

Social Mobilization in the Net Space: Re-Constructed Communication, Identity and Power

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The internet as a communication platform for netizens has become the hybrid space for social mobilization to forward political agenda. A take-off from Manuel Castells' hypotheses on power and counter-power in the network society, this paper is a reading of "Boycott SM Baguio" Facebook Group Page as a space and site for social mobilization. Using textual analysis as a method, reading of the selected posts revealed that the spatial conditions present in the net space effected the reconstruction of identity, group and public and re-shaped the communication process. Elaborating on these two main points elicited a different kind of social mobilization located in the online space that emerged discourses on power, counter-power, political legitimacy and exacerbated questions on sustainability.

Keywords: Online social mobilization, communication, net space, reconstruction, power

Social mobilization is a form of organizing individuals and groups together to encourage civic engagement, facilitate communication interaction and discussion pertaining to a socio-political issue. Aiming for deepened understanding on socio-political issues by individuals and social groups, social mobilization encourages civic engagement. Deemed as vital in the process of social mobilization is the composition of voiced opinions on a socio-political issue and development of a stance so as to contribute to the public political debate. Social mobilization does not merely end at exchange and discussions because in forming groups who will voice their opinions, it also aims at influencing political decisions that will adhere to social change. In social mobilization, the communication process is important because it is a necessary precursor for facilitating discussions on socio-political issues so that individuals and groups will be able to make informed decisions and opinions.

Not exactly new in the Philippine society, social mobilization has been widely conducted by the Filipino people in order to voice their political opinions tantamount to changing political history. Often, such space and site for this are in the streets. To name a few, social mobilization in 1986 that happened in the Epifaniodelos Santos Avenue (EDSA), was integral in making Former President Ferdinand Marcos to relinquish his Presidency in 1986. Another social mobilization in year 2001, again, located in Epifaniodelos Santos Avenue (EDSA), forced President Joseph Estrada to step down from Presidency. Mendiola, a street surrounded by universities, became a witness to varied social mobilization of student activists and social reformists on educational rights, agrarian reforms, labour problems and the assertion of equity. Baguio City, located in the Northern part of the Philippines, is not exempted from its own social mobilizations. Similarly, active

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residents have been conglomerating in varied Baguio City streets to raise their issues and concerns on various social issues... and the current themes that force people to organize and voice their opinions are on urban problems: construction of malls, privatization of public spaces, and the most recent, the rampant cutting of pine trees in the city.

Defined as “purposive collective actions aimed at changing values and interests institutionalized in society...[and] tantamount to modify[ing] the power relations” (Castells, M. 2007), social mobilization, as perceived in a democratic society is the right of individuals and groups to voice their socio-political concerns and opinions so as to influence the decisions of those who are in power. Driven largely by a specific purpose, social mobilization necessitates two primary requisites: the critical mass that should show a huge number of individual and group representation, and the space of choice utilized for discussion, voicing socio-political concerns and future arena for social action. Withstanding these primary requisites is also the understanding of the communication process that facilitates and actualizes exchange of messages so as to encourage apt social action.

Analyzing social mobilization and political movement cannot be limited within this parlance because what is observable nowadays is the change in space where it is currently conducted. The tangible and concrete space as utilized for social mobilization has moved its site and is now located in the virtual or the net space. Houghton (1998) explains that the net space is now becoming the alter space for exercising democracy for a community who wish to present their socio-political stance. Subsequent to the change in the site and location of social mobilization is the strong possibility that spatial conditions present in the net space may result to a different form of social mobilization. Given that there may be advantages and disadvantages in the usage of the net space as a site for communication exchange on socio-political issues, how far can individuals and social groups go in order to achieve social change? Is the net space a main factor in understanding the newfound social mobilization phenomena that will elaborate on the reconstruction of the communication process, identity/group and public and notions of power?

Literature Review

The use of the net space for social mobilization presents a different set of spatial conditions that contribute greatly to the reconstruction of concepts of identity, group and public that re-shapes the communication process; this in turn, reformulates social mobilization.

