Digital Literacies and Civic Literacies: Theoretical Issues, Research Questions and Methodological Approaches

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SUMMARY

Whether seen from a "minimalist" or a "maximalist" model of democratic participation, the issue of the role of the internet in facilitating citizens' participation in the public sphere has acquired a permanent place in the academic and public debate. Particular attention has been devoted to young people and their engagement with the internet and digital media. While a consistent body of writing has focused on assessing the efficacy of online participation in mobilising young people and promoting new citizenship models, a different approach has addressed the issue from the perspective of media literacy, investigating the links between digital and civic literacies. This second strand of research is rooted in, while at the same time originating, the shift from media literacy to digital citizenship operated at a policy and public level. However, the very concept of media literacy is a contested one, as it is its stretching so as to include civic competencies. On these premises, the present papers aims to provide a critical review of the current debate on media and digital literacies framed as social practices, and to investigate the relationship between digital and civic literacies on a theoretical and empirically-driven level, in order to identify which dimensions of both digital and civic literacy should be studied, and how.

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Introduction

Online participation is assumed to be closer and more suitable to young people's orientations towards civic life for it is assumed as being more informal; civic rather than political; and hybrid in nature, being at the boundaries of communication, consumption, creativity and engagement (Bennett 2008; Loader 2007; Gauntlett 2011; Micheletti, 2003). However, studies of the role of online media in promoting political engagement among young people are divided in their conclusions claiming that the internet is effective at mobilising disengaged youth (Montgomery et al., 2004; Lusoli et al., 2006), or that online initiatives are able to intersect only those already interested in politics (Livingstone et al., 2007).

Moreover, both the concept of participation and engagement, and the understanding of the role of the media in shaping the conditions and contexts for political participation (Dahlgren, 2009) represent a point of discussion. As a consequence, the very connection between civic engagement and media consumption has been differently framed and analysed. While a consistent body of writing has focused on assessing the efficacy of online engagement in socialising young people to political participation and its role in promoting new citizenship models – namely, the "actualizing citizen" (Bennett, 2008) – a different approach has addressed the issue from the perspective of media literacy, investigating the links between digital and civic literacies. The very concept of media literacy is, nonetheless, a contested one, as it is its stretching so as to include civic competencies.

On these premises, the present papers aims to provide a critical review of the current debate on media and digital literacies and to argue for a definition of media literacy as a social practice (Buckingham, 2003, 2007; Livingstone, 2009) which is contextualised in the wider social, cultural and political context, rather than as a set of specific skills that an individual may possess or not. Further, it investigates the relationship between digital and civic literacies on a theoretical and empirically driven level, in order to identify which dimensions of both digital and civic literacies can and should be studied, and how to address them.

Background literature

The debate around political participation in contemporary societies has received increasing attention among sociologists, media scholars and political scientists: some scholars expressed concern for the growing levels of citizens' disaffection for

political life, the steady decline in traditional forms of political and civic participation - such as voting and engagement in political and civic associations - and the increasing lack of trust in political institutions (Dalton, 2008; Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Putnam, 2000); others, on the contrary, call for a broader, more inclusive notion of participation, which encompasses civic engagement more in general. They argue that citizens are not disaffected nor democracy is eroded; rather new forms of participation are emerging as a consequence of larger societal changes, such as globalisation, individualisation (Beck, 2000), and the emergence of a network society - promoting networked individualism as the dominant pattern of sociality (Castells, 1996, 2001; Rainie & Wellmann, 2012). These emerging forms are characterised by loose and informal network associations; tend to be more civic than political in nature; and are more closely related to lifestyle concerns, and oriented towards the production and maintenance of identity (Bennett, 1998; Dalton, 2008; Giddens, 1991; Micheletti, 2003; Norris, 1999, 2007; Zukin et al., 2006).

