Media Systems Dependency, Symbolic Power, and Human Rights Online Video: Learning from Burma's "Saffron Revolution" and WITNESS's Hub

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This article bridges scholarship on symbolic power, social movements, and media systems dependency (MSD) theory to analyze how transnational human rights advocates leverage Web 2.0 video networks. MSD offers a multilevel ecological model of power that is useful for analyzing how relationships of information and resource dependency may shift within media systems. The study adapts MSD to consider how human rights activists circulate online video content and how their symbolic power may be enhanced or constrained in the Web 2.0 media ecology. This MSD adaptation is applied to two prominent online video case studies: the grassroots social movement efforts during Burma's "Saffron Revolution" and the Hub initiative of the U.S.-based, nonprofit organization WITNESS. The study bridges cultural and structural analyses of Web 2.0, treating media platforms as imbricated within broader ecologies of dependency relations where symbolic power is wielded and challenged.

Keywords: Human rights, media systems dependency, symbolic power, online video, Web 2.0, Burma, Myanmar, WITNESS

Web 2.0, particularly the proliferation of networked, user-generated online video, has changed human rights (HR) activism communication. Visual media—especially documentary video—is often crucial to HR campaigns, which are largely geared toward mobilizing "witnessing publics" (McLagan, 2003) and resources through the framing and circulation of visual evidence or personal testimony within global media systems (McLagan, 2003, 2005). Although it is widely assumed that HR networks and organizations are

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better positioned in the Web 2.0 era to wield such visual media to attain their goals, ecological analyses of how and why this may be so, as well as how such potential may be maximized, remain a challenge for scholars and activists alike. Here, we bridge scholarship on symbolic power and social movements with an ecological power modeling approach to this challenge.

We consider the shifts in media power relations—that is, the relative ability of HR advocates to achieve their goals as supported and constrained by media systems—in two case studies of Web 2.0 video use by human rights advocates. First we examine user-generated content (UGC) video distribution during the 2007 Burmese "Saffron Revolution" and, second, the development of the Hub (http://hub.witness.org), an online HR video portal that was operated from 2007 to 2010 by WITNESS, a leading international HR nongovernmental organization (NGO). The Burma case has been described as an important early example of how local HR activists operating against authoritarian state power have mobilized international support though circulating imagery online (Castells, 2008; Chouliaraki, 2008a). The Hub was a leading example of an NGO effort to strategically organize HR Web 2.0 video use.

A key premise of international HR communication has been that without visual media, activists and organizations are much less likely to mobilize audiences to achieve their goals. Today, in an era of "unprecedented visibility of distant misfortune," even highly localized social movements frequently aspire to generate a strong "cosmopolitan" sense of obligation and support among international publics through media visibility (Chouliaraki, 2008b, pp. 371, 387).[2]

Social movement scholars have theorized visual media as a key mode through which political meanings or "codes" (Melucci, 1996) are struggled over and rearticulated; visibility is understood as essential for contemporary struggles to attain symbolic power (Castells, 2007; Thompson, 2005). *Symbolic power* here is "the capacity to intervene in the course of events and influence the actions of others by means of the production and transmission of symbolic forms" (Thompson, 2005, p. 50; see also Bourdieu, 1991)—particularly the production and transmission of visual media. The wielding of symbolic power is thus influenced by *both* cultural and structural conditions. Symbolic power is the product of not only compelling visual media (or attaining visibility) but the cultural and political context of its consumption and of the systems through which such media are produced, distributed, consumed, and shared—the latter being the primary focus of this article.

Scholarship on Web 2.0 participatory media and cultures has tended to emphasize the empowerment of the individual or the community of practice, with less attention paid to the structural dynamics of the Web 2.0 media ecology and how they may enhance or constrain the wielding of symbolic power by HR and other activists. Mapping HR communication infrastructures and analyzing processes of attaining visibility is seen as important but largely lacking in existing research (McLagan, 2005). McLagan

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[2] We acknowledge that not all HR campaigns aim to have an international dimension or to draw the attention of Western or global audiences; the cases analyzed here, like many others, did. We also acknowledge that HR discourse itself is primarily embedded in Western ideologies, a debate that is beyond the scope of this article. Many localized and transnational movements draw upon HR discourse and institutions for legitimacy in pursuit of their goals.

argues that these HR infrastructures and processes have become "a mechanism through which local political concerns could be translated into narratives and discursive forms that registered" with international publics (2005, p. 224). Here again we see the necessity of understanding cultural dynamics (including public narratives and discourses) as imbricated with structural concerns when analyzing the circulation of symbolic power. Further, scholarship that takes into account the continually shifting power relations within media systems and the implications for symbolic power in the Web 2.0 era is scarce. Systematic modeling of these shifting relations within and around the media ecology(s) is important, then, for expanding our strategic understanding of the structural potentials and limits of Web 2.0 video for human rights advocacy.

Therefore, although we start from an understanding of symbolic power informed by cultural theory, we find it useful to combine this with a more structurally oriented approach that offers tools for mapping changes in the Web 2.0 media ecology: media systems dependency (MSD) theory (Ball-Rokeach, 1974).[3] This approach may contribute to understanding changes in media systems and symbolic power by considering interdependencies across multiple levels, from macro (societies and states) to meso (organizations and interpersonal networks) to micro (individuals). Although we find limitations with this model, we suggest some adaptations to it in an effort to expand the tool kit available to both academics and practitioners for analyzing Web 2.0 HR video communication.

Given the importance of video for human rights advocacy, we focus here on specific instances of the application of online *video* rather than Web 2.0 more broadly. We first provide an overview of MSD and suggest how it relates to symbolic power and how it can be adapted for HR advocacy analysis. We then discuss the two case studies through this lens.

MSD Theory
Overview

MSD theory, beginning in the 1970s, was originally a response to critiques of linear models of media effects research. MSD proponents argue for "a multilevel ecological theory to capture an effects process wherein individuals and media are situated in their larger social environs" (Ball-Rokeach, 2008). MSD's ecological perspective calls for examining media dependency relations not in terms of a bounded media system but rather in a changing environment where media are interdependent with other social systems (e.g., economic), as well as across macro, meso, and micro levels.[4]

MSD is a theory of media power as a relational phenomenon. Holding media power is thought of as having control over scarce and/or exclusive information resources that are required by others to fulfill various goals; and this power is vested in relationships within and across levels of an ecology rather than emanating from actors. Media power "is the power to control not only access to knowledge construction,

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[3] Traditionally called *media system dependency*, we follow Matsaganis and Payne (2005) in using the plural form to recognize that today's media landscape is best understood as multiple systems.

