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Chapter One: Social Media, Public Sphere and Democracy

Introduction

This chapter provides working definitions of the terms 'network society', 'digital democracy' and 'mediated citizenship' and takes a critical stance as to whether these have shifted social dynamics. In the academic writing about democracy, especially in regard to the media, a collective ambivalence emerges, with some writers expressing more optimism, and other taking a dimmer view. The questions about democracy become still more complex not least as modes of citizenship evolve; the gradual shift to what is often dubbed 'mediated citizenship' raises various issues, alongside with positive and negative forecasts. The chapter explores the literature and academic debates concerning socio-politics of the social media, with particular emphasis on the political value of Web 2.0 technologies. The exercise and devolution of power is also analysed in regard to the vertical communication between citizens and government (for example, with their representatives or agencies). Some such efforts in 'electronic governance' are laudable and facilitate democratic communication. However, other easily fall prey to a power stance that blocks communication. Recent treatments of power specifically in relation to media have been offered, among others, by Coleman and Blumler (2009), who argue that democracy fails to engender relationships of accountability and advocate an online media commons as a policy direction to enhance the democratic character of cyberspace's role in the public sphere, a direction similar to the calls for a public service media model in the online world (see, for example, Iosifidis 2010).

The work also addresses related issues such as 'reformulated participation', 'consumption', and 'prosumerism' and asks whether these lead to new politics and the reduced role of the state and the increasing empowerment of citizens in the era of electronic governance. A vital issue to be discussed is whether democracy is in serious trouble or not and to assess this much credence will be given to sceptics such as Putnam (1995, 2000) and Morozov (2012). Putnam has expressed concerns that a democratic deficit has occurred with regard to a collapse in virtue and citizenship and this has led to a profound 'thinning' of the political community and the formation of the atomised citizen who is 'bowling alone'. He has argued that new forms of social capital are necessary to reconnect citizens with their societies. There is also consideration to the factors that are conducive to citizen engagement and an inclusive public sphere and in this context the chapter refers to Evgeny Morozov's *Net Delusion*. In his volume, Morozov contends that the Internet is a tool that both revolutionises and authoritarian governments can use, so in the latter cases social media sites have been used to entrench dictators and threaten dissidents, making it harder to promote democracy. John Keane's cautious view with regards to social media and the public sphere will be explored, as will Henrik Bang's theory of Everyday Makers with relation to political participation in late modernity.[i] There will also be consideration of the counter arguments, such as Pippa Norris's thesis that democratic engagement has been reinvented for modern times, rather than simply atrophied. We look at the social media and democracy with a normative eye but also empirically, so throughout our book we list a number of examples and cases to validate theoretical points, such as the Arab uprisings and the recent revelations of the extent of US government surveillance of its own citizens and abroad.

The Traditional Public Sphere and the Mass Media

The Traditional Paradigm: the Public Sphere and the media as 'Fourth Estate'

In modern democracies there are typically three branches of government: the legislative branch to make the laws, the executive branch to enforce the laws, and the judicial branch to interpret the laws. However, the rise of mass media enabled the development of another independent institution: the 'Fourth Estate', which is central to pluralist democratic processes. The view that the Press is the fourth branch of government (or fourth estate) is based on the assumption that the media's role is to act as a watchdog on the actions of government. Liberal theorists contend that the existence of an independent press is essential in the process of democratisation and the right of freedom of expression, by strengthening the responsiveness and accountability of governments to all citizens, and providing a pluralist platform and channel of political expression for a multiplicity of groups and interests (Sen, 1999). Under this prism the media is called the fourth branch of the government because it plays a crucial 'checking function' role in the fortunes of political candidates by ensuring that elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of the electorate. In this regard, the media acts as the custodian of the 'public interest', which refers, among others, to the widening of public access to mass media, which in turn promotes democracy and freedom of expression. The growing access to modern technologies such as landline telephones, the printed press, broadcast media, and the new social media, laid the basis for an informed citizenry able to participate effectively in political affairs.

A definition of the term 'public communication', with reference to the mass media, has been suggested by Ferguson (1986: ix) as 'those processes of information and cultural exchange between media institutions, products and publics which are socially shared, widely available

and communal in character'. The context in which these transactions take place is the so-called 'public sphere' - that is, as articulated in particular by political theorist Habermas (1989 [1962]), a space for rational and universalistic politics distinct from both the state and the economy, a scene of activity in which people are addressed as citizens, as rational political beings, and not merely as consumers. The concept of the public sphere is a central analytical tool to help us make sense of the relationship between the media and democracy (civic engagement). Habermas explained that in the late eighteenth century a new political class (the bourgeoisie) came to the fore in Britain in particular and formed a public body which, in sharp contrast to the old authorities, notably the state and the church, provided the conditions for reason-based, public opinion. The creation of a network of institutions by the bourgeoisie within the civil society, and the launch of a number of newspapers more specifically, provided the means through which private thoughts could become public. Libraries and universities became the places for public debate, while publishing enterprises formed the means by which government was criticized. That new public sphere was in principle open to all and was protected from the power of both the church and the state.