Individual Identity, Group and Public in the Net Space

The individual identity in the net space then becomes the “writing of oneself into being in a digital environment” (boyd, 2006, as cited in 2010, in Papacharissi, Z. 2011). Individual identity is re-shaped in the net space because they become individuals who are represented by profiles. Given that the net space only provides a limit on the data for personal information to fit in the prescribed number of lines provided in the net space, the individual then tends to reshape one’s own identity and hone one’s profile so as to fit in the space and to engage in the net space. Considering this re-shaped identity in the net space, the individual tends to match, probably adjusts his/her own personal details to complement other individuals present in the net space.

Individual identity, as replaced by a profile “represents the individual and serve as locus of interaction” (boyd, 2010, cited in Papacharissi, Z. 2011). In a way, the individual profile searches other profiles with whom to establish certain connection, association

and affiliations that become the starting points for communicating with others in the online space. Common interests become a basis for communicating with others online and this may be developed into forming groups in the net space.

Because the individual profile needs to connect with others, boyd explains that establishing ties in the net space is referred to as an “an act of social accounting... that is both social and political” (2010, as cited in Papacharissi, 2011). Spatial conditions provided in the net space enable the filtering and choosing of profiles to establish a social group online. As examples, Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites provides the option of adding “friends,” “followers” and “membership” in the chosen group online. The same application is given to the individual en sans profile who can choose his/her affiliation. Elemental choosing and filtering of group associations and membership online further reconstructs the individual profile. In a way, the profile’s group choice and the group’s method of choosing members compose the identity in the online space.

The reconstruction of the identity and the method of group formation online contribute then to the re-shaping of the definition and understanding of “public.” Individual profiles that come together and form a group in the net space is now called “networked publics...that are restructured by networked technologies; [and] ...are simultaneously a space and a collection of people” (boyd, d. 2010, in Papacharissi, Z. 2011). The public located in the net space is united by the conditions of the space; and, what binds them is the site that “networks” them, creating that semblance of connection, affiliation and group association. danah boyd explains that publics located in the net space as “networked publics [who] serve many functions as other types of publics... allow people to gather for social, cultural, and civic purposes and they help people connect with a world beyond their close friends and family” (2010, cited in Papacharissi, Z, 2011). Such affordances provided by the net space reconstruct the notion of public because it allows the grouping of individuals from varied tangible locations into one space: the net. Thus, the “networked public” no longer needs a tangible space that constructs a certain set of culture and identity, instead, the net space becomes the binding factor in itself that reconstructs its altered set of culture and identity.

Communication in the Net Space

Albeit tangible space and common time, communication process and exchange in the net space does not require physical presence of individuals. The net space constructs “non-reciprocal intimacy” constructing a “certain kind of social situation in which individuals are linked together in a process of communication and symbolic exchange...creating distinctive kinds of interpersonal relationships, social bonds and intimacy” (Thomson, J. 2007). The net space provides “co-presence” that is constructed online by creating interest groups that will establish an online “common locale” among individual members (Thomson, J. 2007). Compensating for the lack of tangible space, common time and physical presence of individuals, the net space provides a notion of community/group/public for individual members to communicate in varied communication cues that all individual profiles can see without a common space and time. Bonding of the individual profiles as a group entail a communication process and form that is far different from the actual communication process happening face-to-face.

Communication messages that are exchanged online is now called “bits that do not simply change the flow of information, but they alter the very architecture of everyday life... through networked technology, people are no longer shaped by just their dwellings but by their networks” (Mitchell, 1995, cited by boyd, 2010, in Papacharissi, 2011).

Information, messages, or bits posted online influences the way other profiles think, in turn, establishes some sort of relationship or common ground information that makes ties them together. Further, communication interaction and exchange online uses “multi-modal hypertext” (Castells, M. 2007). In this space, the types of messages use miniscule conversations, but utilize more images, photographs, music, memes, etc. and can now be received by an individual user at the same time. Multi-modality in communication, as inherent in the net space, produces more types of information that may appeal to a variety of audience and are simultaneously received in one click of a function.

