

**Title:** Critical Reflexivity, Informal Civic Learning and the Development of Democratic Imaginaries in Contentious Communication

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### **Abstract**

This paper charts recently observed shifts in contentious collective action that encompass the technological affordances of the latest social media for evidence of cosmopolitan modes of learning and practicing citizenship that are fundamentally global in outlook, political in the sense of critical of hegemonic power and may be constitutive of citizen subjectivities that expand civic engagement as it is enacted in informal, self-organized digital settings.

Informal civic learning designates an interactional process whereby the exchange and acquisition of citizen knowledge, skills, beliefs and values is performed outside the confines of educational (formal) and social (non-formal) institutions. One aspect of informal civic learning is critical reflexivity by citizens. Critical reflexivity is considered as a practice that forms spaces of possibilities for change. In that, it designates the organisation of informed perspectives, which - reflecting the sprawling culture of connectivity (van Dijck, 2013) - are shared with others. The aim is to explore the changing conditions of civic learning involving critical reflexivity instantiated in the current ecology of collective media and directed at key actors that shape democratic politics, i.e. the media and government, in a broad sense.

In a qualitative study of media criticism focusing on the potential of social media for public discourse, Kaun (2013) retrieved accounts of critical reflexivity about the media and government that kindled informal civic learning about democratic citizenship. Prompted by such findings, this paper undertakes a textual analysis of the communication that unfolded on Facebook and Twitter around the Europe-wide Stop ACTA movement. The latter erupted onto the global political stage in late January 2012, in the wake of the Occupy movement which endorsed it. The Stop ACTA movement disputed the encroachment of corporate interests on democratic decision-making and called for the instatement of participatory

mechanisms and accountability processes in contemporary transnational policy. On this terrain of political contestation, we deploy and query the online civic learning schema designed by Bennett et al. (2009) with the intent to, on the one hand, develop a grounded model for informal civic learning with social media protest platforms. On the other hand, we scrutinize traces of informal civic learning for evidence of spaces of possibilities erected on democratic imaginaries evoked and discussed as advances on extant democratic institutions. For the purpose, we examine a corpus of 19,000 tweets and 7,000 Facebook posts gathered 2 weeks in advance of the pan-European Stop ACTA protest (9 June 2012).

**Title:** Social news media. An idealist business case (or a business case for idealism)

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### **Abstract**

This paper will investigate whether internet-based news media can follow the logic of social media. Social media are different from e.g. print-based news media in that they are reciprocal. The logic of give and take, of losing the distinction between producer and consumer (or content-owner and content-buyer) would seem to be at odds with typically 'high modern' notions of journalistic integrity and quality (Hallin 1992). But are they? Given that social media depend in large measure on a sense of authenticity, there are good reasons to pursue a new type of news production that is both co-created and crowd-sourced, and that is perceived as authentic (co-owned by an interpretive, actual or virtual community) and well-researched. 'Social news media' can only prove themselves as a sustainable form of quality news production by developing viable and trustworthy business models. The Dutch slow-news outlet De Correspondent is a recent successfully crowd-sourced start-up but hardly a social news medium: it is internet-based quality news. Another example De Onderzoeksredactie is financed by subsidies. This project focuses on a project called Urban Stories. It is to be an attractive news source for urban youth, financed by impact investment and related new forms of business consultancy, by crowd funding and sourcing. It may come to include a gamified space for young urban journalists to pitch possible stories to the marokko.nl and other urban communities. Its journalists will work with input from the web community. The defining feature will be its inclusive perspective that centres on dual ethnic-cultural backgrounds. If news is indeed the primary tool to achieve democracy, social news media as co-owned public spaces are of crucial importance, given that youth audiences feel less and less attracted to conventional news sources. A robust business model and countervailing the current neo-liberal regime of governmentality will be its most pressing challenges. The paper is based on participant design research (interviews with urban youth; project work with aspiring young writers with a dual background and regular interaction with Urban Connect, publishers of the Marokko.nl and Hababam communities).

