

# Media and Politics



# Media and Politics:

## *Discourses, Cultures, and Practices*

Edited by

Bettina Mottura, Letizia Osti  
and Giorgia Riboni

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## INTRODUCTION

BETTINA MOTTURA,<sup>1</sup> LETIZIA OSTI,<sup>2</sup>  
GIORGIA RIBONI<sup>3</sup>

Media and politics have always been intertwined. The specific characteristics of such interconnections have traditionally been shaped at national level, by the form of the political system on the one hand and the structure of the media industry on the other. Today, however, this relation is strongly influenced by global trends which, whilst not removing national specificities, reduce them greatly.

In some countries, the media may be considered public spaces entertaining a plurality of voices. They constitute an arena in which public policies are presented to society and are discussed by social actors and groups of interests. In this perspective, they function as construction sites, where representations are built, narratives are selected and meaning is designed and spread throughout society. Moreover, the media are multifaceted by nature: the peculiarities of every outlet influence its communication flow and the political value of the message it spreads. As

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<sup>1</sup> Bettina Mottura, PhD, is Associate Professor of Chinese language and culture at the Department of Language Mediation and Intercultural Communication, and is scientific coordinator of the Contemporary Asia Research Center (CARC) of the University of Milan. Her research focuses on the study of Chinese institutional and media discourse. She has published a number of articles and in 2016 a book on contemporary Chinese culture and institutions. ORCID: 0000-0002-7898-9002.

<sup>2</sup> Letizia Osti, PhD (St Andrews, 2002) is Associate Professor of Arabic language and literature at the University of Milan. Her work focuses on classical Arabic prose and narrative techniques in literature, biography, historiography, and intersections thereof. ORCID: 0000-0002-7501-7654.

<sup>3</sup> Giorgia Riboni holds a PhD in English Studies and is currently working as a Post-Doc researcher at the Department of Language Mediation and Intercultural Communication of the University of Milan. Her main research interests lie in Internet genres and web-mediated communication platforms such as blogs and microblogs. She has published a volume on the new media and political discourse (2014) as well as a number of articles. ORCID: 0000-0003-3161-4374. Section 1 of this introduction was written by Riboni, section 2 by Mottura, and section 3 by Osti.

such, the media play an important political role of their own.

In other countries, on the other hand, political power explicitly keeps tight control over the media and uses it to convey various representations of power and ideology, in order to foster its legitimacy. In such contexts, the mass media are key mediators between different social interests, and the journalists' professional practice is considered crucial for securing public trust in the existing social system.

Even in situations where they are considered free, the media are subject to constraints which may impact their editorial line. Such constraints depend partly on political authorities: for instance, media outlets generally depend on public institutions for licensing, professional credentials, and the accreditation of journalists and reporters. In many instances their very survival hinges on public funding. These manifold equilibriums and mutual influences manifest themselves in journalistic practices, in how news is constructed and conveyed at a discursive, textual and cultural level.

Such a complex landscape calls for a multiplicity of analytical tools and cannot ignore specific socio-political, geographic, linguistic, and cultural contexts which may be overlooked when, as is sometimes the case, the analysis of global media phenomena is limited to outlets in the English language. This volume, on the other hand, adopts a holistic approach to the subject, looking at the media as a global and at the same time multifaceted phenomenon which, on the one hand, cannot be analysed within a single interpretive framework and, on the other, must be considered in its interconnected complexity, taking into account the variety of the current media landscape.

In this volume, experts from a wide range of disciplines, such as discourse analysis, international relations, and cultural studies come together to discuss the relationship between politics and various means of communication (print media, television, and the Internet) as it is expressed in different areas of the world: Europe, Asia, the Americas, and the Middle East.

This plurality of voices, disparate yet complementary, results in a conversation which recognises the media as a global phenomenon without neglecting its local specificities. In this perspective, we have chosen to welcome and explore the variety of topics, approaches, and viewpoints of the different contributions: rather than divide them into sections according to discipline, language or cultural area, we have grouped them around three thematic *inter*-sections, where similar topics are discussed from different methodological and geographical perspectives. The book is therefore divided into three parts, the first investigating news production and reproduction, the second devoted to political communication, and the

last to examining narratives and counter-narratives in the media and political domain.