[4] However, we note that much work remains to be done in MSD theory to better account for cross-cultural analyses of systems.

but also the rules of discourse that operate in the knowledge construction process" (Ball-Rokeach & Loges, 1996, p. 292). Media power in this sense echoes symbolic power, because social reality—and crucially, social change—is considered to be a product of these power relationships. In other words, meaning is understood to be constructed through discourse, and MSD aims to analyze the power relations that structure meaning-making processes.

Dimensions of MSD Relations

MSD's basic unit of analysis is the dependency relationship. Dependency relationships develop around the control of resources necessary for achieving information and communication goals through media. Dependency here is neither good nor bad in itself; what is important is how these power relationships restrict or support stakeholders' goals and how they might be reshaped to benefit particular agendas (Matsaganis & Payne, 2005).

Media dependency relations often emerge when a mass media system has dominant control over scarce resources (e.g., access to television news audiences) that are crucial to other entities (e.g., HR NGOs) to meet their information and communication goals (e.g., circulating evidentiary video to mobilize supporters). Such relationships are structurally either asymmetrical (one party is more dependent on the other) or symmetrical (roughly equal mutual dependency). These relationships are further described in four dimensions: *resource scope* (the range of resources needed for goal attainment), *goal scope* (the range of information and communication goals implicated), *referent* or *media scope* (the range of media channels implicated), and *intensity* (perceived exclusivity of the desired resources) (Ball-Rokeach, 1998). Strong media dependency relationships are more likely to have strong media effects (Ball-Rokeach, 1998); and, significantly for human rights specialists, such dependencies are most powerful when media users feel threatened (Hirschburg, Dillman, & Ball-Rokeach, 1986; Loges, 1994).

Most MSD-guided research has focused on the micro level, though much work has also been done at the macro and meso levels (see Black & Bryant, 1995; Merskin, 1999). Because this article focuses on how the MSD approach might be analytically adapted to the strategic use of HR Web 2.0 video, our case study analysis will take place primarily at the meso level while being mindful of how each level influences the others.

In MSD terms, we can conceive of four interrelated goals of human rights advocacy that may be pursued through Web 2.0 video: *increasing symbolic power* (shaping and circulating public representations of HR issues and influencing subsequent action); the cultivation and shaping of a *collective identity* of a movement; the *mobilization of resources* (e.g., public support and funding); and *seizing opportunities to effect policy change* (e.g., lobbying governments) (Castells, 2007; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Melucci, 1996).[5]

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[5] In classic MSD theory, three fundamental goals were conceived of for *individuals'* uses of media: play, understanding, and orientation (Ball-Rokeach 2008). We have substituted them for typical social movement goals, drawn from the social movement literature, and symbolic power. Social movement theorists in the U.S. tradition often emphasize "framing" rather than symbolic power when analyzing social

MSD and Web 2.0 Video

MSD theory was first developed before the Internet was popularized, when media landscapes were more consolidated and less complex. However, its central questions about dependency relationships can be adapted for the digital age (Ball-Rokeach & Jung, 2009), as we do in this article, to assess the impact of such technologies as Web 2.0 video on HR communication. Some commentators have suggested that Internet technologies can radically shift media power relations in favor of ordinary individual users, grassroots groups, and more democratic processes (e.g., Benkler, 2006; Shirky, 2008). Others have argued that the Internet can maintain and strengthen existing power inequalities (e.g., Kalathil & Boas, 2003; Kluver, 2007; Morozov, 2011). What this debate underscores is the need for tools for analyzing *particular* rather than general contexts of Web 2.0 use.

Key issues in current research on the distinctive sociotechnical characteristics of Web 2.0 online video include its viability as a public sphere, its generation of social networks of communicative action, and its impact on political participation (Antony & Thomas, 2010; Burgess & Green, 2009; Kellner & Kim, 2010; Lange, 2007). Our adaptation of the MSD approach may inform such discussions through its emphasis on seeing media platforms as imbricated within broader ecologies of dependency relations where symbolic power is wielded and challenged.

Case Studies

Case Study 1: Burma's Saffron Revolution

The major civil unrest in Burma in 2007 known as the Saffron Revolution attained a high degree of global visibility through Web 2.0 online video, blogs, and social networks (Chouliaraki, 2008a; Wang, 2007). First, we give a brief overview of the uprising (with particular attention to the use of YouTube, the most popular Web 2.0 video platform internationally); then we articulate in MSD terms how UGC video sharing, embedded within a broader media ecology, mediated the relatively high visibility of, and subsequent support for, the Saffron Revolution and the Burmese prodemocracy movement.[6]

The Uprising and Its Mediation

Fuel price protests in August 2007 quickly dovetailed with the prodemocracy movement in Burma, which the military junta government had largely suppressed since the last major uprising in 1988 (Kingston, 2008). By late September, tens of thousands of monks and others were demonstrating in several Burmese cities and towns. On September 26, the government launched a violent crackdown, quelling the uprising. By September 29, the government had completely shut down public Internet access

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movement goals in relation to visual media. Framing analyses can be too instrumental, fixed, and deterministic, thus obfuscating the broader dynamic, relational sense of symbolic power in terms of cultural struggles over meaning (Melucci, 1996; Steinberg, 2002).

[6] For an analysis of the aesthetics of UGC coverage of the uprising and the modes of witnessing and activism these encouraged, see Chouliaraki (2008a, 2010).

in Burma and disrupted international mobile phone connections, a situation that lasted for nearly two weeks (Chowdhury, 2008; Wang, 2007).

Before and during the shutdown, multiple actors circulated dramatic images and reports of the protests globally via Web 2.0 and broadcast news outlets as well as back into Burma via satellite TV and shortwave radio. Most of these transmissions came from Burmese citizen journalists—many with ties to Burmese exile opposition groups that operate radio, print, video, and television channels as well as Internet-based reporting networks of trusted contacts (e.g., Mizzima, *The Irrawaddy*, and the Democratic Voice of Burma [DVB]). Within Burma's state-dominated media system, these groups operate covertly. Historically, they physically carried their reports over the country's borders; today, Internet and mobile phone technologies are used to transmit reports out of Burma if possible (Chowdhury, 2008; Win, 2008).

