Beyond the Paradox of Young Adults' Political (Dis)engagement: A Cross-Disciplinary Conceptual Reflection on the Expansion of the Political Participation Repertoire

Lara Burton*

* Groupe de recherche en médiation des savoirs, Institut Langage et Communication, Université catholique de Louvain (lara.burton@uclouvain.be)

Abstract

There is a paradox in the social sciences between young adults' political disengagement on the one hand and the options for participation offered by developments in information and communication technology on the other. While some studies draw attention to young adults' negative attitudes toward politics and their disengagement from political activities, others highlight the new ways in which they are participating in society and call for an expansion of the political participation repertoire. Based on a discussion of concepts and approaches from a range of disciplines, this paper highlights the complex nature of political participation and considers it in relation to media literacy. It distinguishes between political, civic, and media participation and positions mediatized civic participation at the intersection of the latter two dimensions. This conceptual work calls into question the traditional methods used to study the evolution of political participation from an information and communication perspective. By calling for actors' expertise to be included in the definition of the norm (i.e., comprehensive method), for literacy to be conceptualized at the level of the group (i.e., collective approach), and for a study of practices serving the common good and the proper functioning of democracy to be undertaken (i.e., collectivist approach), this paper offers an effective way to address the relationship between media literacy and civic participation.

Keywords: conceptual work, media participation, civic participation, political participation, media literacy, comprehensive approach

Introduction

Young adulthood is the period of transition between late adolescence and adulthood. It has traditionally been defined "on the basis of five key experiences—leaving home, completing school, entering the workforce, getting married, and having children" (Flanagan, Levine & Settersten, 2009, p. 1). Young people's participation in the body politic is important for two reasons. By participating in public life, they contribute to the functioning of democracy (Flanagan & Levine, 2010) and develop their material empowerment, that is, their ability to access the political pressure system and affect political decisions (Bucy & Gregson, 2001). Furthermore, young adults' involvement in the body politic fulfills their need for belonging and gives them a sense that life has a purpose beyond the pursuit of individual gain (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). This engagement results in symbolic empowerment, which is associated with psychological benefits and self-efficacy (Bucy & Gregson, 2001). Young people's political participation has implications for both material/practical and symbolic/normative aspects of their lives.

From a social sciences perspective, studying young adults' political participation is highly relevant because "political identities formed in the early-adult years are highly predictive of the positions individuals will hold

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in middle and even late adulthood" (Flanagan & Levine, 2010, p. 161). This period of life is also interesting from a media studies perspective, as "adolescents and young adults are heavy users of new media and are quick to adopt them" (Kahne, Lee & Feezell, 2013, p. 2). Moreover, developments in information and communication technology (ICT) have enabled people to express themselves online, discuss topics with friends and acquaintances or within a larger community, gather individuals around a cause, organize into networks, and coordinate actions (Bennett, 2008; Cammaerts, 2015). These opportunities—along with a renewed vision of citizenship—have expanded the repertoire of political participation to include noninstitutionalized activities such as demonstrations, nonviolent direct action, voluntary work for a community project, and individual lifestyle choices (Bennett, 2008; Theocharis & van Deth, 2017). As such, it seems relevant to focus on young adults when studying mediatized civic participation (i.e., the ways in which individuals use media devices as part of their civic participation), a concept that I will situate within a theoretical framework in this paper.

Over the last few decades, studies have investigated young people's involvement in the body politic under headings such as "civic engagement" (Andolina Jenkins, Keeter & Zukin, 2002; Flanagan et al., 2009; Flanagan & Levine, 2010), "political participation" (Dahlgren & Olsson, 2008), "civic and political engagement" (Chryssochoou & Barrett, 2017), "democratic life" (Cammaerts, Bruter, Banaji, Harrison & Anstead, 2014), and "participation" (Harris, Wyn & Younes, 2010). Some have specifically investigated the "media" or "digital" aspects of this phenomenon, variously referred to as "media participation" (Bucy & Gregson, 2001), "civic life online" (Bennett, 2008), "online civic and political participation" (Kahne, Lee & Feezell, 2012), and "digital engagement in politics" (Kahne & Bowyer, 2019). Although many studies focus on topics related to political participation and mediatized civic participation, they rarely provide clear definitions of the concepts investigated in the present paper and sometimes even use them interchangeably. This conceptual abundance might pose an obstacle to developing a clear line of research.

