

Vesalius College

The role of new media in political communication

Case study on Obama's electoral campaign and Chinese micro-blog

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Abstract

This paper mainly discusses the new media's influence on the political communication. The author contribute two case study- Obama's electoral campaign and Chinese Weibo "revolution", the author is focus on the effect that the new media on the political communication which the former case study represent the developed countries (from electoral campaign aspect) and second case study represent the developing countries (from government operation such as information technology, telecommunication policy, etc. aspects). At the end of the paper, the author will make a brief compare the communication and new media in between the developed and developing countries, and future relationships between new media and political communication.

I. Introduction

Today we are living in a world which technology changing the world. Because of the rapidly growth and constant changing of the new media, it brought us the whole world into "one family"; People can talk to each other at the every corner of the world instead of waiting a few months for mails arriving. In addition, the new media technology has put a great influence on political communication, which is what journalism and mass communication emphasis most of the attention on the political communication. Political Communication of new media is a communication strategy that used by government to political parties and obtains public support for the time of electoral campaign or other times.

New media has permeated different areas such as social, political and economic, transforming the way we life our life and even our thoughts towards specific political issues. However, the emergence of new media has given rise to a set of assumptions

surrounding technological advancement that overlook historical dimensions and ways of thinking about new technology. More importantly, the "new" part of the new media carries out with a renewed sense of optimism about technology and its ability to revive political landscapes and drive the political communication.

Facebook and Twitter can be the two of the most influential social new media within the worldwide. According to the 2012 report, there are more than 900 million people are the members of the Facebook while Twitter has more than 500 million users in total. With the tremendous growth, they can both have enough capability to provide the platforms for general public to participate political discussion. U.S political actors said that the most predominant and clever strategy that Barack Obama used is being able to access to the new media within his last electoral campaign. So did Chinese micro blog- Weibo's rising, it is causing a revolution on Chinese political communication, people are never thought of China will have this level of democracy because of the new media.

II. Media's effect

The media are not the holders of power, however, it is decided by the large space that the media constitute. In some society, political communication is depending on the new media. The language of media has its rules with largely built around images- not necessarily visual, but images. The most powerful and convictable message is through the image. Media politics leads to the personalization of politics around leaders that can be adequately sold in the political market. This should not be trivialized as the color of the tie or the looks of a face. It is the symbolic embodiment of a message of trust around a person, around the character of the person, and then in terms of the image projection of this character. In the traditional theory of political communication, there are more of

elites and professional journalists are interacting with each other through new media. Media act as gate keepers to keep the information they want the audience to know flowing and shaped the public's public sphere. Elihu Katz (1997) emphasized the transformation of the media environment through the fragmentation of the audience, and the increasing control that new communication technologies give to the consumers of the media. The growing role of on-line, multimodal social networking accelerates this transformation. According to Williams and Delli Carpini (2004), there are three negative angles that show the new media's influence on the political communication. Firstly, the expansion of political media can blur the news value itself, which led audience to struggle with the gatekeeper. Public will use more time to distinguish them and find the news they want to know. Secondly, The expansion of media outlets and the move to a 24-hour news cycle has created new opportunities for non-mainstream political actors to influence the setting and framing of the political. Twenty-four hours news give enough opportunity for other electoral campaign to do propaganda and raising its power. And thirdly, people are the one that receiving the message from the new media, its up to individuals' interpretation. According to Williams and Delli Carpini, the rise of cell phones, videogames, ipods, and other new technologies has broken down the binary between media and the rest of everyday life on which most of political communication used to rest.

