

SCUOLA NORMALE SUPERIORE
DIGITAL MEDIA REVIEW

Social Movements and Digital Media

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cosmos



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How are **digital media** important
for social movement (studies)?

Yes, it's a hype.. But we should care

- Episodes of contentions from the Arab Springs to Syriza intensified attention on collective action dynamics
 - ≠ collective behaviors
- Widespread use of digital media catalyzed attention on diffusion and/or transformation of collective action across borders and dimensions
 - nexus between exposure to information and protest organization/diffusion
- Crucial related dynamics – fake news circulation, alternative fact construction, post-truth discussions – that could be tackled starting from extant reflections on the nexus between SMs and DM

A broad overview

1. Clarify the terms of the discussion and the boundaries of the debate
2. Three main lines of inquiry: predictors, organization, symbolic production and collective identity
3. Digital media as contested objects: mobilizing on techno-related issues

1. Much ado about...

The terms of the discussion and the boundaries of the debate

Social Movements

One specific form of *collective action*:

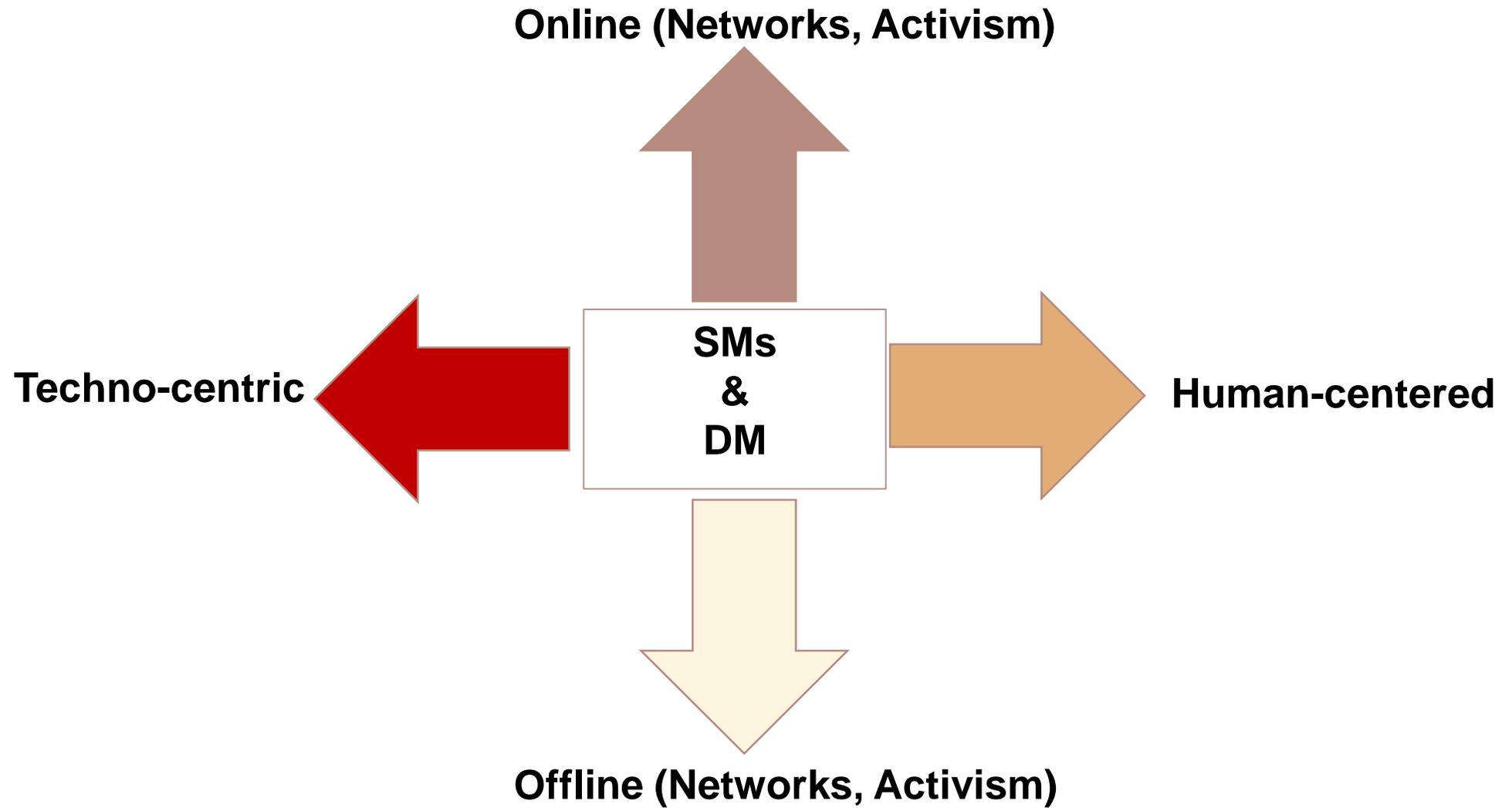
- “A set of social practices, i) involving simultaneously a number of **individuals and groups**, ii) exhibiting **similar morphological characteristics** in continuity of time and space, iii) implying a **social field of relationships** and iv) the capacity of people of **making sense** of what they are doing” (Melucci 1996:20)
- “Coordination **on behalf of shared** interests and programs” (Tilly and Tarrow 2006:7)
- “Contemporary social movements assume the form of **solidarity networks** entrusted with **potent cultural meanings**” (Melucci 1996:4)

