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Abstract

This entry discusses the various roles of media and communication in terms of empowerment and social change. It does so by focusing on a temporal and historical dimension which relates to innovations in terms of media and communication technologies going from the print-press over radio broadcasting and the internet. Besides this, we also identify a special dimension going from the local to the trans-national, but also exposing media and communication as a space of contention. Finally, a strategic dimension is identified focusing on how political actors and social movements frame issues and attempt to influence, at times successfully at other times less so, the process of meaning making.

1. Introduction

If one wants to understand how media contributes to the empowerment of individuals or groups, one needs to realize, first, that empowerment represents a relational construct. In other words, to understand how individuals or groups gain power (politically, economically or socially) it is crucial to analyze the root formulation of empowerment – power itself.

Traditional accounts of power tend to be negatively inclined and envision A having power over B when A can get B to do what B does not want to do. This traditional conceptualization of power is, however, rather limiting. Power is also discursive and frequently manifests itself in A's efforts to diminish the public view of B so that A can more easily dominate B. Moreover, power is often hidden because the dominant groups are able to control the behaviour of the powerless through inescapable structures and systems such as ideology. Power in this form, arguably, 'is at its most effective when least observable' (Lukes, 2005: 1).

In many modern accounts, power is thus not possessed, but rather exercised, through discourse, subject-positions and structures. Its force is not monopolized and 'not the *privilege*, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions' (Foucault, 1990: 26 – emphasis in original). Moreover, public institutions — schools, prisons, hospitals — utilize subtle forms of micro-power, such as self-censorship, surveillance, or (data) monitoring, to imprint their domination on individuals and societies and instill compliance. Media and communication are among

these institutions and play an important role in the construction of knowledge and of common sense, and are pivotal in the process of meaning making.

To discuss empowerment in the context of media 'effects' arguably points to a reverse theory of the traditional media effect-model as this is not about media organisations or elites yielding their power over audiences, neither is this about a top-down linear transmission model. Rather, the notion of empowerment in relation to media and communication is discussed here in terms of audiences becoming producers of media content and of organized citizens or social movements taking control of the means of communication: i.e. becoming the media. As such, we point to a model of communication in which power is diffused, and the circuit of culture (production/representation/reception) deemed to be complex and multi-directional.

As such, what is of importance here is a common presumption that media and communication matters in terms of empowerment, that media and communication tools can potentially be highly effective when it comes to strategies of social change, that media and communication can make a difference. This assumption in turn also drives political elites to attempt to control as much as possible the media and to severely curtail their citizens' communication rights.

In this entry we address three inter-linked dimensions in relation to empowerment and media. First, a temporal dimension inevitably invokes issues of technological change, but also of the nature of political change and of political agency. Second, we will refer to a spatial dimension; empowerment plays out in different ways in different context.

Finally, a strategic dimension is of relevance too; this refers more to the finality of and the aims of a particular communicative action enacted by political actors with the aim of empowering themselves or others through media or by using media.

2. Temporal Dimension

There is undeniably a temporal dimension when assessing the role of media and communication tools in relation to empowerment and social change. We can relate here to technological innovations over time and the different affordances these newly emerging media and communication technologies provide to the agents of social change. Technological innovation has led to a broad variety of media and communication technologies such as print-presses, telecommunication, broadcasting tools, the internet, each having distinct affordances and empowering qualities.

The notion of affordance, Gibson (1977: 75) explains, is a 'unique combination of qualities that specifies what the object affords us'; they represent potentialities for a set of actions, which we perceive or not. Furthermore, through their affordances, objects become an extension of ourselves thereby overcoming the subject-object dichotomy.

In terms of media and communication technologies and protest/resistance, the affordances are multiple. For example, while letters, a telephone, chatting and email all afford inward communicative processes, the telephone and chatting is more prone to real-time communication while letters and email enable asynchronous communication. Another affordance that is of importance here is reach; it is easier to reach large and

diverse audiences through radio or TV broadcasting than it is through a printed newsletter or a pamphlet.

In view of these affordances, media and communication technologies tend to be appropriated very quickly by activists and protest movements thereby at times recognizing hidden affordances (i.e. using twitter to coordinate protest actions). The other side of this coin is the reaction by the powers that be, who often consider new media and communication technologies as a potential threat, which they will subsequently attempt to neutralize through increased control, surveillance and/or regulation. This is, in itself, an indication that there exists a deep-seated assumption that the means of communication in the hands of ordinary people and activists have a genuine impact.

In this section we will address three relevant and somewhat inter-related aspects relating to technological changes. First, the role that print cultures have played in terms of empowerment and giving voice to the often voiceless. Second, the way in which radio was appropriated as a way to produce independent media content, serving their communities. Finally, the internet cannot be ignored as a recent technological innovation that provides multiple affordances or avenues of empowerment for activists.

2.1 Print Cultures and Empowerment

The invention of the print-press in the late Middle Ages, subsequent technological improvements to the print-press and increased levels of literacy, especially amongst the emerging middle classes, provided ample opportunities for political activists to produce, duplicate and distribute their self-produced content on a much larger scale and with a much greater political impact. It is thus not very surprising that political elites who were used to having absolute power did everything they could to control the print-presses.

