The Creation of Micromedia on Social Networking Sites as a Social Movement Strategy: The Case of Migration Aid, a Hungarian Refugee Relief Group

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Abstract : The relationship between social movements and the media that represents them comprises both of the media representation of movements on the one hand, and the media strategies employed by movements on the other. A third possible approach is to connect the two and look at the interactions connecting the two sides. This relationship has been affected by the emergence of social networking sites (SNS) that have a transformative effect on both actors. However, the extent and direction of these changes needs to be investigated. Empirical case studies that focus on newly enabled forms of social movements can contribute to these debates in an analytically fruitful way. Therefore in our study, we use the case of Migration Aid, a Hungarian Facebook-based grassroots relief organization that gained prominence during the refugee crisis that unfolded in Hungary in 2015. Migration Aid formed without the use of traditional mobilizational agents, and that took over roles traditionally occupied by formal NGOs or the state. Analyzing different movement strategies towards the media - we find evidence that while effectively combining these strategies, SNSs also create affordances for movements to shift their strategy towards creating alternatives, their own micromedia. Beyond the practical significance of this – the ability to disseminate alternative information independently from traditional media – it also allowed the group to frame the issue in their own terms and to replace vertical modes of communication with horizontal ones. The creation of micromedia also shifts the relationship between social movements and the media away from an asymmetrical and towards a more symbiotic co-existence. We provide four central factors – project identity, the mobilization potential of SNSs, the disruptiveness of the event and selectivity in the construction of social knowledge – that explain this shift. Finally, we look at the specific processes that contribute to the creation of the movement's own micromedia. We posit that these processes were made possible by the rhizomatic structure of the group and a function of SNSs we coin the Social Information Thermostat function. We conclude our study by positioning our findings in relation with the broader context.

Keywords : social networking sites, social movements, micromedia, media strategies