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# Commentary - mediating the public sphere: democratic deliberation, communication gaps, and the personalization of politics

## Book section

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## 9 *Commentary*

### **Mediating the Public Sphere**

#### **Democratic Deliberation, Communication Gaps and the Personalization of Politics**

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**T**he three chapters in this section are concerned, each in their own way, with the relationship between the media, political communication, and the public sphere. In this chapter, I offer a short synopsis of the main arguments presented by the authors based on their extensive assessments of the state of the art in each of the fields of scholarship they address. I follow this with a reflection on the directions for future research that are suggested in the light of ongoing debates surrounding the theorization of the public sphere in modern politics. My comments begin with a discussion of chapter 7 on public deliberation, followed by that on nanotechnology (chapter 6), and finally the review of research on personalization in politics as presented in chapter 8.

#### **Theory and Practice of Public Deliberation**

In her contribution, Nurit Guttman provides a comprehensive assessment of the gaps between the ideal theory of the public sphere as conceived by Habermas and his critics and the practice of public deliberation as it has been instantiated in a variety of deliberative forums. She draws very effectively on case studies to suggest that the standards of practice deemed most likely to foster rational-critical debate often are contradictory. The result is that the ideals of communicative action cannot be achieved. Nevertheless, she finds that research is needed to discern how those who provide such forums can foster improved contexts for inclusive debates that are the essential foundation of deliberative democracy. Guttman's (2000) research on public health communication has been centrally concerned with whether media campaigns should seek to alter people's values, raising issues around contested power relations. In the present chapter, she assesses the extent to which the institutionalized practices of deliberative forums across a range of issues succeed in mitigating asymmetrical power relations.

The empirical question Guttman addresses is how well do forums for public deliberation fulfill the conditions for deliberation and compensate for deficiencies? She examines this question especially in relation to deliberations on public policy issues aimed at influencing decisions about "wicked" social problems.

Acknowledging that the outcomes of civic forums may simply conform to normative assessments of public welfare enhancing interventions, she suggests that there is a gap between the theoretical criteria for public engagement and the practice-based design of such forums. Her chapter offers an overview of the normative conditions which are said to adhere to the ideal, the procedures for public debate that have been espoused, and, based on an assessment of examples of deliberative forums, an analysis of the ways in which experience suggests insights and challenges to both theory and practice.

Guttman draws attention to the way potentially conflicting conditions aimed at achieving fair access and competence of process are operationalized in the practice of deliberative forums including citizens' juries, scenario workshops, consensus conferences, deliberative polls, citizens' dialogues, 21st century town hall meetings, and an Internet forum. Some of these approaches use computer technology and large scale survey techniques. They also may be informed or influenced by media coverage. Given the differences in approaches and insofar as compromise is acceptable, under what conditions is it acceptable and what should be established as the criterion for success? Although she does not examine online forums in depth, Guttman does ask whether these new electronic opportunities will give rise to improved possibilities for public deliberation, more consistent with those espoused theoretically for the public sphere.

Deliberative theories of democracy are founded upon the ideals of liberty, equality, and the right of citizens to influence decisions. In representative democracies, there is also a need for public dialogue to enable decision makers to become aware of the interests and concerns of citizens. Where deliberative forums are organized to address problems involving controversies over values, there must be a commitment on the part of participants to learn, listen and form opinions about issues in a safe dialogical space. Deliberative forums are expected to foster a knowledgeable public, to provide a space for deliberation that goes beyond the expression of opinions through voting, to enable exposure to a broader range of perspectives, and to encourage learning about the complexity of policy making and the trade-offs. The assumption is that this may lead to greater political efficacy, civic literacy, self-efficacy, and trust in political institutions. Guttman highlights the fact that departures from the ideal speech situation (Habermas, 1962/1989) may arise for many reasons including instances where the topics are not chosen by participants, they are framed by others who may appear to have greater expertise, they occur towards the end of a cycle of decision making, or if they fail to challenge the status quo.

In deliberative forums efforts to enhance the potential for rational discourse, include those to introduce informational strategies, measures to present alternative perspectives and to expose differences in value judgments and moral stance. The aim is to reach a view of the common good through consensus formation. On the basis of her review of a selection of cases, Guttman finds that no forum can be expected to meet all the criteria for an ideal speech situation but, in practice, much can be done to enhance the inclusion of normally excluded voices.