## 1. News Production and Reproduction

The opening section focuses on the mechanisms of news production and reproduction. In the first chapter, **Andrea Ceron, Luigi Curini, and Stefano Iacus** look at the role of different kinds of media as actors in political agenda-setting. They analyse the heated debate on political corruption and public funding that took place in Italy between April and July 2012 and argue that traditional media keep their agenda-setting power even in the social media era. An evaluation of first-level and second-level agenda-setting effects through innovative and efficient statistical methods like lead-lag analysis and supervised sentiment analysis allows them to confirm that the first-level agenda-setting power of traditional media outlets remains unchanged. However, this does not imply that traditional media influence the online debate: the analysis highlights a marked difference in the degree of anti-politics sentiment expressed on social media compared to the level of negativity observed in the stories of traditional media outlets.

In the next chapter, **Geert Jacobs** adopts a linguistic ethnographic approach to carry out a fine-grained analysis of the backstage discursive processes underlying the production of news. His contribution starts from the assumption that studies that do not take into consideration the complexities of life inside the media institutions and limit their scope to textual products may overlook what is happening on the exciting borderline between politics and media. Conversely, going “backstage” allows the researcher to foreground and explore cognitive and discursive perspectives, thus being able to provide interesting insights into news values as constructed in the discourses involved in the production of news. Against this backdrop, **Jacobs’s** chapter explores issues of agenda-setting through the concepts of proximity and impact in today’s globalized political mediascape, reporting on fieldwork he conducted in the television newsroom of a Belgian broadcasting corporation. The results of his case study further highlight the ever-increasing need for production-oriented research on political news, a need that also provides the foundation of the next chapter, authored by **Giuliana Garzone** and **Chiara Degano**. Their contribution continues the reflection on backstage news production processes as it examines the text genre of the news agency wire. By looking comparatively at a corpus of Reuters wires in English dealing with the ongoing Middle East crisis and in international terrorism, a parallel

corpus comprising their Italian versions, and the headlines of news articles based on them, the authors investigate news production on empirical grounds, and compare wired stories and the resulting news articles. The analysis highlights the crucial role played by translators: when re-writing news stories, they do not follow the source text closely, but typically adapt the distribution of information within each text to Italian journalistic conventions. This arguably indicates that the translation/re-writing process is aimed at pre-formulating the wording of the final news story, providing language material to be “re-used” faithfully in the final version of the article.

Chapter Four, by **Bettina Mottura**, contains a genre-based analysis of Xinhua news agency dispatches on Chinese politics. Mottura argues that Xinhua news agency news production of Chinese internal politics in different languages is influenced by the agency’s multifaceted organizational identity, which can be described as both ideologically driven and consumer oriented, as well as by the targeted audiences’ culture and language. Her contribution draws on a corpus of Xinhua news agency press releases (in Chinese, English and French) regarding the 2015 Premier report on the work of government to the Chinese National People’s Congress, shedding light on the basic characteristics of the Chinese official media’s multilingual news production on Chinese politics. In order to better discuss the peculiarities of the news agency’s discourse, the textual findings are interpreted through the lens of keywords concerning the relations between the media and the political system in China, with a focus on the leading role of Xinhua news agency in representing the country to world audiences.

**Faramarz Shadloo**’s chapter focuses instead on the comparative examination of how the same piece of news can be framed differently in different lingua-cultural contexts (English and Persian), thereby conveying different attitudes by means of tacitly encoded assumptions and ideologies. Shadloo’s study offers an analysis of English and Persian headlines referring to the same news as it was published on the English and the Persian sites of the *BBC* respectively. The findings show that language choices carry crucial ideological implications and provide further confirmation that underlying ideological filters frame the news, working most often as an invisible hand, which makes every media text biased even while ostensibly reporting the same facts, albeit in different language versions of the same media outlet. In particular, the findings show that the same news agency broadcasting the same piece of news in two different languages introduces a degree of political as well as audience adaptation to make discourse suit the target audiences’ expectations.



