

Conference Paper

Online advocacy empowers people to dare question and challenge controversial or sensitive issues.

Nowadays, social media has not only taken an important use in our daily life but also taken a greater responsibility in giving voice to the public. Social media is constantly changing and transforming, and instead of informing, it is now leading people to participate. But more importantly, social media is starting to give communities a voice in questioning social issues and asking people to rethink and challenge them. More particularly, social media contains a huge amount of content, it maintains an open and controversial communication environment (Graham, 2018). Especially when online advocacy appears, its media power can directly raise public concern on social issues and advance the public to support changes, as it often provides evidence or personal stories to influence public emotions (Graham, 2018). Thus, online advocacy has the power to press policy changes, not only because it is newsworthy to the public, but also because its contents and approaches are empowering to the public, and people starting to dare to respond and stand up for justice. Similarly, social media has now been seen as an advocacy tool. It embraces communication, develops a voice of wield power, and allows community groups to talk about their own story in their own words to press for changes (Wallack & Dorfman, 1996). In addition, online advocacy can be a significant force in shaping public debate, by putting better pressure on decision-makers or those with influence to convey messages into a broader social environment (Wallack & Dorfman, 1996). Therefore, by focusing on the issues of media freedom, freedom of speech, and human rights in China and Hong Kong. This paper finds that online advocacy empowers people truly started to question and challenge society.

Media freedom is a serious public concern these years. As in China, it has always been condemned by the world. Media freedom is the right to access, receive and publish any kind of information from social media platforms (IMS, 2022). People are allowed to choose what they like to believe, instead of what the governor wants them to believe. Undoubtedly, China has developed many successful social media platforms in different areas, such as WeChat and Weibo. The reason most people in China are only actively using those specific apps is not how successfully used they are, but they are the only social media apps that are allowed to use in China, as the Chinese government maintains a controlled media (Qinglian, 2004). China is a highly controlled information environment with a form of media control (Graham, 2018). It aims to monitor and manage online content on every media platform. China claims this is used to defuse contention and avoid insurrection happens (Graham, 2018), but this form of 'protection' is also harmful to media freedom, as people in China are not allowed to access any 'outside' information or foreign media (Qinglian, 2004), but only can access some kinds of information if the Chinese government allows them to publish online. This also means people cannot choose what they like to see, only official information that is managed by the government. In addition, people are starting to press media freedom, as they understand the selected information could be misleading and influential. In this case, people begin to discuss and share content about media control, as it started to be concerned and doubted by the public (RSF, 2022). When advocacy groups noticed the public is increasingly commenting on some specific issues, they will also take further actions by reaching more audiences to enter the conversation. Or can also describe as a sense of 'shared awareness' (Graham, 2018), as advocacy groups seek to gather support and response from others on specific topics. Similarly in China, online advocacy shares awareness and raised public concerns on social issues (Graham, 2018). Thus, they create content

on social media to enhance social interaction with the public, this can draw more attention to the Chinese government and pushes them to respond. But still, media freedom has been ignored and remains in its original state in China (Graham, 2018). However, online advocacy groups contribute a role in promoting social changes, as the power of the press can use by advocacy groups to stress policy changes. From conveying information to communicating, then from addressing issues to building awareness and social consciousness, where leads people to start thinking and ask the question 'why'. Online advocacy groups know social media have the power to spread information all over the world, so to ensure everyone can access and receive it, they share widely on all social media. But to be clear, online advocacy is not about influencing others to standpoint any position, but about broadening people's horizons and encouraging people dare to challenge controversial issues.

In the past two years, freedom of speech is shrinking fast in Hong Kong. The people of Hong Kong believe China has now been overpowered even more, as the Chinese government has infringed on Hong Kong's policy system (Lui, 2020). Yet, the storm over the extradition bill and national security law has monopolized sovereignty over Hong Kong (Lui, 2020). The public is starting to question Hong Kong government as it indulges its power to grow bigger, even under the basic law, which tends to protect personal freedom. When the news of extradition bill has speared out, it immediately became a social topic all over the social media. Due to advocacy groups have quickly reacted to the topic, they can directly inform the public through the content they have published. But still, those advocacy approaches contained influential messages, as it aims to reflect the question of how Hong Kong can be affected by the extradition bill, and lead against the government in addressing the issue. This raises even more awareness on social media, as it spreads quickly

