

The Internet and Personal Narratives in the Post-Disaster Anti-Nuclear Movement 災害後の脱原発運動におけるインターネットと個人の語り

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Abstract

In this essay I explore the way the internet has facilitated people's participation in anti-nuclear activism in Japan. After contextualising the use of the internet in the anti-nuclear movement which developed after the compound disaster of "3/11", I present a case study focused on the tweet messages of one twitter user. By undertaking content analysis, tracing tweets over time, and tracing the connections between particular vocabulary items, and an interview, we gain a picture of how one participant in the anti-nuclear movement developed a political consciousness through participating in internet-facilitated activism.

Keywords

Atomic Energy/Nuclear Power, Social Media, Social Movements

Introduction

In this essay I explore the role of the internet in anti-nuclear actions in Japan after the compound disaster of 11 March 2011 (hereafter "3/11"). The way people participate in the current anti-nuclear protests differs from an earlier generation of labour and socialist movements. In the immediate post-Second World War period individual participation in social movements was typically facilitated through membership of large hierarchical organisations such as political parties or their affiliated trade unions and cultural associations. In contemporary social movements, however, individual participation

in particular actions is less likely to be a result of compliance with decisions made at the leadership level of a particular organisation. It is more likely the result of individual decisions to attend particular actions and events. The struggle against the ratification of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (Anpo) in 1960 was something of a watershed in the development of a more individualistic style of movement participation. Although large organised groupings such as the Japan Communist Party, the Japan Socialist Party and their affiliates organised huge numbers of people to attend anti-Anpo demonstrations this period also saw the emergence of groups like the "Koe naki koe" (voices of the voiceless) who emphasised their independence from established political parties and labour unions.¹ As Simon Avenell has argued, the philosophy of the "shimin" (citizen) which emerged out of these movements celebrated the political agency of non-aligned citizens as social movement actors.² As the large left-wing parties and smaller New Left groups declined in size and power in the 1970s and 1980s these citizen-based movements flowered. Jasper observes a similar trend in his studies of Euro-American social movements where he describes a shift from the predominance of movements such as labour movements (which often competed with each other because they had clearly defined constituencies) and the new movements which flow more easily into each other. He cites the environmental and feminist movements, for example, which together inspired the antinuclear movement of the 1970s, which in turn gave rise to the disarmament movement of

the early 1980s in Europe.³

The growth of internet communication technologies including email, the world wide web and newer social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Youtube has accelerated the trend away from monolithic organisational structures and towards more fluid forms of political participation. As Slater et al. have noted, after the 3/11 disaster social media played an important role in disseminating information about the Fukushima nuclear disaster and facilitating anti-nuclear activism.⁴ Social media not only facilitates the flow of information in real time across national borders⁵ it also influences the way in which people participate in a social movement.⁶ The loose, non-hierarchical and open structure of new social movement organisations in Japan facilitates the participation of individuals and does not require them to subscribe to any broader organisational agenda. Individual patterns of engagement are visible on social media as activists Tweet, blog and chat about their involvement in different movements and demonstrations.

Political scientist Gono Ikuo describes the way information is shared through the internet in contemporary forms of grassroots political engagement in terms of the "cloudification" of social movements. According to Gono, the web acts as a kind of "cloud" which people access in order to exchange information easily. Internet communication technologies have decreased the cost of sharing information and have taken the hassle out of organising events. Activist groups no longer rely upon specific physical locations or centres in which to organise but only some symbolic information centre. Instead they can download designs for placards, find a meeting point, or check the route of a demonstration online.⁷ "Cloudification", however, does not satisfy all of the needs of social movements. Some scholars have suggested that the effectiveness of the internet has been exaggerated.⁸

The deeper importance of the internet lies not merely in its role as a powerful medium for disseminating information but as an arena in which activists develop their identities. From the point of view of the moral and emotional side of social actions, the internet is a place to exchange personal narratives and explore interactions. Generally, internet users recognise themselves reflexively through these linguistic interactions.⁹ This aspect of the internet is connected with these individuals' participation in activism. Furthermore, this emphasis on the internet as a forum for emotional and personality development is consistent with new trends in the study of social movements. A growing body of social movement literature demonstrates that participation in social movements is not the result of purely "rational" reasoning, as might be suggested by resource mobilisation theory, for example. Joseph Davis, for example, argues that

[...] participants must do more than agree with a particular formulation of grievances or rationale for engaging in ameliorative action. Participants' involvement is perhaps never simply logical and instrumental, but - and in many contexts more so - also imaginative, intuitive, and emotional.

