

**Title:** Social TV: online discursive practices and political engagement

**Bio:** Donatella Selva, PhD in Media Studies at University of Urbino, Italy. She is working since 2009 at the Centre for Media and Communication Studies of Luiss University of Rome ([donatellaselva@gmail.com](mailto:donatellaselva@gmail.com)).

### **Abstract**

Social TV practices are increasingly spreading, especially in Twitter. These kind of practices trigger a number of questions about the evolution of the mediated public sphere towards a hybrid media system where audiences combine online and traditional media in personal routines. This is particularly evident when audiences use Twitter to comment on political talk shows, which are still the major source of information for the majority of the Italian population and can be described as a “third Chamber” of the Parliament.

My research aims to explore the correlations between social TV practices and political engagement by analyzing the Italian Twitter sphere’s behaviour in the frame of mediatized politics. While not suggesting a cause-effect relationship between those two variables, my hypothesis is that the use of Twitter can add to traditional TV viewing a sense of collective belonging – “we the public” – which is fundamental for any political action, as political and media scientists well know. After a quantitative account of users’ patterns of activity during half a TV season, I interviewed some of the most active and constant users: this is one of the first attempts to describe the meaning of social TV by directly interviewing users, instead of using prevalent quantitative content analysis approaches. I identified users to be interviewed by applying a series of filters: first, I executed Gawk scripts in order to obtain the distribution of users in terms of activity for each of the shows’ episodes I selected. Second, I matched the lists using the TM package of R to extrapolate those users who tweeted continuously, episode after episode. Then I interviewed those users, and the analysis gave me the opportunity to develop a model of four different kinds and meaning of using social TV: from the most engaged (which I called civic-informative use of social TV) to the most recreational (the game use), from outburst of emotions (emotional use) to identity building and social control use.

**Title:** Twitter Time: a temporal analysis of tweet streams during televised political debate

**Bio:** Philip Pond is a post-graduate research student based at RMIT University in Australia ([philip.pond@rmit.edu.au](mailto:philip.pond@rmit.edu.au)).

### **Abstract**

A recurrent theme in both the academic and popular press is that social media is democratizing because it extends and strengthens civic society and the public sphere – the intermediary system between state and society. The Habermasian public sphere, however, is a normative model and depends upon certain, specific conditions in order to function. One of these conditions is that media constituting the public sphere should permit rational, deliberative discussion – that is, debate, leading to opinion formation, that is public and transparent; inclusive, offering equal opportunity for participation, and allowing “a justified presumption of reasonable outcomes” (Habermas, 2006).

In this paper I argue that social media, exemplified through the micro-blogging service Twitter, can extend the public sphere in a way that is problematic with respect to this deliberative potential. The principle problem is that Twitter imposes a temporality on communication that is fundamentally different from the temporality of Enlightenment democratic models. I characterize this temporality as Twitter time, a derivative of network time, and propose a series of empirical measures that can be used to describe this temporality.

I apply these measures to a corpus of tweets collected during an episode of the popular Australian political debate show, Q&A, aired in the run-up to the 2013 Federal Election. Three temporal measures – tweet half-life, tweet-stream- density, and user-interaction rate – are used to frame a coded analysis of tweets relating to thematic discussions on the Q&A program. I evaluate the content of tweet streams against the criteria Habermas considered necessary for deliberative discussion – namely that communication is inclusive, transparent and rational (reasonable).

I argue that, in order to engage *meaningfully* and deliberatively with these high speed, high density information flows, Twitter users must operate various filtering mechanisms, excluding the vast majority of published tweets. Some of these mechanisms will be asserted by the user, others dictated by Twitter code and platform design. Inevitably, though, they introduce prejudices, replicate socio-political power structures, and start ‘language wars’ that further complicate Twitter’s position as a deliberative discussion space.

