

Analysis of Relationship between Social Media Conversation and Mainstream Coverage to Mobilize Social Movement

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Abstract : Social media has become an important source of information for the public and the media profession. Some social issues raised on social media are picked up by journalists to report on other platforms. This relationship between social media and mainstream media can sometimes drive public debate or stimulate social movements. The question to examine is in what situations can social media conversations raise awareness and stimulate change on public issues. This study addresses the communication patterns of social media conversations driving covert issues into mainstream media and leading to social advocacy movements. In methodological terms, the study findings are based on a content analysis of Facebook, Twitter, news websites and television media reports on three different case studies – saving Bryde's whale, protests against a government proposal to downsize the Office of Knowledge Management and Development in Thailand, and a dengue fever campaign. These case studies were chosen because they represent issues that most members of the public do not pay much attention to but social media conversations stimulated public debate and calls to action. This study found: 1) Collective social media conversations can stimulate public debate and encourage change at three levels – awareness, public debate, and action of policy and social change. The level depends on the communication patterns of online users and media coverage. 2) Patterns of communication have to be designed to combine social media conversations, online opinion leaders, mainstream media coverage and call to both online and offline action to motivate social change. Thus, this result suggests that social media is a powerful platform for collective communication and setting the agenda on public issues for mainstream media. However, for social change to succeed, social media should be used to mobilize online movements to move offline too.

Keywords : public issues, mainstream media, social media, social movement

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