The decline of the traditional public sphere

However, Habermas pointed out that this space for rational and universalistic politics created by the capitalist market was historically damaged by both the extension of the state and the evolution of monopoly capitalism. The formation of large private institutions (advertising agencies, public relations) and the deals they made with each other and with the state while excluding the public, led to the replacement of rational public discourse by power politics. The role of the media was central to the replacement of the ideal speech situation by conditions of 'distorted communication'. Whereas the independent press at the turn of the

nineteenth century had led to the formation of rational public debate and public decision-making on political and judicial matters, it later functioned as a manipulative agency controlling public opinion. The media's role in the public debate shifted from the dissemination of rational and independent information to the formation of public opinion. Following the changing communications ecology, the public sphere is discovered as a platform for advertising and public relations. Control of the news media is used to reinforce the power of autocratic regimes and to deter criticism of the government by independent journalists, though official government censorship, state ownership of the main radio and television channels, legal restrictions on freedom of expression and publication (such as stringent libel laws and restrictive official secrets acts), limited competition through oligopolies in commercial ownership, and the use of outright violence and intimidation against journalists and broadcasters (Sussman, 2001). As will be shown below, the Internet can be used either way: to empower citizens and enhance the public sphere, or as a means of manipulation and control.

The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere – The Fifth Estate

The debates surrounding the idea of the public sphere have taken a renewed interest with the emergence of the Internet and other new online media and social networks[ii] which can provide new communication spaces where debate can be conducted. It is worth emphasising from the outset that this material is really at the centre of the study and will shape our approach and analysis of the social media. While Habermas' original work published well before the digital revolution, computer-mediated communication has taken the place of coffeehouse discourse (Boeder, 2005). The diffusion of the Internet, first deployed in 1969, but also mobile communication, digital media and a wide range of tools of social software

have prompted the development of interactive communication (Castells, 2007: 246). As was previously the case with radio, television and the printed media, the Internet terrain has produced new spaces for information, debate and participation – as well as new possibilities for manipulation and social control. But as Curran, Fenton and Freedman (2012) argued we need to understand the Internet in its social, economic and political context and avoid a technologically deterministic view. While the rise of traditional news media such as the press, radio and television enabled the development of the fourth state (take, for example, the investigative coverage by the *Washington Post, Time* and *The New York Times* of the Watergate political scandal in the US in the 1970s)[iii], the growing use of the Internet and related digital technologies is creating a space for networking individuals in ways that, according to Dutton (2009) enable a new source of accountability in government, politics and other sectors. Dutton explains how this emerging 'Fifth Estate' is being established and why this could challenge the influence of other more established bases of institutional authority. The author discusses approaches to the governance of this new social and political phenomenon that could nurture the Fifth Estate's potential for supporting the vitality of liberal democratic societies.

The new mantra of media terminology is already characterized by terms such as 'electronic commons', 'virtual democracy', 'electronic agora', 'blogosphere', 'twitter-sphere', and so on. These online forums or social spaces of the Web 2.0 (a nascent movement towards a more interactive and collaborative web as it provides a platform for online social participation in communities of interest) differ substantially from the traditional ones such as that of public service broadcasting in a number of ways: first, they attract many more people than traditional media. In 2015, nearly 740 million people logged into Facebook daily, 48 per cent of its 1.4 billion users (see Chapter 2 for more statistics). Twitter and Google+, with roughly

600 million users each, get more and more activity every day. These numbers are out of reach for traditional media such as radio and television stations. In fact, if Facebook were a country it would now be equally populous to China and/or India, the largest countries on earth in terms of population. But it is not only numbers/scale that matters, for social networks allow more interactivity and many-to-many communication on a global scale, rather than one-to-many as it is the case with traditional broadcast media. The democratic potential of the Internet can be realised through the ever larger quantity of debate that can take place in there compared to the limited capacity of traditional media that are confined within national borders.

The globalisation of the public sphere

In this context, the emergence of the Internet and social media calls for a globalisation of the public sphere and public opinion. The space for public discourse and the formation of public opinion increasingly take place at a transnational context that crosses national boundaries. Whereas the traditional media in the form of the newspaper press and public television have been an integral part in the creation of a national public sphere, there is a widespread assumption that new spheres of communication networks can provide the basis for shared concerns, common tastes, political and cultural turns at a global level. In fact, citizens are taking to the streets in cities across the world to demand greater accountability from their leaders in a surge not seen since the end of World War I. The issues differ from country to country - against austerity measures, violations of privacy, exploitation of the environment or the abuse of electronic surveillance - but they all demonstrate a quest for good governance and the power of the new digital and social media. These citizen uprisings represent a new force on the world stage that serves as a counterweight to the excesses of the current political

order, whether democratic or authoritarian. As the news media have long played an essential role as watchdog over government, a 'fourth estate' that guards against abuse of power, today's exposures of the surveillance activities of the US National Security Agency, or police brutality in the case of Taksim Square demonstrations in Turkey in June 2013, show the ability of new social media to shed light on the workings of government and provide a public forum for the debate of laws and policies.