A good example in this regard the period prior to the French revolution when a vibrant community of dissent emerged in parallel with the widespread distribution of revolutionary journals, books, pamphlets and satirical prints which arguably set the intellectual agenda and political context that made the revolution thinkable. These were seen by the powers that be as incendiary and potentially very dangerous, which explains why in pre-revolutionary France a whole range of preventive measures of censorship such as the screening of content prior to publication, a license to operate print-presses, a monopolistic printing guild or tight controls on distribution of paper, existed alongside post-factum forms of censorship such as police repression against illegal presses or the regulation and surveillance of the booksellers. We can draw a parallel here with how the internet is controlled and filtered in some countries today.

On the eve of the French revolution, about 160 censors worked for the French State (Roche, 1989: 5), but this was to no avail as resistance to this was rife and widespread.

Much of the French subversive content in this period was printed in the Netherlands where a more liberal regime reigned, mainly inspired by Luther's and Calvin's reformation. This material was subsequently distributed through clandestine shops and book-peddlers in France (Darnton, 1982: 184).

The abundant use of print by dissident and oppositional movements did not stop after the French revolution, on the contrary. The student uprisings in May 1968 across the world constituted a particularly vibrant phase for oppositional print-culture and the impetus for an explosion of creativity. Besides pamphlets and newsletters, especially the poster-format became associated with May '68 as an effective and powerful means of communication to engage in discursive resistance, both directed at strengthening collective identities and at critiquing the establishment. The poster as a format enabled the student movement to communicate independently whilst French cities became a canvas for radical artists.

It was cheap to produce and large numbers could be printed relatively quickly. During the May '68 student protests, many thousands of posters were produced each night in the so-called *Ateliers Populaires*. The iconic style of the posters, quite rough, one colour, striking images and playful slogans was to some extent determined by the technique of silk-screen printing. The re-discovery of (silk-)screen printing techniques, partly because silk had dropped in price and because it was an easy and straightforward process, played an important part in the enormous popularity of the political poster at the end of the 1960s.

The themes the protest posters addressed were varied, many calling for the unity between intellectuals, workers and peasants, reminiscent of the French revolution, some demanding for national strike actions, and others propagating anti-police and anti-establishment discourses or promoting sexual liberation. The mainstream media was also seen to be complicit with the establishment and the object of critique in the posters. Another – often forgotten – dimension of this movement was solidarity with anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles in Africa, Asia and Cuba.

The model of the radical printing collectives established by the *Ateliers Populaires* also survived well beyond '68 as in many countries radical print shops emerged in the 1970s and 1980s providing independent spaces and means for activists to print their material (see Baines, 2015 for more on the UK context). The need for such spaces of self-mediation came out of the difficulty of activists to get their content printed by commercial printers who were either too expensive or refused blatantly to print 'radical' content. Radical print shops became central hubs in a network of various progressive struggles ranging from pacifism, radical feminism, ecology, anti-racism/anti-fascism, workers rights, gay rights and community politics.

Later on, the invention of the photocopier and laser printers and Desktop Publishing software reduced the cost of printing considerably and democratized the possibility to print and reproduce texts even further. One of the many outcomes of this was the birth of the phenomenon of the fanzine – a self-made magazine as an expression of fandom (Atton, 1999), which on the internet became known as the e-zine.

2.2 Community Radio and Empowerment

Since it's inception, radio has been particularly attractive to political actors because of its potential to reach large audiences who do not have to be literate to understand a preferred message and discourse. As such, radio was seen as a promising new technology for those striving to own an independent means of communication to advance a particular struggle. The enthusiasm for radio of the German radical theatre maker Bertolt Brecht is well documented. He passionately argued that

> Radio must be changed from a means of distribution to a means of communication. Radio could be the most wonderful public communication system imaginable, a gigantic system of channels – could be, that is, if it were capable not only of transmitting but of receiving, of making the listener not only hear, but also speak, not of isolating him but of connecting him. (Brecht, 1983 [1930]: 169)

This emancipatory appropriation of radio as a 'means of communication' in the hands of the oppressed to shape another system did not materialise in the way Brecht envisaged. Just as discussed above with print, radio was tightly controlled and regulated in various ways. In Western democracies, the airwaves remained closed for alternative voices for several decades, either through state monopolies on broadcasting, as was the case in Europe, or through tailoring regulation to a market-model and to commercial broadcasting, as was the case in the U.S. (Cammaerts, 2009a).

Many radio stations, however, defied this and positioned themselves in-between the state and the commercial model. One of the most prevalent ways to describe such initiatives is community radio, but others are creative or alternative radio. Participatory radio initiatives from below are often positioned in relation to the community(ies) from which they emerge and which they ideally serve. Such community radio stations are often autonomous media that constitute 'vehicles of social movements' to disseminate their frames through practices of disclosure (Langlois and Dubois, 2005: 9-10).

A good example of an empowering and counter-hegemonic radio station is Radio Centraal, based in Antwerp (Belgium). It started out as a pirate radio in 1980, but it subsequently gained an official license to broadcast in 1982. It has been a vibrant station ever since, run by volunteers in a horizontal basic democratic way, without advertising or public subsidies. The station caters to many different alternative and ethnic sub-cultures and constitutes a central node for a variety of local, national and international social movements while at the same time retaining its independence. As a former chairman explained: 'We squarely support [leftwing] political action in our reporting, but in a critical way and without giving up our independence' (De Ceulaer, quoted in Ploem, 2010 – own translation).

However, not all community radio's are as politically engaged or independent as is Radio Centraal. In the UK, for instance, community radio's are much more dependent on state funding and on advertising for their funding, they are also more professionalized, which all together tends to lead to less overtly political radio stations. At the same time, UK community radio stations do facilitate empowerment through promoting social cohesion and community work.