Digital Media

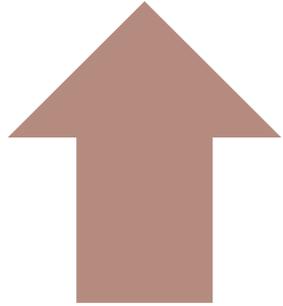
- Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006) define DM as an infrastructure characterized by 3 elements:
 - **Artefacts/devices** (internet, smartphones, websites, blogs, social media, Tv on-demand etc.) used to communicate or convey information;
 - **Activities and practices** in which people engage to communicate or share information;
 - **Social arrangements** or organizational forms that develop around those devices and practices.
- Recall a complex view of technology: $T=\{A+P+K\}$ (Bijker 2006)

What is new in digital media?

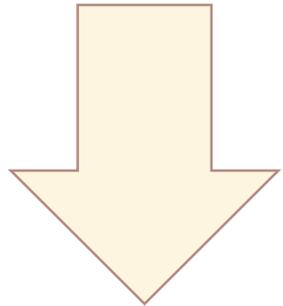
- All technologies can be seen as $T=\{A+P+K\}$, so what makes NM different?
- 5 elements:
 - **Constitutive entanglement** between the social and the material
 - DM are **hybrid/recombinant** technologies
 - DM are **networks of networks**
 - DM are **ubiquitous**
 - DM are **interactive**



Online (Networks, Activism)



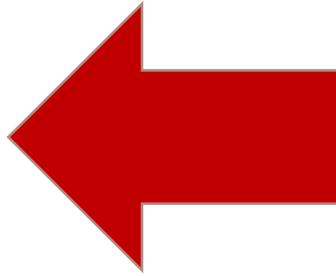
**SMs
&
DM**



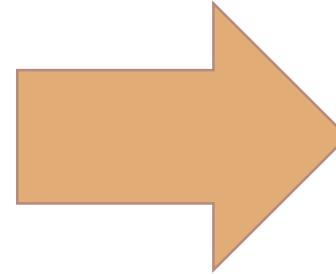
Offline (Networks, Activism)

- **Social Power** as fundamental as Coercive Power and played out through meaning construction within online communication networks (Castells 2012)
- “Technologies do not make collective action. Men and women do. They do so, it goes without saying, within the context of their times. But this is not a purely – nor a mainly – technological context” (Diani 2011: 1-2)
- Three stages of reflection:
 - **Transformation of offline dynamics** (e.g., Rucht 2004; Costanza Chock 2003; Rolfe 2005; Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010; Bimber et al. 2012; Chadwick 2007; Cammaerts 2012)
 - **Online dynamics (autonomous)** (e.g., Bennett and Segerberg 2013, Ackland & O’Neill 2011; Earl et al. 2016, Padovani and Pavan 2016)
 - **Online dynamics (interplay with offline)** (e.g., Castells 2012, Gerbaudo 2012, Pavan 2016)