Despite being one of the world's most closed countries at the time,[7] large amounts of images and information flowed out of Burma and into the mainstream global media during the 2007 unrest. In contrast to the 1988 uprising, which went largely unseen by the global public (see Figure 1), citizen journalists now managed to widely distribute photographs, audio recordings, and video abroad to elicit transnational support (Chouliaraki, 2008a; Chowdhury, 2008; Wang, 2007).[8] By the time the government disrupted Internet and mobile phone connections, visual evidence of the Saffron Revolution and its violent suppression had already escaped and was making global mainstream media headlines, prompting international HR actors—ranging from NGOs such as Human Rights Watch to nation-state organizations such as the United Nations to informal social networks of online activists—to respond.

User-generated online video was a primary source of visual documentation, and mainstream global news outlets "regularly ran grainy video and images from citizen journalists and even tourists who were eyewitnesses on the ground" obtained from the Internet (Chowdhury, 2008, p. 9). YouTube was banned in early September and blocked by Burma's ISPs; activists, however, found workarounds to upload images (Wang, 2007). International users also posted video content, many remixing still images and video sourced from Burmese exile media groups, others using content from mainstream news sources, sometimes adding their own commentary. YouTube and other UGC platforms (including non-video-centric sites such as blogs) were also a part, though somewhat limited, of the media ecology that spread information about protests within Burma; some inside the country reported watching early protests on YouTube, but more received such images rebroadcast via DVB satellite TV, which frequently sources its content from UGC sites (Mizzima News Agency, 2007; Win, 2008). In these ways, informal transnational networks of Internet users circulated and amplified user-generated HR media content, linked to both the global TV news sector and diaspora media networks (see Figure 2).

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[7] In 2007, Burma was ranked 164 out of 169 in Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom Index (http://www.rsf.org/en-classement69-2007.html); it had an Internet penetration rate of less than 1% (International Telecommunication Union, ICT Statistics, http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/ict/index.html).

[8] Student demonstrations in 1996 employed video and Internet technologies on a small scale (Danitz & Strobel, 1999); however, most scholars cite the larger 1988 uprisings as the predecessor to the Saffron Revolution.

For example, a citizen journalist video of the killing of Japanese journalist Kenji Nagai by government forces was, for months, the most viewed Saffron Revolution–related YouTube clip. This video was filmed by a contact of DVB's, acquired and broadcast by Japan's Fuji TV, and then uploaded by a YouTube user in Japan, all within 24 hours (Voice of America News, 2007; Win, 2009). The YouTube video was then linked or embedded by Western mainstream news sites such as the British *Times*. The UGC video thus broadened the transmission of what became a symbolically significant image, acting "as a transnational counter-narrative of power against official accounts of events" (Chouliaraki, 2008a, p. 341) and contributing to the movement's symbolic power to provoke international responses.

International protests supporting the Burmese uprising were organized quickly, facilitated largely by social networking sites and other websites that linked to or embedded YouTube videos and other evidence. Protesters in almost 100 cities worldwide participated in the October 6 Global Day of Action for Burma (Chowdhury, 2008). Established advocacy organizations including Amnesty International collaborated with the growing number of grassroots activists joining Web 2.0–based efforts such as the Support the Monks' Protest Facebook group (Stirland, 2007). The use of UGC platforms catalyzed a "scale shift" (Tarrow, 2005) from local to transnational mobilization and from Burmese-specific networks to broader networks of activists.

In the immediate aftermath of the uprising, the Burmese opposition's demands were unmet. Over the next few years, the junta appeared relatively resilient against internal and external prodemocracy and HR pressures, though not without being forced to make some conciliatory gestures (Lin, 2009; Selth, 2008; Seekins, 2010). Yet the longer-term impacts of the Saffron Revolution, in combination with other economic and geopolitical factors, appear to have fueled recent reforms. Burmese prodemocracy movement leader Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest in 2010 and then was elected to Burma's parliament in 2012, when she also began making official overseas visits. The new president since 2011, Thein Sein, has promoted reforms including greater press freedom and the release of political prisoners. However, at the time of this writing, progress was marred by HR violations in state relations with minorities and the continued domination of the Burmese media by military and other government interests (BBC News, 2012; Hindstrom, 2012; Mizzima News Agency, 2012).

The ways in which citizen journalists and activists used online video and other Web 2.0 tools increased the Burmese movement's visibility and enhanced its symbolic power, raising international scrutiny of the Burmese government. This enhanced visibility increased the political and economic costs of repression for the military junta and reduced its ability to influence the geopolitical framing of the Saffron Revolution (Castells, 2008; Win, 2008). The amplified circulation of influential images (symbolic power) across global media ecologies helped to bring about notable progress in the Burmese human rights situation since 2007.
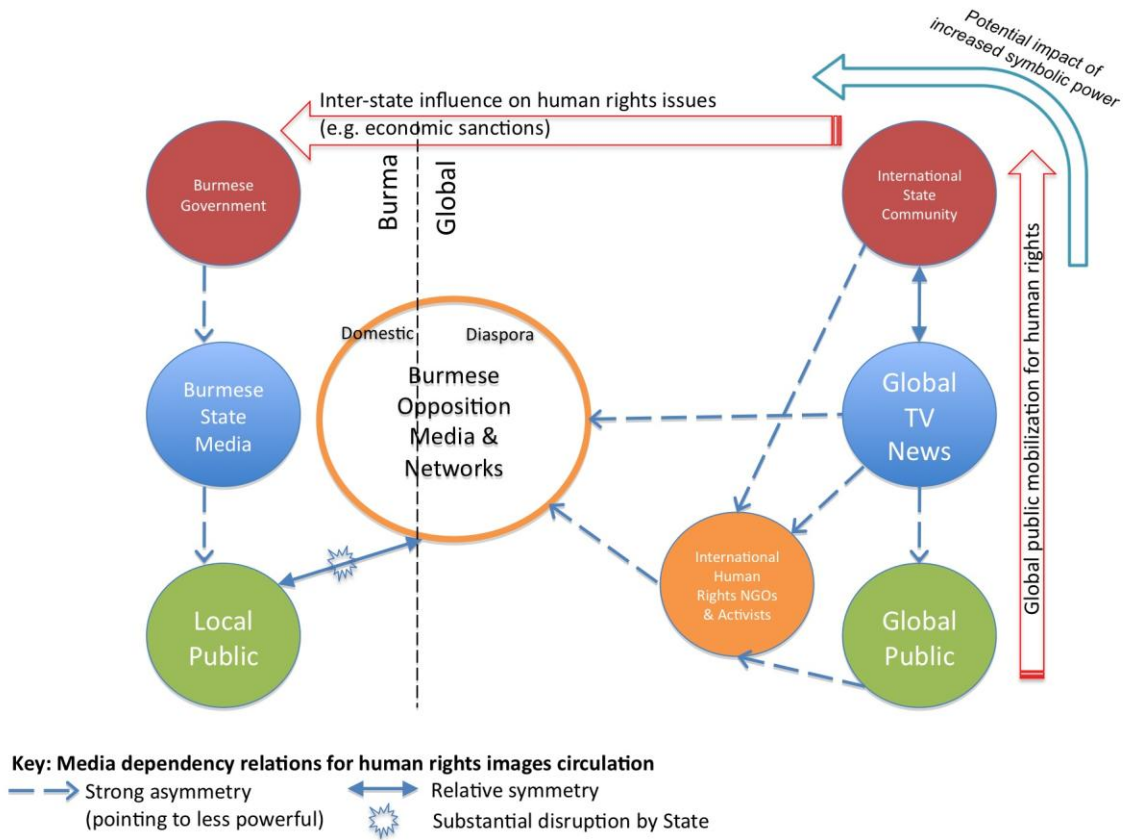
The Saffron Revolution from an MSD Perspective

