

HYBRID POLITICS

MEDIA AND PARTICIPATION

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between media and participation is a central theme in the debate regarding the quality of democracy. An essential ingredient in those 'works in progress' that are democratic regimes is indeed the participation of citizens in the decision-making processes orientated towards influencing political systems in direct or indirect ways. And, the media plays a central role in the participation of citizens within the sphere of politics. In fact, political communication research and social movement studies have demonstrated, since the last century, that the media has the power to shape knowledge, opinion, and information about the diverse actors in a political system, thus influencing the institutional and unconventional repertoires of political action.

The media holds import in democracy, then, insofar as its symbolic production bears on the strategies of participation within the sphere of institutionalised and protest politics. And yet participation within the sphere of media itself matters for democracy too.

Indeed, the media sphere is a societal realm wherein diverse forms of power imbalance develop, related to the construction of dominant representations, the ownership of the technologies that contribute to rendering reality, and the control of the norms that regulate the practices of the production of symbolic forms (Shiller, 1989; Castells, 1996, 2009; McChesney, 2008; Couldry, 2012). Participation within the media sphere enhances the democratic character of societies insofar as it contributes to remedy the power imbalances in the production of hegemonic discourses, in the control of the means of production of symbolic forms, and in the definition of the norms of cultural production and circulation – as shown since the



last century by research into public spheres, active audiences, and alternative media. Participation within the media sphere can be understood as political in and of itself insofar as it contributes to the 'democratisation of democracy' (Giddens, 2002: 93), in so much as it democratises more decentralised decision-making processes which are not restricted to formal politics (Carpentier, 2011a, 2011b).

Combining established and emergent multidisciplinary scholarship in political communication research, democratic theory, audience research, citizenship studies, and social movement analyses, *Hybrid Politics* aims to be an agile resource for research into the role the media plays in weakening or enhancing the participatory processes within the diverse political spheres of democratic societies.

The metaphor of 'hybridity' has seemed to me useful in suggesting an approach that does not hierarchise the importance of processes of democratisation within the political media sphere and within the sphere of politics – an approach that rather does value the study of different forms of power and political participation which co-exist within the sphere of the media and which bear on other forms of participation in formal politics. In order to distinguish, better define, and explore empirically the different forms of power and political participation that involve the media sphere, this book combines key perspectives drawing upon different traditions of research and theoretical frameworks. Multidisciplinary research developed since the last century on media and political participation represents the point of departure for understanding and explaining when participation within the media sphere matters for the decision-making processes that involve institutionalised and protest politics and when media participation matters for overcoming the forms of exclusion within the media sphere itself, thus enhancing the quality of democracies. This 'hybrid research approach' drives, in the course of this book, the analysis of the ways in which the diverse forms of power and political participation that involve the media sphere are being renewed in the contemporary age of 'communicative abundance' (Keane, 2013).

Hybrid Politics aims indeed to contribute to contemporary research on media and participation by suggesting an approach that does not abstract the single medium out of the more complex communication contexts, but rather sheds light on those contemporary changes in political participation and those permanent forms of exclusion that derive from combinations of

and competitions between the newer and older media. This book suggests to avoid the 'epochal' analyses (Williams, 1975) of the technological revolution, instead paying attention to media hybridisation and stressing the renewals and continuities in the diverse forms of power imbalances and political participation that involve older and newer media technologies, practices, actors, contents, and logics.