**Emma Lupano**'s contribution also envisages the possible influence the socio-political context can exert on the process of news production as her study investigates the ways in which the terrorist attack on the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* on 7 January 2015 was portrayed by the Chinese media. Her main aim is to highlight the discursive features of the positions on the *Charlie Hebdo* case in two Chinese language papers, the party-run *Huanqiu Shibao* and the market-oriented *Xin Jing bao*, in order to verify whether on that specific occasion news commentaries expressed a plurality of views on a controversial subject such as freedom of speech in China. The results show that the case was generally used to reinforce the official discourse on both terrorism and press freedom. However, while *Huanqiu Shibao*'s news commentaries failed to perform the genre's purpose to voice independent opinions, some of *Xin Jing bao*'s articles succeeded in presenting original viewpoints. This can be considered a sign that some debate is possible in China even on highly controversial topics, and that the writers of commentaries, who are often freelancers, arguably play a key role in widening the discussion in the country's media sphere.

In the next chapter, which is also devoted to the relation between media and politics in China, **Simone Dossi** relies on a case study, *the People's Daily*'s coverage of the 2014 APEC summit, to examine how the Chinese government represents its international role to its own domestic public. Specifically, Dossi's study draws on the issue of prestige, an issue that, although central to ordinary understandings of international politics, has been largely neglected in International Relations theory. The 2014 APEC summit provides a good case study for investigating prestige because on that occasion leaders from all over the Asia-Pacific region convened in Beijing for the organization's annual conference; the summit therefore offered China an extraordinary platform for projecting itself as a regional power – and for doing so first and foremost towards its own domestic public.

The first section ends with **Francesca Santulli**'s contribution, which shifts the focus to another notion that has been playing an increasingly important role on the international level, i.e. the notion of disability. After a brief introduction to the concept of disability within the context of UN policies, Santulli's chapter analyses UN-Enable, the official website of the Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, illustrating its structure and basic function. It then examines the Convention (the most important text published on the website) in a discourse analytical perspective, focusing on the typical lexicon of human rights discourse, with special attention to politically correct expressions. A small corpus of Press Releases published on the Enable website is then

examined, using the same methodological approach. Santulli investigates the generic structure of the texts, highlighting their narrative approach and the high proportion of quotations and reported speech. The analysis brings out some unexpected discrepancies, revealing that PRs are more focused on the link between disability and development, while the Convention mainly emphasizes human rights. Moreover, the consistent use in the Convention of the now standard expression ‘persons with disabilities’ is not as thoroughly maintained in the PR corpus, which shows a limited but qualitatively significant number of exceptions.

## 2. Political Communication

The second part of the volume focuses on political communication in different textual genres. **Cristina Arizzi** opens this section with a chapter on the American Presidential Inaugural address. Arizzi’s study focuses on the codification of this genre, which has accompanied American history from its very beginnings, thus undergoing a process of internal variation. Her contribution also highlights how social changes and the introduction of new media have modified the way Inaugural Addresses are delivered and received by the public and suggests a possible systematization of the genre; obligatory and optional units and the order in which they occur in the text are examined and described.

In Chapter Ten, **Jing Xu** and **Alice Giusto** address the process of symbolization and discursive construction in Chairman Mao’s political communication. They rely on discourse analysis of *People’s Daily* articles, in the context of the political communication perspective of social constructionism. The authors focus on a case study, i.e. the Great Leap Forward Movement in China (1958), to examine how political movements in Mao’s China were associated with highly routinized political communication patterns, which could hardly have been carried out without a broader process of political symbolization and discourse construction. Xu and Giusto examine three aspects of Chinese political communication of the movement: the symbolic definition of political reality through metaphors, the narrative rationality of political actions and behaviours, and a rhetorical vision of political communication effects.