Accessibility of communication in the hybrid space is also wider and is interspersed with an action button. Because the net space is part of the public domain, individuals who wish to read and view information can do it online without expending time and energy to be physically present in a tangible space. The net space is not limited to its immediate local, but access for information can be extended globally. Therefore an individual located in another country does not need to be physically present in a specific tangible space to access information because all he/she has to do is click a button and a bevy of information will be presented before him/her. Making communication in the hybrid space as a process that can penetrate almost “all domains of social life in a network, at the same time global, local, generic and customized” (Castells, 2007).

Social Mobilization in the Net Space

Seeing the features of communication in the net space becomes the interplay between the communication field, technology and reconstruction of society that evolved anew kind of social mobilization that is located in the net space with a reconstructed net-induced form of advocacy in the attempts for the assertion of social change. Manuel Castells said that “social movements [mobilizations] are not originated by technology, they use technology” (2007); thus, in the usage of the net space as the tool for communication interaction, the tool modifies and re-shapes the conditions for social mobilization. According to Castells, the net space is not only a tool but is also a “medium” (2007), because social mobilization online is a system with inherent qualities that influences greatly the kind of communication that will take place and the effect it will bring. As both a medium and a system, the net space may determine the “social production of meaning [in the hybrid space]...in the process of communication” (Castells, M. 2007) that hones the way individuals think.

The net space as utilized for social mobilization becomes a determining factor in shaping the way people will come together and organize, communicate and discuss social issues and plan for social actions in the future. Spatial conditions present in the net space produces an effect which may be far different from social mobilization located in a tangible and concrete space because “(1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology and practice” (boyd, d. 2010, in Papacharissi, Z. 2011) reconstructs the process and output of social mobilization.

Theoretic Underpinnings

Drawing from Manuel Castells hypotheses in his article entitled “Communication, Power and Counter-power in the Network Society,” this paper takes the starting point of his posit which states that the upsurge in the use of media technology in varied forms of communication has re-shaped the way people communicate, transfer and exchange information that has contributed greatly in societal reconstruction (Castells, M. 2007).

Newfound use of the online space as a platform for social discussion and mobilization is imperative for understanding “the processes challenging institutionalized power relations [that] are increasingly shaped and decided in the communication field” (Castells, M. 2007). Analyzing social mobilization by understanding prevalent communication process in the net space not only emerges anew nature and characteristics of communication but enunciates the “results of power relations, that is relations that constitute the foundations of all societies, as well as the processes challenging institutionalized power relations” (Castells, 2007).

In the discursive interplay between “technology, communication and power reflects opposing values and interests and engages a plurality of actors” (2007). Thus, in reading social mobilization as located in the net space can best be understood by understanding the communication process that can bring about emerging discourses on the reconstruction of identity, group and public that contributes greatly to the massive re-shaping of communication. Manuel Castells rose that this can be seen by understanding the following points: (2007).

- Role of media politics and its interaction with the crisis of political legitimacy
- Key role of segmented, customized mass media in the production of culture
- Emergence of a new form of communication related to the culture and technology of the network society, and based on horizontal networks of communication...[or]...mass self-communication
- Uses of both one-directional mass communication and mass self-communication in the relationship between power and counter-power, in informal politics, in insurgent politics, and in the new manifestations of social movements

Study Objectives

Drawing from Castells’ hypotheses, this paper will describe how these can be seen in the “Boycott SM” Facebook Group Page. This paper furthers its contribution by exacerbating discussions on the reconstruction of identity, group and public, and the communication process as provided by the spatial conditions of the net space. Taking these focal concerns then, this paper expounds on the reconstructed social mobilization that is rampantly practiced online.

