Media and Communication
Open Access Journal | ISSN: 2183-2439

Volume 4, Issue 4 (2016)

Political Agency in the Digital Age: Media, Participation and Democracy

Editors

Anne Kaun, Maria Kyriakidou and Julie Uldam

COGITATIO

Media and Communication, 2016, Volume 4, Issue 4
Issue: Political Agency in the Digital Age: Media, Participation and Democracy

Published by Cogitatio Press
Rua Fialho de Almeida 14, 2º Esq.,
1070-129 Lisbon
Portugal

Academic Editors
Anne Kaun, Södertörn University, Sweden
Maria Kyriakidou, University of East Anglia, UK
Julie Uldam, Roskilde University, Denmark

Available online at: www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandcommunication

This issue is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY). Articles may be reproduced provided that credit is given to the original and *Media and Communication* is acknowledged as the original venue of publication.

Table of Contents

Political Agency at the Digital Crossroads?
Anne Kaun, Maria Kyriakidou and Julie Uldam 1-7

Social Movements and Political Agency in the Digital Age: A Communication Approach
Anastasia Kavada 8-12

Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism: The Case of #BlackLivesMatter
Guobin Yang 13-17

Energiewende's Lone Warriors: A Hyperlink Network Analysis of the German Energy Transition Discourse
Jonas Kaiser, Markus Rhomberg, Axel Maireder, Stephan Schlögl 18-29

Mediatisation, Marginalisation and Disruption in Australian Indigenous Affairs
Kerry McCallum, Lisa Waller and Tanja Dreher 30-42

Free Software Beyond Radical Politics: Negotiations of Creative and Craft Autonomy in Digital Visual Media Production
Julia Velkova 43-52

No Digital "Castles in the Air": Online Non-Participation and the Radical Left
Linus Andersson 53-62

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183-2439)
2016, Volume 4, Issue 4, Pages 1-7
doi: 10.17645/mac.v4i4.690

Editorial

Political Agency at the Digital Crossroads?

Anne Kaun [1,*], Maria Kyriakidou [2] and Julie Uldam [3]

[1] Media and Communication Studies, School for Culture and Education, Södertörn University, 14189 Hudding, Sweden; E-Mail: anne.kaun@sh.se
[2] School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies, University of East Anglia, Norwich, NR4 7TJ, UK; E-Mail: m.kyriakidou@uea.ac.uk
[3] Department of Communication and Arts, Roskilde University, 4000 Roskilde, Denmark; E-Mail: uldam@ruc.dk

* Corresponding author

Submitted: 20 June 2016 | Published: 11 August 2016

Abstract
This thematic issue presents the outcome of the 2015 ECREA Communication and Democracy Section Conference "Political Agency in the Digital Age" that was held at the Copenhagen Business School in Denmark. It problematizes changes in the configurations of political agency in the context of digital media. The articles represent a shift from an exclusive focus on political elites to the interrelation between institutionalised politics and political processes in other societal spheres in the field of media and politics research. Political agency as the main notion of the thematic issue draws attention at the (media) practices through which social actors reproduce, reorganise and challenge politics. At the same time, the issue poses questions about the structures—economic, political and social—that allow for, define and also limit these practices. The contributions gathered here suggest an understanding of agency as constituted through the use of knowledge and resources, themselves embedded within structural contexts; at the same time, agency is transformative of the structures within which it is embedded by making use of knowledge and resources in creative and often radical ways. In that context the development of digital media marks a rupture or critical juncture that allows and requires a rethinking of conditions of political agency. Accordingly the contributions critically scrutinize the role of digital media moving beyond celebratory accounts of democratizing potential of digital media. The rethinking of the grammar of political agency is at the heart of this thematic issue.

Keywords
digital media; media practices; political agency; political participation

Issue
This editorial is part of the issue "Political Agency in the Digital Age: Media, Participation and Democracy", edited by Anne Kaun (Södertörn University, Sweden), Maria Kyriakidou (University of East Anglia, UK) and Julie Uldam (Roskilde University, Denmark).

© 2016 by the authors; licensee Cogitatio (Lisbon, Portugal). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

Research on media and politics has traditionally tended towards separating the sphere of politics from political processes in other societal spheres, focusing on parliamentarian politics and formal, institutionalised interest group politics (e.g. unions). At the same time, there has been a tendency to focus on elites, whether political, corporate, media or cultural. With the emergence of digital media, the research agenda within the field of media and politics research is shifting towards exploring interrelations between institutionalised politics and political processes in other societal spheres, and moving beyond elites to also include "ordinary" people. The personalization of digital media and the rise of user-generated content have led to an increased interest in personal self-expression of citizens as a political act. While this represents an important development, it also warrants fundamental questions about what counts as politics and who counts as political actor. At the same time euphoric accounts of the potential of digital media for political agency are questioned

critically both in terms of effectiveness and the wider structures in which they are embedded. The thematic issue gathers articles that provide a varied analysis of political agency in the digital age assuming that political agency emerges at the intersection of socially and technologically embedded media practices and experiences. In that context the development of digital media marks a rupture or critical juncture that allows and requires a rethinking of conditions of political agency. The rethinking of the grammar of political agency is at the heart of this journal.

The notion of 'political agency' draws attention at the (media) practices through which social actors reproduce, reorganise and challenge politics. At the same time, it poses questions about the structures, economic, political and social, that allow for, define and also limit these practices. We understand agency as constituted through the use of knowledge and resources, themselves embedded within structural contexts; at the same time, agency is transformative of the structures within which it is embedded by making use of knowledge and resources in creative and often radical ways. In practical terms political agency refers to acting on political, economic and social structures in order to promote social change or, as Anthony Giddens has defined it, a 'capacity to make a difference' (Giddens, 1984, p. 14). This focus on political agency, therefore, requires an understanding of empowerment, participation and social change as contextual and as processes that are constantly negotiated. It, therefore, allows us to escape the emerging dichotomy between celebratory and pessimistic narratives about the political participation as enabled by digital media.

In this context, the concept of the 'digital age' invites us to think of digital media, and in particular—although not exclusively—social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, as part of the social, economic, and technological ecologies that allow for and enable the expression of political agency in particular ways (Mercea, Iannelli, & Loader, 2016). This is not to say that these media are the catalyst of new and revolutionary forms of political agency. Beyond the techno-optimism expressed in arguments about 'Facebook' or 'Twitter revolutions', we do not see technology and new media as independent actors in themselves but rather as emerging in the context of specific cultural and societal settings while having specific technological properties (Williams, 1974, 1977). Consequently, we consider media practices as both social and material processes. While social aspects of media practices are increasingly at the heart of empirical investigations particularly in the context of political participation (see for example Couldry, 2012; Mattoni & Treré, 2014), there is still a lack of exploring material aspects of media practices. Besides exploring changes in patterns of political agency in the digital age, the thematic issue hence aims to suggest empirical investigations of material aspects of media practices.

It is important to consider agency as enabled by and performed through digital media both in its individual and collective expressions. Earlier research on digital media has emphasised their emancipatory potential for individual users and highlighted individual creative autonomy as the basis for political participation and social change. In his overly optimistic account, Henry Jenkins (2006) has used the term 'photoshop democracy' to describe how fan engagement with popular culture, further enabled by new media, can lead to political action and a more democratic participatory culture. In similar lines, John Hartley's concept of 'do-it-yourself citizenship' (1999, 2010) , emphasising television viewers' agency, has been applied on discussions about practices of citizen-making through interactions and creative explorations on online media (Ratto & Boler, 2014). Such forms of political agency, van Zoonen, Visa and Mihelja (2010) argue are forms of 'unlocated citizenship', namely of citizenship not necessarily linked to established political institutions. Social media platforms can form the space where such citizenship is fostered, in ways that are 'self-actualising' rather than 'dutiful' (Bennett, Wells, & Rank, 2009).

These approaches are underlined by the assumption that self-expression on online platforms is a political act and can become a tool of resistance. Communicative autonomy afforded on digital media, Castells argues, directly fosters 'social and political autonomy', themselves key factors of social change (Castells, 2009, p. 414). Major characteristic of such forms of action, according to Bennett is the emergence of the individual as an important catalyst of collective action through the mobilisation of her social networks, itself enabled through the use of social media (Bennett, 2012, p. 22). Such networked action is an expression of 'personalised politics', as it is conducted across personal action frames, which embrace diversity and inclusion, lower the barriers of identification with the cause, and validate personal emotion (Bennett, 2012, pp. 22-23). In this context, 'connective action' is substituting 'collective action' at the public space (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

On the other hand, a number of studies have explored political agency in the forms of collectivities organised and mobilised through new media platforms (della Porta, Andretta, Mosca, & Reiter, 2006; Gerbaudo, 2012; Kavada, 2015; Mercea, 2012; Treré & Mattoni, 2015; Uldam, 2010). These studies have emphasised how the collective agency of social movements, such as the global justice movement, environmental activism, or anti-austerity protests, has been enabled and reinforced through new media and the practices of collective identification they allow for. In this context, technology plays an important symbolic role in the formation of movement identity. Taking Alberto Melucci (1996) and his analysis of collective identity as a starting point, Gerbaudo and Treré (2015) consider hashtags and viral images

as well as other forms of online mobilizations as vivid examples of collective identity in the context of digital media. 'Social media, as a language and a terrain of identification', Gerbaudo argues, 'becomes a source of coherence as shared symbols, a centripetal focus of attention, which participants can turn to when looking for other people in the movement' (2014, p. 266).

However, the potential of digital media for the formation of collective identification is still being questioned on the basis of their inherently individualized character, particularly given the corporate nature of social media. These platforms operate on the basis of a business model that puts data at the heart of the enterprise. Hence, the generation of ever new data becomes the main interest of commercial platforms shifting the emphasis from the use value of messages posted to their exchange value (Dean, 2008; Kaun, 2016). Techno-optimist approaches to the political potential of social media, Fenton and Barassi argue, largely ignore the actual uses to which social networking is put, as well as the fact that within the contemporary political context 'personalised politics' (Bennett, 2012) are actually an expression of individualistic politics conducive to neoliberalism (Fenton & Barassi, 2011, p. 191).

Moving beyond debates about personalised vs individualistic politics or collective vs connective action, Anastasia Kavada in her contribution in this issue suggests approaching the collective 'in looser terms, as a process rather than as a finished product' (Kavada, 2016, p. 9). Central in this process is communication, and by extension the media, which constitute sites of conversation, each with different affordances for interaction, but also overlapping and interconnected (see also Kavada, 2015). In this context, Kavada argues, collective political agency should not be merely conceptualised in relation to its effectiveness but also in relation to the 'communication capacities' of social movements, which 'include the control, creation and manipulation of the rules of communication themselves and of the sites where episodes of interaction take place' (Kavada, 2016, p. 10). In conclusion, Kavada argues that digital media have made it necessary to consider communication as central in order to understand current social movements. Extending the idea that movements are always in the making, communication becomes consequently crucial for making sense of the changing nature of political agency.

Communication, and in particular its narrative form, is also the focus of Guobin Yang's contribution in this issue. Similarly to Kavada, Yang emphasises the processual character of social movements and the centrality of communicative practices in their constitution. Adapting Campbell's definition of rhetorical agency as the capacity to speak in a way recognised by others (Campbell, 2005), Yang explores narrative agency in relation to hashtag activism, and in particular the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Comments and retweets in response to hashtags can be thought of as personal stories appearing in a temporal order, which, once part of the Twitter platform, assume a narrative form. Narrative agency, therefore, as 'the capacity to create stories on social media by using hashtags in a way that is collective and recognized by the public' (Yang, 2016, p. 14) is a central form of agency in digitally mediated political participation. This combination of personal stories and comments and their public recognition which constructs them as collective narratives once again shows the interconnection between the personal and the collective.

If political agency is approached as a process, and communication practices are central in its formation, it is also important to see how these practices are directed towards political change and negotiate with structures and institutional political actors. This question redirects attention to the social and political contexts 'within which new projects of *positive* political action (policy promotion, advocacy, implementation) can emerge and be sustained' (Couldry, 2012, p. 114). Digital media can be seen as not only enabling but also amplifying political agency by facilitating networking among individuals, social movements, alternative media, and nongovernmental organisations. Networked campaigns of the kind have the potential of influencing public debate, setting agendas and ultimately contributing to policy changes (Benkler, Roberts, Faris, Solow-Niederman, & Etling, 2015; Wilkin, Dencik, & Bognár, 2015). Such campaigns, however, note the critics, tell us little about how to 'sustain political agency in time' (Couldry, 2012, p. 116) but rather draw attention to isolated acts of disruption. According to Couldry, possibilities of transformative political action are silently weighted towards short-term disruptive interventions and away from long-term positive projects' (Couldry, 2012, p. 125).

Jonas Kaiser, Markus Rhomberg, Axel Maireder and Stephan Schlögl offer a rather pessimistic perspective on this debate in their contribution in this thematic issue. Focusing on the controversial debate on energy resources in Germany (Energiewende), the authors explored the different actors that used digital communication platforms to make their voices and interests of the issue heard. These actors included public administration, other political actors, private business, special interest groups, the media, scientists and civil society. Analysing hyperlink structures on the debate and among these actors, the authors concluded that there was little communication among different actors, as most of them 'only interact with other closely associated actors from their own social field' (Kaiser, Rhomberg, Maireder, & Schlögl 2016, p. 27). At the same time, the claims of NGOs, civic movements and scientific institutions have been largely ignored by political actors. Whereas, however, political actors seemed preoccupied with inter-party community building, actors from the civ-

il society and special interest groups did seem to reach out to other actors. This did not change, however, the overall image of the online discourse on 'Energiewende' as fragmentary rather than integrative.

In juxtaposition to such an exclusive focus on online publics, Kerry McCallum, Lisa Waller and Tanja Dreher in their contribution to this issue show how public discussion facilitated by alternative and digital media can actually influence public debate and policy making, providing voice to the marginalised. The authors examine the intersections among the media practices of policy makers, journalists and Indigenous participatory media in the case of a state-sponsored campaign to formally recognize Indigenous people in the Australian constitution. Adopting a mediatisation perspective and conducting multi-sided analysis, they illustrate the complexity of political agency moving between different sites and media formats. 'A changing media environment', the authors conclude, 'has enabled new players and platforms to execute political agency' and challenge established dynamics, therefore disrupting 'how political elites manage public debate, and the way public opinion is understood and acted upon' (McCallum, Waller, & Dreher, 2016, p. 31).

As the contributions mentioned above show, focusing on political agency as a process constituted through communicative practices allows us to answer questions of how political action, collective and connective, is enabled through digital platforms used by individual and collective social actors coming together. It also allows us to; consider the interaction among different actors and develop an understanding of how existing symbolic, social and political hierarchies structure such communicative practices. Symbolic practices of communication such as discursive struggles over the power to interpret social reality, challenge established political definitions or be heard in the public space are in that context crucial media practices.

If we approach practices, however, not only as symbolic but also as material, in other words as physical and informational work attached to specific technologies, requires us to ask more specific questions about the socio-economic conditions within which these practises occur as well as how they contribute to broader ideological and material fields of cultural production. Such questions have been addressed by a number of critical accounts. Discussions of the digital divide linked to unequal access to communication infrastructures have highlighted structural disadvantages of being excluded from communication (Norris, 2001; Selwyn, 2003; Warschauer, 2004). In contrast considerations of digital labour highlight inequalities that emerge from unequal power relations in the production process of the digital economy, including the exploitation of precarious workers producing the material devices that make online communication possible in the first place (Fuchs, 2015; Scholz, 2012). At the same time, commercial social media constitute fields for corporate surveillance limiting political agency of activists struggling for social change (Uldam, 2016), as well as individual users' privacy by monitoring their data for the purposes of effective advertising (Turow, 2012). Following these critical discussions of material aspects of digital media, political agency is limited within the structures of capitalism, which is reproduced by patterns of ownership and commodification of the online space.

Within this context, Julia Verkova's contribution in this issue provides critical insights into the development of free software and the practices of digital artists, animators and technicians working in digital media industries. Drawing upon an ethnographic study of the production of two free software tools, namely Blender and Synfig, Velkova illustrates the inherent tensions in the production of free software within the context of digital industries operating within a context of 'flexible capitalism'. A series of interviews with developers and technicians reveal that free software becomes meaningful for creators as an 'individual strategy to remain flexible and competitive' (Velkova, 2016, p. 51) rather than as a way of self-realisation or emancipation from the industry. In this context the role of free software within digital production, far from being part of a critical project, should be understood as 'individual strategies to find material security and extend personal creative and craft autonomy through technological choices' (Velkova, 2016, p. 51). As such creative agency ultimately illustrates the 'new spirit of capitalism' (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007).

Another aspect of materiality, hitherto largely ignored and unexplored, is that of non-participation in the digital space. Non-participation can have the form of passive exclusion from digital use of new media due to socioeconomic reasons, as described by the concept of the digital divide. At the same time, however, non-participation can be active, in the sense of choosing to abstain from online platforms. The political dimensions of such acts of abstention, similarly to participation, should be thought of as contextual and therefore open to empirical investigation. For Portwood-Stacer (2013), for example, resisting Facebook can be seen as a performance of elitism on the basis of arguments of taste and distinction. On the other hand, Casemajor, Couture, Delfin, Goerzen and Delfanti (2015) have highlighted how non-participation can be seen as an active rejection of the 'dark sides' of participatory media, such as surveillance, and therefore be politically significant. Similarly, Fenton and Barassi's (2011) interviewees at the Cuba Solidarity Campaign in the UK were concerned that the use of social networking sites as tools of political action might have negative effect on their campaign, distorting people's ideas of collective action.

It is non-participation as a form of protest and claiming autonomy that is the focus of the last article of this thematic issue by Linus Andersson (2016). Ex-

ploring the practices of radical left groups in Sweden, the author applies a model of non-participation that distinguishes between active and passive non-participation. Whereas active non-participation is a form of empowerment and political agency, passive non-participation maps on to forms of non-voluntary exclusion such as the digital divide based on location and socio-economic background. The left groups included in the sample actively chose to abstain from corporate social media as an expression of their ideological leaning and values the groups identify with. Consequently, political agency emerges in media practices of non-usage and abstention that point to structural constraints of digital media for political engagement.

The articles gathered in this thematic issue address the question of how political agency is renegotiated in the digital age through exploring concrete expressions of the dialectical relationship between agency and media in different cultural, political and economic contexts. What the contributions show is that in the era of digital media political agency is necessarily emerging in and through digital media even when it is articulated as a rejection of digital media. This shifts the focus from the question *if* digital media enable political agency towards *how* political subjectivity is negotiated in digital media ecologies. It also points to the fact that a distinction between individual and collective forms of political engagement is increasingly blurred. While corporate social media focus predominantly on individual usage, their infrastructures are appropriated for collectivising practices. It hence remains important to see media practices in their broader context countering a media-centric, techno-deterministic view.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the publication committee of Södertörn University that generously provided extra funding for the publication of the thematic issue. Furthermore, we extend our thanks to the members of the Communication and Democracy Section of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) constituting a vivid and engaged community of scholars and activists interested in the discussion of political participation, (digital) media and social change.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Andersson, L. (2016). No digital “castles in the air”: Online non-participation and the radical left. *Media and Communication, 4*(4), 53-62.

Benkler, Y., Roberts, H., Faris, R., Solow-Niederman, A., & Etling, B. (2015). Social mobilization and the networked public sphere: Mapping the SOPA-PIPA debate. *Political Communication*, *32*(4), 594-624.

Bennett, W. L. (2012). The personalization of politics political identity, social media, and changing patterns of participation. *The AnnalS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *644*(1), 20-39.

Bennett, L., & Segerberg, A. (2013). *The logic of connective action. Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bennett, L., Wells, C., & Rank, A. (2009). Young citizens and civic learning: Two paradigms of citizenship in the digital age. *Citizenship Studies, 13*(2), 105-120.

Boltanski, L., & Chiapello, E. (2007). *The new spirit of capitalism*. London: Verso.

Campbell, K. K. (2005). Agency: Promiscuous and protean. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 2(1), 1-19.

Casemajor, N., Couture, S., Delfin, M., Goerzen, M. & Delfanti, A. (2015). Non-participation in digital media. Toward a framework of mediated political action. *Media, Culture & Society, 37*(6), 850-866.

Castells, M. (2009). *Communication power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Couldry, N. (2012). *Media, Society, world. Social theory and digital media practice*. Cambridge: Polity.

Dean, J. (2008). Communicative capitalism: Circulation and the foreclosure of politics. In M. Boler (Ed.), *Digital media and democracy* (pp. 101-121). Cambridge: MIT Press.

della Porta, D., Andretta, M., Mosca, L., & Reiter, H. (2006). *Globalization from below. Transnational activists and protest networks*. New London: University of Minnesota Press.

Fenton, N., & Barassi, V. (2011). Alternative media and social networking sites: the politics of individuation and political participation. *The Communication Review, 14*(3), 179-196.

Fuchs, C. (2015). *Digital labour and Karl Marx*. New York and London: Routledge.

Gerbaudo, P. (2012). *Tweets and the streets. Social media and contemporary activism*. London: Pluto Press.

Gerbaudo, P. (2014). The persistence of collectivity in digital protest. *Information, Communication & Society*, *17*(2), 264-268.

Gerbaudo, P., & Treré, E. (2015). In search of the ‘we’ of social media activism: introduction to the special issue on social media and protest identities. *Information, Communication & Society, 18*(8), 865-871. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2015.1043319

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Hartley, J. (1999). *Uses of television*. London: Routledge.

Hartley, J. (2010). Silly citizenship. *Critical Discourse Studies, 7*(4), 233-248.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and*

new media collide. New York: New York University Press.
Kaiser, J., Rhomberg, M., Maireder, A., & Schlögl, S. (2016). Energiewende's lone warriors: A hyperlink network analysis of the German energy transition discourse. *Media and Communication, 4*(4), 18-29.
Kaun, A. (2016). *Crisis and critique. A history of media participation*. London: Zed Books.
Kavada, A. (2015). Creating the collective: Social media, the Occupy Movement and its constitution as a collective actor. *Information, Communication & Society, 18*(8), 872-886.
Kavada, A. (2016). Social movements and political agency in the digital age: A communication approach. *Media and Communication, 4*(4), 8-12.
Mattoni, A., & Treré, E. (2014). Media Practices, mediation processes, and mediatization in the study of social movements. *Communication Theory, 24*(3), 252-271.
McCallum, K., Waller, L., & Dreher, T. (2016). Mediatisation, marginalisation and disruption in Australian indigenous affairs. *Media and Communication, 4*(4), 30-42.
Melucci, A. (1996). *Challenging codes: Collective action in the information age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Mercea, D. (2012). Digital prefigurative participation: The entwinement of online communication and offline participation in protest events. *New Media & Society, 14*(1), 153-169.
Mercea, D., Iannelli, L., & Loader, B. D. (2016). Protest communication ecologies. *Information, Communication & Society, 19*(3), 279-289. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2015.1109701
Norris, P. (2001). *Digital divide: Civic engagement, information poverty, and the Internet worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Portwood-Stacer, L. (2013). Media refusal and conspicuous non-consumption: The performative and political dimensions of Facebook abstention. *New Media & Society*, 15 (7), 1041-1057.
Ratto, M., & Boler, M. (2014). *DIY citizenship: Critical making and social media*. Cambridge and London: MIT Press.
Scholz, T. (Ed.). (2012). *Digital labor: The Internet as playground and factory*. London: Routledge.
Selwyn, N. (2003). Apart from technology: Understanding people's non-use of information and communication technologies in everyday life. *Technology in Society, 25*(1), 99-116. doi:10.1016/S0160-791X(02)00062-3
Treré, E., & Mattoni, A. (2015). Media ecologies and protest movements: Main perspectives and key lessons. *Information, Communication and Society, 19*(2), 290-306. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2015.1109699
Turow, J. (2012). *The daily you: How the new advertising industry is defining your identity and your worth*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
Uldam, J. (2010). *Fickle commitment. Fostering political engagement in 'the flighty world of online activism'* (PhD Thesis), Copenhagen Business School, Copenhagen.
Uldam, J. (2016). Corporate management of visibility and the fantasy of the post-political: Social media and surveillance. *New Media & Society, 18*(2), 201-219. doi:10.1177/1461444814541526
van Zoonen, L., Visa, F., & Mihelja, S. (2010). Performing citizenship on YouTube: Activism, satire and online debate around the anti-Islam video Fitna. *Critical Discourse Studies, 7*(4), 249-262.
Velkova, J. (2016). Free software beyond radical politics: Negotiations of creative and craft autonomy in digital visual media production. *Media and Communication, 4*(4), 43-52.
Warschauer, M. (2004). *Technology and social inclusion: Rethinking the digital divide*. Massachusetts: MIT press.
Wilkin, P., Dencik, L., & Bognár, É. (2015). Digital activism and Hungarian media reform: The case of Milla. *European Journal of Communication*, *30*(6), 682-697.
Williams, R. (1974). *Television. Technology and cultural form*. New York: Schocken Books.
Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Yang, G. (2016). Narrative agency in hashtag activism: The case of #BlackLivesMatter. *Media and Communication, 4*(4), 13-17.

About the Authors

Anne Kaun is Associate Professor in Media and Communication Studies at Södertörn University. Kaun's research interest include media activism, temporality of media technologies, and media memories. Her work has appeared in among others *New Media and Society*, the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Media, Culture and Society*. In autumn 2016, her book *Crisis and Critique* is published by Zedbooks.

Maria Kyriakidou is a Lecturer of Cultural Politics, Communications and Media at the University of East Anglia. Her research focuses on the intersection between media, politics, and globalisation. Her work has appeared among others in *Media, Culture & Society*, the *International Journal of Communication*, and *Communication, Culture & Critique*.

Julie Uldam is Associate Professor at Roskilde University. Her research explores the interrelations between political participation and digital media, especially social movements and social media. Julie's work has been published in peer-reviewed journals, including *New Media & Society*, *International Journal of Electronic Governance* and *International Journal of Communication*. Her book *Civic Engagement & Social Media* was published in 2015. Julie is chair of ECREA's Communication & Democracy section and chair of the network on Social Innovation and Civic Engagement.

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183-2439)
2016, Volume 4, Issue 4, Pages 8-12
doi: 10.17645/mac.v4i4.691

Commentary

Social Movements and Political Agency in the Digital Age: A Communication Approach

Anastasia Kavada

Westminster School of Media, Arts and Design, University of Westminster, Middlesex, HA1 3TP, UK;
E-Mail: A.Kavada@westminster.ac.uk

Submitted: 21 March 2016 | Accepted: 25 March 2016 | Published: 11 August 2016

Abstract

Digital media pose a dual challenge to conventional understandings of political agency. First, digital media destabilize long-held assumptions about the nature of collective action, about social movements and their capacity to effect change. This is because digital media are thought to facilitate more decentralized, dispersed, temporary and individualized forms of political action that subvert the notion of the collective as singular, unified, homogeneous, coherent, and mass. One way of resolving this challenge is to view the collective in looser terms, as a process rather than as a finished product, a conceptualization that can be influence our understanding not only of social movements, but also of other political actors and of society as a whole. Second, digital media highlight the need to take communication seriously in how we conceptualize both collective action and political agency. Placing communication at the centre allows us to develop this looser and more processual understanding of the collective by studying it as a process that is constituted in and through communication. Inspired by organizational communication and particularly the work of Taylor and van Every (2000), this essay proposes a conception of collective action as emerging in conversations and solidified in texts. This conceptualization allows for a more multiplex and variegated view of political agency that takes into account the specific context where agency is exercised and the power that different actors can exert in a communicative process of negotiation, persuasion and claim-making.

Keywords

collective action; communication; digital media; political agency; social media; social movement

Issue

This commentary is part of the issue “Political Agency in the Digital Age: Media, Participation and Democracy”, edited by Anne Kaun (Södertörn University, Sweden), Maria Kyriakidou (University of East Anglia, UK) and Julie Uldam (Roskilde University, Denmark).

© 2016 by the author; licensee Cogitatio (Lisbon, Portugal). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

The digital age challenges conventional understandings of political agency. Within social movement research this challenge is, I would like to argue, two-fold. First, digital media destabilize long-held assumptions about the nature of collective action, about social movements and their capacity to effect change. Second, digital media highlight the need to take communication seriously in how we conceptualize both collective action and political agency. In what follows, I outline these two interrelated challenges and suggest how they can be addressed.

