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The Dramatic Form of Online Collective Action: A Case From China

Abstract
Recent scholarship argues that online collective action happens through the connection of personal expression in digital networks. Why some cases of online personal expression escalate into online collective action while others do not, however, remains unresolved. Conceptualizing online collective action as social drama, this article shows that online collective action happens when routine online interaction takes on a dramatic form. Routine interaction begins to assume the form of online collective action with a breaching event. The progression from breach to crisis is made possible by the appearance of characters in conflict over contentious issues. These conflicts are dramatic performances through which characters engage one another and entice audience participation, thus propelling the action forward. A narrative logic drives online collective action. This approach is illustrated with a case study from China.