and drags more attention when everyone is starting to talk about it. While the Hong Kong government remains silent and ignores the fact that the issue has become severe, advocacy groups starting to arouse more attention, thus more emotions and personal content are involved in the advocacy approaches. Folger, Taylor, and Morrison stated (2022, p.1), "The intensity of cognitive and emotional reactions to perceived injustice, and the resulting motivation to restore justice". The people in Hong Kong are driven by anger, fear, and distrust (Lui, 2020), and begin more aggressively pressing the Hong Kong government to respond. Through public protests, rallies, and demonstrations to directly express public anger (Graham, 2018). These are the most straightforward forms of putting pressure to express public dissatisfaction and demand changes (Graham, 2018). The public protests in Hong Kong are raised by advocacy groups, with apps like telegrams and lihkg have been used to convey the event's details. Hong Kong protesters mainly use social media to communicate and organize social events. Also, through online advocacy groups, protesters can immediately receive the latest news or information on social media. More importantly, all the social movements that happened in Hong Kong have been captured by the press. It carries a great power of alertness to catch the government's attention, and it also provides online advocacy groups with more accurate and first-hand information to inform the public on social media. However, the Hong Kong government did not even try to quell the disputes. Instead, it uses the police force and the Hong Kong national security laws to restrict freedom of speech and control popular indignation. The Hong Kong government pushes citizens to stay silent. Suppress the public, especially advocacy groups, the press, and the protester, to stop sharing inflammatory content in any applications. Here, the people of Hong Kong have lost their voices and right to express their opinions, with many being arrested and accused of inciting hatred, have again frightened the public to stand

against the government. In addition, advocacy groups have created different slogans like “be water” to represent the present social movement without breaking the laws to keep sharing awareness and empower people to be fearless and stand against government tyranny (Satoshi, 2019). Therefore, in the case of Hong Kong, the public’s response has decided what further action online advocacy groups will take, and indeed it raised many social movements for the public to express and spread awareness throughout the whole dynamic.

In Hong Kong, human rights issues have been combated by the world recently, but it is controversial and has been hindered by the governor and regimes, people around the world are difficult to aware of the issue across other countries. The social movement against the extradition bill is getting more intense in Hong Kong, as human right has become increasingly important for the people of Hong Kong. The government tyranny, police violence, and false prosecution have challenged the Hong Kong government failed to take great responsibility in attacking the main issues that caused the social changes. The Hong Kong government in order to stay in power, used armed suppression to spread fear and restrict public movement that against the government. Thus, people who protests against the Hong Kong government have caused human rights issues as the police arbitrarily arrested protesters and forced violence even when they have lost consciousness and were unarmed, after hours and hours of interrogation when it was only a false accusation (Reporters without borders, 2020). These have been discovered and shared by advocacy groups on Instagram and Facebook, as it is newsworthy to the world, showing the Hong Kong government tends to ignore the fact of human rights issue has been violated by the policemen. More importantly, personal freedom should be guaranteed by the Hong Kong Basic Law and human rights should always be

maintained by the world, but the authority of the Hong Kong government has imposed restrictions on freedom (Reporters without borders, 2020). Although human rights are a controversial topic, in places like Hong Kong, it is hard to address the problem if the government failed to speak up for the public. So, advocacy groups started to stand up for the public, as they developed a sense of social responsibility to voice social justice and rights that people should have (Kuah & Guiheux, 2009). Indeed, online advocacy can be able to inform and report the reality, but its power can also gain support from communities, organizations, or even other states to press human rights issues in Hong Kong. Therefore, due to the advocacy approaches that share awareness about human rights, people are more likely to arouse more people to go against the unscrupulous government, as they feel this is the only way to gain rights and freedom in Hong Kong. Thus, online advocacy has raised the issue of human rights and strengthened the public's power to raise more attention and support for this controversial issue.

To sum up, online advocacy has built a powerful influence on people, as it pushes people to discuss and question the topic that they were unaware of or afraid to express in real life. As social media provided an open environment for us to spear information, it is easier to catch people's attention and share awareness through advocacy approaches (Graham, 2018). In regard to China and Hong Kong, they are great examples of showing how the controlled information environment has changed the way that people are reacting and involved, and how advocacy approaches can be able to address social issues throughout the whole dynamic. Online advocacy has motivated people to be more active in the public movement, and the issues of media freedom, freedom of speech, and human rights have truly been raised by the advocacy groups and the press. Indeed, they have taken an important role in

empowering people and promoting social changes. Therefore, the role of online advocacy empowers people in ways to dare question and challenge controversial and sensitive issues within the field of media freedom, freedom of speech, and human rights.

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