The emergence of digital media has led to an intense questioning of the meaning of collective action and of the collective in general. Digital media are thought to facilitate more decentralized, dispersed, temporary and individualized forms of political action that subvert the notion of the collective as singular, unified, homogeneous, coherent, and mass. This is evident, for instance, in the declining use of the collective identity concept in recent studies of social media and activism (Treré, 2015). Instead, scholars like Bennett and Segerberg (2013) are exploring how the coordination mechanisms of digital media platforms bring disparate individuals together without the need for a coherent collective identity or formal organization. Bennett and Segerberg consider such action to be

'connective' rather than collective and explicitly position their influential framework against 'earlier models that insisted on stable identities, ideologies and organizations as a prerequisite for civil society mobilization and action' (Bakardjieva, 2015, p. 986).

One way to address the debates around the nature of the collective and to navigate around controversies over categorisation (is it connective or collective action?) is to think of the collective in looser terms, as a process rather than as a finished product. This is a conceptual move that requires us to delve into theoretical work that has attempted to transcend the 'static and often structuralist or psychologically reductionist' (Bakardjieva, 2015, p. 986) models of collective action against which scholars like Bennett and Segerberg are reacting. The work of Alberto Melucci (1996) is very useful in this respect as it is based on a definition of the collective as an open-ended process that is always in a state of becoming. Melucci (1996) thus invites us to study the interactive processes through which an aggregation of individuals becomes a collective with its own distinct identity, a question that, as he notes, 'is apparently raised by no one' (p. 84). 'The theoretical problem for us today', he suggests, 'is this unity, the creation of a collective subject of action as process which needs to be subjected to explanation' (p. 84).

But once we embrace such a conceptualization of the collective, why stop at social movements? Why not consider the various institutions and organizations that social movements engage with, from the police to the state to the media, also as open-ended processes and not as finished products? Movements are by definition less formalized actors, their structures more uneven, their seams and stitches showing. By contrast, institutionalized actors have sophisticated procedures that render them seamless, smooth and opaque to the outside, their backstage operations and internal divisions safely tucked away from public view. Yet this does not mean that they aren't also actors in the making.

The same can be said for the social system itself. Macro-structures, and particularly the structures of domination that social movements attempt to challenge, are often perceived as rigid, monolithic, and all-encompassing and thus changed only through wholesale revolution. This does not leave enough space for considering the more gradual and partial kinds of social change, those that erode rather than smash the system and which unfold on multiple levels and at different times. Furthermore, and as Sewell (2005) puts it, 'many structural accounts of social transformation tend to introduce change from outside the system and then trace out the ensuing structurally shaped changes, rather than showing how change is generated by the operation of structures internal to a society' (p. 139). To address this issue, Sewell argues that 'a theory of change cannot be built into a theory of structure unless we adopt a far more multiple, contingent, and fractured conception of society—and of structure' (p. 140).

A focus on communication helps us to develop exactly this conception of society and structure since it allows us to study the collective as a process that is constituted in and through communication. In other words, resolving the second challenge that digital media pose—the need to take communication seriously in our understanding of social movements and political agency—can go some way towards addressing the first.

Communication is a spectre that haunts collective action theory: it is always lurking in the background but rarely placed at the centre of enquiry (Flanagin, Stohl, & Bimber, 2006). It can be found in the looming presence of Goffman and symbolic interactionism that has influenced work on framing (Benford & Snow, 2000). It underlies Melucci's (1996) conception of collective identity as a process of interaction. It is most evident in the work of Tilly (2005) who studies contentious politics as a conversation between claim-makers and their targets. Yet the emergence of digital media has brought communication into sharper relief within social movement studies, leading to a shift in how we view the role of communication in collective action: from focusing on how already existing collectives communicate with other actors to also considering how communication is involved in the construction itself of the collective.

Such a change in perspective amounts to a paradigm shift in recent studies of digital media and collective action. For instance, scholars like Gerbaudo (2012, p. 138) and Bennett and Segerberg (2013, p. 8) view *communication as organization*, while Flanagin, Stohl and Bimber (2006) assert that collective action is a communicative phenomenon, 'involving the crossing of boundaries between private and public life' (p. 32). The field is marked by conceptual creativity as evidenced by the introduction of new frameworks like connective action or by the increasing cross-fertilization between social movement theory and media studies, with concepts such as mediatization (Mattoni & Treré, 2014) and media ecologies (Treré & Mattoni, 2015) crossing into social movement theory, while collective action concepts like political opportunity structures travel in the opposite direction as in Cammaerts' (2012) analysis of the 'mediation opportunity structure' (see also Uldam, 2013).

The approach outlined in this essay belongs in this new wave of theorising. Based on organizational communication, and particularly the work of Taylor and van Every (2000), I propose a conception of collective action as emerging in conversations and solidified in texts. For Taylor and van Every, conversation involves the ordinary interactions in which people enact their world. In the case of social movements, this would involve conversations over objectives and the mission of the movement, its boundaries, resources and processes, as well as its targets and adversaries. These conversations are then recorded and codified in texts—from the minutes of meetings, to common statements, to

videos and photographs, to shared scripts of behaviour in meetings—that then affect the conversations of the movement in other times and spaces. 'Text' can be thought in broader terms here and it can encompass any stable patterning and materialization of conversation, including for instance software code and architectural design. Texts and conversations mutually constitute each other in a dynamic process that shapes and reshapes the organization.

Within this framework, the media can be thought as sites of conversation that have different affordances for interaction and 'textualization', for recording and codifying the conversations that take place in and through them. The media also have different spatialities and temporalities in terms of how they arrange interaction in time and space. Conversation sites—which can also include the spaces of face-to-face communication—are overlapping and interconnected through flows of people and information. Their articulation, boundaries, norms and regulations affect the collectives created through them (for a more detailed analysis, see Kavada, 2015a).

This conceptualization provides a more grounded perspective of the processes through which social movements come to constitute themselves as collective actors. It allows us to trace the sites, conversations and texts that play a crucial role in the creation of the collective and to study social movements as a dynamic process. This framework can also be applied to our understanding of the institutions and organizations that social movements engage with, and of social structures in general, allowing us to think of the social system in terms of 'flexibility, adaptability, and evolutionary change emerging from the sum of social interactions' (Chadwick, 2013, p. 16), rather than as a monolithic structure.

Placing communication at the centre also has significant implications for how we understand political agency. A prevailing tendency within social movement research is to assess a movement's political agency based on the effectiveness of its contentious performance and claim-making in the public arena. Tilly's (2005) concept of WUNC—an acronym for Worthiness, Unity, Numbers and Commitment, the four characteristics that collective actions should exhibit in order to be effective—is exemplary in this regard. In this approach, '[c]ollective actors are mainly studied as "entities" appearing on a public stage and addressing themselves to other actors' while their internal processes 'remain essentially a black box' (van de Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht, 2004, p. 10).

Embracing a processual view of the collective and of society in general provides a more multiplex and variegated view of political agency. First of all, it points to the fact that the constitution of the movement as a political actor can, in itself, be a political outcome. In fact, a movement's public performance may consist exactly of the process through which it creates unity. A central component of the Occupy movement, for instance, was the public assemblies where participants were taking decisions following the rules of participatory democracy. What was essentially an internal process was rendered into a kind of public claim-making that functioned both as an implicit critique of the representative system of democracy and an example of what democracy could look like (Kavada, 2015b). In other words, rather than projecting unity in the sense of uniformity, such performances make the backstage public by shedding light on the processes through which the collective becomes a collective.

Furthermore, analysing the changes that social movements can effect on other institutions, and on society in general, needs to take stock of the specific communication episodes and sites of conversation where these actors interact. This entails a fine-grained analysis of the participants in each communication episode, of which parts of the movement are engaging with which part of society. It also requires a better understanding of where these communication episodes fit in the institutional processes that social movements aim to influence. What is more, paying attention only to public performances means that we lose sight of how political agency also hinges on secrecy, on access to elite spaces of power and on the preservation of closed internal spaces. Instead of training our vision only on a central public stage, our understanding of political agency needs to take into account the multiple sites of variable publicness where movements effect change. Dispersion might be as important as unity in this respect as it allows the movement to access and engage with institutions in different sites and communication episodes.

Within such episodes of engagement and interaction, the political agency of social movements can be thought in relation to their communication capacities. These are not limited to the effective public performance of claims, as the WUNC model suggests, but include the control, creation and manipulation of the rules of communication themselves and of the sites where episodes of interaction take place. In this respect, we can consider the following capacities: the capacity to *access* and participate in the sites of targets, adversaries, and the mainstream media; the capacity to *manage* and regulate the conversations with targets and adversaries; the capacity to *persuade,* to make compelling arguments, texts, visuals that sway public opinion, targets and adversaries; the capacity to *articulate*, to link different sites, actors, conversations and create alliances and coalitions; and the capacity to *represent*—to speak on behalf of (at least a part of) society, to assume and define its collective voice. Most importantly, communication power encompasses the capacity to *create* new codes that shape how society interacts, new sites of conversation that operate differently, to provide models of living and being that change the world in a way that conforms to the movement's ideals and values.

The short length of this piece does not allow for an in-depth analysis of these forms of communication power. But what this essay points to is the need to understand how power and agency play out in specific communication sites and episodes where movements attempt to bring change. It thus allows us to 'focus on the diversity of mechanisms and behaviors that enable power to be exercised in discrete contexts' (Chadwick, 2013, p. 16). Yet, through the notion of 'text', we can also study how these communication episodes are shaped by macro-structures of domination that constrain the capacities of movements in different contexts. We can further develop a more grounded view of how movements influence and generate more enduring codes or texts that can be transferred to other contexts and thus lead to a more wide-ranging transformation of social structure.

New media have a disruptive effect on both social practice and the theoretical frameworks we use to study it. Resolving the dual conceptual challenge posed by digital media—the need to think of the collective as an open-ended process and the need to take communication seriously in how collectives constitute themselves—can advance our understanding of social movements and political agency. Placing communication at the centre can be a catalyst for much-needed conceptual innovation in an effort to not only understand the world but also to change it.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the editors for giving me the opportunity to publish in this thematic issue. The research referred to in this article has been supported by a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship for the project 'Digital Communications Technologies and Protest Movements: The Case of Occupy' (Ref: MD130045).

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

Bakardjieva, M. (2015). Do clouds have politics? Collective actors in social media land. *Information, Communication & Society*, *18*(8), 983-990.

Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *26*, 611-639.

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2013). *The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of collective action*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Cammaerts, B. (2012). Protest logics and the mediation opportunity structure. *European Journal of Communication, 27*(2), 117-134.

Chadwick, A. (2013). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Flanagin, A. J., Stohl, C., & Bimber, B. (2006). Modeling the structure of collective action. *Communication Monographs*, *73*(1), 29-54.

Gerbaudo, P. (2012). *Tweets and the streets: Social media and contemporary activism*. London: Pluto Press.

Kavada, A. (2015a). *The communicative constitution of collective action*. Paper presented at the 65th Annual Conference of the International Communication Association, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 21–29 May 2015.

Kavada, A. (2015b). Creating the collective: Social media, the Occupy Movement and its constitution as a collective actor. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(8), 872-886.

Mattoni, A., & Treré, E. (2014). Media practices, mediation processes, and mediatization in the study of social movements. *Communication Theory*, *24*(3), 252-271.

Melucci, A. (1996). *Challenging codes: Collective action in the information age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sewell, W. H. Jr (2005). *Logics of history: Social theory and social transformation*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Taylor, J. R., & van Every, E. J. (2000). *The emergent organisation: Communication as its site and surface*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Elbaum Associates.

Tilly, C. (2005). *Identities, boundaries and social ties*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Treré, E. (2015). Reclaiming, proclaiming, and maintaining collective identity in the #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico: An examination of digital frontstage and backstage activism through social media and instant messaging platforms. *Information, Communication & Society*, *18*(8), 901-915.

Treré, E., & Mattoni, A. (2015). Media ecologies and protest movements: Main perspectives and key lessons. *Information, Communication & Society*, Online First, doi:10.1080/1369118X.2015.1109699

Uldam, J. (2013). Activism and the online mediation opportunity structure: Attempts to impact global climate change policies? *Policy & Internet*, *5*(1), 56-71.

Van de Donk, W., Loader, B. D., Nixon, P.G., & Rucht, D. (2004). Introduction: Social movements and ICTs. In W. van de Donk, B. D. Loader, P. G. Nixon, & D. Rucht (Eds), *Cyberprotest: New media, citizens and social movements* (pp. 1-25). London and New York: Routledge.

About the Author

Anastasia Kavada is Senior Lecturer in the Westminster School of Media, Arts and Design at the University of Westminster. Her research focuses on the links between online tools and decentralized organizing practices, democratic decision-making, and the development of solidarity among participants in collective action. Anastasia's case studies include, among others, the Global Justice Movement, Avaaz, and the Occupy movement.

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183-2439)
2016, Volume 4, Issue 4, Pages 13-17
doi: 10.17645/mac.v4i4.692

Commentary

Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism: The Case of #BlackLivesMatter

Guobin Yang [1,2]

[1] Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA;
E-Mail: guobin.yang@asc.upenn.edu
[2] Department of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA

Submitted: 27 February 2106 | Accepted: 25 March 2016 | Published: 11 August 2016

Abstract
Hashtag activism happens when large numbers of postings appear on social media under a common hashtagged word, phrase or sentence with a social or political claim. The temporal unfolding of these mutually connected postings in networked spaces gives them a narrative form and agency. Applying Karlyn Campbell's propositions about rhetorical agency to the case of #BlackLivesMatter, this essay shows that narrative agency in hashtag activism derives from its narrative form as well as from its contents and social context. Narrative agency is communal, invented, skillful, and protean.

Keywords
#BlackLivesMatter; agency; hashtag activism; narrative

Issue
This commentary is part of the issue "Political Agency in the Digital Age: Media, Participation and Democracy", edited by Anne Kaun (Södertörn University, Sweden), Maria Kyriakidou (University of East Anglia, UK) and Julie Uldam (Roskilde University, Denmark).

© 2016 by the author; licensee Cogitatio (Lisbon, Portugal). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

One of the most interesting developments in digital activism in recent years is the rise of hashtag activism, meaning discursive protest on social media united through a hashtagged word, phrase or sentence. #BlackLivesMatter, for example, was a protest movement that happened both in the streets and on social media in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in July 2013 in the shooting death of African-American teen Trayvon Martin. Another example is #Ferguson, which happened in response to the shooting to death of Michael Brown on August 9, 2014 by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Within the first week of Brown's death, millions of posts with the hashtagged #Ferguson appeared on Twitter alone (Bonila & Rosa, 2015).

These important cases of online protest brought renewed attention to the power of digital activism in shaping public discourse. Research on digital activism has focused on its networked and connective character (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013) and debated about the question of organization and leadership (Gerbaudo, 2012). This essay argues that a neglected form of agency in the study of digital activism is its narrative form.

2. The Narrative Analysis of Social Movements

Narrative forms are an essential element of human existence (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1). Scholars have argued that "the nature of daily action and self-construction lends an essentially narrative character to life" (Steinmetz, 1992, p.496). Carr, for example, claims that "Narrative is not merely a possibly successful way of describing events; its structure inheres in the events themselves" (1986, p. 117). Bruner (2004, p. 708) similarly states that "a life as led is inseparable from a life as told."

The most distinct feature of the narrative form is its temporal sequence. In literary representations, narrative form accounts for the progression from beginning through middle to an end. Thus Kenneth Burke states that a literary work has form "in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence" (1968, p. 124). The form of de-

tective fiction, for example, often centers on a quest, adventure, or mystery. As the protagonist (the detective) goes in search of solutions, the plot generates curiosity, surprise, and suspense (Sternberg, 2003).

Like works of literature, social movements have narrative forms. In his study of working-class formation, sociologist Steinmetz notes that "Narrative thus has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and the movement toward the end is accounted for by conflicts, causal explanations, and the sequence of events" (Steinmetz, 1992, p. 497). Focusing on the rhetorical form of social movements, Griffin (1952, 1969, 2003) and Cathcart (1978) underscore the processual nature of social movements. Cathcart (1978, p. 234) argues that movements are "a kind of ritual conflict whose most distinguishing form is confrontation." Griffin (1969, p. 461) maintains that all social movements have forms: "Every movement…has form….It is a progression…from suffering, misfortune, passive condition, state of mind."

Social movement scholars have long recognized the power of narratives (Polletta, 2006; Selbin, 2010), but the question of narrative agency has received relatively little attention in studies of digital activism (but see Clark, 2016; Kaun, 2015). In contrast to "traditional" forms of digital activism such as distributed denial-of-service actions (DDoS) or signing online petitions, hashtag activism has a distinctly narrative character. An incidence of hashtag activism takes place when large numbers of comments and retweets appear on social media in response to a hashtagged word, phrase, or sentence. Because these comments and retweets consist of numerous personal stories and appear in temporal order, they assume a narrative form. Narrative agency is thus central to hashtag activism.

Rhetorical theorist Karlyn Campbell defines rhetorical agency as "the capacity to act, that is, to have the competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one's community" (Campbell, 2005, p. 3). Adapting this definition, I consider narrative agency in hashtag activism as the capacity to create stories on social media by using hashtags in a way that is collective and recognized by the public. Illustrated with an analysis of a historical text (a speech allegedly delivered by Sojourner Truth at the 1851 woman's rights convention in Akron, Ohio), Campbell's five propositions about rhetorical agency are useful for analyzing narrative agency in hashtag activism.

First, she argues that "agency is communal, social, cooperative, and participatory and, simultaneously, constituted and constrained by the material and symbolic elements of context and culture" (p. 3). Second, agency is both "invented" and invention. Because authors and rhetors "are materially limited, linguistically constrained, historically situated subjects" (p. 5), they have to find and invent ways of expression. Agency is thus invention. Third, agency emerges in artistry or craft. It is a set of heuristic skills and includes "stratagem, flair, subtlety, and the like as well as the habits of mind learned through practice" (p. 7)

Fourth, agency is achieved through form. The agency of form is realized through generic conventions and textual and rhetorical devices. Narrative forms have agency because they "invite" audiences, readers or listeners to participate in the co-production of stories (also see Polletta, 2006). As Campbell puts it, "Textual agency is linked to audiences and begins with the signals that guide the process of "uptake" for readers or listeners enabling them to categorize, to understand how a symbolic act is to be framed" (Campbell, 2005, p. 7).

Fifth, Campbell warns that "agency can be malign, divisive, and destructive" (2005, p. 7). It is "protean, ambiguous, open to reversal" (p. 1). The openness of the narrative form makes it susceptible to perversion.

Below, I will discuss each of these five propositions as they are applied to the analysis of #BlackLivesMatter. One modification I will make to Campbell's framework is that I consider form as the most fundamental feature of the narrative agency of digital activism and will discuss it first.

3. The Power of Narrative Form

Digital activism on social media has different narrative forms because narrative conventions may differ from platform to platform. Earlier digital protests, for example, took place in electronic bulletin boards or newsgroups (Gurak, 1999), which allowed the posting and cross-positing of longer narratives. The wide circulation of several such narratives could create an online protest event, but the number of participating voices may be significantly more limited than on Twitter. A unique feature of hashtag activism on Twitter is that it starts, well, with a hashtag. Adding the hashtag sign # to a word, such as #change or #climate, makes it easier for other users on Twitter to search, link, and interact with one another via the hashtagged word and to share stories related to it. Indeed, such hashtags are a common practice on Twitter. They are routine hashtags.

These everyday hashtags, however, do not usually evolve into contentious collective events online. The most influential cases of hashtag activism, as opposed to routine hashtags, have a recognizable narrative form with a beginning, a crisis/conflict, and an end (Clark, 2016). Within this temporal framework, individuals contribute to the co-production of narratives by hashtagging their personal thoughts, emotions, and stories.

The hashtags in many influential cases of hashtag activism have complete sentence structures rather than single words like #change. The following is a random list of examples: #BlackLivesMatter, #BringBackOurGirls, #StopGamerGate, #WhyIStayed, #JeNeSuisPasCharlie, #OccupyEverywhere, #CancelColbert, #ThisIsACoup, #IcantBreathe, #MuslimsAreNotTerrorist.

As the above examples show, these hashtags con-

tain verbs expressing a strong sense of action and force. The actions are petitioning, demanding, appealing, and protesting. They express refusals, objections, and imperatives to take immediate action. They often challenge narratives in mainstream media. In all these ways, activist hashtags embody what Cathcart (1978, p. 234), in his rhetorical study of social movement forms, refers to as "a kind of ritual conflict whose most distinguishing form is confrontation."

The narrative forms of hashtag activism are not limited to the syntactical structures of the hashtags. They also consist of the generic conventions and rhetorical devices used in the hashtagged postings. An incidence of hashtag activism typically spans days, weeks, and even months. During this period, textual signals and rhetorical devices "guide the process of 'uptake' for readers or listeners enabling them to categorize, to understand how a symbolic act is to be framed." (Campbell, 2005, p.7) They encourage audience participation. People participate by reading, retweeting, commenting on others' tweets or posting their own with the same hashtag. The temporal unfolding of such an incident is a process of people interacting with one another and collectively creating a larger narrative. To understand the narrative agency in this process, I will now turn to the other four dimensions of narrative agency as outlined by Karlyn Campbell and use the example of #BlackLivesMatter as an illustration.

4. Communal, Invented, Skillful, and Protean

According to a *USA Today* story (Guynn, 2015), the statement "Black lives matter" initially appeared in a Facebook post by Alicia Garza in July 2013 after Garza saw from television news the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of African-American teen Trayvon Martin. Garza's friend Patrisse Cullors added the hashtag sign to the statement after she read it. The rest is history. #BlackLivesMatter quickly spread on social media and spawned not only an online protest event, but also a social movement organization headed by none other than Garza and Cullors.

At 8:45am Eastern Time on February 25, 2016, I searched the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag using my personal Twitter account. As I scrolled down the screen, the results expanded. I saved a 74-page pdf document of the search results. These 74 pages are only a small slice of the much longer temporality of the #BlackLivesMatter, but still show clearly #BlackLivesMatter as a case of narrative agency.

My Twitter's search results are shown in reverse chronological order, with the most recent postings at the top. The 74-page document is thus a narrative in reverse chronological order. My experience of reading it was like reading a live narrative about an unfolding event, one that is at the same time created by the narrative form.

At the top of the search results was a HuffPost Politics story showing a photograph of Hillary Clinton making a speech. The title of the story is "Black Lives Matter Activists Interrupt Hillary Clinton At Private Event In South Carolina: They wanted her to account for some of her past statements on racial justice." As I scroll down the results, I begin to see the key aspects of narrative agency at work.

First, the communal and participatory feature of agency is evident from the many likes and retweets of individual postings. Some postings have hundreds of "favorites" and "retweets." Individuals in these communal spaces may or may not know one another. They are like dramatic personae in what Campbell refers to, citing Sartre, as "a serial relationship": "Individuals in a serial relationship have no set of attributes in common except their shared relationship to an external object, event, or, in other cases, to a law, an institution, a norm, a stereotype and so on." (Campbell, 2005, p. 4) In this case, since they all tweeted with the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, their relationship is primarily to the hashtag with all its moral, political, and social implications.

As I read on, the story grows, expands, and becomes richer and more complex. Texts are mixed with photos. One hashtag is used in combination with another, such that #BlackLivesMatter becomes intertwined with multiple other hashtags. Again, in reverse chronological order, I saw the following hashtags used together with #BlackLivesMatter: #blackish, #WhichHillary, #notasuperpredator, #ChicagoPD, #alwaysshavealwayswill, #Apple, #FeeltheBern, #Trump, #abff, #blacktwitter, #OscaSoWhite, and so on and so forth. Each of these hashtags tells a new story, but all are linked to #BlackLivesMatter. #BlackLivesMatter becomes a unifying theme of multiple stories about racial justice.

Second, Campbell writes that agency is invention and authors and rhetors are "inventors" in the rhetorical sense. They "link past and present, and find means to express those strata that connect the psyche, society, and world, the forms of feeling that encapsulate moments in time" (p. 5). This process of invention depends on artistry, craft, stratagem, flair, subtlety, and skill.

#BlackLivesMatter is the result of such a process of skillful invention. In a simple sense, all Twitter postings have to have some degree of artistry in order to meet the 140-character exigency of the Twitter platform. To create a collective story of struggles for racial justice, such as through #BlackLivesMatter, requires individual users to mobilize additional artistry and flair. One particularly powerful method is the sharing of personal stories. For example, one posting on February 22 goes: "In 2015, dozens of African American's [sic] were killed by police. I put 84 of their names on my shirt. #BlackLivesMatter pic.twitter.com/c0H0ltrgE0." Such personal stories are linked to broader social issues and shared with the public through the use of the hashtag, thus

giving hashtag activism a communal and collective character.

Part of the artistry of a collective hashtag narrative derives from its versatility of expressive forms. Besides the common practices of tweeting and retweeting, the posting itself takes different forms. There are photographs, jokes, slogans, curses, and cartoons. There are links to news, videos, music and songs. In the middle of these personalized but artful story-telling, a protest narrative is created and carried forward.

Finally, as Campbell notes, rhetorical agency is protean and promiscuous with a "malign, divisive, and destructive" side. In the case of #BlackLivesMatter, this malign side is seen in the racist language and remarks that appear in my search results. Considering the open nature of the Twitter platform, this is not surprising. The presence of such racist remarks vindicates the urgency of struggles for racial justice and the challenges facing activists and citizens. To those involved in the online narrating of #BlackLivesMatter, they are concrete evidence of the necessity of taking personal action. Thus, in response to a racist posting, one person tweeted on February 16: "I support #BlackLivesMatter because there's people like this."

5. The Social Context of Narrative Form

In Campbell's study of rhetorical agency, the capacity to act is "constituted and constrained by the material and symbolic elements of context and culture" (p. 3). In other words, agency responds to social conditions and articulates social issues. In the same way, the narrative forms of hashtag activism are not independent of culture and society. It is not a coincidence that hashtag activism has been especially notable in recent struggles for racial justice and gender equality (Berridge & Portwood-Stacer, 2015; Clark, 2016). As Bonnia and Rosa (2015, p. 8) write in their study of #Ferguson, "it is important to examine how and why digital activism has become salient to particular populations. It is surely not coincidental that the groups most likely to experience police brutality, to have their protests disparaged as acts of 'rioting' or 'looting,' and to be misrepresented in the media are precisely those turning to digital activism at the highest rates."

Because hashtag activism happens in social and political context, its forms may vary when contexts change. For example, does it take different narrative forms in a different language, say #JeNeSuisPasCharlie in French? Are confrontational forms more prevalent in the U.S than in China? Are some forms more effective than others? These are some of the questions for future research.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Anne Kaun, Maria Kyriakidou, and Julie Uldam for inviting me to give a keynote speech at the conference on "Political Agency in the Digital Age: Media, Participation and Democracy" in October 2015, which inspired this essay.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

Bennett, P. W. L., & Segerberg, D. A. (2013). *The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berridge, S., & Portwood-Stacer, L. (2015). Introduction: Feminism, hashtags and violence against women and girls. *Feminist Media Studies*, *15*(2), 341-341. doi:10.1080/14680777.2015.1008743

Bonilla, Y., & Rosa, J. (2015). #Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States. *American Ethnologist*, *42*(1), 4-17. doi:10.1111/amet.12112

Bruner, J. (2004). Life as narrative. *Social Research*, *71*(3), 691-710.

Burke, K. (1968). *Counter-statement.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Campbell, K. K. (2005). Agency: Promiscuous and protean. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, *2*(1), 1-19. doi:10.1080/1479142042000332134

Carr, D. (1986). Narratives and the real world. *History and Theory*, *25*, 117-131.

Cathcart, R. (1978). Movements: Confrontation as rhetorical form. *Southern Speech Journal, 43,* 233-247.

Clark, R. (2016). "Hope in a hashtag": The discursive activism of #WhyIStayed. *Feminist Media Studies.* doi:10.1080/14680777.2016.1138235

Gerbaudo, P. (2012). *Tweets and the streets: Social media and contemporary activism*. London: Pluto Press.