The two narratives on youth participation, that, following Loader (2007), we might call the "disaffected citizens" and the "cultural displacement" perspectives, are both partly right (Bennett, Wells & Freelon, 2011): indeed, they are grounded in two alternative models of democracy, with the former accounting for a decline in the modern pattern of citizenship, while the latter focuses on an emerging civic pattern. In a "minimalist model of democratic participation" (Carpentier, 2011), citizens' political role remains limited to any activity directed toward, or effective at, influencing government or formal political institutions (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995). The "dutiful citizen" (Bennett, 2008; Bennett, Wells & Freelon, 2011) engages in public life through organised groups and through being informed via the news, out of a sense of personal duty. At the opposite, the so called "maximalist model of participation" conceptualises everyday life as a possible site of democratic engagement (Carpentier, 2011), and rejects isolating the practice of citizenship from everyday activities such as consumption, popular culture, and entertainment (Burgess et al., 2006). The corresponding citizenship model, the "actualizing citizen" (Bennett, 2008; Bennett, Wells & Freelon, 2011), rests on the notion of citizenship as a personal engagement, a voluntary practice and an opportunity for self-expression, which involves a novel, personalised and lifestyle-related repertoire of actions.

No surprise, then, that the two perspectives, and the underlying alternative models of participation and citizenship, differ also in how they frame and investigate the role of the internet in democracy and the issue of online participation. The branch of research on participation and the internet adhering to a minimalist understanding of the political role of citizenry is aimed at evaluating whether internet use in general, or specific online activities (such as information gathering) have a positive

effect on offline political participation and are capable of influencing vote. In this perspective, online media, just as broadcast media, are framed as unidirectional, top-down means for increasing individuals' civic and political engagement. Developments such as the rise of web 2.0 and the emergence of a "convergence" or participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), however, seem to be better grasped within maximalist approaches to citizenship, which recognise the political value of informal, everyday political talk and, in so doing, pay attention to the forms of digital storytelling, cultural remix, and other grassroots practices that emerge on social media.

Optimistic studies of creative participation on social media claim that online creativity is transforming citizens' relationship not only with cultural industries and their products, but also with politics, education, and the market (Jenkins, 2006). Research on young people's use of the internet, however, invites to be more cautious with respect to this growing "rhetoric of participation": first, although younger generations are assumed to be "digital natives" (Prensky 2001), a growing body of studies have questioned the validity of the label, showing persistent divides in the access and use of online technology on the basis of traditional indicators of socio-economic status, age, gender and educational background (Hargittai 2010; Livingstone & Helsper 2007). And, second, prior research has shown that creative and participatory uses of the internet are popular but not universal: the majority of internet users, also among the so-called digital natives, do not engage in bottom-up creative practices (Livingstone et al., 2011). Social, cultural, media and political context still matter and are influential factors shaping on- and offline civic and political engagement.

Therefore, we argue, the study of youth's online participation would benefit from a reframing of research questions: we agree with Bennett and colleagues (2011) that a productive way to understand the emerging citizenship practices is to focus on the relationship between citizens and civic/political institutions as a *communicative relationship* that mobilises a set of civic and communication skills, and produces certain discourses on citizenship in which both citizens and institutions are positioned. To reach this goal we need to deeper understand the nature of the relationship between digital and civic literacies: which components of media and digital literacies are seemingly connected to, and potentially activating civic literacies? what role do media literacies play within an "actualizing citizenship model" (Bennett, 2008)? The inquiry we are going to undertake will thus work on the following issues: 1) young people's media literacies, and, 2) the role of these literacies in socialising young people to a citizenship model (the actualizing vs the dutiful) and to the corresponding civic literacies. More specifically, we propose a reflection

on "civic literacy" as a concept that arises from the convergence between the two disciplinary fields of political communication, and media studies. This convergence is triggered by a set of research questions that come from different theoretical and empirical traditions but nevertheless point at the same empirical phenomena. The two following paragraphs will show a substantial overlapping between recent contribution of both research traditions, simultaneously suggesting how the current debate on media literacy has incorporated a substantial link to empowerment and how research on political socialisation has gradually adopted a communication perspective.