## **Deliberating on Science and Technology**

In their review of the literature focusing on public debate around the introduction of nanotechnology applications, Dietram Scheufele and Anthony Dudo highlight a communication gap between scientific evidence and the public perception of the issues. What counts as legitimate evidence and what role do the media play in such debates? Scheufele and Dudo ask “how can we establish sustainable channels of communication between science and the public, especially for increasingly controversial, politically charged issues...?” (this volume, p. 144). In contrast to the preceding chapter in this section, these authors draw on research on how the public and scientists (and the media) frame potentially emotionally charged issues by drawing on culturally shared imagery.

The starting point in this chapter is not the idealized Habermasian public sphere but, instead, an assessment of whether citizen’s worldviews and understandings of science and technology can be understood through the lens of cultivation theory, the processing of emotional insights, message framing and the authoritative status accorded to science in a given societal context. The authors review empirical evidence on widening communication or knowledge gaps with respect to nanotechnology, raising the possibility that interpretive models of the way audiences negotiate the meaning of information are likely to shed important light on the social-psychological processes that give rise to public attitudes. Like Guttman, Scheufele and Dudo suggest that the shift to online sources of information and debate may hold potential for new strategies and theoretically informed means of reducing the gaps and offering a more inclusive basis for the public understanding of science.

These authors are concerned about the relative absence of contributions by media and communication scholars to the “wicked” social controversies over nanotechnology. This issue has given rise to a host of moral and ethical issues that have been discussed extensively by those concerned with ethical, legal, and social implications (ELSI). From media depictions of nanotechnology killing butterflies to the Greenpeace Frankenfood campaign, Scheufele and Dudo suggest that deliberative forums, together with a greater awareness on the part of scientists, could make a considerable difference to the way the public understands the potential and the risks of this new technology. They point to studies suggesting that individuals’ moral belief systems may be challenged and that ideology serves as a perceptual filter when audiences need to balance values and worldviews against scientific facts. They argue that public opinion and communication research should be able to provide us with a more accurate picture of what groups in society want to know, their concerns, and the opinions they value.

Scheufele and Dudo argue that the goal of public deliberation and media coverage of the nanotechnology issues should be an informed citizenry that is capable of making well-reasoned policy decisions and ethical choices about scientific issues. If communication strategies are failing because scientists are working with the sender-receiver model of media effects, then it is important

to make them aware of research by media and communication scholars into media framing. Drawing in part on the work of Tversky and Kahneman (1981), they suggest that people systematically violate requirements of consistency and coherence, normally assumed to be necessary for rational choice.

Thus, they suggest that empirical research in this area needs to focus on how the public forms attitudes based on information, visual cues, and popular representations of science. More creative public engagement might be achieved with the public through the use of art forms, communication campaigns and informal outreach aimed at introducing less threatening imaginaries of nanotechnology and other science-based technological innovations.

### **Personalizing Politics**

Silke Adams and Michaela Maier evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of empirical research on what has been labeled the “personalization of politics.” The focus in this chapter is on the normative standard that is invoked in assessments of the implications of the personalization of politics for democratic processes. Silke and Maier argue that, notwithstanding the (historical) presence of personal attributes concerning political leaders in the media, the evidence is at best ambiguous on the issue of whether personalization has been increasing.

The claims and counterclaims emerging from empirical studies are attributable to the absence of consistent definitions, methods, and assessments of systemic and contextual variables. Personalization in this chapter is broadly understood to encompass processes whereby politicians become the main sources of interpretations and evaluations of the political process, the concern being that this may have negative implications for democracy if it detracts from rational decision making. In the literature, personalization is said to result in a focus on candidates and politicians (and their non-political personal characteristics) to the detriment of issue-based deliberation in contexts such as election campaigns, media reporting, and voting behavior.

Adam and Maier’s review of the literature suggests that there are complex interactions between parties, candidates, and issues. This complexity includes the possibility that decisions may be rational even if citizens do not achieve the highest standard of information. Citizens may economize on information based on criteria such as the perceived integrity and honesty of the source, enabling them to make short-cuts. Personalization may help citizens to bundle information in a political person in a way that enhances the democratic process. Their assessment is that: (a) there is relatively little research, (b) what there is generally is not based on longitudinal studies, and (c) there are contradictory claims in the literature.