Griffin, L. M. (1952). The rhetoric of historical movements. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 38*, 184-188.

Griffin, L. M. (1969). A dramatistic theory of the rhetoric of movements. In W. H. Rueckert (Ed.), *Critical responses to Kenneth Burke* (pp. 456-477). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Griffin, C. J. G. (2003). Movement as memory: Significant form in eyes on the prize. *Communication Studies*, *54*(2), 196-210.

Gurak, L. J. (1999). *Persuasion and privacy in cyberspace: The online protests over lotus marketplace and the clipper chip* (Revised edition). New Haven: Yale University Press.

Guynn, J. (2015, March 4). Meet the woman who coined #BlackLivesMatter. Retrieved from http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2015/03/04/alicia-garza-black-lives-matter/24341593

Kaun, A. (2015). When narratives travel: The Occupy

Movement in Latvia and Sweden. In J. Uldam & A. Vestergaard (Eds.), *Civic engagement and social media* (pp. 111-130). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. Retrieved from http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137434166_6

Polkinghorne, D. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Polletta, F. (2006). *It was like a fever: Storytelling in protest and politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Selbin, E. (2010). *Revolution, rebellion, resistance: The power of story*. London and New York: Zed Books.

Steinmetz, G. (1992). Reflections on the role of social narratives in working-class formation: Narrative theory in the social sciences. *Social Science History*, *16*(3), 489-516.

Sternberg, M. (2003). Universals of narrative and their cognitivist fortunes. *Poetics Today*, *24*(2), 297-395.

About the Author

Guobin Yang is an Associate Professor of Communication and Sociology at the Annenberg School for Communication and Department of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania. For more information, please see https://www.asc.upenn.edu/people/faculty/guobin-yang-phd

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183-2439)
2016, Volume 4, Issue 4, Pages 18-29
doi: 10.17645/mac.v4i4.554

Article

Energiewende's Lone Warriors: A Hyperlink Network Analysis of the German Energy Transition Discourse

Jonas Kaiser [1,*], Markus Rhomberg [1], Axel Maireder [2], Stephan Schlögl [3]

[1] Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Zeppelin University Friedrichshafen, 88045 Friedrichshafen, Germany;
E-Mails: j.kaiser@zeppelin-university.net (J.K.), markus.rhomberg@zu.de (M.R.)
[2] GfK Austria, 1030 Vienna, Austria; E-Mail: axel.maireder@gfk.com
[3] Institute of International Development, University of Vienna, 1010 Vienna, Austria;
E-Mail: stephan.schloegl@univie.ac.at

* Corresponding author

Submitted: 11 January 2016 | Accepted: 25 March 2016 | Published: 11 August 2016

Abstract
This paper explores the integration of different social fields within the German Energy Transition (Energiewende) discourse in the election year 2013 by analysing the hyperlink structures online. Energiewende describes the fundamental transition from non-renewable energy to sustainable sources. This goal is both ambitious and controversial. Numerous stakeholders try to make their voices and interests heard and as such politics has to both disseminate and collect information in order to include all relevant groups from different social fields in the political process. This discourse is also visible online. By analysing the hyperlink structures we are able to see the attention distribution of different actor groups in the network. This study shows that most actors tend to link within their own social field and do not aim for a more integrated public sphere. Especially political actors appear to be lone warriors who neither look left or right and mostly link within their own party and ignore other actors. Whereas social field as the media or public administration are relevant within the network we find that scientific actors are ignored by all fields, except for their own.

Keywords
energy transition; Energiewende; environment; hyperlink publics; network analysis; online communication

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Political Agency in the Digital Age: Media, Participation and Democracy", edited by Anne Kaun (Södertörn University, Sweden), Maria Kyriakidou (University of East Anglia, UK) and Julie Uldam (Roskilde University, Denmark).

© 2016 by the authors; licensee Cogitatio (Lisbon, Portugal). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

On March 11, 2011 a tsunami led to a meltdown at the nuclear power plant in Fukushima with disastrous consequences for the Japanese population. Besides the sympathies for the direct victims of this catastrophe, Fukushima evoked a new discussion on energy policy in Germany. As a reaction the Federal Government enacted a so-called "Atom-Moratorium"—a pause that soon led to a withdrawal from the previously decided lifetime extension of nuclear reactors. Likewise, Chancellor Merkel appointed an ethics committee to find a social consensus regarding the nuclear phase-out and to compile proposals for the transition to renewable energies. Due to these events the German term "Energiewende" ("Energy Transition") became once again the heart of the public and political debate in Germany. The term describes the fundamental transition from non-sustainable energy sources like nuclear or coal to sustainable sources like solar power, biomass or wind—a transition that has wide-reaching consequences for every part of society. Not only has the Energiewende social consequences, its success is largely depending on the integration of

vital parts of the society in the adaptation process. As many other great transformation issues like climate change, sustainable living or social policies, the implementation of the Energiewende is very complex and "wicked" (Rittel & Webber, 1973). By *wickedness* problems are described that are difficult to solve because of incomplete, contradictory and changing requirements and the need to integrate a large number of stakeholders in the process (Rhomberg & Stehr, 2012).

Public debates and the integration of different stakeholders and publics can be best understood through the lens of public sphere theory (e.g. Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2010). The integration of actors (especially from civil society) from different social fields within the public sphere—often times understood as the mass media–, however, was mostly poor (e.g. Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002). The Internet in this sense was supposed to foster the integration of different publics and create a better, i.e. more open and inclusive public sphere (e.g. Benkler, 2006). One concept that attempts to account for the changes the Internet had on public communication, participation and society in general is the concept of the *networked public sphere* (Benkler, 2006; Neuberger, 2009). Indeed, a growing body of research indicates that Internet communication has increased the interweaving of publics and intersections between the different spaces that make up the public sphere (Benkler, 2006; Nahon & Hemsley 2013; Neuberger, 2009). Kleinen-von Königslöw (2010) in this sense suggests that one main criterion for the integration of the public sphere is the degree of connection between the different publics. Integration is either achieved on a basal level through observation (i.e. all publics observe each other) or on a more advanced level through the integration of actors from other publics in one's own public (pp. 58-62). The integration of different social fields is especially important for a wicked issue like Energiewende, since stakeholders from different social fields need to be integrated to implement it. As actors from one social field tend to stay within their own field (Giddens, 1984), we extend Kleinen-von Königslöw's (2010) integration approach to social fields. Since the Internet offers actors from less influential fields to form alliances, reach other social fields and influence public opinion (Benkler, Roberts, Faris, Solow-Niederman, & Etling, 2015) we will focus in this paper on the question of how well the political field is able to integrate other social fields within the Energiewende discourse. Hyperlink analysis is a well-tested digital method, which allows us to analyse this question. This paper, then, adds to this special issue by critically assessing the potential of digital media for political agency in the case of the German Energiewende.

Therefore, our analysis focuses on the hyperlink structures between different actors and on the attention that these actors pay to each other. Usually these processes of attention attribution between actors are not visible to scholars but a growing body of literature has shown that it is to some extent visible online (e.g. Adamic & Glance, 2005; Benkler et al., 2015). We assume that public spheres are constituted by condensed networks of communication and understand the public and segmented publics respectively as forms of communicative aggregation (Habermas, 2006; Latzer & Saurwein, 2006). Such agglomerations evolve especially when social actors communicate about shared problems and interests, and thereby refer to each other. Referring to each other in our perspective indicates paying attention and thereby assigning relevance to certain social actors. In this paper, we measure the attribution of relevance on the base of Internet communication's hyperlink structures. Hyperlinks serve as indicators of relevance on the Web that construct structural vectors, which establish association between websites that allow users to navigate between them.

Since this article focuses on the integration of different social fields we first have to ask: how is the Energiewende hyperlink discourse structured with regard to actors and social fields? We will then take a closer look at the role of the political field and how well it is able to integrate different fields in the political communication processes of the policy field Energiewende, and whether the political actors are actively distributing and collecting information in order to include as many actors in the political process as possible.

Surprisingly, there are only a few studies on the field of the Energiewende (e.g. Kemfert & Horne, 2013; Sohre, 2012). Studies with a focus on political communication and the communicative interactions and the public debate between these fields are missing completely. We therefore aim to close this gap by examining the online public debate on the Energiewende in order to systematically identify the active stakeholders that deal with this problem and how they interact with each other. In this context it is both important to identify the specific involved actors but also, for a larger pattern, the social fields.

By empirically analysing the hyperlink-structures of the Energiewende debate, this paper also seeks to give insights on how far communication in the Internet can contribute to the integration of social segmented publics and therefore promote democracy. In order to answer our questions, we first explain the case of the Energiewende and highlight the most relevant actors (based on indegree, i.e. the amount of links one actor received from others). We then explain the significance of hyperlink publics within this context, then posit the research questions and clarify our methodology and finally describe our results and what these entails for this study as well as for future research.

2. Framework and Research Question

2.1. The German Energiewende

Energiewende is about to become an international synonym for a major energy system transformation. It was originally coined by the German Institute for Applied Ecology ("Öko-Institut Wuppertal") in 1980. It found its way into the political debate no later than in 2002, when the Social Democrats and the Greens formed a coalition government. The term lost its political grip in the following years, and required a window of opportunity in 2011 provided by the Fukushima disaster to bring the issue back on the top of the public and political agenda. The German government intends to change its overall energy system by shutting down all nuclear power plants by 2022 and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% by 2050 (BMWi & BMU, 2012)[1]. With the Energiewende Germany also aims to increase the share of renewable energy for electricity production to 80% by 2050 (cf. Kemfert & Horne, 2013, p. 1). This transition does not only concern the German energy sector, for which the Energiewende is a major economical challenge but also affects the German society as a whole, since the resulting issues touch upon political, economic, social, scientific, technological and ecological aspects. As *The Economist* (2012) puts it: "The *Energiewende* raises costs, unsettles supply and provokes resistance at grass-roots level." Hence it is not really astonishing that this complex issue affects many interests of companies, citizens, politicians as well as NGOs and that it became a major issue in election campaigns in Germany (Althaus, 2012). The first election after Fukushima, for example, resulted in the first coalition government with a Green majority in March 2011 in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg. The election of the German Bundestag on September 22, 2013 was the first nationwide vote after the introduction of the Energiewende.

The complexity of the issue, the need to integrate a broad range of stakeholders, the uncertainties concerning technological innovations, the relationship between renewable energies and fossil fuels, the debates on a Post-Kyoto climate regime and the interwovenness of the German energy sector in the European market lead to the assumption that the Energiewende is a good example for a "wicked" problem (Rittel & Webber, 1973). What makes a problem wicked is on the hand the impossibility of giving it a definitive formulation: the information needed to understand the problem depends upon one's idea for solving it. "In fact, it's the social complexity of wicked problems as much as their technical difficulties that make them tough to manage" (Camillus, 2008, p. 98). Because wicked problems are embedded in social contexts, embrace a broad range of stakeholders from different social fields with their specific and often contradicting interests, and solving wicked problems depends on integrating the needs and stakes of actors from different social fields, decision-making on these issues is especially challenged by a vital public debate and major efforts of these groups to strategically gain influence on decision-making with public pressure. The logic of the Internet as potentially non-hierarchical and non-linear communication infrastructure not only calls for new modes of political discourse, it potentially allows actors without formal access to decision-making processes and without high social and financial status to gain more influence in the debate.

For the framework of this paper it is important to highlight that the implementation of the Energiewende does not only depend on political actors on different spatial levels, but can also be influenced by different other interest groups from the economic sector, science, NGOs and civil society via strategic public pressure. Although there are various policy-analyses on interest and pressure groups in the policy-making process of the Energiewende, these analyses especially highlight already established and accredited actors. However, these studies serve as a starting point to gain insights in the field. They subsume actors into two different streams: the "conventional energy coalition", which aims to maintain the status quo of the energy system, and the "sustainable energy coalition", which "argues that the current costs of the Energiewende have to be seen as long-term investments that will pay off in the light of rising energy prices and decreasing costs for renewable energy equipment" (Kemfert & Horne, 2013, pp. 6. 7; see also Gawel, Strunz, & Lehmann, 2012; Kemfert, 2013; Sohre, 2012). The conventional energy coalition comprises political actors like the BMWi, the CDU/CSU, FDP, private companies, energy producers, the transmission system operators, the energy intensive industries as well as their interest groups. The sustainable energy coalition is supported by renewable energy companies and their associations, the renewable energy manufacturers, various environmental groups and NGOs as well as by the BMU, the Green party, large parts of the Social Democratic Party and research institutes in the fields of renewable energy, energy efficiency, storage and grid technology (cf. Deutsch, Krampe, Peter, & Rosser, 2014; Graichen, 2014; Graichen & Redl, 2014).

Although we conclude that the debate is shaped by a diversity of actors and interests, we nevertheless can systematize different groups: the political field (parties and executive branch), economic interests, scientific

[1] German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Technology (BMWi—Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Technologie) and German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMU—Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz und Reaktorsicherheit).

experts, NGOs and environmental groups as well as civil society actors. Due to its decision making-competence, the political field is located in the centre of the debate. The other groups of actors are trying to influence political actors by setting the agenda for energy policy with multiple strategies: These strategies can be operated in the public or non-public. Since public acts like direct communication or referring to each other on a website is one way to publically show allegiance or alliances (e.g. scientific networks) and be transparent and accountable to the public we are looking at the hyperlink connections between websites. These offer scholars new ways of analysis and interpretation and we will thus take a closer look at hyperlink publics.

2.2. Hyperlink-Publics

Our perspective on this debate is based on structural theories of the public sphere. We understand the public sphere as complex network of multifaceted spheres of communication. These spheres can be structured alongside thematic threads ("horizontal categorization", Wessler, 2002), common interests ("publics", Gruning & Hunt, 1984), shared forms and types of communication, different authorities of actors as well as groups of actors on different spatial levels. Actors communicate within and across these spheres on collective issues like Energiewende, connecting different publics and linking topics and opinions.

In contrast to a public sphere primarily structured by mass media, the Internet-based networked public sphere (Benkler, 2006) is characterized by an inclusion of a wide range of actors into the public discourse and manifold options for connection between different spaces and levels of the public sphere. This may lead to a more integrated public sphere. However, the Internet may also lead to a more fragmented public sphere which consists of several loosely connected publics that do not observe each other and thus can be considered a danger for democracy (Sunstein, 2001). The major form of connective structure online is the hyperlink, a vector that links documents, establishes association between digital objects, and allows users to navigate between sites and services. Despite the fact that hyperlinks may have different meanings (Harrison, 2002), all of them reallocate attention and transfer relevance across social contexts. Hyperlinks in this sense can be understood as a proxy for integration practices with regards to observation of other publics and/or integration of actors from other social fields within one's own field (Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2010).

Researchers have been studying the networks emerging from the interlinkage of websites for almost two decades, often regarding websites as actors and interpreting the hyperlink patterns between them as social association (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Park, 2003) or paths for the flow of information (Chang, Himelboim, & Dong, 2009). Hyperlinks between documents within a specific public discourse—defined as the set of information (fact, interpretation and opinion) pertaining to an identifiable theme—are indicating connections between different statements and thus different parts of the overall debate. They also suggest associations between the actors that published the respective documents. Furthermore, documents (and actors) linked to by large numbers of actors can be considered particularly important to the discourse as a whole, because they have been marked relevant by participants from different fields of society.

In the context of the Energiewende discourse, hyperlinks may show how different groups of actors—political parties, administrative institutions, for-profit companies, non-profit organizations or citizens' initiatives—assign relevance and express association to others within a specific topic. It is a particular form of expression, because it is publicly observable. Hence, hyperlinks are indicators of association that actors explicitly state and the hyperlink network on the Energiewende discourse is the aggregation of those explicit expressions. At the same time, the discourse hyperlink network is not only representing association, but it is the structure Internet users navigate in when they seek information on Energiewende. For those reasons, we regard the structural analyses of hyperlinked-based actor networks a potentially fruitful approach to the study of a complex discourse on a wicked and far-reaching topic like Energiewende.

2.3. Research Questions

This paper seeks to investigate the integration of different social fields in the Energiewende hyperlink discourse and especially if and how political actors contribute to said integration. Since we are mainly interested in understanding the network's structure and politics' role in it we opt for three explorative research questions. Taking the debate on the Energiewende on the one hand and our understanding of the public sphere on the other hand, our first question focuses on the social fields' productivity, in terms of published documents about the Energiewende:

> RQ1. Which social fields are the most "productive" ones?

Since the Energiewende discourse is closely connected and in the end being managed and decided by political actors, we are especially interested in the way political actors are linked to (RQ2) and link themselves (RQ3) since it can be assumed that political actors might want to build a broad coalition with different actors to tackle this wicked issue. We thus ask:

> RQ2. Which actors link to the political field? And

which political actors are the most prominent link targets?

RQ3. Which social fields and which specific actors are the most linked to by the political field?

With these questions we want to focus on political actors and address how they see themselves but also how they are seen by others in the Energiewende discourse.

3. Research Design

Most hyperlink network studies start with predefined lists of websites and then manually or (semi-)automatically retrieve links from those websites. Many studies retrieve all links from a certain website to other sites, while others include only a certain type of link—in the case of blogs, the 'blogroll' for example. Because many studies aim to objectify the network of a previously defined set of actors, hyperlinks to websites not included in the original selection are ignored (cf. Adamic & Glance, 2005; Chang et al., 2009; Hsu & Park, 2012; Schumate, 2012).

Our approach, however, is different: First, the focus on specific websites can be seen as a limit to a study's explanatory power since it restricts an otherwise fluid and emergent linked "discourse"; thus the actors that collectively create it cannot be identified beforehand and bundled into a fixed set. Second, reconstructing the interrelationships of these actors as a whole (like many traditional hyperlink network studies) would not necessarily reveal anything about a particular discourse, as actors tend to participate in multiple discourses simultaneously. Hence, we do not start with a fixed set of actors and grasp all hyperlinks on the sites, but use keyword-based web data retrieval and scraping techniques (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012) and combine those with hyperlink network analyses in an effort to determine the structure of the Energiewende discourse through the network of hyperlinks that connect messages containing these keywords.

The findings we present in this paper do not include content from social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter since these are often times not public, introduce new vectors like shares or retweets that cannot be equated with hyperlinks and would skew the network analysis as every profile page can be considered to be a unique actor. Against this background hyperlinks are a well-tested vector for the identification of key actors within a public and how these are connected with each other (see Section 2.2).

3.1. Data Retrieval & Scraping

We used Google's search engine to grasp documents that included the term 'Energiewende' within a period of 30 weeks, starting in March 2013 when the first party conventions were held, and ending in October 2013 one month after the election of the German Bundestag on September 22. We conducted automated search requests on a daily basis and saved all entries that had been published or at least updated within the last 24 hours using the 'time range' option. Next, we deleted all duplicates based on the documents' URL, resulting in a total of 70204 unique documents from 7911 unique domains. Document in this context refers to a unique webpage accessible via Unified Resource Locator (URL) on a website (e.g. a news article is the document whereas its parent site on which the article is hosted is the domain).

We then automatically accessed each of the collected URLs and retrieved all the hyperlinks they contained. We identified a total of more than 6 million hyperlinks of which the majority led to other documents on the same domain. In order to create a network of hyperlinks between documents addressing the issue of Energiewende, we just kept the references that pointed to URLs we had previously identified. We will furthermore refer to the resulting network as the 'document-network'. Next, we merged all documents by their respective domains (e.g. spd.de, spiegel.de), resulting in a 'domain-network' as a network of actors that individually or collectively took part in the discourse through a specific medium. In order to hold true for this assumption we counted subdomains of blogging platforms like 'michael.wordpress.org' or 'michael.blogger.com' as domains, although technically they are not. In order to being able to properly work with the network and code the domains we then reduced the network to the largest weakly connected component that contained 2086 nodes and 4803 edges. This 'domain network' was the main object of the further analyses.

3.2. Coding

Because we were interested in the patterns of association between different groups of actors, we manually assigned each domain to one of 8 categories representing social fields. Those fields are *Public Administration* (governmental and parastatal institutions), *Politics* (politicians, political parties), *Economy* (for-profit companies), *Special Interest Groups* (*SIG*; organizations with specific social aims), *Media* (both websites of traditional mass media and alternative media), *Science* (universities or private research institutes), *Civil Society* (non-affiliated individuals and citizens' groups) and others. Two graduate students coded all domains based on the appearance of the website and information of the website's imprint. The pre-coding intercoder reliability test showed a Krippendorff's alpha of 0.76.

Based on the coding, we grouped nodes and edges accordingly and calculated network metrics in an effort

to describe the interrelations between the fields and actors and thus answer our research questions properly.

4. Results

When looking at the Energiewende hyperlink network a few things are interesting to note (see Figure 1). We computed a community detection algorithm on the network (Blondel, Guillaume, Lambiotte, & Lefebvre, 2008), which identified several communities (54) and a rather high (0.6) modularity for the resulting partition. This indicates that the communities are only loosely connected to each other and that the Energiewende public is generally weakly integrated. We can also see the relevance of mass media actors for the Energiewende network. This importance is naturally closely connected to the topic's relevance for Germany, which forces the media to cover it in depth. In the next sections we will focus on our research questions in order to identify the most relevant fields and take a closer look at the relevance of political actors and their linking habits.

4.1. Productivity of Social Fields in the Energiewende Network

While comparing social groups and sub groups by productivity certainly has its purpose, it also neglects the question of relevance. Since the Internet enables anyone to potentially blog about Energiewende on a daily basis this, of course, does not make the blog inherently relevant for others. There are further factors like *status* (often times transferred from the "offline world"; cf. Gonzalez-Bailon, 2009) or expertise that may make an actor more important within a network even though the actor is not necessarily very productive. A person's weblog, which gets updated twice a day, will still, most likely, be less relevant to others than an article by an official government body. This assumption is reflected by our results: Whereas we understand productivity by documents published on Energiewende we assume one actor's relevance as the amount of times s/he was linked to by others (Indegree) since links are—as stated above—a way of attributing relevance.

As Table 1 shows *Media* is—not surprisingly—the most productive field within our network with over 36,618 documents regarding Energiewende and as such fulfilling its function of reporting about the process, its (dis)advantages and other relevant news. Interestingly, *Media* is also one of the most relevant social fields with an average indegree of 2.76. As can be seen in Table 2 a prime example would be the conservative quality newspaper *Die Welt*'s online outlet (welt.de; Mueller, Ligensa, & Gendolla, 2009) which has published over 859 documents and has also an indegree of 86, thus making it the most productive as well as relevant media outlet in the Energiewende network. It is also interesting to note that most of the country's quality newspapers (e.g., faz.net, spiegel.de, handelsblatt.de, heise.de, sueddeutsche.de; Mueller et al., 2009) are both productive and relevant within the network and thus demonstrating the media's importance and relevance in such a complex and abstract issue.

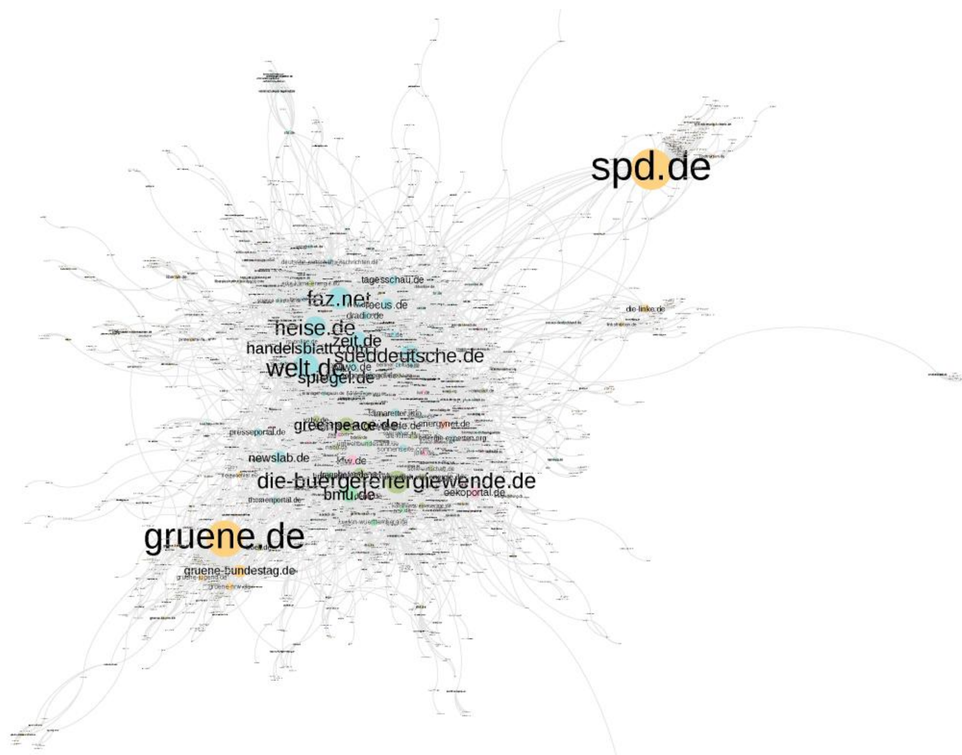

Figure 1. Hyperlink-Network of all domains (node size by indegree, node colour by coded societal field, layout algorithm: ForceAtlas2).

Table 1. Links from social field to social field.

	SIG	Media	Politics	Public Administration	Economy	Science	Civil Society	Other
SIG	181	149	11	32	39	12	24	3
Media	372	1098	96	137	222	76	60	17
Politics	45	60	572	25	3	1	10	3
Other	26	158	10	11	16	9	10	17
Public Administration	10	9	4	32	4	5	0	0
Economy	85	262	15	48	133	16	25	1
Science	18	22	1	18	13	39	2	0
Civil Society	109	263	21	13	41	6	53	10
Total	**846**	**2021**	**730**	**316**	**471**	**164**	**184**	**51**

Table 2. Actor productivity (by documents published) and indegree.

Actor	Documents	Indegree
spd.de	15	111
gruene.de	60	108
welt.de	859	86
die-buergerenergiewende.de	121	77
faz.net	1112	76
heise.de	400	75
sueddeutsche.de	280	70
spiegel.de	901	61
zeit.de	234	61
handelsblatt.com	492	59

Table 3. Social fields' indegree.

Social field	Domains	Documents	Av. Indegree
SIG	243	1927	3.50
Media	735	36618	2.76
Politics	417	1291	1.76
Public Administration	64	815	4.94
Economy	261	3049	1.81
Science	74	545	2.22
Civil Society	175	883	1.06
Other	117	929	0.4

An indicator that suggests that productivity does not necessarily imply relevance however are the fields of *Public Administration* and, to some extent, *SIG*. Both are not extremely productive but obviously are very relevant in the network. This holds especially true for *Public Administration* which is naturally an authority on the subject of Energiewende but which only published 815 documents in our investigation period (44 less than welt.de) and still has an average indegree of 4.94 and thus the highest of all fields. As can be seen in Table 2 both administrative institutions, the BMU (bmu.de) as well as the BMWi (bmwi.de), have a high indegree without being very productive. Another not so lively group of actors, which is highly relevant within the network, is *SIG* with 1927 published documents from 243 domains and an average indegree of 3.49. Its importance can be explained by the Energiewende's wide-reaching consequences for all parts of society and the interest groups' attempt to channel those. Especially foundations like Agora Energiewende (which specifically deals with the Energiewende and its associated consequences and issues) or environmental NGOs like Die Bürgerenergiewende, Greenpeace or BUND took the opportunity and established themselves as relevant actors within the discourse; something which can also be seen in the network (Table 2).

It is also rather interesting to see the two German political parties SPD (spd.de, indegree 113) and The Greens (gruene.de, indegree 109) having the highest indegree in the network even though they haven't been very productive. This is even more striking since the political field has a lesser indegree than *Science* and is on the same level as *Economy;* both fields have published less documents together than the political field did (see Table 3). When looking at Table 2 it is, of course, evident that there a few relevant domains within the political group but the field consists of neither productive nor relevant actors.

We were able to show that *Media* was the most productive field in our network. However, the fields of *Public Administration* and *SIG* were both more relevant within the network.

4.2. Links to Political Actors

Second, we investigate which social groups, and specifically which actors, link to the political field and which political actors are the most prominent link targets since this might indicate which fields or actors may try to integrate politics within the Energiewende public.