Figure 1. MSD analysis of Burmese and global news media and human rights images circulation in the 1990s.

Inter-state influence on human rights issues (e.g. economic sanctions)

Potential impact of increased symbolic power

Burma / Global

Burmese Government

International State Community

Domestic | Diaspora

Burmese State Media

Burmese Opposition Media & Networks

Global TV News

Global public mobilization for human rights

International Human Rights NGOs & Activists

Local Public

Global Public

Key: Media dependency relations for human rights images circulation
- - -→ Strong asymmetry (pointing to less powerful)
←→ Relative symmetry
⚡ Substantial disruption by State

***Figure 1. MSD analysis of Burmese and global news media
and human rights images circulation in the 1990s.***

Figure 1 includes mid-to-late 1990s e-mail, fax, and camcorder use in global Burmese prodemocracy activism networks when the Internet's influence was quite limited (Danitz & Strobel, 1999).
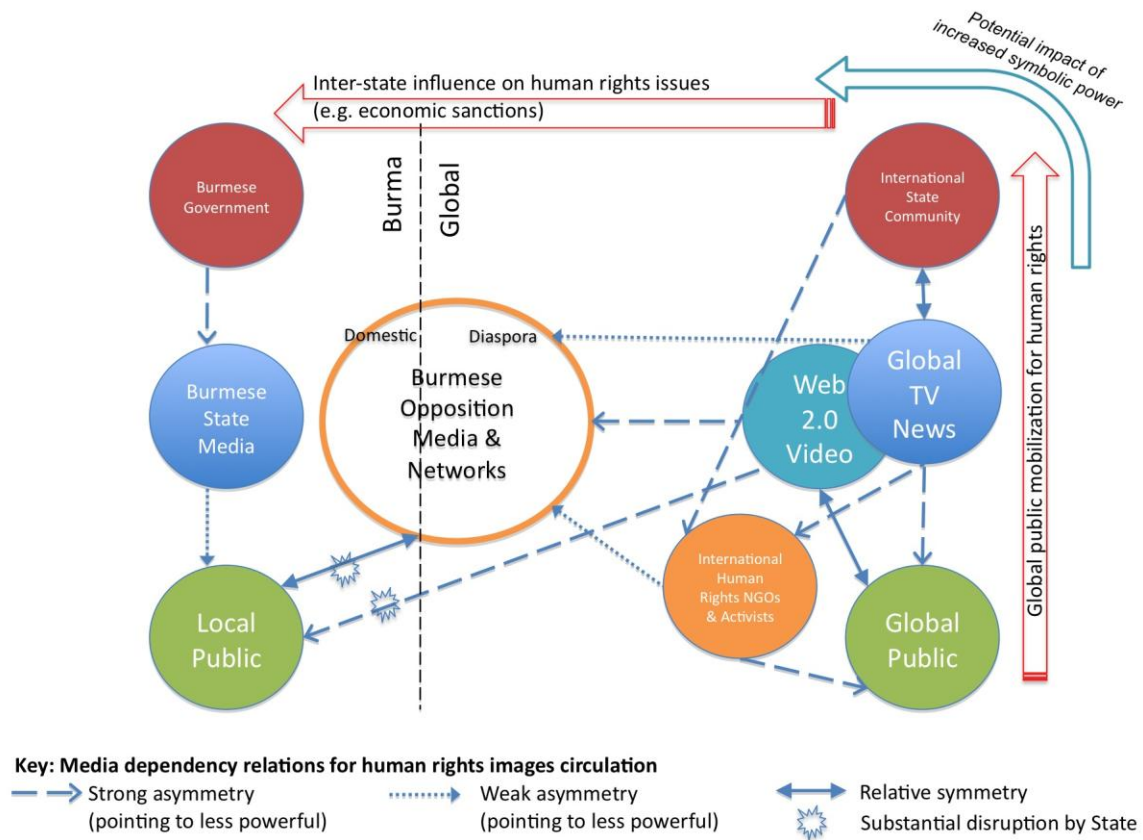
Figure 2. MSD analysis of Web 2.0 (pre-Hub) human rights images circulation circa 2007.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate, in MSD terms, the differences between pre–Web 2.0 and Web 2.0 media ecologies in which Burmese and human rights activists operated locally and globally.[9] Under Burma's pre–Web 2.0 authoritarian media system, the activists' and local citizenry's goal of circulating HR video to (primarily) global TV audiences to mobilize transnational support was strongly dependent on the efforts of the opposition media's diasporic network (see Figure 1). This relationship has very constrained

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[9] MSD's multilevel approach is often described in hierarchical terms (i.e., micro, meso, macro), but this does not preclude more networked and less linear relationships within and between levels, as these figures illustrate.

resource and media scopes; it is high intensity (particularly during elevated unrest) yet also relatively symmetrical. The local public and the opposition media (and its diasporic networks) are dependent upon each other for support in their goal scopes. Although there is some circulation of media content into the local public sphere by diaspora networks—primarily via shortwave radio and satellite TV broadcasting—grassroots communications from Burma to the outside are subject to severe state controls.