Arguing that personalization has been a feature of media coverage for decades, they conclude that it “has not strongly affected voting decisions, and personalization has not yet transformed the political process into a depoliticized contest in which non-political traits....have become increasingly impor-

tant” (this volume, pp. 232–233). A future research agenda needs to develop standardized research instruments and definitions and undertake longitudinal cross country comparisons to establish a stronger evidence base to explain the complexity of personalization in modern politics. Rather than an emphasis mainly on content analysis of the media and on surveys, they suggest that cultural and institutional changes in politics and the changing character of professional journalism, especially with respect to media framing, need to be better understood before conclusions about the strengthening or undermining of democracy are drawn. As in the two preceding chapters, research on economizing on information or “information shortcuts” needs to be located in a theoretical framework that acknowledges the interpretive capacities of citizens (audiences) and the implications for the informed citizen within the wider context of pluralist, participatory, and discursive theories of democracy. When deliberative theories of democracy are drawn upon, they argue it is important to consider questions about the role of intimacy and its implications for citizen’s perceptions of candidates and political issues.

### **Interdisciplinary Research Agendas**

In summary, all three chapters in this section raise questions about the normative standards for deliberative democracy, whether they are achievable, and whether it is necessary to include an understanding of the personal, the emotional, values, and the interpretative capacities of audiences/citizens to understand the implications of public deliberation. Each highlights issues of the legitimacy of political systems, the role of informed elites, access to decision making forums, participation, and the quality of discursive reasoning.

Guttman locates her work within the field of political communication focusing on the theory and practice of deliberative democracy; Scheufele and Dubo locate their work in the tradition of studies of public understanding of scientific communication; while Adam and Maier work within the field of political communication and studies of political candidates and leaders. These authors invoke the standard of rational-critical discourse as the foundation of the democratic ideal, but each suggests the need to draw upon theoretical insights into factors contributing to inconsistencies and departures from the normative ideal speech situation without concluding that such departures are necessarily detrimental to democracy. In so doing, they are implicitly suggesting an interdisciplinary research agenda for future research on the relations between public deliberation, the role of the media, and politics and democracy.

This strengthening of the research agendas is supported in each chapter by drawing upon insights from media and communication theories, but also from political theory, psychology, cultural studies, sociology, and the economics of information. In the remainder of this chapter, I contextualize the forward-looking research agendas proposed in each of these chapters, by pointing to lines of argument that serve to situate the arguments in the broader context of the relationship between the media and democratization.

**Contextualizing the Media, Deliberation, and Democratization**

In his analysis of strengths and weaknesses of Habermas's depiction of the public sphere, Calhoun (1992) highlights Habermas's main concern: "What are the social conditions ... for a rational-critical debate about public issues conducted by private persons willing to let arguments and not statuses determine decisions?" Calhoun suggests that for Habermas, "a public sphere adequate to a democratic polity depends upon both the quality of discourse and quantity of participation" (p. 2).

The three chapters in this section speak to the extent to which formal and informal procedures for public deliberation are influenced by the media and by the practices and sense-making or interpretative strategies of citizens.

Habermas (1962/1989, 1996) was concerned that as private organizations became historically powerful, especially in the production of the mass media, and as the state became more influential in the private realm of citizens' lives, the public sphere underwent a "refeudalization" such that relatively passive consumption of culture and the media became the norm in contrast to rational-critical debate. Modern media (information and entertainment) consumption entails a process whereby the personal becomes more visible making it difficult to achieve the ideal of this form of argument. As Calhoun explains, "the media are used to create occasions for consumers to identify with the public positions or personas of others" (1992, p. 26). The public may agree, disagree, or ignore, but engages less and less in the critical discourse required for the normative ideal of democracy. The struggle today for political decision making is to enable consensus formation through communication in ways that are not dominated by powerful actors. The research question then is whether there are mediated contexts and deliberative strategies that facilitate the emergence of rational-critical discourse.