In the next chapter, which is also devoted to political communication in China, but in a contemporary context, **Paolo Magagnin** explores the intertextual devices at play in a speech delivered by Xi Jinping at Peking University in 2014, providing an insight into the current Chinese leadership’s propaganda project. Magagnin argues that the quotations drawn from the Chinese classics displayed in the leader’s speech

demonstrate an intention to represent Xi as a Confucian man of virtue, to support the discourse of “core values,” as the expression of a traditional model elaborated in the past that is still deemed relevant in a contemporary socialist society. This communication strategy would tone down the impact of Western-derived components of socialist ideology in favour of traditional ethics, presented as the source of the Party’s legitimacy and of contemporary individual, social, and national virtues. Thus, it establishes a connection between the Confucian socio-political model, the May Fourth Movement spirit, and the “Chinese Dream,” fostering cohesion in order to rally the Chinese nation.

**Natalia Riva**’s chapter examines how the Western-originated theory of soft power has been incorporated into China’s official and media discourse in the form of cultural soft power. Drawing upon the guiding role of formalized political language in directing the overall orientation of the mainstream Chinese soft power narrative, her analysis identifies the constituents of this narrative, its main theoretical features, and practical contents. A description of the process that has framed the cultural soft power theory into a national strategy promoted at a concrete level through cultural policies sheds light on why the call to “enhance the country’s cultural soft power,” a formulation appearing recurrently in China’s political agenda since 2007, falls within the context of a collective project aimed at the overall improvement of China’s internal and external conditions, but giving priority to domestic demands, in the country’s ascent as a world power in the 21st century. An overview of the role that the state media play in corroborating this cultural soft power effort inside and outside China completes the analysis.

The next two chapters of this section look at political communication during electoral campaigns and elections. These contributions, authored by Riboni and Subotički Milić, explore the role played by the media in the Greek and Serbian elections respectively. **Giorgia Riboni**’s analysis sets out to investigate the online media coverage of the January 2015 Greek elections in the United Kingdom, a country that seems representative of a controversial attitude towards the notion of Europeaness and reveals an insular, often self-isolating culture. The study examines an ad hoc-built corpus consisting of news stories, editorials and blogposts published on the online versions of three of the most popular British newspapers (*The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*) and reveals the presence of a common, hegemonic, and simplified framing of the general election (i.e. that Syriza’s victory represents a reaction to the austerity measures implemented in Greece). Such simplified framing can be found across all

the newspapers examined, which makes it difficult for the British public to challenge its validity.

**Dijana Subotički Miletić**'s contribution also focuses on the press, but from a gender perspective. Her research investigates Serbian daily and weekly papers to examine the press coverage of female politicians during the election campaign for the 2014 early parliamentary elections. Her analysis—based on a corpus of articles published in the February and March issues (February 16-March 13, 2014) of five leading daily papers, *Danas*, *Politika*, *Dnevnik*, *Kurir* and *Blic*, and two local weekly papers *Kikindske* and *Nove kikindske novine*—shows that female politicians rarely feature in newspaper articles and are completely absent from reports and interviews. When women are represented, gender-sensitive language is used inconsistently and the female politician's functions are often obscured by the use of the masculine form of their title, especially in attention-catching headlines. Although the legal requirement regarding gender representation in Serbian politics, of a third of each candidate list, was met during this election, this proportion of representation was not reflected in the media coverage of female politicians, which was only 15%.

**Mirko Benedetti**'s chapter concludes the section on political communication. His study focuses on the use of statistics in political communication. The author contends that, by and large, all actors of political communication frequently use official statistics improperly. In particular, the political system may use them to provide self-interested readings of social and economic phenomena. The media, instead, may use them in a sensationalistic way in order to create catchy headlines. These discursive practices may well end up trivializing or even distorting data, reducing them to a mere rhetorical device in order to become more persuasive. Thanks to the potentials of the Web 2.0, this abuse of numbers can be better detected and its spread counteracted. However, the qualitative analysis of the two cases presented in the paper shows that online interactions involving innumerate users tend to generate confusion and conflict, which suggests that social networks may nonetheless be unfit to reveal numerical abuses. As a consequence, users may feel unable to distinguish correct figures from wrong ones, thus maturing an attitude of distrust towards data in the long term. In this perspective, the right of access to the public good of official statistics may suffer a serious limitation, reducing the opportunities of citizens to participate in the process of democracy.