Chapter 1 outlines a toolkit of key theoretical perspectives which – since the last century, drawing upon diverse strands of social research and diverse disciplines – have contributed to defining the diverse forms of power and political participation that involve the media sphere. The chapter moves from the classic analyses developed in the last century's political communication research, which contributed to defining in what ways the broadcast and press media influence electoral behaviours (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1948; Campbell et al., 1960), voters' agendas (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), political socialisation (Gerbner and Gross, 1976), and public opinion formation (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). In continuing to examine the multidisciplinary field of political communication research, Chapter 1 also analyses the mechanisms of audience selectivity and information processing that have interested political scientists and sociologists in their studies of political knowledge as a support for the decisions of citizens in mass democracies (Popkin, 1991; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Shudson, 1998; Norris, 2000). Moreover, Chapter 1 highlights scholarship on TV and newspapers as public spheres (Habermas, 1962, 1981), which has broadened the concept of political action, bringing the discursive action and the construction of a critical public opinion back towards the heart of the debate on democracy. The reflections on the 'deliberative turn' continue in Chapter 1 through a focus on the research in political philosophy and the audience studies which have problematised the capacity of performative publics to produce counter-interpretations and counter-discourses about conflicting public matters in the mediatised sphere as well as in other political spheres of media consumption and discussion (Fraser, 1990; Livingstone and Lunt, 1992, 1994; Dahlgren, 1995). Chapter 1 next refers to the tradition of cultural studies which understands the representational systems as political and considers popular media texts as crucial sites for the struggle over hegemony, showing the agency of resistant audiences in the negotiation over the meanings of these media texts (Hall, 1980; Fiske, 1987). Through a focus on the modern, radical media, Chapter 1 reserves

analytical attention also for the participation of critical citizens, activists, and social movements in the production of both alternative media content and more horizontal media organisations, wherein non-elite actors may have voice and which are not incorporated by the state and the market (Downing et al., 2001; Atton, 2004; Pajnik and Downing, 2008; Carpentier, 2011a). Along with the use of alternative media by social movements, the chapter considers some key positions which have stressed the importance of conflicts between social movements and modern mass media over the production of symbolic resources for the construction of collective identity and sense of belonging (Halloran, Elliott and Murdock, 1970; Gitlin, 1980; Melucci, 1980, 1989, 1996; Gamson 1995; Cottle, 2006).

Finally, Chapter 1 outlines a scholarship which contributes to better defining the different forms of power and political participation that involve the internet sphere. These reflections draw upon the studies of the 2.0 public spheres (Gitlin, 1998; Sunstein, 2001; Papacharissi, 2010; Dahlgren, 2011) and the diverse forms of 'structural participation' within the internet (Carpentier, 2011a), through different examples that go from open source social network software to hacktivism (Atton, 2004; Taylor, 2005; Lievrouw, 2011; Coleman, 2013). Chapter 1 also analyses scholarship on mainstream corporate social media as signifying and 'organising agents' of mobilisation in contemporary, large-scale, self-motivated, and loosely organised social movements and protests (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, 2013). Moreover, internet studies on e-democracy, e-government, and e-consultation (Grossman, 1995; Coleman and Blumler, 2009) are pointed out in order to underline the opportunities for and constraints on the ability of citizens to propose, through the internet, options for politics and policies. The reflections on the internet outlined in Chapter 1 do not neglect the renewed forms of political and economic power that involve digital media industries (Terranova, 2000; Castells, 2009; van Dijck, 2013; Fuchs, 2014; Webster, 2014).

Chapters 2 and 3 retrace the multidisciplinary strands of research introduced in Chapter 1, orientated towards pointing out the multifaceted character of power and political participation that involve the media sphere. Yet these two chapters focus on contemporary theoretical positions and empirical case studies that have managed to overcome the 'single-medium approach' to the study of political participation, which has often characterised social research on the modern broadcast and press media, earlier, and on the internet, later.

Chapter 2 analyses theoretical perspectives in contemporary debate on media and political participation which pay attention to the combinations and competitions between older and newer media technologies, older and newer media practices, elite and non-elite media actors, top-down and bottom-up media contents, and broadcast and social media logics.

The chapter outlines the roots of this effort to construct a 'hybrid media approach' within the vast scholarship that has explained, more generally, media change as a process influenced by economic, political, and social changes, wherein older and newer technologies, as well as dominant and emergent cultural logics and practices, compete, adapt, and co-evolve (Altheide, 1994; Fidler, 1997; Postman, 1998; Bolter and Grusin, 1999; Madianou and Miller, 2012).

