Book Review

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Social Media, Politics and the State
    Protests, Revolutions, Riots, Crime and Policing in the Age of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube
    by: Daniel Trottier (Editor) and Christian Fuchs (Editor)
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This book is the essential guide for understanding how state power and politics are contested and exercised on social media. It brings together contributions by social media scholars who explore the connection of social media with revolutions, uprising, protests, power and counter-power, hacktivism, the state, policing and surveillance. It shows how collective action and state power are related and conflict as two dialectical sides of social media power, and how power and counter-power are distributed in this dialectic. Theoretically focused and empirically rigorous research considers the two-sided contradictory nature of power in relation to social media and politics. Chapters cover social media in the context of phenomena such as contemporary revolutions in Egypt and other countries, populism 2.0, anti-austerity protests, the fascist movement in Greece's crisis, Anonymous and police surveillance.

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Chapter contents

Section 1: Introductions

In the introductory chapter of the collective volume, *Theorising Social Media, Politics and the State: An Introduction*, Daniel Trottier and Christian Fuchs give an overview of the issues to be treated in the collective volume, namely what is social media, a theoretical framework to understand modern society, an analysis of the nature of social media activity in relation to modern society, a theoretically grounded understanding of the state, the relation between the state and politics, issues of state power and corporate

power in relation to social media, crime and policing and the distinctions between protests, revolutions and riots.

In Chapter 2, *Social Networking Sites in Pro-democracy and Anti-austerity Protests: Some Thoughts from a Social Movement Perspective* Donatella della Porta and Alice Mattoni, adopting as starting point the fact that the use of internet services and social networking sites has been a common feature in mobilisations worldwide from 2008 onwards, introduce two analytical dimensions rooted in social movement studies, the temporal and relational dimensions of social movements. The authors consider these dimensions as an appropriate basis to foster a critical discussion about social networking sites in current mobilisations.

Section 2: Global and civil counter-power

In Chapter 3, *Populism 2.0: Social Media Activism, the Generic Internet User and Plebiscitary Digital Democracy*, Paolo Gerbaudo focuses on the virtual presence and activity of a series of social movements and political parties such as *Indignados* in Spain and *Occupy Wall Street* in USA, as well as the *5-star Movement* in Italy and the *Partido X* in Spain, to introduce a concept of populism 2.0.

In Chapter 4, on *Anonymous: Hacktivism and Contemporary Politics*, Christian Fuchs embarks on discussing the phenomenon of the *Anonymous*, which is used as basis for a more general treatment of hacktivism as an emerging means of intervention in politics. The author analyses the activity of *Anonymous* as a mechanism to create social movement power, exercised through unconventional and anti-hierarchical means, and concludes that the *Anonymous* may be understood as a parody and absurd theatre of liberalism, articulating in their own political demands the conflict between liberalism and socialism.

Section 3: Civil counter-power against austerity

In Chapter 5, *Web 2.0 Nazi Propaganda: Golden Dawn's Affect, Spectacle and Identity Constructions in Social Media*, Panos Kompatsiaris and Yiannis Mylonas discuss how Gold Down (Nazi party in Greece) use of social media can be linked to Goebbels' propaganda theory, so as to show social media can be a tool to promote and effectively contribute to building fascist communities.

In Chapter 6, *More Than an Electronic Soapbox: Activist Web Presence as a Collective Action Frame, Newspaper Source and Police Surveillance Tool during the London G20 Protests in 2009*, Jonathan Cable examines G20 Meltdowns collective action frames, press coverage and the reaction of the policy and public authorities via social media pages, as well as produced materials (leaflets) and content analysis of national press. The author highlights the important potential of Internet as a communication channel for activists, but also the fact that the content distributed online becomes available for the press and for police intelligence at the same time.

In Chapter 7, *Assemblages: Live Streaming Dissent in the 'Quebec Spring'*, Elise Danielle Thorburn discusses the role and potential of live streaming technology in the case of social movements, based in the CUTV coverage of students strikes in Quebec during 2012. Starting from the Deleuze and Guattari theory of the notion of assemblage, the author analyses the potential of assemblages as a state power mechanism but also a civic resistance one.

Section 4: Contested and toppled state power

In Chapter 8, on *Creating Spaces for Dissent: The Role of Social Media in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution*, Sara Salem analyses the role of social media and the way they were used by the different parties involved in the 2011 protest and revolution in Egypt.

