

The civic value of being an audience: The intersection between media and citizenship in audience research

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Abstract:

Drawing upon the review of collected literature on publics and participation, this article aims at identifying and analytically mapping those dimensions of being an audience that have been considered as having a civic and political value. On the basis of a deep examination of the vast array of similarities and differences between all the collected contributions, the paper describes a basic morphology of the field identifying three main areas of research: the area of *practice*, grouping together those contributions that have looked for civic/political value in what people do with media; the area of *interpretation*, where the emphasis has been put on the symbolic meanings that are produced by people with and through media; the area of *space and culture* where the political relevance has been found in the mutual interdependence between media practices and meaning making processes. The discussion will show how the three different approaches not only bring different issues into the foreground but also envisage different figures of implied citizens.

Keywords: literature review - audience - publics - civic engagement - practices – interpretation - civic culture - publicness

1. Introduction

The ways in which media affect the liveliness and the quality of civic engagement have always catalyzed a relevant portion of media research. Since the very beginning, the issue has taken the form of a concern about the risk that media consumption could undermine the interpretative autonomy and the responsible awareness of citizens in society. This peculiar framing emerged within an intellectual milieu that was deeply influenced by theories of mass society and was reasonably impressed by the way in which broadcasting had been strategically used by the various forms of European fascism (Scannell, 2007). The issue has repeatedly emerged for each succeeding new communication media, every time showing an undiminished capability of setting the agenda of research priorities and of absorbing instances, fears and hopes of each historical period. In the last decade, the framing has been colonized by the debate on the participatory potentialities and the new structural constraints of online civic engagement. After an initial phase of great expectations and oppositions between cyber-enthusiasts and cyber-skeptics, scholars have started to read the present through the lens of a 'normalized revolution' (Wright, 2012) where the unprecedented opportunities of mobilization and participation are seen as dialectically shaped by existing institutions and practices.

Analyzing the literature published in the decade comprised between 2005 and 2015, the study we present in this article has delved into the several drifts and readjustments of approaches and analytical toolboxes that have followed the digital revolution. The aim has been to understand how the study of media and citizenship has evolved within a media environment where audiences have stepped out of their homes and their engagement with media has diversified in a long and continuously evolving list of activities (networking, sharing, publishing, blogging, gaming, chatting, commenting, ...). We have identified and analytically mapped those various dimensions of being audiences where an intersection between media and citizenship has been looked for and detected by recent literature. In simple terms, we expect that a possible meeting point between media and citizenship is recognizable whenever people intertwine the use of media with the values, practices, attitudes and conditions of their public engagement. In more analytical terms, we know that this potential intersection is grounded on a double interdependence. The first interdependence has to do with the systemic balance of representative democracies that strictly depends on the kind of communication process that mutually links citizens and institutions. The quantity and quality of circulating information, the realized right of expression and the cultures of dialogue that allow the formation of public opinion, are not ancillary complements of democracy, they rather constitute the essential premise of popular sovereignty. It is in this vein that McNair (2003, p. 21-22) has provided a list of five functions that communication media should accomplish in 'ideal-type' democratic societies: a surveillance function, by informing citizens reliably about what is happening in the political sphere; an educational function, by illustrating the meaning and the significance of facts; a discursive function, by providing a platform where synergies between dissent and consensus can make their ways; a publicity function at the service of governmental and political

institutions; finally, an advocacy function, by providing parties and movements with an outlet for the articulation of their public instances.

Beyond this systemic interdependence, media and citizenship tend to intersect because they share some basic cultural dynamics. Dayan (2005) has pointed at a common denominator that encompasses the processes implied in both media and civic engagement. In both cases, what occurs is the focusing of collective attention, which in turn generates 'personae fictae', a variety of attentive, reactive and responsive bodies, collective or not, that emerge in the role of enacting attention and that we are used to identify as publics, meaning-making audiences or consumer audiences. Therefore, the potential synergies or mutual obstacles between media and citizenship descend from the fact that they both produce and lean on some kinds of social entities in their basic processes. Of course, these social entities deeply differ in terms of style of behaviors, of reflexivity and of the experiential fabric that hold them together, but are nevertheless united in that they both rely on processes of imagination for their very existence and embody that fundamental dimension of social experience that is the collective attention generated through the 'watching with' (Dayan, 1998).