The opposition media networks also strongly depend on mainstream global TV news, their most important media channel for attaining publicity and spurring transnational mobilization (see Figure 1). This dependency may distort the message of HR communications, as the audiovisual evidence must be reshaped to follow the conventions and needs of mainstream journalism, which increasingly favors short, decontextualized spectacle (Chouliaraki, 2008b, 2010; Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). The movement's goal scope—increasing symbolic power, mobilization, and seizing political opportunity—is constrained by the (primarily commercial) goals of mainstream news.

As shown in Figure 1, the relationship between international HR advocates and the mainstream news media is sharply asymmetrical in favor of the latter. While they may be sympathetic to the prodemocracy movement's HR content, news organizations can choose among a great variety of human rights stories from different locales, each dependent upon the mass media for circulation.

As shown in Figure 2, large-scale Web 2.0 video platforms emerge as a new domain of media influence, albeit still linked with mass media TV news. Out of economic interest, the military regime permits a limited amount of Internet access and mobile phone infrastructure inside Burma. This expands the resource and media scopes for the distribution of video directly between the Burmese opposition media and local and international publics, although it is still limited by government controls. This has the effect of reducing the intensity of the opposition's asymmetrical dependency (and subsequently the Burmese public's) on the mass media global TV news.

For example, Norway-based DVB used online user-generated imagery to analyze and report on the protests for both international and Burmese audiences (Kyaw, 2007). In MSD terms, this was enabled by a shift not only in the structure of dependency but in the resource and media scopes. Likewise, the global mainstream media's dependency on Burmese opposition media has increased because of the ways in which digital technologies enable citizen journalists inside Burma to be in the best position to capture and spread visual media internationally.

In contrast to the pre–Web 2.0 media ecology (Figure 1), opposition media and activist networks within Burma's borders had access (albeit very limited) to online platforms for visual media distribution; their dependence on mainstream global television news was somewhat reduced. Similarly, the dependency relation of Burmese opposition organizations and activist networks on international NGOs was somewhat reduced, as Web 2.0 platforms for circulating their media expanded and mainstream news could source content directly from these platforms. In MSD terms, the visibility and increased symbolic power of the Saffron Revolution can be explained in large part by structural changes in the international and, to a more constrained degree, domestic media ecologies that shifted certain dependency relations in favor of the social movement actors operating through Web 2.0 media platforms.

Yet new technology platforms alone cannot explain the visibility of the 2007 uprisings; the use of them by exile opposition media's established contact networks was crucial. Without these (particularly the Burmese exile blogosphere), most visual and other HR evidence about the Saffron Revolution would likely have remained uncirculated (Win, 2008). That is, networked social relationships between trusted contacts were fundamental to content circulation. Trusted social relationships (or "strong ties," after Granovetter [1973]) operating through Web 2.0 platforms might be understood as a key resource for transnational activist networks as well as for publics and mainstream media. As the Burma case illustrates, strong ties will continue to play a critical role for social movements in Web 2.0 media ecologies.

Particular attention should be paid, however, to the problems of how circulating HR video may rely on commercial Web 2.0 systems to reach the largest audiences (McLagan, 2005). As Sam Gregory has written, "Issues around consent, representation and re-victimization and retaliation have emerged even more clearly in an open and networked online environment" (2010, p. 191); he summarizes these problems in three broad categories: safety, authenticity (or verification), and efficacy for action (p. 194).

In the Burma case, the government began using online imagery uploaded by activists to identify protesters, prompting some activists to take precautionary measures such as blacking out recognizable faces (Gregory, 2010; Win, 2008). The electronic footprint left by those in Burma involved in producing and distributing protest images online poses an ongoing risk to them (Wang, 2007). Of additional concern for online activists more broadly is the increasing filtering of the Internet by governments, including sometimes secret censorship agreements reached between Internet companies and governments (OpenNet Initiative, 2008).

Verification of HR claims made through popular UGC platforms such as YouTube is often difficult due to unreliable, vague, or nonexistent sourcing. Images depicting violence and distress are frequently decontextualized, encouraging their consumption primarily as spectacle. YouTube is, after all, a commercial site that was not designed for advocacy; most of its users seek entertainment (Clark, 2007; Madden, 2007).

Furthermore, the overlapping of Web 2.0 video platforms with mass media means that problems of distortion by mass media culture logics remain and are indeed complicated by the harnessing of Web 2.0 as a new component of their hegemony. The constraints of mainstream media conventions (e.g., the preference for short, easily understandable narratives) remain and can result in human rights abuses being used as "adventure news" rather than as calls for action (Chouliaraki, 2008b).

Case Study 2: WITNESS's Hub

WITNESS is a prominent international human rights organization specializing in video (Evolve Strategies, 2005) and was a leader in transitioning to Web 2.0. An MSD analysis of its engagement with the Web 2.0 media ecology offers a framework for understanding its shifting media dependency relations in terms of the organization's efforts to enhance the symbolic power of HR communications. We consider three general phases of WITNESS's development in the Internet era: before the rise of Web 2.0; the development of the Hub as an early adaptation to Web 2.0; and, finally, the shutting down of the Hub and

WITNESS's subsequent strategic shift toward influencing the cultures of Web 2.0 use through engagement with mainstream platforms, technology companies, policy makers, and other HR organizations.

Before Web 2.0

Founded in 1992, WITNESS's original mission was to distribute camcorders to HR activists worldwide. WITNESS also developed partnerships with local activist groups in various countries to help produce and strategically narrowcast their video evidence to key officials and judicial inquiries as well as for international news media broadcast (Walker, 2008).[10] The organization's focus on camcorder distribution became obsolete with the spread of cheaper camera technologies, but narrowcasting and production partnerships continued to be central to WITNESS's HR strategy and characterized most of the organization's work before the popularization of Web 2.0 online video.

