

Regina Marchi

31 Media and Social Movements

Abstract: This chapter provides a brief overview of the historical connection between media and social movements, illustrating their symbiotic relationship. Noting that mainstream news media have historically had the power to validate or undermine social movements, it traces the role of alternative media in promoting marginalized political perspectives and inspiring individuals to see themselves as part of a collective that shares similar experiences and grievances. Historical examples of alternative media are discussed, from subversive grassroots pamphlets of the American Revolution to abolitionist, labor, and suffrage periodicals, to pirate radio, zines and public access cable TV. Ritual communication and public art are also noted as important but often overlooked forms of alternative media that have inspired and sustained social movements.

With the advent of digital media, twenty-first century activists now interact directly with the public via social networking technologies. Noting the pro's and con's of these technologies for social movements, the chapter reviews recent research on digital media, participatory politics and connective action. It concludes by observing that while digital media have dramatically reshaped the landscape for social movements, they have not erased the importance of mainstream media in legitimizing a movement's goals and actors, nor eliminated the need for long-term, face-to-face political organizing work.

Keywords: political communication, social movements, alternative media, activism, framing, citizenship, civic engagement, counterpublics, participatory politics, digital media, connective action, marginalized voices, community media, Internet

1 Media and movements: A symbiotic relationship

As sociologist Todd Gitlin observed, media and social movements need each other. On one hand, social movements provide “good copy” for media outlets whose very survival depends on conveying dramatic stories. On the other, media have the power to validate or undermine social movements, whose adversarial character towards the establishment diminishes their ability to be seen as legitimate political actors. Mass media can define a social movement's public significance and attract sympathizers or can deprive social movements of significance by underreporting and misreporting movement activities (Gitlin 1980). This symbiotic and sometimes antagonistic relationship reflects a larger ongoing struggle, noted by sociologist Herbert Gans: “In any modern society in which a number of classes, ethnic and religious groups, age groups, and political interests struggle among each other for control over the society's

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resources, there is also a struggle for the power to determine or influence the society's values, myths, symbols and information" (Gans 1972: 373).

Besides relying on the mass media to help mobilize political support and validate movement perspectives in the mainstream, social movements have also relied on them to broaden the scope of the conflict and the sphere of public debate (Gamson & Wolfsfeld 1993; Hallin 1994). In order to better understand the relationship between media and social movements, it is important to define what we mean by a "social movement." Many sociologists rely on the definition put forth by Sydney Tarrow, one of the best-known scholars of social movements, who has studied them since the 1960s. Focusing on the contentious power dynamics between political "insiders" who hold institutional power (politicians, government or corporate officials, security forces) and political "outsiders" (ordinary citizens), Tarrow defines social movements as: "collective challenges [to authorities or other powerful groups] based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities" (Tarrow 1998: 4).

The *collective* aspect of this definition is crucial, since one individual, no matter how charismatic, cannot sustain a social movement. Social movements require large numbers of people who have common goals and a collective sense of solidarity and identity based on shared experiences or values. These groups *challenge* powerful authorities such as governments or corporations, which they feel are responsible for their grievances, or able to address them (Kolb 2007: 5). The next key term in this definition is *sustained*, since a one-time or short-term protest action does not equal a movement. As exemplified in social movements for labor rights, civil rights, women rights or environmental rights, achieving meaningful social change requires many years of sustained activism. Finally, this sustained struggle to change the status quo takes place among ordinary citizens (those directly affected by a particular grievance, and their allies) "interacting with elites, opponents, and authorities" via tactical repertoires such as political meetings, letter-writing, protest events, advocacy work, and lawsuits aimed at changing social structures and public policies (Massey 2012). A social movement emerges when there is a perceived need for social change *and* when the opportunity exists for the general public to express their protest. Consequently, in undemocratic countries where there is excessive repression and citizen surveillance, opportunities for public protest are often not available.