A communication approach to political socialisation

On the political communication side, we can see a growing interest in the role that communication dynamics play in political socialisation processes (McLeod, 2000). This communication approach to political socialisation considers adolescents as active participants in their own socialisation and pay particular attention to the process of learning that goes beyond the acquisition of a predetermined set of facts and beliefs reflecting the political system. Within this tradition, Lee et al. (2012) propose a "communicative model of youth civic engagement" which examines how different communicative contexts (family, schools, peers and the media) mediate young people's development of fundamental communicative competences. More specifically they argue that the conceptual linkages between these key socializing agents and participatory outcomes can be grasped by two main concepts: communication competence, understood as a set of communication skills and motives that are essential for democratic engagement; and communication mediation, defined as a process in which news consumption and political talk - that is discussing politics with family, peers etc. - shape and direct social structural influences on civic and political engagement. Their survey shows the centrality of communication, both in the form of informational media use (TV news, newspaper, conventional online news, and nonconventional online information) and interpersonal discussion and expression (face-to-face discussion and online political messaging) in shaping youth socialisation into political and civic life.

Similarly, Ekström and Östman (2013) study the potential influence of family and peer talk on youth's civic orientation. More broadly, Ekman and Amnå (2012) include both media use and informal political talk among the factors that shape individual's attention to and interest in political and social issues: their aim is, therefore, to understand the process of political socialisation in its visible and latent, individual and collective forms.

Other studies focus more specifically on digital literacy and internet uses. For example, Bakker and de Vreese (2012) found a positive correlation between a variety of Internet uses and different forms of political participation. The use of traditional media, instead, seems less influential, albeit still positive. Kahne, Lee and Feezell (2012) investigate the role of digital literacy education in promoting youth engagement in civic and political life, concluding that "digital media literacy activity is associated with gains in the quantity of politically driven online activities" (2012, 19).

Even so, most discussion remain at the level of recognizing a correlation between online participation and political engagement. Instead, Bennett, Wells and Freelon (2011) not only note a concurrence between "actualizing citizenship" practices and attitudes, on one side, and participatory uses of the internet on the other. More importantly, they recognise that the two alternative citizenship paradigms shape different civic styles that are grounded in different sets of civic competences as well as in diverse communicative practices and logics. The dutiful style understands information as part of being a good citizen, but as a one-way, top-down communication process from selected authoritative (media and political) institutional sources; citizens are positioned as recipients of news, whose interpretation is framed by collective identities and groups belonging, and when they are actively engaged they produce communication aimed at institutional targets (such as contacting a public official or writing to media). On the other side, actualizing citizens engage with information in a different way: rather than relying exclusively on authoritative sources, they tend to combine different media and personal sources of information based on trust and reliability, and they expect media platforms to allow participation and self-expression (Wells, forthcoming). Young people's disaffection with politics is thus reframed as a disconnection between democratic institutions, which favour dutiful citizen styles in their communication, and the actualizing citizenship practices preferred by younger generations.

From media literacy to digital citizenship

Variously labelled as digital literacy, internet literacy, information literacy or media literacy, the notion of literacy has long proved contested, involving some crucial debates at the theoretical, empirical and policy levels (Livingstone, 2009). Nonetheless, it has assumed a central role in the academic and policy agenda in recent years: recognized as a vital resource in contemporary societies and a pre-condition for citizenship, digital literacy has been the focus of the hopes that ICT can pro-

mote (young) citizens' empowerment by offering new opportunities in education, participation and creativity.

Despite the ongoing debate over its meaning and implications, in fact, a growing consensus has emerged with the definition of media literacy as the ability "to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms" (Aufderheide, 1993: xx). Thus defined, literacy encompasses a range of educational, cognitive and social skills, through which "literate" citizens are able to critically assess media content, and make effective use of media in their participation to the public sphere as competent and informed citizen. Beyond consisting of specific practical skills and expertise, its main outcome is, or should be, a "critical autonomy relationship" to media (Aufderheide, 1997). The emphasis on critical understanding and the ability to communicate "in a variety of contexts" (as added in the 2008 definition by Ofcom), marks the shift from protectionist approaches to media literacy - which conceive media education and media literacy as a defence against the harmful effects of media - to a substantial valorization of emancipatory uses of the media.