In MSD terms, WITNESS's efforts during this period can be understood as creating an alternative dependency relationship. Local civil society groups and human rights advocates redirect some of their dependency on mainstream media systems for visibility toward WITNESS; WITNESS mediates and provides resources (e.g. expertise, contacts, and legitimacy) for narrowcasting as well as for negotiating the relationship with media channels globally. International NGOs with extensive networks and strong communication skills—in WITNESS's case, most notably for narrowcasting but also to some extent for mass media news outreach—have greater resource and media scopes for promoting issue visibility and may wield more influence over how issues are framed than smaller, local groups. These resources are needed by local groups to support their symbolic power, mobilization, and policy goals. WITNESS represents a somewhat more symmetrical relationship for local civil society groups seeking an alternative to the highly asymmetrical dependency they otherwise have when directly engaging with mainstream media systems.

With the near worldwide spread of Web 2.0, the functions of the established human rights video distribution ecology were changed by the vastly improved capacity for distributing video content rapidly and globally, without dependency on traditional channels of distribution (see Figure 2). WITNESS's established role expanded to help harness Web 2.0 video use for human rights campaigns and address the possibility of grassroots groups' new dependencies on the likes of YouTube for both narrowcasting and mass outreach. The following analysis of WITNESS's Hub initiative provides an early example of HR strategists responding to such shifts in the media ecology through an attempt to serve as expert, reliable facilitators in shaping how activists engage the Web 2.0 ecology.

The Hub

WITNESS program director Sam Gregory has suggested the "participatory panopticon" (Cascio, 2005) as a key concept for HR video (Gregory, 2009). This model supposes that in the Web 2.0 era, large numbers of ordinary citizens can record and widely distribute video evidence of abuses of authority—a

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[10] Narrowcasting refers to communication aimed specifically at key decision-making groups and supporter communities rather than general audiences (Gregory, 2010).

reversal (though not displacement) of the established abilities of state institutions to monitor their citizens.[11] The mainstream online video platforms enable the circulation of HR videos by and for global publics without relying on traditional, nonparticipatory media channels (Christensen, 2008; Milliken & O'Donnell, 2008).

However, this model is unlikely to be realized effectively solely through the grassroots use of commercial Web 2.0 video platforms designed primarily for entertainment purposes. From WITNESS's perspective, such platforms could not be depended upon to adequately resolve the concerns (security, credibility, etc.) about the safe circulation of HR video, as the Burma case illustrates. NGOs could play an important role in helping guide the grassroots use of the new technologies in the HR video ecology through strategic networking, curation, mobilization support, and increased security and privacy measures. This was the intent of WITNESS's Hub.

The beta version of the Hub was launched in 2007 as a "sort of club room, notice board, and YouTube-style video site for those concerned with human rights" (Walker, 2008, p. 63). The early vision for the Hub was of WITNESS leading the adaptation of online video in the HR advocacy field by developing an online, one-stop center for HR professionals, journalists, and activists interested in working with video (Evolve Strategies, 2005).

The Hub offered a video hosting platform where HR videos could be uploaded (or transferred from other video networks) to an online context entirely dedicated to HR activism and as free as possible from political or corporate interference. The website had heightened user security and privacy precautions and hosted materials for promoting these as norms among activists. The Hub also provided a place for activists to seek expert advice to refine their online video campaign content and strategy before releasing it for narrowcasting purposes or to broad audiences on mainstream sites.

The Hub was not intended to replace sites such as YouTube but rather to be an alternative yet complementary global staging area for human rights videos that could address the kinds of concerns about mainstream platforms suggested in the Burma case study. (Our understanding of the Hub's development is informed by two main sources: the 2005 consultants' report about the creation of an online video site by WITNESS [Evolve Strategies, 2005] and interviews we carried out with WITNESS senior staff members in 2009). In addition to supporting activist media and mobilization through the Hub, the organization also played an editorial and curatorial function in archiving material and adding contextual descriptions and strategic action points to videos as well as "bridging between local campaigns and international contexts, finding ways to loop international support back to local activists" (staff interview, May 29, 2009), with the ultimate aim of increasing the HR activists' symbolic power.

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[11] Others argue that the use of Web 2.0 in this way also brings problems of mob vigilantism or harassment and that skepticism should be exercised about whether such technologies can empower civil society (Dennis, 2008; Morozov, 2009). Even when effective, such empowerment may also lead to the further naturalization of surveillance culture.

In our MSD model of the Hub's envisioned position in the online HR video media ecology (shown in Figure 3), the local public and the opposition media could still directly access mainstream Web 2.0 video platforms. However, the relatively secure and reliable online video support services offered by the Hub as part of a network of HR NGOs created an alternative channel that could avoid the problems associated with mainstream Web 2.0 and possibly increase their symbolic power. This expanded the HR groups' resource and media scopes when they used the Hub and, ideally, would also mitigate the potential degree of their media dependencies on mainstream online video platforms—at the same time as those platforms reduced these groups' dependency on traditional communication channels whether for narrowcasting or for mainstream TV news.
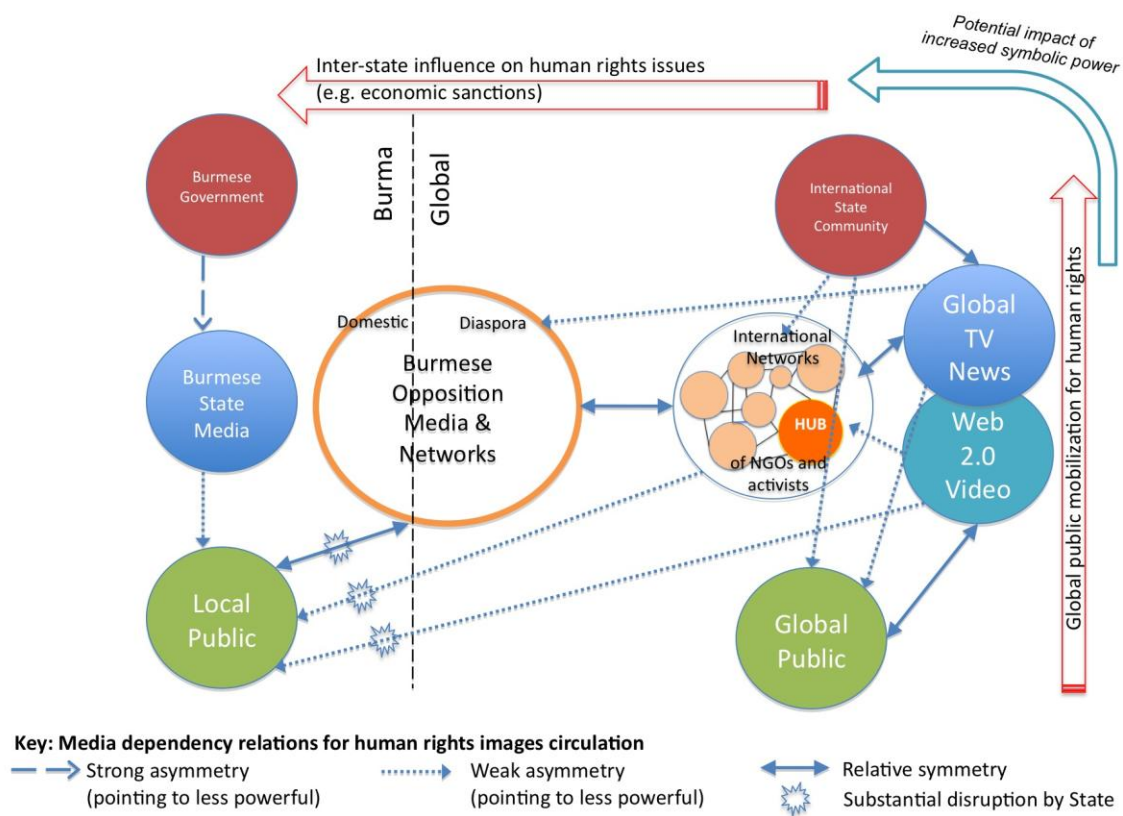