One of the historical aims of media research on citizenship has been that of understanding whether this interdependence makes way for coincidence and overlapping. Therefore, the leading research question has asked if audience and publics converge and with what consequences for democracy. In a research field deeply sensitive to normative arguments, the answers have mainly inclined to pessimistic judgments, subsuming a polarization between an ideal public of educated, well-informed and dutiful citizens and a suggestible, emotional and pleasure-seeking audience (Butsch, 2013, p. 153). This opposition has historically drawn on the dualism between the public and the private sphere: audiences have been usually ascribed to the private domain and media consumption has been supposed to engender a deceitful publicity that repositions what was or might be a public as a mere crowd or a mass of consumers (Livingstone, 2005, p. 18). Beyond this Manichean polarization, more balanced positions have acknowledged as a matter of fact the irreversible and mutual hybridization between media and the political field. From a cultural citizenship perspective, it is not possible to understand exhaustively any issues about citizenship without an appreciation of the ways in which 'ordinary' understandings become constructed (Stevenson, 2001, p. 2). In the same vein, Jones (2006) invites to look beyond information acquisition as the primary reason for how and why citizens employ political media, and instead see how media are deeply involved in the forces and factors that precede political action. While acknowledging the empirical overlap between publics and audience, Sonia Livingstone (2005) argues in favor of maintaining their analytic separation, interposing a mediating domain - that of civic culture or civil society - between the sphere of experience and the identity and the sphere of collective, politically efficacious action.

Nowadays, the convergence between audiences and publics is often framed by the paradigm of 'ubiquitous citizenship'. The term has been coined by Schrøder (2013, p. 189) in order to describe a new strand of thinking about media and citizenship which maps and

assesses mediated citizenship in practices that are firmly lodged in the realm of everyday life and are often not perceived by individuals as properly political. After having identified five historical stages of reception research on citizenship, Schrøder tentatively concludes that, in the current era of mediatization of the entire society, 'in virtue of being a member of the media audience, the individual *is* a politically inscribed citizen everywhere' (Schrøder, 2013, p. 190). This new paradigm is grounded on the recent retheorization of the Habermasian theory of public sphere and the related valorization of both informal conversations in daily life and emotional, narrative and subjective engagement. The 'ubiquitous citizenship' paradigm brings new challenges for reception research. The most relevant is the challenge of understanding how 'mediated dormant citizenship may transform into mediated, engaged, or even interventionist, citizenship: in short, how latency becomes agency' (Schrøder, 2013, p. 190). For the literature review presented here, this challenge has acted as a starting point that has been translated into a compass to be used in interrogating and categorizing the collected contributions. Each of the collected essays has been examined according to the following analytical question: *what dimensions of being an audience are considered as having a civic and political value, as producing civic and political consequences?* Instead of aiming at an exhaustive description of the state of the art, this specific kind of literature analysis has thus been guided by the purpose of interrogating existent research in quest of those theoretical and empirical resources that can help in taking on the challenge indicated by Schrøder. It is our belief that in a context where the general paradigm assumes that citizenship is potentially nested in every mediated sphere of social life, it could be useful to map and differentiate between the diverse political consequences that are supposed to be engendered by the diverse kind of relationships that people have with media.