**Title:** Web 2.0 communication at the local level

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores how the quality of democratic processes can be augmented by ICT uses on the local level. Firstly the paper presents actions that are being introduced to improve local administration and information systems in Poland. It discusses contemporary structures of local e-government in selected communes in Poland (top-down process). Secondly, the paper focuses on the development of local community e-participation (bottom-up process). It looks at the ways in which the affordances of the Internet and web 2.0 services apply (or not) on the level of local democracy. Using both quantitative and qualitative research and website content analysis, the paper analyses how the power of ICT is used by local communities in regions of different economy level.

When we look closer at the local governance across Europe we can clearly see that different ways of strengthening citizens' trust in local authorities and the creation of platforms of public dialogue are important factors that shape contemporary democracy. Globalization does not render locality irrelevant but it challenges it as was emphasised for instance by the concepts of glocalization (Featherstone, Lash & Robertson 1995) hyperlocality (any reference) or translocality (Appadurai 1996). These concepts suggest that encounters of the local and the global can be productive in terms of modifying locality by placing it in the wide context of the global and vice versa. When using digital technologies in a local context, we are not interested in their width but in their depth. Looking at the implementation of the digital technologies into the life of the local community, we are not concerned with the question how the local gets modified by the global but if it can get intensified.

The main aim of the paper is to analyse democratic challenges and problems associated with new information and communications technology (ICT) being implemented by local communication systems in Poland. A survey has been carried out in different regions of Poland. Questions are asked about how ICT can further democracy by creating the new shape of the public sphere? Whether and how ICT has changed the functioning of local government in Poland? Does ICT support political communication and local democracy? Is ICT used as platform for local debate? Is ICT used mainly as a tool for transmitting

information from the dominant one-sided communication? These questions are pertinent in light of the current problems in democratic organization.

**Title:** “Let’s Get them Involved”... to Some Extent: Conditioning Co-Creative Media Space

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### **Abstract**

The development of social media applications, such as blogs, Facebook and Twitter, has offered new participatory opportunities to everyday media users. In some respects this also marks a transformation of public space, as the broadcasting era’s “audiences” nowadays also can take on the role as participating “co-creators”. Or to put it slightly differently: the contemporary media landscape allows for new forms of coexistence between producer and user generated content.

For traditional media companies, this transformation has brought both challenges and opportunities. User generated content has always played a part in media production, but the current media situation has made it a more salient feature. Among online newspapers, specifically, the new opportunities to include users’ participatory practices have taken different forms. For instance, they nowadays allow sharing content through Facebook and linking blog posts adjacent to articles. Within this context of offering new, participatory opportunities, online newspapers have also come to adapt to and develop on one specifically salient strategy: To allow readers/users to comment on articles online.

Media research has already paid attention to user comments as a participatory practice. These studies have typically looked into what technological features for participation that are offered and how they enable and limit users’ participatory practices (cf. Domingo et al., 2008; Hermida & Thurman, 2008). In this paper, we take on a slightly different approach. Firstly, the paper looks into the conditions for participation in terms of topics: What content are users allowed to comment on? How do content characteristics differ between news that are made available and news that are withheld from comments? After having mapped these conditions for participation, we – secondly – analyze how users actually navigate within this (conditioned) space: What news are they interested in commenting on? How does commenting vary between different kinds of articles? These questions are answered by help of an analysis of 1.100 news items and their adjacent user interface in an online news site

(affiliated with a professionally produced, local newspaper). In terms of methodology, we apply quantitative content analysis.

Our analysis reveals that the participatory space offered to the readers is geared towards light news, whereas users themselves have clear preferences for commenting news concerning changes in their local environment, about general national politics and welfare issues. The paper concludes with a discussion on potential explanations as to why this discrepancy exists and it also further reflects on its potential implications for users' participatory practices.