2.3 The Internet and Empowerment

As already implied above by introducing the notion of communicative affordances, social movements and activists will appropriate any media and communication technology that is available to them in order to produce their own media. Movement media are less prone to reach the broad public; depending on the cause and popularity of the movement, they tend to have niche or micro-audiences. The internet and social media could in many ways be seen as the quintessential movement media, important both at a facilitative, instrumental level, but also innovative and constitutive of a new repertoire of contentious action.

Foucault's account of technologies of the self is an appropriate way to theorize these new forms of contentious action (Cammaerts, 2015). Foucault (1997) identified four distinct technologies of the self:

1) Disclosure or "the cultivation of the self" (ibid: 234)
2) Examination or "taking stock" (ibid: 237)
3) Remembrance or the "memorizations of deeds and their correspondence with rules" (ibid: 247)
4) Interpretation of dreams or 'an announcement of a future event' (Ibid, 241)

Internet-mediated movement media are foremost relevant at the level of processes of disclosure, examination and remembrance, which all subsequently feeds into the interpretation of dreams, i.e. the idea that 'another world is possible'. The technologies

of the self seen in this light represent the tools through which a social movement becomes self-conscious of itself as a movement.

Through the **disclosure of self**, movement media are instrumental in constructing and sustaining collective identities, to identify problems that need to be fixed, articulate a set of demands and solutions to these problems and to mobilize for direct action. Movement media are, however, also essential to facilitate the **examination of self**, enabling self-reflexivity and making transformation and change within a movement possible. Finally, movement media also increasingly enable the **remembering of self**, archiving the past and in doing so transmitting practices, tactics and idea's across space and time. The **interpretation of dreams** relates to the way in which an alter-reality is imagined and envisaged.

Each media and communication technology from the print-press over broadcasting to the internet have provided social movements with different affordances at the level of disclosure, examination and remembrance and all together they constitute a sorts of repertoire – a communicative toolbox – out of which activists and movements choose to promote and to imagine a better world. As Langlois and Dubois (2005: 10) argue, social movements are keen to:

> create media that breakdown hierarchies of access to meaning-making, therefore allowing those typically found at the grassroots to have a voice and to define reality

At the level of the Internet, so-called Independent Media Centers (IMCs), which emerged at the end of the 1990s in the wake of the anti-WTO protests in Seattle, are a good example of this. Indymedia's popped-up in cities across the world and promoted as well as facilitated self-mediation practices by activists through the establishment of an independent activist-focused online platform that could be used to disclose alternative information as well as to mobilise for direct actions. The core slogan of IMCs is: 'don't hate the media, be the media'. Through *being the media* they construct an alternative and organic counter public space which also functions as a space for steering and promoting contentious action – they can be seen as the archetypical movement media organisation (Cammaerts, et al., 2003).

In order to maximise exposure, the IMCs have over the years also diversified their media activities, through collaborations with community or alternative radio stations, producing more audio-visual content, and experimenting with print such as flyers and brochures. All this indicates that a 'multi-media approach' is being pursued by activists. However, with the emergence of blogging and web 2.0 many IMCs collapsed or morphed into something else, such as citizen journalism projects.

Presently, media and communication technologies such as the internet also play an important role in terms of the performativity of protest and of resistance and this obviously also has a temporal and historical dimension. While the performance as protest and the carnivalesque was arguable part of a feudal repertoire of contentious action (Tilly, 1986), the affordance of media and communication technologies to capture and record protest performances have promoted new genres and ways of artistic expression linked to protest. Through photography and video-art protest artefacts can

be produced. This in combination with the important affordance to construct a digital archive of protest performances can potentially influence future movements or activists.

One particular example of an archived protest performance is the so-called flash-mob. A flash-mob is mobilized using social networking sites to show-up in a particular space at a given time to perform togetherness with a touch of street theatre while also occupying a public or commercial space. Flash mobs were considered apolitical at first – a somewhat playful gimmick without being explicitly wanting to be political[i]. However, activists also started using this internet-mediated tactic to organize protests, which Rheingold (2002) denoted as smart-mobs. As a performative protest event the smart-mob only makes sense if it is recorded and uploaded contributing to an ever growing archive of protest artefacts available online.

2.4 Summary

The temporal dimension in terms of social change and empowerment is an important one and it has relevance both in terms of technological innovation and the very issues that are contested.

When it comes to technological innovation, it is clear that various media and communication technologies have different affordances for activists. The production of media content by citizens and activists has become much easier and straightforward,

and with it the potential for empowerment. This has become even more pronounced in the digital age characterized by media and communication convergence.

What is also relevant to remember is that media and communication technologies tend to be highly regulated and severely controlled. It is here that we observe the assumed danger and impact of media and technologies in the hands of citizens and movements; the powers that be often do not trust media and communication tools in the hands of activists or ordinary citizens precisely because they believe they can have a detrimental impact on their interests and hegemonic status.

3. Spatial Dimension

Tools of communication can also empower people to move through spaces, to connect people across spaces, and to define and create new spaces. Paper-based media pamphlets; books, and the later incarnation of 'zines', have been disseminating powerful ideas across oceans and igniting local communities for hundreds of years. The arrival and dissemination of the printing press has been credited with revolutions. More recently, hobbyists and activists have utilized radio to mobilize and empower local communities. The last three decades has seen the arrival of a type of media-aided communication with the power to connect people and spread ideas across the globe almost instantaneously.

This coming together *through* media has a profound impact on collective actors and their potential for empowerment. Moreover, technology and globalization affords mass self-communication to a potentially worldwide audience. Media users increasingly become both senders/producers and receivers of messages.

