Youth participation in the Umbrella Movement: the role of new media

Compiled by Carmen Tong

Below: From the provision of supplies to the treatment of injuries and evacuations, the Umbrella Movement provided information and exchanged resources online in the Umbrella Movement.

Min-cho Zou

The Umbrella Movement has gradually died down. While I was not a protester at the frontline, I still feel involved for what I did in transforming Hong Kong into a better city. The umbrella movement via social media to family and friends in mainland China. In mainland China, official media did not report the movement and social media was placed under surveillance. When you typed 'Umbrella Movement' in Baidu, China's most popular search engine, you would be reminded that, "according to laws and regulations 'none' results can be found." This means all information has been filtered. Despite it, the government's great efforts in blocking information, people in mainland China were not completely in the dark. Weibo, the Chinese Twitter, is the most fascinating platform - because of its most tactful users. You need to play with words, for example using allusion or puns, when conveying sensitive issues. Amid rumours of a clearing-off before the Chinese National Day, I voiced on Weibo my disappointment with some protesters. I elaborated my concerns using 'Moments' in Wechat, the ubiquitous social networking service. When I reposted pictures and articles from Facebook onto my 'Moments', they generated constructive responses, and I felt my efforts in bringing the truth and concern for Hong Kong to people in mainland China had not been in vain.

Hok-yee Siu

I would like to do a documentary. Can I videotape your dream about your future and about Hong Kong?

This was my opening question and interviews in the documentary I made. During the Umbrella Movement, young people were constantly criticised, mainly by their elders, for being too idealistic and selfish. Idealistic, but their demands for universal suffrage are unlikely to ever materialise, and are certainly doubtful within the parameters stipulated by Beijing. Social media, because their acting as online laboratories, have convinced many others, and in all likelihood caused their parents to worry. Many critics furthermore argued that the young will eventually, when they grow up, abandon their "superficial post-materialist" values (unrealistic ideals, detached from material reality). I found such cynicism repulsive, but couldn’t help wondering what if such prophecies come true? I started to record young people’s ideas in their own voice for my documentary project. I discovered that, beneath the slogan "I want genuine election", different protesters harbour different agendas about working towards a better Hong Kong.

One protestor would like to run a quality bakery with reasonable prices for ordinary people; some would like to become teachers who nurture civic-minded pupils; and others would like to be professional journalists who work for the public. It was most interesting to learn that some protesters had never listened to their partners’ dream! I was especially touched by two junior college boys who were preparing for their school test under the streetlights. They chose not to go to the study area which had proper chairs and desks, because they felt that the students taking public examinations were more in need. Despite their different backgrounds, these young people were all trying to strive for the public good.

People say Hong Kong is dying, but the aspirations of young people are sparks in a seemingly hopeless situation. I still believe as long as we work out our individual dreams, together we will transform Hong Kong. When you are moved, you are important to preserve the present, so that neither our wishes nor our longing for democracy can be eroded by time.