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ST44

Internet and Political Participation : Traditional Questions, New Research Devices and New Data

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Description:

Studies on offline political participation have for a long time demonstrated a deep participatory divide between those participating a lot – a minority – and a vast majority of citizens taking part to very few political activities (Gaxie, 1978 and 1993).

However, according to proponents of the "(new) mobilization" paradigm ("(new) mobilization") (Hirzalla, van Zoonen and Ridder, 2011), the internet would have lowered the threshold of participation and allowed new citizens to participate in political life. Empirical work in the US but also in Europe have highlight the real effects - although modest - that Internet has on the mobilization of new participants (Boulianne, 2009; Christensen, 2011; Nam, 2012). According to them, not only social media - such as YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, Facebook, Tumblr etc. - might be used for political purposes but also internet use would be an incentive to vote or to participate politically, so that even the time spent in "surfing" might increase political activity (Margetts, 2015).

Yet such findings remain unchallenged. Cyberenthusiast are criticized either by the proponents of the theory of the "normalization" (Margolis and Resnick, 2000; Schlozman et al, 2010), according to whom on-line participation would mostly be done by individuals already involved off-line (Bimber, 2001; Norris, 2003; Nielsen, 2006; Carlisle and Patton, 2013), and by the proponents of the thesis of the "substitution" who argue that new technologies could feed "clicktivism" (or "slacktivism": "soft" or "lazy" activism) (Shulman, 2009; Morozov, 2009) of individuals the political activism of whom would be only on line (via e-petitions, facebook groups, etc.). For them, the digital divide would even add to the "social fracture", not only for technical reasons, but mainly for cognitive reasons (Cardon, 2010).

The difficulty to conclude seems partly linked to the fact that methods used to study online participation are the same as methods already used to analyze offline participation. Conversely, one might assume that the emergence, multiplication and diversification of new modes of online political participation (Facebook, twitter, instagram, youtube, forums, site

reviews, online petition sites, more institutional platforms, ...) as the provision of new large big data for research could help to deal with those traditional issues in new ways. Using new types of data or innovative methodological devices.

This thematic section will precisely deal with this perspective. It aims to gather empirically grounded studies which use new data and/or new methodological devices in order to address this now traditional issue of the relationship between "participatory divide" and "digital divide". Interdisciplinary work will be particularly welcome. Studies about varied national or international grounds also. The ethical and legal dimension of such studies, which may involve working on personal data sometimes partly without the knowledge of those who produce them, will also be one of the issues of the thematic section.

This thematic section responds also to counterparts sections organized at IPSA Congress in Poznan and at ECPR General Conference in Prague, with a view to establish a research community around these issues and to enhance those works in a book or a journal issue (rather in English).

Any proposal with empirical dimension corresponding to these prospects will be examined with interest.