This latter perspective, which emphasises empowerment over protection, then advances "a view of the media as affording an expressive, cultural and participatory opportunity which brings significant benefits to those who are able to 'read' its codes and conventions and to use its tools and technologies." (Lunt & Livingstone, 2012: 119). Within these discourses, media literacy is rearticulated and linked to citizenship, thus being equated with civic literacy. This rhetoric twist is evident in recent pronouncements from the European Commission, which define media literacy as a "key pre-requisite for an active and full citizenship" and for citizens' inclusion in society (Europa 2009, quoted in Lunt & Livingstone, 2012: 126). These words by Paolo Celot, co-author of a study assessing digital literacy across Europe, are emblematic of the incorporation of the connection between digital and social inclusion in the discourses on media literacy at the policy level: "in the current environment and in view of future innovation, it is no longer an advantage to be media literate; rather it is a debilitating disadvantage not to be." (Celot, 2012: 77).

The relevance of media literacy and media education for the exercise of citizenship has long been recognised in the rich body of writing on media and democracy. Roger Silverstone argues that media literacy is "a pre-requisite for full participation in late modern society, involving as it does the critical skills of analysis and appreciation of the social dynamics and social centrality of media as framing the cultures of the everyday." (2004: 48). On the same grounds, Couldry, Livingstone and Markham (2007) underscore the role of mundane practices of media consumption in shaping a sense of public engagement in citizens: in contemporary societies,

they argue, "public connection", that is the orientation towards matters of public concern, is increasingly "mediated".

However, the equation between digital literacy and digital citizenship, operated at the policy level and now widely popular in social discourses, remains problematic and cannot be taken for granted. The first issue is that, notwithstanding the appreciation of the social and political relevance of media literacy, which is presupposed by the notion of digital citizenship, the majority of these discourses still rely on a skill-based notion of literacy, as a set of specific instrumental, cognitive and social competences that an individual should acquire. On the contrary both fields of media education and media studies have extended the notion of literacy beyond the skills-based approach, so as to encompass the cultural and communicative competencies associated with the consumption of media and avoid downplaying the influence of the socio-cultural and political context in which media use is contextualised (Buckingham, 2007; Livingstone, 2004, 2008).

This framing means that instead of researching media literacy as a set of skills aprioristically defined and grounded in the individual dimension of learning process, we orient the theoretical and empirical exploration towards a three-dimensional empirical field shaped by the interdependence between textuality, competencies and power (Livingstone, 2004). Media literacy thus emerges as the historically and culturally contingent relationship between three elements: 1) the way in which knowledge is codified and transmitted within and through frames that are both symbolic and material, and which involve both a technological platform and a textual representation; 2) the unequal distribution of interpretative abilities across population 3) the power relations connected to literacy, and more specifically the access to power that a competent management of knowledge guarantees to those who are literate.

Consequentially, research should pay attention not exclusively to citizens, and to the number and type of skills that they mobilise when accessing social media in order to gather political information, express opinions or sponsor a political cause. These competencies should not be taken for granted, but rather conceptualised and analysed as the dynamic product of the complex interdependence between on the one hand, the ideal user and the paradigm of citizenship that are inscribed in the textual and technological interfaces of digital media, and the concrete user on the other hand, which is- contextualised in a specific social and cultural environment providing him with a predetermined set of constraints and opportunities.

A second difficulty is the normative character of the concepts of both media literacy and participation: "good citizens" are expected to be media literate and participate

in civic and political life. However, as Banaji explains (2008), not all youth's "civic action" that takes place on and offline is, *per se*, positive nor beneficial for the well functioning of democracies.

Digital and civic literacies: a conceptual definition

A notion of civic literacy conceived as a system of social practices, rather than as a set of individual skills aprioristically identified, goes hand in hand with the reference to "cultural-oriented models of public sphere" (Hebert, 2005; Murru, 2013) which accept the plurality of discursive patterns - whether rhetoric, dialogic, narrative or ritual - as potentially conducive of democratic outcomes (Young, 1996). Normative conceptions of public sphere, namely those inspired by deliberative models (Habermas, 2006) establishes a link between the quality of democracy and the quality of communication, the latter being defined through a set of strict communicative standards. According to Habermas' (1995), these standards require rational argumentation, full transparency of intentions by participants and the ability to introduce new ideas that should be deeply grounded on information or logical assumption while also taking into account all points of views expressed in the discussion. This approach requires a skill-based definition of civic literacy that does not take into account the constitutive interdependence between discourse, language and power (Chouliaraki, 2008).