Background

Rampant urbanization of Baguio City has resulted to construction and addition of physical structures like malls, parking lots and condominium. To give way to such structures, cutting of trees is currently happening in Baguio City that led to many protests from local residents and sympathizers. One of the culprits identified by the local residents in the cutting of trees is the SM Mall who owns a large portion of land in the city. Though by law, and as implemented by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), clearly articulates non-cutting of trees in Baguio City, SM mall continues to cut trees located in their own property to give way to its expansion. To voice their opinions on this, local residents and interest groups have already organized and demonstrated in the streets but the war against SM mall and the cutting of trees continue in the net space. Several Facebook group pages have been constructed carrying the statements: “No to cutting of trees in the city” but the most prominent and active Facebook Group Page, with 23,914 members to date is “Boycott SM Baguio.” (*Image 1*). This Facebook Group Page, with its

numerous members, actively communicates resistance to the cutting of trees. “Boycott SM Baguio” Facebook Group Page carries this profile description at <http://www.facebook/groups/boycottsm/>.



“Boycott SM. Everywhere. Everyday

- *until SM will declare that they’ll not harm the trees of Luneta Hill.*
- *until SM will declare that they’ll stop the SM Baguio mall expansion*
- *until SM will declare to respect our cities.*
- *until SM harmonize with the geography, culture and history of the local people*
- *until SM stops their unfair labor practice.*

Image 1. Number of members

Members of this group are encouraged to totally boycott SM and also raise the awareness of the issues and ask others to join the movement to save the environment and the remaining trees of Baguio City—on Luneta Hill, John Hay, Mt. Pulag, Longlong, Trinidad, M. Sto. Tomas and everywhere else.”

Methodology

Presenting a discursive reading of “Boycott SM Baguio” Facebook Group, primary method used in this study is textual analysis. Screen shots of selected posts, comments, links, and uploads were collected as media texts. These media texts then were arranged and organized according to the following thematic representations: (i) identity, (ii) group/public and (iii) communication process/flow. To counter-check further the reach of information, number of likes, shares and comments were also examined.

As deemed necessary in this paper, the collected and organized media texts then were subjected to discourse analysis. Discourse is described as a “sense of system of possibilities for the creation of knowledge” (Foucault, M. 1980, as cited in Mumby, D. 1997). Reading communication from media texts, as taken from a discursive perspective, “is not concerned with truth per se but rather with ‘explicating games of truths’ –implicit rules that shape what counts as knowledge, who can speak such knowledge, and how individuals are constituted as subjects of this knowledge” (Mumby, D. 1997). Considering as well that in reading media of texts, such as the ones collected from “Boycott SM Baguio” Facebook Group Page, should be understood from varied disciplines, communication messages collected were not just read as a linguistic text. To further enrich this paper, reading and analyzing “concerns on the structure of social interaction as manifested in conversation and their descriptions emphasise features of social context” (Brown, G. and Yule, G. 1993) were also employed.

Reconstruction of Identity and Group

Communal Yet Individual

The aim of social mobilization is to construct a community or group composed of members who will actively participate in the social issue at hand. Essential in a democratic society, it is believed that a critical mass should be reached so as to show resistance and/or to assert for the rights and welfare of the people. The net space as used for social mobilization has the capacity to create a group with numerous members who may assert for social reforms but this type of community has taken a different form. Castells observes that in the hybrid space, as utilized for social mobilization produces “opposition between communalism and individualism that defines the culture of societies as identity construction works at the same time with materials inherent from history, geography, and from the projects of human subjects” (2007).

The net space alters the patterns of social mobilization and notions of community and group. The formation of the online community is primarily through membership that paves a way for the image construction of the individual member. The net space, through the Facebook Group Page, provides the notion of belongingness for the individual member. This becomes the associated image and identity formed by the individual online. An individual who becomes a member of such FB pages take on the identity or profile of that of the Facebook Group’s page and accepting the Facebook Group’s goals. Contrary to group formation located in a tangible geographical space, membership takes heed of individual’s intentions in joining the group. Thus, the individual has his/her own identity and persona before affiliating in a group. In the tangible, geographical space, affiliation and membership in a group who wishes to advance a social cause is already composed of individuals with a clear identity, who usually possess a clear set of social principles that become their motivation to join. In the online space, it is the other way around. The Facebook Group Page, in the case of “Boycott SM Baguio” is already a profile in itself with its own identity and goals. Since most of the individual profiles are invited to join in the group, there is no clear assurance on the reasons and motivations of individuals who become part of this Facebook Group Page.