This article contributes to a better conceptualization of young adults' political, civic, and media participation in three ways. First, it contextualizes the need for conceptual disambiguation by highlighting the definitional problem at the heart of the paradox of young people's (dis)engagement (sections 2 and 3). Second, it underscores the importance of developing (digital and) media literacy as a potential prerequisite for fully participating in society, as well as the need to refine our understanding of participation in the context of (digital and) media literacy studies (section 4). Third, it presents a cross-disciplinary discussion of concepts of political participation (section 5), which provides the foundation for conceptualizing three basic types of participation (political, civic, and media participation) and a fourth hybrid type—mediatized civic participation—that is positioned at the intersection of civic and media participation (section 6). Fourth, it reflects on the conceptual limits of the traditional methods used to study mediatized civic participation (section 7) and concludes that a comprehensive, collective, and collectivist approach to this topic is needed (section 8). Our overarching research question concerns how to define the various forms of participation, with a view to studying the expansion of the political participation repertoire from an information and communication perspective.

A paradox in the social sciences: young adults' political disengagement and ICT developments

A paradox can be observed in the social sciences literature regarding young adults' civic and political participation. On the one hand, the development of media platforms and social software enables "unprecedented levels of production and distribution of ideas, public deliberation, and network organization" (Bennett, 2008, p. 1). These changes have "the potential to strengthen young people's participation in civic and political life" (Kahne et al., 2012, p. 2). On the other hand, young people seem disconnected from politics and distrustful of political institutions. Many studies tackle this political disengagement, considering both individuals' activities and attitudes.

The results of research on young people's civic engagement conducted in the USA are quite pessimistic. Flanagan and Levine's work shows that Americans in their twenties in the 2000s were less likely than their counterparts in the 1970s to participate in nine out of ten important activities characteristic of citizenship (such as voting, being a member of a trade union, or reading a newspaper at least once a week) (Flanagan et al., 2009; Flanagan & Levine, 2010). With regard to political attitudes, the focus groups led by Andolina et al. showed that young cohorts aged between 18 and 24 have a "general cultural disdain" for politics: "They see it as largely irrelevant to their daily lives" (Andolina et al., 2002, p. 194).

Studies conducted in Europe and Australia soften this gloomy picture. With regard to young Europeans' political attitudes, Cammaerts et al.'s work shows that a majority of people aged 16 to 30 "have clear views and opinions about politics" and "are critical rather than apathetic; that is, they are unhappy with the political offer rather than bored with politics" (Cammaerts et al., 2014, p. 661). The authors note "the mismatch between young people's hopes for democracy and the way these are being addressed (or not) by politicians" (Cammaerts et al., 2014, p. 661). Harris, Wyn, and Younes's research project reached similar conclusions about Australian adolescents aged between 15 and 18. Their study demonstrates that "many young people have social and political concerns, but eschew traditional participation because they do not feel heard" (Harris et al., 2010, p. 28). With respect to their political activities, young people "continue to value recognition by the state [but] take up more individualized and everyday practices in efforts to reshape society" (Harris et al., 2010, p. 28). Overall, adolescents in their mid-teens and young adults seem to have social and political views, opinions, and concerns but do not address them through political activities.

By contrast, some researchers are very optimistic regarding the opportunities for young people to participate in society opened up by digital media. These technologies are at the heart of many new modes of participation, positioning ICT users as "both producers and consumers of information" (Bennett, 2008, p. 9). From a technical point of view, "the capacity and speed of the network infrastructure has dramatically increased in most parts of the world" (Cammaerts, 2015). In terms of speed, the Internet enables people to communicate in real or delayed time by sharing and receiving various types of content such as text, videos, or images. In terms of capacity, online interaction offers multidirectional possibilities: one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many, and few-to-few.

These technical evolutions enable "rapid formation of large-scale networks that may focus their energies in critical moments" (Bennett, 2008, p. 9) and the creation and organization of various types of movements, ranging from local to transnational in scale (Cammaerts, 2015). With regards to political activity, the Internet and social networks are used "for organizing protests, mobilizing protestors, communicating [their] claims […], and reporting on the progress that was being made," but also "to create virtual spaces where [they]

could meet and communicate […] without supervision or interference by the government, police, or security forces" (Chryssochoou & Barrett, 2017, p. 297). In everyday life, ICT also enables individuals or groups, including members of ethnic minorities or those with low socioeconomic status, "to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern (e.g., blogging, circulating political news, starting a new political group, creating petitions, mobilizing one's social network, etc.)" (Chryssochoou & Barrett, 2017, p. 297). In summary, researchers in this second camp regard digital media developments as a potential source of increased political participation.