III Obama's Election Campaign: making the use of the new media

President Obama's election campaign was the beginning and most successful case that for the researchers and professors to study the effect of the new media technologies on political communication. "A major success factor for Obama's victory was how Obama's campaign used social media and technology as an integral part of its strategy, to raise

money, and, more importantly, to develop a groundswell of empowered volunteers who felt they could make a difference.” His example of using new digital media was a huge source of inspiration for the political campaign’s leader all over the world. Generally, Obama was get support from the tremendous volunteer workers who prepare to devote themselves and full of the zest, which are willing to work day and night to commitment and deliberation. These people including: creative political writers, experienced media professional and advanced visual artists. The campaign is also invited the outstanding graphic designers to design the best brand image of Obama that can be portray him as the best president of USA. Then they create a website named as “MyBarrackObama.com”, was launched for the use of to spread the messages of the election campaign throughout the country. The campaign not only used this website for more effectively than other candidates to organize, communicate, and fundraise, but also leveraged them to support its grassroots strategy that tapped into the hearts of the voters. What resulted was both a victory for the Democrats and Obama, and the legacy of one of the most effective Internet marketing plans in history, where social media and technology enabled the individual to activate and participate in a movement. At the meantime, Obama’s posters, pictures have a huge visual coverage, people can see he almost all of the daily activities and there are videos for the general public for the speech presented by the Obama as well. Later on, the E- campaign become very popular and there are more than 13 million Americans receiving the regular political campaign emails from Obama’ team. Also, according to the statistic, Obama has 5 million “friends” on more than 15 social website, 3 million people on Facebook. There are 8.5 million visitors on MyBarackObama.com monthly, 35,000 volunteers organized 200,000 offline events; nearly 2,000 official

YouTube channels, watched more than 80 million times, 135,000 subscribers, 442,000 other-generate related YouTube videos. Just like the use of Internet, Obama also using mobile phone to disseminate the electoral messages to voters, so does he use the service to deliver his thankfulness and encouragement to his campaign workers. E-mail Matching Campaign is another tool that he used for his electoral campaign. In mid-2007, the team invented grassroots matching. They sent out two e-mails: the first asked prior donors to whether they can give again if the campaign could find a new donor to donate the same amount; in the second, non-donors were told that if they donated any amount, the campaign would find a match from someone who had already donated. "This was incredibly compelling," said Rospars. "We raised tremendous people who make connection with grassroots supporters."

The Obama campaign made a perfect interconnection between new media technology and politics. It is start a revolution that the new media is rising up to become the crucial propaganda means of the electoral campaign.

III. Case study on Chinese micro-blog (Weibo)

For the last two decades, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been gone through the extremely quickly pervasion of information and communications technology that has given rise to new social networks with unparalleled power to gradually pushing China into a more democratic process. Many of the scholars who studied the transformation of political communication in China have pointed out that the capability of one's state to strengthen and control media power is to through the commercialization of mainstream media. Recently the challenges that the new media in china facing is how to control the information, in other side, the popularization of Internet is shaping Chinese politics at

some level. We can see through the statistics as an exam of information regime theory and found out that the new media, or information is change the relationship between the country and public. The diffusion of Internet, mobile communication, digital media, and a variety of tools of new media has developed a series of horizontal networks of interactive communication between local and government. The political communication of the industrial society was centered around the mass media, characterized by the mass distribution of a one-way message from one to many. The communication foundation of the network society is the global web of horizontal communication networks that include the multimodal exchange of interactive messages from many to many both synchronous and asynchronous.

In late 2009, there is a Twitter-like micro-blog (Chinese called Weibo) have exploded in popularity in China, it already have over 300 million users by 12th, March. It is estimated that by 2013 up to 30% of China's Internet uses will have a Sina Weibo account. The experts foreseen that Weibo is causing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s media landscape could be inevitably loosen instead of continue tight control.

Weibo will eventually lead a revolution in China, which it will influence on Chinese political communication in two aspects.

Firstly, the new media should promote government's new idea in a more approachable and understandable way for the general public, even though Weibo has its negative side since it is easy to spread rumors and cause "add fuel to the flames" and "confuse public opinion", hence ultimately leading to "instability". There is one of the government Weibo named "Wuhan government official Weibo", not only does it shares about the things happened in Wuhan, but also make the polls to let public select "which policy you

want to devote/ change in Wuhan”. 10 thousands citizens have voted, half of them select “developing urbanized in the mid of the Yangtze River and essential to that is support Wuhan in its application to be the national central city”, perhaps it is because Wuhan government also have the same plan, or perhaps government really listened what the citizens said, 4 months after the polls ended, Wuhan government start to work on this and trigger small and medium size of enterprises to invest urban areas. By 2011, the different part of the sprawling Chinese bureaucracy already had over 1700 active weibo accounts, approximately about 700 Chinese politicians. Some parts of the Chinese government are even welcoming public oversight, encouraging the general public to “ask them questions of the government related questions through weibo” and participate in the political system. Another, less sanguine report written by Kan Daoyuan, an official at the State Tax Bureau worries that as microblogging “becomes more and more representative of the new pattern of online life,” it will “erode and influence the production of ideological and political work by the mass media.”