Thereafter, Chapter 2 analyses key perspectives which adopt a 'hybrid media approach' in contemporary research on political newsmaking, showing the broader opportunities for the participation of non-elites in the process of mediation of politics, particularly during electoral events, controversies, and scandals. At the same time, this scholarship argues that the political newsmaking of the beginning of the 21st century is still dominated by intra-elite competition, with professional broadcasting and newspaper organisations co-opting newer media logics for their own purposes and with new, emerging elites interacting with older elite media actors. A major contribution in this strand of research is provided by the work of Chadwick (2011a, 2011b, 2013), but also by journalism studies orientated towards understanding how newsrooms have 'embraced social media' (Hermida et al., 2012: 815), as well as by other analyses of the techno-cultural and socio-economic aspects of media logic (van Dijck and Poell, 2013).

Furthermore, Chapter 2 analyses some key perspectives developed in contemporary audience research on the broader opportunities for performative publics to produce online bottom-up media representations of politics which circulate across diverse media platforms. According to these positions, the online bottom-up texts that are more apt to reach the diverse media expand the meanings and salvage the languages of the top-down mass-produced media contents. These practices of audience participation in the online production and cross-media circulation of political content that refers to the older media open a complex (and messy) scenario. These participatory practices can indeed harmonise with or resist against the interests and values of media corporations and the political elite. In this strand of research, Jenkins' work has paid particular attention to the

activist practices of performative publics that, particularly during political campaigns, remix the raw materials provided by the entertainment media industry in order to represent their issues, thus reaching diverse media and their diverse audiences (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, Ford and Green, 2013). As Chapter 2 will discuss, these changes that relate to the participation of the online publics in the representation of politics, through the language of the older entertainment media, again propose the long-standing questions regarding the manipulatory and emancipatory effects that hybrid genres of political communication have on citizens' participation in politics (Postman, 1985; Putnam, 2000; van Zoonen, 2004, 2005; Coleman, 2012).

Finally, Chapter 2 analyses contemporary scholarship on social movements and protest participation that has considered new media as adding to, rather than substituting for, existing relationships in the media politics of dissent, raising new questions about the complex and networked layers of agency in the mediation of political struggle. Major contributions to this strand of research are Papacharissi's work on the hybrid news values in the collective storytelling of the 2011 Egyptian uprisings via Twitter (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015) and Castells' most recent work (2012) on 'multimodal' contemporary social movements.

The scholarship on social movements and protest participation reviewed in Chapter 2 also analyses the increasing 'media reflexivity' of contemporary activists (Cottle, 2008), who are aware of the older media expectations and norms (Chadwick, 2007, 2013; Juris, 2008; McCurdy, 2011) and move across a multifaceted media environment to represent their issues and to mobilise diverse repertoires of political action (Gerbaudo, 2012; Mercea, Iannelli and Loader, 2016; Trerè and Mattoni, 2016).

Each strand of social research outlined in Chapter 2 contributes to raising particular research questions on the renewed forms of power and political participation that involve the hybrid media sphere. Chapter 3 then faces some of these new questions through the analysis of an emerging body of research focusing on two participatory practices that show the increasingly complex relationship between older and newer media – on the one hand, talks and comments on social media around TV politics, involving the audience, journalists, and politicians; on the other hand, the contemporary 'pop protests', that is, protests that increasingly comply with the familiar grammars of reality shows, blockbuster movies, popular TV series, and comics in order to reach different media and its different publics.

The practices of talking on social media around TV politics while watching a broadcast, as well as online discussions among audience members, the casts of programmes, and the politicians present on the programmes, pose specific theoretical and methodological challenges to the research introduced in Chapter 1 regarding the power of TV in setting the audience's agenda and frames and the role of performative TV publics in the mediated public spheres of the last century. Chapter 3 shows in particular the efforts that scholars are undertaking in order to analyse the diverse practices of Twitter talk about politics on TV, the contents and the formats of the tweets produced regarding diverse formats of TV politics, the level of involvement of the diverse media actors, and the characteristics of the online publics involved in these practices. In particular, the scholarly research analysed in Chapter 3 focuses on dual screening practices on Twitter regarding radio and TV debates among political candidates (Shamma, Kennedy and Churchill, 2009; Mascaro and Goggins, 2012; Bentivegna and Marchetti, 2015; Freelon and Karpf, 2015; Vaccari, Chadwick and O'Loughlin, 2015); the *Question Time* format (Anstead and O'Loughlin, 2011; Doughty, Rowland and Lawson, 2011); the official speeches of leaders (Wohn and Na, 2011); political talk shows (Iannelli and Giglietto, 2015); and other media events during electoral campaigns (Lin et al., 2014).