Two predominant groups have studied the topic of social movements and media: 1) political communication scholars interested in institutional politics and elections, and 2) social movement scholars focused on the non-institutional and contentious side of politics. The power imbalance between institutional actors and non-institutional activists has had implications for mass media coverage of social movements (Gamson & Wolfsfeld 1993; Ryan 1991). Since politicians and government officials have a strong institutional power base, journalists habitually consider them to be "newsworthy." By contrast, in their "challenger" role as political outsiders, movement activists lack

an institutional power base and have to work harder to receive media attention. Thus, they get attention for their cause by staging public protests and other dramatic events meant to mobilize people and influence public opinion (Vliegthart & Walgrave 2012). Recognizing the insider/outsider dynamic between social movements and powerful institutions allows us to better understand the power that the mass media have historically had in 1) raising public awareness of a movement; 2) promoting a sense of collective experience and/or moral responsibility that encourages sympathy for a movement; 3) legitimizing movement demands; and 4) keeping a movement in the public eye for sustained periods of time.

Many scholars of social movements have pointed out that within capitalist societies, social movement activists, by being ordinary “everyday” people, have much less access to space, staff, financial resources, media attention, and political power than do corporate or government entities that can afford to hire researchers, lawyers, and public relations firms to promote and defend their messages. As Todd Wolfson (2014) notes, unlike corporations, social movements do not sell products that generate profits, nor do they have the privileged access to lawmakers or government agencies that corporations and government officials do. Most activists work full-time jobs to survive, which limits the time and energy they are able to devote to politics. While this has always been the case, neoliberal conditions of growing economic precarity and diminishing social safety nets (i.e. health care, pensions, social security benefits), make it even harder for ordinary citizens to find the time to do activist work (Wolfson 2014).

Until the advent of the Internet, most social movement scholars focused on traditional mass media such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines, books, recordings, and films. These media carried movement ideas to broad audiences, helped activists recruit members, provided members with leverage in policy debates, and helped mobilize publics. They also influenced how political elites responded to social movements and protests (Wisler & Giugni 1999; Knight 2001). News media, in particular, were the subject of most research on media and social movements because they had the “agenda setting” power to decide which events and social problems were relevant to the public and how a movement would be framed. “Framing” refers to the placing of events within specific fields of meaning that can legitimize or delegitimize a social movement’s actions and claims (Gamson 1992; Goffman 1974; Ryan 1991).

2 News framing of social movements

Historically, while social movement activists could create their own press releases and attempt to cultivate positive relationships with journalists in efforts to garner favorable news coverage for their cause, they were at the mercy of the mainstream news media regarding how their movements were framed. Gitlin (1980) argued that the liberal media in the U.S. have quietly invoked a need for reform on certain social

issues while disparaging movements that radically oppose the status quo system. He noted that social movements have been disparaged via common news framing devices such as *trivialization* (making light of movement participants' language, age, or style of dress); *polarization* (providing equal emphasis to much smaller counter-demonstrations); *marginalization* (portraying demonstrators as deviant, violent, or unrepresentative of ordinary citizens); *undercounting* numbers of protesters; *emphasis on internal dissension* (focusing on infighting within a movement rather than on its goals); and *disparagement of a movement's effectiveness* (27). He and other scholars have shown that while media coverage can help publicize a social movement, it can also be devastating in a number of ways including: attracting new members who may not share the original organizers' goals or values (Gitlin 1980; Porto & Brant 2015); portraying activists' claims as unreasonable (Knight 2001); or framing social movements within a "nuisance paradigm" that depicts protesters as bothersome, ineffective, and unpatriotic (Di Cicco 2010).