As the new media disrupt the industrial model of information, citizens now have the power to oversee the actions of their elective representatives, thereby enabling a more direct form of democracy to emerge. The availability of information via social media like Facebook and Twitter, and the rise of user-generated content such as personal blogs have enhanced citizens' ability to communicate and self-organise. The emerging 'citizens movement', or to copy Castells (2012) the 'social movements in the Internet age' is a worldwide phenomenon and serves as a check and balance on the prerogatives of government. Millions of citizens have taken to the streets of Sao Paulo, Tel Aviv, Manila, Madrid and Bangkok demanding good governance and an end to corruption. Demonstrators have swept away autocratic governments in many Arab countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Citizens in Southern Europe call for an end of austerity measures that lead to economic exploitation and hopeless poverty. India demand protection from rape. In China tens of millions of bloggers have become a virtual citizens lobby pushing for environmental change, blocking huge new dams and petrochemical plants. It is fair to say then that the new social media enhance traditional journalism in defending the public trust. Citizen journalists have expanded the reach and the scope of established mass media outlets like the BBC and Al Jazeera and have brought a greater degree of transparency to governments than has ever existed before. Now that access to a mobile phone, news reports, pictures and opinions are almost universally available

people have become empowered to demand accountability from their governments. As Hoffman (2013) put it, 'citizens are the new Fourth Estate'. There are certainly risks that these newly empowered citizens could become pawns for populist demagogues, but this is far more likely to happen when the media are controlled by a few than when there are multiple and independent sources of information (ibid.).

In today's network society, power is multidimensional and is organised around digital, interactive and self-expanding networks whose participants have very diverse interests and values. In direct contrast to power relations that are embedded in the institutions of society, especially the state, social movements exercise counter-power by constructing themselves initially through a process of autonomous communication, free from the control of those holding institutional power. As Castells (2012: 9) argues, 'because mass media are largely controlled by governments and media corporations, in the network society communicative autonomy is primarily constructed in the Internet networks and in the platforms of wireless communication'. These social networks carve out a new public space for deliberation, distinct from the constitutionally designated space which is occupied by the dominant political and economic elites. But are these new media enhancing democracy and contributing to political participation?

The democratization of the public sphere

A democratic social system can be defined as a system in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation typically involving periodically held free elections. The origins of democracy can be traced in Athens about 2,500 years ago. In the 6th century BC the 'Ancient Agora' was the centre of

public life in Athens and this place can also be considered as the centre of democracy as Athenian citizens were gathering to listen to speeches by philosophers in the likes of Demosthenes, Plato and Socrates. The Ancient Agora was a place of direct democracy as people were taking important political decisions and were voting by raising their hand. Nowadays, most democracies around the world are representative ones as people usually choose their leaders to represent them through general elections. However, the Internet seems to challenge this as it offers a powerful means for citizen direct involvement in public life and politics. It satisfies the need for a new form of democracy, a type of post-electoral democracy whose spirit and institutions were infused with a commitment to casting out the devils of arbitrary, publicly unaccountable power.

The Internet's democratic potential has been highlighted in such works as Rheingold (1993) and Kellner (1997), whose central thesis is that cyberspace provides an ideal basis for transnational dialogical exchanges. Another optimistic view is that the Internet tends to democratize access to information and undermine hierarchies. For example, De Sola Pool (1983) viewed computer-based communication networks like the Internet as inherently democratic 'technologies of freedom'. In response to this freedom versus control debate, Danziger et al (1982) noted that the Internet can support and reinforce many different forms of networks. These connect in the traditional one-to–many pattern of the mass media, but in the new world also one-to-one, many-to-one, many-to-many, and so on. Therefore, the Internet can be shaped by developers, users, and regulators to support the 'communicative power' of both institutions and individuals in many ways.

The Internet can facilitate the spread of debate and deliberation across many parts of the population that may be spatially dispersed. In this sense, the democratic potential of the

Internet can be realized through the ever larger quantity of rational critical debate that can take place in there compared to the limited capacity of traditional media that are confined within national borders. Viewed this way, the emergence of the Internet (and other new online and international media) calls for a globalization of the public sphere and public opinion. The space for public discourse and the formation of public opinion increasingly take place at a transnational context that crosses national boundaries. It has been put forward that new technologies have allowed the formation of a transnational or global public sphere as a forum for political discussion. While the traditional media in the form of the newspaper press and public television have been an integral part in the creation of a national public sphere, there is a widespread assumption that new spheres of communication networks can provide the basis for shared concerns, common tastes, political and cultural turns at a global level. The power of media is increasing with the spread of 24-hour cable news networks, the Internet, the seeming omnipresence of personal audio and video devices, and the social networking sites, so the influence of the media on enhancing public dialogue and political debate - the so-called 'political socialization' - has become ubiquitous. But has it?