This emerging research details the presence – in diverse, concrete contexts of hybridisation between social media and TV – of multifaceted groups of informed audiences acting on Twitter as critical 'relays' for politicians' catchphrases, requesting clarification from the politicians in the studio and criticising the parties' political choices and inner conflicts. At the same time, this research into the practices of tweeting TV politics outlines the survival and renewal of event TV as a trigger for online commentary, the significant dependence of the volume of tweets about TV politics on media events and controversial periods, and the permanent central role of TV in setting the agenda for Twitter discussion.

One of the main challenges posed by this emerging body of research, then, consists of understanding, through a more steady and fine-tuned path of research, when online talk about TV politics is an 'orchestrated' activity (Chadwick, 2011b, 2013), with hybrid media logics pursuing dominant interests, and when it is a form of participation within a hybrid media system, with Twitter publics engaging in TV discussions on politics and thus influencing the televised representation of politics. Another challenge

for contemporary research on the dual screening of TV politics refers to the relationship between the participation of publics in the mediation of political campaigns and their participation in elections and other various ways of engaging in institutionalised politics.

Like practices of the dual screening of TV politics, pop protests also raise new research questions regarding the renewed forms of power and political participation that co-exist within the hybrid media sphere and regarding the ways in which these hybrid genres of political struggle influence the disinterested citizens (or those well-informed citizens who have become more selective when faced with increasing numbers of calls to action).

Combining diverse case studies on pop protests, Chapter 3 contributes to the refinement of the contours of an emerging research on the highly media-reflexive and spectacle-oriented protests that adopt the language of reality shows (Iannelli, 2012, 2014), popular movies and TV sitcoms (Cammaerts, 2007; Deuze, 2010; Jenkins, 2010; Gray, 2012; Mehta, 2012), and comics (Trope and Swartz, 2011; Jenkins, 2012) in order to circulate their conflicting issues across diverse media and thus reach diverse audiences (Brough and Shresthova, 2012).

The case studies discussed in Chapter 3 shed light on the ‘normalisation’ of the political jamming of popular culture, which no longer intends to resist and struggle against the original meanings of these media texts (as it was for the cultural jamming of the avant-garde art movements of the 20th century, the *bricolage* of the post-war subcultures, and the anti-consumerism organisations of the 1990s) but rather is employed as a strategy for salvaging and expanding these languages which have become familiar to citizens through their everyday mass media consumption.

The chapter demonstrates that these self-generated hybrid genres of political struggle involve a broad range of political groupings – from flash activism to labour rights protests, from advocacy group campaigns to social movements – shifting their content across diverse media platforms, garnering the attention of media and political elites, and engaging (also at the affective level) online and offline publics. At the same time, the case studies outlined in Chapter 3 point out how these practices of political jamming of popular culture are of ever-increasing interest to politicians, political parties, and media industries as well. This raises problematic questions concerning the institutionalisation of political jamming, that is, the pop protester’s ability to involve a disinterested and inattentive

audience without becoming incorporated by media markets and political marketing, in order to promote change rather than consensus for the status quo. Moreover, the documented recourse to political jamming by groups that challenge democratic values (Cammaerts, 2007) – such as xenophobic and negationist groups – encourages normative analysis of pop protests and definitively suggests research on media and participation to maintain democratic cultures as analytical horizons (Carpentier and Dahlgren, 2011), avoiding a priori celebrations of the diverse forms of political participation that involve the hybrid media sphere.

This emerging body of multidisciplinary scholarly research into the dual screening of political broadcasting and contemporary pop protests examines different socio-cultural and political-economic contexts of media hybridisation. *Hybrid Politics* provides the reader with case studies developed not only in US and UK contexts – extensively recognised as ‘laboratories’ for research on political communication and participation – but also reserves particular attention for Italy.