Keeping the previous results in mind it is especially fruitful to focus on the question, who deems the political parties relevant. As Table 3 shows, the field that links most to political actors is *Politics* itself. Over 79% (n=572) of incoming links to political actors came from within the field itself. And most of the times these links even stayed within the own party network. In fact, there are only 3 cross-party references: two links from SPD to the Greens and one from a Green politician to the official Green party's Austrian website. Except for those no political actor linked to another political group, who was not within his/her party. The parties' local and regional subsidiaries and the respective parties' hierarchies can explain this number and especially the main party website's relevance within the network. Most of the links to the Greens, for example, stem from the Greens themselves and this is also true for the other parties. This self-referentiality is especially noteworthy with the German Social Democrats where almost 90% (n=165) of incoming links stem from its own party network.

The other field that relatively often (13% of politics' incoming links) links to political actors is the *Media*. And even though this number may seem high in comparison to other fields it demonstrates how seldom (n=96) actors actually link to the websites of political parties. Adding from Table 1 it rather can be detected that if someone choses to link to political content, the official sites from the Federal Government (*Public Administration*) are chosen. Nevertheless, there are actors that explicitly refer to political actors. The most productive actor that regularly links to the political field is the conservative weblog Freiewelt.net, which sees the Energiewende rather critical. It is, however, also worth mentioning that the party-affiliated foundations from the Green party and the liberal party often times refer to their respective party website and thus make their affiliation obvious.

Within the political field the most prominent single actor targets are—as shown above—the main homepages of SPD (indegree 111) as well as Greens (indegree 108) and then by a wide margin the Green faction in the German parliament (indegree 43), followed by the official website of the left party Die Linke (indegree 28). It is also very telling that of all 417 political actors that broach the issue of Energiewende only 148 are linked to at least once, with the main party websites being the most linked to and thus showing the party hierarchies and allocation of power.

The results show that the field of *Politics* is very self-referential and almost exclusively links within one party's own network with the main website as most important link target.

4.3. Links from Political Actors and the Network's Interconnectedness

Third, we examine which social fields and which specific actors are the most linked to by the political field. While we already asserted, that the political field is mostly occupied with itself, we want to understand the extent to which some political actors are trying to integrate other actors.

We already covered the phenomenon that most of the political links refer to actors within the political field. It has to be noted though that there are some remarkable results within *Politics'* linking habit. One is the lack of links to *Science*. Only the small ecological party ÖDP linked once to the Umweltinstitut and thus to a scientific actor. All other parties refrained from doing so. Especially since Energiewende is such a complex issue which touches upon questions of energy security, renewable energy efficiency, energy markets or energy alternatives it is surprising that politics do not seem to regard scientific actors as relevant—at least when it comes to referencing them.

When actors from the political field *do* link to another field they link to websites from *Public Administration* (7.9%). This can be explained with political parties referring to public authorities to validate their demands or, in some cases, because political actors are also part of the *Public Administration*. Within this context it is interesting to note that only 3% of outgoing links refer to actors from the media. This may indeed show politics' unwillingness to let the media shape their agenda. The second most linked field by political actors is *Civil Society* (5.4%). The third most linked to is *SIG* (5.3%). Especially actors from the civil society sector like boell.de were prominent link targets for political actors. These websites were linked to mainly by the Greens.[2] This does not only show how important *Special Interest Organizations* are in the Energiewende discourse but also allows for a picture of whom the political parties feel "close" to. Since hyperlinks are consciously added and thus a reference of importance, the connection between a party and a lobby organization, for example, makes an otherwise rather implicit connection visible.

[2] It has to be noted that the Heinrich Boell Stiftung is the Green party's foundation and thus the connection between these two actors is not very surprising.

As the political actors did not fulfil the central position we assumed they would, we further investigated whether the self-referentiality is prevalent in all fields we found or whether there are other, more interconnected fields. As Table 3 shows there are four more fields where most of the links stay within the field (*SIG, Media, Public Administration* and *Science*). And even though these fields link up to 52% to their own field's actors they don't come close to *Politics* (79.55%). Two fields, however, linked more to another field than to their respective own: both *Economy* (44.79%) and *Civil Society* (50.97%) linked the most to *Media*. It's especially interesting to see that in both cases roughly around 50% of the links refer to actors from the media indicating its importance for these fields. Another remarkable connection is between the fields of *Civil Society* and *SIG*. Whereas actors from the civil society linked in 21% of the cases to actors from SIG, this connection does not seem to be reciprocal: only 5.32% of the outgoing links from the field of *SIG* were directed towards actors from the civil society. Overall these findings suggest a little integrated online public sphere that is shaped by the social fields' self-referential linking practices.

By looking at the political field's outgoing links we were able to show that the most important fields for political actors are *Public Administration, Civil Society* and *SIG*. By looking at all the fields' connectedness it became obvious that most actors tend to link within their own field and that the field of *Media* seems to be very important within the network (as was already shown in Section 4.1).

5. Discussion

Taking on the one hand into account that a major energy transformation process in one of the world's leading economic and industrial powerhouses is a complex and very difficult task, which can only be worked on a systemic and intersocial level, the results of this study are a robust starting point for an analysis of the vital constellations of problems of the Energiewende. The description of the Energiewende case determined the need to integrate a broad range of different stakeholders and interactions of them and therefore serves as a good example for this special issue by establishing some shifts of political agency in the digital age. Indeed, the case of the Energiewende amplifies that tight descriptions of political processes do not fit any more for intersectoral issues which impact society as a whole. And the linking patterns suggest different degrees of political agency. Whereas political actors seem preoccupied with inter-party community building, actors from the civil society and special interest group reach out to other actors, bridge social fields and try to make their voices heard.

For the interpretation of our findings we must consider that the various types of media on the Internet may vary in terms of hyperlink practices. While hyperlinking is important for political bloggers to ensure visibility and to position themselves within the community, German mass media usually limit their outgoing links to sources and related articles on their own site. This does not necessarily weaken our findings, but it has to be kept in mind when interpreting the data.

Based on the public sphere theory we assumed that political actors are located in the centre of the debate and would try to integrate other actors within the discourse. Given the centrality of political decision-making in that case on the one hand and modern governance processes on the other hand it is plain to assume that politics shall play an important role in the integration of different stakeholder from the economic world, science and innovation actors as well as NGOs, the media and citizens.

These attempts, however, are as far as our online analysis could show not echoed via hyperlinks by the political field. Politics is rather circling around itself than integrating stakeholders. Whereas we assumed in the beginning that the political field has to interact with the different stakeholders in order to give them the feeling that their interests are being taken into consideration and are of relevance to politics our results showed that *Politics* referred in over 79% of the cases to itself. And even though the interaction between political actors and stakeholders will certainly be on a different level in the real life, hyperlinks also do signify attribution of significance.

From a governance and political decision-perspective one could assume that first, *good* decisions need appropriate information of the concerned stakeholders (Converse, 1990). Second, political actors have the duty not only to collect information for themselves, but to spread decision-relevant information to the public to justify their own position (Parvez & Ahmed, 2006). In this analysis we did not find that information brokering and justification position. Rather political parties give almost no visible interest in other actors. They almost exclusively linked within their own party networks with the main website as most important link target.

Interestingly, the lack of a connective position is not only obvious in the political but also in other fields: most actors tend to link within their own field. Especially problematic in this respect is the total silence with regards to scientific actors. It would be easy to assume that a political party would link to a scientific source about the Energiewende in order to back their demands or ideas up scientifically. However, none of the relevant parties in Germany decided to do so. Our analysis also showed *Science's* irrelevance for other fields—except for the *Media*. We thus hypothesize that even though scientific facts and expertise are virtually around the corner the mass media remain the main source for scientific information—even online. Inter-

estingly, however, the *Media's* role is an important topic within our analysis: even though the networked public sphere concept suggests that actors from the mass media are less relevant since other actors are able to connect with each other and forge alliances we see that most social fields heavily link to the mass media. Especially most of the quality newspapers are both productive and relevant within the network.

In general, the Energiewende's online discourse seems to be more fragmented than integrative. This, of course, is especially obvious when it comes to political actors but also actors from Public Administration. While Sunstein (2001) assumes that fragmentation and several loosely connected publics could be considered a danger for democracy, the *Media* played in the Energiewende-network an integrative role. This field was responsible for many outlinks and thus for observing the different social fields and integrating them in the wider public sphere. This is also true for actors from the civil society and SIG thus suggesting that these, even though not fully exploiting its potential (e.g. Benkler et al., 2015), are adapting to the Internet and its possibilities whereas politics is not.

6. Conclusion

This study's main interest was to take a closer look at one of the most ambitious projects in Germany's recent history: the Energiewende. We were especially interested in the Internet's potential in integrating many different actors from multiple social fields into the discourse. We also were interested in the role of the political field and whether it would try to reach out to different stakeholders in order to tackle the issue of Energiewende.

Our analysis showed however, that it is safe to say that the online network does not reflect the complexity and the systemic level of the problem: most actors only interact with other closely associated actors from their own social field. This is especially true for the "lone warriors" from the political field who neither deem NGOs nor civic movements relevant and who ignore scientific institutions altogether and thus fail their duty to collect, interpret and reflect different interests in the online Energiewende debate. It is thus worth noting that within the Energiewende public sphere there seems to be little integration of different actors even though this seems to be mandatory for such a high profile project.

Moreover, the findings of this study also add to the already broadly existing research investigations on the integrative potential of the Internet for democratic processes. Although our case was quite special and we should be careful not to conflate hyperlink relationships with political discourses per se, we can conclude that our findings suggest that integration processes within the networked public sphere do happen, albeit rarely. Our findings also lead to the conclusion, that especially the online platforms of traditional quality newspapers do fulfil the highly relevant task as intermediaries between actors from different social fields.

However, due to our focus on the hyperlink structures we are only able to speculate about the discourse's specific content with regard to frames and positions. Future research could include automated content analysis to further contextualize the different communities or identify potential polarizations alongside a specific position. Additionally, our interpretation of hyperlinks is limited to their function as vectors of relevance. Future research should also include an in-depth interpretation of the specific meaning of references in order to further understand the content strategies of the authors involved in the discourse.

Additional research into the role of actors from *SIG* and the *civil society* seems imperative to understand with which methods these may enforce further integration. Especially foundations and NGOs seem to understand the logic of the world of online communication really well and a closer look into their online networks would be interesting. Another important future aspect of research is the connection of hyperlink analysis and social media in order to fully assess the online discourse on a subject.

Acknowledgements

Parts of this research were conducted within the project "Towards an Analytics of Networked Publics, TA-NEP" at the University of Vienna and funded by GfK Verein, Nuremberg (Germany).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Adamic, L. A., & Glance, N. (2005). The political blogosphere and the 2004 U.S. election: Divided they blog. In *Proceedings of the 3rd International Workshop on Link Discovery* (pp. 36-43). New York: ACM.

Althaus, M. (2012). *Schnelle Energiewende: Bedroht durch Wutbürger und Umweltverbände? Protest, Beteiligung und politisches Risikopotenzial für Großprojekte im Kraftwerk- und Netzausbau Wissenschaftliche Beiträge*. Wildau: TH Wildau.

Benkler, Y. (2006). *The wealth of networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Benkler, Y., Roberts, H., Faris, R., Solow-Niederman, A., & Etling, B. (2015). Social mobilization and the networked public sphere: Mapping the SOPA-PIPA debate. *Political Communication, 32*(4), 594-624. doi:10.1080/10584609.2014.986349

Blondel, V. D., Guillaume, J.-L., Lambiotte, R., & Lefebvre, E. (2008). Fast unfolding of communities in large networks. *Journal of Statistical Mechanics: Theory and Experiment*, *2008*(10), P10008.

BMWi, & BMU. (2012). *Erster Monitoringbericht: Energie der Zukunft*. Berlin: Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Technologie & Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz und Reaktorsicherheit.

Camillus, J. C. (2008). Strategy as a wicked problem. *Harvard Business Review, 86*, 98-101.

Chang, T.-K., Himelboim, I., & Dong, D. (2009). Open global networks, closed international flows: World system and political economy of hyperlinks in cyberspace. *International Communication Gazette*, *71*(3), 137-159.

Converse, P. E. (1990). Popular representation and the distribution of information. In J. A. Ferejohn & J. H. Kuklinski (Eds.), *Information and democratic processes* (pp. 369-388). Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Deutsch, M., Krampe, L., Peter, F., & Rosser, S. (2014). *Comparing the cost of low-carbon technologies: What is the cheapest option*. Berlin: Prognos AG.

Ferree, M. M., Gamson, W. A., Gerhards, J., & Rucht, D. (2002). Four models of the public sphere in modern democracies. *Theory and Society, 31*, 289-324.

Gawel, E., Strunz, S., & Lehmann, P. (2012). The German Energiewende under attack: Is there an irrational Sonderweg? In *UFZ-Diskussionspapiere* (Vol. 15). Leipzig: Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Introduction of the theory of structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gonzalez-Bailon, S. (2009). Opening the black box of link formation: Social factors underlying the structure of the web. *Social Networks*, *31*(4), 271-280.

Graichen, P. (2014). *10 questions and answers on the 2014 Reform of the German Renewable Energy Act*. Berlin: Agora Energiewende.

Graichen, P., & Redl, C. (2014). *The German Energiewende and its climate paradox. An analysis of power sector trends for renewables, coal, gas, nuclear power and CO2 emissions 2010–2030*. Berlin: Agora Energiewende.

Gruning, J., & Hunt, T. (1984) Managing public relations. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Habermas, J. (2006). Political communication in media society: Does democracy still enjoy an epistemic dimension? The impact of normative theory on empirical research. *Communication Theory, 16*(4), 411-426.

Harrison, C. (2002). Hypertext links: Whither thou goest, and why. *First Monday*, 7(10).

Hsu, C., & Park, H. (2012). Sociology of hyperlink networks of web 1.0, web 2.0, and twitter: A case study of South Korea. In J. Hughes (Ed.), *SAGE internet research methods* (pp. IV237-IV255). London: Sage.

Kemfert, C. (2013). *Kampf um Strom. Mythen, Macht und Monopole*. Hamburg: Murmann.

Kemfert, C., & Horne, J. (2013). Good governance of the Energiewende in Germany: Wishful thinking or manageable? In *Hertie school experts on the German Federal Election 2013*. Berlin: Hertie School of Governance.

Kleinen-von Königslöw, K. (2010). *Die Arenen-Integration nationaler Öffentlichkeiten*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Latzer, M., & Saurwein, F. (2006). Europäisierung durch Medien: Ansätze und Erkenntnisse der Öffentlichkeitsforschung. In W. Langenbucher & M. Latzer (Eds.), *Europäische Öffentlichkeit und medialer Wandel. Eine transdisziplinäre Perspektive* (pp. 10-45). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Mueller, D., Ligensa, A., & Gendolla, P. (2009). *Leitmedien. Konzepte—Relevanz—Geschichte*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

Nahon, K., & Hemsley, J. (2013). *Going viral*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Neuberger, C. (2009). Internet, Journalismus und Öffentlichkeit: Analyse des Medienumbruchs. In C. Neuberger, C. Nuernbergk & M. Rischke (Eds.), *Journalismus im Internet* (pp. 19-105). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Park, H. W. (2003). Hyperlink network analysis: A new method for the study of social structure on the web. *Connections*, *25*(1), 49-61.

Parvez, Z., & Ahmed, P. (2006) Towards building an integrated perspective on e-democracy. *Information, Communication & Society*, *9*(5), 612-632.

Rhomberg, M., & Stehr, N. (2012). Environmental change. In G. Ritzer (Ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell encyclopedia of globalization*. Boston: Blackwell Publishing.

Rittel, H. W., & Webber, M. M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences, 4*, 155-169.

Schumate, M. (2012). The evolution of the HIV/AIDS NGO hyperlink network. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *17*, 120-134.

Sohre, A. (2012). *Strategien in der Energie- und Klimapolitik. Bedingungen strategischer Steuerung der Energiewende in Deutschland und Großbritannien.* Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Stieglitz, S., & Dang-Xuan, L. (2012). Social media and political communication: A social media analytics framework. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, *3*(4), 1277-1291.

Sunstein, C. (2001). *Republic.com*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

The Economist. (2012). Energiewende. Retrieved from http://www.economist.com/node/21559667

Wessler, H. (2002). Multiple Differenzierung und kommunikative Integration: Symbolische Gemeinschaften und Medien. In K. Imhof, O. Jarren, & R. Blum (Eds.), *Integration und Medien* (Vol. 7, pp. 56-76). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

About the Authors

Jonas Kaiser is Jonas Kaiser is a PhD candidate at Zeppelin University Friedrichshafen, an Associate Researcher at Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet & Society, and a Fellow at Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University. His research focus is on political and environmental communication in the networked public sphere.

Markus Rhomberg is Professor and Chair of Political Communication at Zeppelin University Friedrichshafen (Germany), Faculty of Political and Social Sciences. He was fellow for Political Communication at the Mercator Foundation in Berlin and Acting Professor for Empirical Communication Research at the University of Hamburg. His research interests include political and science communication.

Axel Maireder, Dr., is Head of Social Media Research at the global market research company GfK. Prior to joining GfK in 2015, Axel worked at the University of Vienna's Department of Communication, focusing on the study of practices and dynamics of social media communication with a focus on political communication.

Stephan Schlögl is researcher at GfK Austria and PhD candidate at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Vienna. He studies digital inequalities in transnational public spheres focusing on the unequal distribution of attention between the Global North and South in social media.

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183-2439)
2016, Volume 4, Issue 4, Pages 30-42
doi: 10.17645/mac.v4i4.695

Article

Mediatisation, Marginalisation and Disruption in Australian Indigenous Affairs

Kerry McCallum [1,*], Lisa Waller [2] and Tanja Dreher [3]

[1] News and Media Research Centre, Faculty of Arts and Design, University of Canberra, Bruce, ACT 2600, Australia; E-Mail: Kerry.mccallum@canberra.edu.au
[2] Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University, Burwood, VIC 3125, Australia; E-Mail: lisa.waller@deakin.edu.au
[3] School of Arts, English and Media, Wollongong University, Wollongong, NSW 2522, Australia; E-Mail: tanjad@uow.edu.au

* Corresponding author

Submitted: 18 February 2016 | Accepted: 2 April 2016 | Published: 11 August 2016

Abstract
This article considers how changing media practices of minority groups and political and media elites impact on democratic participation in national debates. Taking as its case study the state-sponsored campaign to formally recognise Indigenous people in the Australian constitution, the article examines the interrelationships between political media and Indigenous participatory media—both of which we argue are undergoing seismic transformation. Discussion of constitutional reform has tended to focus on debates occurring in forums of influence such as party politics and news media that privilege the voices of only a few high-profile Indigenous media 'stars'. Debate has progressed on the assumption that constitutional change needs to be settled by political elites and then explained and 'sold' to Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Our research on the mediatisation of policymaking has found that in an increasingly media-saturated environment, political leaders and their policy bureaucrats attend to a narrow range of highly publicised voices. But the rapidly changing media environment has disrupted the media-driven *Recognise* campaign. Vigorous public discussion is increasingly taking place outside the mainstream institutions of media and politics, while social media campaigns emerge in rapid response to government decisions. Drawing on a long tradition in citizens' media scholarship we argue that the vibrant, diverse and growing Indigenous media sphere in Australia has increased the accessibility of Indigenous voices challenging the scope and substance of the recognition debate. The article concludes on a cautionary note by considering some tensions in the promise of the changing media for Indigenous participation in the national policy conversation.

Keywords
mediatisation; Indigenous constitutional recognition; Indigenous media; participation; political communication

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Political Agency in the Digital Age: Media, Participation and Democracy", edited by Anne Kaun (Södertörn University, Sweden), Maria Kyriakidou (University of East Anglia, UK) and Julie Uldam (Roskilde University, Denmark).

© 2016 by the authors; licensee Cogitatio (Lisbon, Portugal). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

This article examines the mediatisation of Indigenous politics in Australia. Taking as its case study the state-sponsored campaign to formally recognise Indigenous people in the constitution, the article considers how the changing media practices of both Indigenous people and political and media elites impact on national policy debates. Our concern is the juncture between the mediation of political and policy issues by mainstream institutions of power, primarily established news media organisations, and the 'local' discussion of

public affairs that is increasingly taking place through social media. In the media-focused policy process mainstream media continue to play a key role in reporting politics and are closely listened to by the politically powerful. Oppositional voices, such as the growing chorus of Indigenous opinion critiquing the very concept of recognition (Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2010), fight to be heard in the intimate relationship between policy and media (Davis, 2016; McCallum & Waller, 2013). At the same time, a changing media environment has enabled new players and platforms to execute political agency and challenge this established dynamic. We argue this has disrupted how political elites manage public debate, and the way public opinion is understood and acted upon.

The mediated political campaign for constitutional recognition provides an ideal lens to examine how processes of mediatisation operate in the context of core debates over national identity. The debate over constitutional recognition takes place in the context of Australia's complex racial history and the ongoing dispossession, colonisation and marginalisation of Indigenous people and communities (see Attwood & Markus, 2007; Davis, 2016; Davis & Williams, 2015; Dodson, 2012). Australia became a federation in 1901 at the height of racist thought and practice, and its constitution was deliberately drafted to exclude and discriminate against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Australia's most successful referendum occurred in 1967, with 90.77% voting in favour of changing the constitution to enable the Commonwealth to make laws for all Australians and to take account of Aboriginal people in determining the population. Despite being held up as 'an outstanding expression of public sentiment' (Goot & Rowse, 2007, p. 27), since 1967 there have been persistent calls for further reform of the nation's framing document to recognise the status of Indigenous people and remove discriminatory clauses (Davis & Williams, 2015). At the same time a global movement and scholarly critique of the politics of recognition has emerged (e.g. Coulthard, 2014; McNay, 2008; Povinelli, 2002; Simpson, 2010). In the Australian context there have been growing calls to acknowledge unceded sovereignty, land rights and a treaty. Aileen Moreton Robinson stresses ongoing Indigenous sovereignty as fundamental, and welcomes 'a future in which Indigenous sovereignty is formally recognised and we are no longer treated as trespassers in our own lands' (2007, p. xi,). A series of government inquiries and committees have advised on the wording and process of the referendum (Australian Government, 2016), which by 2015 had cross-party support. As a key tenet of contemporary Indigenous politics, the referendum invokes unresolved questions at the very foundation of settler colonial Australia.

In 2015 Prime Minister Abbott oversaw a formal consultative process to bring on the referendum in 2017 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of 1967. This political process operated alongside an advocacy and awareness campaign run by the government-funded organisation Reconciliation Australia (*Recognise*, 2016). Together, these processes essentially took the complexity of settler colonial Australian race relations and reconstructed it as a simple political choice. Constitutional lawyer Megan Davis has observed that the common message from media and government has ignored an important facet of the debate:

> 'The mainstream media, by and large, uncritically report on referendum momentum and mostly obsess over any chinks in the bipartisan order of things. The subjects of recognition are all but erased from the process.' (Davis, 2016, p. 76)

However, the mediatised political campaign was challenged by the underlying multiplicity of views and perspectives on what might be changed by the referendum. Furthermore, by the end of 2015 Australia had a new prime minister, opposition to *Recognise* was increasingly vocal, and the move towards constitutional recognition had all but stalled.

This article builds on an ongoing research project that is investigating how changing media institutions, technologies and practices affect Indigenous participation in public debate (Dreher, McCallum, & Waller, 2016; Waller, Dreher, & McCallum, 2015). Here we consider how the media-related practices of Indigenous affairs policymaking, journalism and Indigenous participatory media intersect in an increasingly fragmented and abundant media environment. We first analyse the mediatised practices of government in the 2015 campaign for constitutional recognition. This is followed by a systematic examination of mainstream news reporting of policy debates and public opinion polls on the recognition issue. Finally, an analysis of social media-driven advocacy opposing or contesting *Recognise* demonstrates the breadth of political discussion and opinion formation taking place outside the dominant spheres of influence. We assess how Indigenous participatory media disrupted the mediatised development of the constitutional recognition campaign and argue that Indigenous resistance via social media had significant, if indirect, implications for policymakers and those seeking to harness public opinion in support of the referendum. Drawing on theories of public opinion, mediatisation and democratic participation, the article offers insights into the relationships between established forums of influence, new entrants to the Australian media landscape and local political engagement in Indigenous affairs.

2. Researching Political Discourse

Our research is broadly located in the fields of political

communication, Indigenous media and social movement studies. We acknowledge our status as non-Indigenous researchers working with the knowledge and innovation of Indigenous media practitioners. We see this article as contributing to our broader research paradigm that works with Indigenous researchers to challenge the colonial mindset and the prevailing discourse of deficit in Indigenous affairs (Fforde, Bamblett, Lovett, Gorringe, & Fogarty, 2013). In this article we emphasise Indigenous innovation in social media and use the mediatisation framework to focus attention, scrutiny, analysis and critique on non-Indigenous institutions and powerful elites.

Responding to criticism that the study of political communication has become too narrowly preoccupied with politics at the centre (Nielsen, 2014), our research approach considers the broad impacts of media on culture and society. We view politics as incorporating the everyday conversations and engagements with politics that take place outside the formal and traditional avenues of politics (Carey, 1975; Gamson, 1992; Tönnies, in Splichal, 1999). Herbst (1998) conceptualised public opinion as a discursive and contingent phenomenon that is constructed over time by the types of technologies and methodologies available for its assessment. In the late 20th century media content and opinion polls became the dominant technologies for 'knowing' public opinion about a topic. Herbst (1998, p. 138) identified a third understanding of public opinion, '…as something located in local community, something sewn into the fabric of interpersonal social networks' (see also Blumer, 1948; Salmon & Glasser, 1995, p. 452). The digital revolution means that 'reading' public opinion is more complex than ever. But we argue it is time to consider the conversations that take place in digital social networks, and their relationships with polls and news content.

In a 'hybrid media system' (Chadwick, 2013) political communication research is well placed to bridge the divide between a still-influential mainstream media and a burgeoning and transformative digital and social media sphere, where media consumption is increasingly individualised, networked and fragmented (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). This is not to imply news media are no longer important to opinion formation and change. We contend news media's framing of reality is crucial to the way policy issues are communicated in the post-mass media era. Our approach echoes calls for a more nuanced, rather than generalising, approach to political communication research to address the complex questions asked in public discourse, such as those about mediatised Indigenous policy. To that end we focus on three interrelated aspects of public discourse about constitutional reform—mediatised policymaking, news reporting, and oppositional campaigns in social networks—to shed light on the media-related processes of all players in this fundamental issue. We address the following research questions:

1. What were the media-related practices of the Australian government in the campaign for constitutional recognition?
2. What role did institutional news media play in reporting on constitutional recognition?
3. How did Indigenous participatory media engage with and disrupt the constitutional recognition campaign?
4. What are the implications of changing media environments for Indigenous people to engage with mainstream policy and media debates?

To address these questions we developed a project that analysed three bodies of intersecting mediated texts: official government material, news media reports, and Indigenous participatory media discussion. Texts were collected over the 12-month period 1 January to 31 December, 2015, by the chief investigator.

- We first recorded the media-related activities of the Abbott government and the *Recognise* campaign over 2015. We gathered all digitally available reports, media releases and statements emanating from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in relation to constitutional recognition (Australian Government, 2016), as well as promotional material from the *Recognise* website (*Recognise*, 2016);
- Secondly, we mapped the dominant topics, themes, voices and media practices evident in news media coverage of constitutional recognition. Our dataset included 200 national news and opinion texts reporting on the constitutional recognition campaign. News sites included the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (online and television public broadcaster), *The Guardian* (Australia), Fairfax Media (*Sydney Morning Herald*, *Age*, *Canberra Times*), News.com (Herald Sun, Sydney Telegraph), *The Australian*, Sky News, Channel 9 News, and SBS News. We acknowledge a blurring of the boundaries between the online forums and 'mainstream', 'legacy' or 'institutional' media, with Twitter an essential tool of journalism, but contend that the crucial role played by commercial and public service news organisations in negotiating policy debate mean they remain a key site for investigation;
- Our final domain of media practice was Indigenous participatory media. We analysed the growing opposition to *Recognise* in a range of alternative news sites including New Matilda, Croakey and The Stringer, Indigenous media including NITV, National Indigenous Radio Service, Koori Mail, blogs such as IndigenousX and Rantings of

> an Aboriginal Feminist, and social media discussion emanating from Twitter and Facebook. We are mindful of the potential risks of exploitation when working with readily available digital trace data, and the need to avoid 'extractive' research without informed consent, so have limited our analyses to publicly available blogs and news sites.