Democratic Deficit: Putnam's concept of social capital

There have been growing concerns that a 'democratic deficit' has occurred with regard to a collapse in virtue and citizenship. The concept of a democratic deficit or a democratic gap is the idea that the governance in a country or region in some ways lacks democratic legitimacy. This has led to a profound 'thinning' of the political community and the formation of the atomised citizen who is 'bowling alone' (Putnam, 1995). US scholar Robert Putnam considered the theory of the social capital as a governance mechanism that provides 'closeness' and 'trustworthiness' among people. Putnam's thesis needs to incorporate his

definition of social capital and therefore take account of both structural and cultural dimensions of social capital simultaneously, that is, the strength of social networks (measured in terms of belonging to a wide range of associational groups and social movements), and the cultural norms (measured by feelings of social trust). By 'social capital', the author referred to features of social life - networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives (Putnam, 1996). Coleman (1988: 96) defined social capital according to its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions by actors (individuals or corporate) within that structure.

A similar definition has been provided by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 119) who said that social capital is 'the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition'. Social capital then is composed of a network, a cluster of norms, values and expectations that are shared by members of a group (Halpern, 2005). To return to Putnam, he argued that new forms of social capital are necessary to reconnect citizens with their societies (Putnam, 2000). The fears of inequality have been heightened by the decline of civic virtues, the dismantlement of democratic associations and the disengagement of public with the political classes. Putnam noticed that communication agreements upon what constitutes the common good have dissolved as trust has been eroded. To fill the accompanying void, Putnam called for the extension of voluntary organisations to create 'virtuous circles' to accumulate social capital so that enable citizens may agree on a set of shared aims for collective activity (Putnam, 2000). Shing and Chung (2011) though seem to put their faith on the new technology to encourage citizens' participation and contribution to the public sphere. With the current technological advances like the use of Web 2.0 media,

the authors argue, online social network platforms could promote civic engagement that allows for bridging of social capital across geographical, organizational, hierarchical, temporal and spatial barriers.

The argument that citizen engagement and contribution within the public sphere is in doubt can be seen if one considers the case of the European Union (EU), where it is said to exist a democratic deficit. The term was initially used to challenge the transfer of legislative powers from national governments to the Council of Ministers of the EU and it is most used in traditionally 'Eurosceptic' countries such as the UK. A growing number of politicians and academics propose that there is a political communication deficit in the EU that leads to the following long-term consequences: apathy, political ignorance and the alarming dissatisfaction of European citizens with politics in Europe. Kaitatzi-Whitlock (2005) investigated the relationship between political communication, politics and policymaking in the EU over a twenty year period and correlated the political communication deficit with the communication strategies and policies that have been pursued by the EU ever since the early 1980s and have resulted in de-politicization and the diminishing of the EU's legitimacy as a supranational political entity. The author argued that European citizens have been deprived of their most fundamental rights and needs for political information as well as the means for political participation, despite the empowering possibilities offered today by technology. The Euro crisis has worsened the problem and affected negatively political apathy. This is justified by the low European Parliament election turnout in May 2014 at around 43 per cent, matching the 2009 election turnout, but well below the 1979 European Parliament election (62 per cent) or even the 1994 election (57 per cent).

Pippa Norris is among the commentators that go against the arguments raising concerns about citizen disengagement from the traditional channels of political participation, anti-party sentiment and the decay of civil organisations. In her trilogy considering related facets of these phenomena, the author stated that these concerns are not justified. The first volume, Virtuous Circle (Norris, 2000), developed a critique of the mass media malaise thesis, demonstrating that attention to the news media was positively, not negatively, linked to civic engagement. The second, Digital Divide (Norris, 2001), explored the potential of the Internet for civic engagement, and the way that new opportunities online altered the resources for political competition, facilitating a more level playing field for smaller challengers and opposition movements with technical skills and know-how. Building upon this foundation, the third volume of this trilogy, Democratic Phoenix (Norris, 2002), compares systematic evidence for electoral turnout, party membership and civic activism in countries around the world and suggests good reasons to question popular assumptions of pervasive decline. It is stated that multiple forms of civic engagement have emerged in modern societies to supplement traditional modes of political activism and that political participation appears to have evolved and diversified over the years, in terms of the agencies (collective organisations), repertoires (the actions commonly used for political expression), and targets (the political actors that participants seek to influence). The process of societal modernisation and rising levels of human capital are primarily responsible for driving these developments, although patterns of participation are also explained by the structure of the state, the role of mobilising agencies, and social inequalities in resources and attitudes. As a result, according to Norris, democratic engagement has been reinvented for modern times, rather than simply atrophied. It can be seen then that there are mixed finding regarding the presumed declining confidence among the citizens in the formal political system's capacity to deal with contemporary issues.

Social media and the public sphere: John Keane's cautious view

Much has been written about the democratizing and empowering implication of the Internet and the new social media and much of it can be dubbed as idealistic and representing technological determinism (see Nieminen, 2009: 40). Not surprisingly, the attempt to ground theoretically and empirically the 'ideal speech situation' - at least as formulated by Habermas - on the web has been met with scepticism. Coleman (1999) suggests that much online discussion in characterized as bad-tempered, perhaps as a result of the decline in public debate in physical spaces such as open meetings and street corners, where people first learnt to argue effectively. Wilhelm (1999) also refers to the dangers of poor dialogue and a skewed distribution of contributors in cyberspace. As Boeder (2005) argues, it is often the case that major decisions and actions concerning transnational matters occur without intense public attention. This section attempts to identify the basic contours of how the notion of the public sphere is taking shape in the realm of social media and for this purpose will refer to John Keane's work of monitoring democracy.