A definitional problem: What do "citizenship" and "political participation" mean?

This apparent paradox between young people's political disengagement on the one hand and their opportunities for participation opened up by ICT on the other is rooted in a definitional problem: namely, how we define the concepts of citizenship and political participation. Societal and technological transformations in recent decades—including the popularization of the Internet and ICT—have coincided with a generational shift in the normative definition of citizenship (Bennett, 2008; Theocharis & van Deth, 2017). The paradigm of citizenship has shifted from a dutiful citizen model to an actualizing citizen model (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017, p. 6):

> Citizens' conceptions and norms of what it means to be a "good" citizen are moving away from the dutiful and obedient, allegiant to the state, paradigm (Schudson 1998) that is inextricably linked to voting as the hallmark of political participation, and party membership as the main avenue for being represented (Dalton, Scarrow, and Cain 2004; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000).

While the former model is "still adhered to by older generations and many young people who are positioned in more traditional social settings" (Bennett, 2008, p. 14), the actualizing citizen model reflects societal changes experienced by many young adults. Their life courses have become "increasingly 'de-standardized,' forcing young people […] to develop newer, flexible personal strategies" (Dahlgren & Olsson, 2008, p. 496) and reducing their "allegiances to the state and respect for authorities" (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017, p. 5). At the same time, this process "has brought new political issues to the forefront and new ways to advocate them" (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017, p. 5) as "individuals have become more responsible for the production and management of their own social and political identities" using various tools (social networks, communication media) (Bennett, 2008, p. 13). As a result, the repertoire of political participation has expanded: "There is less participation in politics through institutionalized avenues, and more participation through extra-institutionalized, personalized, self-expressive, and individualized forms" (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017, p. 6). New forms of politics are emerging, especially "advocacy or issue politics, often in the form of ongoing campaigns or social movements outside parliamentarian party politics" (Dahlgren & Olsson, 2008, p. 495). These changes favor "loosely networked activism to address issues that reflect personal values" (Bennett, 2008, p. 14).

Linking advances in ICT to the expansion of the political participation repertoire, some researchers distinguish between Internet-*supported* and Internet-*based* practices (Cammaerts, 2015; Theocharis & van Deth, 2017; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010). The former is "supported by (specific platforms that rely on) the internet," which means it "already existed offline prior to the arrival of this particular technology and thus

'merely' provides a low-cost online equivalent" (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017, p. 28). In other words, ICT has a "facilitating function, lowering tactic-related thresholds and making traditional protest action more transnational" (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010, p. 1148). Internet-supported practices are used "to organize internally, recruit and network," to "mobilize for and coordinate direct action," to "disseminate movement frames independently of the mainstream," and to "discuss/debate/deliberate/decide" (Cammaerts, 2015). Internet-based practices, meanwhile, also called Internet-enabled practices, are ones "enabled by the internet or an internet-based platform, [and] can be thought of as a new way of engaging in politics altogether" (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017, p. 28). They highlight "the internet's creative function of new and modified tactics expanding the action toolkit of social movements" (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010, p. 1148). Internet-based practices are used to "attack ideological enemies," to "surveil the surveillers," and to "preserve protest artefacts" (Cammaerts, 2015).

However, the democratic hopes associated with opportunities for civic participation opened up by digital media need to be treated with caution. These opportunities may only be taken advantage of by people who are already politically engaged offline. Moreover, the potential benefits of digital media are dependent on the various levels of the digital divide in the population: specifically, inequalities in access to ICT (first level), in skills and usage (second level), and in the benefits derived from this usage (third level). Researchers should not only investigate the positive outcomes of Internet use, but also "the less beneficial or negative outcomes of Internet use, such as problematic Internet use, Internet addiction or privacy issues" (Scheerder et al., 2017, p. 1614). These negative outcomes include polarization (i.e., the reinforcement of "ideological extremism" due to algorithms feeding users popular content that generates strong reactions) and misinformation (i.e., "issues of trustworthiness, bias and (mis)representation [that] undermine democracy and its reliance on a well-informed citizenry") (Polizzi, 2021, p. 4).