Figure 3. MSD analysis of WITNESS's Hub vision, 2009.

An MSD interpretation of WITNESS's original (2005) centralized vision of the Hub would suggest that other NGOs would develop a significant degree of dependency on the Hub's one-stop specialist platform, even as optimal symmetry is sought in relations between the NGOs and client grassroots activist groups. An MSD interpretation of the operation of the Hub *in practice* suggests that the popularization of

Web 2.0 platforms has expanded the resource and media scopes of all NGOs and grassroots activist groups, while also greatly enhancing their networking capabilities and reducing the importance of having a central organizing structure. Thus, by 2009, WITNESS had adapted its vision of the Hub to being one node of a broader online HR advocacy network with no distinct center rather than being a central dependency relationship for HR communicators.

Post-Hub

Since 2007, the Web 2.0 media ecology has developed prolifically, and online video production and consumption patterns have become more apparent. The Hub attracted a diverse range of partners, including mainstream media organizations such as Al Jazeera.[12] However, it remained largely a niche site, proving ineffective at drawing mass audiences to increase campaign visibility and collective action (symbolic power); local civil society groups, even those using the Hub, still found it necessary to upload their videos to YouTube when their goals were increased visibility and mobilization. Further, the costs and time required to maintain the Hub created a burden on WITNESS's resources. By August 2010, WITNESS had shut down the Hub, maintaining its content as an online archive. (Our understanding of this decision is informed by two main sources: Gregory [2010] and interviews with senior WITNESS staff in February 2011.)

Grassroots groups' continued dependency on mainstream sites such as YouTube (with their larger potential audiences) rather than on WITNESS's HR-specific platform suggests their prioritization of visibility despite greater risk, less control over messaging, and the sidelining of media expertise that NGOs like WITNESS provide. Even though Web 2.0 use has reduced local groups' asymmetrical dependency on traditional media channels and NGOs through expanding their media scope, it has also introduced some degree of dependency on mainstream Web 2.0 platforms. Thus, as the mainstream, especially commercial, online video platforms' predominance became clear, it demonstrated one way in which the new media ecology still reflects the old; media power is greatly concentrated in those channels that have the potential to reach the largest audiences—a key difference here being that it was primarily *user* production and circulation of content that solidified the media power of platforms such as YouTube. The symbolic power of HR campaigns still may be enhanced by using such platforms, though the audiences for such media are much smaller than those for entertainment. Symbolic power to mobilize publics is more likely to increase if the HR content is also broadcast across traditional mass media news channels.

As the widespread preference for YouTube in distributing HR video became apparent, WITNESS decided it was critical to engage in the mainstream new media ecology by reaching out not only to mainstream Web 2.0 users but also the Web 2.0 companies themselves. The organization's goal scope shifted to prioritize propagating enhanced HR media norms in the wider Web 2.0 culture.

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[12] These remain listed at
http://www.witness.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=26&Itemid=54

We hope to identify the optimal combination of norms and code/architecture, as well as potentially law and market approaches . . . to promote a safer, more effective world of ubiquitous HR video. . . . These approaches include adjustments to site governance and review policies in video-sharing sites and social networks to allow better handling of sensitive HR footage. (Gregory, 2010, p. 205; see also Padania, Gregory, Alberdingk-Thijm, & Nunez, 2011)

A comparison of Figures 2 and 3 reveals how, in MSD terms, the evolving strategic vision for the Hub can be understood as shifting the power relations, media scopes, and resource dependencies of different stakeholders in the HR online video ecology. For instance, the new space specifically for HR communication that opened up around the Hub and its partner network shown in Figure 3 dilutes the strong asymmetry of the local public's dependence upon the Web 2.0 video domain for HR video circulation shown in Figure 2.

What WITNESS came to prioritize was not the Hub's prominence within the media ecology itself but rather the broader promotion across platforms of certain practices and norms of respect (such as informed consent, respect for privacy, and appropriate commentary norms among users of online video sites) for Web 2.0 HR video production and consumption. As of May 2012, WITNESS was partnering with YouTube and social media newsgathering organization Storyful to launch a new human rights channel on YouTube and had been in discussions with Google, YouTube's parent company, regarding online HR activism (Gregory, 2012); in July 2012, YouTube announced that it had added a new tool for blurring human faces in uploaded videos, "with the security of activists in mind" (YouTube public affairs representative Jessica Mason, quoted in Bosch, 2012). These recent developments suggest that WITNESS's evolving strategy of engagement with the mainstream Web 2.0 media ecology may be influencing changes in these platforms, calling for further analysis. In MSD terms, WITNESS's goal scope evolved toward becoming an HR norm-promoting influence in the Web 2.0 media ecology more broadly, using its position to affect the relationship between activist groups, commercial Web 2.0 platforms, and potential audiences to enhance the symbolic power of HR communications.