According to Keane (2008), strong caution is counselled in the face of such utopian extravagance, not least because the new age of communicative abundance is unstable, even self-contradictory, for instance in the widening power gaps between the communication rich and poor, who seem almost unneeded as communicators or consumers. His claim is that our world is now living through an historic sea change, one that is taking us away from the old world of representative democracy towards a form of democracy with entirely different contours and dynamics, workings and political implications, namely *monitory democracy*. Keane (2008) argues that the growth of monitory democracy is tied closely to the growth of

media-saturated societies – societies in which all institutions operate within fields of media defined by 'communicative abundance'. This monitory democracy and its powerful mechanisms of handling and moderating conflict should take into account the mediation of power and conflict by the institutions of communication. In the age of monitory democracy, the old utopia of shedding light on power - pushing, for instance, towards 'freedom of information' and 'government in the sunshine' and greater 'transparency' - strongly motivates journalists, citizens, lawyers, judges, NGOs and others (ibid.).

Thus monitory democracy has been helped by the end of the age of scarcity and the emergence of communicative abundance (and the wide availability of computerised media networks). Citizens nowadays have in their discretion multiple means to scrutinise, complain about and resist their governments, not just through parliaments, but also through watchdogs, audits, local assemblies, civil society monitors and so on. Keane's central example of monitoring democracy in action is India, as this vast emerging country has a distinctive combination of almost limitless political variety. One could also argue that other countries like Britain lived through a monitory democratic moment in 2011-13 as the expenses scandal (in which public figures were claiming money for personal expenses like mortgages and swimming pools) showed how much harder it has become for politicians to keep things hidden. Silvio Berlusconi's government in Italy also went down following sex scandals made known by the new social media. As a commentator (Runciman, 2009) put it, monitoring democracy is an essentially negative idea of politics – it is, as Keane argues, the idea of a politics in which 'nobody should rule'. As such, it is only a partial description of what democracy is and what it needs to be.

The Internet's contribution to politics: Bang's theory

The Internet's contribution to politics is evidenced by the fact that since the mid-1990s most general elections in democratic countries have had official websites, whilst the main political parties across the globe are trying to improve their online activities. Pippa Norris's comparative analysis, listed above, also provides evidence of democratic engagement and growing political participation in the modern era. Yet, can the Internet and social media undermine democratic institutions and erode traditional institutions of representative, deliberative democracy by providing the means for citizens to participate directly in public policy-making? To answer this question we refer to Bang's concept of Everyday Makers.

Bang argues that the nature of politics and political participation have changed in the era of late modernity.[iv] In his view, there are tensions between engagement norms and duty norms. This distinction revolves around, on the one hand, whether people get involved out of a sense of duty or because they want to engage to make a difference, and on the other, between having a project identity and a legitimating or oppositional one. For Bang, people have engagement norms and a project identity, rather than duty norms and a legitimating and/or oppositional identity. In his view, citizens have reacted to the increased change and complexity associated with late modernity in innovative ways: they have engagement norms and a project identity, so they are certainly not apathetic, but they reject duty norms and do not have a legitimating (or indeed oppositional) identity. Rather, they are increasingly reflexive, drawing on their own experience and engaging on their own terms. Some have become what he terms Expert Citizens, who use their skills to speak on behalf of, rather than listening to, ordinary citizens. In many ways, the emergence of the Everyday Maker is a response to the Expert Citizen (see Marsh and Vromen, 2013).

Bang identifies five key characteristics of Everyday Makers: a. their participation is ad hoc, cause specific and part-time, and thus not driven by organisational membership; b. Everyday Makers have minimal interest in party-based and organised politics and stay away from state-based participation, such as consultation exercises, thereby distinguishing themselves from Expert Citizens who operate in partnership and collaboration with the state; c. Everyday Makers' participation is grounded in their lived experiences and thus is immediate and local, certainly non-ideological, but driven by a project identity; d. they are not interested in idea-driven social and political change, but rather in an issue or cause-driven projects; e. finally, they are involved in politics for fun and to express themselves. For this reason, creative forms of action, expression and multimedia use are often at the core of participation for Everyday Makers.

Marsh and Vromen (2013) viewed the concept of Everyday Makers as one of the most interesting developments in recent conceptual work on political participation, but they looked critically at it, drawing on a series of empirical examples. In their view, it should be acknowledged that there are many participating citizens who demonstrate some, but not all, of the characteristics of Everyday Makers. While Bangs does not discuss variations between Everyday Makers along this dimension, Marsh and Vromen think these to be very important and, as such, there is a need either to distinguish between different types of Everyday Makers, or, alternatively, to recognise that we need more categories. Marsh and Vromen illustrate this point by applying Bang's model to six contemporary case studies of participation, three from the UK (Marsh, O'Toole and Jones' work on young people and politics in Birmingham; Taylor's study of feminist activists in Manchester; and the case of UK Uncut), one transnational (Halupka's research on Anonymous), and two from Australia (Vromen and Coleman's work on GetUp in Australia; Jackson and Chen's research on Occupy Sydney).