Techno-centric



**SMs
&
DM**



Human-centered

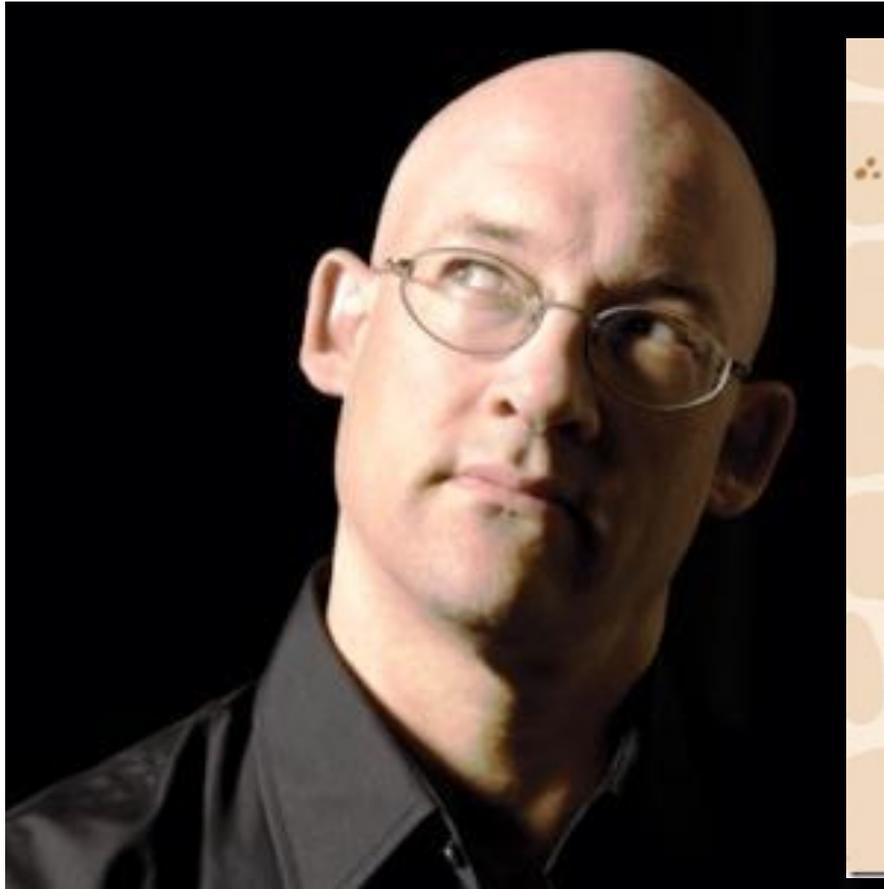
Transformations of politics thanks to Web 2.0 (Chadwick and Howard 2009):

1. Internet platform for political discourse
2. Collective intelligence
3. Importance of data
4. Perpetual experimentalism
5. Small-scale political engagement
6. Multiple platform distribution
7. Rich user experience

Beyond Information and Communication there is **Mediation** (e.g., Lievrouw 2011, Cammaerts 2012):

- Reconfiguration of devices
- Remediation of contents

Stuck in the middle



Yes(wo)men and No(wo)men

Pro

- Overcoming the **trade-off** between communication and group formation
- Internet is:
 - Native **support** for group conversations
 - **Carriage** for all other media
 - Tool to **merge** use and production of info
- A fourfold set of **transformations**:
 - Professionals > Amateurs
 - Outside > Locally
 - Sparse > Quantity
 - Slowly > Quickly
- Features of the current media landscape: **global, social, ubiquitous and cheap**

Cons

- **Propaganda** tool which is more effective than censorship
- **Authoritarian deliberation**: authoritarian regimes allow opponents to manifest dissent online. Twofold effect:
 - **Apparent democratic inclusion**, tolerance and respect of the democratic principle
 - Online communication flows become a source of information for **governments** (open source intelligence) on what threatens the regime

Communication Reductionism

1. (Digital) Media as neutral channels to reach already established political goals
2. Fetishization of technological novelty (esp. in Europe, North America and Middle East)
3. Underestimation of material specificities of different digital media led to a monolithic conceptualization of the nexus between SMs and DM
4. Dependency of studies on the characteristics of the platforms (data-driven) as well as on the idea that protest = SMs

DM as Public Spaces

- Other problems: Digital inequalities, Reciprocity \neq trust, commercialization
- ⇒ How can we assess the democratic potential of digital media?
1. Civic Narcissism
 2. Direct Representation and Subversion
 3. Hybrid influence



#NOFILTER



Civic Narcissism

- Goes along with **personalization**
- **Introspection** and **self-absorption** that is typical of new media:
 - Self-serving
 - Self-oriented
 - Not selfish
- Democratizing **potential**
 - Encourages plurality of voices
 - Expands public agenda
 - Fragmentation compensated by pluralism (but what about coherence?)
 - Low cost (but what about slacktivism?)
 - Dilution of the agenda-setting function of mass media
- **Not a matter of reviving the PS but rather of broadening/overlapping agendas**

Direct Representation...