3.1 Global Connections

The spreading of ideas across time and space, or what is commonly called 'movement spillover' (Meyer and Whittier, 1994), is not a new phenomenon, but has in recent years received renewed attention due to the technological changes outlined above. This is most apparent in the growing set of affiliated, mutually inspired, but locally activated movements pushing back against neoliberal globalization and in the calls for a renewed politics of redistribution, which resonate ever stronger. The Occupy Movement of 2011 was an International phenomenon that spread from its initial target of New York City to London, UK; Munich, Germany; Sao Paulo, Brazil; Rome, Italy; Vancouver, Canada; Sydney, Australia; Cape Town, South Africa; and could even be found in the town squares of small town US. The strategy of the Occupy Movement, however, was years in the making, and borrowed ideas and movement frames from across the globe.

It could be argued, for example, that the emergence of the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, in the 1990s gave birth to many of the most iconic features of the Occupy movements (Clifford, 2005). The Zapatistas hold both extremely local concerns, like the welfare of the indigenous Mayan population, alongside global ideological ambitions of opposing neoliberal globalization and unfettered free trade. The Zapatistas

have inspired much of the style and ideology of anti-globalization and anti-neoliberal reforms. Key internal practices of Occupy such as the horizontal movement structure that disallowed the rise of any individual or group of individuals to permanent leadership, the insistence on consensus decision-making, and use of masks in protests to simultaneously protect the protester and to symbolize the universal nature of the protests, were also prevalent in the Zapatista movement (Nail 2012), but arguably also in the so-called New Social Movements of the 60s and 70s. Likewise, it could also be argued that the Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East, and the Spanish Indignados protests in their use of the tactical indefinite 'occupation' of public spaces also served as an inspiration for the Occupy movement.

Space is not merely an obstacle that media allows social movements to circumvent, a demonstration of space and the symbolic negation of distance can become a powerful part of protest and social activism in itself. While the Occupy movement could have been discrete local and regional protests, they instead became a global phenomenon where groups of protesters all over the world mutually supported and informed one another, and ultimately gained from an overwhelming sense of global support.

Protesters outside Wall Street held posters stating 'March Like an Egyptian', Spanish Indignados found allegiance with unemployed graduates in London, and supporters from Taiwan to Libya ordered pizzas to feed the activists in New York City and Madison, Wisconsin. In the face of a globalization which deliberately pits workers of different nations against one another in economic competition, this expression of solidarity and common cause across international boundaries was itself an important (and surprising) expression of empowerment. Arguably, media and communication

tools in this instance enabled social movements to deny spatial boundaries and appeal to intrinsic human values.

3.2 Local Empowerment

As already discussed above, media tools and technologies can potentially empower both communities of birth and dissipated, otherwise hidden, communities of interest. These global networks facilitated by media and communication tools do not only enable us to think globally. In many instances, media has empowered people to think and act locally and regionally, with traditional borders and definitions not being broken down but reinforced as they become threatened. In the recent Hong Kong pro-democracy protests of 2014 and 2015, which birthed the Umbrella Movement, Hong Kong students asserted their democratic rights against the authoritarian control of mainland China. Using a simple online software platform – a forum called HKGolden, the Umbrella Movement organized a set of protest practices characterized by restraint and civic conscientiousness, and the protesters became internationally known for their extremely polite form of creative disruption.

Through creatively adopting a symbol of the protests, namely the umbrellas that the students used to protect themselves from police tear gas, the Umbrella Movement developed a powerful set of iconography that marks their presence both on the streets and online. The Hong Kong Umbrella Movement used this iconography and a coordinated protest effort, all produced and disseminated online, to assert and reinforce their unique regional identity and assert their rights over a powerful parent-nation. In

the face of aggressive censorship from the Chinese government, the creativity of the activists in the Umbrella Movement sustained the attention of both social and mainstream media, bringing international awareness and a protective gaze to their local plight.

The assertion of national boundaries and identities is not always ideologically progressive, as pointed out above. In Europe and North America, right-wing and anti-immigrant groups have increasingly turned to online media tools to recruit and organize (Cammaerts, 2009b). Radical Islamist groups also depend on online media to both recruit new members and to broadcast their radical and violent messages to large audiences.

3.3 New (Media) Communities

Media and communication tools have also empowered people to connect various diasporas and create new communities of interest. It has particularly enabled minority groups to create online spaces where no real (or sometimes, no safe) spaces exist offline. In 2010, the Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) activist and journalist Dan Savage started the 'It Gets Better' project in response to a rash of LGBT teen suicides. Activists and celebrities were encouraged to create and upload videos discussing their experiences as LGBT youth, or express their support for their LGBT friends and family. With explicit recognition that young people often lack the personal autonomy to access physical spaces where LGBT individuals are welcome and safe, a virtual space of support was constructed to help emotionally support them until they

reach adulthood. The 'It Gets Better' Project has since spread from North America and has sister branches in many countries and many languages. In Chile there is 'Todo Mejora', in Italy 'Le cose cambiano', in Finland 'Kaikki muuttuu paremmaksi', amongst many others.

With the increasing importance of media and communication technologies in everyday life, and specifically in terms of connecting and empowering the otherwise disenfranchised, the media itself –particularly the internet – has become an endangered space that is under threat of censorship and control from both government and corporate forces. With this endangerment comes a new form of activism and activist activity aimed at protecting the open nature of the internet and its related hardware and software infrastructure (Powell and Cooper, 2011).