Inter-changeability of individual identity and that of the Facebook group’s may also happen simultaneously because the net space has taken a non-tangible geographical space to organize members. The identity of the individual members and that of the Facebook Group Page tends to be fluid and malleable. Because the net space relies greatly on membership, vis-a-vis, in the context of the Facebook group pages, through networking, initial membership is called for in the Facebook group page to form an alliance and association of individual members who are willing to be identified with the group’s social cause. This kind of membership or group forming varies greatly from that of group formation located in a tangible geographical space because: (i) though application for membership in the net space can be screened, administrators may not exactly know the real identities of all individual members, and (ii) individual membership in the groups in the net space does not exactly provide a clear proviso for certain responsibilities the membership may entail. Therefore, both individual and Facebook group identity are fluid—adjusting and modifying one’s own identity through association and networks formed online. Contributory to this is also the inherent quality of the net space wherein one can easily modify one’s own individual and group identity by: (i) removing oneself as member in the group, (ii) if not accepted in membership, then blocking the group, and (iii) to gain leverage in individual and group identity, modifying the profile.

Access and Membership

The net space as a hybrid space for social mobilization possesses a broad range of possible audience due to its inherent characteristic of being accessible. In gathering individual members together to form a group, what is deemed as futile and impossible in a tangible, geographical space is made promising in the net space. Given a short period of time, the net space can have more individual members than that of a social or interest group who are forming themselves in a given geographical space. But the hybrid space poses its limitations as well. It may be true that the hybrid space, in the context of social mobilization, can accommodate more information that can be disbursed to a larger group of people, but public viewing is still limited. If the individual profile is not a member, one cannot view all of the posts and links by the Facebook Group Page.

Boy, this guy sounds like SM...



Man chops down 22 protected trees to improve the view from a deck

A Pennsylvania man has been charged with 22 felony counts of agricultural vandalism and 22 misdemeanor counts of agricultural trespassing after...

OAKCTXL | BY PELMOREX INC.

Image 2. Post with a Joke About SM Mall

Looking into the posts and links of “Boycott SM Baguio,” what is noticeable is that some of the information appears to be customized for its group members. As an example, a postmocking theSM mall and its ethics in business is a joke that is customized for those who have knowledge about the mall and its business ethics that did not get any response from the members. *Image 2*. This means, that even if the post can be viewed by the public, not all can relate to such post. Castells (2007) notes that “the key role of segmented, customized mass media is the production of culture.” Examining how the posts, links and shares are uploaded for public viewing, it is noticeable that not all can understand what the posts are all about.

The Facebook Group Page, pre-sets a cultural identity for its members by conveying messages and information that can only be understood exclusively and in selecting and controlling who can be accepted as members. Looking at the members of the group, most of them are in some way connected to each other. Meaning, they know each other outside the net space. Though the networked individual members are large in number, still not all of them are closely associated with the others. Thus, even in the Facebook Group Page, possible formation of sub-groups can happen. Examining the activity of the posts, noticeable as well is that the same individual members are the one posting and responding to each other through Like, Share and Comments which creates exclusivity of communication among smaller groups.

Reconstruction of Communication

Information Reach

Social mobilization in the net space enables an immeasurable reach for Facebook messages, posts, images, etc. can be re-shared and re-posted over and over again, creating that potential for farther reach in the spreading and disbursing of information. Because the

Facebook is structured in a way that when an individual presses the LIKE button, this can be seen in the individual's personal pages; making his/her own network of friends can see and trace what the individual liked. This provides a leeway for the information that is LIKED by an individual member to be seen by others who are not part of the Facebook group. Another function that makes access and reach of information possible to more audience is the SHARE button. Once, this button is clicked, the post that is shared can be seen in an individual's personal Facebook page, and can be re-shared by others who can view it.

Social mobilization conducted in the net space is also re-shaped. Reading the media texts of "Boycott SM Baguio," what is observable is the proliferation of monologic communication that gives birth to an evolving net language, adherence to image and bits of information that is consequential to the re-definition of horizontal communication.