- Digital media are multipliers for existing powers but are empowering also to collective actors
- Main added value: direct representation \Rightarrow communication stands at the core of collective action organizational processes:
 - Enhanced discursive opportunities
 - Facilitate sensitization of public opinion on issues and claims
 - Enhanced capabilities of direct intervention
 - Enhanced advocacy capacity
 - Enlargement of action repertoires
 - Innovation of protest genres
 - Change mobilization predictors

Hybrid Influence

- Digital media exist simultaneously as public spaces and commercial spaces
- Commercialization still stands as a threat to civic engagement but...



- Big conglomerates coexist and need to deal with fluid information production
- Hybrid influence stems from the capacity of combining audience demands with commercial practices
- **Does not revive the PS but plurality of contents is essential to democracy**

What is to be done? (cit.)

1. Going back to the building blocks:
 - SMs: predictors, organization, symbolic production/collective identity,
 - DM: different structures and affordances, networking logic that comes first, discourse and individual expression as the basis
2. Because it takes two to tango...adopt a sociotechnical approach to disentangle how SMs structuring processes intersect/are intersected by DM
3. Tie back to 'church and supper' (Breiger 2015): scale down to the reality of social grievances, cleavages, needs and desires for change

Follow the white rabbit...

Three lines of inquiry: predictors, organization, symbolic production/collective identity

Fostering collective participation

1. 'Technological Opportunity Structure' (Ward and Gibson 2009) but:
 - “dialectical, mutual-shaping, or co-production perspective, where artifacts and social action are seen as mutually constitutive and determining” (Lievrouw 2014:23)
 - The point is not availability but affordances
2. Non-linear relationship between DM presence and collective participation (Earl 2010):
 - Faster circulation of information = 'Supersize effect'
 - Enrichment of action repertoires or more 'biographical availability'
 - Protest spreads as an 'action script'

Organizing collective action

- A flash-flood model: “new, alternative model of protest power, which research reveals can be effective in affecting agendas, policy decisions, corporate policies, etc.” (Earl et al. 2016: 356)
- Retrenchment of traditional SMOs..
- ...but not all users are the same:
 - Gonzalès-Bailòn et al. 2013: users, broadcasters, celebrities, hidden influential
 - Padovani and Pavan (2016): programmers, mobilizers, switchers
- ... and not all online networks are the same:
 - Power signatures (Bennett and Segeberg 2014)
 - Forms of Integrative power (Pavan 2016)

Action Repertoires

- “whole set of means that are available for making claims of different types on different individuals” (Tilly 1986:2)
- Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010) classified movement repertoires depending on the level of risks and the extent of mediation
- Others (e.g., Sauter 2013) adds DDOS – but only as a real practice turn..

	Internet supported	Internet based
High threshold	<p>More violent action/ destruction of property</p> <p>Sit-in/occupation</p> <p>2</p> <p>Transnational demonstration/ meeting</p>	<p>Hactivism</p> <p>4</p> <p>Culture jamming</p> <p>Protest website/ alternative media</p>
Low threshold	<p>Legal demonstration</p> <p>1</p> <p>Consumer behaviour</p> <p>Donate money</p>	<p>Email bomb/ virtual sit-in</p> <p>3</p> <p>Online petition</p>

Building 'us': DM and collective identities

- “an interactive and shared definition produced by a number of individuals (or groups at a more complex level) concerning the orientations of their action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which such actions is to take place” (Melucci 1996:70)
- Played out sociotechnically:
 - Technological affordances
 - Processes of appropriation – “politics of visibility” (Milan 2015)
- ... and at the crossroads of different agencies – page admin and users (Gerbaudo 2015)
- Remains highly conflictual (Kavada 2015)
- Fuelled by ‘strong’ feelings – affective publics (Papacharissi 2016)

