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New Media and ICT for Social Change and Development in China

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Abstract
As the country with biggest Internet population, by December 2011, China had at least 513 million Internet users. As the biggest developing country in the world, in the past three decades China experienced rapid social change and enormous economic development. The impacts of new media and ICT (Information and Communication Technology) on social change and development in China have attracted increasing attention among scholar communities. This dissertation aims to study the new media and ICT for social change and development phenomena in China. It draws upon data from my fieldwork and participant observations in the past three years as well as a nationwide large sample survey of ICT use among Chinese CSOs (civil society organizations).

I situate this research primarily in the theoretical framework of communication for development and social change studies (e.g., Servaes, 1999; Servaes, 2008). In this research, new media and ICT for social change phenomena refer to the widely emerging new media and ICT for

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social change and development policies, projects, or actions initiated by different stakeholders including government, CSOs, and individual activists. Through a case analysis approach, this research analyzes specific new media and ICT for social change cases, conducted by different stakeholders, concerning urgent social change issues such as digital inequality, CSOs empowerment, government accountability and transparency, and hunger/malnutrition using various communication for development and social change theories as well as other new media studies theories and the ICT/new media for social change model that I propose in Chapter two.

This research reveals: how different stakeholders engage in new media for social change and development interventions (policies, projects or actions); the communication channels involved in these interventions; the relation and the interactions of different stakeholders in these new media for social change interventions; the sustainability issue of these social change and development interventions. The findings of the research show that the new media for social change model I propose is an effective analytical framework for the study of new media for social change. The research reveals that a multi-channel perspective which incorporates ICTs and other communication channels as well as the interactions between different channels is of great significance in the study of new media for social change. Moreover, the analysis of the interactions between different communication channels shows that in the media environment of convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006), in social change actions, the relation between ICT channels and other communication channels is not an either/or relation. They interact with each and reinforce each other in the social change actions. The research also shows that the multi-stakeholders approach I employed can significantly enrich our knowledge of the new media for social change phenomena. The multi-dimensional relations and interactions between different stakeholders in social change interventions are important issues that the study of new media for social change should address.

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