Media literacy: a bridge between participation and media competences

From a societal perspective, media literacy education offers a way to work on these limits and negative outcomes, as one strand of media literacy studies links the acquisition of media skills and competences to a wider aim: the ability to participate in society. Hobbs (2010) argues that ICT developments mean that literacy must be expanded to a variety of different media: "Because today people use so many different types of expression and communication in daily life, the concept of literacy is beginning to be defined as the ability to share meaning through symbol systems in order to fully participate in society" (Hobbs, 2010, p. 16). She defines digital and media literacy (DML) as "a constellation of life skills that are necessary for full participation in our media-saturated, information-rich society" (Hobbs, 2010, p. vii). According to Fastrez & De Smedt, media literacy (ML) comprises a set of competences possessed by "critical and creative, autonomous and socialized citizens in the contemporary media environment" (Fastrez & De Smedt, 2012, p. 47, my translation). From an information and communication perspective, media literacy represents a good way to address the expansion of the political participation repertoire.

One question that arises: What competences, according to media literacy studies, does one need to participate in society? My ideas about the relationship between media competences and participation in civic and political life are informed by Hobbs's and Fastrez and De Smedt's theories. Hobbs's DML model includes various abilities: accessing, analyzing, and creating media messages in a variety of contexts; reflecting on

one's conduct and communication behavior; taking social action as a member of a community. Fastrez and De Smedt's ML matrix describes the competences required to perform four types of tasks ("reading, writing, navigating, and organizing") on three types of media objects ("informational, technical and social") (Tilleul, Fastrez & De Smedt, 2015, p. 76).

Both models give a central place to the reception (analysis, reading) and production (creation, writing) of media objects. In an age of information overload, reception competences are crucial: "People need the ability to access, analyze and engage in critical thinking about the array of messages they receive and send in order to make informed decisions about the everyday issues they face regarding health, work, politics and leisure" (Hobbs, 2010, p. vii). As reading means transforming an existing media object into thoughts through decoding, understanding, and evaluating (De Smedt, 2012, p. 131), these reception competences enable individuals to allocate their attention to "quality, high-value messages that have relevance to their lives" (Hobbs, 2010, p. vii) and distinguish them from the rest of the information flow. Furthermore, people are not only media consumers; they also participate in the contemporary culture and civic life of their communities by creating and sharing messages. Production competences are therefore also essential. Hobbs further observes that "to fulfill the promise of digital citizenship," citizens "must acquire multimedia communication skills that include the ability to compose messages using language, graphic design, images, and sound, and know how to use these skills to engage in the civic life of their communities" (Hobbs, 2010, p. vii).

Hobbs's and Fastrez and De Smedt's models emphasize the link between the acquisition of (D)ML competences and the achievement of a societal aim, which entails either fully participating in society or being a critical, creative, autonomous, and socialized citizen. However, both models seem to use the notion of participation in a very broad way. Hobbs explicitly connects participation to various fields, including culture, health, work, and politics. Moreover, there is an ambiguity in Hobbs's model regarding the place of participation. She does not just refer to participation as a purpose of DML but also integrates this notion into the dimensions of her model. Participation and citizenship can be associated with two of these dimensions: reflection and taking social action. Reflection is the ability to incorporate ethical, social, and emotional dimensions of communication (i.e., notions of identity, self-esteem, power, and responsibility) and develop multiperspectival thinking. This notion is related in some respects to that of social reading, defined as the ability "to decode, understand and evaluate […] the institutional context of [media] production, the intentions of their authors, the cultural stereotypes they reinforce" (, 2015, p. 78). Taking social action is the ability to work "individually and collaboratively to share knowledge and solve problems in the family, the workplace and the community, and participating as a member of a community at local, regional, national and international levels" (Hobbs, 2011, p. 12). By doing so, individuals come to "see a role for themselves as contributors to their own well-being and the lives of those around them" (Hobbs, 2011, p. 19). This definition goes far beyond the competences of the ML matrix, which refers strictly to media objects (reading, writing) and collections of media objects (navigating, organizing).

