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# Towards 2 Way Participation

**Prabhas Pokharel**

Formal actors are increasingly using technology in order to push youth participation forward. Incredible stories of grassroots youth engagement efforts that use technology have given and continue to give inspiration to many of these efforts. In this essay, I use this inspiration as a premise to argue that the power of story-making and narrative formation is important to consider when designing participation efforts. Using examples from UNICEF Kosovo Innovations Lab, I urge practitioners in this area to loosen their narrative constraints on efforts encouraging youth participation through technology, and to re-interpret youth participation as a two-way dynamic.

## **Story and narrative**

In order to make my argument coherently, I will first try to describe two objects, the narrative and the story.

A story is simple; roughly, it has a beginning and an end, a plot and a flow that guides one from the beginning to the end, some characters, and some action. It is a tale, a set of events glued together one after the other, a set of characters moving through time or space in one form or another. The narrative, on the other hand, is the framework within which these events and actions happen. It sets the rules that stories must follow: The types of characters that are allowed, and the kinds of interactions they can have with each other. The fairy tale narrative, for example, includes magic, wizards and witches, princes and princesses, gingerbread men, and happy endings. The western rational narrative of the world, on the other hand, insists on causality according to the laws of physics, biology and various other sciences. Stories

simply exist (are told) within these narrative frameworks. In a fairy tale, Cinderella finds her prince in a ballroom, uses pumpkins that turn magically into chariots, and has a fairy godmother. In the western rational world, Darwin rides a boat through the Caribbean, observes many different kind of animal life as they progress through generations, and deduces the existence of evolution.

Simply put, the story is the flow of events, a motivation that prod some actions which are followed by consequences. The narrative is the framework, the rules and constraints that dictate what kinds of interventions are appropriate given certain motivations and what consequences actions can have.

And now that I have described these two objects, I will move on to the subject of this paper: the contemporary practice of youth participation through technology.

## Youth participation through technology

In this paper, I will talk to and about formal actors involved in the practice of youth participation<sup>1</sup> through technology. But before getting to technology, the practice of youth participation that formal actors engage in is worth breaking down, as participation is a broad term. In the paper, formal actors mean government organisations, aid organisations, non-profits, and even private sector participants—entities with budgets, employed staff, rules of operation and so on. And youth participation refers to the practice of involving young people in the kinds of processes the aforementioned formal actors perform.<sup>2</sup> To give an example, I am referring to something like UNICEF Kosovo's effort to engage young people in its anti-smoking program, by hosting debates to bring out issues important to youth, and by asking young people to design media campaigns that would appeal to their peers. Another example would be the program through which Plan Benin has been getting young people to contribute reports about child-related abuse and violence, in order to help the organisation get a better understanding of the child protection needs in Beninese communities.<sup>3</sup> Youth participation efforts like these can be thought of as participatory planning<sup>4</sup> extended to action — involving young people directly into work formal actors are engaging in. Planning is one type of work in which people can be engaged, but also included are activities such as designing new campaigns (for example against smoking), developing better maps of communities, or creating better pictures of on-the-ground situations (for example of child-related violence). And formal actors like UNICEF, Plan, and governments around the world have been interested in such efforts for a long time, for reasons that range from enabling youth participation itself, to electoral considerations, promotion of volunteerism, and many other reasons.

Such kind of youth participation both exists and is desired by many formal actors.

It is here then, that technology and recent history enter. For in the recent years, what has arisen is that the very “audience” of these participation efforts has been organising themselves using technology in highly notable ways.

I will use an example that I am intimately familiar with, that of the NepalUnites protests organised in Kathmandu in demand for Nepal’s new constitution to be written in May of 2011. By then, Nepal’s constituent assembly was running short on its second deadline for writing the constitution (the first was a year before, in May 2010), and phenomenally little progress had been made.<sup>5</sup> So young people got together using Facebook as a primary organisational tool, to protest against the inaction of the constituent assembly members. Starting with the slogan of:

## ज्याला पुरै लियौ, अब संबिधान देऊ

(“You have taken your full salaries, now give us the constitution”), the group organised protests ahead of the constitutional deadline, gathering crowds of thousands of people repeatedly.<sup>6</sup> The protests were interesting in that (1) their declared interests were simply those of tax-paying citizens, and (2) they were organised and led by youth not affiliated with any political party, union, or organisation — both rare enough in Nepal for people to take notice.