### 3. Narratives and Counter-narratives

The third section addresses the role of the media in shaping less formal aspects of communication in society at large. The first contributions in this final part investigate how the press and mainstream media contribute to generating collectively shared narratives. The opening chapter, by **Eric Sangar**, focuses on collective memory, an object of study that has been increasingly explored both by the disciplines of International Relations and Communication Studies. One crucial theoretical question such disciplines have extensively explored is whether the transnationalisation of communication and media consumption has led to the emergence of transnational collective memories. However, there is a relative lack of quantitative analyses that would allow for systematic transnational and longitudinal comparison to test this assumption. Sangar's contribution presents a corpus-analytic proof-of-concept study that pursues a dictionary-based approach to the detection and cross-national comparison of uses of historical references in mediated discourses on contemporary conflict. Although this method lacks hermeneutic depth compared to existing qualitative studies of collective memory in media discourses, it can produce important new insights regarding peak periods in the uses of history and possible transnational similarities. Using newspaper discourses from France, Germany and the US on the conflicts in Kosovo, Liberia, and Chechnya, the study shows that there clearly exists a repertoire of historical references that is used across national boundaries, including references to both World Wars and the Vietnam War. While further research is needed to discover how these references are actually used in each context, this is an important piece of quantitative evidence supporting the relevance of the transnational memory thesis for understanding the uses of history in contemporary conflict discourses.

The theme of collective memory is also the main object of study in the next chapter, authored by **Paola Paderni**. In recent years in China, as elsewhere, there has been a spate of studies of memory and works based on personal memories, mostly on a non-official level but also in academic publications. The present article looks at a specific form of memory text, necrologies published in the press, a journalistic genre relatively new in China and one result, amongst others, of the commercialization of Chinese media. It examines about a hundred death notices collected in a book by the editorial board of the daily newspaper *Xin Jing bao* (*Beijing News*). Reading these stories what emerges is the view of a society in transformation, a patchwork of the perceptive, emotional and moral experiences of men and women who have lived through crucial moments

during the changes of the last thirty years. They reflect a growing emphasis on individualism in the Chinese society and “the remaking of the person in China’s emotional and moral context.” The stories told in the necrologies cut across well known and lesser known current social issues, often implicitly criticising the status quo and official narratives. In this sense, they are part of the increase in autonomy the media exploit to bring delicate issues to the attention of the public, possibly leading to changes in official political discourse and even in decision-making.

The next contribution by **Aysun Kiran**, also deals with the press as it examines the construction of military operations in the 1990s’ context of the Turkish-Kurdish war in the mainstream print media in Turkey. It aims to explore how the mainstream print media’s construction of military operations engaged with the state’s promotion of a hard-line security-oriented stance on the conflict during the given period. To this end, the paper focuses on one particular mainstream newspaper (*Milliyet*) and one particular year (1993 i.e. when the conflict reached its peak). As a result, the analysis demonstrates that the print media texts provide an example of oppressive language that can be characterised as undialogical and intolerant of difference. The selected newspaper affirms and promotes the state’s approach by providing imbalanced access to the views of officials such as government representatives and military officials in contrast to the absence of the enemy’s voice. Indeed, the enemy is vilified as opposed to the exaltation of the soldiers’ statuses as heroes. Furthermore, the death toll of the enemy is underlined to create the impression that the operations yielded results in eliminating the target, which thereby contributes to the construction of the operation as a rational action by the state.