The ambiguity surrounding the notion of participation in (D)ML parallels Buckingham's criticism of the notions of media and civic engagement:

> "media engagement" is not necessarily the same as "civic engagement." […] I would suggest that "civic" implies some notion of the public (the polis or the public sphere, even)—by which I suppose

> I mean an open debate about issues of general social concern between people who may not agree with each other. (Buckingham, 2006, p. 23)

These conceptual ambiguities are problematic, especially as ICT developments are partly responsible for the expansion of the political participation repertoire. Theoretical clarification is necessary in order to study these transformations from an information and communication perspective, and to explore the relationship between media and civic participation.

Philosophy, political science, sociology: What does "political participation" mean?

Concepts of participation and citizenship have primarily been studied in three disciplines: philosophy, political science, and sociology (Berger & De Munck, 2015). Each discipline has its own definition of and approach to political participation, which provides the basis for distinguishing three types of participation (political, civic, and media participation).

Philosophy

The oldest studies of participation and citizenship come from the field of political philosophy. It explores these notions from an external and normative perspective. This discipline considers the "good society" and its virtualities from a general and abstract point of view. Its normativity is external to the social world, and is the prerogative of the philosopher/researcher (Berger & De Munck, 2015, p. 3).

Offering a contemporary perspective on political philosophy, Zask (2011) reviews the many forms of participation that exist, including political participation. She argues that three types of experience constitute all forms of participation: taking part, contributing, and receiving a part. Taking part refers to the social enjoyment of being with others, which is a powerful motivation for creating and maintaining collectives on the basis of sociability. Contributing is an interactive phenomenon that "integrates the contributor into a shared story" (Zask, 2011, p. 12, my translation). Through this phenomenon, individuals link their personal contributions (e.g., expressions of interest, ideas, or competences) to the issues that the group is concerned with and produce a reaction within this group. Receiving a part refers to the opportunities for individuation (i.e., self-realization as an individual) in a given society. It includes the notions of "good environment" and "recognition" (i.e., acknowledgement of an individual's contributions by society).

Zask elaborates further on the specificity of political participation: "The political phase of social life refers to the circumstances in which the disorganization of an individual's existence is not the result of their own mistakes or fate, but of the activities of strangers" (Zask, 2011, p. 194, my translation). In this phase, citizens affected by the same issue come together in order "to detect, identify, and define their specific [shared] interests" (Zask, 2011, pp. 194–195, my translation), to take action for these interests, and to rebuild the coherence of their individual existences. Zask refers to this as "active participation" (Zask, 2011, p. 195, my translation).

Philosophy has a broader understanding of participation than other disciplines. On the one hand, Zask (2011) shows that participation has a wider social purpose than individuals' contribution to public life. While participation can be linked to (digital and) media literacy in terms of an individual actualizing their competences and using them to contribute to a social group, her theory places this contribution into a bigger

picture, comprising social enjoyment (in taking part) and opportunities for individuation (e.g., recognition) offered by society. This definition suggests that a "collective" approach is needed to analyze participation, in which individuals are understood as members of communities. On the other hand, philosophy distinguishes political and civic participation from broader social participation, emphasizing that political and civic matters relate to the disorder of a person's individual existence caused by the activities of strangers. Civic or political participation thus occurs through the constitution of groups of people who face the same difficulties and want to act collectively to overcome these difficulties. So in addition to a collective approach, the study of civic or political participation requires a "collectivist" approach, which will be further clarified based on the sociological definition of participation (see below).

Political science

Political science investigates the concepts of participation and citizenship from an empirical point of view, studying the reality and contingencies of state-centered processes (i.e., ones located within the state sphere and related to government action). It typically defines political participation as "a set of processes that interests and engages citizens in the political system, by complex mechanisms linking state authorities and social action systems through mediation (parties, trade unions, etc.)" (Berger & De Munck, 2015, p. 3, my translation). Berger and De Munck note that classical political science "tends to isolate and specify a set of institutions and activities presumed to be intrinsically (or at least centrally) political in opposition to other institutions or activities that will therefore be considered nonpolitical (culture, the economy, family …)" (Berger & De Munck, 2015, p. 4, my translation).