3 Alternative media

Less studied within the discipline of Communication are alternative media, a blanket term that can include non-profit community media as well as non-corporate alternative lifestyle magazines, independent publishers, small presses of poetry and other media formats that counter the dominant messages of the mainstream media. Chris Atton (2002) notes that the primary aim of alternative media is social and political action that strives for a more equitable social, cultural, and economic whole. While mainstream media in the U.S. have historically engaged in vertical or "top down" communication that privileges the perspectives of the most powerful actors in society (such as government leaders and economic elites upon whom these media depend for financing), alternative media have sought to share information in ways that create horizontal links among citizens for their empowerment. Through alternative media, marginalized political perspectives are prioritized over the viewpoints of the most powerful individuals and institutions in society (Atton 2002; Eyerman & Jamison 1998; Howley 2005; Love & Mattern 2013). John Downing notes that alternative media "provide an alternative public forum – sometimes referred to as the 'public sphere' or 'public realm' to the official forum and the official story" (Downing et al. 1995: 250).

Under the umbrella of alternative media fall community-based, not-for-profit media that are created and/or controlled by a geographic, cultural, religious, or linguistic community. These include community newspapers, community TV stations, and community radio that have a history of supporting radical movements for social change. Kevin Howley (2005: 2) defines community media as "grassroots or locally oriented media initiatives predicated on a profound sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream media form and content, dedicated to the principles of free expression

and participatory democracy, and committed to enhancing community relations and promoting community solidarity.” Described as “grassroots,” “radical,” “home-grown,” “independent,” “non-commercial,” or “participatory,” these media typically emphasize creativity, community involvement, and participatory processes, providing opportunities for community activists to share success stories and strategies (Hamilton 2000; Pickard 2007). Expressing a population’s identity and collectively-felt injustices with the goal of promoting social change, alternative media formats also include zines (Duncombe 1997), public murals (Sperling Cockcroft & Barnet-Sanchez 1990), street processions and street theater (Broyles-González 1994; Davis 1986), poetry slams (Hoffman 2001; Somers-Willett 2009), graffiti (Chaffee 1993), posters (Noriega 2001); storytelling (Cohen-Cruz 2006), public art (Lipsitz 2001; Love & Mattern 2013), culture jamming (Harold 2004), video projects (Atton 2002), and music (Garafalo 1992; Mattern 1998). Public rituals are another grassroots media form used for political expression and the advancement of social movements (Rothenbuhler 1998), such as Day of the Dead public altar installations created by Chicano Movement activists to draw attention to racism, labor abuses, and human rights violations (Marchi 2009a); the traditional “dancing” of hand-made masks in Mexico to critique political leaders and government policies (Schlossberg 2015); and spontaneous public shrines that honor deceased victims of socio-political violence (Santino et al. 2006).

Such community-based media may not immediately come to mind for Communication scholars because our notions of “media” are heavily biased towards print, broadcast, and digital technologies. Yet all the above media provide important spaces “to generate historical memories and analyses, nurture alternative visions for the future, and contest dominant representations and definitions of reality” (Kidd 1999: 116). Moreover, they encourage a rethinking of traditional assumptions regarding the formulation of the public sphere and the definition of political communication.

4 Historical examples of media, community-building, and social movements

The precursor of any effective social movement is the consciousness-raising and solidarity-building work that takes place long before a social movement materializes. Communication theorist James Carey observed that the knowledge and consciousness people need to act politically can develop “only by divesting life of its mundane trappings and exposing our common sense or scientific assumptions to an ironic light that makes the phenomenon strange” (Carey 1988: 25). Critiquing the dominant “transmission model” of communication that narrowly views communication as an “extension of messages across geography for the purposes of control,” Carey advocated for a “ritual” view of communication, in which social identities are symbolically constructed and reinforced while engaging the intellectual, spiritual, and/or physical

participation of the public (Carey 1989). He emphasized the roots of the word “communication” in terms such as “commonality,” “communion,” and “community,” arguing that the “publics” that are so crucial for democratic participation can only be created via communication that emphasizes *collective* experiences. As the following historical examples illustrate, alternative media have played a key role in this process.