In some nations, like China, this concern is realized and existential with the government asserting strict control over what is and is not allowed online through software protocols that have been collectively termed 'The Great Firewall'. In response, Chinese users have become highly creative in their use of software circumventions like onion routing browsers (cf. TOR-network[ii]) and virtual private networks (VPNs). Users also find creative ways of using language on public and legal social media platforms, like Weibo, that manage to express subversive ideas while evading official observation and filtering.

In other countries, particularly in the West, the internet remains officially an open space, but this reality is increasingly challenged. In mid-January of 2012 a series of

coordinated protests took place against two proposed laws that came up for a vote in the United States Congress, the PROTECT IP Act (PIPA), and Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA). Both pieces of legislation were aimed at Internet 'piracy', or rather the infringement of private copywriter ownership by web-users. The language of both bills was vague enough to legally endanger common creative activities on the Internet, including user-made videos and forum posts, creating a chilling effect on user-generated on-line media.

Interpreting this as an act of protectionism in favor of private profits over the most democratizing aspects of the internet; companies, organizations, and activists mobilized and demanded the bills not be passed into law. This activist coalition included internet companies like Google, non-profit organisations such as Wikipedia, open-source software developers, free speech organizations, and professional associations. Many popular websites, notably Wikipedia, Tumblr, and Reddit shut down their services for a day, redirecting their users to contact their government representatives to protest the bills.

Protests also took place offline in major cities like New York, Seattle, and San Francisco in support of a free and open Internet. The campaign gained an unlikely boost from traditional corporate media when comedian John Oliver called on his viewers to object to the proposed changes in governing the internet. Oliver's rant went viral online, prompting an overwhelming response that crashed the US Federal Communications Commission website because of the heavy traffic.

This is not merely a U.S. phenomenon, with protests erupting later that same year against the European Union version of the bill, the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA). While all these bills were subsequently defeated, the internet as an open space – who is allowed in it, what users are allowed to say, and their ability to access it reliably and freely – remains very much up for debate in lieu of a universal legal protection of the internet as a public good that is free from government manipulation or corporate control.

As media technologies expand as a space, so too do its inhabitants in both number and type. Media and communication technologies become their own type of empowerment for those who know how to learn and utilize them. With the emergence of the identity of the 'hacktivist', the network itself has become constitutive of direct action. The technologically proficient can become politically or personally inclined to use their skills to impact both the virtual and the real world, good examples of this are the works of individual hackers and hacking groups like LulzSec and Anonymous. These groups and individuals have been targeting everything from their personal rivals to major corporations like Visa, MasterCard or Sony.

Thus far hacktivism is more a skill, an ability to move more freely in cyberspace than most and to impact and change its infrastructure from the inside, than it is an ideology. You can find hackers acting on behalf of just about any political position, progressive and reactionary. However, it requires no official sanction nor education, and in many cases the effectiveness of hackers and hacktivists is not reliant on public exposure through mainstream media, a hurdle that much traditional activism is still required to clear. Unsurprisingly, if hackers and hacktivist groups like Anonymous appear to be

coalescing around a specific cause, it is concerning the internet itself as a free and open space. Many hacktivists stood against SOPA, PIPA, and ACTA alongside Google and Wikipedia, and on the Blackout day of protest they set about taking down the many websites of organizations which supported the legislation, including the U.S. Justice Department.

3.4 Summary

The spatial dimension is important when it comes to the precise role media and communication tools play in terms of empowering and connecting activists and ordinary citizens in and between particular locations. The political context in which you are situated matters as this defines the regulatory regimes vis-à-vis media and communication technologies and infrastructures. This in turn has an impact on what is possible to do with media and communication technologies, the nature of the restrictions and the cost of political participation. In some parts of the world organizing a protest event through an online platform is much more risky to your personal integrity than in other parts of the world.

Besides this, certain struggles are more local whereas other struggles are more trans-national or even global. Mediation plays an important role in terms of facilitating movement spillovers. Ideas, movement frames, slogans, imagery, protest tactics, etc. tend to travel from one locality to another through mediation. Having said this, the local context is important too; it is where contestation has to be organized and enacted.

The internet, finally, has the potential affordance to transcend space and time restrictions leading to the establishment of online communities of interest (rather than offline communities of birth). This transcending of boundaries and borders through using online infrastructures is, however, also contentious and being challenged; not only by authoritarian regimes, but also by Western capitalist democracies. While authoritarian regimes are highly active in terms of attempting to stop their netizens to access (certain) information, in Western democracies, content is blocked to protect the interests of the (Western-based) content producing industries (f.e. blocking Pirate Bay or geo-blocking of content). All this also shows that access to internet technologies themselves has become an issue around which activists and movements wage struggles.

4. Strategic Dimension

This last section considers the strategic dimensions of empowerment. It explores how citizens and activists use communication to propel a particularistic agenda, to exercise power and to empower themselves. As highlighted earlier, political discourse can resonate beyond the like-minded and can potentially have a profound impact, even provoke change. Take Martin Luther King Jr.'s memorable 'I Have a Dream' speech in 1963, for example. His words reverberated well beyond his supporters to produce real social change. Why, though, were his words so empowering? And why did they mobilize people and motivate change? The answer to those questions is not straightforward.

The way we communicate (what we talk about and the way we talk about those things) can sustain traditional power structures (think: government and corporations) as well as ways of understanding the world (think: discourse). At the same time, communication can also disrupt the influence of structures and enable agency. Hegemony is thus never fixed nor total. It always remains vulnerable to new ideas and to new ways of doing things.

