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Info 200 Blog Post #4: Article Summary

Posted on [October 13, 2018](#) by [Jason Weekley](#)

Tufekci, Zeynep. (2013). “‘Not this one’: Social movements, the attention economy, and microcelebrity networked activism.” *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57(7), 848-870. doi: 10.1177/0002764213479369

Zeynep Tufekci is an Associate Professor at the University North Carolina School of Information and Library Science. Her research and academic work focus on technology and society, particularly social movements, privacy issues, and algorithmic decision making (UNC Faculty Directory, 2018). In this study, Tufekci (2013) examines the concept of *attention* as a key resource in social movements and how it in connection with participatory media has led to networked microcelebrity activism. The author developed her theory based on her data gathered during the Arab Spring in 2011, conversations with staffers from international human rights organizations, researching traditional media coverage of the events, and analyzing the social media

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accounts of activists. The main case study presented in this paper is Bahraini political activist, Zainab Al-Khawaja, whose Twitter account was examined from the beginning of unrest in Bahrain in February 2011 until January 2013.

The main finding of this study is that the traditional reliance of social movements on mass media to garner attention for their cause has been fundamentally altered. By using digital technologies, social movements can bypass traditional media sources to bring attention to broader publics. What this ultimately means for social movements is that their strategies for attention operate under new conditions. Furthermore, these new media pathways have led to individuals who use affordances of social media to present themselves in ways that brings attention to their cause and who become microcelebrities (Tufekci, 2013).

This paper is useful for studying social movements as an information community because it looks directly at the importance of attention as a resource in social movements. Tufekci (2013) writes, "Attention is the means through which a social movement can introduce and fight for its preferred framing, convince broader publics of its cause, recruit new members, attempt to neutralize opposition framing, access solidarity, and mobilize its own adherents" (p. 849). Analyzing social movements through a framework of attention is useful in understanding their informational needs and behaviors.

In addition to reframing the approach to social movements, this paper adds to the research on leadership within modern networked social movements. The horizontal ethos of social movements has been frequently commented on by researchers who see social media as facilitating leaderless movements (Gerbaudo, 2012). This paper

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illustrates, however, how microcelebrities form within social movements who then become de facto leaders. This is an example of how social media has facilitated the rise of complex or soft forms of leadership (Gerbaudo, 2012).

By framing attention as a key resource, the ecological theory of human information behavior (Williamson, 2005) becomes valuable in analyzing the information needs and behaviors of social movements. This model is situated in the everyday life seeking (ELIS) field and emphasizes that information is not always purposefully sought after, but often is incidentally acquired (Williamson, 2005).

Furthermore, this model considers social and cultural factors that influence information seeking which in turn affects which information sources are trusted and used (Savolainen, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, this paper is useful in providing a framework of how to look at the information needs and behaviors of social movements. Information becomes the loci when using a framework of attention and digital technologies become pathways to bring attention to the public sphere. Furthermore, this paper can be used to highlight how the microcelebrity status of certain individuals within social movements help to broaden information encountering to people outside of the social movement sphere and into a broader public discourse.

References

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One thought on “Info 200 Blog Post #4: Article Summary”



[Michael Stephens](#) says:

October 18, 2018 at 5:49 pm

I think this is a linchpin study for your work in 200. You describe the article clearly and connecting to ELIS and the ecological theory grounds it in LIS.

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