However, recent work in political science questions this strict distinction between the political and nonpolitical arenas. Theocharis and van Deth (2017) argue that "the expansion of participation creates the problem of deciding what to consider as participation, while at the same time, avoiding to fall into the trap of considering everything as participation (van Deth 2001)" (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017, p. 9). They distance themselves from an established concept of political participation focused on "those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" (Verba & Nie, 1972, p. 2) and instead develop "a unified conceptual framework of political participation […] [that offers] a vocabulary that helps researchers to arrive at commonly agreed aspects that can be integrated in the systematic study of participation" (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017, p. 9). This framework provides a definition of political participation, following a set of decision rules in a hierarchical order. Based on these rules, the authors define all types of political participation as nonprofessional, voluntary activities or actions. Their first category is "located in the sphere of government/state/politics" (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017, p. 68), the second is directed at this sphere from the outside, and the third "aim[s] at solving collective or community problems" (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017, p. 70). The fourth and fifth categories broaden the definition to activities situated in a political context and to those used to express political aims and intentions.

Classical political science places institutional politics at the heart of its definition of political participation. This predominant position remains visible in Theocharis and van Deth's framework, which defines the first type of political participation as "all non-professional, voluntary activities located in the sphere of government/state/politics" (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017, p. 68). The salience of institutional politics to the

definition of political participation underscores the importance of differentiating it from other types of participation, reserving the notion of "political participation" for institutional activities. More generally, their framework is a useful tool to distinguish this first type of participation from less institutionalized forms. It also provides a basis for defining all forms of political participation, with the specification that they are nonprofessional and voluntary.

Sociology

Political sociology offers an approach that cuts across that of the two previous disciplines, considering participation and citizenship as both normative and empirical concepts. It explores citizen participation by studying actors' effective practices and norms (i.e., the meanings they assign to their practices when describing or criticizing them). However, the sociological approach also differs in some respects from that of philosophy and political science. By contrast with philosophy, sociology typically takes normativity to be "implemented, debated, and contested by the actors themselves, who are only citizens if they are able to give a normative meaning to the idea of citizenship" (Berger & De Munck, 2015, p. 3, my translation). Moreover, this discipline regards social actors as competent users of their language. Hence, sociological language is not a metalanguage; it is constructed in dialogue with the actors' language. Meanwhile, by contrast with classical political science, the sociological approach highlights the shifting boundary between the political and the nonpolitical. It espouses "a broad concept of 'politics' that includes, but is not limited to, government activity and what surrounds it" (Berger & De Munck, 2015, p. 4, my translation). Furthermore, sociology does not place institutional politics at the core of its definition of political participation, but takes it as referring to all situations in which "collectives gather, reflect on, or engage in issues where there is a common/public good to achieve or a common/public harm to avoid" (Cefaï, 2011, p. 546, my translation).

Sociology is inspiring both conceptually and methodologically. Considering actors' practices and norms, it develops a comprehensive approach to participation. This discipline thus has the resources to theoretically grasp changing realities, such as the evolutions in the spheres of media and politics, and to comprehend the many uses of media for political/civic purposes. It allows us to compare external normative conceptions (e.g., those developed by philosophy or media literacy studies) with those of social actors. Finally, it provides a wide conception of political participation, which goes beyond state-centered processes and helps us to develop a theoretical account of civic participation, and underscores the need for a "collectivist" approach to civic/political participation, which aims at the achievement of common good and the proper functioning of democracy.

Conceptual synthesis: toward political, civic, and media participation

The definitions and concepts set out in the previous sections are helpful when it comes to clarifying the terms used to study the expansion of the political participation repertoire. In my theoretical work, I will carefully follow two recommendations. First, I will try to avoid ending up with a "concept of everything" (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017) by differentiating political from civic participation. Second, I endorse Buckingham's criticism regarding the lack of distinction between media and civic participation, and so I will

define three distinct types of participation: political, civic, and media participation. Moreover, I will conceptualize mediatized civic participation as a research object that is useful for studying the expansion of the political participation repertoire from an information and communication perspective.

How do I propose to distinguish political participation and civic participation? As discussed above, both notions refer to voluntary (i.e., unconstrained), nonprofessional activities or actions (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017) that correspond to "the circumstances in which the disorganization of an individual's existence is not the result of their own mistakes or fate, but of the activities of strangers" (Zask, 2011, p. 194, my translation). However, political participation is located within the governmental and state sphere and aims to "influenc[e] the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" (Verba & Nie, 1972, p. 2). It includes, for example, voting, being part of a participatory budgets council, contributing to the campaign of a politician, or being a member of a panel organized by a political entity.