**Title:** Social media, public broadcasting and governance: A case study from the Palestinian Territories

**Bio:** Rhian Were is Research officer, works at BBC Media Action in London, UK (Rhian.were@bbc.co.uk).

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### **Abstract**

Residents of the Palestinian Territories have a high level of access to both traditional and new media. BBC Media Action data shows that of those with access to these platforms, 79% watch TV every day and 60% use the internet daily. The same dataset also shows a high level of political participation. The paradox however is that Palestinians feel that they lack opportunities to engage in dialogue and debate with decision-makers. In order to address this, BBC Media Action works with the state broadcaster, Palestine TV, to produce two debate programmes. These programmes aim to enable ordinary people to engage with decision-makers in society, empowering them to participate in public dialogue and contribute to holding these decision-makers to account. But the data shows that TV programmes alone are not enough to increase governance and accountability. Data collected through BBC Media Action's nationally representative surveys has been used to demonstrate that Palestinians who report a multi-platform approach to media use are more likely to engage in offline civic participation when compared with those who only use traditional media. Therefore the BBC Media Action programmes also use social media to offer Palestinians, particularly young people, a resource for political participation through communication, which may further contribute to holding decision-makers to account. Primarily through an official Facebook page, the programme makers encourage participation from inside and outside the Palestinian Territories, generating dialogue, opinions and inputs for the debate shows.

In this presentation, we will present BBC Media Action's work in the Palestinian Territories through a case study approach; explaining what the programmes are and how they aim to improve governance in the territory. The presentation will draw on extensive research data collected specifically to inform and evaluate the project including national representative surveys, audience focus groups and social media metrics.

**Title:** Tweeting Global Events: Soft Power, Publics and the Politics of Participation in International Broadcasting

**Bio:** Marie Gillespie is Professor of Sociology at The Open University and Co-Director of the Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change, UK ([Marie.Gillespie@open.ac.uk](mailto:Marie.Gillespie@open.ac.uk)/[www.cresc.ac.uk](http://www.cresc.ac.uk)).

### **Abstract**

State-funded, international news broadcasters operate in an intensely competitive and uncertain financial, geo-political and media arena. In order to survive in the digital age, they seek to engage overseas publics in participatory social media initiatives that involve trade-offs between established public service news values and public diplomacy imperatives (for example, impartiality and transparency, empowerment and surveillance). As more or less overt agents of soft power and public diplomacy, international broadcasters use social media very differently, often with unintended, contradictory and surprising consequences. This paper examines how international news organisations, including the BBC World Service (WS), Russia Today (RT) and Al Jazeera (AJ) are responding to and adopting social media. It evaluates the uneven success with which they integrate Twitter into their journalistic practices and how publics engage with these organisations via Twitter, sometimes switching between them and participating in multiple public spaces.

The paper draws on a series of interdisciplinary, empirical case studies carried out at the Open University around global political crises (Syria in particular) and sporting events (the London and Sochi Olympics). The case studies share a broad methodological framework, which we refer to as ‘the public life of methods,’ in order to get at the performative nature of the social media monitoring methods used by broadcasters. We examine how data circulates within the organisations, shapes organisational processes and editorial decision-making, monitors publics and seeks to influence them. It looks at what happens when academics intervene in these processes using alternative methods.

The case studies combine big data analysis, discourse analysis and production ethnography in order to theorise the reconfiguration of transnational publics and the politics of participation at the intersection of social media and international broadcasting. It evaluates the twitter strategy adopted by broadcasters and the extent to which they succeeded in actively engaging overseas publics and widening participation in global public debate around global events. We assess the extent to which attempts at promoting of a participatory journalistic

culture are thwarted, and how social media is used to enhance soft power and public diplomacy objectives. We point to some intriguing contradictions in our findings, challenge assumptions about participation via social media, and highlight the surprising success of RT in engaging its Twitter users in debate around the Syria crisis. The paper will reflect on the wider theoretical and methodological implications of our findings for notions of connectivity and conviviality in public space and publicness.