The current anti-nuclear movement draws on multiple strands and diverse levels of experience in political activism. Some participants draw on pre-existing political groups. Others are aligned with movements to improve the situation of precarious workers.¹¹ The movement also includes politically-committed artists, such as the rapper ECD, the artist and MCAN (Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes) organiser Misao Redwolf, or the graphic designer Kozuka Ruiko. In all of these cases, however, motivations for

participation in the anti-nuclear movement reflect a complex of rationalistic and emotional factors.

Some of the most promising social movement theories take a narrative approach to thinking about political consciousness. Such theorists argue that developing a political consciousness bears some resemblance to religious conversion. In recent religious studies based on a narrative approach, conversion is understood to involve a process whereby the individual gradually takes on the vocabulary and rhetoric of a religion.¹² As a follower's beliefs develop, the individual can become more involved in the vocabulary of the religious organisation and come to use its more sophisticated rhetoric.¹³ In activism, we can observe a similar process. Individuals talk about their experiences of activism and thereby sustain a collective identity.¹⁴ Participants learn the vocabulary of activism, share collective stories of activism and tell this as a narrative of their lives.¹⁵ This is not a sudden and complete conversion, but a continuing process of storytelling and rewriting of their life stories.

Beautiful @tatangarani's Dining Tables and Anti-nuclear Activism

How do individuals decide to go to a demonstration for the first time and what is the role of the internet in this process? In order to explore how internet communication technologies facilitate individual engagement in contemporary social movements I analyse the the case of a company employee in Tokyo who goes by the Twitter handle of @tatangarani. Having grown up in a rural city of Japan in a rather conservative family, @tatangarani had never thought about participating in political protests prior to 3/11. I can trace her activism through an interview I conducted with her in 2013¹⁶ and via an analysis of the Twitter messages which she provided to me.¹⁷ I used text mining software to analyse her tweets, from 11 August 2010 to 4

August 2013, a total of 50,563 messages, allowing me to investigate the role of the internet in developing a narrative of involvement in a social movement.

Figure 1 is a visualisation of her Twitter messages. These messages were analysed using the software, KH Coder,¹⁸ and are shown here as a network of frequently occurring words. Words in the map were translated into English after the analysis. This method is called quantitative text analysis or text mining. First, we break sentences into their smallest parts, morphemes, and classify them according to the parts of speech. Then we find the words which appear most frequently and then those which co-occur most frequently. The KH Coder is unable to analyse syntactic constructions but can provide a visual map of characteristics of the text. The map indicates the co-occurrence ratio of words. Frequently co-occurring words are connected by lines and this leads to a visualisation of networks of words. Each sub-network - a small network which is roughly understandable as a topic - is connected to the other sub-networks and this constitutes the whole network map. Words which unite plural networks are called words with high "betweenness centrality". Words with high "betweenness centrality" relate multiple topics and are therefore significant.

that if she went to a demonstration she would be arrested or treated roughly by the riot police. In her imagination, a demonstration was a dangerous place. She hesitated, but ultimately participated in the 4.10 Genpatsu Yamero Demo!!!!!! (10 April No Nukes Demonstration). One of popular singer Saitō Kazuyoshi's songs was a decisive factor in @tatangarani's decision. Saitō uploaded a song "Zutto uso datta" (It Was Always a Lie)¹⁹ to the video sharing site YouTube.²⁰ The song charged that the government and the nuclear power industry had been lying to the Japanese people about the dangers of nuclear power. The video was deleted soon after, but somebody kept uploading it persistently. @tatangarani thought Saitō might encounter serious difficulties in his career because of this but she recognised that he was fighting, nevertheless. His determination to speak out inspired her. She thought:

I have to respond to this. If I don't respond, what kind of person am I?²¹

She consulted her friends about participating in the demonstrations and they said, "Don't do it!" She was disappointed that she could not depend on her existing networks. She went to her first demonstration with a new friend that she got to know via Twitter. She thus found a new network via the internet. Now, she likes to go to the demonstrations of TwitNoNukes and the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes (MCAN). She goes to these demonstrations because the organisers pay attention to how they present themselves. As Patricia Steinhoff observes, many people in Japan have extremely negative views of political protest which are tied up with disturbing collective memories of the violent incidents which marred the student New Left in the early 1970s.²² The organisers of TwitNoNukes, like many new participants in the anti-nuclear movement, feel that only by

dissociating their activism from the disturbing memories of violence which they associate with "old style" demonstrations can they attract new followers and develop popular legitimacy. The organisers therefore prohibit the banners of labor unions and political parties which were popular in these "old style" demonstrations, in order to make the demonstrations seem less threatening for new participants. They stop people from provoking confrontations with police, because this would make it difficult to sustain the movement. @tatangarani's own professional work is related to this kind of "impression control," so she found their methods easy to understand. She was uneasy about participating in demonstrations at first but she was moved by the behaviour of the organisers and started acting like them.