2. Methodological approach: a conceptual review

The research question that has guided our exploration – what dimensions of being an audience are considered as having a civic and political value? – has been left deliberately generic in its definitional extension. We have considered the civic/political value in the widest meaning, as entailing the multiplicity of processes within which the relationship with media shapes and is shaped by various forms of belonging to collective identities and orientation towards matters of public concern. The same has been done with the notion of dimensions, whose semantic openness has been kept programmatically wide with the aim of leaving the field open enough in order to include attitudes, practices, interpretative stances and any other processes that is part of audiencing (Fiske, 1992) and may come out unexpected from the literature overview. However wide in its analytical extent, this research question still brings some selective effects into the collection of pertinent literature mainly because of its audience-centric perspective. Privileging those contributions that have looked for civic relevance and political consequences within the vast array of attitudes and activities that people act out towards media, this perspective has excluded that portion of literature where the issue of media and democracy has been explored exclusively at the

level of media system, of cultures of production or political economy of media institutions. The review has been organized in three phases: collection, analysis, clustering. The annex contains all the details concerning the strategies applied for the collection. With regards to the analysis, each article has been examined in light of the following four questions: 1) which conception of media is applied (as a mere symbolic content, as a platform, as a tool, as an environment/a context/a space, ...); 2) which conception of the political it refers to (formal/institutionalized democracy, political as ontological dimension, cultural citizenship, civil society ...); 3) which traditions/strands of audience research are mobilized 4) finally, the pillar of our analysis, what dimensions of being audience are considered as having a civic-political value/a civic-political resonance/as producing civic-political consequences.

The method for the clustering phase has been inspired by Wolfswinkel, Furtmueller & Wilderom (2013), who have applied Grounded Theory as a method for rigorously reviewing literature. According to the three scholars, this kind of literature review is theory-based and concept-centric and has the purpose of developing a grounded theoretical sensitivity that provides guidance and delineates new paths of future research. Considering that our purpose has been that of conducting a concept-centric review, the Grounded Theory approach has proved to be a particularly pertinent logical approach for the grouping and the categorization of key concepts. More specifically, we have taken from the review protocol proposed by Wolfswinkel, Furtmueller & Wilderom (2013) the two tasks of *open coding* - the analytical process of generating higher-abstraction level type categories from sets of concepts/variables - and *axial coding* - the further developing of categories and relating them to their possible sub-categories. In the *open coding* phase, the production of higher-abstraction level type categories has drawn on the differences that were detected in relation to the ways in which the analyzed contributions tackle what we considered as the main research question. The coding process has isolated three main categories of contributions:

- a) those that have looked for civic/political value in what people do with media – *the area of practice*
- b) those that have looked for civic/political value in the symbolic meanings that are produced by people with and through the media – *the area of meaning-making*
- c) those that have looked for political relevance in the mutual interdependence between media practices and meaning making processes – *the area of culture and space*

These three areas are not mutually exclusive; in many contributions an acknowledgement of the relevance of meaning making co-exists with an empirical research focused on practices. However, our classification has taken into account where the analytical emphasis is placed and the empirical efforts are oriented. The following paragraphs will enter into the details of

the three areas, identifying for each of them the sub-categories and the thematic articulations.

3. Practices between individualization and participation

The massive and capillary diffusion of digital media has brought to the foreground the material dimension of media. Now that media are embodied in multiplatform technologies that host a huge variety of content and that are ever less sequestered to discrete domains (domestic and public, work and leisure, individual and collective), it becomes increasingly relevant to construct a phenomenology of usages and media-related practices. In the strand of literature that is more focused on the wide range of activities that people carry out with and through the media, we can find a large portion of research that has examined and quantified the co-occurrence of media-related practices traditionally associated to citizenship - as reading news, debating, expressing opinions - and civic practices (as voting, participating in public demonstrations, party politics, and so on) (Boulianne, 2009; Ognyanova et al., 2013; Mihahilidis, 2014; Xenos et al. 2014). The major part of these studies are focused on digital media and converge in acknowledging a positive association between civic engagement and the informational and conversational use of online media, while excluding any causative relation between the two (Theocharis and Quintelier, 2014).