Monologic Communication

Social mobilization in the net space operates without face-to-face communication that is needed in the discussion of social issues. Absence of face-to-face communication makes it difficult to gauge the sincerity and commitment of each members. Therefore, the Facebook group page only provides the notion of being united that may not exactly translate into actions and behaviours in the real time space. Thomson refers to this as "quasi-interaction that is predominantly monological" (2005).

Compensating for the lack of face-to-face communication interaction, what is observable in the "Boycott SM Baguio" Facebook Group page is the evolution of a net language that is ambivalent in meaning. Several posts with many "LIKE" and "SHARE" provides a reconstructed meaning of linguistic terms. To illustrate, if a post garners more than 200 LIKES, what does it exactly mean? Looking at these posts, did the individual members actually understand the post? After LIKING, what happens to the information then because the number of LIKES is often not equal to the number of COMMENTS? In the reconstructed term called SHARE in the online space—when a post is re-SHARED, what happens to the re-post? What if the re-post shared in another individual's profile page does not receive any comments or like? What happens then to the information? In a way, the use of these net languages contribute to monologic communication in the net space because the language in itself interrupts and/or may not exactly invite interactions.

Thomson notes that in the net space, communication messages tend to be "constructed for indefinite range of potential recipients that are and relatively open-ended" (2005). Monologic communication can also be seen online in the thread of comments. Observable in the Facebook Group Page is when an



Image 3.Thread of comments

individual member posts a comment, other threads of comments are not exactly related to the previous comments. Often times, each comment is isolated and do not follow the trail of thought in the previous comments, or may serve as a communication interaction stopper. *Image 3*. Noticeable is that the comments and opinions do not exactly invite room for more communication interaction because each individual member is free to start a new conversation through posting and commenting. What is missing is the apt flow in conversation exchange.

Because the communication process becomes monologic in the net space, it produces horizontal type of communication without appropriate feedback, interchange and response. Information just continuously flow through LIKE, SHARE, adding COMMENTS, re-posting that all archives and revives the posts without deriving feedback to the individual or administrator who started the post. Therefore, even if the posts will be re-shared and re-posted several times, there is no assurance if there will be a clear response or action to these messages. Chances are, these posts may be read, probably responded to by adding comments but closing the so-called conversation online is difficult to predict. This contributes to the monologic communication happening in the net space, wherein an individual profile uploads a photograph, a link, or a message but no one directly responds.

Contributing to the evolving characteristic of communication in the net space is the proliferation of images that tend to replace worded information. Castells said that in the hybrid space the “language of media has its rules...largely built around images and the most powerful message is a simple message attached to an image” (2007). Examining both Facebook group pages, posts with images and photographs, etc. receive the most number of LIKES and VIEWS. There is nothing really wrong with images but pertinent discussion and exchange on socio-political issue to facilitate understanding is being compromised. When individual members do not thoroughly understand the topic being discussed, there is a strong possibility that group decisions may not be well thought of. What may proliferate is the kind of communication exchange wherein individual members will only react or respond once or twice then take the image as the sole message without validating other possible arguments. This may lead to uninformed political decisions by individual members and by the group. Images and short posts become the sole message that individual members rely on to make socio-political decisions. In such cases then, the images and short posts tend to compete with substantial information that is uploaded (i.e., documents, researchers, etc.). Selecting the shorter messages then may become habitual in generating information on socio-political issues online and offline.

Admittedly, social mobilization in the online space, there is the spreading of information but the depth of understanding and the sincerity in liking and sharing is actually difficult to gauge. The evolution of the net language may impede communication flow, especially in the cases wherein there are no reactions to the information provided. The information remains online and may spread widely but the communication exchange may not exactly be present. By and large, this gives a semblance of monologic communication wherein an individual who posts may not exactly derive any response from the others—or the response may be limited to like and share of which both terms are linguistically problematic as well.

Castells refers to this kind of social mobilization online as “mass self-communication that is closer to ‘electronic autism’ than to actual communication” (2007). In the online space, individual members are largely communicating to the self especially when messages are posted and it does not elicit any LIKE, SHARE, RE-POST or comment. The individual who posted something appears to be doing self-talk because the message is not re-processed by others even if the members have seen or read it.