I can go to my office in torn jeans if I want to, but I intentionally wear some "office lady"-like dress to the demonstrations.²³

The dark suits worn by male Japanese salarymen and female so-called "Office Ladies" (OL) are gendered symbols which designate their wearers as respectable middle class professionals. By adopting the identity of a "normal" Japanese office worker when she attends the protest @tatangarani, like the TwitNoNukes organisers, attempted to dissociate the act of participation in a demonstration from stereotypes of violent student protest. The demonstration is rather presented as an activity in which salaried workers and other "normal" Japanese people can participate.

@tatangarani's consciousness about her dress reflects how important the embodied act of demonstrating was in the development of her new identity as a social activist. Her original explorations of the dangers of radioactive fallout on the internet were materialised through her decision to participate in physical

demonstrations. The friends she made online discussing nuclear power translated into real-world relationships as she attended demonstrations with them.

@tatangarani's narrative of identity involves both online communication and physical participation in the movement. In addition to narrating her journey into activism via Twitter, @tatangarani also maintains a collection of ephemera (known as gudzu [goods] in Japanese) which she has collected at the demonstrations she attended in a cake tin. During our interview she showed me this tin and reflected on the meaning of the tin and the objects it contained to the development of her new activist identity. "It's like the jewellery box of a little schoolgirl", she said, as she smiled, and opened the tin (Figure 3). "I don't know why I am collecting these, but I remember many things while I am reading these fliers".²⁴ Inside the box there were MCAN stickers and fliers from TwitNoNukes and other demonstrations. The fliers are filed according to the organisation which issued them.



Figure 3: Demo "goods"

I asked her if that was a way of maintaining her memories.

Well, hmm...I wonder? I haven't thought about it that way so far. I just tried to save them in the cake tin because I had collected so many. I put items I bought to assist affected areas in Tōhoku here, too. Demonstrations and assisting the affected areas are two sides of the same coin to me.²⁵

Keeping these mementos and organising them is also a way of ordering and remembering her experiences. Stickers and fliers, voluntarily designed by artists, were not only the expression of protests but also mnemonics for participants to order their memories and create

an internally consistent timeline through which they can reflexively create their own identity. In personal narratives, individuals like @tatangarani choose the elements of their experience and line them up according to a timeline which makes sense from the point of view of the moment of narration. In narrative identity theory, a personal narrative is a point of view which makes sense of the individual and their convictions.²⁶ With the clues provided by the mementos from the demonstrations, she confirms her convictions about social activism and nuclear power. These physical artefacts complement her online narrative.

An analysis of @tatangarani's tweets since 3/11 shows that they have drastically changed since the disaster (Figure 4). Where the "smile" emoticon previously had the highest "betweenness centrality", now the word "demo" connects all sub-networks: sub-networks A (demo-nuke plants), B (government-Japan), C (Fukushima-evacuation) and so on. This network provides a map of the Twitter messages sent by @tatangarani - a company employee who also participates in demonstrations. Her previous daily life is still present, however, in words like "delicious", "eat", "work" and "time".

@tatangarani's tweets also reflect her changing attitudes. Figure 5 is a time series analysis for categories of messages. I set up a coding rule which classifies messages according to categories. Twitter messages were classified into five categories, including "anti-nuclear action", "radiation exposure", "children", "Japan", or "anti-racism". This is based on the trends of the most frequently-appearing words. From April 2011 to July 2011, the number of words for radiation exposure suddenly increased. This is the period when she was learning about radiation and learning a new vocabulary. After September 2011, the term "anti-nuclear action" started increasing and

there was a peak in June 2012.