In contrast, civic participation is external to the governmental and state sphere, but may direct its activities toward that sphere. Civic activities are part of a broader set of situations in which a collective of citizens affected by the same issue comes together "to detect, identify, and define their specific [shared] interests" with regard to this issue (Zask, 2011, pp. 194–195, my translation), and takes action in order to achieve a common good or to avoid a common harm (Cefaï, 2011). Emphasizing the notion of collectives, the definition aims to distinguish civic participation from the activities of individuals acting for their private interest (i.e., "consequences [that] solely affect those who are themselves involved in these activities" (Zask, 2011, p. 195, my translation)). Some examples of civic participation are peaceful marches in opposition to government policies (i.e., collective action directed at the state sphere) and participation in neighborhood committees (i.e., collective action aimed at solving collective or community problems) (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017).

Media participation differs in nature from civic and political participation. While the qualifiers "political" and "civic" specify the sphere of participation, media participation relates to the media device with which an individual participates, defined as a "social place of interaction and cooperation with its own intentions, its own material and symbolic functioning, and its own interaction patterns" (Peraya, 1991, cited in Meunier & Peraya, 2004, p. 388, my translation). This distinction is important if we wish to avoid falling into technological determinism about potential positive effects of digital media on civic or political participation. As discussed earlier, media developments offer new technical possibilities, which could be useful for civic or political participation. However, no one can tell in advance to what use these possibilities will primarily be put. For example, media participation can serve entertainment, cultural, or social purposes.

Finally, at the intersection of media and civic participation, the concept of mediatized civic participation questions the ways in which individuals use media devices (which are not necessarily digital) as part of their civic participation. ICT developments challenge the definition of civic participation by enabling the rapid formation of very diverse groups (diverse in terms of the number of people involved, longevity, scale, and so forth), sometimes prior to the identification and definition of their shared interests and the common goals they wish to achieve. Digital media also enable individual acts, such as publishing politically oriented content on one's social media profile. These mediatized forms "surround" civic participation and are "neither located in, nor targeted at, government/state/politics or at solving community problems" (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017, p. 71). However, contextual evidence or political aims and intentions underscore the civic nature of these activities. Mediatized civic participation therefore needs to be conceptualized in discussion with social

actors, taking account of those actors' normative representations and the meanings they assign to their practices (i.e., adopting a comprehensive approach).

Methodological reflection: media literacy education, the digital divide, participatory cultures

The conceptual work undertaken in this paper questions the traditional methods used to study the relationship between media participation and civic participation. Three research traditions will be discussed: media literacy education (MLE), the digital divide, and participatory cultures.

First, MLE research on civic engagement explores the correlations between several variables, usually related to educational activities (Hobbs, Donnelly, Friesem & Moen, 2013; Kahne et al., 2012; Kahne & Bowyer, 2019; Martens & Hobbs, 2015; Mihailidis, 2008). Frequently used variables are learners' participation in MLE activities, their media knowledge, their media analysis and production competences, and their engagement in civic/political activities. MLE studies are mainly quantitative and deductive, considering media literacy and civic participation from an external and normative perspective. On the one hand, they use close-ended questionnaires relying on preexisting frameworks to survey media knowledge and competences (often resulting from media education activities). On the other hand, they correlate these data with self-reported items on either actual participation in civic and political life, or intentions to participate in the future. Nevertheless, some researchers use a mixed methodology. For example, Mihailidis (2008) supplements his deductive approach to media skills (open-ended questionnaire) with an inductive element (focus groups) in order to investigate learners' perceptions of media's democratic role.

Second, studies on the digital divide focus on the discriminatory effects of the uneven distribution of access to and use of ICT, and the "gaps in individuals' capacity to translate their internet access and use into favorable offline outcomes" (van Deursen & Helsper, 2015, p. 30). These discriminatory effects are related to economic, cultural, social, and personal domains, including citizenship (Brotcorne, Damhuis, Laurent, Valenduc & Vendramin, 2011; Scheerder, van Deursen & van Dijk, 2017; van Deursen & Helsper, 2015). As with studies on MLE, studies on the digital divide are mainly quantitative and deductive, with an external and normative perspective. They use close-ended questionnaires with many self-reported items on individuals' media access and media use, and few on citizenship (as it is one out of many outcomes). From a normative point of view, these studies assess media competences for individual outcomes, following an individualistic approach. They aim to develop compliant and functional individual media use in order to avoid marginalization or social exclusion.