Other lines of research are less interested in effects and more inclined to identify and examine those new communicative practices that result from the massive diffusion of digital/online media and that open up new roads for civic participation. Interestingly, here the main element that is mostly considered as constructive for citizenship deals with the subjectivity that is supported by the practice. However, contributions differ in the kind of subjectivity that is emphasized. For some contributions, it's the individualized nature of the practice that triggers the act of responsibility-taking and consequently ensures its civic value. For others, only relational practices that rely on participatory construction of intersubjectivity are considered as having a democratic quality.

Relatively new practices as for instance the use of email by single citizens to communicate and interact with campaigners (Oostven, 2010) or the so-called 'individualized civic watch' - the use of information and communication technologies to monitor elites and organizations that has been studied by Haythio and Rinne (2009) - are valued as reflexive political actions that are grounded on the act of individualized responsibility-taking. The personal involvement of individuals allowed by individualized usage of the net is supposed to engender a self-made public sphere where individuals can express personal political judgments, activities and debates detaching themselves from the constraints of structural formal politics. These contributions identify a direct connection between internet communication and single-issue campaigns as a new style of civic engagement. The reasons that explain this synergy deal with some general features that are attributed to online communication: the direct style of communication, the possibility of individual engagement, the cheapness, the wide accessibility, the lack of any editorial control (Oostveen, 2010). Critically discussing the same argument applied to social media, Fenton and Barassi (2011)

posit that the ongoing process of individuation of political acts can be liberating for the user but not necessarily democratizing for society. Drawing on ethnographic research on alternative media within the Trade Union Movement in Britain, they argue that, far from being empowering, self-centered participation can represent a threat for collective endeavor of political change.

On the opposite side, it is argued that the democratic value of new communicative practices allowed by digital media reside in their participatory and relational potentialities. This is of course deeply linked to the wider reconfiguration of media research approach, specifically with what Livingstone (2013) has termed as the contemporary 'paradigm of participation' which describes the growing interest among audience researchers in how the changing media and communication environment enables or impedes participation in society. The emphasis is mainly placed on the participatory organization of those practices that are aimed at media production and which are seen as 'citizenship in action' (Rodriguez 2001). More than to the final outcome or to the qualities of the produced content, relevance is attributed to the production process that is supposed to be transformative in itself at least whenever it is informed by a participatory rationale that blurs the boundaries between producers and consumers. The expected transformation is that of 'audiences that coalesce into publics' (Dahlgren, 2006, p. 275) and that begin to enact their civic identities and to make use of their civic competencies by moving from the private realm of consumption to the public realm of production. The intrinsic value of a media production practice becomes particularly clear in research on alternative media where it expresses the challenge of actively intervening into and transforming circulating social discourses and cultural codes (Atkinson, 2008; Harcup, 2011). The production of alternative media is examined as a set of practices that provide people with the possibility of acting as citizens, having their say and engaging in satisfying dialogue with others. On the background of these arguments, it is generally found a radical conception of democracy within which citizenship, more than given and received, is constantly pursued, achieved and constructed. A clear focus on the political meaning of participatory media practice is developed by Carpentier (2011). In order to give a fixation to participation as a floating and saturated signifier, Carpentier proposes to differentiate it from access and interaction, attributing to participation a strong material substance. From his perspective, participation means to play an active role in decision-making processes. In this argument, he finds support in Dahlgren, according to whom 'participation has a clear material and actionist dimension, and cannot be reduced to how we think or feel about participation. To put it into simple grammatical terms, to participate is a verb' (Dahlgren, 2011, p. 8, quoted in Jenkins, Carpentier, 2013, p. 275).

4. Interpretations

The interpretative dimension of being an audience is the main focus of this category. At this level, media reception is considered to have political consequences because meaning making is understood as a site where identities and social realities are constructed. This can

be illustrated by the three subcategories: audiences as interpretative communities; audiences and listening; audiences and news.