**Antonella Ceccagno**, in Chapter Nineteen, discusses policy-makers’ and media’s choices in representing the Chinese migrants’ mode of emplacement in the Italian fashion industry on the basis of news reports on the death of seven Chinese migrants in a fire that swept through the building where they worked and lived in Prato (Italy) in December 2013. Starting from the local, national, and global media’s framing of the tragedy, Ceccagno argues that this event has fostered a strengthening of the internal coherence of a set of locally shaped narratives on a double Chinese attack – from China and from its migrants – against the local community of Prato. Ceccagno explains why and how the narratives of the Chinese entrepreneurs as disembedded from the local community and responsible for a highly exploitative production regime easily travel from the local to the national and international scales. Thus, the author offers an interpretive framework by introducing the concept of ‘travelling strategic narrative’, according to which narratives, like policies, may, and indeed

do, travel from one scale to another. The process is facilitated when the new travelling narrative resonates with compatible concerns and approaches in the target contexts, and when vested interests are better protected by the incoming narrative.

The next chapter, by **Paola Catenaccio** and **Roberta Garruccio**, draws upon scholarly literature on deindustrialization as a diverse interdisciplinary field of studies and deals with a distinctive aspect of cultural representations of industrial shrinkage in developed societies, examining the long term social and cultural legacy of deindustrialization and focusing in particular on narratives disseminated through advertisements in various media. More specifically, Catenaccio and Garruccio's contribution investigates the rhetorical exploitation of discursive representations of de-industrialization in three US TV advertisements aired in 2011-2012, two released by the car manufacturer Chrysler and one by the fashion brand Levi's. In all three advertisements, representations of post-industrial loss are narratively reconstructed and reframed as symbols of endurance, reinforcing collective identity construction grounded in the mythologization of national resilience. It is argued that the romanticising of post-industrial loss and its reframing as resilience for purely commercial purposes entail a process of discourse appropriation which leads to the creation of hybrid discursive artefacts that challenge conventional discursive boundaries, highlighting their porosity and instability and contributing to the emergence of novel discursive formations which merge social and commercial themes in the service of neo-capitalistic gain.

**Maria Cristina Paganoni's** chapter examines the diffusion of urban policy discourse through the media, focussing on a case study, i.e. the 'Smart City' concept as represented by Guardian Cities, an online platform launched by the homonymous newspaper in 2014 and supported by the Rockefeller Foundation. A textual selection of the Guardian Cities site's peculiar blend of news, commentary, online discussions and analysis is critically investigated in order to elicit the recurrent threads and discursive tensions of a global debate on what makes a city smart. This debate extends over an ambitious axiological map—technology hype, sustainability, social inclusion and active citizenship being among its bold promises. In the framework of discourse analysis, and in the spirit of media linguistics, analytic attention is paid to the communicative context in which texts are produced, embedded and linked with each other, intertextually and transmedially on the website itself and on the social web. Knowledge production is measured not only against the relevance of the themes treated by Guardian Cities but also against the accessibility and

participatory nature of its communicative formats, with the aim of tracking how user feedback is received and incorporated into journalistic texts in a collaborative practice of social creation of meaning.

The final chapters in this section examine counter-narratives and the alternative means of communication they are conveyed by. In the first of these papers, **Elisa Pierandrei** describes the use of graffiti and street art in contemporary Egypt. During the Jan. 25th Egyptian Revolution, Cairo's graffiti and street art grew into a surprising and new phenomenon, erupting in an urban context usually full of restrictions. Often small and therefore adaptable to any space, murals, stencils and graffiti-writing had been used by a handful of graphic designers, architects and artists as a powerful tool to raise people's attention to a counter-narrative embracing a fascinating and emerging culture of protest. As a means of both communication and subversion, residing at the intersection of art and transgression, graffiti and street art mostly spread around symbolic centres of power. Their popularity was mainly due to the topics addressed and their relevance to issues of everyday revolutionary turmoil. It ultimately constituted a challenge to the mass media's coverage of the unfolding events. Pierandrei's contribution specifically deals with the work of a selected number of artists who have used urban inscriptions as an alternative medium to spread a counter-narrative of the events that disrupted Egypt in 2011. Her research is an attempt to map the communication strategies implemented by graffiti and street art to shape the narrative of a public culture of protest.