And notice people did: the protests received media coverage for many weeks of their existence. It started with simple reports of the protests that people had organised, but moved quickly on to the discussions of the pure “citizen” stance of the effort, criticism of the classed nature of technology-based organisation in a country with 58 percent literacy,<sup>7</sup> and rebuttals cautioning against sticking only with supposedly tried and true but ineffective methods of influence. All in all, the protests stayed on national newspapers for at least two weeks around the constitutional deadline. The protests didn’t receive any concrete goals in terms of achieving constitutional progress, but media coverage extended even to international media. The story of how young people in Nepal organised themselves using technology, and articulated their demand loudly, was indelibly entered into the annals of national and international media,<sup>8</sup> and the minds of the public consciousness.

What this means is that any designer of a program for youth participation in Nepal’s future will now be forced to confront, discuss, and address this set of protests of May 2011. Formal actors can no longer frame youth participation efforts inspiring apathetic youth to action; they will instead have to frame their audience in terms of one that was able to use technology to organise themselves and articulate themselves loud and clear in May of 2011. As the

access to and usage of technology increases (as it has been), more and more youth participation efforts in fact will be using technology directly. And more than any other participation efforts, these will have to speak to movements such as NepalUnites.

And they have. While the example I have used is so recent that it forces me to foretell consequences, many events of the past lend credibility to what I have argued. The 2011 revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East, the Pink Chaddhi campaign in India, the Ushahidi Haiti crowdsourcing effort, the Map Kibera project, and the uprisings in Iran and Moldova are just a handful of youth efforts with a heavy technology component that the world knows about. Efforts like these are notable, widely discussed, and already play a crucial part in the design of new youth participation efforts by formal actors. I myself have seen these very examples repeatedly appear in opening paragraphs and motivating slides talking about formal participation efforts that deal even tangentially with technology. Often, these grassroots efforts act as the very catalysts for technology usage within youth participation projects. And even when not, they are bound to act as inspiration, or at the very least as examples who can provide lessons learned.

To me, this is a very welcome way of doing things. Formal efforts for youth participation should learn from how young people themselves organise and have their own say using technology. What I want to do in the rest of this essay is break down two particular attributes of participation efforts: story-making and narrative power, and argue for their inclusion (and if not inclusion, at least consideration) in new participation methods that use technology.

## **Crowdsourcing and competitions: Storymaking and narrative power**

In this section, I want to describe two methods of youth participation through technology: crowdsourcing and competitions. In the process, I will tease out two properties of youth participation efforts: storymaking and narrative power.

One increasingly popular method of technology-based participation uses the technique of crowdsourcing. The idea of crowdsourcing is to get large numbers of people (the 'crowd') to contribute information or an action of some sort. The goal is to obtain (source) something from the crowd; the something varies from some information individuals already have to small tasks they have to complete. Popularised by the Ushahidi initiatives to solicit information from large numbers of people during crises in Kenya and Haiti, the method has been used for soliciting reports of child violence in Benin as well as to collect information during disasters by UN-OCHA.<sup>9</sup>

Crowdsourcing depends on a crowd, i.e., a large number of people. The tools that enable crowdsourcing, because of its very nature, try to enable as many people to contribute to an effort as possible. The reliability of aggregate results is improved by the number of contributions; ‘number of contributions’ to a crowdsourcing effort are in fact one of the measures of its success. In order to enable large-scale participation in such a way, however, the barrier to action has to be reduced as much as possible—the action each person performs has to be made atomised and simple. But when contributions, or ‘participation’ if you will, are (is) so atomised, the crowd is left with control of neither story nor narrative. By the time a young person is invited to participate, the task that should be done is already defined, the story of the why and the how are already told. In what ways the crowd is supposed to contribute, how the need for the effort translates to the specific pieces of data or action that the crowd has to be performed, all of that is determined pre-‘participation’.

Simply put, crowdsourcing efforts give participants very little control of either the story or the narrative. There will be a story produced by the information that the crowd contributes. But the story of why the effort was started (i.e., the need that motivated the effort), how that translated into the specific actions the crowd is now performing, and decisions to change these actions based on new information: all of that is out of participants’ hands. This is especially true in formal efforts, where there tends to be a large separation between the ‘crowd’ (the participants) and the ‘crowdsourcers’ (the formal actors). The language of crowdsourcing itself carries with it the notion of a disempowered ‘crowd’ which can be ‘sourced’ for effort and information. But the crowd cannot define the ‘why’ (the story) or the ‘how’ (the narrative) of what they contribute.