In the first one, audiences are conceptualized as interpretative communities that engage discursively via media with each other and with society and/or politics. Communities are used to make sense of media and to discuss interpretations of reality television and popular culture formats, especially in regards to values, norms and identities (Klaus & O'Connor, 2012; Lunt & Lewis, 2008). The discursive engagement is enhanced by the use of online and mobile media through which audiences transform their individual acts of television consumption into a shared experience of collective meaning making (Punathambekar, 2005). The communitarian turn gives to participation in fan discussions a pre-political value insofar as it allows media users to approach alternative discourses and to familiarize with discourses of social change (Yang, 2015).

The focus of the second subcategory is the concept of listening. Crawford (2009) suggests considering the concept of listening as a 'metaphor for forms of receptivity online' (p. 1). This should help to understand and productively analyze forms of online engagement that are usually described more negatively, such as non-participatory or as 'lurking' (see Kaun et al. in this issue). While the concept of voice has been considered as prominent to address the democratic-participatory potential of online media, considerable little attention has been paid to the concept of listening (Macnamara 2013). In this sense, participation is seen as coinciding with writing and expressing, and reading is of only peripheral importance to an online community (Crawford, 2009). Macnamara (2013), for example, argues that much attention is paid by mass media to creating, maintaining and engaging audiences, but comparatively little attention is paid to how, if and what audiences listen to when they are connected to new media and social media. Quoting Couldry (2010), Macnamara underlines that the current possibilities of having voice are really valued only if they can count on listening audiences. In times of demassification and 'fragmentation' of audiences, the work of listening is seen as unprecedentedly problematic and important media literacies are considered as essential requisites to make voice matter. In the same vein, O'Donnell et al. (2009) address the neglected notion of listening within a path-building strategy that explores the akin theorizations of speaking and listening, voice and hearing, logos and interpretation/deconstructions. They show how listening as a meaning-making process innervates issues of conflict and inequality in diverse practices of citizenship (O'Donnell et al. 2009). The authors point out that listening has been a means of offering more insights into difference and variability in public discourse than is commonly found in political or media theory. As stated also by Couldry (2006), listening research is seen as relevant in providing a knowledge of the world that can enable scholars and audiences to recognize and respond to those issues and identities that they least understand, and to negotiate with those whom they habitually might not even hear (p. 431).

Audiences and news are the focus of the third subcategory. We use news as an umbrella term that includes different kind of news, both those produced by mainstream media such as newspapers, television or online media, and those created by users outside of

the mainstream circuits, as alternative journalism or citizens' media (e.g. Kaufhold et al. 2010).

The articles focus on how people read, interpret and make sense of news, and how they consider the reception of news media as a way to take part in the democratic system. This could happen starting from media as simple sources of information (Cushion 2009, Hao et al. 2014), or using interactive affordances of digital media to communicate with each other (e.g. Wells 2013). However, the interpretation process is seen as a unidirectional process that starts from the news and passes through to audiences. Only one article (Hao et al. 2014) problematizes this unidirectional process, taking into consideration that news production and consumption is a circular process and that news media are only one part of a multifaceted process of interpretation and meaning making. Additionally, we observed that user-generated news, citizenship journalism or alternative journalism are often oversimplified in the articles in a way that research mainly focuses on the interpretative dimension of consuming the news and not on the process of producing this kind of news. Although we find that most articles (except for Ksiazek et al. 2010) consider digital media as a great possibility that can offer a polyphonic space for people that could be useful to find voices that diverge from what mainstream media spreads, we see that the reviewed literature neglects the dialectical process of the production and consumption of news that is enabled through digital and online media.

5. Culture and space

The third cluster groups together those contributions that have looked for political relevance in the mutual interdependence between media practices and meaning making processes. In some contributions this mutual interdependence deploys itself at the level of culture, especially but not uniquely within the so-called civic cultures. For others, it develops in the metaphoric space of publicness and differs in its implications depending on which specific conception of public space is applied.