All texts were recorded and coded in a custom-built database to identify key features, and each body of data was analysed inductively using thematic analysis to identify the broad themes inherent in the text. The article concludes by considering the intersections between these three domains of media practice, with a particular focus on the role of new players in mainstream media such as *The Guardian* (Australia).

3. Constitutional Recognition as Mediatised Policymaking

Mediatisation theory helps us to understand how changes occurring in the media landscape were central to the way the constitutional recognition debate played out. Increasingly, the activities of political and oppositional actors are carried out within media and this is both opening up opportunities for a wider range of voices to be heard within the political process, and at the same time limiting opportunities for engagement. Mediatisation refers to the body of theory and research that considers the broad impacts of media on society. While it has been virtually ignored by the dominant US Political Communication journals (Nielsen, 2014) mediatisation has been embraced in European scholarship (Livingstone & Lunt, 2014; Lundby, 2014). Mediatisation relates to '…changes in practices, cultures, and institutions in media-saturated societies…' (Lundby, 2014, p. 3; Couldry & Hepp, 2013). The institutional approach to mediatisation concerns the transformations of institutions, like politics and religion, scrutinising when they adhere to the formats of media for their function and practices in society and culture (Hjarvard, 2014; Flew & Swift, 2015). This branch of scholarship emphasises the changing structural relationship between different spheres of society and micro processes such as 'news logic' whereby routines, priorities and practices of news media are internalised and embodied by policymakers (Thorbjørnsrud, Figenschou, & Øyvind, 2014). For example, the adoption of increasingly market-driven practices by bureaucracies, the reliance on easily consumed content such as polls and institutionally prepared media content can all be seen as the adoption of media logics in politics and policymaking. McCallum & Waller (in press) found the practices of bureaucrats working in the Indigenous affairs domain changed as the media environment changed and intensified. In major policy debates over Indigenous health and education the ear of senior political leaders and their bureaucrats was turned towards mainstream media, or attuned to a narrow range of Indigenous voices amplified through mainstream news institutions.

The case study of constitutional recognition builds on this body of research to explore the mediatised practices of political leaders and Indigenous people. Each of our three sites of evidence—policy, news reporting, and Indigenous participatory media activity—provide evidence of how media change—the central tenet of mediatisation—impacts on policy development. In addressing our first question we identify three elements of media-driven government policymaking during 2015: media events, government-funded advocacy, and the commissioning of opinion polls.

3.1. Media Events

Prime Minister Abbott made constitutional recognition a hallmark of his administration. Presenting the referendum process to mainstream political news media was a vital stage in gaining political legitimacy for a referendum. Throughout 2015 a series of high-profile events were held to gain maximum exposure. Standing with Australian of the Year, Indigenous sporting hero Adam Goodes, on Australia Day, the PM pledged in a nationally televised speech to:

> 'Work towards completing our constitution by recognising the first Australians. The spirit of generous inclusion has always marked our nation at its best.' (*The Guardian*, 2015a)

This statement demonstrates that, from the outset, the PM framed recognition as a way of containing Indigenous sovereignties via a politics of inclusion, rather than through an acknowledgement of Australia's ongoing colonial legacy. With bipartisan political support he pushed ahead with plans to confirm a question to take to the people. Debate progressed on the assumption that constitutional change would be settled by political elites and then explained and 'sold' to Indigenous and non-Indigenous voters. The report of a joint parliamentary committee[1] coincided with the Prime Minister calling a summit for July 6 to discuss the timing and the working of the referendum. Attended by a group of 40 secretly selected Indigenous leaders and held behind closed doors at the spectacular harbour-side Sydney residence of the Prime Minister (D. Parker, 2015), the summit was designed to achieve maximum media attention. During the second half of 2015 the PM was increasingly required to manage Indigenous calls for

[1] This followed a failed referendum to include a preamble in the constitution in 1999, the Report of the Expert Panel in January 2012, and the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition.

more consultation with Indigenous communities and growing evidence of widespread community scepticism about the proposal (Medhora, 2015c).

3.2. Government-Funded Advocacy

The Prime Minister was supported by the non-government organisation Reconciliation Australia through its $15 million *Recognise* awareness and advocacy program (Graham, 2016). *Recognise* is funded by government and private sponsorship to promote community understanding and acceptance of the need for constitutional reform. It worked in tandem with government as an arms-length public information tool; an outsourcing of political function in a form that adopted the logics of marketing to engage the electorate. Throughout 2015 *Recognise* engaged in a comprehensive social marketing program using advertising, publicity events, an interactive website and social media platforms. Public relations tactics included the production of news releases, editorials by the *Recognise* co-chairs, and third party endorsements from celebrities, sportspeople, and businesses elites (*Recognise*, 2016).

3.3. Opinion Polls and the Spectacle of Support

A final element of the campaign was the commissioning of opinion polls to gather quantifiable evidence and publicise public support for the referendum. In May 2015, Reconciliation Australia strategically released the results of a privately commissioned opinion poll that found the majority of Australians would support a change to the constitution to recognise Indigenous people (*Recognise*, 2015a; Sky News, 2015). As discussed later, this poll and others gained widespread, largely uncritical media coverage. Here we observe the commissioning of polls is an established mechanism for representing public sentiment about a policy issue. Polling has also been critiqued as a way of modelling public opinion on issues established by elite agendas in the absence of deliberation (Carey, 1995, p. 392; Lewis, 2001), with little consideration of significant minority groups' opinions. Using polls as quantified 'evidence' for media consumption (Herbst, 1998; Lewis, 2001) may provide the spectacle of community support, but it ignored vital voices in the process that ultimately worked against the campaign.

While it may seem self-evident that widespread community acceptance is a necessity in a census vote such as a referendum, the reliance on media and marketing logics calls for critical analysis. The increasingly commercialised and market-driven nature of government has long been of concern to critical political communication scholars (McChesney, 2015). *Recognise* critic Celeste Liddle (2014a) challenged *Recognise* for its collaboration with powerful commercial interests such as Qantas that have worked against Indigenous people. A more critical analysis comes from Treré (2016, p. 131) who takes the case of the 2012 Mexican elections to argue that political parties and governments deploy the same digital tools as political activists to 'manufacture consent' for government programs and 'sabotage dissent' against them. He argues 'the algorithmic construction of consent goes hand-in-hand with the undermining of critical voices' (2015, p. 131). While we do not contend that *Recognise* equates to the symbolic violence enacted against the populous in Mexico, we do observe parallels in the use of polling and social media to both model and mobilise Indigenous support. The upshot is that while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may have been highly visible in the campaign to bring the referendum to fruition, the full range of Indigenous voices was not heard or considered.

4. Reporting Constitutional Recognition

Our news media analysis identified three key features reinforcing the importance of political journalism in the communication of major policy developments: strong parallels between government and media agendas: broadly uncritical support for *Recognise*, and reliance on news subsidies driving news content.

4.1. Alignment of Media and Political Agendas

Over the first half of 2015 Australian journalists predominantly reported constitutional recognition as a political issue. News about the referendum process was decontextualised from reporting of Indigenous affairs more generally, and focused on the process of reaching an agreement on a question to bring to the people. From the Prime Minister's Australia Day speech through to the Kirribilli House meeting in July, national news media attended closely to the activities and priorities of Prime Minister Abbott and the machinations of the campaign with stories such as: 'Path for Indigenous recognition mapped out at historic meeting' (Tingle, 2015). In an article discussing growing frustration with the process of resolving the referendum question in late March, *The Guardian* reported:

> 'Divisions over Indigenous recognition fuels pressure for meeting with PM.' (Jabour, 2015)

As a result of *Recognise*'s advocacy efforts Indigenous faces and voices were highly visible in news media reports about recognition, but they belonged to a small number of high-profile spokespeople. *Recognise* co-chair Tanya Hosch was a prominent and widely quoted advocate, but the main focus of news reporting was on the two prominent leaders, Noel Pearson and Patrick Dodson, as representative of all Indigenous people to negotiate a referendum solution. News media's reliance on these two figures brought attention to

the issue, but also allowed journalists to ignore a wider range of opinions. Journalists' sourcing practices are crucial to who and what gets listened to in Indigenous affairs (Waller, 2013). Journalists look to individuals who represent institutions, from the state to 'experts' and key community representatives, to both generate and verify stories about particular policy issues. When powerful decision-makers and powerful media look at Indigenous issues through the same frame, the range of policy problems to be addressed is limited, and so is the range of possible solutions.

4.2. A Good News Story for Non-Indigenous Australia

In what may appear a divergent finding from the extensive body of literature that shows Australian news media perpetuates racism and amplifies Indigenous failure in a discourse of deficit and negativity (Fforde et al., 2013; Hokowhitu, 2013; Meadows, 2001), our research demonstrates that constitutional recognition was generally framed as a 'positive' news story. News reporting framed recognition as an example of the non-Indigenous community's goodwill towards Indigenous people and readiness to amend a flaw in the founding document, rather than engaging with complex and challenging Indigenous demands, critique and dissent.

Major news outlets published news subsidies supplied by *Recognise* as an additional source of good news. Editorials by co-chair Tanya Hosch (*Telegraph*, 2016) and third party endorsements from high-profile sportspeople and political leaders featured in several news outlets. Conservative oppositional voices were largely portrayed as atypical of widespread community support for the referendum. However, this seeming contradiction supports a body of research that has found Australian news media has a long history of distancing itself from systemic racism by highlighting individual aberrant 'racist' acts while representing the white mainstream as 'tolerant' (Meadows, 2001). A potential outcome is that Indigenous people who oppose constitutional recognition are either silenced or shunned.

4.3. News Drivers, News Events and Polls

The July meeting at the PM's Sydney residence was the most widely reported topic in 2015, generating reports and commentary about constitutional recognition. Stunning imagery of Indigenous leader Pat Dodson in conversation with the prime minister on Sydney Harbour helped to frame the event as a constructive political process. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reported that:

> 'Political and Indigenous leaders are united in their support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recognition in the constitution, saying it is an "historical injustice" that needs to be addressed.' (ABC, 2015)

Noel Pearson, who attended the meeting, was scathing about the political spectacle, referring to the event as 'stage-managed' (Medhora, 2015b).

Survey research and opinion polls were prominent sources of news. Both government and media relied on poll results to reflect back to the population its support for the referendum. Hard news stories were driven by the release of polls commissioned by *Recognise* or media organisations. In May the ABC reported on a poll commissioned by *Recognise*:

> 'Australians would vote yes now to constitutional recognition: poll.' (Henderson, 2015)

Apart from the *Recognise* polls, journalists reported widely on an Australian National University ANUpoll (Gray & Sanders, 2015; Medhora, 2015a) and Fairfax Ipsos (Gordon, 2015). Each of these commissioned polls showed high rates of community acceptance for recognising Indigenous people in the constitution despite no question being settled on. Polls were strategically released to coincide with major political events. Ahead of the Kirribilli meeting, *The Australian* published an article based on an exclusive Newspoll:

> 'Two out of three back Indigenous recognition.' (Hudson, 2015)

As Australia's most established and newsworthy opinion poll, Newspoll generated substantial publicity for the *Recognise* campaign. This poll-driven news follows traditional political news values and formats that prioritise poll results as quantified evidence of public opinion (Lewis, 2001).

We conclude that the alignment of institutional news media coverage with the government's mediated policy approach left little room for other perspectives, limiting the range and agency of dissenting voices available to contribute to the conversation over constitutional recognition.

5. The Intervention of Indigenous Participatory Media

Our analysis to this point suggests the reconceptualisation of Indigenous recognition as an elite political issue worked to marginalise a wide range of Indigenous people from the mainstream political communication system. But close examination of the third domain of media practice—Indigenous participatory media—paints a different picture of public sphere activity in relation to the constitutional recognition debate. Throughout 2014 and 2015 an oppositional discourse to *Recognise* emerged through Indigenous-led, alternative and social media. Emanating in local social networks and communities, discussed via established social media networks

and disseminated through the sophisticated Indigenous media sphere, this opposition both reflected and engaged with a national and global discourse challenging the very concept of constitutional recognition.

In recent years the digital and social media space has built on a long, rich and innovative Indigenous community media tradition (see Indigenous Remote Communications Association, 2016; Meadows, 2016). Social media has been crucial to promote Indigenous strength and showcase a diverse range of Indigenous voices (Sweet, Pearson, & Dudgeon, 2013). Indigenous Australians in urban, rural and remote settings are active in social media, with substantially higher rates of Facebook use than the general population (Balough, 2014; Carslon & Frazer, 2015). These networks operate with their own logics, largely outside of the mainstream media and policy spheres. But they have increasingly been used to enable engagement with political debate about local issues of concern. Indigenous media has harnessed political and social networks to express political opinion, engage with institutional media and perform protest, as part of a growing sphere of global social media activism (Bruns & Highfield, 2016; Cottle & Lester, 2011; Hutchins & Lester, 2015; Moscato, 2016; Waller et al., 2015). One significant new player is the media organisation IndigenousX. Established in 2012 as a rotating Twitter account to facilitate the unfettered exposure of a diverse range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, IndigenousX has emerged as a fully integrated Indigenous owned and operated online media organisation (Pearson, 2015). Social media also provides a critical mechanism for Indigenous media activists to bridge private and public spheres and to bring a wider range of voices and perspectives to narrow political debates.

5.1. Anti-Recognise Campaigns in Social and Alternative Media

Facebook and Twitter were key sites of political activity as momentum built against the campaign for constitutional recognition. Several Facebook pages were opened including 'Facebook Anti*Recognise*' and 'Vote "NO" to Constitutional Recognition', each with widespread support (Dreher et al., 2016). With 20,000 followers, the Facebook page of Sovereign Union (2016) is an example of the melding of community forum and platform for activism, where opposition to *Recognise* has been debated and promoted. Twitter has also provided a forum for the diversity of Indigenous views about *Recognise*, with humour, advocacy and rapid responses to government activity, particularly through the influential #NoRespect hashtag. In addition, advocacy media such as *New Matilda* provided a crucial platform for the publication of the diversity of views on constitutional reform.

The July 2015 Kirribilli House Indigenous leaders event proved a catalyst for the growing opinion against the *Recognise* campaign and most Indigenous opposition took place via social media. In an article for IndigenousX and published in *The Guardian* titled:

> 'Indigenous community voices must be heard in the recognise debate.' (D. Parker, 2015),

@IndigenousX host Darren Parker captured the growing anger that Indigenous people were being excluded from decision-making processes. Parker's widely disseminated views indicated the level of mistrust in political institutions by Indigenous people. Davis (2016, p. 77) argues that 'Social media captured the overwhelming rejection of the campaign for recognition, and the growing resistance to being 'recognised' by the settler state.' By early 2016 *New Matilda* reported that 500 Indigenous people had openly rejected constitutional recognition at an historic Victorian government consultation, with the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Minister, Natalie Hutchins, admitting that:

> 'Communities consistently express opposition to constitutional recognition.' (Graham, 2016)

Local communities have expressed desire for genuine consultation in plans for a referendum, and for the question to be posed in the context of their concerns. This response supports the First Nations writer Coulthard (2014, p. 152) who argued the cultural politics of recognition maintains rather than transforms the settler-colonial relationship between Indigenous nations and the (Canadian) state, and has advocated 'refusal' rather than recognition (see also Simpson, 2007, 2010).

5.2. The IndigenousX Poll

A significant intervention came with the publication of an online survey by IndigenousX. In response to a heavily publicised *Recognise* poll in May 2015 that found 87% of Indigenous people supported constitutional recognition, IndigenousX conducted an online, non-random sample survey of the Indigenous community. The results of the poll's 827 Indigenous respondents deviated significantly from four earlier surveys of community sentiment towards constitutional recognition. The survey found that just 25% of respondents supported *Recognise*, and the overwhelming majority of respondents (67%) would vote NO in a referendum if a question did not introduce specific measures against discrimination. Significantly, the poll showed Indigenous respondents felt most strongly about sovereignty and parliamentary representation—two issues that had been ignored in political and mainstream media representation (McQuire, 2015a, 2015b). Writing for *The Guardian*, blogger Celeste Liddle stated:

> '87% of Indigenous people do not agree on recognition. You'd know if you listened.' (Liddle, 2015)

While the IndigenousX poll can be seen as advocacy polling (*Recognise*, 2015b), the exercise captured the otherwise unheard Indigenous public sentiment at the heart of the constitutional recognition question. Use of the established technology of polling for the measurement of public opinion, and publicity by alternative media such as *New Matilda*, helped move the anti-*Recognise* agenda onto the mainstream agenda. Here was clear, quantifiable evidence that Indigenous people were resisting the constitutional recognition process unless they could be part of it. Social media meant that IndigenousX had an established network to conduct the survey, the technologies to execute it online and the means to disseminate its findings both through its own networks and traditional media channels.

6. New Media Entrants and News Diversity

A key finding of our media analysis is the role played by new entrant to the Australian media landscape, *The Guardian* (Australia). Since it was launched in 2013, *The Guardian* (Australia) has made a concerted effort to listen out for and report diverse Indigenous stories. It provided a platform for the anti-*Recognise* movement through the publication of a series of invited columns by constitutional experts and vocal anti-*Recognise* advocates (e.g. Liddle, 2014a). As a result, its coverage painted a very different picture of the constitutional debate than found in other institutional news coverage. In a 2014 column for *The Guardian*, law expert Larrissa Behrendt identified a diversity of opinion in relation to how the constitution might be changed:

> 'Indigenous recognition: The concerns of those opposed must be taken seriously.' (Behrendt, 2014)

In April 2015 *The Guardian* reported Indigenous leader Kirsty Parker raising deep concerns. In a column titled 'Is Indigenous constitutional recognition salvageable? We have to hope so' she observed:

> 'Anyone plugged into conventional or social media over the past week could be forgiven for thinking Australia is on the cusp of settling the matter of appropriately recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the nation's constitution.' (K. Parker, 2015)

In contrast to the favourable coverage of *Recognise* in the majority of mainstream news, *The Guardian* reported widespread disillusionment:

> 'Indigenous people fear being left out of recognition debate, academic says.' (*The Guardian*, 2015b)

The intersection between *The Guardian* and social media organisations such as IndigenousX is a crucial development in the changing media landscape. By reporting the stories of regular @IndigenousX hosts and publicising the IndigenousX poll, *The Guardian* amplified Indigenous voices, acted as a bridge between social and mainstream media, and provided a platform for otherwise unheard Indigenous perspectives. Its established relationship with *The Guardian* meant the results of the June 2015 IndigenousX poll permeated mainstream media, albeit with little acknowledgement from the legacy press who had, by this stage, lost interest in the campaign.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

This article has examined three interrelated elements of the mediatised campaign for constitutional recognition: the media-related practices of government; institutional media reporting and resistance to *Recognise* in Indigenous participatory media. We considered the implications of each of these for Indigenous people to engage with narrowly defined debates around constitutional recognition, and how the changing media environment is disrupting the exclusive domain of political communication.

The article provides evidence of the nature of mediatised political practice in the *Recognise* campaign and the centrality of pre-packaged news and political marketing to contemporary policymaking. Over the course of 2015 the Prime Minister led the government campaign to resolve the timing and question of the Indigenous recognition referendum. The government relied on a spectacle of community goodwill towards the recognition project, despite clear indications of diverse community opinion on the topic. The political project focused on ensuring that designated 'Indigenous leaders' reached agreement with government on the nature of the referendum question and its timing. It reconstructed constitutional recognition as a simple question of accepting the need for recognition in the constitution, rather than addressing fundamentally challenging questions around Indigenous sovereignties, rights and the legacies of colonialism. Events were designed to attract positive media attention while opinion polls were commissioned and publicised as a key indicator of widespread public support for *Recognise*.

Next we addressed the role of institutional media in reporting on the campaign and found support for the long line of political communication research pointing to the exclusive relationship between media and politics (Blumler, 2014; Voltmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2010). Institutional news media embraced the 'good news story' of reforming the constitution. News agendas largely fell in line with political agendas in the media-driven campaign, with reporting focused on political priorities, debates over proposed models, and

division in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous leadership. In short, Australia's established news media reported on this as a political story. Public opinion polls and media events generated by *Recognise* were a major source of news, reinforcing that established news organisations are increasingly reliant on subsidies from government-sponsored advocacy organisations. As political momentum for the grand symbolic change stalled in the second half of 2015, the campaign became enmeshed in a range of wider concerns about race relations. By 2016, in the absence of sustained political news, most media had lost interest.

Our third research question was: 'How did Indigenous participatory media engage with and disrupt the constitutional recognition campaign?' Drawing on a broad conceptualisation of politics we looked to local Indigenous social media networks and identified these as a vibrant site of social and political discussion about Indigenous sovereignties, rights, and the legacies of colonialism. We identified a powerful opposition that emerged to unsettle the *Recognise* campaign. As a result, this article addresses an aspect of political communication theory that has not been well thought through to date. It challenges the exclusive relationship between news media and politics that has been the focus of so much political communication theory, demonstrating how digital and social media have opened new spaces for Indigenous engagement in political processes from which they have typically been excluded.

An important finding was the role of new media entrant *The Guardian* in listening to and amplifying a wider range of Indigenous perspectives and voices. *The Guardian* (Australia)'s coverage raises a number of questions about the changing media environment in public discussion of Indigenous affairs. It suggests that its 'open journalism' approach has been an important intervention in the scene (Ingram, 2016). As a new player and an outsider to the legacy Australian political media, *The Guardian* was able to challenge the dominant routines and offer a wider range of perspectives on this national issue. It provides valuable evidence of how new media entrants have opened bridges between Indigenous participatory media and the mainstream. Given this amplification of diverse Indigenous voices, political leaders had ample opportunity to listen to the range of concerns over *Recognise*.

Our final question asked, 'what are the implications of changing media environments for Indigenous Australians to engage with mainstream policy and media debates?' While popular media celebrates the value of participatory media with terms such as 'Twitter revolution', our study resonates with the growing body of research that suggests a more complex picture (eg. Dencik & Leistert, 2015). Couldry (2012) sees evidence of successful politics of protest or disruption operating on certain temporalities, but what of enduring 'positive political action' (p. 116)? The multiplicity and interactivity of online politics is frequently associated with protest rather than a long-term fixed political project. Moreover, the transformations brought about by digital media benefit all political actors, so that both political elites and racist movements have enhanced opportunities for voice (Couldry 2012; Dencik & Leistert, 2015). State and corporate actors are well placed to mobilise the social media techniques and appearance of social movements (e.g. Curran, Fenton, & Freedman, 2012; Treré, 2016).

For our own study, we found the changing media environment included increased opportunities for diverse and dissenting Indigenous voices. The *Recognise* campaign was also able to mobilise a sophisticated social media strategy as well as established media advocacy techniques to enlist support and generate largely positive mainstream media coverage. We also found evidence of considerable disruption, whereby Indigenous media and new mainstream media entrants mobilised fundamental critique of the *Recognise* campaign. We argue that changes in the media environment are a significant factor in the increasing incapacity of formal political communication to manage such complex debates over Indigenous sovereignties, rights and the legacies of colonialism. However, longer-term research is required to address the argument that the social media environment enables a politics of protest and disruption, but does not necessarily produce longer-term political transformations.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the many producers of Indigenous media whose work on participation and self-determination has inspired our analysis. Tanja Dreher's research for this article was supported by the Australian Research Council (FT140100515).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

Australian Broadcasting Corporation. (2015, July 5). *In quotes: Indigenous constitutional recognition*. Retrieved from http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-07-05/political-indigenous-viewpoints-on-constitutional-recognition/6594556

Attwood, B., & Markus, A. (2007). *The 1967 referendum: Race, power and the Australian constitution* (2nd ed.). Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.

Australian Government. (2016). *Constitutional recognition*. Retrieved from http://www.dpmc.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/constitutional-recognition

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2013). *The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization*

of contentious politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bennett, W. L., & Iyengar, S. (2008). A new era of minimal effects? The changing foundations of political communication. *Journal of Communication*, *58*, 707-731.

Bruns, A., & Highfield, T. (2016). Is Habermas on Twitter? Social media and the public sphere. In A. Bruns, G. Enli, E. Skogerbo, A. Larsson, & C. Christensen (Eds), *The Routledge companion to social media and* politics (pp. 56-72). Milton Park: Routledge.

Balough, M. (2014). Indigenous media research: Matt Balogh, McNair ingenuity research. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ZjcSsA5Yb8

Behrendt, L. (2014). Indigenous recognition: The concerns of those opposed must be taken seriously. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/25/indigenousrecognition-the-concerns-of-those-opposed-must-be-taken-seriously#start-of-comments

Blumer, H. (1948). Public opinion and public opinion polling. *American Sociological Review*, *13*(5), 542-549.

Blumler, J. (2014). Mediatisation and democracy. In F. Esser & J. Strömbäck (Eds.), *Mediatisation of politics: Understanding the transformation of Western* democracies (pp. 31-41). London: Palgrave.

Carey, J. (1975). A cultural approach to communication. *Communication*, *2*(April), 173-191.

Carey, J. W. (1995). The press, public opinion and public discourse. In T. L. Glasser & C. T. Salmon (Eds.), *Public opinion and the communication of consent* (pp. 373-402). New York: Guilford Publications.

Carlson, B., & Frazer, R. (2015). 'It's like going to a cemetery and lighting a candle': Aboriginal Australians, Sorry Business and social media. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, *11*(3), 211-224.

Chadwick, A. (2013). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford: OUP.

Cottle, S., & Lester, L. (2011). *Transnational protests and the media*. New York, Peter Lang.

Couldry, N. (2012). *Media, society, world: Social theory and digital media practice*. Cambridge: Polity.

Couldry, N., & Hepp, A. (2013). Conceptualizing mediatisation: Contexts, traditions, arguments. *Communication Theory*, *23*(3), 191-202.

Coulthard, G. (2014). *Red skin, White masks. Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Curran, J., Fenton, N., & Freedman, D. (2012). *Misunderstanding the internet*. Milton Park: Routledge.

Davis, M. (2016). Listening but not hearing: When process trumps substance. *Griffith Review*, *51*, 73-87.

Davis, M., & Williams, G. (2015). *Everything you need to know about the referendum to recognize Indigenous Australians.* Sydney: NewSouth.

Dencik, L., & Leistert, O. (2015). *Critical perspectives on social media and protest: Between control and emancipation*. Washington: Rowman & Littlefield.

Dodson, M. (2012). *Mick Dodson constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians* (Senate Occasional Lecture Series, Parliament House). Retrieved from http://www.aph.gov.au/sitecore/content/Home/About_Parliament/Senate/Powers_practice_n_procedures/pops/pop57/c02

Dreher, T., McCallum, K., & Waller, L. (2016) Indigenous voices and mediatized policy-making in the digital age. *Information, Communication & Society*, *19*(1), 23-39.

Fforde, C., Bamblett, L., Lovett, R., Gorringe S., & Fogarty, W. (2013). Discourse, deficit and identity: Aboriginality, the race paradigm and the language of representation in contemporary Australia. *Media International Australia*, *149*, 162-173.

Flew, T., & Swift, A. G. (2015). Engaging, persuading, and entertaining citizens: Mediatisation and the Australian political public sphere. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, *20*(1), 108-128.

Gamson, W. (1992). *Talking politics*. Cambridge: CUP.

Goot, M., & Rowse, T. (2007). *Divided Nation? Indigenous affairs and the imagined public.* Carlton: Melbourne University Press.

Gordon, M. (2015, July 6). Recognition closer as Indigenous leaders meet. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from http://www.smh.com.au/national/recognition-closer-as-indigenous-leaders-meet-20150517-gh3n61.html

Graham, C. (2016, February 8). *Recognise* rejected: Historic meeting of 500 Black leaders unanimously opposes constitutional recognition. *New Matilda*. Retrieved from https://newmatilda.com/2016/02/08/recognise-rejected-historic-meeting-500-black-leaders-unanimously-opposes-constitutional-recognition

Gray, M., & Sanders, W. (2015). *Australian public opinion on Indigenous issues: Injustice, disadvantage and support of recognition* (ANUpol Report No. 17). Canberra: School of Politics and International Relations, Australian national University.