Third, studies of participatory cultures explore the creative media practices of young people and the ways communities share these productions and act on them through ICT, considered both as creative expression and civic engagement (Jenkins, Purushotma, Clinton, Weigel & Robison, 2006; Shresthova & Jenkins, 2016). These studies mobilize qualitative approaches to document literacy practices and the ways in which they give voice to young people. They also address media participation from a collective point of view, "shift[ing] the focus of literacy from one of individual expression to community involvement" (Jenkins et al., 2006, p. 4). However, these studies often conflate media participation with civic participation by considering many types of media productions as new forms of "civic engagement," even though some belong to other spheres instead. Moreover, they often fail to go beyond the description of practices and do not link their productions to existing theories of (digital and) media literacy, for instance in order to revise and amend those theories.

Conclusion: toward a qualitative and comprehensive, collective, and collectivist approach to mediatized civic participation

Based on my comparative analysis of three research traditions, I emphasize the need for a qualitative and comprehensive method to study the relationship between media participation and civic participation, with the aim of understanding the media practices and norms shared by civically engaged young adults. Moreover, I advocate a collective and collectivist approach to mediatized civic participation, which conceptualizes media literacy at the level of groups and communities (rather than individuals) and envisions it as a way to achieve a common good or avoid common harm, and to build a fairer and more democratic society (rather than as a way to achieve individual outcomes).

As discussed above, studies of MLE and the digital divide are mainly quantitative and deductive, using close-ended questionnaires that rely on preexisting frameworks and self-reported items about (actual or potential) civic participation. In contrast, I recommend a qualitative and comprehensive approach to mediatized civic participation that is able to examine the new ways in which people participate in civic life. As competences are actualized through media practices, qualitative and comprehensive methods will be useful to identify the actual media practices mobilized by young adults for civic participation, and the variety of media literacy competences necessary for mediatized civic participation. Moreover, this approach allows us to understand how these practices are implemented, debated, and contested by the actors themselves, and so to understand these actors' normativity, considering social actors as competent users of their language, capable of giving a normative meaning to their practices. By integrating actors' practices and normative conceptions into the definition of mediatized civic participation, this quantitative and comprehensive method will broaden the interpretative field and enable a nuanced understanding of the media practices and competences supporting civic participation. This understanding will be useful to nurture both civic aspects of media education curricula and media aspects of civic education curricula. Strengthening the links between these disciplines is crucial given the media-saturated nature of societies.

In addition to participatory cultures, I endorse a collective approach to media participation, focusing on communities rather than individuals. Furthermore, I have developed a collectivist approach for studying the mediatized civic participation of these groups, which differs from the individualistic approach adopted by studies of the digital divide (i.e., envisioning media competences with a view to individual outcomes). Following a collectivist approach, mediatized civic participation takes place in a civic context, and so relates to the definition of civic participation, that is, the activities of citizens affected by the same public issue who form a collective, define their shared interests regarding this issue, and take action in order to achieve a common good or avoid a common harm. Studying mediatized civic participation thus entails a focus on the practices serving the achievement of a common good and the proper functioning of democracy. The notion of "common good" is central to addressing mediatized civic participation, a concept that goes beyond media participation and private interests. This focus on a "common good" helps us to clarify the link between media education and its societal—civic—purpose. Moreover, it highlights the need to develop theoretical accounts of other spheres related to media participation (e.g., entertainment, work, socialization, self-development) without conflating them with mediatized civic participation. This will allow researchers to articulate the

various spheres of media participation, and to explain how these can lead to the development of civic participation.

Finally, the comprehensive, collective, and collectivist method supplements MLE with concrete topics, such as the need for "hygiene" both in reception and in production. While MLE studies show the limits of a pedagogy centered on media analysis (Mihailidis, 2008) and the appeal of one based on media production (Hobbs et al., 2013), my empirical data temper the production benefits, highlighting that many civically engaged people are overwhelmed by the reception of too many messages from their peers. In a previous study (Burton, 2019), I therefore emphasized useful media competences for mediatized civic participation, including "dealing with incoming media requests" and "selecting appropriate channels to interact and to convince others" in order to avoid creating more noise than information when producing a message.

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