Looking back on history, the United States began with a social movement: American colonists sought independence from an oppressive and unaccountable monarch who taxed them without representation. The colonial mainstream media at the time were pro-British, and anyone caught talking about rebellion could be hanged for treason. Leading up to the American Revolution, underground newspapers and pamphlets were secretly printed and distributed, passed along surreptitiously from person to person after each use. Thomas Paine’s 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense*, which condemned the “race of kings” and “the absurdity and evil of hereditary succession” and encouraged colonists to rise up against “the Royal Brute of Great Britain,” was widely circulated (Downing 1995: 242). Tom Paine, Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Adams, John Adams and other founders of the new nation relied on alternative media to critique the government and advocate for radical social change.

Throughout U.S. history, alternative media coverage of topics deemed “unthinkable” for discussion in the mainstream press has inspired the formation of numerous social movements. For example, in the 1800s, working class, ethnic, and labor newspapers contradicted the pro-business narratives of the mainstream press by writing about exploitative labor practices, wage theft, and inhumane working conditions. Through reading such publications as *The Mechanic’s Free Press* (1828–1831), *The Working Man’s Advocate* (1829–1930), and *The Jewish Daily Forward* (1897–present), individual workers recognized their collective plight, saw themselves as part of a larger community of people experiencing similar exploitation, and were inspired to organize for a better life. In these and many other alternative newspapers, workers could read and debate critiques of capitalism from socialist, Marxist, and anarchist philosophers whose messages were absent in the mainstream media.

Broadening perspectives on social and political issues beyond the limited political range found in the mainstream media, these publications encouraged workers to consider the larger socio-political structures responsible for creating intersecting forms of oppression. As John Downing notes, they “pointed out the interconnections between exploitation in the workplace and slum housing, between industrial accidents and poor health care, between factory discipline and the police force” (Downing 1995: 243). A growing awareness of the nature of social injustice eventually sparked social movements that established public education, public health services, public parks, public regulatory agencies, improved labor conditions (including an end to child labor), police department reform, and investigations into political and corporate corruption.

Independent abolitionist publications such as *The North Star* (1847–1851), published by Frederick Douglass, and *The Liberator* (1831–1865), published by William

Lloyd Garrison, urged an end to slavery and connected like-minded people to the collective goal of abolition. Similarly, alternative newspapers such as *The Lily* (1849–1853), published by Amelia Bloomer, *The Revolution* (1868–1872), founded by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, and *The Suffragist* (1913–1920), published by the National Women’s Party, advocated voting and other civil rights for women, inspiring and sustaining the early feminist movement.

In Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and other countries engaged in twentieth century anti-colonial struggles, illegal “pirate” radio stations kept citizens informed about rebel resistance forces – information that was banned in the national news media because of the threat it represented to colonial governments (Fanon 1959). In Cuba, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and other Latin American countries, non-commercial shortwave radio, which could inexpensively transmit over entire continents, was the only way for citizens to get information about revolutionary movements from the 1950s to early 2000s (Barlow 1990; Darling 2007). Community radio in Indigenous areas of Latin America continue to provide alternative health information unavailable on commercial stations, providing a forum for contesting traditional gender roles and supporting incipient movements for women’s rights (McKinley & Jensen 2003).

In the U.S., low-power and pirate “micro” radio stations in low-income rural and urban areas have transmitted information to underserved communities, helping them to organize politically (Dunbar-Hester 2014; Marchi 2009b). One of the first and best known pirate radio stations in the U.S. was Zoom Black Liberation Radio, which operated from a low-income housing project in Springfield, Illinois. The station broadcast commentary on issues ignored in the mainstream press, such as police brutality against the city’s Black residents, tenants’ rights information, and traffic safety issues. In a community with high rates of functional illiteracy and strong oral storytelling traditions, Zoom stimulated political activism on topics ranging from housing code violations to political corruption (Coyer, Dowmunt & Fountain 2007; Sakolsky 1992).