Henderson, A. (2015, May 18). Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people referendum has majority support, *Recognise* poll finds. *ABC*. Retrieved from http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-18/majority-support-indigenous-recognition-in-constitution-poll/6476538

Herbst, S. (1998). *Reading public opinion: How political actors view the democratic process*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hjarvard, S. (2014). Mediatization and cultural and social change: An institutional perspective. In K. Lundby (Ed.), *Mediatisation of communication, handbooks of communication sciences* 21 (pp. 200-226). Mouton: De Gruyter.

Hokowhitu, B. (2013). Theorizing Indigenous media. In B.

Hokowhitu & V. Devadas (Eds.), *The fourth eye. Maori media in Aotearoa New Zealand* (pp. 101-123). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hudson, P. (2015, June 20). Two out of three back indigenous recognition. *The Australian*. Retrieved from http://www.recognise.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/200615_Two-out-of-three-back-indigenous-recognition_TheAus1.pdf

Hutchins, B., & Lester, L. (2015). Theorizing the enactment of environmental conflict. *The International Communication Gazette*, *77*(4), 337-358.

Indigenous Remote Communications Association. (2016). *History of the remote Indigenous media sector*. Retrieved from http://www.irca.net.au/sector/history-remote-indigenous-media-sector

Ingram, M. (2016, February 3). Do *The Guardian*'s losses mean 'open journalism' has failed? *Fortune Magazine*. Retrieved from http://fortune.com/2016/02/03/guardian-losses

Jabour, B. (2015, March 30). Divisions over Indigenous recognition fuels pressure for meeting with PM. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/13/divisions-over-indigenous-recognition-fuels-pressure-for-meeting-with-pm

Lewis, J. (2001). *Constructing public opinion: How political elites do what they like and why we seem to go along with it*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Liddle, C. (2014a). I don't want your *Recognise* campaign—It's nothing but a sham. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/aug/18/i-dont-want-yourrecognise-campaign-its-nothing-but-a-sham

Liddle, C. (2014b). *On diverse views of constitutional recognition. Rantings of an Aboriginal feminist*. Retrieved from http://blackfeministranter.blogspot.com.au

Liddle, C. (2015, July 19). 87% of Indigenous people do not agree on recognition. You'd know if you listened. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/19/87-of-indigenous-people-do-not-agree-on-recognition-youd-know-if-you-listened

Lundby, K. (2014). Introduction. In K. Lundby (Ed.), *Mediatisation of communication. Handbooks of communication science*, *21* (pp. 3-35). Berlin: De Gruyter Moulton.

Livingstone, S., & Lunt, P. (2014) Mediatisation: An emerging paradigm for media and communication research? In K. Lundby (Ed.), *Mediatisation of communication. Handbooks of communication science,* 21 (pp. 703-723). Berlin: De Gruyter Moulton.

McCallum, K., & Waller, L. (in press). The dimensions of mediatized policymaking in Australian Indigenous affairs. *Communications: The European Journal of Communication*, *42*(2).

McCallum, K., & Waller, L. (2013). Media interventions in indigenous policymaking. *Media International Australia*, *149*, 139-149.

McChesney, R. W. (2015). *Rich media, poor democracy: Communication politics in dubious times.* New York: The New Press.

McNay, L. (2008). *Against recognition*. Cambridge: Polity.

McQuire, A. (2015a). Peak indigenous body acknowledges resistance to *Recognise* campaign. *New Matilda*. Retrieved from https://newmatilda.com/2015/02/20/peak-indigenous-bodyacknowledges-resistance-recognise-campaign

McQuire, A. (2015b). Online poll finds majority of black Australia opposed to *Recognise* campaign. *New Matilda*. Retrieved from: https://newmatilda.com/2015/02/20/peak-indigenous-bodyacknowledges-resistance-recognise-campaign

Meadows, M. (2001). *Voices in the wilderness: Images of Aboriginal people in the Australian media*. Westport: Greenwood.

Meadows, M. (2016). Dangerous dancing. A commentary on Australian Indigenous communication futures. *Media and Communication*, *4*(2), 33-37.

Medhora, S. (2015a, March 27). 73% of Australians want Indigenous recognition in constitution—Study. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/mar/27/75-of-australians-want-indigenous-recognition-in-constitution-study

Medhora, S. (2015b, July 7). Noel Pearson claims Indigenous summit on referendum 'stage-managed'. *The Guardian Australia*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jul/07/noel-pearson-claims-indigenous-summit-on-referendum-stage-managed

Medhora, S. (2015c, August 20). Tony Abbott changes mind, supports Indigenous meetings on recognition. *The Guardian Australia*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/aug/20/tony-abbott-changes-mind-supports-indigenous-meetings-on-recognition

Moscato, D. (2016). Media portrayals of hashtag activism: A framing analysis of Canada's #Idlenomore Movement. *Media and Communication*, *4*(2), 3-12.

Nielsen, R. (2014). Political communication research: New media, new challenges, and new opportunities. *MedieKultur*, *56*, 5-22.

Parker, D. (2015, July 6). Indigenous community voices must be heard in the recognise debate. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/06/a-historic-indigenous-meeting-is-taking-place-why-dont-we-know-whos-at-it

Parker, K. (2015, April 20). Is Indigenous constitutional recognition salvageable? We have to hope so. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/20/is-indigenous-constitutional-recognition-salvageable-we-have-to-hope-so

Pearson, L. (2015). *IndigenousX Constitutional recognition survey*. Retrieved from http://indigenousx.com.au/constitutional-recognition-survey

Povinelli, E. A. (2002). *The cunning of recognition: Indigenous alterities and the making of Australian multiculturalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Recognise. (2016). Retrieved from http://www.recognise.org.au

Recognise. (2015a, May 18). *An overwhelming 'Yes' if Recognise vote were held today*. Retrieved from http://www.recognise.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/5.-MR-ReadyTo*Recognise*18May2015.pdf

Recognise. (2015b). *We all have a responsibility to listen 24 July 2015*. Retrieved from http://www.recognise.org.au/blogs/polling

Salmon, C. T., & Glasser, T. L. (1995). The politics of polling and the limits of consent. In T. L. Glasser & C. T. Salmon (Eds.), *Public opinion and the communication of consent* (pp. 437-458). New York: Guilford.

Simpson, A. (2007). On ethnographic refusal: Indigeneity, 'voice' and colonial citizenship. *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue*, *9*, 67-80.

Simpson, A. (2010). Under the sign of sovereignty: Certainty, ambivalence, and law in native North America and Indigenous Australia. *Wicazo Sa Review*, *25*(2), 107-124.

Sky News. (2015, May 18). Indigenous referendum would pass. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/may/21/dont-rush-recognition-referendum-says-lnps-first-indigenous-senator

Sovereign Union. (2016). *Website*. Retrieved from http://www.sovereignunion.mobi

Splichal, S. (1999). *Public opinion: Developments and controversies in the twentieth century*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Sweet, M., Pearson, L., & Dudgeon, P. (2013). @IndigenousX: A case study of community-led innovation in digital media. *Media International Australia*, *149*, 104-111.

The Guardian. (2015a, January 25). *Australia Day: Tony Abbott promises not to neglect Indigenous recognition*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/26/tony-abbott-promises-indigenous-recognition-agenda

The Guardian. (2015b, May 25). *Indigenous people fear being left out of recognition debate, academic says*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/australianews/2015/may/25/indigenous-people-fear-being-left-out-of-constitutional-recognition-debateunsw-academic-says

Tingle, L. (2015, July 6). Path for indigenous recognition mapped out at historic meeting. *Australian Financial Review*. Retrieved from http://www.afr.com/news/politics/path-for-indigenous-recognition-mapped-out-at-historic-meeting-20150706-gi6847

Thorbjørnsrud, K., Figenschou, T., & Øyvind, I. (2014). Mediatization in public bureaucracies: A typology. *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research, 39*(1), 3-22.

Treré, E. (2016). The dark side of digital politics: Understanding the algorithmic manufacturing of consent and the hindering of online dissidence. *IDS Bulletin*, *47*(1), 127-138.

Voltmer, K., & Koch-Baumgarten, S. (2010). Introduction: Mass media and public policy—Is there a link? In S. Koch-Baumgarten & K. Voltmer (Eds.), *Public policy and mass media: The interplay of mass media and political decision-making* (pp. 1-13). London: Routledge.

Waller, L. (2013). It comes with the territory: 'Remote' Indigenous reporting for mainstream Australia. *Australian Journalism Monographs*, *14*, 5-38.

Waller, L., Dreher, T., & McCallum, K. (2015). The listening key: Unlocking the democratic potential of Indigenous participatory media. *Media International Australia*, *154*, 57-66.

About the Authors

Kerry McCallum is Senior Research Fellow in the News and Media Research Centre, University of Canberra. Her research focuses on the relationships between changing media and policy in Indigenous affairs.

Lisa Waller is a senior lecturer in the School of Communication and Creative Arts, Deakin University, Australia. Her research centres on news media and Indigeneity and conceptualizing the place of local news in the digital era.

Tanja Dreher is an ARC Future Fellow at the University of Wollongong. Tanja's research focuses on the politics of listening in the context of media and multiculturalism, Indigenous sovereignties, feminisms and anti-racism. Her current Fellowship analyses the political listening practices necessary to support the potential for voice in the context of proliferating community and alternative media in the digital age.

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183-2439)
2016, Volume 4, Issue 4, Pages 43-52
doi: 10.17645/mac.v4i4.693

Article

Free Software Beyond Radical Politics: Negotiations of Creative and Craft Autonomy in Digital Visual Media Production

Julia Velkova

Department of Media and Communication Studies, Södertörn University, 14189 Huddinge, Sweden;
E-Mail: julia.velkova@sh.se

Submitted: 16 January 2016 | Accepted: 27 February 2016 | Published: 11 August 2016

Abstract
Free software development and the technological practices of hackers have been broadly recognised as fundamental for the formation of political cultures that foster democracy in the digital mediascape. This article explores the role of free software in the practices of digital artists, animators and technicians who work in various roles for the contemporary digital visual media industries. Rather than discussing it as a model of organising work, the study conceives free software as a production tool and shows how it becomes a locus of politics about finding material security in flexible capitalism. This politics is ultimately contradictory in that it extends creative and craft autonomy of digital artists but does not mobilise a critical project. Instead, it nurtures further precarious labour. Empirically, the article draws on ethnographically collected material from the media practices of digital artists and programmers who engage with two popular free software production tools, Blender and Synfig.

Keywords
Blender; craft autonomy; F/OSS; media tools; material politics; media industries; open source software; post-Fordism; Synfig

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Political Agency in the Digital Age: Media, Participation and Democracy", edited by Anne Kaun (Södertörn University, Sweden), Maria Kyriakidou (University of East Anglia, UK) and Julie Uldam (Roskilde University, Denmark).

© 2016 by the author; licensee Cogitatio (Lisbon, Portugal). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

Media practices, such as free and open source software development, and the technological experiments of hackers have been broadly recognised as fundamental for the formation of political cultures that foster democracy in the digital mediascape. Their relevance for political agency today is expressed through the ability of actors who take part in these practices to reconfigure 'the material politics of cultural action' (Coleman, 2013, p. 185), primarily through introducing new 'entities' into the world (Söderberg, 2011, p. 23), and by making them public (Kelty, 2008). These entities can range from material objects that take the form of open hardware, such as self-made 3D printers (Söderberg, 2014), through writing an independent operating system (Coleman, 2013; Kelty, 2008), creating alternative institutions for intellectual property rights management, to experimenting with digital aesthetics and critical art projects (Morgan, 2013). In all these cases, politics is practised primarily through creatively engaging with building, modifying and maintaining technological equipment, an activity that resembles both public demonstrations of technical expertise and a way of arguing about technology with and through it (Kelty, 2008; Kubitschko, 2015).

Occasionally, the public entities and institutions that are brought to the world can inspire broader social groups to repurpose them for other goals and embed them in other practices, imbuing them with other meaning. Such cultural 'modulations' (Kelty, 2008, p. 242ff) of free software often represent forms of criticism, such as in the case of Indymedia, to make a case for alternative journalism (Atton, 2007; Lievrouw,

2011), its use by the open data movement (Baack, 2015), its use for creating alternative social media networks (Gehl, 2015) and the emergence of the Creative Commons licences for open cultural production (Coleman, 2013, p. 197ff). Free software also plays an important role among artistic minorities as a way to develop criticism of dominant regimes of ownership over digital 'materials', i.e. software used to make visual media (Morgan, 2013).

Despite the richness and importance of these studies, one of their limitations has been their focus on the uses of free software predominantly for political activism by social movements and creative minorities. However, free and open source software has also come to be increasingly integrated in the practices of corporate technological manufacturers like IBM, Google and Hollywood computer graphics giants Disney and Pixar. With regards to these developments, Kelty (2013) suggests that corporate use of free software threatens to make its critical potential 'sterile' by being equally easily put to use to mobilise counter-critical power that strengthens monopolies rather than to criticise them. At individual level, free software could also be used instrumentally for technical career advancement: 'for a great many software developers, toiling as they do in the richer veins of freelance precarity, it meant not having to rebuild the same damn thing over and over again with every upward career move' (Kelty, 2013). Kelty concludes that 'As open source becomes an instrumentalized kind of politics, the possibility of new beginnings fades'. Thus, the critical potential offered by free software seems to simultaneously flourish among activists, and get neutralised by its use in the media industries, converting it into a motor for new models of value creation (Barron, 2013).

This article seeks to broaden the scope of knowledge about the role of free software in the politics of digital media production by discussing its relevance for other actors, beyond activists, hackers or large media corporations. In particular it explores its value, use and development among computer graphics artists, designers and animators who work in a wide range of roles at small advertising agencies, visual effects and computer game and film production companies for the contemporary digital media industries, while occasionally engaging in projects on free culture and independent film making.

The material for this study comes from a large research project on the media practices of two free software computer graphics communities: those formed around the programs Blender for 3D animation and Synfig for 2D animation. The data has been collected through multi-sited ethnography and qualitative interviews with 35 visual media artists and developers. They were held between 2013 and 2015 and documented the use of these two programs for, predominantly, open and free cultural production (see Velkova, in press). As the large research project progressed, however, it became clear that the same producers who engage, for payment, in open cultural production and free software development also work in different roles for the media industries where they put the same media production tools to use. Some have worked on large projects such as the LEGO movie or Pixar's short films or for Rovio, who own the Angry Birds franchise. Others work for advertising agencies across Europe, develop animation for educational projects, or create independent and free culture films. Oscillating between two supposedly antagonistic fields of media production, by having a relation to the industries and to free culture projects, the empirical material that underpins this article represents a fruitful starting point to explore the broader value of free software as a media production tool beyond its uses for radical politics.

The approach I take here is to first briefly outline the work context in flexible capitalism using the overarching framework of Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) on the moral justifications that motivate society to engage in the ideology of capitalism. I then apply a narrow focus on digital media production and draw on Howard Becker's work on 'Art Worlds' (1982/2008) in order to discuss the role of materiality in creative practice, which I connect to the conditions of producing media in flexible capitalism.

The argument developed here is that free software for visual media production is conceived by media creators as a form of material capital that represents a source of creative emancipation and security in relation to their creative practice in the highly competitive media production environment. These forms of empowerment, however, are not mobilised to serve a broader critical political project, but represent individual pragmatic strategies to extend digital artists' creative autonomy in the media industries or establish links of equivalence with them while nurturing further precarity.

2. Media Production and Free Software in the New Spirit of Capitalism

Digital visual media production takes place today to a large extent in the context of post-Fordist work frameworks that promote 'creativity, reactivity and flexibility' (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007, p. 90) as core cultural values. In their seminal work on the transformations of capitalism between 1960 and 1990, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello advance the thesis that these values are not universal but rather manifestations of a new 'spirit' of capitalism. By 'spirit' they refer to a set of normative and moral rules that justify society's engagement in capitalism. These rules need to offer a promise of some form of autonomy and security for individuals while serving the common good. In terms of autonomy, Boltanski and Chiapello argue that there should exist an incentive for people to engage in the process of accumulation even if they will not necessarily enjoy the

main benefits of it. Individuals also need to feel some form of security for themselves and their children, while participation in accumulation needs to be justified as serving 'the common good which contributes to producing for everyone' (p. 8) and being just.

The transition to post-Fordism in the 1980s and 1990s is regarded by Boltanski and Chiapello as a specific point in capitalism when its justification apparatus is radically redefined. In terms of autonomy, the core values become 'the development of oneself and one's employability' (p. 111). The former emerges through the paradigm of constant improvement of skills, reputation, being adaptable, self-organised, and participate in novel and exciting projects. To become employable, workers need to know how to engage in a project and to remain 'adaptable, physically and intellectually mobile' (p. 112). Enhanced by networked communications, qualities such as flexibility and adaptability are argued to emerge from *activity* and *autonomy*, rather than from obedience and belonging to hierarchical structures. In this way, personal development as an option for 'everybody' serves the ideal of the common good, while contributing to broader processes of value production and its accumulation.

This spirit is particularly identifiable in the contemporary media industries and in the debates about autonomy and control of media work. These industries carry a strong allure for young people and creators promising work of greater social status, autonomy, personal expression, flexibility and self-actualisation (Mayer, 2014). To stimulate their employees' creativity, many media companies adopt an anti-corporate work culture and on occasions enable creators to develop a reputation of being an 'auteur' (Deuze, Martin, & Allen, 2007), a celebrity (Hesmondhalgh, 2009), or a person with broader public recognition (Mayer, 2014). At the same time, the organisational frameworks of production are dependent on constant rationalisation of labour in order to accelerate production and reduce costs, thus constraining the autonomy of creators and adjusting it to market demands. They do so by, first, transferring ever greater responsibility for personal artistic and technical skill development to individual creators and, second, by embedding creators in institutions of employment and regulatory systems of intellectual property that detach creators from their creations, converting their labour into an object of value extraction (Deuze, 2007; Huws, 2014; Stahl, 2010). In the latter context, free software development has been acknowledged to have a potential to bring change in terms of offering more efficient and less alienating ways of organising and managing media production (Benkler, 2006). These alternatives have nonetheless been questioned in terms of their financial viability (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010) and placed free software in the context of the free labour debates (Terranova, 2004), two issues that I have engaged with and nuanced extensively elsewhere (Velkova & Jakobsson, 2015).

In the context of digital media production, free labour has been discussed largely in terms of the unpaid work that media users perform by producing content in various online contexts, work that is valorised by the media industries (see for example Bolin, 2012; Hesmondhalgh, 2010; van Dijck, 2009). However, unpaid work has always been integral to certain spheres such as those of social reproduction (Jarrett, 2016) or cultural production (Hesmondhalgh, 2010, p. 277). In these spheres, free labour can be regarded not only in terms of paid or unpaid, but also as good and bad, just and unjust (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010). For example, the internship systems in the media industries today are largely unjust, but unpaid labour as such has always been part of the process of developing skills, ranging from learning to play music instruments to programming, computer graphics and game development (Hesmondhalgh, 2010). Rather than being unjust, the latter forms of free labour stem from the dependency of cultural production on materiality and are addressed in part by Howard Becker (1982/2008) in his work on the sociology of art production. I will discuss this dependency later.

Free software producers are also able to engage in the valorisation of their products (Velkova & Jakobsson, 2015), something which, as Barron (2013) shows, has transformed it from a critical practice to a distilled form of the 'spirit' of contemporary capitalism. Converting technology into global software commons, free software enables autonomy and project mobility for everyone, serving the common good. What it falls short of, Barron concludes, is to guarantee security to those who engage in its development, thus paving the way for new forms of criticism.

Indeed, security is what Boltanski and Chiapello dismiss as the new 'spirit' of capitalism not offering enough solutions to. The main security that projects or companies can offer to individuals today is development of personal capital that could help employability in future projects and initiatives.

However, as I will argue, free software could represent a specific form of security, that of *material security*, that enables media creators who engage in using and developing it to also gain a form of creative autonomy, namely craft autonomy. In order to understand how this happens, we need to take a different perspective on free software and approach it as a *media production tool* rather than a *model of organising work*. This article therefore continues by exploring more deeply the relationship between technology and digital media creators rather than that between individuals and the broader organisational structures of media production.

3. Materials for Media Production

Employability and participation in media projects is largely predicated on the creativity and technical skills of creators, whose practice in turn develops in relation to the materials, or tools, available to them. In the cur-

rent 'spirit' of flexible capitalism, media creators need to be adaptable and flexible not only in relation to the organisations or projects that they work on; their possibility to sell their work or develop criticism also depends on the flexibility and creative autonomy that the technologies they work with can offer them.

From this perspective, creators of media are not only integrated in structures of employment, nation state politics, or networks of peers, but also in the specific logics of technology with which they interact daily and in which they are embedded at multiple levels. The sociology of art proposed by Howard Becker (1982/2008) offers some insights into how to understand these entanglements in relation to creative autonomy. In his discussion of art as collective action, Becker emphasises that creators' choice of materials affects the work they do (p. 71). Materiality forms a crucial part of the production of artistic works:

> "Musical instruments, paints and canvas, dancers' shoes and costumes, cameras and film—all these have to be made and made available to the people who use them to produce art works." (Becker, 1982/2008, p. 3)

In the case of producing specialised media, e.g. digital visual media, creators need materials that are designed and manufactured specifically for them. Becker argues that since the manufacturing of specialised items is so technical a specialty, the artists who use them cannot in most cases produce the items themselves. Despite the fact that manufacturers try to be sensitive to the needs of the creators of a particular medium, they may fail to satisfy those who try to innovate in the medium: 'How much conventional materials constrain an artist depends on how monopolistic the market is', he argues (p. 73). Through this argument Becker establishes a link between technical innovation, creative autonomy and the frameworks of creation and distribution of materials. The fewer manufacturers that dominate the market, he argues, the more insensitive they become to what artistic minorities want or need. Occasionally, artistic minorities can revert to the craft of making their own materials, or of customising existing ones if faced with the threat of discontinuing the material against which creators have developed their skill, if they want more than the available materials can provide or if materials to satisfy a creative impulse are not available (Becker, 1982/2008, p. 71ff)

It is in this context, and rather pragmatic considerations about individual strategies to develop creative practice, that free software emerges as a tool of high value among media professionals, digital artists and aspiring media workers. The next section substantiates this point through a discussion of the emergence of two popular free software tools for computer graphics production, Blender and Synfig.

4. Crafting Technical Autonomy: The Blender and Synfig Free Software Projects

The free software discussed here, Blender for 3D animation and sculpting and Synfig for 2D vector animation, were conceived as digital tools that would enable their creators to exercise a greater degree of craftsmanship, innovation and autonomy in the medium. They also represent the free software alternatives for professional animation production to programs such as 3D Studio Max, Adobe After Effects, Anime Studio and Maya.

The 3D animation software Blender and the 2D Synfig were initiated by two industrial designers, one living in Europe and the other in the US, who had ambitions to make large-scale independent animation projects of Hollywood class. Despite having notable differences in their focus of specialisation, and being incepted at different points of time, with Blender having its roots in the late 1980s and Synfig in the mid-1990s, both were conceived as in-house programs developed within two small commercial animation studios. After facing bankruptcy in the early 2000s, both projects emerged as free software through very particular processes of de-commodification (Velkova & Jakobsson, 2015).

In the case of Blender, the need to start developing an independent program emerged from the ambition of its creator, Ton Roosendaal, to align with the industrial practices of 3D technological development:

> "3D is specialist…it is so specialist….any big studio who does animation—or visual effects—they depend for the most of it on their own, in-house software development. They are not going to buy all their applications—and even when they buy some stuff, they want to have the code. Because they can't depend on a software, submit a bug, then wait for two weeks for a bug fix to come in while a thousand people are waiting, right? That's kind of… at that level your IT, your information systems have to be under control…." (Ton Roosendaal, interview, 2014)

Blender emerged from its author's desire to have complete control over the development, changes to and possible extensions of a computer program, 'a digital tool' that would enable its creator to adapt it and mould it to his own creative ambitions.

Until the mid-1990s, software for computer graphics development was distributed as an add-on to very expensive hardware that media creators anyway needed to invest in. The computer industry restructured in the late 1990s. With computing power becoming cheaper and more ubiquitous, companies began developing business models around selling, and more recently renting specialised software for computer graphics production. The changes in the politics of distribution of software for computer graphics production

have been experienced as constraining creativity, experimentation and large-scale projects by small studios and individual digital artists:

> "[In the 1990s] the hardware cost money, but once you had it, you could do anything—we were getting CDs with Silicon Graphics code! It was proprietary stuff, but it didn't prevent us from making things with it….Computer graphics is about openness, because you can build on everyone else's developments. Once you get a patent or close it—people find a way around it." (notes from informal conversation with Ton Roosendaal, May 2015)

Hence, the experiences of material constraints to continue experimenting with computer graphics led Blender's creator to find a way round them by re-licensing his program as free software as a strategy to retain technological and creative independence and let the program grow by allowing other digital artists to contribute to it:

> "open source is about developing your own software. So the best model [to develop computer graphics]….OK, not the best, the Blender open source model is the in-house software model." (Ton Roosendaal, interview, August 2014)

Similar concerns drove the development of Synfig. Its founder Robert Quattlebaum wanted to rationalise one of the most laborious tasks in 2D animation creation, tweening, and adapt the software to his own creative ambitions:

> "Our goal was to write a tool that could be used for the production of feature-film quality 2D animation….In traditional animation, the senior animators use the storyboards to create the keyframes for each shot. The junior animators then use these keyframes as guides for making all of the frames in between—which is called tweening. Tweening is a time-consuming and labour-intensive (and thus expensive) process. However, it is also rather mechanical. So that was the original idea from day one—the elimination of the tweening process… While Synfig has been used in production, the animators using it had the benefit of having the primary developer sitting behind them. That counts for a lot." (OS News, 2006)

After its de-commodification in the mid-2000s, and conversion into a free software project, Synfig's development was driven forward primarily by one self-taught animator, Konstantin Dmitriev, from the city of Gorno-Altaysk in Southern Siberia, Russia. For him, Synfig, represented a technology that with some further development could fulfil his creative idea of making a large-scale independent feature-length animation film.

In search of style, his work had begun with proprietary programs such as 3D Studio Max but after some time he experienced a limitation in scale: 'the more I complicated a scene, the less controllable it became…', he explained. Facing in this way a constraint to innovate in the medium, instead of trying to adapt his practice to the technical limitations of the tool, he switched to experimenting with free software as a way to adjust technology to the scale of his creative ideas. Initially he tested Blender, an experience which he describes as largely affective:

> "What shocked me in Blender the first time I used it was that it had layers…layers existed in many other types of programs at that time, but not in 3D…this was so daring, to do layers in a 3D program, I had never seen such a thing before." (Konstantin, interview, January 2015)

While improving his skills in Blender, Konstantin also specialised in 2D animation in parallel with using proprietary programs until their development frameworks collided with his own work process. The manufacturer of the 2D animation program Moho discontinued its development under Linux, which had gradually become Konstantin's main platform. The impossibility to use this software as a production tool caused him great anxiety:

> "I liked the fact that everything (in Moho) was under my control. But nobody was supporting it…then I realised what dependencies proprietary software was creating. It is not about the cost, it is about the dependency." (Konstantin, interview, November 2014)

Since then he has focused his efforts on studying and developing the free software Synfig, which he integrated at the core of his creative practice, and multiple projects ranging from free-lancing work to education and independent free culture production (Velkova, 2014).

Both Konstantin's and Ton's choices to invest their time in developing Synfig and Blender respectively emerged out of explicitly pragmatic concerns related to the possibilities to create within frameworks of their own making and under their own control. This form of engagement with technology has been referred to, in the contexts of free software development and hacker cultures, as forms of establishing 'craft autonomy' (Coleman, 2016), one that fosters skill and expertise, but also sensibilities similar to pre-industrial, craft-like engagement with technology. The emergence of these two programs for visual media production is also an indication that constraints to creativity imposed by the politics of creation and distribution of media production tools continue to be a topic of high concern even in digital media contexts, and lead to reactions similar to those that have always been historically present in artistic practice (see Becker 1982/2008, pp. 71-77).