Furlong and Cartmel (2012) appear to share their view by referring to the UK case, and in particular to the social change and political engagement among young peoples in 2009/2010.

The public interest and media governance

The regulatory issues associated with the social media will be examined in detail in Chapter Three, which identifies the key policy variables within national governments (UK and the USA), and at a supranational level in the European Union. Here, it suffices to note that the articulation of a public interest framework in a regime of social media governance has to take into account both traditional concerns (such as access, media plurality and freedom of expression) and new emerging concerns. These include: privacy and intellectual property rights; transparency about data processing; protection of users from harmful content (violence, sexually explicit content, hate speech and harassment). Some of these concerns have been with us for some time, but specific points of focus in the Internet era include issues of access to (and usage of) user data by social media platforms typically for advertising and marketing purposes and/or insurance companies. Content ownership, especially the application of copyright laws to the practices in which social media facilitate the production and dissemination of user-generated content, may also integrate copyright material. Protection of minors has always been high in the agenda of regulators, but this issue has gained renewed interest in the online world with an attempt to define enhanced safeguards for user data, the vulnerability of minors to sexual predators, their exposure to hate speech, as well as online bullying.

So, what can be done to protect ourselves from the above? Most countries have adapted *content regulation* (especially *negative content regulation* - restricting diffusion of certain

types of information, text, sound and images, imposing advertising restrictions) and have expanded it to cover the online world. However, the restriction or suppressing of harmful, politically or socially undesirable content is at odds with the principle of freedom of speech in democratic societies and therefore it is not a straightforward task for contemporary policy to apply content rules. Also, the principle of liberal democracies' non-interventionist approach in communications is incompatible with imposing negative media content policies. Given this, it has been put forth that the online digital era brings with it an increased responsibility to the individual media users and that social media platforms should enable individual responsibility and autonomy. Commentators such as Singer (2014) claim that users should now play a more predominant role in social media governance as they are increasingly involved in the production and dissemination of online content through their functions as citizen journalists. Certainly, the public is to bear more responsibility and indeed to be more accountable in using the Internet and social media. At the same time, social media platforms need to comply with acceptable levels of transparency, accountability that have been set by governments or international bodies, for the presence of these is crucial if the public is to bear more responsibility and indeed to be more accountable in using the Internet and social media. The complex issue of whether citizens can actually become custodians of the emergent model of the public interest is elaborated further in Chapter Three.

Social Media and Democracy

The key question to address here is whether social media contribute to democracy, revolution and expansion of the public sphere, or whether social media are first and foremost instruments of control and commerce. To answer the above question this section engages

with social media sceptics and discusses various concerns that have arisen regarding the contribution of electronic networks to democracy.

Unstructured participation

First, the open participation of the Internet and social media can turn chaotic in which there might be no model rules of behaviour, thereby allowing no structured conversation. Gladwell (2010) stressed that successful activism requires strategic hierarchies, with a careful and precise allocation of tasks. In contrast, social media create loose and essentially leaderless networks, not capable of organising revolutions. As networks typically do not have a centralised leadership structure and clear lines of authority, they cannot reach consensus and cannot set strategic goals. A relevant issue is that social sites also have the tendency to distract people from important issues. Morozov (2012) believes that few people use the Internet and social media for political activism, whereas huge numbers view in there pornography, play games, watch movies, or share pictures. These trivial uses of the Internet and social media are well known in the West and they are now spreading in authoritarian regimes. Furthermore, Morozov notes the danger that the sheer volume of information available through social media - coupled with its increased general availability via the Internet and 24/7 news cycles - creates shorter attention spans in which important news is quickly supplanted by new developments elsewhere. For example, the 'Twitterverse' flocked to read and retweet news of the ultimately unsuccessful Iranian uprising of June 2009. Yet the story was swiftly cast aside upon the death of pop megastar Michael Jackson. While social media may create quicker and louder conversations, those conversations may tend to be shallow, short, and easily displaced by the newest 'big thing' (Joseph, 2012).

Unreliable information

A related issue is that a good deal of the Internet's content is unreliable. As a widespread source of information the Internet should provide reliable, authentic and up-to-date information, but user generated content and blogs, in particular, are often defined as unreliable sources, containing personal and one-sided opinions. It is fair to say that common sense (house rules) and common decency should be the rule, or acceptable practice, when posting materials on the Internet, but as this is largely a self-regulated area, reaction comes only when someone complains. There is clearly a need for a better balance enforcing appropriate online behaviour, the assignment of liability, and protecting freedom of speech. Frankly providing an informed (and safe) online experience is important both for users and businesses. Dahlberg (2007) has found that the online debate is polarised and there is generally a lack of listening to others. He pointed out that the Internet and social media fail to adequately consider the asymmetries of power through which deliberation and consensus are achieved, the inter-subjective basis of meaning, the centrality of respect for difference in democracy, and the democratic role of 'like-minded' deliberative groups. What is often absent in online deliberations is a consensus-based, justified and rational decision, let alone that not everyone affected by that decision is included. But it is fair to say that very little of online content is legally actionable, and an even smaller proportion is actually subject to any kind of legal action. Exceptions to this are cases like the famous Sally Bercow tweet case that took place in the UK. In November 2012 Bercow used her Twitter account to hint the name of Lord McAlpine, a Conservative peer, alleged by the BBC to be a paedophile. The allegations proved to be unfounded, and the peer took legal action against Bercow and others. In May 2013, the High Court found that Sally Bercow's tweet 'was libellous' and Bercow agreed to pay damages. However, most content that people are publishing is not defamatory.