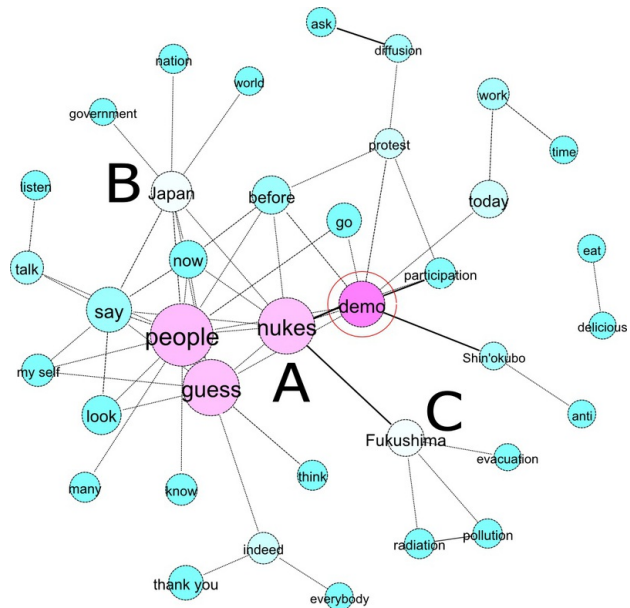


Figure 4: Tweets after 3/11. (From 16:53, 11 March 2011 to 16:16, 4 August 2013. 30 months. 46,395 Twitter messages).

As @tatangarani's level of comfort with social activism grew she began to branch out from her anti-nuclear activism and take an interest in other issues. After February 2013, the "anti-racism" category increased due to her developing interest in the Counter-Racist Action Collective (C.R.A.C., formerly Reishisuto Shibaki-tai), a group dedicated to countering the racist hate speech of the Zaitoku-kai.²⁷ Reishisuto Shibaki-tai started their actions against the Zaitoku-kai in February.

This time series analysis indicates that there were transitions in the issues with which she was concerned. As described above, gaining a new vocabulary is the first step in attitudinal change, whether in religious conversion or in developing political consciousness. From March to September 2011 she acquired a new vocabulary, developed her consciousness of social issues and overcame her misapprehension about participating in

political demonstrations.

I did not know anything about nuclear power stations ... I had been scared of people who yelled "no-nukes!" though I didn't know anything. (Twitter message, 12 April 2011)

She was aware of her ignorance, studied hard, learned about the issues and got to know that it was time for her to change. She had become more proactive in seeking information about the nuclear issue. However, this growing political engagement did not result in her letting go of her existing identity. The fluid nature of communication through Twitter allows us to see how participants' daily life activities are enmeshed with their political participation. @tatangarani continued to post regular photographs of her meals, a very popular activity among social media users in Japan. Not all in her existing "follower" network, however, understood the relationship between these two aspects of @tatangarani's identity.

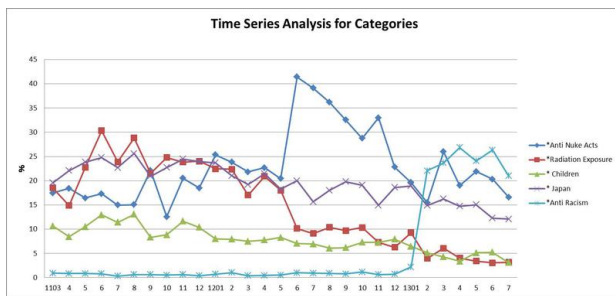


Figure 5: Time series analysis of categories of tweets

Somebody suggested that I should have two [twitter] accounts, one for daily life and one for antinuclear issues. But, both are

the truth and both are me. So, I don't divide my account. Please feel free to respond to my daily messages about the food I like even if I post about my anger about nukes. I appreciate it. (Twitter message, 28 April 2011)

Her narratives before 3/11 differed from those after 3/11 as is indicated in Figures 4 and 5. If she had created a separate Twitter account, it would have symbolised another identity for her. However, the phrase "both are the truth and both are me" indicates that she accepted her new convictions and reconstructed her narrative of self and of her identity. This is in some ways similar to the abovementioned descriptions of religious conversion. This decision also implies her making a bridge between the world she inhabited before 3/11, where many of her followers still belong, and her awareness after 3/11. She said,

I am afraid to be presumptuous, but I want to be a bridge between demonstrators and others who are not interested in demonstrations. I keep sending Twitter messages about my daily life and talk about the nuclear issue, too.²⁸

Just as @tatangarani had donned typical "Office Lady" attire in order to present an easily digestible image of protest, she continued to display a concern with "image management" through her Twitter feed. She presents herself in her tweets through beautiful images of her dining table to make it easy for her followers to understand her (Figures 6 and 7).



Figure 6 & Figure 7: Photos of @tatangarani's dining table posted to Twitter.

Twitter message for Figure 6 - Bacon-cheese bagel from Shigekuniya 55 bakery, salad (organic tomatoes from Hokkaido, sweet!), pumpkin potage soup, orange, grapes, orange juice and Perrier. September is starting! Have a nice day! (September 2, 2013) .