5.1 *Cultural approaches to media and citizenship*

In the contributions that are included in this group, the assumption is that the intersection between media and citizenship can only be rightly understood in cultural terms. This is in line with a cultural turn in the understanding of civic agency, within which issues regarding meanings, identities, trust and values have been put in the foreground (Turner, 2001). From this point of view, popular media experiences become meaningful in terms of not just entertainment value but also for the opportunities they provide for their viewers to reflect on their life situations and enter public discourses about moral standards and political values (Hermes, 2005; Van Zoonen, 2005). Jones wrote that a cultural approach to the study of mediated citizenship starts from the 'intimate role that media play in the daily lives of citizens' (2006, p. 370). This implies the acknowledgement of the relevant role that rituals play in media consumption and of the ways in which 'acts of communication facilitate a

sense of identification, community/sociability, security/control, expression, pleasure/entertainment, distraction and even possession' (Ibid, p. 376). But this also means to recognize the affective component as one of the essential drivers of citizenship, which relies on rationality as much as on anger, hate, love, sense of injustice, consequently being strongly influenced by the opportunities of narration, representation or reflexivity that are offered by media.

Peter Dahlgren is one of the authors that most has contributed to bring the cultural perspective into the study of mediated citizenship. He writes that 'publics should be conceptualized as something more than mere media audiences and public spheres should be seen as larger communication and cultural chains that include how the media output is received, made sense of and utilized by citizens' (2006, p. 274). From this premise, it descends that the intertwinement between media and citizenship cannot be understood paying attention uniquely at how people use media as a source of political information, neither circumscribing the focus on how people interpret a specific online content or a specific TV program. What makes the difference is the way in which these practices of media consumption and the related meaning making processes are channeled into the building of individual and collective identity, into the connection to any of the available public spaces, into the shaping of trust linkages among people. In other words, Dahlgren reminds us that the decisive element does not reside in media per se, not in the practices neither in the interpretative endeavor; what rather matters is how the symbolic and material processes surrounding media become entrenched with civic cultures, considering the latter as the cultural patterns in which identities of citizenship and the foundations for civic action are embedded (Dahlgren, 2009). According to Kotilainen and Rantala (2009), what media gives to civic cultures is both an 'action space in which it is possible to develop new practices and civic identities' (p. 662) and 'a forum for not necessarily political, but civic expression in action' (p. 663). This forum is where civic identities develop, and evolve through the two key processes of identifying oneself as an agent (civic self-image) and of being connected to different communities. Because of this environmental quality of media, the two authors suggest to adopt the inclusive notion of 'media culture' in order to underline that civic agency is diffused even beyond those media domains that have an explicit political connotation. From this perspective, every media activity which brings people into a public space where the opportunity of having their say is accompanied by the chance of receiving a feedback from the audience, appears to be 'a significant enough civic action' (p. 674). In the same vein, the analysis by Wu (2012) focused on online discussions centered on *Super Girl*, a popular Chinese talent show, demonstrates how popular media play a special role in the ritual aspect of being a citizen. Interestingly, the fact that the social discussions on *Super Girl* drew more on the foundational value of the political process, rather than on the technical aspects, is interpreted by the author as both a consequence of strict state regulations on public expressions but also as a further confirmation of the central argument of cultural citizenship, that people 'do not just enter public discourses to solve immediate, grand social issues but to also search for the core values that define the

political system' (p. 15). Most recently, the research by Yang (2015) has shown how the reception of Japanese trendy drama by a Taiwanese community of fans played a crucial role in Taiwan's democratization and nationhood building in the 1990s. In this specific case, the pivotal element which gave political resonance to the acts of cultural consumption is the symbolic phenomenon of 'foreignness' which became evident in the so-called Japanomania, consisting of a 'wide range of cultural practices such as watching Japanese TV shows, listening to Japanese pop music, reading Japanese comic books, participating in cosplay, and following Japanese fashion' (p.97). The author demonstrates how the encounter with a foreign culture provided a background of subversive symbols that have been later applied for local resistance and political mobilization. Also, other authors show that there is a strong relationship between the political and the popular. Hartley's paper (2010) focuses on children as future citizens and active agents. The author introduces the term 'silly citizenship' which means that comedy such as satire TV is becoming a more trusted source of political information for the monitorial citizen than partisan commentators in mainstream news. He proposes to use the term of silly citizenship in order to put silliness – and children – on the agenda of media and social theory (p. 4). Couldry (2006) also addresses the link between culture and citizenship in one of his articles. He deals with the uncertainties about what constitutes the culture (or cultures) of citizenship and emphasizes the contribution of cultural studies to the problem of democratic engagement. He criticizes the concept of cultural citizenship insofar as it seems to downsize the urgency of questions like: 'what would a culture of citizenship look like? Is it perhaps the absence of such a culture that underlies the often-feared decline of politics? Or, more positively, what new cultures of citizenship might be emerging, and where or how can we best look for them empirically?' (p. 323).