At a European Union level, the eCommerce Directive (EU, 2002) establishes clear rules and protections that online retailers and service providers must comply with when dealing with consumers in the member countries of the EU, covering platforms that are allowing other people to publish user generated content.

Censorship

Third, censorship might be an issue. The extent of Internet censorship varies on a country-to-country basis. While most democratic countries have moderate Internet censorship, other countries go as far as to limit the access of information such as news and suppress discussion among citizens. In countries like China, North Korea and Cuba the respective governments restrict their citizens' Internet access by blocking specific websites. Amnesty International, a non-governmental organisation dealing with human rights, notes that China has the largest recorded number of imprisoned journalists and cyber-dissidents in the world. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are all explicitly blocked in China, while in March 2010 Google withdrew from China owing to an ever stronger censorship of its searches. Domestic Chinese equivalents of these sites, such as Baidu, Taobao, Renren and QQ have been launched, that can be more readily controlled by the state. Likewise, the Cuban Internet is among the most tightly controlled in the world, while Internet access in North Korea is only permitted with special authorisation and primarily used for government purposes.

In Turkey, on 20 March 2014 the Erdogan government imposed a block on Twitter after tweets began spreading linking the prime minister to a corruption scandal, only to be lifted a few days later thanks to a Turkish court order. Douglas Frantz, an American State Department official, likened the move to '21st century book burning' (see

, accessed 28 March 2014). The United States' history on freedom of expression has not always lived up to the highest values, for post 9/11 brought about privacy and freedom concerns even in a country with a strong democratic tradition such as the US, as evidenced by the passing of the 2001 Patriot Act which expanded law enforcement's surveillance and investigative powers. In Europe, in the immediate aftermath of the British riots in August 2011, which resulted in widespread looting and property damage, British Prime Minister David Cameron partially blamed social media for the unrest, and raised the possibility of banning criminals from and otherwise censoring social networks.

Corporate online activity and privacy concerns

Fourth, the Internet has become a major arena for corporate activity, similarly to other brunches of the cultural industries. Individualisation of consumption has been accompanied by consolidation of media ownership producing global multimedia corporation intent on redeveloping cyberspace as retail real estate (Murdock 2004). Fuchs (2011a) argues that the Internet and social media are today stratified, non-participatory spaces, and an alternative, non-corporate Internet is required. Giant corporations colonise social media and dominate their attention economy. In a more recent work, Fuchs (2014) takes a step further and contends that big corporate (and to a lesser extent, political) actors dominate and therefore centralise the formation of speech, association, assembly, and opinion on social media.

> Liberal freedoms turn on capitalist social media into their opposite. The concept of
> social media participation is an ideology…it seems both necessary and feasible to

theorize "Web 2.0" not as a participatory system, but by employing more negative, critical terms such as class, exploitation and surplus value (ibid: 102).

Corporate social media gather data on users by continuously monitoring and recording online activities. Collected data are then stored, merged and analysed in order to create detailed user profiles containing information about personal interests and online behaviours. This, in turn, enables targeted advertising with the objective of luring consumers to buying products and services. The mechanism of targeted advertising on social media has been termed 'panoptic sorting' (see Gandy, 1993a, 1993b) as social media obtain an accurate picture of the interests and activities of their users. According to Fuchs (2014: 110) corporate social media sell the users' data commodity to advertising clients at a price that is larger than the invested constant and variable capital. Fuchs (2013) argues in another work that social media 'prosumers' are double objects of commodification: they are commodities themselves and through this commodification their consciousness becomes, while online, permanently exposed to commodity logic in the form of advertisements.

> With the rise of user-generated content, free access social networking platforms, and other free access platforms that yield profit by online advertisement – a development subsumed under categories such as web 2.0, social software, and social networking sites – the web seems to come close to accumulation strategies employed by the capital on traditional mass media like TV or radio. The users who upload photos, and images, write wall posting and comments, send mail to their contacts, accumulate friends or browse other profiles on Facebook, constitute an audience commodity that is sold to advertisers. The difference between the audience commodity on traditional mass media and on the Internet is that, in the latter case, the users are also content

producers; there is user-generated content, the users engage in permanent creative activity, communication, community building, and content-production (ibid).