Reconstruction of Social Mobilization

Ambivalent Power and Counter-Power

Power is “the structural capacity of a social actor to resist and challenge other social actors” (Castells, M. 2007) that currently negotiated in the hybrid space. Acknowledging that power relations is present in all societies, Castells believes that the use of net space in forming certain social groups also sees to light the re-shaping of power (2007) because “communication and information have been fundamental sources of power and counter-power, of domination and social change” (Castells, M. 2007). Therefore, in the use of the net space as a source of communication and wherein communication interaction is present it is also reshaping structures of power and power relations. Given the spatial conditions and provisions present in the use of the net space, any individual profile can be engaged in socio-political debates, thus, by and large, more individuals can actually gain “the capacity ...to resist and challenge power relations that are institutionalized” (Castells, M. 2007). Points of inquiry pertinent to his statement then is that in the influx and use of the net space for social mobilization, are the opinions and voices of the individual profiles taken heed? In the growing numbers of networked publics who are attempting at social change by utilizing the online space, are their voices made legitimate?

Spatial conditions of the net space, social mobilization occurring online takes on a different form. Acknowledging that the aim of any social mobilization is to form a group that will present a unified voice and stance on a socio-political issue so as to influence social change, but social mobilization online presents ambivalence in power and counter-power. It may be true that Facebook group pages provide individuals and ordinary citizens to influence socio-political decisions of others, and in a large way, can even contribute to several actions and behaviours in order to achieve their goals. Facebook group pages, as a platform for communication interaction and exchange, can take on initiatives for further activities outside the net space that may provide deepened understanding about the social issue. Meaning, the online space as primarily used for social mobilization has to be re-located in a tangible and geographical space in order to meet their goal.

In the case of “Boycott SM Baguio” Facebook Group page, such initiatives like organizing a forum in a tangible space provided more depth discussions on the issue at hand, but given the large membership of this Facebook Group Page, only a few members attended the forum. Other initiatives outside the net space, such as pocket mobilizations in a tangible, geographical space was only able to gather a few participants which is far from the number of members online. The so-called action and activity, by and large, is very much concentrated in the net space wherein a huge number of members tend to post, share links, comment, etc. What can be attributable to the Facebook Group Page, through its regular posts is the power to disburse information and barrage public opinions online that can go viral online and can eventually reverberate outside the net space can put pressure on political decision makers. Features of the net space enables more individuals to “create and disseminate” (Thomson, J. 2005) information that is difficult for political authorities to control. Critique, opinions, among others, are freely posted and circulated in the net space that contributes greatly to certain pressures that political authorities may feel. The constant sending of opinions on the cutting of trees and the massive petitions signed online by many supporters may have influenced the decision of the Supreme Court of the Philippines to temporarily suspend the cutting of trees in Baguio.

The net space as used for social mobilization creates an arena for counter-power providing individual members “the capacity of a social actor to resist and challenge power

relations that are institutionalized” (Castells, M. 2007). The net space may become the starting point arena where political and social decisions are made, but brings about a reconstructed mode of social mobilization where identity, power and counter-power can be re-shaped.

Though power and counter-power is present in the hybrid space for social mobilization, the individual members and the Facebook group in itself, based on their profiles and socio-political goals may experience imminent “crisis of political legitimacy which has been replaced by communication framing of the public minds” (Castells, M. 2007). Posts are taken by its members at face value and usually without validating the information source, and then eventually re-posted and re-shared; thus, control of the information belong to the hands of individual members. Formal and legitimate social organization outside the net space is slowly diminishing its power as more individual members rely greatly on the information provided in the net space. Therefore, the weighing of information and eventually, individual members’ socio-political decisions may be influenced by associations and networks online. In a way, if an individual member is not associated with the source, even if the post contains valid information, the individual member may decide not to read or consider the message content. Elemental trust and reliance on information are placed on the online space wherein individuals tend to trust co-individuals/co-members.