In all these cases, alternative media provided a space to question hegemonic ideologies. Community newspapers, community, pirate, and shortwave radio, public access cable television (such as Paper Tiger TV),¹ and newer online formats such as blogs, podcasts, and multi-media electronic presentations, have been instrumental in raising consciousness about injustices and contesting dominant political policies such as discrimination, war, colonialism, police brutality, economic exploitation, U.S. cultural imperialism, and military intervention. This consciousness-raising is an indispensable first step in the contentious, risky and often dangerous process of organizing for socio-political change, and the social movements discussed above were the precursors to twenty-first century activism such as Occupy Wall Street,

1 To learn about Paper Tiger TV, see DeeDee Halleck. 1984. Paper Tiger television: Smashing the myths of the information industry every week on public access cable. *Media, Culture & Society* 6(3). 313–318.

#BlackLivesMatter, the fight for marriage equality, women's equality, immigrant rights, digital rights, and more.

However, mainstream and alternative media are not always opposed to each other, and can sometimes work in conjunction. For example, in the early twentieth century, popular songs broadcast on commercial radio throughout the American South discussed the lives of southern textile workers, not only creating a sense of collective identity (Huber 2008) but also expressing the low wages and dangerous labor conditions workers faced, connecting the root causes of these problems to exploitative companies. This music, together with the "Fireside Chats" broadcast nationally on mainstream radio by President Franklin Roosevelt (in which he expressed support for industrial workers), helped mobilize textile worker strikes for better labor conditions in the 1920s and 1930s (Roscigno & Danaher 2001).

In mainstream, for-profit magazines, newspapers, and books, journalists have published critical exposes that helped launch national and global social movements. For example, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), an exposé of abysmal labor and sanitation conditions in the U.S. meat packing industry at the turn of the twentieth century, was first published in 1905 in installments in the alternative (socialist) newspaper *Appeal to Reason*, which supported Sinclair's undercover investigation. But, a year later, the novel was published by Doubleday Books (one of the largest book publishers in the U.S. at the time), becoming a national bestseller that launched the food safety movement. Ralph Nader's 1965 best-selling book, *Unsafe at Any Speed*, which exposed the reluctance of U.S. car manufacturers to spend money on safety features, helped launch the consumer protection movement. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a book about the devastating effects of pesticides on plants and humans, was published in 1962 by the mainstream publishing house, Houghton-Mifflin, and became a best-seller that inspired the birth of the U.S. environmental movement.

Still, since most critiques of the powerful are not economically or politically advantageous, alternative, rather than commercial, media have historically been the leading avenues for the unfettered expression of information that is absent or marginalized in mainstream media discourse, whether for financial, political, or ideological reasons. Alternative media inspires individuals – especially those who are under-represented and misrepresented in the mainstream – to see themselves as part of a *collective* body that shares similar experiences and grievances, a first step towards becoming politically active.

5 Social movements in the Internet age

Before the advent of the Internet, good or bad media coverage could make or break a social movement. While "old" media still play an important role in raising the profile of and legitimizing social movements (Banaji & Buckingham 2013; Vliegenthart & Walgrave

2012), activists in the twenty-first century do not depend as heavily on mass media, since they can now interact directly with the public via social networking technologies. For example, the use of Meetup.com, Facebook, and Twitter in Democratic Party organizing helped relatively obscure “long shot” presidential candidates, such as Howard Dean in 2004, Barrack Obama in 2008, and Bernie Sanders in 2016, gain national prominence. Moreover, citizens are now using digital media to hold elite institutions and leaders accountable in ways that were difficult to do in earlier times (Armstrong & Zuniga 2006).

Contemporary digital media offer functions that are vital to social movements, such as fundraising, training, and recruitment. Indeed, they provide the very organizational structures of movements, including decentralized campaign networks, interactive calendars and discussion forums, and the crowdsourcing of ideas or services in ways that connect diverse and geographically dispersed activists (Bennett & Segerberg 2013; Tarrow 2011). In the process, digital media have diminished the relative importance of local and national offline offices as bases for activism, while increasing the advantages of resource-poor organizations and improving transnational activist collaboration (Bennett 2003).