Within cultural approaches to mediated citizenship, an emergent theme is that of literacy. If it is true that nowadays the tools, the spaces and all the preconditions for civic agency reside in media cultures, it is not anymore possible to ignore the career path that people should accomplish in order to master the ways in which civic cultures are now 'codified and transmitted within and through frames that are both symbolic and material, and which involve both a technological platform and a textual representation' (Livingstone, 2004). According to some scholars, digital media literacy can help youths to offset their low political engagement motivation (Borge and Cardenal, 2011; Kahne, Lee and Feezell, 2012). Differentiating between the operational competences of Internet skill literacy and the Internet information literacy as the ability to filter and assess information, Kim and Yang (2015) have demonstrated that, while the first one is negatively related to the respondents' political efficacy, the capacity of critically understanding and effectively evaluating online information is more likely to be found among those who are actively engaged in civic affairs. Many scholars have underlined that the current entrenchment between digital media culture and lifestyle politics (Giddens, 1991) have enhanced new styles of civic participation that are superseding the dutiful model of citizenship, based on traditional acts as voting, party and union membership. The new emerging self-actualised citizen privileges

personalised, expressive modes of engagement in life-style related issues, wide network of loose affiliations and repertoires of individualised action (Bennett, 2008). According to Bennett, Wells and Rank (2008), civic education should keep pace with the practices and identifications of this new generation of citizens, by favoring interactive, networked activities to be communicated with participatory media production.

5.2 In the space of publicness

In this sub-group, the materiality of practice and the symbolic products of meaning making are combined together in the construction or in the achievement of publicness. Publicness is studied as a peculiar communication environment that is gradually built by people involved in a common endeavor or as a scarce good for which it is necessary to fight. Practices and meaning making are thus measured and assessed in light of the peculiar relationship they establish with publicness. On the one hand, publicness is shaped by practices and symbols, while on the other hand it transcends them with its own dynamics and functioning. In comparison with the previous group focused on cultural approaches, here the issues of power and inequality are most often addressed.

In some cases, publicness is examined as the common symbolic ground that transforms a social group into a public. In the study of collective action that is undertaken by fully established publics, the research object deals with the gradual reinforcement of a group's publicness, through the strengthening of membership and the elaboration of a shared definition of common will. Consequently the research questions ask if the use of the internet allow individuals and organizations to develop a sense of belonging in relation to a political community, and in what ways digital media allow citizens to contribute to definition and the achievement of a shared purpose (Mahony, 2010). In other cases, publicness describes the step-by-step process through which independent individuals join the space of publicness, crossing the boundaries between the private and the public realms. A concept that repeatedly recurs in recent years' literature is that of 'subactivism' by Bakardjieva (2009) which explains the role played by media in affording and supporting new forms of making sense of public issues that evolve at the level of everyday life. Subactivism is described as 'categorically submerged and subjective. It can be described as small-scale, often individual decisions and actions that have either a political or ethical frame of reference and remain submerged in everyday life' (p. 96).