Political knowledge then tend to be legitimized online because any individual member can post information, knowledge on socio-political issues is no longer limited to the authorities, politicians, social scientists, etc. because the nature of the net space and the claiming of such legitimate knowledge is no longer pertinent. Sources of information can be from anyone. Once the message and information are posted, individuals are free to decide whether this information is legitimate or not because individual members are connected to each other, there is a strong tendency to believe in the posts online.

Conclusion

Spatial conditions of the net space reconstructed the identity, group, and public that contributed to the re-shaping of the communication process. Thus, the use of the net space for social mobilization has re-conceptualized the understanding of social mobilization in itself. This re-shaping of social mobilization entails answering larger questions on political legitimacy and sustainability. Grossman (1998, as cited in Holeyton, R.1998) said that “the birth of media technology resulted to the decline of a specific geographical space for communication interaction.” He explained that this is characteristic of a socio-political process and exercise of democracy located in the net space wherein individuals and groups may be “located within geographical constituencies” but a larger voice representative of different communities, nations, locality, countries, etc. are involved in the conversation (Grossman, L., 1998 in Holeyton, 1998). The net space, as widely used for social mobilization, cuts across tangible geographical boundaries that contribute greatly to preference in its usage. Advocacy, education, organization and mobilization conducted in the net space no longer require physical presence of individuals and a specific geographical space where they can conglomerate. The Facebook Group Page allows the re-sharing and re-posting of a wall post, or information that enables transfer of messages to reach a wider set of audience. Understanding the spatial conditions of the net space and that it can accommodate a larger set of information and can reach more individuals and groups, is the social mobilization happening online sustainable enough to actualize social change?

Thomson says that “relations of power can shift quickly, dramatically, and in unpredictable ways” (2005) in the online space. There is the danger of an individual member to propagate his/her own political agenda, infiltrate information and re-shape how others think. Power then in the hybrid space can be controlled by just a few, while other individual members may take whatever information posted online, making counter-power less possible. Observable in the posts of “Boycott SM Baguio,” most of the actions and activities by the Facebook group are temporary panacea for socio-political issue that is deeply rooted and inextricably linked with a series of political problems that necessitate permanent solutions. Messages are still limited because information provided online is insufficient in embedding understanding of a social issue, making the activities and actions of the groups fragile and unsustainable. And, if these groups will not be able to think and plan for the next series of actions, other individual members may eventually leave the group.

Because of the nature of the net space wherein posts and communication interactions can be archived online which may contribute to the sustainability of the Facebook group page’s goals, but what poses as another challenge in the aspect of sustainability of the social mobilization in the hybrid space is the translation of these information and action to the tangible geographical space. Given that the net space is in a large way an unreal space, can the power and counter-power exercised online be practiced in the real, tangible geographical space? Regardless how many members in the Facebook group, actual activities and mobilizations presented in tangible geographical spaces are still very few—too little in number and not influential enough in arriving at a political decision based on the groups’ assertion.

Social mobilization in the hybrid space may have produced a fragile kind of sustainability. In the context of sustainable social mobilization, a prerequisite is depth in understanding of the social issue. The hybrid space can accommodate many forms of communication and simultaneously disburse this information. But given the preference of communication mode— often images, individual members tend to receive messages about the social issue that are in part and parcel. The kind of information received may result to several actions and behaviours of individual members that are sporadic.

The influx of social mobilization in the net space presents a reality in the tangible, geographical real life that those who belong in power still tend to lean towards the parlance of their own political agenda. The number of individual members, the bevy of information available in the hybrid space, and the platform for counter-power may be present, but this larger question can be raised: Who is listening/reading to these Facebook groups and their posts? Voicing of opinions may be present in the net space but it does not mean that these opinions are taken heed in vital political decisions. This question exacerbates arguments on political divide between the ordinary net users and that of individuals and groups who are the actual and institutionalized political decision-makers. Though the voices and opinions of net users are influential and contain the capacity to spread the information further, but, by and large, in our context, these voices are rarely legitimized. Power of the net users is still dependent on political positions made by institutionalized and legitimized voices.

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