In Chapter 9, on *Social Media Activism and State Censorship*, Thomas Poell examines social media protest activity and contention in China, Tunisia and Iran to argue that instead of blocking or repressing social media activism, authoritarian states rather shape online contention. As the author notes, while activist social media communication is shaped by internet censorship and encapsulated by commercial social platforms, activists are constantly exploring new ways to evade censorship, but also to regain control over their collective data.

Section 5: State power as policing and intelligence

In Chapter 10, on *Vigilantism and Power Users: Police and User-Led Investigations on Social Media,* Daniel Trottier treats the issue of digital vigilantism, defined as a user-led violation of privacy that not only transcends online/offline distinctions but also complicates relations of visibility and control between police and the public. The author discusses the concept form both a theoretical and practical perspective, as social media are considered as tools that enable a parallel form of criminal justice.

In Chapter 11 on *Police 'Image Work' in an Era of Social Media: YouTube and the 2007 Montebello Summit Protest*, which concludes this volume, Christopher J. Schneider treats the issue of unfavourable user generate content on police image circulated online. Based on data from the 2007 Montebello summit, the author discusses whether and how police may shape and keep control of their public image online.

Significance for the state of research and practice

Thanks to the advancement of internet and social networking sites and tools, leaders can connect with followers as never before. At the same time, availability of these platforms gives protestors and social an open virtual space internationally, independent of traditional media structures and of the government.

According to a 2012 study published in Nature, "*messages on users' Facebook feeds could significantly influence voting patterns*". The study report results from a randomised controlled trial of political mobilisation messages delivered to 61 million Facebook users during the 2010 US congressional elections. As results show, the messages exchanged directly influenced political self-expression, information seeking and real-world voting behaviour of millions of people. Furthermore, these messages not only influenced recipients but also recipients' friends, and friends of friends (Bond et al., 2012).

Clearly technology has been as disruptive in politics as in every other sphere of life. For one thing, it provides us with insights into the thinking of the world's politicians in a way that was never before possible. Or there are no signs social media is softening the global disenchantment that electorates feel about political elites (Pickard, 2016). Meta-studies like "Social Media Use and Participation: A Meta-analysis of Current Research" (Boulianne, 2015) showcase a positive relationship between SNS use and some form of civic or political engagement or participation, but clearly cast doubt on whether SNS use 'causes' strong effects and is truly 'transformative'.

Under this context, the book takes a critical approach to the relationship between social media, politics and protest. Combining theoretical and practical perspectives, this collective volume discusses the social aspect of social media, analyses the nature of social media activity in relation to modern society, and highlights key issues and concerns in contemporary forms of social media use (social movements, state power and corporate power, crime and policing, distinction between protests, revolutions and riots) from both a top-down and a bottom-up perspective, trying to critically discuss reality as such, beyond a number of optimistic and pessimistic stereotypes.

At the same time, the volume opens up new grounds for research towards whether and how social media may also help initiate proactively and sustain civic engagement beyond and after protest and mobilisation. As stated in recent literature (Margetts et al., 2016), what we are currently facing is the emergence of a '*chaotic pluralism*', in which mobilisations spring from the bottom-up, often reacting to events: "*social media are making democracies more 'pluralistic', but not in the conventional sense of the word, involving diverse but stable groups*", but rather the opposite.

In a world where the *post-truth era* term made it as word of the year as soon as it entered the Oxford Dictionaries, where it is defined as an era in which "*objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief*", whereas the creator of Facebook states his intention to transform Facebook in an environment for engagement in existing political processes, this book is clearly well timed.

Significance for managers and instructors

This collective volume has a crucial value for anyone interested in the key political and social question of our time: the relationship between media technology, politics and activism.

The volume can serve to introduce students and researcher in political studies, media and IT, as well as the general public to the challenging role played by social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter within contemporary political and civic participation and activism, in the sense that political participation and civic engagement capture the effort of civil society actors to address issues of public concern beyond the rights and obligations of liberal citizenship such as voting (Uldam and Vestergaard, 2015). Public sector managers as well as civil society actors will find in the chapters of this volume useful and clarifying analysis, in terms of theory and practice, on issues such as the way in which social movements emerge; how they are organised; how prospective participants are recruited; how movements interact with the political system and other organisations in the digital era.

In parallel with this analysis, the volume chapters showcase the complexity and geographic and cultural diversity of digital activism worldwide. Drawing examples from the new media practices associated with social and political movements in Spain, USA, Italy, Canada, China, Tunisia, Iran and elsewhere, authors of this collective volume enrich the understanding of how contemporary digital communication technologies are contributing to new forms of civic activism, as well as of the challenges and potential boundaries of such actions.

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