Shaping the mind, argues one school of thought, most often happens through media messages because of its privileged place and capacity to 'create and sustain meanings' (Silverstone, 1999: 143). Power, however, is never monopolized. And the other school of thought stresses that audiences can — and often do — resist mediated messages. On top of that, it could be argued that too much thinking about communication and media is too focused on the *effect* or power of media messages. Perhaps, the meanings we make (or the ways we interpret our world) are just partly related to media (Couldry, 2004).

Martin Luther King's speech, as noted earlier, echoed well beyond the Washington Mall. The media arguably empowered him and his message because millions saw it on TV, including then US President John F. Kennedy, who was reportedly moved by King's words, repeatedly saying, 'He's damned good! Damned good!'. *The New York Times* also heaped praise on King the day after the March on Washington with a front-page headline declaring, 'Peroration by Dr. King Sums Up a Day the Capital Will Remember'. Media, clearly, mattered in this case. King was empowered because he was able to communicate with an audience that was much larger than his 250,000 supporters on the Washington Mall. The media (TV, radio, newspapers and magazines) gave him a chance to *shape* more human minds than those listening to him in situ.

The recent Occupy movement also had an impact outside of their temporary camps in New York's Zuccotti Park or on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral. Media picked up on – and amplified messages relating to inequality. The contrasting image of 99 per cent versus 1 per cent became a slogan or *bumper sticker* (which is important for strategic reasons as the coming pages makes clear) that empowered the Occupy movement.

There is little doubt that media play some part in shaping and determining what we talk about and how we talk about those things. This ability can be both empowering and disempowering — and, of course, both at the same time. The media, surely, is:

> a significant social force in the forming and delimiting of public assumptions, attitudes and moods [...] They sometimes generate, sometimes amplify a field of legitimate discourse that shapes the public's *definition of its situation* (Gitlin, 1980: 9 - emphasis added).

Media and culture are inexorably linked. Media use can even be connected to levels of political knowledge and participation. Simply reading a newspaper or blogging about politics can be empowering. So, if we accept the media is responsible, in part, for *shaping human minds*, then we must ask ourselves how it happens.

4.1 Framing

Our lives are filled with competing ways of seeing things and describing the world around us. Nearly a century ago, Walter Lippmann hinted at the idea of framing in his description of the competing political ideas swirling in the popular press attempting to shape the so-called 'pictures in our heads' (Lippmann, 1922: 3). Some fifty years later, Erving Goffman (1974) highlighted the importance of how people use frames to map, construct and understand their world.

Defining Framing

Akin to the structure of a house, frames lay the foundation for our understanding. Our stories and our metaphors (the way we use language) shape the messages we send and the meanings we take away from the messages we receive. Frames make connections in our brain. They make issues and events appear natural by bringing 'order to events' and providing a language to 'make the world make sense' (Manoff, 1986: 228), while also heightening specific ways of defining issues and particular interpretations of that world. Frames often simplify things. Politicians frequently, for example, equate government spending to balancing our personal chequebooks. Frames, in these cases, are like 'recipes' from leaders intended to help us *cook up* our opinions in a way that advances that politician's agenda (Kinder, 2007: 156). Frames, similarly, often *spotlight* a conflict, aiming to accomplish four important tasks: 'problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation' (Entman, 1993: 52). Frames can also empower individuals and social movements.

Movement Frames

What words and ideas (or frames, in keeping with understanding empowerment) motivate us to do something or enable us to challenge power? There are no simple answers when it comes to understanding how frames trigger collective action or the relationship between frames and empowerment. At its most simple level, changing minds relies on *receiving* new information and then *accepting* the recently digested information, resulting in an opinion change. This switch can then – potentially – motivate action. The empowering potential of frames, like so many social actions, is a complicated confluence of factors.

Frames, as stressed earlier, often define the nature of a problem. Collective action frames, however, offer more than just a way of seeing something. They also offer solutions to those problems and provide justifications for action. They suggest *strategic interpretations* of what is wrong and what needs fixing. Collective action frames tend to do three main things:

- *Diagnostic framing:* offers like-minded individuals or potential recruits a new understanding of an issue or event. Simply put, it tells the receiver of the message what is wrong and why;
- *Prognostic framing*: solves the problem by offering how to fix it; and
- *Motivational framing:* inspires people to get involved and take action

(Snow and Benford, 1988).

Successful social movements do all three at once. The Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters, as mentioned earlier, successfully empowered their cause by framing their goals effectively. The group outlined – in simple terms – the unfairness of Communist officials in Beijing reneging on their promise to hold open elections in 2017. Protesters also offered a solution to end the Umbrella Revolution. They would leave the streets of Hong Kong when Beijing changed its electoral guidelines and **the city's** pro-Beijing chief executive resigned. The group's resolute non-violent stance and umbrella as a symbol of resistance and defense against tear gas clearly inspired thousands of supporters to stay on the streets for weeks.