A conception of science and politics as objective and disinterested is central to this normative notion of the public sphere. As Calhoun (1992) suggests,

The very idea of the public was based on the notion of a general interest sufficiently basic that discourse about it need not be distorted by particular interests (at least in principle) and could be a matter of rational approach to an objective order, that is to say, truth. (p. 9)

Or, put another way, of harmony and consensus. Readers will be aware that Habermas has been criticized, not the least for his neglect of diverse identities and their politics, whether associated with feminism, religion, nationalism, or social movements (Dean, 2003; Thompson, 1993). One radical departure, while similarly concerned with the functioning of democracy, suggests a different standard for the assessment of the quality and quantity of public deliberation. Mouffe (1999) offers this alternative through her conception of agonistic pluralism (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

In contrast to the public sphere envisaged by Habermas, Mouffe (1999)

argues that when the public sphere is principally concerned with the moral grounds for decision making, this downplays the contested interests of citizens. She suggests that this conception "... consists in replacing the market-inspired view of the public sphere by another conception that conceives political questions as being of a moral nature and therefore susceptible of being decided rationally" (1999, p. 746). But, in politics conditions of power and antagonism remain ever-present suggesting that any consensus must be provisional and partial. "Political practice in a democratic society does not consist in defending the rights of preconstituted identities, but rather in constituting those identities themselves in a precarious and always vulnerable terrain" (Mouffe, 1999, p. 753). It is in this context then that the research question becomes one of how to constitute or institutionalize power relationships in ways that are consistent with democracy.

Instead of seeking to attain the highest standard of an objective commensurability of views and opinions (consistent with an objective science), it is crucial to seek means of acknowledging diversity and difference, of allowing passionate debate, and of providing the means for enabling conflict among adversaries to be expressed. This, Mouffe, argues can lead to insight and mobilization toward democratic practice in a way that is consistent with a multiplicity of voices. This offers a theoretical model that contrasts with the goal of deliberative democracy that tends to repress passion and to elevate standards of rationality and morality.

The chapters in this section are principally located in the tradition of research informed by the deliberative conception of the public sphere, but they all acknowledge the extent to which the media and political processes fall short of the normative ideal. It is therefore helpful to juxtapose this view with the alternative offered by Mouffe. This invites us to consider how power relations between citizen and state are organized in different contexts and to assess whether we should extend the range of criteria used to assess how political practices either facilitate consensus formation or vigorous debate among adversaries.

The Habermasian view of the public sphere is more in line with a conception of power in which power is visible through observed behavior, decision making (as well as non-decision making), and observable conflict on issues or potential issues where citizen's subjective interests are regarded as policy preferences to be revealed through their political participation, e.g., voting, participation in deliberative forums (Lukes, 1974/2005). Another view of power focuses on issues and potential issues and on observable and covert issues, but also on *latent conflict* so as to distinguish between subjective and real interests.

The three dimensional view of power involves a thoroughgoing critique of the behavioural focus of the first two views as individualistic and allows for considerations of the many ways in which potential issues are kept out of politics, whether through the action of social forces and institutional practices, or through individual's decisions. (Lukes, 1974/2005, p. 24)



In this view, the interpenetration of the media with political processes suggests that mediation processes have the power to frame issues, to prime people through cultivation, and to engage in agenda setting. They are also implicated in the extent to which latent and observable conflicts are resolved through, following Mouffe, emotionally charged adversarial debate in multiple contexts (place based deliberative forums, voting and elections, and online discussions) in which such debate may occur. When we consider issues such as the standards to be achieved by deliberative forums (Guttman), the communicative relations between scientists and lay publics on nanotechnology futures (Scheufele & Dudo), or the implications of personalization for democracy (Adam & Maier), a forward looking research agenda arguably would be enhanced by considering the merits and disadvantages of both these conceptions—that is consensus and agonism—of the articulation of the political with the media in modern democracies.

Acknowledging the potential explanatory power of both these theoretical models, suggests that we should understand the mediated environment as one in which both reason and emotion are in play. In Castells' work on *Communication Power* (2009), for example, he argues that “the most fundamental form of power lies in the ability to shape the human mind. The way we feel and think determines the way we act, both individually and collectively. Yes, coercion, and the capacity to exercise it, legitimate or not, is an essential source of power. But coercion alone cannot stabilize domination” (p. 3). Although individuals interpret media materials in diverse ways, their mental processing is conditioned by the communications environment. In other words, it is this broad context that matters in examining the factors influencing public opinion and decision making. And as Silverstone (1999, p. 143) observed, “It is all about power, of course. In the end.” There are other conceptions of the public and the nature of public discourse and publicity, following, for example, Arendt and developing the notion of theatricality (Villa, 1999). There are debates about the legitimacy of place based and non-place based forums for dialogue within the democratic sphere (Barnett, 2003) and about the role of rationality, objectivity as well as subjectivity, and the personal or private boundaries (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhard, & Rucht, 2002; Warner, 2002) of decision making. These cannot be pursued here.