In contrast is yet another popular method for youth participation through technology: Competitions. The World Bank’s apps4dev competition, state department-sponsored Apps4Africa, and challenges sponsored by private sector companies such as GSMA (2011 Mobile App Challenge) and Nokia (Calling All Innovators program) work by developing a broad problem definition, and then accepting a wide range of submissions to solve the problem. The problem statements reflect the needs and priorities that the formal institutions seek to be addressed, but there is usually plenty of freedom to define why and what to do. Apps4Dev, for example, asked technologists young and old to create apps (applications) using World Bank data. Creators of apps could tell their own stories about what kinds of data they wanted to use, how they wanted to use the data, why, who the audience would be, and so on. The basic constraint was only that the application had to use WorldBank data. This of course restricted approaches to be datacentric and analytic. But besides that, there was a lot of freedom in choosing what kind of story to tell and what narrative to use. The MigrantsMovingMoney app,<sup>10</sup> for example, told a

story about migration around the world, while DevelopmentTimelines tried to tell the stories of development of individual places through time. And the narrative constraints by which their motivations manifested to interventions were their own. Participants defined 'app' in their own way (MigrantsMoving-Money was a simple web-based visualisation of data; Get a Life! presented intuitions in the form of a game; Bebema was a mobile app directed towards mothers), thereby defining what interventions were appropriate for the kind of story they were trying to tell.

I have on purpose not yet argued which of these is the better approach as no technique of enabling youth participation is a panacea. However, I find this property of story-making and narrative to be an important one to consider when designing youth participation efforts. In the next section, I will bring out examples from my experience at the UNICEF Innovations Lab Kosovo, which has suggested to me that allowing for these freedoms in fact enables more powerful mechanisms of youth participation.

## Some real life examples

Here, I would like to share my experience from UNICEF Innovations Lab Kosovo, which was founded in November 2010, and which I led for the initial six months of its existence. The Lab has a mandate of increasing youth participation through technology among other things, and experience with young people's projects there has me convinced that narrative and story-making powers are of great value in youth participation efforts.<sup>11</sup>

An early challenge that the Lab was given was to make better digital maps of Kosovo for UNICEF's use—existing public maps had little information about points of interest such as health facilities, youth centres, schools, and other public service resources. Young people, including those from the organisation Free Libre Open Source Software Kosova (FLOSSK) wanted to make better maps of Kosovo and were already working on this issue. Given that part of our mandate was to increase youth participation through technology, then, our task was to craft a methodology to involve these (and other) young people in processes of making maps that would be useful for UNICEF (and ultimately the Kosovo government and the Kosovo public). Two basic methods were obvious: (1) to start with a certain set of interesting points to map from UNICEF's perspective, define the correct way to map each point, and ask young people to contribute individual pieces of data; (2) to simply tell young people what we were doing, and ask them how they wanted to contribute to our effort. The first method is the method of atomisation: to define the process and break the task into small chunks. The second is a non-atomised method that leaves all of the 'how questions' (and some of the 'why') to be defined by young people themselves.

We tried both methods. Kosovo Youth Map (<http://kosovoinnovations.org/youthmap>) was a project to map youth resources in Kosovo using the atomised/crowdsourced approach. We defined exactly the kind of data we wanted (“youth resources”: youth NGOs, youth centres, student councils and peer clubs), atomised the data collection process (give us information for one of these resources; here is a form to fill), and invited young people to contribute points of interest onto the map (after starting with a base layer of data we obtained through other means). Two projects were born out of the latter method, of just putting our request to young people of Kosovo. One of the projects was to map polling stations throughout Kosovo (<http://kumevotu.info>), and another wanted to map public facilities (schools, municipality offices, health centres, etc.) throughout the country. The methods for mapping were similar in both these youth-defined projects: they included getting as much public data as possible, and then using GPS units to locate specific facilities and putting them on the Wikipedia-like mapping platform OpenStreetMap.

I worked with all three projects. While I have no rigorous evaluation method to stand behind me, and more confounding variables that anyone could count, young people’s engagement in projects they defined themselves, and told their own stories for, were much higher than the project where participation was more atomised. I can particularly differentiate between the KuMeVotu project and the Kosovo Youth Map, two projects that were more or less completed during my tenure at the Lab. Judging by number of contributions received, number of person-hours contributing to a given project, and the amount of material contributed, the participatory output was simply higher for the youth-defined project.