Despite the freedom of creative expression which developing autonomous media production tools granted to their creators, it also constrained their autonomy in new ways. In order to fulfil their ideas they needed to motivate more people to adopt these technologies and contribute to the free software projects in order to let them grow in functionality. Both Blender and Synfig faced the problem that, instead of developing art projects, they needed to develop frameworks to train or convince other people to use these technologies. As Becker (1982/2008, p. 74) points out, when creators go about developing their own materials, they need to spend time in developing their material precursors and knowledge frameworks instead of working on making art. There is no space in this article to discuss in detail the strategies employed in these cases, but for the present argument it is enough to say that Blender succeeded in creating a large user base on a greater scale than Synfig and is today embraced to a greater extent by animators, digital artists and technical artists who use it for a broad range of purposes. Uses range from experimental concept art projects through developing 3D printing models to experiments with novel forms of artistic collaboration; from open culture projects to the production of special effects, games, animation, and simulations for the media industries.

The variety of uses which it finds implies that the public nature of free software represents a source of value and craft autonomy for a broad range of actors and purposes. The next section discusses three main ways in which digital media artists find meaning in these tools and illustrates how they reconcile craft and creative autonomy with efficiency, independence, ultimately securing *materially* their creativity.

5. Sensibilities of Craft

Every media creator has a unique work process. The more creators develop their skill, the stronger the connection established to the tools they use, as this skill is shaped through practice which is anchored in the materialities of technologies, even in the case of digital ones.

French free-lancing illustrator and digital comic artist David Revoy recalls how he used to work with proprietary digital production tools such as Corel Painter, Manga Studio, Photoshop Elements and CS2. After upgrading to a newer computer and a newer version of a proprietary operating system, all these tools stopped working: 'I had to do a lot of horrible hack to make all my software run on it, but it wasn't [as] stable as it was on Xp anymore. I had to reboot almost twice a day' (Revoy, 2013). From a tool that automates and mediates creative expression, media production software can become an artifact with 'agential' (Paasonen, 2015) properties that may, for a time, leave the user powerless. Faced with the choice of either re-purchasing all his programs to match the new operating system and hardware, reverting to the older computer and operating system, or doing something completely different, Revoy (2013) chose to move to free software: 'I thought all of this circus couldn't work in the long term and wasn't happy…. I switched my machine to a full open-source system around 2009…thinking open-source could work on the long term.'

The result of this move was not explained in terms of economic gains, but in the qualitative difference related to a new degree of creative autonomy and security gained in relation to technology:

> "I really like the independence I get from it: I can install it on laptops, every machine, upgrade, downgrade, fine-tune it. This independence is gold. The con is that I'm now dependent on 'Linux' compatible [hardware]. Which is not easy to find and not well documented." (Revoy, 2013)

If, for David, free software was initially a way to reduce his material and creative dependency from technological frameworks out of his control, for other media producers switching to free software has been a way to increase their work efficiency.

Hjalti, an animator from Iceland who has worked for many years in the advertising industry, encountered Blender by chance after many years of using the popular package 3D Studio Max. He adopted Blender in his practice out of a desire to collaborate on a commercial campaign with a colleague of his who had it as a tool of his choice. He discusses his initial experience of learning Blender as an agony that has been worth it:

> "I was throwing my keyboard at the screen for the first couple of weeks or whatever, but once you get over it you start to realise why it makes sense. Why pressing G is already moving an object…instead of like having a widget that you press on…it's because it's faster. It just cuts a lot of steps out of the way. Which adds up. So you start doing things a little faster. And smoother. And then of course you can customise everything you want now after Blender 2.5. Which I do, a lot." (Hjalti, animator, interview, August 2014)

Later versions of Blender and Hjalti becoming more experienced with it allowed him to adapt it to his own work process in a way that increased his working speed. In practice this meant adjusting small details, such as the position of his hands which he wanted to keep static while working. Until moving to Blender, whenever he needed to change perspectives on the screen while animating, the program interface would require him to move his hand to the keypad on the right side of his keyboard. He experienced this as a constraint to be efficient:

> "I am doing it every 10 seconds. And take one second to let go of my mouse, I am losing valuable time, you know, after 15 hours or whatever…and it also breaks your concentration. Because your eye, your thought process has to go into that motion instead of just keeping going, doing what you are supposed to be doing." (Hjalti, animator, interview, August 2014)

After version 2.5 of Blender it was easier for its users to customise their work processes to a great degree. Hjalti used this possibility to assign his own commands in such a way that he would no longer need to move his hands away from the keyboard while working. Such a seemingly minor detail was very important for him as regards experiencing a sense of craft:

> "That's when it becomes really beautiful. When the tool itself doesn't become a hurdle, you are just doing something and it's an extension of you….So you can do something, you can adjust something, it's intuitive. It is muscle memory. Which is really awesome." (Hjalti, animator, interview, August 2014)

This example shows how free software as a production tool is conductive to frameworks of rationalising production, and personal skill development while maintaining a strong sense of autonomy among its users. This combination ultimately gives a competitive advantage in the media industries' labour market. Of course, possibilities for customisation exist in other software too yet, in line with Becker's argument about the constraints of materials, the limits to which free software allows creators to adapt technology to their everyday practice depends more on individual technical skill and creative ideas than on the production frameworks and affordances set by software manufacturers.

Besides reducing dependencies and increasing efficiency, many digital artists value free software for its infinite adaptability and extensibility. In the spring of 2014, a free-lancing animator and a technical artist from Costa Rica worked on a 4-second shot for the teaser for a larger free culture animation film project. The shot was supposed to show a green caterpillar blinking. The animator wanted the caterpillar's pupils to resemble the facial features of the main character in the animation film. They were using Blender for this production task and found that it did not have the technical capacity to animate the desired effect. The technical artist came up with a concept for how the problem could be solved and delved into the program code: 'I started hacking a python script to automate this ^_^. At about 3:00am it actually worked!'. He shared the script and the technical details online with the following comment:

> "Beware it's a production script and as such it doesn't have a nice UI or anything and you might need to change a couple of names in the first few lines :)." (Salazar, 2014)

In this case, the animation process was very similar to hacking. Hackers, artists and free software developers have come to be described as 'craftspeople' who have resisted the general decline of craft in the Western that came with the dominance of Fordist styles of production (Coleman, 2016).

A common metaphor frequently used among the digital artists who were interviewed was to compare working with free software to the work of painters from pre-industrial craft production: 'It is more like the old painters who made their paint themselves. Mixing the ingredients and building their paint themselves', Timothée Giet, a comic illustrator explained. In these cases, the possibilities to craft and mould their own tools blur the separation between art and craft, techne and poiesis:

> "Free software matches very good with the artistic idea because no artist wants to be locked into what they can do—a lot of the process of making art is about making the tools." (Bassam, animation director, archived blog post, 2014)

The above examples illustrate how free software strengthens feelings of creative autonomy in their users by being flexible and adaptable to individual needs for creativity, efficiency and material independence. In their totality, these experiences construct free software as a source of individual material security and capital that allows digital artists to gain competitive creative advantage in the post-Fordist media industry frameworks. With the increased transfer of responsibility over skills development to individual media creators, the choice of technology becomes an investment that can increase media producers' mobility and employability in different projects. At the same time, while free software stimulates a craft-like engagement with technology, it illuminates how the values of personal self-development, flexibility and security of the new 'spirit' of capitalism become embedded in digital artists' technological choices. The problem to which the latter leads is that the security and autonomy that controlling and extending free software digital tools gives may decrease criticism of some problematic aspects of the post-Fordist production frameworks, e.g. precarity of labour. As the next section will show, while digital artists strengthen their creativity and material security through free software, they further nurture precarity of work.

6. Tools Development as a Source of Precarity

Once digital artists identify free software as tools of value to them, they employ different strategies to attempt to further shape and adapt the programs to their indi-

vidual needs. Those artists who are unable to code (and they constitute a majority), or do not want to dedicate time to code, resort to financial and rhetorical means to convince programmers to do the work for them. Below I discuss three dominant ways in which this can happen.

6.1. Hiring a Developer

The technical possibility to extend Blender for other purposes than those intended by its original creator emerged from a technical artist's need to rationalise his process of work at a wealthy media production company. He attempted to find a less costly and more flexible alternative to a professional 3D program that could satisfy the production needs of the company: 'I got Blender and I started extending it', he remembers. He admits that his programming skills were not good, so he hired a programmer from Canada to come to Australia to do the extension for him:

> "Well, no, I didn't know how to program, like—I was, I was artist, so—I was OK, making stuff with the mouse. But I knew some programmers so I got them to program…I hired them to program. I had one of the Blender developers come over to my house, doing internship with me, so I got him to program so it was like—the artist and developer thing happening." (technical artist, interview, 2014)

The functional extensions made at that time entered the core of Blender and made it possible for other artists to further develop the program. While representing a contribution to the common good, the possibility that free software opens for an artist to hire a developer changes the artist's status. From being a wage-earner who sells his or her work to the industry, the artist can become an employer who creates small, temporary jobs for programmers. By offering programmers temporary projects, digital artists mirror the frameworks of the media industries by outsourcing jobs with the promise of personal development, employability and a wage, for the common good. Hence, while free software represents a source of material security for artists, it becomes a source of work insecurity for developers, further nurturing precarity.

6.2. Becoming a Financial Patron of a Project

Another common strategy used by artists to influence the general direction of free software tools development is to become a financial patron of the project. This can happen by making small donations to the free software projects in order to buy developer time to develop the project in the direction they want.

A free-lancing animator from Sweden who specialises in cut-out animation which he sells to the Nordic advertising and film industries explained how he could make small financial donations to Synfig to push its development in the direction he needed. His principle has been to donate 3-4 per cent of his income from commercial projects to the free software projects he uses, with occasional higher donations in order to set a priority for the development of a specific feature. He remembered during a conversation we had how he once paid a few hundred euros to the project to speed up the development of a specific function in Synfig that he needed in his work for the industry.

This form of exercising influence over the broader technical development of the project turns digital artists into patrons who become connecting links between a media project (be it for the industry or not), the creative visions of an artist and the technical community that can be convinced to prioritise the development of a feature.

6.3. Motivating Developers

When artists do not have financial means to invest in a project, they resort to rhetorical means to motivate a developer to do the job for them for free, an approach that is the driver of major disputes in the communities formed around free software tools.

Digital artists can request features and extensions directly from the programs' main developers. Mobilising rhetoric and prototypes of unfinished media projects in order to illustrate the need to improve software in a particular direction, these interactions become the locus of many tensions and conflicts. In some cases, feature requests are welcomed and fulfilled, but in most cases they are ignored:

> "We get far, far more requests than we even have time to read. Also, these requests vary in quality. People may explain features in detail, which we already have….People ask for very specific stuff…'I'm using Blender for an interactive blah blah and it's draw modes don't work for me because…etc'…. People who use Blender for ten minutes and don't like colour also post…" (Blender developer, interview, December 2014)

This example illustrates the fact that despite gaining a greater technical autonomy, free software makes digital artists deeply embedded in the social dynamics surrounding the maintenance and development of their tools of choice. Those artists who manage to convince the developers of the importance of their request are usually those who are most active in the media industries and have concrete, urgent needs:

> "I was already doing graphics that were watched by millions, and I started falling in love with [Blender] because it is so versatile. And plus I really liked the idea that you could change the program….That's

what sold me on Blender. Wasn't the interface, wasn't the toolset, it was just the fact that you could change it. That made the case that even if you are not happy with it, if you argue for your case well, you can actually get changes to it." (Beorn, animator, interview by BlenderGuru.com, 2014)

Hence, a rhetorical approach anchored in a concrete project for the media industries can become the equivalent of a financial donation as its fulfilment may bring value for a broader range of digital artists while satisfying individual creative demands.

7. Conclusions

The empirical examples discussed in this article show that free software's role in the politics of digital media production should be understood as individual strategies to find material security and extend personal creative and craft autonomy through technological choices. Approaching free software as a tool, rather than as a form of organising work, allowed the degree to which digital media creators' creative autonomy is configured to be illuminated in relation to the affordances, mouldability and degree of control over the programs that they use in their everyday creative practice. The main issues which artists used to struggle with in the past, as described by Becker (1982/2008), such as dependency on materials and the frameworks of their production, changes in the politics of their distributions, and not least, their affordances, remain highly relevant in the contemporary digital mediascape.

Drawing on Becker, the article conceived free software as a strategy to develop one's own materials and independent frameworks of production in response to changes in the political economy of software distribution. In Becker's framework, such an approach has been commonly used by artistic minorities. This article has shown that free software can resemble this approach by becoming relevant for a broader range of users, beyond creative minorities, in particular those working in different roles for the contemporary media industries. Free software as a source of value for digital artists is thus about meaningful, and not ideological, self-realisation (cf Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010, p. 180ff). In the new 'spirit' of capitalism that promotes self-development and outsources the responsibility for skill development to media producers, the ability to shape technology according to distinct creative ideas becomes an individual strategy to remain flexible and competitive.

The specific ways in which artists find meaning from using free software as a production tool are in bringing their work to a form of pre-industrial craft, and saturating their work with an attitude described by Peter Dormer as: 'you get the best out of the computer and its software if you are able to drive the tool rather than being driven by it' (Dormer, 1997, p. 146). The senses of craft autonomy developed through free software are, importantly, not mobilised for a broader critical or political project for social change, but are rather pragmatic, rooted in strategies to influence technological development in ways that benefit one's individual work practice. As a consequence, digital artists inscribe further the values of the new 'spirit' of capitalism, embedding them in the free software tools that they use and develop.

Finally, in crafting security and autonomy for themselves, digital artists do not offset some of the negative effects of flexible capitalism, such as the shift of responsibility for skill, personal development and finding work onto individual creators. Rather, their practices further nurture precarity of labour by them becoming employers or patrons of other groups of creative workers, such as hackers and software developers. Further research could fruitfully explore the practice of media workers hiring developers to code functionality for them and study whether such engagements create new hierarchies or forms of exclusion, or whether they are a positive source of pleasure from digital work that enhances autonomy and creativity in the digital media industries.

Acknowledgements

This article has greatly benefitted from the comments and close readings of Patrik Åker, Göran Bolin, Johan Fornäs, Peter Jakobsson and Fredrik Stiernstedt, as well as the two anonymous reviewers. Special thanks go to Paško Bilić and Dina Vozab, the Croatian Sociological Association, as well as the ECREA Doctoral Summer School 2015 for providing me with a platform to develop the first drafts of this contribution.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

Atton, C. (2007). Alternative media in practice: The Indymedia network. In K. Coyer, T. Dowmunt, & A. Fountain (Eds.), *The alternative media handbook* (pp. 71-78). New York: Routledge.

Baack, S. (2015). Datafication and empowerment: How the open data movement re-articulates notions of democracy, participation, and journalism. *Big Data & Society*, *2*(2).

Barron, A. (2013). Free software production as critical social practice. *Economy and Society*, *42*(4), 597-625.

Becker, H. S. (2008). *Art worlds*. London: University of California Press. (Original work published 1982)

Benkler, Y. (2006). *The wealth of networks how social production transforms markets and freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Bolin, G. (2012). The Labour of media use. *Information, Communication & Society*, *15*(6), 796-814.

Boltanski, L., & Chiapello, È. (2007). *The new spirit of capitalism*. London: Verso.

Coleman, G. (2013). *Coding freedom: The ethics and aesthetics of hacking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Coleman, G. (2016). Hackers. In B. Peters (Ed.), *Keywords: A vocabulary of information society and culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Deuze, M. (2007). *Media work*. Cambridge: Polity.

Deuze, M., Martin, C. B., & Allen, C. (2007). The professional identity of gameworkers. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, *13*(4), 335-353.

Dormer, P. (1997). *The culture of craft: Status and future*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Gehl, R. W. (2015). The case for alternative social media. *Social Media + Society*, *1*(2), 1-12.

Hesmondhalgh, D. (2009). *The cultural industries* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.

Hesmondhalgh, D. (2010). User-generated content, free labour and the cultural industries. *Ephemera*, *10*(3/4), 267-284.

Hesmondhalgh, D., & Baker, S. (2010). *Creative labour: Media work in three cultural industries*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Huws, U. (2014). *Labor in the global digital economy: The cybertariat comes of age*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Jarrett, K. (2016). *Feminism, labour and digital media: The digital housewife*. New York: Routledge.

Kelty, C. M. (2008). *Two bits: The cultural significance of free software*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Kelty, C. M. (2013). There is no free software. *Journal of Peer Production*, *3*. Retrieved from http://peerproduction.net/issues/issue-3-free-software-epistemics/debate/there-is-no-free-software

Kubitschko, S. (2015). Hackers' media practices: Demonstrating and articulating expertise as interlocking arrangements. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, *21*(3), 388-402.

Lievrouw, L. A. (2011). *Alternative and activist new media*. Cambridge: Polity.

Mayer, V. (2014). Creative work is still work. *Creative Industries Journal*. doi:10.1080/ 17510694.2014.892286

Morgan, T. (2013). Sharing, hacking, helping: Towards an understanding of digital aesthetics through a survey of digital art practices in Ireland. *Journal of Media Practice*, *14*(2), 147-160.

OS News. (2006). Interview with Synfig's Robert Quattlebaum. Retrieved from http://www.osnews.com/story/13241

Paasonen, S. (2015). As networks fail: Affect, technology, and the notion of the user. *Television & New Media, 16*(8), 701-716.

Revoy, D. (2013, May 1). Why I use open-source? Retrieved from http://www.davidrevoy.com/article170/the-choice-of-open-source

Salazar, D. (2014). Caterpillar making of—Animating UVs. Retrieved from https://gooseberry.blender.org/caterpillar-making-of-animating-uvs

Söderberg, J. (2011). *Free software to open hardware: Critical theory on the frontiers of hacking* (Doctoral dissertation). Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.

Söderberg, J. (2014). The cunning of instrumental reason: Reproducing wealth without money one 3D printer at a time. In J. Söderberg & S. Maxigas (Eds.), *Book of peer production* (pp. 46-58). Gothenburg and Århus: NSU Press.

Stahl, M. (2010). Cultural labor's 'democratic deficits': Employment, autonomy and alienation in US film animation. *Journal for Cultural Research*, *14*(3), 271-293.

Terranova, T. (2004). *Network culture: Politics for the information age*. London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press.

van Dijck, J. (2009). Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content. *Media, Culture & Society*, *31*(1), 41-58.

Velkova J. (2014). Two weeks in Siberia with Morevna Project, open-source animation tools, and Animé. Retrieved from http://phd.nordkonst.org/?p=84

Velkova, J. (in press). Ethnography of open cultural production: From participant observation to multi-sited participatory communication. In N. Wildermuth & T. Ngomba (Eds.), *Methodological reflections on researching communication and/for social change.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Velkova, J., & Jakobsson P. (2015). At the intersection of commons and market: Negotiations of value in open-sourced cultural production. *International Journal of Cultural Studies, August*, 1-17.

About the Author

Julia Velkova is a PhD candidate in Media and Communication Studies at Södertörn University in Stockholm, Sweden. In her dissertation project she explores forms of autonomy, value creation and power enacted within techno-artistic practices that are centred on building independent media production infrastructures and content. Her broader research interests are on computer cultures, the politics of infrastructure and internet governance.

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183-2439)
2016, Volume 4, Issue 4, Pages 53-62
doi: 10.17645/mac.v4i4.694

Article

No Digital "Castles in the Air": Online Non-Participation and the Radical Left

Linus Andersson

Media and Communication Studies, School of Health and Welfare, Halmstad University, 30118 Halmstad, Sweden;
E-Mail: linus.andersson@hh.se

Submitted: 11 January 2016 | Accepted: 26 March 2016 | Published: 11 August 2016

Abstract
This article presents results from a study of online presence in activist milieus associated with the radical left in Sweden discussed from a perspective of non-participation. With the aim to further the understanding of digital non-participation as communicative strategy in activism, it builds upon empirical findings and argues that the online practices and use of social media, as could be observed in milieus associated with the radical left, indicates active non-participation and that this, in turn, is related to the ambition to claim autonomy. The article draws from existing scholarship on critical perspectives on protest movements and social media as well as empirical examples of online content published by radical leftist groups. Furthermore, it analyses how these activities could be understood in terms of active and passive non-participation, abstention or adaptation to social media affordances, as well as implosion of the social in digital media. The findings suggest that much of the activities in the material could be described as active non-participation and that this media practice relates to ideological positioning and values in the milieu.

Keywords
activism; digital media; non-participation; online media; radical left

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Political Agency in the Digital Age: Media, Participation and Democracy", edited by Anne Kaun (Södertörn University, Sweden), Maria Kyriakidou (University of East Anglia, UK) and Julie Uldam (Roskilde University, Denmark).

© 2016 by the author; licensee Cogitatio (Lisbon, Portugal). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

Ten years ago, "cyber-protest" usually meant active engagement with digital online media by protest- or activist groups (e.g. van de Donk, 2004). However, with the present development and proliferation of online digital media, the question of how to understand political agency in relation to online media practices has become less obvious. Following heady narratives about "Facebook revolutions" and "revolutions 2.0", there has emerged a literature where more critical perspectives on protest movements and social media are presented (e.g. Cammaerts, Mattoni, & McCurdy, 2013; Dencik & Leistert, 2015). This approach has turned its attention to a number of tensions and contradictions that come with the use of social media for social change, including issues such as surveillance and censorship (Hintz, 2015; Redden, 2015), affordances of individualism (Fenton & Barassi, 2011), commodification of users and systemic constraints (Fuchs, 2011; Leistert, 2015), and, affordances of connectivity versus the need for anonymity in activist groups (Treré, 2015).

This article is based on the findings from a previous study of online presence of the radical left in Sweden (Swedish Media Council, 2014). The ambition is to address some of the conflicts above and connect them to a recent discussion about online non-participation as a strategy (Casemajor, Couture, Delfin, Goerzen, & Delfanti, 2015), with the purpose to contribute to our understanding of non-participation. My argument is that the online practices and use of social media as could be observed in milieus associated with the radical left indicates active non-participation and that this, in turn, is related to a political ambition to claim autonomy.

The argument is structured as follows: After a brief background about the nature of the study I will discuss the theoretical concepts *participation*, *empowerment* and *autonomy* and present the analytical framework, followed by notes on method. The analytical part is structured from three themes: active and passive non-participation, abstention and adaptation, and implosion of the social. The paper ends with a discussion about the possibilities for the concept online non-participation and its implications for further, empirical studies.

1.1. Background

In contrast to much of what has been published about social movements and online media, the study from which the material in this article was taken could be described as a propaganda study (Jowett & O'Donell, 1999) designed to chart "anti-democratic and pro-violent messages on the internet" (Swedish Media Council, 2014). It was conducted by the Swedish Media Council and initiated by the Swedish government as part of an "Action Plan for Protecting Democracy against Pro-Violence Extremism". The task was to describe where and what type of messages could be found online that publicly propagated for ideologically motivated violent action, and what could be said about recruitment strategies in this material. The question was not what these groups do or why, but how they present their activity and cause publicly. Much of the aim, design, and scope of the study were defined by the commissioner, which meant that the findings are limited to a quite narrow area of investigation. It is not a study of social movements in general, but of a small autonomous or anarchist fraction of the radical left who publicly display an apologetic sentiment toward violence. Nor is it a study exclusively about corporate social media, but more broadly defined online media that includes organization web sites.

The findings showed that the radical left, at least in the sense as was defined by the assignment, were sparse users of online digital media for dissemination of propaganda; in contrast to the other groups included in the study, especially the extreme right. Instead, they seemed to be quite reluctant in adapting to online communication. While the original study did not include measures for examining non-participation, the results were of a kind that activates questions about participation/non-participation dynamics that motivates a review of these findings in a new theoretical context.

2. Online Non-Participation

Lately, the scholarly interest in the issue of online non-participation and disconnection has increased (Cammaerts, 2008; Kaun & Schwarzenegger, 2014; Portwood-Stacer, 2013; Selwyn, 2003). While much of the focus of these studies has been on individual motivations for abstention, attention has also been drawn to non-participation as a form of activism (Casemajor et al., 2015), as well as an interest in the decline of certain types of online radical politics (Wolfson, 2014). Still, the greater part of the literature that has surfaced since the Arabic spring, the Occupy-, and Los Indignados-movement tends to focus on connectivity, online presence and participation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Gerbaudo, 2012; Hands, 2011). In this section I will look into some of the theories and models of participation and discuss theoretical foundations for understanding digital non-participation in terms of strategy or protest. Online media here refers to those channels and services where messages and content is made public on the web; either in the case with social networking sites, or in other forms of user-generated content, what used to be called web 2.0. Hence, forms of private or non-public online communication such as e-mail or direct messages are not included in this definition. The reason is that the original study focused on public messages that were easily accessible and published with the intent to reach an audience.

2.1. Social Implosion and Interpassivity

The idea of non-participation as empowering in relation to media has been part of what could be described as a postmodern critique of social theory, especially as articulated by Jean Baudrillard (1988). Even if Baudrillard's work does not present a scholarship that offers verifiable theories, some observations and concepts have proven useful figures of thought and Baudrillard was early to assess the affordances of an abundant information society. One such concept that he addressed both politically and philosophically was the issue of media-related non-participation. In the essay "The Masses: The implosion of the social in the media" (Baudrillard, 1988), Baudrillard introduced the idea that non-participation should be understood as a rational and effective response to a power structure that fostered a hypocritical form of non-communication:

> "I would no longer interpret in the same way the forced silence of the masses in the mass media. I would no longer see in it a sign of passivity and of alienation, but to the contrary an original strategy, an original response in the form of a challenge." (Baudrillard, 1988, p. 208)

Non-participation in this context is not understood as hampered citizenship, but as rational and empowering, a position that finds resonance in more recent accounts of non-participation (Casemajor et al., 2015). The challenge is directed toward a system that requires of its population a symbolic engagement: to have opinions, to be well-informed, to make conscious choices.

What Baudrillard opposes is the equation of participation with empowerment—a theory of empowerment that only acknowledges active participation is seen as hypocritical and quite useless; a more efficient form of opposition would be to refuse to participate. While Baudrillard's level of analysis makes grand claims with little-to-none empirical grounding, his change in perspective should also be added to the recent debate on strategic non-participation also when it comes to digital media.

The backdrop for Baudrillard's argument was a Marxist understanding of mass media as a tool for manipulation of the masses. In the digital era, manipulation and false consciousness may not hold the same position in critical thought, even if the notion of filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011), is an example of updated suspicion about media manipulation ("what the internet is hiding from you"). Its legacy is also present in discussions about involuntary participation where notions of social media's affordances of visibility and individualism have been commented on by scholars (Fenton & Barassi, 2011; Fuchs, 2014; Poell & van Dijck, 2015). Furthermore, the challenge in digital media can also be approached through the concept of interpassivity (Dean, 2009; Žižek, 1998), described as the opposite to interactivity. Originally developed as a critical term in order to explain how mediated quasi-interactivity functions as stand-in for real engagement, it has come to use in discussions about online engagement/disengagement and what is sometimes called "slacktivism" (Morozov, 2011), where taking part in online petitions and campaigns become stand-in for actual social engagement and activism.

2.2. Participation and Empowerment

Participation is a key feature of digital life (Kelty, 2015). The concept, however, is polysemous and it is quite difficult to define what qualifies as participation. This means that any attempt to build conceptual models for participation/non-participation has to be dynamic (Casemajor et al., 2015). In the field of media studies, at least two theoretical conceptualizations of participation co-exist. On the one hand, there is the tradition that understands participation as a term connected with the political, e.g. in form of democratic deliberation (Dahlgren, 2014). On the other hand, there is the notion theoretically based in cultural studies about active audiences and audience participation, which gained new status with the rise of digital, interactive media. Media studies harbor both these conceptual understandings that sometimes lead to tensions (as could be illustrated by the dialogue in Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013). But what brings them together is that they both address the notion of empowerment.

Definitions of empowerment are manifold and range from individual aspects such as psychological enhancement, and self-awareness, to more social and political where both individuals and groups achieve a status of autonomy (Freire, 2000; Rodriguez, 2001). Sometimes empowerment is described as a scale from self-awareness to political action (Higgins, 1999). In the context of this article, empowerment should be understood in relation to autonomy rather than self-awareness. Much of the literature on mediated participation has concentrated on the question of empowerment (Castells, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009) and participation (Carpentier, 2011; Jenkins, 2008). Some of these scholars have pointed to online social media's role in increasing civic engagement and political participation for citizens (Castells, 2009). One could say that the position taken by these scholars has equated empowerment with participation, and accordingly the idea that more participation equals more autonomy has taken hold.

