagement activities such as commenting, and "retweeting" facilitate discourse, reframing, and counter framing towards consensus mobilization.

Social Movement Participation

There have been several conflicting results on the relationship between offline and online activism. While some studies have shown that there may be no correlation between online and offline action as people's behavior online and offline may be different. Yet, other empirical studies have shown a positive relationship between online and offline activism (Greijdanus et al., 2020). This study aligns with the latter and proposes that the effect of framing online and framing resonance translates into both online and offline participation. As such, the effect of online activities on offline participation is included in this study.

Future Research Direction

A mixed-methods approach will be used to empirically test the proposed theoretical model; analyses will include both data from social media and data from interviewing social movement activists. Multiple social movements will be identified, and hashtags and tweets dating to the beginning of the movement will be collected and categorized into frames. Engagement metrics of these tweets (reactions, comments, and retweets) will be collected to access discourse, the reframing process, and how frames align with that of users. The correlation between original frames and frames identified in retweets and comments will represent frame alignment. Social movement activists and leaders will be identified and interviewed on how they communicate on social media in constructing collective identities and enhancing participation in movement activities. We will establish a link between online and offline activities using contextualized time periods of online activities created based on offline events. A three-step process using topic modeling, network analysis, and community detection will be used for frame analysis (Walter & Ophir, 2019). Topic modeling has been argued to allow the automatic identification of frames in texts in a way that reduces researcher bias (DiMaggio et al., 2013). Similarly, semantic networks will enable us to identify groups of words in networks, with manifests as frames (Baden, 2018). Community detection helps in revealing relations in networks. Grounded theory approaches will be used to analyze interview responses.

Conclusion

This study seeks to investigate the drivers of impactful social movement outcomes through a framing perspective by understanding the dynamics of communication and discourse that lead to specific social movement outcomes. Research on technology and social movement as such advances knowledge on how IS can be used to create change for the good of society.

REFERENCES

Aanestad, M., Kankanhalli, A., Maruping, L., Pang, M.-S., & Ram, S. (2021). *Digital Technologies and Social Justice*. MISQ. https://misq.umn.edu/skin/frontend/default/misq/pdf/CurrentCalls/SI_DigitalTechnologies.pdf

Baden, C. (2018). Reconstructing frames from intertextual news discourse: A semantic network approach to news framing analysis. In *Doing News Framing Analysis II* (pp. 3–26). Routledge.

Bateson, G. (1972). Steps to an ecology of mind: Collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry. *Evolution & Epistemology. Paladin, London*.

Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *26*(1), 611–639.

DiMaggio, P., Nag, M., & Blei, D. (2013). Exploiting affinities between topic modeling and the sociological perspective on culture: Application to newspaper coverage of US government arts funding. *Poetics*, *41*(6), 570–606.

Gamson, W. A. (1995). Constructing social protest. *Social Movements and Culture*, *4*, 85–106.

Greijdanus, H., de Matos Fernandes, C. A., Turner-Zwinkels, F., Honari, A., Roos, C. A., Rosenbusch, H., & Postmes, T. (2020). The psychology of online activism and social movements: Relations between online and offline collective action. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *35*, 49–54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.03.003

Hallahan, K. (2008). Strategic framing. *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*.

Ivaturi, K., & Chua, C. (2019). Framing norms in online communities. *Information & Management*, *56*(1), 15–27. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2018.05.015

Karahanna, E., Xu, S. X., Xu, Y., & Zhang, N. A. (2018). The needs–affordances–features perspective for the use of social media. *Mis Quarterly*, *42*(3), 737–756.

Khoo, H., & Chua, C. (2009). *Running to Stand Still: How Organizations Motivate Users to Participate in Maintenance Upgrades*. Fourth International Research Workshop on Information Technology Project Management.

McAdam, D., McCarthy, J. D., & Zald, M. N. (1996). *Comparative perspectives on social movements: Political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings*. Cambridge University Press Cambridge.

McCammon, H. (2013). Resonance, Frame. In *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470674871.wbespm180

McCay-Peet, L., & Quan-Haase, A. (2016). A model of social media engagement: User profiles, gratifications, and experiences. In *Why engagement matters* (pp. 199–217). Springer.

Rucht, D. (1999). The transnationalization of social movements: Trends, causes, problems. In *Social movements in a globalizing world* (pp. 206–222). Springer.

Sæbø, Ø., Federici, T., & Braccini, A. M. (2020). Combining social media affordances for organising collective action. *Information Systems Journal*, *30*(4), 699–732. https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12280

Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, *49*(1), 103–122.

Snow, D. A., & Benford, R. D. (1988). Ideology, frame resonance, and participant mobilization. *International Social Movement Research*, *1*(1), 197–217.

Snow, D. A., Rochford, E. B., Worden, S. K., & Benford, R. D. (1986). Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation. *American Sociological Review*, *51*(4), 464–481. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095581

Turner, R. H., & Killian, L. M. (1957). *Collective behavior* (Vol. 3). Prentice-Hall Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

Venkatesan, S., Valecha, R., Yaraghi, N., Oh, O., & Rao, H. R. (2021). INFLUENCE IN SOCIAL MEDIA: AN INVESTIGATION OF TWEETS SPANNING THE 2011 EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION. *MIS Quarterly*, *45*(4).

Walter, D., & Ophir, Y. (2019). News Frame Analysis: An Inductive Mixed-method Computational Approach. *Communication Methods and Measures*, *13*(4), 248–266. https://doi.org/10.1080/19312458.2019.1639145

Zheng, Y., & Yu, A. (2016). Affordances of social media in collective action: The case of Free Lunch for Children in China. *Information Systems Journal*, *26*(3), 289–313.