On the contrary, "cultural-oriented models" consider communication standards of public sphere as historically and contextually contingent; in this vein, deliberation is seen as being only one of possible paths through which intersubjectivity can be constructed in the public sphere and eventually lead to decision-making. This approach provides two main coordinates to the research on civic literacy. The first one allows to develop a critical stance in positing the quality of democracy as depending on giving value to discursive plurality and on multiplying expressive opportunities so that counter-publics or alternative spheres of discussion could always be visible and erode the tyranny of majority (Benhabib, 1992). In research on media literacy, this normative coordinate can be translated into paying attention on how the subject is able to deal with the discursive closures that could come from the kind of symbolic and material codifying implied by the interface through which knowledge and meanings are represented and transmitted; for instance, the language of self-disclosure which plays a central role in this specific conception of public sphere appears to be fundamentally shaped within social media by technological as well as social affordances of these platforms, within which specific patterns of usage are established as legitimised, acceptable or contested.

The second coordinate is mainly analytical: instead of limiting the analysis to the observation of absence/presence of certain features of the communicative exchange, the cultural-oriented model of the public sphere goes further in exploring the set of social and cultural preconditions that trigger the adoption of certain discursive styles, while inhibiting others. The cultural contextualisation of communicative practices taking place in the public sphere is provided by the concept of "civic cultures" recently developed by Peter Dahlgren (2009). Drawing on the "republicanism imaginary", Dahlgren (2009) understands citizenship as a mode of agency and an achievement that is promoted or inhibited by a set of socio-cultural conditions, among which identity has a prominent role. Doing citizenship (Dahlgren, 2006) is a social and cultural practice that originates when individuals recognise themselves as citizens, develop a sense of belonging in a collective "we-ness", share knowledge, norms and values, and engage in practices which are embedded in particular places. Civic cultures, then, can be defined as "cultural patterns in which identities of citizenship, and the foundations for civic agency, are embedded" (Dahlgren, 2009: 103). Moreover, they can be empirically analysed as being comprised of six dimensions: they constitute shared systems of (1) meanings and knowledge, (2) values, (3) trust, (4) spaces, and practices (5) through which citizens define (6) collective identities that support or hinder their political engagement.

Civic literacy, then, can be thought as necessarily embedded in civic culture, or better, in a network of stratified civic cultures within which different practices, values or knowledge systems are valued and actualised. Each civic culture provides civic literacy with a framework of values, motivations, system of trust, expectations in which specific civic competencies are rooted.

As far as civic cultures consist of taken-for-granted orientations (factual and normative frames guiding and informing action, speech and understanding) that are internalized intersubjectively but continuously transformed and re-negotiated in the moment of their actualisation, civic literacy can be conceived as the competence of entering in an active and autonomous relationship with the surrounding civic cultures, by being able to decode, assess, analyse and modify them. Being "civic" literate thus means being able to actively engage with the related civic cultures: carry out specific practices (as, for instance, public discussion, searching and listening to other viewpoints, connecting ideas and perspectives, expressing opinion and ideas in ways that are recognised by other members); be familiar with - and to be able to manipulate - social conventions that establish boundaries between different spaces; be able to give and withdraw trust according to specific criteria; know, acquire or refuse values, meanings and knowledge in which civic practices find their motiva-

tions and raison d'être; be able to develop a process of individual and collective identification.

Mediated civic literacy: towards an operational definition

Drawing upon the definition of media literacy as the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create the expressive forms (messages) in which knowledge is symbolically and materially codified, civic literacy can thus be reframed as the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create civic cultures in the cultural, symbolic and material forms in which they are currently organized. Before being a matter of individual skills, civic literacy has thus to do with the positioning of subjects within the cultural environment: competent enough to avoid social exclusion, autonomous enough to avoid being pre-determined by the environment itself, and critical enough to be able to creatively manipulate it.