Notions of empowerment and digital media have been connected with the problem of the unequal distribution of access to the internet, popularly referred to as the digital divide (e.g. Norris, 2001). Lately, with the expansion of internet access on a global scale, interests in various types of digital divides, in terms of social inequalities have gained ground in critical research (Danielsson, 2014; Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). This means that focus has changed from asking if people have the possibility to go online, to asking what they do when online. Here again, the question of empowerment becomes important since there are structural limitations to how digital media can be used. Along traditional lines of active and passive media use, online digital media can be used as a means for political participation (simulating the golden days of public sphere) or as mere passive consumption (the decline of the public sphere). However, there is yet another type of relation to digital media and empowerment that does not fit into these categories, namely the acts of deliberate non-participation.

2.3. Models of Non-Participation

An interesting paradox in relation to the discussion about participation and empowerment above is that much of the developments in today's digital media could be described in terms of forced or involuntary participation: online mainstream media invite us to "like" and share content with our social networks, while smartphones gathers data over our mobility and communication (Dahlgren, 2014). The idea of participation has been a central part of all theorization about the internet, in terms of affordances for interactivity or user-generated content (Kelty, 2015). One recurring critique from critical internet scholars has been that power relations have too easily been eradicated from theories on participation and that digital media participation creates new or reinforces existing structures of unequal distribution of power (Beer, 2009; Cammaerts, 2008; Goldberg, 2010).

One reason for taking an interest in non-participation is that it could (and should) be understood as a politically significant action (Casemajor et al., 2015, p. 851). This means that in an era of forced participation that serves the interest of existing power structures, one way of opposition is to refuse to participate. This insight is part of the dynamic model of online participation/non-participation proposed by Casemajor et al.: "The framework…is an attempt at going beyond the linear model of participation and showing that non-participation cannot just be considered as hampered citizen action or passivity; it can also be empowering" (2015, p. 863).

The model sketches four possible types of participation: active participation, passive participation, active non-participation, and passive non-participation. And in the case of active non-participation, three ideal types of action are defined. The first one is obfuscation which means to act in ways to diffuse data gathering online, through erratic behavior that renders collected data useless. The second type of active non-participation is called sabotage and includes strategies to disrupt digital platforms, for instance, denial of service-attacks on websites. The final ideal type is exodus and simply means withdrawal from digital platforms, sometimes in order to create own.

The model proposed by Casemajor et al. (2015) shows some resemblance to a model developed by Rucht (2004) called the "Quadruple 'A'"; a model that presented four ideal types of communicative strategies that social movements have developed in relation to unfavorable mainstream media coverage. Building on data dating back to the 1960s and onwards, Rucht identifies four strategies on an axis between inward- and outward oriented strategies; as well as strategies with low or high resource demands: abstention and attacks on mainstream media are not very resource-demanding. The former means avoiding publicity and "keeping to oneself" while the other allows interactions with mainstream media but voices mistrust. Alternatives and adaptation, on the other hand, are strategies with quite high resource demands where the former means creating own media outlets and the latter to enact events that might attract the attention of mass media (Rucht, 2004, p. 46). Two of these strategies, abstention and alternative are directed inwards, while attack and adaptation are outward-looking. Rucht (2011) has later commented on the implications of online digital media for his model, acknowledging the possibilities but warning about over-estimating the importance of digital media (p. 259).

2.4. Activism and Media Practice

The role of digital media in mobilization among radical groups is well-researched (Askanius, 2012; Neumayer, 2013). In a study of online counter publics associated with the extreme right and radical left, Neumayer (2013) argues that in order to understand how these groups make use of digital media, one has to look at three dimensions: technological affordances; strategies, tactics and media practices; as well as political positions and ideology. Consequently, media practices do not exist in a vacuum but should be understood in relation to both technology and ideology. Mattoni (2012, 2013) discusses media practice as part of wider repertoires of communication in social movements. In that context, repertoires include both participation and non-participation in terms of interactions with media technologies, media outlets and media professionals, what Mattoni refers to as "relational media practices" (Mattoni, 2013, p. 49).

When approaching media practices and repertoires of communication from the perspective of ideology, notions of empowerment and autonomy again become relevant. Langlois & Dubois (2005) discuss autonomous media strategies, as attempts to "bypass mainstream media through experimentation with new forms of democratic communication" (Langlois & Dubois, 2005, p. 23). On a similar note, Milan (2013) speaks of appropriation of means of communication by social movements in terms of "liberated technologies" and part of "emancipatory communication practices" (Milan, 2013, p. 2). This, in turn, is related to the practices of the autonomist leftist tradition of creating and claiming autonomous spaces in the social landscape (e.g. Katsiaficas, 2006). Following this, it is possible to understand ideologically motivated non-participation as part of the media practices and repertoires of communication in radical groups.

The perspectives outlined above constitute an analytical framework that turns attention to participation/non-participation dynamics, as well as issues of autonomy and empowerment in an ideological context.

3. Material and Method

As already mentioned, the original study was designed as a propaganda study, i.e. an investigation into modes of address and means of persuasion as employed by groups advocating violent means for an ideological cause. The method was a qualitative content analysis of digital media and online platforms, with a focus on text analysis (semiotics, discourse analysis). The material consisted of online content produced within three ideological milieus that were pre-defined by the assignment: the extreme right, militant jihadist and the autonomous left.[1] While there are many aspects that

[1] The governmental action plan and its use of terms such as "anti-democratic" and "pro-violent" have been contested by social activists and academics, especially because of a tendency to equate extra parliamentary activism and civil disobedience with extremism. For an overview of this debate, see Kaun (2015).

separate these types of movements, they had been targeted by officials as environments with a potential to propagate for violent actions for an ideological cause. It should be said that the sample was quite limited since the content up for analysis had to meet the criteria for voicing an extreme stand in favor of political violence. Few groups or online content did this and the material analyzed here was published in milieus in and around militant anti-fascist and militant animal rights groups. Needless to say, this is a marginal phenomenon in context of the radical left activist scene online, but it stood out in terms of communication strategies in comparison to what could be observed in the material published in the extreme right milieu where more aggressive discourses were present. In all, three websites associated with the militant fringe of the radical left were observed: antifa.se, revfront.org, and djurensbefrielsefront.org, and of these only revfront.org could be described as active. These are also strictly closed milieus that seldom engage in propaganda or open recruitment. "Act without being seen" has been a motto and this might be true also for how participation in digital media is organized.

The analysis consisted of three parts: first, a description of pro-violent communication as could be found in the online milieu associated with the radical left; thereafter followed a charting of the web presence of three groups that had been identified as groups who met the criteria of openly expressing themselves in favor of ideologically motivated violence. Finally, the report included a thematic analysis of online videos published on YouTube (for a full account, see Swedish Media Council, 2014, pp. 132-190).

In the review of these findings, it is important to acknowledge the communicative modalities and affordances provided by online, digital media. What qualifies as online content is not restricted to symbolic expressions in the form of words, images, video and audio, but could also include possibilities for interaction that are part of the communication practice and experience, or a social, or network media logic (Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). To like, link, share, and comment are activities that have become part of meaningful communication and by looking into how these activities are activated, one can get the sense of how digital media communication works in the studied environment. The study did not analyze user interaction, but paid attention to affordances for interactivity, and how these were used.

4. Analysis

The following argument is structured in order to address two sets of questions: what types of non-participation can be identified in the online activities of the radical left, and, how can this material be conceptualized in relation to theories on activist media practices? The analysis has been thematically divided into three categories: active and passive forms of non-participation; abstention and adaptation; as well as the implosion of the social online.

4.1. Active and Passive Non-Participation

The most visible form of non-participation that appears in the material is "exodus", i.e. instances of apparent withdrawal from online communication. The other types of active non-participation that are described in Casemajor's et al. (2015) model, obfuscation and sabotage, are not represented in the material. The withdrawals can come in different guises, either in terms of complete exodus, i.e. closing down web sites, or in semi-withdrawals as in turning off or limit communicative affordances. Both are result of active choice.

When it comes to complete exodus, this can be observed in the case with antifa.se, web site for a militant antifascist group Antifascist action (AFA). It had been on the web since the early 2000s but was apparently disconnected around 2010. Hence, the site was not in operation during the sample period. A similar case of probable exodus was *djurensbefrielsefront.org*, a web site by DBF, the Swedish branch of militant animal rights activists: Animal Liberation Front. The site was still accessible but gave the impression of having been abandoned, the last updates dated back to 2010.

Online communities and chat forums dedicated to the radical left were filled with speculations on whether AFA still exist at all, since they showed no presence online. The quote below is an example from this type of discussion on socialism.nu, a leftist online community, and is an answer to questions about the existence/non-existence of AFA:

> "Oh, yes. They're still here. Their activities haven't disappeared with the web site. That line of thinking originates from how the Nazis organize themselves. There, they have tons of Web sites but little or no activity IRL. It's a good thing that AFA does not spend time building digital "castles in the air". Those who need to know about AFA's existence will certainly see it =)" (https://www.socialism.nu/showthread.php?t=6164&page=8)

Even if we do not know how well-informed this commentator is regarding the issue, the response bears witness to a notion of active non-participation. Furthermore, the quote highlights another aspect apart from mere presence/absence, as it makes a clear distinction between online activities and activities in the "real" world. By describing online activity as "building digital castles in the air", the commentator gives voice to a view where "real" action is preferred over symbolic action. This could also be seen as an outcome of ideological positioning and an act of distinguishing them-

selves from political opponents by means of its view on and understanding of media practices. Haunss (2015) addresses the issue of online/offline-dynamics and notes that much of the recent literature on protest movement's social media practices stresses the role of preexisting social ties in mobilization (p. 26). This has been noted in previous studies on autonomous scenes, where personal interaction is preferred above mediated communication (Leach & Haunss, 2009).

The study focused on content that was accessible and could be observed; hence, it is not correct to speak of full non-participation. However, there are examples of what could be described as semi-withdrawals from online communication. One such example is the YouTube channels *RevFrontMedia* and *RevFrontMedia2*, both associated with the militant group Revolutionary Front (RF), who, at the time of the study had published in total 19 videos online depicting violent confrontations with neo-Nazis and the vandalizing of homes and properties of people claimed to be associated with the extreme right. While the publication of these videos arguably is an example of online participation, they also display a tension between active non-participation and passive participation. This manifested itself through the use of the comment function, which is pre-set by YouTube to be automatically attached to the published video. This comment function can however be deactivated, and this has been done for all of the videos published by *RevFrontMedia*. Since the deactivation requires an active choice, it is fair to argue that this also could be interpreted in line with the argument of active non-participation. At least, it does not invite viewers to participate or communicate through the means of the affordances of this type of digital media.

4.2. Abstention and Adaptation

While the exodus strategies described above could be filed under what Rucht (2004) named "abstention", i.e. to avoid attention from mass media and keep to oneself, there are examples in the material of strategies that rather meet the criteria of "adaptation". Rucht (2004) describes adaptation as an extrovert strategy with considerable high resource demands where activist groups plan their activities with (mass) media attention in mind. For the adaptation strategy, the distinction between "real" and symbolic action is less articulated which means that actions that are "unsuccessful" in meeting their concrete aims can still be deemed successful if they achieve the right media attention (e.g. DeLuca, 1999).

One example of adaptation to media attention in the material is the Facebook-account and logo that RF launched during the sample period. It could be added that this addition of a Facebook page in late 2012 does not make the group appear as early adopters when it comes to social media. This arguably late awakening does not lessen the enthusiasm; the launch was announced in quite high-flown manner on the website revfront.org:

> "[Revolutionary Front] is an organization that constantly strives for improvement and to take steps forward in our political work. We understand the importance of being seen in public space, both on the streets and on the Internet. We have therefore chosen to start a Facebook page. A page that, we hope, our readers will appreciate. The page will serve as a tool for spreading our news and to reach out to more people with our political message." (http://revfront.org/?p=5465)

With Mattoni's (2012, 2013) concept "relational media practices" it becomes possible to approach adaptation as not only an adaptation of activist groups to media logics in order to attract the attention of mainstream media professionals, as described by Rucht (2004), but to also understand adaptation in relation to technological affordances. The quote above could be seen as an example of adaptation where the group adapts its action to the requirements or logics of a media technology, in this case online social media. Milan (2015) writes about a "politics of visibility" (p. 63) brought about by social media, a politics that allows surveillance and mass scrutiny and makes activist groups vulnerable to political adversaries and the state. There are good reasons to abstain from using these services, but Milan's (2015) research has pointed to a sense of inevitability of corporate social media that leads protest groups and activists to a resignation to the unwanted consequences of being present in corporate social media. The Facebook page in itself could be seen as a form of adaptation.

However, the words by which this Facebook page was announced bear witness to an understanding of Facebook as, not primarily a means for reciprocal communication, but for broadcasting political messages. There are also formulations that declare that this move is partly motivated by the ambition to reach out to outsiders. However, the announcement says nothing about using the Facebook page as a platform for contact and communication, but seems to treat it more as a tool for broadcasting political messages. This tendency becomes even clearer as they describe political messages as "propaganda", a term probably more associated with totalitarian ambitions of manipulation through media than social and reciprocal communication:

> "After ten years as an organization we are also proud to present the [Revolutionary Front] logo! It will represent the organization and mark our propaganda." (http://revfront.org/?p=5465)

The mode of communication employed could be

described in terms of a complicated tension between secrecy and visibility. Communication is reduced to one-way channels of information rather than to share and create a sense of community. Comments-functions are turned off, and overall, the communication affordances provided for interaction and reciprocal communication are not put to use in any considerable extent. One way to approach this is to see it as "asocial" media practices.

4.3. Implosion of the Social Online

A common definition of social media is that it refers to media services that enable reciprocal communication between humans, and provides some sense of community (cf. Fuchs, 2014, p. 1). When observing the use of social networking sites and digital media in the sample, it appears as if the way that these services have been put to use renounces some of those modalities of communication and community-building that makes them "social". In accordance with the discussion about semi-withdrawal above, it is a complex act of being present without full participation, similar to passive forms of participations such as lurking (Crawford, 2011).

A first example of "asocial" online presence is RF who are active in publishing propaganda on the web and in social media, but seem more cautious when it comes to sociability online. The content that is published is not aimed at recruiting sympathizers; it does little to promote the positive and inspiring sides of being associated with RF or participating in their actions (perhaps it is not be necessary to advertise—potential followers might be attracted or motivated by other incentives than to seek for a social community). It might also be more important for various reasons to keep internal activities secret than it is to put themselves on display (other than through their actions). Anyone wishing to come in contact with the group is directed to e-mail or a pre-paid mobile phone number. There was a @revfront Twitter-account but it was closed for outsiders—only accepted followers could read its tweets and see the number of followers.

The asocial online presence is also true for the other groups; AFA and DBF are even more reclusive, the latter explicitly discouraging people from attempting to make contact with them. Leach and Haunss (2009) have noted how autonomist activist scenes build heavily on personal contacts and direct communication, which might help explain this desire to redirect users from the online platforms to other means of communication that are more direct and personal.

Secondly, many of the services for publishing content online are social per default, and hence set limits for the control over content. As has already been mentioned, *RevFrontMedia* had switched off the commenting-functions for their YouTube-videos, but the display of these videos is companied by a list of suggestions for similar videos presented in the right-hand margin on the YouTube web site. On many occasions during the sample period, the viewer was given suggestions for videos produced and published by right-wing extremist groups. Hence, when using YouTube as a tool for broadcasting propaganda, there is a risk that it provides unintentional attention to propaganda from political enemies.

Finally, articles and communiques published in the milieu are written by pseudonyms or unidentifiable collectives. This anonymity feeds into an overarching strategy of secrecy that is complemented by photographs depicting people in ski-masks or a casual custom of blurring out faces from photographs and videos. Who these individuals are remains a secret. One of the things that social networking sites brought to online culture was identity. Where previous forms of online communities had been characterized by a logic where identities were disconnected from physical reality ("On the internet, nobody knows you're a dog") (Turkle, 1995), My Space and Facebook brought back traditional modes of identification ("On the internet, everybody knows you're a dog") (see Gershon, 2011). Fenton and Barassi (2011) have noted how social media is built on a "politics of individuation" that stands in a contradictory position to collective action, solidarity and participation. For groups that traditionally have valued its secrecy, sometimes on good grounds regarding a history of surveillance and infiltration of groups on the marginal left, the priority to keep oneself hidden is in conflict with the visibility paradigm of digital media. Furthermore, Fenton and Barassi (2011) argue that the logic of self-centered participation promoted by social media can represent a threat for political groups rather than an opportunity. This tension reflects an ideological contradiction within autonomist tradition between individual liberty and collective solidarity. Autonomist politics have sometimes been described as a "politics in the first person" (Leach & Haunss, 2009, p. 262). Related to this, lifestyle politics and slacktivism has long been targeted as a problematic consequence of social media activism.

The process of de-socialization could be understood both as an extension of a tradition of secrecy within the milieu, but also a strategy of how to oppose a technical architecture that reduces the ability to control over content. Put another way, the conflict between control and emancipation as identified by Dencik and Leistert (2015) is relevant here as well. The groups that were included in the study constituted a very secluded milieu. They did not show much interest in using the web to attract new followers or recruit activists. Control over content appeared to be more important than sociability.

5. Discussion: Non-Participation and Empowerment

Previous research on militant groups associated with the radical left have pointed out that these groups sel-

dom take an active part in designing propaganda or make efforts to reach out for new possible sympathizers (e.g. Peterson, 2001). Propaganda is understood as a means associated with the extreme right. It is therefore not surprising to find the type of active non-participation presented in the analysis. Theoretically, we can assume that there are numerous reasons for these kinds of groups to abstain from online communication and corporate social media (Dencik & Leistert, 2015). Still, as was shown in the empirical analysis, abstention is not total, but rather selective and partial. From these findings we can make the following observations:

First, empowerment is a complex term (and it is difficult to speak of empowerment without hearing the voice of those assumedly empowered). Still, if we understand empowerment partly as acts to claim autonomy, it is possible to review much of the online media practices described above as active non-participation with claims to autonomy. It is clear that much of the non-participation is a consequence of active choice. The groups are present online, but they have orchestrated their presence in a way that reduces the degree of participation, for instance by disabling possibilities for commenting and keeping strict directives of how to get contacted.

Following this, when these milieus are put in a historical context, it shows that they have a tradition of "acting without being seen" which collides with the affordances of connectivity and visibility of social media. This tradition, in turn, might help explain the tendency to treat online media as channels for the broadcasting of propaganda (rather than open it up for reciprocal communication) as a form of non-participation.

6. Conclusions

From what we have seen in this study, there are clear instances of active non-participation in digital media in the milieus included in the sample, which opens the field for further inquiries about activism and non-participation as media practice. Because this study was limited to analyses of online content, questions that concern intentions are beyond its scope. Hence, further research into the strategy and political implications of disconnection and non-participation would be instrumental to complement these findings, as well as would also efforts to put them in historical and geographical contexts. Such research would require a different methodological approach, preferably including interviews. In addition to this, the question of how a certain ideological position is associated with a media practice that builds on non-participation is worth elaboration, especially considering possible variations between different ideological groups. Given its limitations, the study shows how a non-participation-framework can provide a fresh perspective for understanding activism in the digital age.

Acknowledgements

The research and data that is considered in this article was collected in a study supported by the Swedish Media Council.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

Askanius, T. (2012). *Radical online video: YouTube, video activism and social movement media practices* (Doctoral dissertation). Lund: Studies in Media and Communication 17.

Baudrillard, J. (1988). *Selected writings*. Cambridge: Polity.

Beer, D. (2009). Power through the algorithm? Participatory web cultures and the technological unconscious. *New Media & Society, 11*(6), 985-1002.

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2013). *The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics*. Cambridge: University Press.

Cammaerts, B. (2008). Critiques on the participatory potentials of Web 2.0. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, *1*(4), 358-377.

Cammaerts, B., Mattoni, A., & McCurdy, P. (2013). *Mediation and protest movements*. Bristol: Intellect.

Carpentier, N. (2011). *Media and participation: A site of ideological-democratic struggle*. Bristol: Intellect.

Casemajor, N., Couture, S., Delfin, M., Goerzen, M., & Delfanti, A. (2015). Non-participation in digital media. Toward a framework of mediated political action. *Media, Culture & Society*, *37*(6), 850-866.

Castells, M. (2009). *Communication power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Crawford, K. (2011) Listening, not lurking: The neglected form of participation. In H. Greif, L. Hjorth, A. Lasen, & C. Lobet-Maris (Eds.), *Cultures of participation* (pp. 63-74). New York: Peter Lang.

Dahlgren, P. (2009). *Media and political engagement: Citizens, communication, and democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Dahlgren, P. (2014). Political participation via the web: Structural and subjective contingencies. *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture*, *5*(3), 255-269.

Danielsson, M. (2014). *Digitala distinktioner: Klass och kontinuitet i unga mäns vardagliga mediepraktiker* [Digital distinctions: Class and continuity in young men's everyday media practices] (Doctoral dissertation). Jönköping University.

Dean, J. (2009). *Democracy and other neoliberal fantasies: Communicative capitalism & left politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.

DeLuca, K.M. (1999). *Image politics: The new rhetoric of environmental activism*. New York: Guilford Press.

Dencik, L., & Leistert, O. (Eds.) (2015). *Critical perspectives on social media and protest: Between control and emancipation*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Fenton, N., & Barassi, V. (2011). Alternative media and social networking sites: The politics of individuation and political participation. *The Communication Review*, *14*(3), 179-196.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Fuchs, C. (2011). *Foundations of critical media and information studies*. Abingdon: Routledge

Fuchs, C. (2014). *Social media: A critical introduction*. London: Sage.

Gerbaudo, P. (2012). *Tweets and the streets: Social media and contemporary activism*. London: Pluto Press.

Gershon, I. (2011). On the Internet, everyone knows you're a dog. A review essay. *Comparative Studies in Society and History, 53*, 997-1007.

Goldberg, G. (2010). Rethinking the public/virtual sphere: The problem with participation. *New Media & Society*, *13*(5), 739-754.

Hands, J. (2011). *@ is for activism: Dissent, resistance and rebellion in a digital culture*. London: Pluto.

Haunss, S. (2015). Promise and practice in studies of social media and movements. In L. Dencik & O. Leistert (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on social media and protest: Between control and emancipation* (pp. 13-34). London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Higgins, J. W. (1999). Community television and the vision of media literacy, social action, and empowerment. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *43*(4), 624-644.

Hintz, A. (2015). Social media censorship, privatized regulation and new restrictions to protest and dissent. In L. Dencik & O. Leistert (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on social media and protest: Between control and emancipation* (pp. 109-126). London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Jenkins, H. (2008). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Jenkins, H., & Carpentier, N. (2013). Theorizing participatory intensities: A conversation about participation and politics. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 19*(3), 265-286.

Jowett, G., & O'Donnell, V. (1999). *Propaganda and persuasion* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Katsiaficas, G. N. (2006). *The subversion of politics: European autonomous social movements and the decolonization of everyday life* (2nd ed.). Oakland, CA: AK Press.

Kaun, A. (2015). Civil disobedience is not the same as violent extremism. *Open Democracy*. Retrieved from https://www.opendemocracy.net/anne-kaun/civil-disobedience-is-not-same-as-violent-extremism

Kaun, A., & Schwarzenegger, C. (2014). "No media, less life?" Online disconnection in mediatized worlds. *First Monday*, *19*(11).

Kelty, C. M. (2015). Participation. *Digital Keywords*. Retrieved from: http://escholarship.org/uc/item/8z13p7g9

Klinger, U., & Svensson, J. (2015). The emergence of network media logic in political communication: A theoretical approach. *New Media & Society, 17*(8), 1241-1257.

Langlois, A., & Dubois, F. (Eds.). (2005). *Autonomous media: Activating resistance & dissent*. Montréal: Cumulus Press.

Leach, D. K., & Haunss, S. (2009). Scenes and social movements. In H. Johnson (Ed.), *Culture, social movements, and protest*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Leistert, O. (2015). The revolution will not be liked: On the systemic constraints of corporate social media platforms for protests. In L. Dencik & O. Leistert (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on social media and protest: Between control and emancipation* (pp. 35-52). London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Livingstone, S., & Helsper, E. (2007). Gradations in digital inclusion: Children, young people and the digital divide. *New Media & Society*, *9*(4), 671-696.

Mattoni, A. (2012). *Media practices and protest politics: How precarious workers mobilise*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Mattoni, A (2013). Repertoires of communication in social movement processes. In B. Cammaerts, A. Mattoni, & P. McCurdy (Eds.), *Mediation and protest movements* (pp. 39-56). Bristol: Intellect.

Milan, S. (2013). *Social movements and their technologies: Wiring social change*. Houndmills and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Milan, S. (2015). Mobilizing in times of social media: From a politics of identity to a politics of visibility. In L. Dencik & O. Leistert (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on social media and protest: Between control and emancipation* (pp. 53-72). London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Morozov, E. (2011). *The net delusion: How not to liberate the world*. London: Allen Lane.

Neumayer, C. (2013). *When neo-Nazis march and anti-fascists demonstrate: Protean counterpublics in the digital age* (Doctoral dissertation). Copenhagen: IT University.

Norris, P. (2001). *Digital divide? Civic engagement, information poverty, and the Internet worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pariser, E. (2011). *The filter bubble: What the Internet is hiding from you*. London: Viking.

Peterson, A. (2001) *Contemporary political protest: Essays on Political militancy*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Poell, T., & van Dijck, J. (2015). Social media and activist communication. In C. Atton (Ed.), *The Routledge companion to alternative and community media* (pp. 527-537). London: Routledge.

Portwood-Stacer, L. (2013). Media refusal and conspicu-

ous non-consumption: The performative and political dimensions of Facebook abstention. *New Media & Society*, *15*(7), 1041-1057.

Redden, J. (2015). Social media protest in context: Surveillance, information management, and neoliberal governance in Canada. In L. Dencik & O. Leistert (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on social media and protest: Between control and emancipation* (pp. 127-143). London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Rodríguez, C. (2001). *Fissures in the mediascape: An international study of citizens' media*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Rucht, D. (2004). The quadruple 'A': Media strategies of protest movements since the 1960s in W. v.d. Donk (Ed.), *Cyberprotest: New media, citizens and social movements*. London: Routledge.

Rucht, D. (2011). Protest movements and their media usages. In B. Cammaerts, A. Mattoni, & P. McCurdy (Eds.), *Mediation and protest movements* (pp. 249-268). Bristol: Intellect.

Selwyn, N. (2003). Apart from technology: Understanding people's non-use of information and communication technologies in everyday life. *Technology in Society, 25*(1), 99-116.

Swedish Media Council. (2014). *Pro-violence and anti-democratic messages on the Internet*. Stockholm: Swedish Media Council.

Treré, E. (2015). The struggle within: Discord, Conflict and paranoia in social media protest. In L. Dencik & O. Leistert (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on social media and protest: Between control and emancipation* (pp. 163-180). London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

van de Donk, W. (Ed.) (2004). *Cyberprotest: New media, citizens and social movements*. London: Routledge.

van Dijck, J., & Poell, T. (2013). Understanding social media logic. *Media and Communication*, *1*(1), 2-14.

Wolfson, T. (2014). *Digital rebellion: The birth of the cyber left*. Springfield: University of Illinois Press.

Žižek, S. (1998). Cyberspace, or, how to traverse the fantasy in the age of the retreat of the big other. *Public Culture*, *10*(3), 483-513.

About the Author

Linus Andersson (born 1979) is lecturer in media and communication studies at the School of Health and Welfare, Halmstad university, Sweden. In 2012 he defended his doctoral thesis on alternative television at Södertörn University, and has since worked for the Swedish media council and Konstfack University College of Arts and Crafts. Andersson has published work on alternative media, media activism and media aesthetics.

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183-2439)

Media and Communication is an international open access journal dedicated to a wide variety of basic and applied research in communication and its related fields. It aims at providing a research forum on the social and cultural relevance of media and communication processes.

www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandcommunication

COGITATIO