Habit and Impulse in Digital Activism: The Case of Amnesty International

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"I never read the [digital] petitions that I sign, I do not want to engage in all of these horrible situations. I believe that I make a good thing without knowing about it in detail."

Motivation

The persisting challenges in balancing the volatile nature of digital activism with sustained political engagement

Research Questions

Why do individuals collectively organize around some digital petitions while they do not around others, and for that matter, what seem to be the mechanisms that facilitate impulse activism?

Habit by Impulse

A non-Amnesty member appear more likely to act on impulse conveyed by the content of the petition rather than ideology

Attracted by proximal referents, grave violations of dignity, and media exposure

Dead Habit

Individuals in this group can have a sustained interest in civic action but without the faith in digital petitioning. Signing a digital petition is an avoidance behavior.

For them, in the digital environment, thoughts and feelings are missing from action

Methodology

Multi method approach with three main data sources:

- Survey data from a pop-up survey three weeks in September 2013.
- Interview & Observational data during Summer and Fall of 2013
- Secondary data, Twitter and Facebook data of 62 urgent actions distributed by Amnesty International over social media sites during 2012 and 2013.

Theoretical Implications

- Contribute to the emerging agenda on the influence of social media on the psychology of civic engagement
- Theoretically explore the broader significance of social media as an extreme case of temporary organizing
- Generate new insights to social movement theory on the impact of the digital material.