In the light of this broader (and contested) theoretical framework, however, we can revisit the chapters in this section. In the case of Guttman's discussion of public deliberative forums, we might ask whether standards aimed at achieving fairness and equity and which privilege rational discourse might be complemented by those designed to encourage other forms of narration and storytelling, even if they are passionate and emotional. This is important in the light of Janssen and Kies's (2005) observation that the evaluation of the quality of online political forums requires that we operationalize what quality means and clarify the range of conditions for a public sphere. And given the increasing reliance of the public on Internet-based sites for the exchange of information and communication, we might also extend consideration of these criteria

to research on these online sites. Albrecht (2006), for example, calls for more empirical studies of online deliberation, since it is not clear who participates or who is represented. Just as in offline forums, the Habermasian deliberative ideal of a more informed public is clearly not being achieved very extensively. While some barriers to deliberation may be reduced, others come to the fore including play with identity and conflictual behavior.

While some studies in this area continue to work with the framework of rational-critical deliberation there is contradictory evidence as to whether online and offline deliberation yields increases in participants' knowledge, political efficacy, and willingness to participate in politics (Min, 2007). There is a growing body of research on e-democracy but this rarely focuses on who participates or what the consequences of such deliberation online may be. Haque and Loader's work on *Digital Democracy* (1999) indicates that it is no less difficult to create the conditions for the ideal speech situation in e-democracy initiatives than it is in the offline world. Similarly, Wilhelm's (2000) *Democracy in the Digital Age* suggests that political participation online in the United States at least is neither inclusive nor deliberative. Coleman and Gotze's (2001) review of representation, engagement, and democracy online similarly suggests that government representatives find it very hard to build relationships with the proliferation of online communities. To understand whether a deliberative or agonistic model best explains developments in this area it also may be useful to draw upon the large literature on the way the contexts of online communication interact with beliefs and actions (Delli-Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Rice, 1993; Tidwell & Walther, 2006; Walther, 1992) in the field of computer mediated communication.

Studies of online social movements are suggesting that, despite the unbounded nature of the Internet, when transnational civil society groups seek to construct a transnational public sphere they encounter constraints:

... the power-shift from the nation states towards regional/global political or indeed economic institutions and the lack or rather weak democratic controls on these 'higher' levels of governance, have promoted civil society organisations—and more specifically social movement organisations—to organise themselves beyond the nation states in order to critically question the legitimacy of international economic and political actors. (Cammaerts & Van Audenhove, 2005, p. 149)

Whether in national or transnational contexts, the conflictual or agonistic model seems an essential complement to the rational-deliberative model. Cammaerts' (2008) work offers insight into the larger scale online interactive processes in connection with debates in the context of World Summit on the Information Society and on the European Convention, suggesting a mixed picture where participants appear to learn and become more informed about issues, but rarely are able to influence the outcomes of debates, indicating the importance of

analyzing exclusions from democratic processes (Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2007).

In general, research on forums for deliberative online dialogue suggests that if the criteria are: “exchange and critique of reasoned moral–practical validity claims ... reflexivity ... ideal role taking ... sincerity... discursive inclusion and equality ... autonomy from state and economic power” (Dahlberg, 2001, p. 623), then these are not met as a result of the shift from offline to online forums. Dahlgren (2000) distinguishes between the structures (how online spaces are configured), representation (media output in terms of fairness, accuracy, agenda setting), and interaction (citizens engaged in talk with each other) offered by the online public sphere. He observes that criticism of the Habermasian public sphere generally runs as follows:

The rationalist bias tends to discount a wide array of communicative modes that can be of importance for democracy, including the affective, the poetic, the humorous, the ironic, and so forth ... [and] that adherence to the perspective of deliberative democracy risks downplaying relations of power that are built into communicative situations. (Dahlgren, 2005, pp. 156–157)

He turns to a consideration of civic culture, constituted by values, affinity, knowledge, identities, and practices, thereby opening up the range of criteria for assessment to admit both the rational–critical and the potentially agonistic.