Accordingly, the research path that we are going to undertake as part of a larger research project on social media and politics in comparative perspective starts with identifying the points of overlapping and reciprocal cross-fertilisation between the notion of civic cultures (Dahlgren, 2009), that of dutiful/actualizing civic style (Bennett, 2008; Bennett, Wells & Freelon, 2011) and media literacy as it has been defined in the media research field. The question then becomes how the current media environment is mediating the symbolic and material coding of civic cultures and consequently changing the condition of accessing, analysing, evaluating and creating them. Rather than studying "civic literacy" in general as the result of a process of political socialisation, we are indeed interested in focusing on those aspects of civic competencies that are primarily shaped by the current digital media ecology. We are thus proposing an analytical toolkit, which helps understand how the process of mediation is changing conditions of media literacy and shaping the ways in which civic cultures can be accessed, evaluated and created.

Access

In relation to access, and in line with the consistent body of writing on the internet and democracy (see among others Coleman & Blumler, 2009), we can assume that digital media have broadened the chances to access civic cultures beyond the structures of opportunities and constraints within which the subject has grown up. Digital media multiply the sources of information, offer tools and spaces for the embedding of collective identities, and making civic cultures more visible, providing resources for self-presentation beyond the bottlenecks of traditional media.

However, this apparently full visibility is counterbalanced by evidences showing that there are relevant not always negotiable mechanisms operating at the three levels of devices, practices and organization (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006), which shape the conditions of visibility.

At the level of devices, the analysis by Bucher (2012) on EdgeRank - the algorithm structuring the flow of information and communication on Facebook's 'News Feed' - shows how the infrastructural regime of visibility constructed by social networking platforms, imposes a perceived 'threat of invisibility' on the part of the participatory subject. Even in a state of pervasive visuality, the visual manifestations and representations of bodies are thus built through and shaped by specific politics of arrangement, architecture and design.

Visibility of other civic cultures could be also mediated by social practices. For instance, the news flux is mediated by individual's social networks; this inevitably conditions the types of news to which we are exposed and the perception of their representativeness (Mascheroni, 2013). Exploring civic literacy at this stage implies analysing how people deal with the dynamics of visibility that condition access to civic cultures. How and to what extent are people aware of the multiple ways in which visibility is "coded" in the contemporary media environment? How and to what extent do they take advantage of these unprecedented opportunities for visibility, and circumvent constraints that are materialised in platforms as well as reproduced by social conventions and organizational systems? The aim should be that of exploring the social/cultural/civic variables across which these competencies are stratified.

Evaluation

Evaluation in media literacy points at the ability of critically assessing media content referring to criteria of authority, quality and objectivity: «it is no simple skill, rather critical evaluation rests on a substantial body of knowledge, regarding the broader social, cultural, economic, political and historical contexts in which media content is produced» (Livingstone, 2004). Knowledge is a crucial asset in civic cultures and civic competencies. As Dahlgren puts it (2009: 108) «a crucial aspect of this dimension is not just the question if citizens already have the knowledge they need, but, more important, if they are able to acquire relevant knowledge, that is, if they have viable strategies for obtaining knowledge».

The shift from the dutiful citizen to the actualizing citizen style makes access and evaluation of information sources even more critical: the overabundance of information fostered by digital media and the loss of authority of traditional media

combines with a decline in membership-based identification that helped frame and understand news (Wells, forthcoming). As a result, a variety of actors are competing as legitimate and reliable information sources and criteria of quality, authority, authorship and objectivity are continuously negotiated and questioned. The weakening of traditional mechanisms aimed at consolidating trust expectations, together with the rise of new intermediaries claiming for different types of credibility - such as networks of trusted online social contacts - are transforming the assessment of quality information into a difficult and unpredictable task, and the corresponding competences into a moving target demanding a continuous cognitive effort. In other words, evaluation involves more than being able to combine, and assemble diverse contents and sources in an activity of *bricolage*.