One of the reasons why I think the engagement was higher in this case points directly to narrative power; a lot of it came down to simply the somewhat technical choice of a mapping platform. For a UNICEF that wanted good maps most of all, the slight preference of open source tools was no match to the much greater quality and quantity of data available from proprietary vendors like Google. So the Kosovo Youth Map used proprietary map information from Google as the default base layer, and Ushahidi, the popular crowdsourcing software for collecting information about youth resources. The polling station and public institution projects, on the other hand, were working with OpenStreetMap, which is a community-based mapping platform that places very few restrictions on public consumption and re-use of mapping data. The young people we engaged with had already been working on OpenStreetMap, and had a very high preference for continuing to work on that platform for ideological reasons (the license that OpenStreetMap uses is a Creative Commons license that puts only two basic restrictions on usage of data: that credit be given, and that any new work based on that work must also have a similar license and therefore also allow re-use). The group of youngsters

wanted to contribute to a global knowledge base that would be expounded on by others after them, and was simply more excited to work using these tools.

So ultimately, engagement was driven by the how of the project (ie, how it was implemented), with the hidden politics of choice of tools. It was a narrative choice, a choice of how motivation (need for mapped polling stations) translated to intervention (create points mapped on OpenStreetMap). The Lab could have done interviews with the young people to bring out this preference and accounted for it in designing our atomised participation tools. But allowing narrative flexibility was another, easier way to deal with the same issue. And there might be subtler issues that our assessment tools might miss, issues that can only be captured by putting young people in the driving seat of the narrative.

There was also something behind the story-making power that the youth-defined projects offered the participants. Motivations for all three projects were built with somewhat of a collaborative approach, but the main responsibility and ownership of storytelling fell on the young people for the project they themselves defined. There was simply a greater feeling of ownership and therefore responsibility that led to higher engagement. Moreover, this is not an uncommon phenomenon—it has been documented repeatedly by those working in issues of community and sustainable development.<sup>12</sup>

## The drawbacks

There are drawbacks to such approaches. I see three big drawbacks: potential cost, loss of outcome control, and loss of process control. The first one is simple: some ways of providing young people their own storymaking and narrative facilities can be costly, precisely because there is a greater domain to explore. The WorldBank Apps4Dev competition needed to put forth substantial resources in the form of competition prizes as incentives for people to participate, because it wanted to draw in and incentivise a wide audience. Most atomised participation methods, where participation is made as effortless as possible, have no need for such incentives. The second drawback is that there isn't always full control of what the outcome will be. UNICEF was interested in better maps of Kosovo, but its first priority for mapping wasn't necessarily polling centres — health facilities would have been preferred without doubt. The Lab was lucky that youth participation was part of its mandate, and it could afford a narrative-rich approach to participation that didn't yield preferred outcomes. Other formal actors may be more constrained. And finally, there is the possibility of the loss of process control. When formal actors let young people control the narrative of progress (i.e. the how), it will likely not fit exactly with the processes already being employed by the former. There will be differences in the kinds of communications

protocols, archiving, decision-making, and evaluation processes that communities of young people and formal institutions employ, and this will simply be something extra to deal with.

## **Towards 2 way participation**

Despite the drawbacks, however, I think many institutions can commit to youth participation through technology efforts that let young people make up their own stories and narratives of progress. And those who can, should, for story-making and narrative power are building bridges towards real 2 Way Participation.

I believe many institutions are beginning to focus increasingly on such approaches. I will share here my knowledge of UNICEF Innovations Lab Kosovo, which certainly has. The Lab has tried to design programs that meet young people halfway in participation platforms—where formal processes (such as the use and development of digital maps) and young people’s inclination (such as of using digital tools that ensured public contribution) are both respected. One way it has done so is by creating a project framework where young people are asked to “submit innovative projects for social good”. Young people define social good themselves (their motivational story) and “innovative” themselves (their narrative of change), and the project framework is innately flexible enough to let people define their own motivations and methods.