This case study illustrates how MSD can help explain shifts in—and inform adaptations to—media systems for HR communication. It also illustrates how HR communication is both shaped by, and may help shape, Web 2.0 media ecologies.

Discussion

There are both strengths and limitations to applying MSD to map the relationships through which the symbolic power of human rights advocacy may be enhanced or constrained in the Web 2.0 era. Here we consider these in relation to both theoretical and practical advancement.

Insights for MSD Theory

In these case studies, we have suggested ways in which MSD analysis can be applied to NGO and activist use of Web 2.0 online video networks and to an understanding of their efforts to increase their

symbolic power. In doing so, it becomes apparent that the MSD framework itself needs to be adapted when applied to Web 2.0. We believe our analysis can inform such emerging research. The Burma and WITNESS cases highlight how MSD can model the interdependencies of media ecologies in relation to global civil society. MSD studies have typically focused on a local or national frame of reference, but this is not sufficient to account even for local media flows in a globalized world. For instance, Burma-based activists who give video footage to diasporic groups for broadcast via satellite television back into Burma suggest how the spatiotemporal dimensions of MSD analysis need to expand across borders.

Our case studies suggest that MSD analysis also can elaborate why and how those local HR groups not only urgently seek and distribute advocacy information among themselves but also produce information that is then distributed to distant others. Such efforts are facilitated by global media and civil society structures. A survey of the democratizing effects of the Internet in MSD terms across 152 countries found that even in those countries with low levels of Internet use during major sociopolitical crises, such use still produced significant effects in favor of political liberalization (Groshek, 2009). We suggest that this could be explained by the response of transnational media and civil society to such crises and the expansion of media scopes—and the increased symbolic power—that such attention brings.

However, such analysis should be modified from MSD's broadcast-era conception of media ecologies as dominated by the influence of higher-level institutions upon the micro level to accommodate an expansion of production and distribution power (with certain limitations) as well as media scope *at the grassroots*. This is a key development for MSD in the era of global, participatory Web 2.0 networks, particularly for transnational actors such as NGOs.

Furthermore, while MSD theory helps analyze how power is shaped (in part) by the structure of media systems, it is less robust in accounting for cultural factors; our emphasis on the concept of symbolic power was an initial attempt to better integrate cultural with structural theories of power in contemporary media systems. The relationship between symbolic power and MSD warrants elaboration in future research. Chouliaraki's work on the "symbolic features" of human rights images and the kinds of narratives, discourses, and actions these encourage (2008a, p. 345; 2008b; 2010) could inform future development of this approach.

Insights for HR Advocacy

For practitioners, conceiving of dependency relations—a fundamental component of the MSD framework—as a critical element of media power offers a nuanced way of thinking about how to mobilize witnessing publics beyond spectatorial sympathy and into action. Understanding a target audience's media ecology and the sources upon which the audience depends for certain kinds of information is another way of thinking about narrowcasting; one that moves beyond thinking of how to reach an audience to how to have the greatest effect. This could be elaborated through the lens of symbolic power by considering how meaning-making activities may be bolstered or hindered within particular media ecologies. Thinking in terms of dependency relations and symbolic power may support more sophisticated narrowcasting strategies based on an ecological model, even if necessarily simplified.

Similarly, the MSD framework of *goal fulfillment* as a way to conceptualize information-seeking behavior and the likelihood of media influence on mobilization may be useful for strategizing HR campaigns. The goal scope, for instance, that may motivate a seasoned HR activist to watch and act on an online video may differ significantly from the range of goals that motivate a young student to join an online activist network, remix a political video, or participate offline. Such an emphasis may be useful for effective targeting of audience segments. We tentatively suggested using social movement goals for an MSD analysis of HR communication (i.e., collective identity cultivation, resource mobilization, seizing opportunities to effect policy change, and increasing symbolic power); our case studies focused especially on the latter. However, these goal constructs require further analytical development for practical and theoretical application.

Although we have focused in this article on meso-level analysis as a first step, study of the effects on mobilization at the micro and macro levels (and the interaction between levels) is necessary to better understand the possibilities of Web 2.0 video for human rights advocacy. MSD's multilevel, ecological approach is both its strength and weakness; the theory's power is lessened when one level is pulled out for analysis and risks becoming too linear to adequately analyze the complexity of social change. We therefore underscore the need for further elaboration of the relationships between levels and how these impact the exercise of symbolic power.

On the other hand, MSD's complexity and range may make it unwieldy in some situations as an analytical tool for HR professionals. Another limitation for practitioners is that MSD does not directly take into account the technical design of media platforms; as the WITNESS case illustrates, this is a crucial factor in the Web 2.0 media ecology. Future collaborative efforts between MSD analysts and human rights activists/practitioners are thus needed to yield more effective, MSD-based analytical tools for strategic HR communication.

As a final suggestion for future research, we highlight the significance of our case studies for Ethan Zuckerman's "'cute cat theory' [CCT] of Web 2.0" (2009), which suggests that repressive regimes are reluctant to censor or suppress popular mainstream Web 2.0 platforms even when they are being used by antiregime activists because of potential social costs; these include upsetting the many other purely entertainment-focused platform users who are then more likely to become politicized against the regime and to seek out knowledge of Internet censorship circumvention skills. CCT implies that activists working against repressive governments should prefer to use existing popular, mainstream Web 2.0 platforms rather than smaller, independent platforms.

Contrary to Zuckerman's cute cat theory, the Hub did not attract significant levels of government censorship attempts despite being a relatively high-profile project created by a well-known international human rights NGO (staff interview, February 16, 2011). It is possible that the activity on the Hub did not reach a large enough scale to motivate government action against it. Detailed MSD analyses may offer HR theorists and practitioners considering the implications of CCT strategic insights into the extent to which HR organizations should commit to independent versus mainstream platforms in different contexts of media system dependency and asymmetry. Both CCT and strategic HR communication in general might thus be refined through deeper engagement with an MSD framework.

The MSD approach that we have adapted here treats media platforms as imbricated within broader ecologies of dependency relations where symbolic power is wielded and challenged. Because symbolic power is shaped by both cultural and structural conditions, we encourage further bridging between cultural and structural analyses of new media in future studies of human rights and social movement communication.

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