Researchers of the Berkman Center (2012) suggest to expand the current focus on credibility towards a more holistic and process-oriented notion of information quality. Instead of using credibility as a set of aprioristically defined criteria of assessment, the analytical focus is moved towards the grassroots emergence of information quality values throughout the entire process of process of determining information needs, finding information, evaluating information, and adapting or applying information.

The quality of information is also assessed drawing on new coordinates of trustworthiness that citizens are developing. The topic of trust marks one of the most relevant area of intersection between reflections on media and civic literacy. In fact, trust has long been considered as a fundamental component of democracy and civicness. Putnam (2000) distinguishes between thick trust - based on established personal relationships - and "thin" trust - generalised expectations of honesty and reciprocity that we acknowledge to people that we don't know personally. However, as contested by Dahlgren (2009), democracy always involves conflicting interests and identities; trust, thence, should always be counterbalanced by a clear-headed monitoring of informative transparency of the system. According to Silverstone, this mechanism of reciprocal recognition on which democracies are grounded is partially filtered by the media, which exert a gate-keeping role especially in the development and establishment of "thin" trust: «media are abstract systems in which we trust, which reinforce our willingness to trust other abstract systems, and which provide a structure for us to trust each other» (1999: 120). The same trust on which civic cultures are grounded is thus conditioned and shaped by the kind of trust linkages that we establish with the media as texts and as institutions.

However, digital media, and social media in particular, mobilise alternative coordinates of trust. Pavlìčová (2013) has explored the strategies through which readers

interpret online user-generated contents and assess trustworthiness of a source. Findings show that media users trust the author and the text relying on three qualities of the imagined author: identity, expertise and reputation. However, these qualities are subjective rather than being objectively established. While trust in the author cannot be discussed without discussing his paratextual presence, perception of trust builds on users' previous experiences, pre-existing knowledge and value systems that contextualise these qualities. The main point is, thus, that trust is not a universal relationship, but a «socially differentiated, experientially variable response» (Coleman, 2012: 38, quoted in Pavlìčová, 2013). This opens the way to an empirical exploration of the relationship between different attributions of trust in the field of online news and specific civic cultures of readers. Placing trust could be also an interesting test bed of the much spread assumption that the skills acquired through daily and "politically disengaged" practices of media consumption could have direct consequences on civic and political competences. Is there any exchange, overlapping or cross-fertilization between systems of trustworthiness in the area of civic participation - defined in the broadest meaning of *public orientation towards topics of common interest* (Couldry, Livingstone, Markham, 2007) - and those acquired in consuming/producing popular culture? Van Zoonen (2012) argued that contemporary paradigms of knowledge and trustworthiness are deeply influenced by what she calls "I-pistemology", a cultural attitude that replaced expert knowledge with the truth coming from personal experience and lay discourse. Institutions, including media institutions, are observed with increasing suspect, while subjective experience becomes the only parameter on which sources, quality and knowledge are assessed. This extreme form of cognitive individualism mirrors the preference for communicative autonomy within an actualizing information style (Wells, forthcoming), and finds its most emblematic embodiment in the practice of mass-self communication, which is "self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception" (Castells, 2007: 248).

These variations in trust expectations and knowledge paradigms should be taken into account by empirical research on mediated civic literacy. Again the aim is not only to map new conceptions of authorship or credibility gaining ground on contemporary media environment, but to contextualize them in pre-existent civic cultures and subsequent outcomes in civic and political participation.

Creation

The dimension of creation calls into question crucial dynamics of democracy: the possibility of a creative and personal contribution to the political environment by

citizens. In the media literacy debate, arguments usually raised up in favour of creation are: the pedagogic argument, that people learn best through making media; the employment argument, according to which the current labour market requires media skills; finally, the cultural argument, according to which media skills are essential to guarantee the rights to self-expression and cultural participation (Livingstone, 2004).