There is a big debate concerning the privacy of peoples' correspondence when using online services such as email, text messaging and social media. Put it simply, people in the past created some content with the expectation that that content should remain private, but with the advent of social media this is now in the public space, with text messages and tweets. Once we are onto Facebook or Twitter we are basically telling everyone where we are, what we are doing, 24 hours a day. This social media world creates an environment of open distribution and as the technology is indeed pervasive and the amount of data we are creating very large, it makes it difficult to regulate. But do large social media sites take steps to protect user privacy? This is dealt with in Chapter 2.

Absence of critical discussion

Fifth, extensive dialogue and critical discussion (the very essence of the public sphere) is often absent on the Net. There seems to be a gap between 'access to information' and 'ability to conversation and dialogue' as meaningful debate is typically absent in social networking sites, which are dominated by trivial communication. In the case of the Twitter, for example, dialogue is limited by the very fact that it only allows the exchange of swift, short messages (up to 140 characters). This implies that there might be an increase in the number of active participants in the communication process, albeit leaving little space for substantive social and political dialogue involving groups and individuals. Shirky (2011) argues that 'political freedom has to be accompanied by a civil society literate enough and densely connected enough to discuss the issues presented to the public'. He endorses the theory of sociologists

Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld (1970) that the formation of well-considered political opinions is a two-step process. The first step requires access to information; the second, use of that information in conversation and debate. Under this framework, Shirky argues that social media sites have revolutionised how people form political opinions and have made information so widely accessible that more people than ever are able to develop considered points of view.

Lastly, despite its increasing prominence as a place where people access news and advertisers spend money, the Internet remains a distribution medium, not a source of original news content. Although Internet companies invest in this medium, the investment has tended to be in technology and not in journalists. Internet sites unaffiliated with traditional media typically collect stories from various newspapers and wire services, or comment on the news, but do little original local news coverage or investigative reporting. So, is it just a myth that the Internet has the ability to contribute to democracy by creating a healthier public sphere? Is the creation of new social and political units by social media a cyber-fantasy? Not quite, as it was argued in a previous work (Iosifidis, 2011). If traditional media like newspapers helped to set up public spaces where people initiated forms of communication within nation-states, new social media can do likewise in the international space in which citizens increasingly invest their time to communicate with each other and create things. It all depends on how one uses the Internet and social media. As all new media technologies, the Internet and social media can provide a useful tool or the basis for a healthier democracy and an enhanced public space, but they cannot themselves create such a space. They can either be used as instrument of empowerment or domination.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the theoretical framework of the book. It critically investigated the complex interaction between social media and contemporary democratic politics, and provided a grounded analysis of the emerging importance of social media in the public sphere, democracy and civic engagement. There is a widespread assumption that social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are empowering people and making political processes more democratic, and yet the evidence is not always there to support such assertions. The literature review examined the salience of the network as a metaphor for understanding our social world, but also the centrality of the Internet in civic and political networks. As Loader and Mercea (2012: x) have argued, on one angle, there is often an assumption that the widespread use of the Internet for social networking, blogging, video-sharing and tweeting has an elective affinity with participatory democracy'. On the other, they suggest that 'such optimistic claims for the political benefit of social networking are in sharp contrast to much of the mainstream academic discourse surrounding the prospects for digital democratic governance'.

The central question discussed here was whether the social media actually provide new forms of participatory democracy and result in an enhanced public sphere. The chapter intentionally took a more circumspect and open-ended type of approach at present and offered a balanced view of both the sceptics and the optimists. The two sections of the book that will follow intend to test the concepts against the empirical material drawn from the global North (section one) and South (section two). While the first section will explore the relationship between online mobilisation and policy change in mature, liberal democracies, the second

section will shift the focus from the Western world to non-Western, developing countries, as well as authoritarian regimes.

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[i] Chapter four discusses in more detail whether the new communications techniques can overcome the perception of a democratic deficit that has affected modern politics and contends that Bang and Keane's approaches provide a partial analysis of the true worth of Internet politics. It demonstrates how Obama's 2008 Democratic Presidential campaign directly interacted with Everyday Makers through an innovative use of new information communication technologies. Similarly, it looks into how Keane's 'Monitory Democracy' occurred in the UK 2010 General Election Prime Ministerial General Election Debates which brought a heightened level of consumer-led scrutiny to the election as they placed a focus on political leadership.

[ii] A social network can be described as a set of actors (individuals, organizations, families, neighborhood, and so on) and relations that hold the actors together (maintain a tie) (Haythornthwaite, 2002). The study of social networks can be perceived as a disciplinary enquiry into patterning of relations between social actors. The core aspect of the study of social networks is that network structure and position have important behavioral, perceptual and attitudinal implications for the individuals and the social system (Emirbayer, 1997).

[iii] This and other '-gate' scandals show that even in an era when print and limited spectrum audio-visual media were much more closely aligned with political parties, investigative journalism exposed and brought into public scrutiny dirty political actions and controversies about secret power.

[iv] Polish-British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman argued that late modernity (or 'liquid modernity' as he terms it) is marked by the global capitalist economies, the process of increasing privatisation of services, and by the information revolution. In his Liquid Modernity, Bauman (2000) investigates how we have moved away from a 'heavy' and 'solid', hardware-focused modernity to a 'light' and 'liquid', software-based modernity.