In order to spark interest and spur us to do something tweet, e-mail your Member of Parliament, sign a petition, donate money, protest in the streets leaders sponsoring the frames need to make strategic choices to define issues or events in sympathetic and

narrow terms, playing up positive aspects while avoiding other more negative ones. So-called 'social movement entrepreneurs' need to articulate a message that inspires their followers (or potential followers) to actually do something (Noakes and Johnston, 2005). Motivational frames also need to be simple enough that they can be *amplified*. Amplification requires boiling a frame, be it, diagnostic, prognostic or motivational, down to a bumper sticker-like slogan. Successfully articulating and amplifying a frame thus requires careful crafting of strategic rhetoric. King's frame, of course, was his *dream*. The more recent debate over climate change has slogans such as:

- Climate Change is Real!
- Climate Change Apathy is Not Ok
- Global Warming Is Just Hot Air!
- Tell Al Gore It's the Sun's Fault

Successful collective action frames need to bridge old and new ideas, aiming also to not alienate one's targeted audience. Occupy's concerns about income inequality, for instance, echoed values of fairness and unassailable notions of the *American Dream* that are deeply embedded in the mystique and history of United States. Skilled social movement *framers* often *rent* frames from movements that came before them. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the women's rights movement, for instance, *borrowed* many of the frames adopted by the civil rights campaign. These so-called 'master frames' are larger – more rooted in grand narratives and ideology – than *everyday* social movement frames.

Frames, as we know, do not just appear; they do not happen in a vacuum as they are culturally connected. Movements and their leaders construct frames that favour their point of view and drive their preferred course of action. Not all suggested frames work.

Some fall flat. Others fail to resonate beyond the likeminded. Movement frames also meet resistance from counter-movements and elites. The fight to frame an issue or an event is often a competitive and contested affair. Debates regarding abortion, for instance, represent an ongoing struggle of various movements, with both the pro-choice and pro-life sides constantly trying to influence public opinion and lawmakers. The mass media further complicates the contest, without a doubt, especially as the mass media is rarely a neutral actor in these so-called framing wars.

Often, though, successful framing depends ultimately on how much you have to spend — and not what you have to say. Movements and leaders that have more resources frequently, but not always, win the contest to frame an issue or event. Well-financed organizations around the globe, for instance, spend heavily on promoting their way of thinking about issues and events. Investing in sophisticated public relation machines in the U.S., in fact, paid off with more visibility in the media for many think tanks (Rich and Weaver, 2000). However, sometimes, words (better frames), combined with superior campaign tactics, matter more than money and prestige. Ultimately, only some frames resonate and empower their sponsor. Frames have their desired *resonance* when the people or group they are aimed at are persuaded to interpret the problem or grievance in the frame sponsor's preferred way.

The diagnosis and prognosis must make sense — and the suggested course of action (motivational frame) must be a logical conclusion (Snow and Benford, 1988). The message is important — but arguably whom it emanates from is also relevant. Umbrella Movement leaders in Hong Kong in 2014, for example, became credible source for the Western media because they led a social movement that was able to get thousands of protestors to stay on the streets for weeks. Their message of nonviolence in the face of police brutality further enhanced the group's legitimacy with many, including the

media. World leaders bestowed further credibility on the movement by praising movement leaders and their calls for democracy.

We are also more inclined to accept messages or courses of action from people or organizations regarded as trustworthy. Governments, officials, experts and academics, for instance, are often viewed as more credible sources than, say, an anarchist. As well, we are more apt to trust the frames sponsored by venerable news organizations such as the BBC or *The New York Times* over an independent blogger with a few hundred followers. The news media, as well, relies largely on government sources to provide information and define problems.

4.2 Indexing

News organizations tend to focus on — and place greater emphasis on — issues of greater importance to elites and mainstream public opinion. News media 'tend to *index* the range of voice and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate' (Bennett, 1990: 106 - emphasis in original). In the early 1960s, the debate over civil rights burned hot in the U.S. In his January 1963 inaugural address, Alabama Governor George Wallace vowed: 'segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever'. Months later, President Kennedy countered this with his civil rights address, condemning the threats of violence at the University of Alabama over attempts to desegregate the campus. Civil rights, without a doubt, were of great importance to elites and mainstream Americans. So it is no surprise that the march on Washington and King's speech received so much media attention.

News media also closely adhere, in particular, to elite views concerning military, foreign and economic policy. In a practical sense, journalists give more prominence to official sources. Reporters quote the President much more often than the *person on the street*. It's not a given, however, that journalists will repeat uncritically what these sources say. But governments tend to be the dominant source of information. As a result, news tends to echo and amplify hegemonic interpretations and positions. In the aftermath of 9/11, the news media largely supported — uncritically — the so-called *war on terror* frame sponsored by the White House.

Indexing, arguably, does not turn all journalists into *lapdogs* of power, slavishly reproducing elite discourse. Journalists prize conflict, after all. Tension is a key ingredient of good storytelling. Furthermore, journalistic ethics and professional norms tend to ensure *both sides* get represented in almost every story. Moreover, when elites disagree about an issue, those dissenting voices get represented in news media. After no weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq (a major rationale for going to war in 2003), for example, journalists increasingly reflected a less unified picture about the rationale for the military invasion of the Middle Eastern country and gave more prominence to the frames of anti-war movements. Still, the propensity to privilege elite sources can have a profound impact on the public.

Social movements can benefit from (be empowered by) this indexing propensity in several ways. Mainstream media often ignore – and even ridicule – protest movements. Commercial media, arguably, did not know what to make of the Occupy Movement in the early days of its occupation of Zucotti Park in New York. The movement's unwillingness to adhere to the traditional media logic of coherent messages articulated by designated spokespersons confounded traditional journalists. Occupy protestors

were not like previous protestors. Yet, as the movement grew, news organizations could not ignore the increasing number of people and tents occupying the world's financial capital. Sometimes, protest movements demand media coverage simply because of the public spectacle they create. Media organizations cannot ignore thousands of people on the streets, even if they just report on the chaos and disruption caused by the protest.