The use of counter-narratives in Egypt also represents the main object of study in **Cristina Dozio**'s chapter, which specifically examines satire and dialect in the Egyptian press in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since the mid-2000s, the Egyptian cultural scene has witnessed a proliferation of satirical publications that criticize socio-political issues using wit and jokes. Often labelled as popular culture or lowbrow literature, satirical writing (*adab sākhir*) combines literature and journalism, fiction and non-fiction. Among the authors of *adab sākhir* Bilāl Faḍl, an independent journalist and screenwriter, has published both satirical columns and best-selling collections of humorous short stories. Dozio's contribution examines three articles by Bilāl Faḍl as an example of the satirical approach to politics in the Egyptian printed and online media. These articles, published in 2009, 2013, and 2014, comment on significant moments in the recent evolution of the Egyptian political landscape. Her analysis, conducted from a literary and linguistic perspective, identifies the narrative structure and the degree of fictionality in the articles. It also looks at the recurrence of genres (for example, the letter), images, and characters. Finally, it examines some



rhetorical figures employed to produce humour, as well as the combination of two linguistic varieties (Modern Standard Arabic and Egyptian Colloquial Arabic) with satirical purposes

Finally, **Gianni Turchetta**'s "Afterword" reflects on the impact of the so-called new media, and the new ways in which even traditional media is conveyed, on mainstream culture and on participation in public life. In the light of Turchetta's remarks, we hope this volume will promote further debate by arousing the interest of both media professionals and scholars specialising in media studies in its various facets: news (re)production, political communication, institutional discourse, the public sphere, etc. Given the wide geographical range we cover, we also welcome the participation of experts in area studies.

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## **SECTION ONE**

# **NEWS PRODUCTION AND REPRODUCTION**

## CHAPTER ONE

# SOCIAL MEDIA OR TRADITIONAL MEDIA: WHO IS THE REAL AGENDA SETTER?

ANDREA CERON,<sup>1</sup>  
LUIGI CURINI,<sup>2</sup> STEFANO M. IACUS<sup>3</sup>

The rise of social media and social network sites (SNS) has re-opened the debate on the role of Internet as an “un-coerced” public sphere that provides room for the unmediated diffusion of news. The reduced costs required to spread information and the bottom-up, networked structure of social media allow each single Internet user to become a supplier of political information, potentially undermining the dominance of traditional media outlets and preventing any attempt to hide inconvenient political news.

In the light of this, and building on the wide literature on agenda-setting (McCombs 2004), we will focus on the alleged agenda-setting power of the web (Hindman 2005; Meraz 2009, 682; Neuman *et al.* 2014, 193; Parmelee 2013, 434; Sayre *et al.* 2010, 7; Vargo 2011, 296; Wallsten

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<sup>1</sup>Andrea Ceron is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Milan and co-founder of VOICES from the Blogs (<http://voices-int.com>), an Academic Company working in the Big Data predictive analytics field.

<sup>2</sup>Luigi Curini is an associate professor of political science at the Università degli Studi di Milano, affiliated professor of polimetrics at the Waseda University of Tokyo, and co-founder of VOICES from the Blogs. His research spans a range of topics concerning party competition, valence politics, public opinion, quantitative methods, legislative behaviours and social media analytics. ORCID: 0000-0003-1974-9815.

<sup>3</sup>Stefano M. Iacus is a full professor of statistics at the Department of Economics, Management and Quantitative Methods, University of Milan. He is a member of the R Core Team (1999-2014), the R Foundation for Statistical Computing and co-founder of VOICES from the Blogs. His research interests include stochastic processes, computational statistics, causal inference and sentiment analysis. ORCID: 0000-0002-4884-0047.

2007, 567) to investigate whether, through social media and SNS, the general public is able to play the role of agenda-setter or conversely the agenda-setting power of traditional media outlets is unchanged and they continue to influence the public debate.