Twitter message for Figure 7 - Late breakfast. I had a peach smoothie when I got up. Kefir, a bowl of frozen berries, orange juice, shortbread. I love this wooden spoon from Africa, via "fair-trade". Simple but beautiful. (August 31, 2013)

Since 3/11, the lives of many people in Japan

have changed. @tatangarani realised her ignorance about nuclear power, studied the situation and came to participate in demonstrations. She had been scared of demonstrations, but now invites others to participate. She accepted this change and thought that ordinary life and social activism were both part of her truth. She learned through Twitter, tweeted and reflectively reconstructed her narratives of her self. As is reflected in the changing content of her tweets, she has started to participate in the anti-racism movement as well as the anti-nuclear movement. She has jumped into a new networks of relationships and a new consciousness of social issues which were established and nurtured in the anti-nuclear movement.

Conclusions

@tatangarani's participation in the anti-nuclear movement is an example of how internet communication technologies facilitate the highly individualised forms of participation characteristic of contemporary social movements. @tatangarani is not a member of an organised political party or organization and her involvement in the anti-nuclear movement after 3/11 is her first experience of social activism. As her comfort with participating in demonstrations and her political consciousness developed, @tatangarani moved between the anti-nuclear movement and the anti-racism movement. She was an avid Twitter user prior to the 3/11 disasters and she used the medium to communicate about her life in Tokyo. As she became more and more concerned about the Fukushima nuclear disaster she turned to the social media platform to express her fears, learn about nuclear power, develop relationships with other users who shared those concerns and eventually join in her first political protest. Later, as she became more comfortable with the world of political activism, she began to take part in anti-racist actions and to encourage others to join the movement.

Nevertheless, she continued to use Twitter to communicate about her everyday life and to contextualise her new-found desire for democracy within her existing narrative of her identity.

In this essay, I have discussed the relationship between the internet and one person's new level of activism. Activist groups such as TwitNoNukes and MCAN use the internet and new social media to disseminate information about their actions. Saitō Kazuyoshi's anti-nuclear song on Youtube prompted people like @tatangarani to participate in demonstrations. She, in turn, used Twitter to disseminate information about the nuclear issue and the demonstrations in which she participated. The internet is a new social infrastructure for exchanging information and making new relationships. It has what is called a "bridging function" in social capital theory.²⁹ The internet can expand unexpected encounters and construct new communities, as it did for @tatangarani. For @tatangarani, the Internet is a place to talk about herself. Through such a process individuals can objectify their experiences, reinforce their convictions and learn strategies for social movements. Social movements, in turn, can use the internet to raise consciousness, disseminate information about meetings and demonstrations, or disseminate designs for placards and posters.

While it is widely accepted that the internet plays an important role in disseminating information in social movements there is less understanding of the particular ways in which internet communication technologies like social media shape the forms which activism takes. As large, hierarchically organised social movements have given way to more fluid forms of citizen activism participation in movements has come to reflect the complexity of multiple individual processes of identity formation. The internet, with its non-hierarchical spaces, allows users to construct their own narrative identity by communicating about what is important to

them, sharing photographs and interacting with other users. As internet users like @tatangarani became more and more involved in social movements, the manner in which they constructed their identity changed to incorporate their new identifications without necessarily letting go of consumer pleasures like photographing foodstuffs. Similarly, media-savvy protesters like @tatangarani engage in protest activity in an image-conscious manner. @tatangarani preferred to participate in protests like TwitNoNukes and the MCAN actions because organisers shared her image-consciousness and created easily communicable and "likable" messages which could communicate key ideas to a wide audience. As the forms of participation in social movements become more fluid and contingent on individual actions and desires and larger organisational imperatives take a back foot the internet provides an important infrastructure through which intersecting narratives of anti-nuclear identity can coalesce into street protest.

Acknowledgments

This article draws on research conducted as part of Australian Research Council Discovery Project DP10928278 (2010-2013), Internet History in Australia and the Asia-Pacific.

Recommended citation: Takanori Tamura, "The Internet and Personal Narratives in the Post-Disaster Anti-Nuclear Movement", *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 13, Issue 6, No. 4, February 16, 2015.

Author Biography

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¹⁶ Interview with @tatangarani, 13 April 2013

¹⁷ The tweets analysed are from 11 August 2010 to 4 August 2013 (a total of 50,563 messages).

- ¹⁸ KH Coder is free software and can be obtained from [Sourceforge](#). Retrieved 14 March 2014.
- ¹⁹ "[Zutto uso datta](#)". Retrieved 14 March 2014.
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