Italy represents an interesting context in which to analyse if and how the hybrid media sphere broadens opportunities for citizens to participate in the decisions of leaders, parties, and traditional media professionals. Unlike the UK and US ‘liberal model’ of relations between media and political systems, Italy is indeed characterised by a ‘polarised pluralist’ model of media–politics relations (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). In this Mediterranean country, the political system has known a delayed democratisation, a significant intervention of state and parties in the economy, a multiparty and clientelistic system of government (ibid). The Italian media system is built on a high ‘political parallelism’ of journalists and politicians in both the commercial media and the public service broadcasting systems, and it is characterised by strong divides in the access to the press media in view of a generalised diffusion of TV (ibid).

Italian democratic anomalies have been widely echoed in other countries, particularly during the so-called *Berlusconian* period that lasted 20 years, beginning in the 1990s. Nevertheless, Italy shares with the US and UK contexts a vibrant history of alternative media – from free radio to the ‘zine’ subcultures of the 1970s and the 1980s – which has prepared Italians for the use of the web as an alternative medium: in 2001, when the global justice movement gathered in Genoa, the Italian hub of the Indymedia network was already one of the most active in the world (Andreatta et al., 2002; Vicari, 2015).

Between 2009 and 2011, Italy, like other Western democracies (Crouch, 2005), encountered an increasing distrust towards traditional politics and political institutions, a sentiment which underpinned transnational 'indignant' protests and which, in Italy, was drained by the 'Movimento Cinque Stelle' or M5S (the *Five Star Movement*), sitting in parliament since the last general election, in 2013 (Mosca, 2014b). The M5S has most in common with other anti-establishment parties in Europe, such as the euro-sceptic UK Independence Party, the radical leftist Syriza Party in Greece, the Podemos Party in Spain, and the Piraten Partei in Germany. Like other populist parties, the M5S oversimplifies complex problems and proposes Manichean visions of reality, and yet – showing its significant peculiarities – this 'party of protest' (Mosca, 2014b) involves a social base which goes beyond the traditional ideological distinctions among right and left and combines charismatic leadership with an emphasis on direct participation (Biorcio and Natale, 2013; Corbetta and Gualmini, 2013).

Beppe Grillo – the popular comedian who has led the development of the M5S – and other Italian political leaders of the post-Berlusconian age are comfortable with social media and put a strong emphasis on democratic participation via the internet. However, despite their emphasis on new communication technologies, these contemporary political leaders have in fact been heavily exploiting the Italian hybrid media sphere.

The current Italian Premier – Matteo Renzi, the youngest in the Republic's history – reiterates his appeal to 'generational change' by attending a popular talent show and by organising Q&W via Twitter or live streaming on Facebook (Bordignon, 2013, 2014; Roncarolo, 2014; Giunta, 2015). Beppe Grillo draws not only upon a blog and an online deliberative forum, the MeetUp platform, the mainstream social networks, and web TV but also upon spectacular repertoires, TV coverage, and political meetings in the most popular Italian squares (Scaglioni and Sfardini, 2013; Barisione, Catellani and Garzia, 2014; Sloam, 2014; Tipaldo and Pisciotta, 2014).

This scenario encourages a research approach to political participation which should be more attentive to the complexity of the contemporary media sphere and able to go beyond the simplistic emphasis that politicians and journalists put on the broader participation, transparency, and openness promised by new technologies. Nowadays, in Italy as well as in other Western countries, celebratory expressions such as 'Twitter revolutions' or 'internet democracy' describe the new hope for the democratisation of societies through the new media. And yet, the ability of the

internet to 'make the difference' in contemporary democratic societies remains an open question in scholarly research.

The role that the older and newer media play in weakening or enhancing the participatory processes within the diverse political spheres of democratic societies is more complex than it appears in the celebratory narratives of media participation. Multidisciplinary scholarly research on hybrid media and political participation – and its ongoing work of theoretical refinement and empirical application – may represent an effective antidote to these oversimplifications, distinguishing the diverse forms of political participation that involve the complex media sphere, understanding the permanent forms of exclusion, and explaining what factors limit the quality of participation in democratic societies.