However, the fact that digital technologies have been effective in quickly publicizing political struggles around the world has led to overly facile perceptions that the Internet has made social movements more powerful. Many people have heralded the emancipatory power of networked communication technologies, an enthusiasm perhaps best expressed in Clay Shirky’s *Here Comes Everybody* (2008). Shirky contends that the innate desire of humans to socialize and cooperate has resulted in the wide-scale adoption of digital technologies to organize for change. These digital tools, he argues, provide a non-institutional platform for groups to organize with minimal risk, simultaneously negating the advantages of money, technology, and staff that state and corporate actors have traditionally held. This is giving voice to people who previously had little or no power in official political channels, such as individuals who cannot vote because of their age or citizenship status (i.e., high school students or undocumented immigrants). While Shirky highlights the exciting potentials of digital media in political organizing work, his conception of “Everybody” leaves out those individuals lacking access to digital technologies, such as many senior citizens and low-income, illiterate, and other populations who live largely or entirely offline (Brabazon 2008).

Despite billions of people around the world owning cell phones, digital inequality remains significant. About a third of the world’s population lack cell phones and only about 40% of the global population have Internet access (Internet World Stats 2016). This inequality, shaped by existing structural inequalities of class, race, and gender, is replicated within the online activities of social movements. Research on Occupy Wall Street (Costanza-Chock 2012), Arab Spring (Howard & Hussain 2011), the 2013 Brazil protests (Porto & Brant 2015), and other movements illustrate this. Therefore, Costanza-Chock (2011) argues for the importance of cross platform or “transmedia” mobilization to engage the social base of movements in a variety of participatory media-making practices across multiple “old” and “new” media platforms.

Others have argued that the impact of digital media on social movement effectiveness has been exaggerated. This position is most notably expressed by Malcolm Gladwell (2010) in the *New Yorker* article “Why the Revolution will not be Tweeted.” Using the U.S. civil rights movement of the 1960s as an example, Gladwell argues that effective social movements depend on “strong ties.” Strong ties involve the trust and affection that is developed over extended periods of face-to-face contact, in which people are willing to engage in high risk – even life threatening – protest activities because of the strong personal connections they feel for fellow activists. In contrast, he argues, online activism is based on “weak ties” of people who typically have never met and feel little sense of mutual responsibility or obligation. Gladwell contends that while the numbers of social movement participants today *appear* to be higher than in the past, as thousands of people can converge for a protest in a matter of minutes thanks to Facebook and Twitter, the weak ties that work well for convincing people to participate in one-shot activities like a protest are the exact opposite of what is needed to carry out sustained political organizing work. He states: “Social networks are effective at increasing participation – by lessening the level of motivation that participation requires.” He further argues that both hierarchical organization and a clear leadership structure – things typically absent from online social movements – are necessary for a movement’s success, given that effective movements must be able to endure over a period of years, requiring dedicated long-term, well-organized leadership.

While horizontal, rather than hierarchical organizing structures have been the emblem of social movements in the Internet era, Todd Wolfson draws our attention to the ways in which an infatuation with the Internet by many social movement theorists neglects the power structures and uneven resources that radical protest movements face in capitalist societies. Critical of the “logic of horizontality” among the “Cyber Left,” a term Wolfson coined to refer to the creative use of new media and social networks by progressive activists, he argues that horizontally-organized movements and institutions “have weak organizational structures with little collective decision-making power because they have dismissed, a priori, centralized power and structures of accountability and leadership of any kind” (Wolfson 2014: 24). A lack of powerful leadership, he argues, impedes effective collective action.

Still others, such as Evgeny Morozov (2011), reject the liberatory claims of digital media enthusiasts on the grounds that authoritarian states are using the Internet as a powerful tool for the surveillance and repression of dissident activists, as well as for the dissemination of nationalist and extremist propaganda. While digital technologies are associated with progressive politics, he notes, ultra conservatives, neo-Nazis, and fascists are also adeptly utilizing them.

Numerous studies have shown that the Internet has the potential to both strengthen and weaken practices of democratic expression and civic engagement (Allen & Light 2015; Gerbaudo 2012; Papacharissi 2014; Wolfson 2014). It is also important to remember that many political events and actions portrayed via social media as “movements” do not meet the definition of a social movement, particularly in that

they are not sustained over time. They are simply outbursts of collective behavior done by people with no long-term commitment to a cause (Carty 2015).