I think one of the most interesting things that comes out of this is that the notion of “youth participation” itself is re-interpreted. Usually, when formal institutions talk about “youth participation”, it is framed in terms of some decision-making or formal process that young people are encouraged and invited to participate in. There is no thought of formal institutions themselves participating in the processes of youth, despite the motivation I provided in the beginning of this essay, of the need and responsibility for formal actors to learn from grassroots efforts of young people using technology. This has to change—formal institutions need to think about how they can tap into the realities of communities like NepalUnites.<sup>13</sup>

The release of story-making and narrative power in youth participation efforts through technology is one way to start working on this issue immediately. By allowing young people to define the why and the how of projects, institutions can tap into ecologies of existing practices that people are already a part of. When the Innovations Lab asks young people to submit “innovative ideas for social good”, young people submit ideas that they are already working on, whether they be about developing open maps, tackling environmental issues using photography, or developing new methods for inter-ethnic co-operation through the arts.<sup>14</sup> When the ideas are new, they build on existing

communities, existing sensibilities and values. When participation includes the ability to define the story of why, and the narrative of how, participation begins to become two-way.

## Endnotes

- 1 Actually, what I really want to talk about is participation efforts geared towards a digitally active public: perhaps best represented with a term such as “digital participation”. However, such a term delinks the efforts I want to talk about from very similar efforts which do not use technology, which to me have much more similarity than differences. Therefore, I will use the cumbersome phrase “youth participation through technology”. For then, the base idea is “youth participation”, a universe in which technological and non-technological interventions lie close together. Many of the efforts I talk about do include non-youth actors, but the audiences of technologically-capable audiences are largely young people, and the language about digitally-capable publics and youth correspond closely. Therefore, despite the impreciseness, I find “youth participation” to be the best established term I can pick up and talk about.
- 2 To make this even clearer, it might be worth breaking down the relationship between youth and formal process. Four basic relationships between youth and formal process are obvious: formal process for youth, youth for formal process, youth in formal process, and formal process with youth. I am talking about the latter two — formal process (or action) with youth, and youth in formal process. I am not talking about the formal processes that are designed for young people, or the process of mobilising young people in support for formal process. I am talking about incorporating young people directly into the processes themselves: formal institutions enacting these processes with young people as involved participants.
- 3 More about UNICEF Kosovo’s anti-smoking efforts: <http://kosovoinnovations.org/w?s=smoking&search=Search>. More about Plan Benin’s work on child-violence reporting: <http://www.globalhealthhub.org/2011/01/13/revisiting-the-smsviolence-reporting-project-in-benin/>.
- 4 Wikipedia: Participatory planning is an urban planning paradigm that emphasises involving the entire community in the strategic and management processes of urban planning or community/.
- 5 Before the last month, in the entire one-year extension period, the constituent assembly met for a total of 95 minutes and even then on procedural issues rather than those of content (<http://www.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2011/05/17/top-story/atale-of-idleness-in-365-days-constituent-assemblysweated-for-95-minutes/221797.html>). By the time the one-year extension was again renewed, only two major issues were decided, one of which was the name of the constitution (<http://www7.economist.com/node/18775293>).
- 6 <http://nepaliblogger.com/news/nepal-unites-viafacebook-and-speaks-up-at-khula-manch/2062/attachment/nepali-singers-at-nepal-uniteskhulamanch-event/>
- 7 UNICEF Nepal Statistics [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/nepal/nepal\\_nepal\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/nepal/nepal_nepal_statistics.html)
- 8 Even the Economist began an article on Nepal’s political climate with “A gaggle of protesters want to turn the Arab Spring into a Himalayan Summer”. (<http://www7.economist.com/node/18775293>)
- 9 See Plan International’s SMS violence reporting networking in Benin (ref. <http://www.globalhealthhub.org/2011/01/13/revisiting-the-sms-violence-reportingproject-in-benin/>) and UN-OCHA’s crisis map for Libya at <http://libyacrisismap.net/>.
- 10 This, and the rest of the apps mentioned in this paragraph can be found at <http://apps-fordevelopment.challengepost.com>.