The last argument is in fact that of "cultural citizenship" (Stevenson, 2001), according to which in contemporary society we cannot speak about citizen's rights without taking into account that one of the central divisions today deals with the power to construct meaning and exert control over the flow of information. To talk of cultural citizenship does mean that issues of rights and responsibilities should be extended so as to include the capacity to question established codes and to rework frameworks of common understanding. There are no doubts that with digital media, content creation is easier than ever. Moreover, it is widely recognised that engagement with new media allows young people to develop skills and knowledge that are essential preconditions for a full participation in collective action (Ito et al. 2009). Skills that are indicated as essential for literacy in contemporary media culture (Jenkins 2006) substantially overlap with the competencies required to every citizen: performance (defined as the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery); appropriation (the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content); judgement (the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources); and networking (the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information). Papachirissi and Easton (2013) add that the discursive habitus of social media positions users as authors: different social media platforms involve different authorship narratives and regimes of self-disclosure. Thus disclosure and redaction are crucial abilities that provide users an access to online spaces of self-expression.

However, the generalised rhetoric of participation that permeates the convergent media ecology is likely to weaken the interpretative potential of the very concept of participation. Carpentier (2011) proposes to conceive of participation in relation to power and its unequal distribution. Applying a negative-relationist strategy that opposes participation to access and interaction, Carpentier defines participation as the «political – in the broad meaning of the concept of the political – process where the actors involved in decision-making processes are positioned towards each other through power relationships that are (to an extent) egalitarian». Similarly, participatory skills cannot be analysed in isolation from the context of power relations in which they are put into play and actualized and the ease of manipulation offered by

digital media doesn't guarantee, *per se*, a fully egalitarian distribution of symbolic power.

Accordingly, the empirical exploration of participatory competences in the field of mediated civic literacy should take into account that the concept of participation is contingent, its specific articulation depending on the ideological framework and the citizenship paradigms adopted. As a consequence, the investigation of participatory practices should unveil which notions of participation are implied in citizens' daily practices, which expectations and knowledge are driving them: «We structure our practices at least partially on the basis of the idea of participation. [...] the definition of participation allows us to think, to name and to communicate the participatory process [...] this definition is simultaneously constituted by our specific practices» (Carpentier, 2007: 107). Competences of creative participation thus include both the user's competences in manipulating expressive codes and appropriating techno-logical platforms for civic purposes, and the citizenship vocabulary of participation (Thorson, 2012) which frame the taken-for-grantedness of practices and the poten-tialities for learning. The challenge we are facing is a re-framing of the research question: from asking whether media creation has positive consequences on civic participation, we are interested in exploring how different participatory uses of the web are associated with specific civic cultures and what models of citizenship are promoted.

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Digitalne pismenosti i građanske pismenosti: Teorijski pristupi, istraživačka pitanja i metodološki pristupi

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SAŽETAK

Bez obzira na to je li sagledan kroz "minimalistički" ili "maksimalistički" model demokraktske participacije, pitanje uloge interneta u olakšavanju građanske participacije u javnoj sferi poprimilo je stalno mjesto u akademskoj i javnoj raspravi. Osobita se pozornost posvetila mladim ljudima i njihovom angažmanu putem interneta i digitalnih medija. Dok se dosljedni pismeni korpus usredotočavao na procjenu učinkovitosti online participacije u mobilizaciji mladih ljudi i u promociji novih građanskih modela, drugačiji se pristup usmjerio na to pitanje iz perspektive medijske pismenosti, istražujući poveznice između digitalne i građanske pismenosti. Ta druga istraživačka linija ukorijenjena je u prijelazu s medijske pismenosti na digitalno građanstvo rukovođeno na političkoj i javnoj razini, a istovremeno uvjetuje taj prijelaz. Unatoč tome, sam je koncept medijske pismenosti osporavan, baš kao što je i rastezanje tog koncepta kako bi uključivao građanske kompetencije. Na tim premisama, ovaj rad želi dati kritički uvid u trenutačnu raspravu o medijima i meidijskim pismenostima kao određenim društvenim praksama, i istražiti vezu između digitalne i građanske pismenosti na teorijskoj i empirijski vođenoj razini, kako bi se definiralo koje dimenzije, kako digitalne tako i građanske pismenosti, treba učiti i zašto.

Ključne riječi: medijska pismenost, građanska pismenost, javna sfera, građanstvo