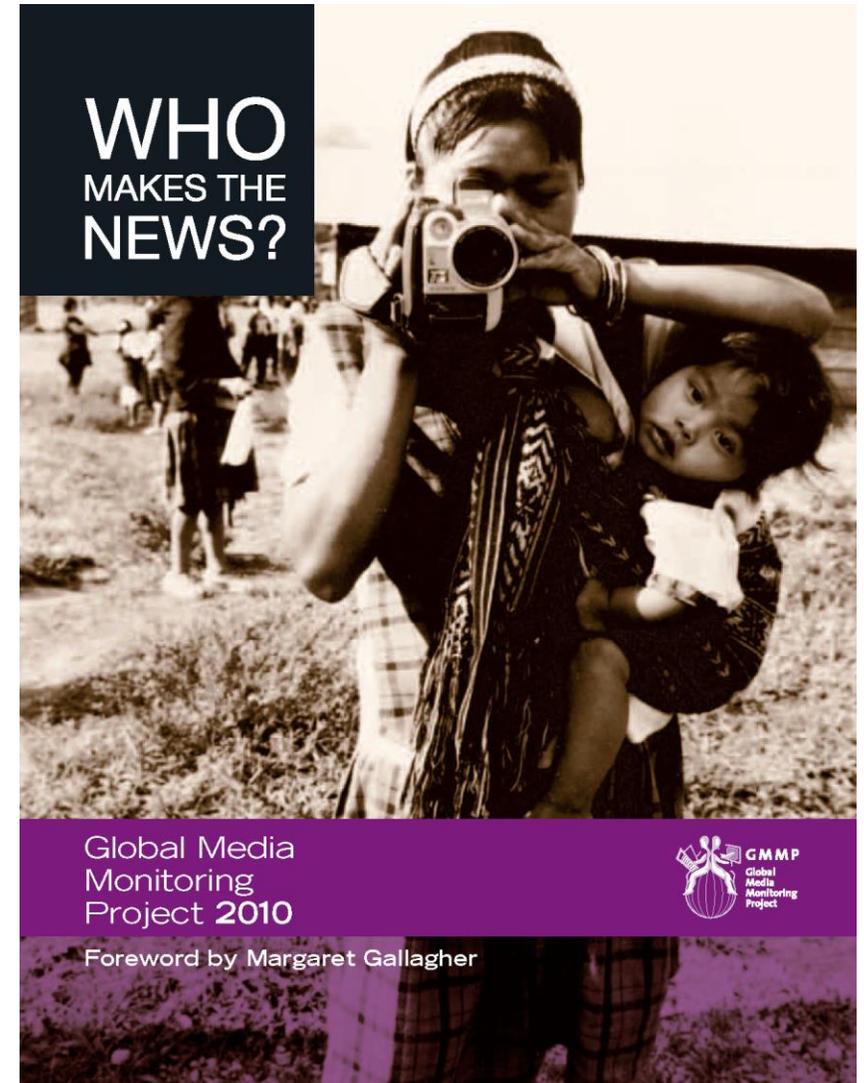
The elephant in the room

DM as contested objects

A long story of alternative media

alternative traditional media (Atton 2002; Coyer, Dowmunt & Funtain 2007, part 1)

- “radical alternative media constitute the most active form of the active audience and express oppositional strands, overt and covert, within popular cultures” (Downing 2001: 3)
- Possibility of involving ‘normal’ citizens
- Horizontality of ties with the public
- Counter-hegemonic value
- Media practices become resistance practices in their own right



Protesting about the digital

With the diffusion of the internet:

- communication rights (Padovani and Pavan 2009);
- democratic media activism (Hackett and Carrol 2006);
- media activism (Milan 2013);
- Internet Governance (Pavan 2012);
- communication governance (Raboy and Padovani 2011)
- Hacktivism (Kubitschko 2015; Milan 2015; Sauter 2013)

With the big data «mantra»: from *digital activism* to *data activism*:

“composite series of sociotechnical practices that, emerging at the fringes of the contemporary activism ecology [to] interrogate datafication and its socio-political consequences” (Milan and van der Velden 2016:59):

- Resistance to datafication vs. making the most of big data

here, use this apps
at Zero Rating



DM entering existent grievances

- DM features (anonymity, automation, action at distance, affordability, propagation) foster:
 - Different forms of online VAW: cyberstalking, online harassment, image manipulation, privacy violations, diffusion of “sex videos”
 - Enhancement of existing forms of violence (online VAW is a continuation of violence, not something new)
- Normative vacuum filled in by grassroots organizations (e.g., Take Back The Tech!)
 - Launched in 2006 by Association for Progressive Communications (APC), it runs yearly between Nov. 25th and Dec. 10th (16 days against VAW)
 - 16 “daily actions” to sensitize on the nexus between VAW and ICTs, to educate to an aware and empowering use of ICTs
 - Heavy use of the very technologies it considers
 - Targets intermediaries carrying anti-corporate protests to a next level (Pavan 2017)

That's all Folks!.....



... Just for today!