6 Participatory politics

A major focus of research regarding the Internet's impact on social movements concerns the ways the Internet has broadened definitions of civics and citizenship. In the twenty-first century, notions of political activism have extended beyond the electoral focus or political party affiliations that used to dominate discussions of political activism (Bennett 2008; Kahne, Middaugh & Allen 2014; Zukin et al. 2006). Today's political activism ranges from traditional activities such as voting, protest marches, boycotting, volunteering, or circulating political petitions, to lifestyle politics, digital sharing of files and links, or online petitioning of music, movie, television, gaming or other companies. Recent research has pointed to the ways that participants in playful online communities or "participatory cultures" (such as gaming sites or fan sites) can develop the "civic imagination" useful for engaging in offline politics and meaningful social change (Jenkins et al. 2016; Kligler-Vilenchik 2016). Moreover, young people increasingly use the online sharing of photos, news stories, videos and other "artifacts of engagement" to express solidarity and bring into being the publics or counterpublics necessary for collective political action (Clark & Marchi 2017).

The term "participatory politics" is influenced by the concept of "participatory culture," which specifies that online participation is significantly peer-based, interactive, non-hierarchical, social, and independent of elite institutions (Jenkins et al. 2009). Influenced by research on participatory culture, Cathy Cohen and her colleagues developed the term "participatory politics" to describe how younger generations engage in politics online in ways that have changed the relationship of ordinary citizens to institutions and elites (Cohen et al. 2012). Examples of participatory political acts include starting a new political group online, writing and disseminating a blog post about a political issue, forwarding a funny political video to one's social network, or participating in a poetry slam. Participatory politics allows individuals to operate with greater independence in the political realm, circumventing the traditional gatekeepers of information and influence, such as newspaper editors, political parties, and political interest groups.

In institutional or elite-driven politics, highly organized groups such as political parties, mainstream media companies, non-profit organizations, lobbyists, and special interest groups historically drove the national political conversation about which issues deserved attention, what actions should be taken, and how citizens could be mobilized. There were limited options for average citizens to express their political views, which included calling, visiting or sending a letter to an elected official, or, if one were lucky, getting a letter to the editor published. Now there are

myriad ways outside of institutional contexts for ordinary people to share political information and opinions and to organize actions.

Ethan Zuckerman uses the term “participatory civics” to refer to new forms of civic engagement that use digital media in ways that allow people to see their impact on issues they care about. Rather than seeing “thick” and “thin” engagement or “strong” and “weak” ties as binary categories, Zuckerman (2014: 159) argues that they are on a continuum and that digital technologies allow people to participate in “instrumental engagement” that targets a specific social change goal that is important to them.

Inherent in much research about online participation is a focus on how the Internet and social media allow people to have a voice (Allen & Light 2015; Clark & Marchi 2017; Couldry 2010; Crawford 2009), sharing personal experiences and perspectives online that help isolated individuals to identify and affiliate with a collective cause. As Zuckerman notes, “Voice begets voice ... when other people talk about a controversial issue, it’s easier to share your voice ... as a member of a marginalized group or an ally” (Zuckerman 2014: 163).

7 Connective action

Today, people are not limited to the Informed Citizen model, in which citizens are expected to be widely informed on a broad range of political issues, or the Monitorial Citizen model, in which citizens intermittently monitor the political landscape, keeping just enough informed to recognize danger and act when needed (Schudson 1998). Rather than being motivated by a sense of obligation, duty, or loyalties to specific political parties or philosophies, contemporary citizen involvement in political issues (especially among younger citizens) is inspired by what they feel passionate about (Bennett 2008; Papacharisi 2014; Clark & Marchi 2017).