Secondly, the rising of Wibo is an essential tool for government “information central control” and the general public has the responsibility to know what happened. This is essentially significant for the process of political communication because it can transparent the government system and show its official sensations (states’ punishment). For example, On July 23, 2011, two brand new Chinese high-speed trains collided outside the city of Wenzhou, killing about 40 people and hundreds of people get injured. Back into times, transportation accidents are too common to worth report in China, which by official estimates shows that the deaths of over 2,000 coal miners in a year. Censorship authorities usually discourage such accident report. After the crash, the

Railway Ministry officials ordered that damaged train cars should be buried in an apparent bid to prevent further investigation, however, people start to discuss this traffic damage on micro blogging sites- Weibo especially, so that pressure from tens of thousands of Chinese citizens for government forced officials to dig up the buried cars, however, and begin a proper accident investigation. So the experts said that the Sina and Weibo would changing the way that Chinese government deal with the crisis and also “Breaking the news”. From this case, Weibo function as a pressure group to push the Chinese government and the power to shape official policy is undeniable. Even powerful ministries of the central government have bowed before the power of China’s 300 million micro-bloggers. Li Qing, 22 years old, son of a powerful Hubei province police official, killed one college student and injured another people with his car after a night of drinking in 2010, after that, he spoke to them “go ahead to sue me, my father is Li Gang!” he did not expect prosecution. But on Sina Weibo in particular, quickly made “my father is Li Gang” a buzzword for official misconduct and irresponsibility. Which Li Qiming should be totally fine and excepted unpunished before the Weibo era. However, he was sent into prison and should accept the punishment today.

Even though Chinese government still have blocked some of the sensitive topic such as territory issues (Taiwan, Tibet), negative words towards the president (Mao, Xi Jinping), or specific topics (air pollution, traffic disaster, etc.), but because Weibo is increasing the democratic process, government can no longer control all the information. Like the Weibo customer’s service will always delete some sensitive posts in a few minutes, but within this few minutes, this post should already spread out.

IV. Conclusion

The new media can reach it broadly to Election campaign and government's operation. The new media function as propaganda, disseminate political ideas, etc., in electoral campaign especially in the developed countries, also works as anti-corruption to show a positive government image to the public, and setting a relatively transparent government functions in some of the developing countries. In this case, its effects are more obvious in the developed country than in the developing countries, which because in developed country, the democratic process are more advanced and complete, accessible technologies, and acceptance of information. However, developing countries are now also giving more concentration to the spread of modern technologies. It has been found that the new media technology has been able to change the political attitude and voters' behaviors if there are more frequently country uses new media. The developing countries are trying to set up a positive change towards its image. Even though the rural area still takes place a large percentage, the universal and widespread of new media should be the development tendency for the developing world.

As the new media became functioned, it is ubiquitous, and seemingly invulnerable. It help electoral democracies to "play a game", using power, persuasion, and mobilizing support for policies and politicians. And it becomes one of the essential ways to show candidates' opinion and aggregate voters without Internet and television. Thus, television and politics became indeed complementary institutions, existing in a state of mutual dependence. Hence, new media and political communication become indeed complementary. Political provides raw news materials to television to packed it to be more attractive, then through the each levels' image packing, delivery to audience eventually. The rules of journalistic game is they should preclude any major political

message if they cannot fully control of their message. But over time, this rule become to shift to the editors, journalists, and executives began to be more skeptical, less deferential towards the sources, particularly for the political and therefore, there are a more actively interventionist role as a new media's organization. So the balance of the power between two began to goes to a more even and regulate situation in the future.

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