- 11 And here I do have to add the disclaimer that the Lab is only less than eight months old at the time of writing, and therefore has not “proven” its success or the robustness of its approach yet (however that will be defined).
- 12 For instance, a quick Google search finds a product sheet from the Sustainable Development Group International which includes the following sentence as motivation: “SDGI believes that the best governed projects are those in which communities are encouraged to take an active part in identifying needs and formulating solutions”. <http://www.sdg-int.org/view/english/ensuring-local-participation-andownership>.
- 13 One possible method is the Innovations Cafe hosted at UNICEF Innovations Lab Kosovo. The Lab is essentially hosting a community of young people working for social change using technology. These include people working on projects supported by the Lab, but include an open and welcome invitation for anyone working on similar projects. The Lab brings this community together every two weeks in an informal event where everyone gets together. The discussions involve Lab staff and sometimes revolve around the work that young people are doing in various ways, or ideas and problems posed by either UNICEF or the various government ministries UNICEF partners with.
- 14 See <http://kosovoinnovations.com/w/byfy/projects> for a list of projects that young people are working on at the Innovations Lab.

## Annotation

Padmini Ray Murray

Prabhas Pokharel’s article focuses on a specific shift in Nepalese protest culture that saw the country’s youth mobilise themselves with tools traditionally used as an instrument of intervention by ‘formal actors.’ Pokharel defines formal actors as government and aid organisations, not-for-profit and private sector operations that work with and for young people to achieve social change.

This shift was occasioned by the NepalUnites protests, which urged the constituent assembly to frame the country’s constitution, a process that had already been considerably delayed. A cursory search for the campaign throws up evidence of sustained organized endeavor, with a Twitter, Facebook, and blog presence, as well as diasporic groups united under the same banner. However,

while these fora represented spaces where the youth could seize agency, it is worth considering some offline features that may have contributed to the success of the project. Nepal’s inhabitants had already rallied behind the Citizen’s Movement for Democracy and Peace in 2005, thus creating a blueprint for activism that was keen to distance itself from any rhetoric of being a “formal” or “political” organization. This lack of party bias presented a refreshing alternative to past struggles, and this characteristic may have also helped to contribute to the success of the NepalUnites campaign. While its online nature attracted criticism, as lack of access and literacy obviously prevented large swathes of the population from participating, and the protest itself did not accomplish its stated goals, it created a template for youth protest using the Internet as a mobilizing force. However, this brings up the question of how we quantify the success of such projects.

Looking back on this admirable initiative through the thicket of social network activity that now exists, in contrast to 2011, one can imagine a far more undiluted and immediate response than what might be fostered today by the constant attention deficit economy that currently prevails in online spaces. Added to this, the kneejerk activism encouraged by Facebook's 'liking' and 'sharing' mechanisms seem counter-productive to actual sustained protest.

While the protest itself did not yield political change, it can be argued that it succeeded on a level of affective spectacle. The increased ubiquity of media-producing gadgets and platforms for sharing such media almost demands the photogenic spectacle, in order to go viral and thus increase the visibility of the cause at hand. Paulo Gerbaudo describes this sort of decentralized, social-media-mobilized protest as "emotional choreographies," and images of the silent NepalUnites protest bear out the truth of this—the theatrical pervades and elevates the protest with an aura of the iconic, which then immediately fulfils its purpose as eminently shareable media.

What differentiates these hyperdocumented protests from their predecessors is their dissemination through a citizen-powered, alternative media outlet, congregating under hashtags and @ characters but also that of a slogan: NepalUnites. Eric Kluitenberg designates the affective slogan as a "resonance object" which is "semantically void." It is instructive to observe that

in this case, the slogan says nothing about what the campaign hopes to achieve; rather the emphasis is on mobilization, the more achievable goal. The slogan also marks the shift in status of the citizen from 'audience' to 'public' by virtue of the collapse of the private and public caused by the personal networked device—as Sonia Livingstone points out: "teenagers communicate privately in space that is conventionally public (texting in the cinema) and communicate publicly in space which is conventionally private"—and these behaviours are no longer restricted to the youth.

The most significant difference between the NepalUnites moment and the digital media landscape four years on, is how this public/private collapse has been negotiated and navigated by more traditional news organizations. The turn towards long form, multimedia narrative journalism (see The Guardian's seminal 'Firestorm' news story) has been spurred on by the decline of the print newspaper, and the struggle for such entities to remain relevant. These journalistic formats, along with disruptors such as clickbait sites and listicles, are most successful when deploying an empathetic human interest approach, replicating and reproducing affect. The algorithmic preferences of social sites can sometimes work counter to the demands of users, but I would argue that the force of the affective spectacle counteracts such logic by persuading readers to share such content, thus mobilizing themselves as actors working in favour of the cause.

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