The foregoing suggests a more inclusive theoretical agenda for considering the relationships between scientists, the media, and citizens than that proposed by Scheufele and Dudo in their assessment of public understanding of nanotechnology. In line with the tensions between the two theoretical approaches to public debate outlined here, individuals can be expected to interpret science and media stories on the basis of both information and emotion as they suggest in their chapter. When these authors point to the theoretical insights that can be drawn from the field of media and communication studies, they may, however, in addition to recourse to cultivation and related theories, consider drawing upon insights into the complexity of mediation processes and the ways these inform decision making about highly controversial, ethically charged social and political issues (Silverstone, 2007).

Castells’ (2009) work suggests that there are lessons to be drawn from experimental cognitive neuropsychology, and we also know that the media can be understood to offer a particular mode of representation through its texts and images, serving as a form of government which is engaged in the “elaboration of a language for depicting the domain in question that claims both to grasp the nature of that reality represented, and literally to *represent* it in a form amenable to political deliberation, argument and scheming” (Miller & Rose, 2008, p. 31).

Sociological studies of the relations between science, technology, and public understanding reveal the extent to which scientists’ self–understanding is

resistant to the idea of reflexivity and often modeled on a theoretical conception of truth and progressive innovation for the common good (MacKenzie, 1996). It may be that the problematic nature of the knowledge or communication gap highlighted by Scheufele and Dudo would benefit from studies drawing upon research in the field of science and technology studies, once again, emphasizing the need for media and communication scholars to reach out to draw upon the insights in cognate fields of study. For instance, Rogers-Hayden and Pidgeon (2007) emphasize the importance of engaging in new forms of risk communication in the context of nanotechnology debates, arguing that there is a need for more than attention to the standards of deliberative forums or to holding them earlier in the innovation process. They suggest that such dialogue may open up differences or conflictual visions as much as it may move towards public consensus (Rogers-Hayden & Pidgeon, 2007). And Macnaghten, Keames, and Wynne (2005, p. 270) argue that in addition to focusing on issues of media framing, there is a need to ask questions about covert and latent power relations. “Why these technologies? Why not others? Who needs them, and what human purposes are driving them? Under what conditions will they be enacted; and who sets those conditions? Who is controlling them? Who benefits from them? Can they be trusted?” Like Scheufele and Dudo in their chapter in this section, they call for research that would seek to understand how nanotechnologies are imagined noting that imaginaries are “mobilized through ongoing public discourses and enacted in everyday practices” (Macnaghten et al., 2005, p. 279). Importantly, they ask “how do they mobilize public and private interest and opposition?” recalling a concern about latent and potentially conflictual relationships.

In recent work, analysis of visionary images has been undertaken by Losch (2008) who focuses on media representations of alternative futures for nanotechnology, by Bennett-Woods (2008) in *Nanotechnology: Ethics and Society*, and by Schummer and Baird (2006) in *Nanotechnology Challenges*, taking up some of these issues. Perhaps the most comprehensive work to date is by Anderson, Petersen, Wilkinson, and Allan (2009) who examine *Nanotechnology, Risk and Communication* in the United Kingdom, focusing on media framing as well as on the way policy makers and scientists represent developments in this area. The strongly interdisciplinary flavor of research in this area is emphasized again here as these authors work within the fields of Sociology, Science Communication and Journalism/Media Studies.

In their research on personalization Adam and Maier suggest a research agenda that calls for definitional clarity, longitudinal comparative studies, and consideration of the informational short-cuts that voters may employ that may be rational, relevant, and valuable for decision making, adhering closely to the wider precepts of the deliberative norm offered by Habermas’s concept of the public sphere. This suggests a rich and important forward-looking research agenda. The comparative research agenda is one for which there has been strong demand especially by Gurevitch and Blumler (2004), but this is an area of political communication that has remained underdeveloped. In

many instances, scholars based in the United States have led the way in tackling issues in the field of political communication and the questions around personalization are no exception. Others have contributed country studies examining similarities or differences with U.S. trends. In this area there are few comparative frameworks such as is the case more generally in political science, for example, where there are comparisons of democratic institutions and electoral or party systems (Johansen, 2009). Comparisons offered by scholars in the media and communication field tend to be organized around themes such as trends in the professionalization of politics, in media logics, and in personalization. Arguably, work in this field would benefit from being located within the broader disputed territory of the theories about power and discourse outlined at the beginning of this section.