As noted above, the Hong Kong pro-democracy Umbrella Movement gained media attention because of its size and staying power. Indexing can also work to protesters advantage when like-minded elites articulate their framed messages for them. Often, social movements strategically use academics, experts or celebrities to spark media attention. Traditional media may be inclined to dismiss social movement leaders – but they are unlikely to ignore a celebrity or a noted expert.

Sometimes, indexing benefits social movements when elites echo their frames. President Barack Obama, arguably, lent more credibility to the Occupy movement (therefore validating more media attention) when at the height of the New York disruptions he told a news conference that the protest

> expresses the frustrations the American people feel, that we had the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression, huge collateral damage all throughout the country [...] and yet you're still seeing some of the same folks who acted irresponsibly trying to fight efforts to crack down on the abusive practices that got us into this in the first place.

4.3 Agenda-Setting and Priming

Messages emphasized in news often become important to us. Polls taken during an economic downturn, for example, often find increased awareness of the jobless rate. Obama, arguably, primed how audiences interpreted the Occupy movement when he conceded in a television interview that the banking industry's actions leading up to the financial crisis 'wasn't necessarily illegal; it was just immoral or inappropriate or reckless.'

Agenda-setting suggests media messages influences what the public cares about, linking our awareness and opinion to how often and how issues are represented in media. As Cohen (1963: 13) famously asserted, 'the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about'. We can, however, ignore media messages and make up our minds in other ways, drawing from different or no sources. Still, many of us rely on media for information. So, media, in this way of thinking, possesses a potentially important role in making messages present or absent in our minds.

These mediated messages then often *prime* us, arguably, to think about them in certain ways. Priming as an *effect* of media leads us to change the criteria by which we evaluate politics and politicians. Since news media highlight certain issues or characteristics — making them more top of mind for people (agenda-setting), media can shape how we make decisions about events, issues and even politicians. For many of us, 'frames subtly and often unconsciously direct which beliefs or information are primed or *cued* (i.e. made accessible psychologically) for subsequent evaluations' (Callaghan and Schnell, 2005: 14 - emphasis in original).

As a result of this highlighting, the media 'shape the considerations' in the foreground of our thinking as we pass judgment on public policy and politicians (Scheufele and Tewskbury, 2007: 11). While agenda-setting makes mediated issues and events shift more to the top of our minds, priming influences the factors we consider when judging a public debate or politician.

Social movements can take advantage of agenda-setting and priming to empower their agenda. If highlighting certain messages in the media can 'shape' how audiences consider issues and events, then social movements are wise to try to influence those considerations strategically. *Playing the game* with sophisticated public relation machines (f.e. adapting to the media logic) can potentially empower groups with more visibility for their frames. Some social movements even sponsor think tanks so their like-minded experts can play a role in shaping public discourse. Protest movements can also be empowered by using elites or celebrities to sponsor their preferred frames.

4.4 Summary

Communication can empower us. We can use language strategically to frame issues and events in hopes of advancing our agenda. And while our words can empower us, we must remember they also have power over us. We use discourse – but it also, in many ways, uses us. Indexing, priming and agenda-setting can influence – and even alter how we talk and think about events and issues.

Dominant people, groups, structures and systems, no doubt, have considerable power to shape and control meaning. This privilege is never absolute, though. What we and others think about issues and the world around us is never static. Powerful actors may

have sway (framing, indexing, agenda-setting and priming) over what we talk about and how we talk about it. Still, we can contest those powerful frames – and empower ourselves and our movements – especially given our growing ability to self-mediate our messages.

5. Conclusions

This entry presented a theoretical understanding of how media and communication can potentially empower individuals and groups. It has to be said, however, that at the same time rigid structures and dominant interests aim to perpetuate the status quo and to sediment hegemonic meanings. While these dominant forces in society are often able to sustain economic, social and political inequalities, media and communication tools are also used instrumentally and strategically by subaltern groups with a view to disrupt long-established systems and hegemonic meanings. Over time, technological innovations are appropriated and provide specific affordances to individuals and movements in their struggles for social change.

Moreover, media and communication can compress space, connecting people across the world and create new communicative spaces of action. Media and communication technology furthermore allow people and social movements to connect in seconds – and spread ideas across the globe almost instantaneously. The spatial dimension also teases out tensions that make media and communication tools and infrastructures an object of political struggle rather than only a tool to facilitate social and political struggles.

As the final strategic section draws out, media tools can be combined with strategic messages (or frames) to empower individuals and social movements and promote social change. And while dominant groups, structures and interests continue to hold considerable power over controlling meaning and shaping what is considered to be 'common sense', this advantage is never total nor absolute, otherwise the history of humankind would be one of stasis, which it is not.

While change at times happens fast and in a radical way, most of the time it is a slow and above all step-by-step process. In both cases, however, media and communication tools arguably play a pivotal role. Through disclosing movement frames, changing discourses, by facilitating internal processes of examination and coordinating, remembering the past, citizens, activists and social movements can imagine alter-realities and dreaming a better future.

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END NOTES:

i The first flash mobs were organized in New York in 2003. One involved a gathering of more than 100 people on the 9th floor of department store Macy - the rug-department. Participants were told that they would have to pretend to be part of a commune that is out to buy a gigantic love-rug. Another notable example was a silent disco in 2004 with people convening on the London Underground to dance using their iPods.

ii TOR is a global network of encrypted proxy-servers and uses a technique called onion routing. TOR repeatedly encrypts data and then sends it through several intermediate routers masking the origin and the destination of the data. The US Navy patented onion routing in 1998 and it was initially set-up to secure government communication