Lance Bennett’s (2008) work on the “self-actualizing citizen” notes that young people in the early twenty-first century do not abide by the “dutiful citizenship” model of older generations, in which people felt a “duty” to follow the news, vote, and become involved in political party activities or civil society organizations. Instead, the experience of self-actualizing citizenship is marked by a diminished sense of government obligation; higher sense of individual purpose; more personally defined acts such as consumerism, volunteering, or transnational activism; lower rates of voting; and a mistrust of media and politicians, reinforced by a negative mass media environment (Bennett 2008: 14). He explains that this model of citizenship favors loose networks of community action – often established or sustained through friendships and peer relations and thin social ties maintained by interactive information technologies.

Bennett’s research and his work with Alexandra Segerberg have contributed significantly to contemporary discussions about the connections between online information-sharing and democracy by revealing the ways that digital media expand

possibilities for political organization and action. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) discuss the emergence of what they term *connective action* – a form of political action in which networked communication enables individuals to personalize expressions of a social movement’s goals outside of the bounds of traditional social movement organizations. Contrasting *connective* action with the pre-Internet logic of *collective* action (associated with high levels of organizational resources and the formation of collective identities), the authors note that the logic of connective action is based on personalized content sharing across media networks. Social network technologies enable people to personalize their connections, choosing both what kinds of information they will share with those in their networks and how they will share that information. This research brings to the forefront the ways that online communicative acts constitute relationships between people that are vital in organizing for political change.

Zizi Papacharissi’s research on the role of emotion in politics shares some common ground with Bennett and Segerberg’s argument that social media have brought about possibilities for connective action. She asserts that social media provide new locations through which people can express themselves and participate in publics and counterpublics that help them feel that their views *matter*. “Affective publics,” as Papacharissi terms them, are “networked public formations that are mobilized and connected or disconnected through expressions of sentiment” (Papacharissi 2014: 125). She notes a two-part progression: first, we *feel* like we’re a part of the developing story, and second, as we contribute our own emotive declarations online through words, photos, and videos on social media venues, we *become* a part of the story. Papacharissi connects current debates about social media’s ability to facilitate feelings of belonging with debates about political engagement, helping to explain how people “feel their way into politics” (Papacharissi 2014: 25).

Influenced by both Papacharissi’s research on affective publics and Bennett and Segerberg’s theory of connective action, the concept of *connective journalism* refers to the ways that communicating stories, personal experiences, and opinions via social media to express one’s identity can also create communities of like-minded individuals who organize for social change (Clark & Marchi 2017). Practices of connective journalism hinge on the role of emotion in suturing people into a collective identity. Connective journalism draws attention to a continuum of online communicative actions to better understand how people move from first considering whether to express themselves at *all*, to sharing meaningful stories and artifacts online, and finally to involving themselves in the more arduous work of political organizing.

8 Concluding thoughts

While digital media technologies have dramatically reshaped the relationship between social movements and media, particularly regarding the organizational

structures of movements and movement organizers' ability to communicate directly with the public, they have not erased the importance of mainstream media coverage, which still plays a key role in legitimizing and popularizing a movement's goals and actors. Nor have digital technologies eliminated the need for long-term, face-to-face organizing work. Online activism is best seen not as a replacement for but rather a compliment to on-the-ground social movement organizing work (Carty 2015; Tarrow 2011). As Tarrow points out, the dilemma of hierarchical social movement organizations is that if they permanently internalize their bases into organizations, they lose their capacity for disruption, yet if they become too decentralized, they lack the infrastructure necessary to maintain sustained interactions with allies and opponents (Tarrow 2011: 138). The challenge facing contemporary movement organizers is to find the right balance between centralized and decentralized structures and between digital and face-to-face engagement.

In the twenty-first century, social movement activists around the globe are experimenting with hybrid combinations of protest, combining traditional media formats with face-to-face and electronic mobilization in domestic and transnational actions. Civic engagement in concrete actions such as voting, volunteering, or actively organizing a social movement must be preceded by consciousness-raising processes that create the foundation for more elaborate political action. Media, old and new, have always played a crucial role in this work and will continue to do so.

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