There is a “driving democracy” agenda (Norris, 2008) in the field of political communication that seeks to compare different types of political institutions including the electoral system, parliamentary or presidential executives, unitary or federal states, and the structure and independence of the media. This work often relates to new democracies and the process of entrenching or consolidating democracy but also has implications for issues of civic engagement and participation in older democracies. There is a comparative agenda in this area, but although studies of personalization are underway, this work is still marginal. For example, the youngish democracies in Latin America, nearly all post-military dictatorships—have without exception opted for presidential systems which are personalized to one degree or another—for various reasons including the absence of well-developed civil society organizations. In these contexts, personalization emerges in tension: it may be a necessary step towards democratization but it may also be a source of vulnerability as charismatic leaders take on more power and weaken sources of opposition. These developments juxtapose two images of personalization—the classic Weberian “big” charisma associated with a strong, heroic populist leader; a form that is arguably distinct from the Western/Northern anxieties about the intrusion of the private, that is, the “small” charisma of the intimate, personal charm, sincerity, and personal affinity.

In addition, Adam and Maier’s call for a renewed focus on the description, explanation, and evaluation of personalization needs to be pursued. In addition to the definitional clarify that they call for, there is scope to go further to build on the work of Langer (2006, 2007). She analytically separates the dimensions of personalization to consider: (a) “presidentialization” (concentration of power in the person of a leader at the expense of cabinet/parliament) through constitutional change without effective deliberation and (b) personality politics (increased attention from media, citizens, and parties to the personal qualities of leaders). These might include attention to qualities deemed “legitimate” for voters to exercise rational choices or they might entail a focus on private characteristics such as whether a leader is a good parent (Smith, 2008). In the latter case, Langer refers to this as the politicization of private persona (Langer, in press). In the first case, the changes may result in a redistribution of executive

power as in the case of Chavez in Venezuela and Putin in Russia. Although these dimensions of personalization may be linked, it is analytical useful to separate them as each may imply different normative consequences for the public sphere.

Lastly, it may be productive to consider personalization from the “demand” side. Most research approaches this concept as a characteristic that emerges from the top down as a result either of a media logic and understanding of media power and the needs of television and journalism professionals, or of campaigning strategy where the goal is to create a competitive advantage under conditions of considerable ideological/policy similarity between rivals (Scammell & Semetko, 2001). This downplays the bottom-up contributions to personalization. Personalization may enable citizens to connect with leaders and therefore may facilitate their engagement with politics and the democratic process. There is relatively little work on how leader images are constructed and created in part from the bottom up (Scammell, 2003) through branding. Leader images may be regarded as a form of brand equity, something in the gift of consumers that, while influenced by the media, is distinct. There is increasing interest in the bottom-up creation of leader image as in the 2008 Obama campaign using social media such as YouTube and other social networking sites such designforobama.org, also suggesting the importance of charisma and heroic leadership.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the synthesis of the state of the art of research in the field of public deliberation, media, politics and political outcomes presented in this section demonstrates that there is a need for future research that is designed to encompass longitudinal, comparative research based on a wider range of empirical methodologies. In each of the areas of concern in this section, the researchers are exploring outwards to acknowledge findings in related disciplines and fields of inquiry. They are also challenging scholars in the media and communication field to widen their investigation to embrace issues of substantial public concern that raise new issues of risk both for individuals and society.

While the contributors to this section work predominantly within a theoretical framework informed by Habermas’s conception of the public sphere, they all find it essential to reach beyond this framework if we are to understand how better to create inclusive opportunities for citizens to engage in political decision making. In this chapter, I have suggested the need to acknowledge the tension between those concerned with power and consensus formation around those issues and interests that rise to the surface of public life and those which frequently lie concealed or latent, but which belie ongoing contestations over power in society. In all of these cases, the media play a significant role in representing political leaders, scientists and lay publics. Research that reveals greater insight into how publicity and opinion formation interact in today’s

mediated environment is clearly essential to democratic functioning and its results offer the foundations for political practice in many diverse areas.

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