In order to do this, we will analyse a case study focusing on the heated debate concerning political corruption scandals and the reform of public funding for political parties that took place in Italy between April and July 2012 and triggered a process of actual policy change. On the one hand, we will examine first-level agenda-setting power, i.e. the ability to affect the attention to an issue, measuring the number of mentions in printed newspaper articles compared to Twitter messages, while checking the number of news items on the online websites of media outlets and the number of posts on independent weblogs. The aim is to investigate who can be considered the real agenda-setter in this particular case study. On the other hand, we will also address the second-level agenda-setting effects and, by means of a supervised technique of sentiment analysis, we will provide a comparison between the content broadcast online by traditional news media outlets and the attitudes expressed in Twitter conversations to check whether SNS reproduce the same frames proposed by traditional media or not.

As we shall see, our results show that the traditional mass media retain their first-level agenda-setting power. The attention devoted to an issue by newspapers influences the public salience of that issue and encourages bloggers and Twitter users to discuss it. However, the enhanced public attention built up by the mass media does not imply that traditional media outlets exert second-level agenda-setting and are able to influence Internet users. In fact, we find a difference in the degree of anti-political sentiment expressed on Twitter, which is considerably higher if compared to the level of negativity observed in the frame of online news stories.

## **1. The Agenda-setting Role of News Media and New Media**

A vast body of literature has analysed the agenda-setting power of mass media arguing that they are able to shape public debate and public opinion by directing attention to certain issues (Dearing and Rogers 1996; McCombs 2004; McCombs and Shaw 1993, 58). In doing so, the mass media can theoretically produce policy change (John 2006, 1053). The agenda-setting power of the mass media is confirmed by a meta-analysis of the existing literature (Wanta and Ghanem 2007, 37).

Since “the public learns the relative importance of issues from the mass media” (Wanta and Hu 1994, 225) the journalists’ choice to cover some issues more than others can influence what issues are seen as important by the public at large (Parmelee 2013, 434). Hence, the media contribute to building public consensus on the issues of the day, altering their perceived salience in public discussions (Lippmann 1949; McCombs, 2004).

This line of research then links the public agenda with the media agenda showing that citizens’ perception of the salience of certain issues is related to media salience, i.e. the frequency with which the topics are mentioned in the mainstream media (Kiousis 2004, 71).

Nonetheless, things may have changed after the advent of SNS in the Web 2.0 era, as citizens can bypass traditional media to explore other sources of information (Meraz 2011, 107). While traditional media have owned the tools of content creation and content distribution for a long time, the rise of SNS can break this dominance, particularly if users start to rely on online networks, instead of professional news channels, to acquire information (Bakshy *et al.* 2012, 519; Baresch *et al.* 2011, 1) and consider user-generated content desirable and authentic (Wahl-Jorgensen *et al.* 2010, 177).

Social media dramatically reduce the transaction costs typical of old media technologies and build a new bottom-up style of communication (Benkler 2006), providing egalitarian access to the production and consumption of news (Prat and Strömberg, 2011), which are no longer biased towards the elite (Woodly 2008, 109). This raises the question of whether the traditional media still affect the public agenda or, conversely, whether the media are now being influenced by citizens’ conversations on the social media and SNS.

After some anecdotal evidence on their agenda-setting power (for a review: Neuman *et al.* 2014, 193; Wallsten 2007, 567), scholars started to undertake a more systematic investigation of the impact of blogs and interactive social network sites on the media agenda (McCombs 2005, 543; Meraz 2009, 682) to assess whether the former have replaced traditional mass media as a source of first-level agenda-setting, retaining the ability to influence the (public) attention devoted to a certain issue on the policy agenda.

On the one hand, a number of studies show that the mainstream media still affect the salience of issues discussed on-line. The traditional media seem to set the agenda of Internet-fuelled communication tools, such as bulletin boards and chat rooms (McCombs *et al.* 2005, 156; Roberts *et al.* 2002, 452), weblogs (Lee 2007, 745), and online information seeking (Scharnow and Vogelgesang 2011, 104; Weeks and Southwell 2010, 341).