Publicness can be framed also as a difficult achievement, as a public recognition of credibility and relevance that is generated mainly through the media but resides within an agonistic arena that can be gained only with efforts and struggles. Studying CODEPINK, a web-based women's movement for peace, Simone (2006) identifies a set of online communication activities based in the movement's website through which the group has gained access to mainstream spaces in the broader public sphere: 'the website provides a controlled space for CODEPINK to (...) add its voice to the deliberations in a networked public sphere' (p. 360). This conception of publicness is particularly valid when the research

object is constituted by counter-publics (Fraser, 1992) which need to publicly articulate their alternative standing in contrast to dominant publics and mainstream media.

One of the most debated issues within this sub-group asks to what extent the power balances that shape the space of publicness are modified by digital media and the web. From the most optimistic perspectives, the web is seen as providing an outlet for developing and disseminating counter-discourses, making it easier for subaltern voices to find their way into popular consciousness with or without the support of mainstream press (Simone, 2006). In their analysis of online discussion forums in Kazakhstan, Shklovsk and Valtysson (2012) show how the availability of networked communication has allowed the development of 'secretly political' publics even within an authoritarian regime where speech online is actively controlled through censorship. Whether in the form of cooperation and knowledge sharing for home-made soap or in the very careful expressions of dissatisfaction with the state that proliferate among the volunteers of a charity, the two authors observe the gradual emergence of a web of networked publics, well-anchored in the lifeworld and occasionally inclined to blur the boundaries between their mundane origins and a proper political realm.

Another theme that has attracted a lot of attention deals with the global shift that new media technologies are often supposed to bring to social and political activities. Moving from an educational approach, Hull, Stornaiuolo and Sahni (2010) have examined the development of cosmopolitan dispositions within a group of teenage girls that were engaged in an online international social network during an extra-school class. The authors show how the ensemble of critical dialogues, creative digital arts production, and networked communication that were practiced at school, helped Indian youth to reimagine themselves in relation to their local communities and to develop an awareness of their positionality relative and in conjunction with the global community. From a more critical stance, Dencik (2009) underlines as the emphasis on cosmopolitanism as conducive of a new democracy from below and on a global scale, is based on a misleading representation of space, which privileges its abstracted meaning and removes any real sense of political community and collectivity. Using the failed attempt of OhmyNews International to move towards a global space of activity as a case in point, the author demonstrates that the cosmopolitanist narrative is contradicted in practice by the deeply unequal nature of any global constellation upon which new media technologies are contingent.

6. Conclusion

The goal of this article has been that of providing a concept-centric review of the literature produced from 2005 to 2015 on audiences and citizenship. On the basis of a deep examination of the vast array of similarities and differences between all the collected papers, we have described a sort of basic morphology of the field, identifying the main approaches that have recently been applied to study of the various intersections between people, media and their civic engagement. More than an exhaustive description of all the available knowledge, the findings we have presented here offer a map that can potentially

guide further and more circumscribed explorations of the state of the art. This study has been guided by the assumption that one of the benefits that could come from a literature review is that of highlighting analytical and conceptual differences within the common interpretative horizon that is shared by most scholars of the field. The starting point of our inquiry has been the assessment of the state of the art offered by Schrøder (2013), according to whom audience research on this topic is now dominated by the paradigm of 'ubiquitous citizenship'. Within an intellectual milieu where the constitutive interdependence between publics and audiences is often framed as a seamless coincidence, it could be then useful to point at how the various approaches available in the field diverge in placing their analytical emphasis at different levels of the intertwinement between media and civic engagement. We have thus explored the literature aiming at identifying which of the several dynamics that are activated in the relationship that people have with media, are supposed to hinder, support or even substantiate their civic engagement. The open coding has given us three main coordinates of the field, allowing to distinguish between the *area of practices*, the *area of meaning-making* and the *area of culture and space* where political relevance is understood as residing in the mutual interdependence between media practices and meaning-making processes. Within this classification, the thematic trends, the empirical urgencies, the big and most debated issues, have not been marginalized; they have been instead brought back and associated to the one of the three areas where they have been explicitly thematised.

In the first area, political implications are found in the activities that people carry out with media. In some cases, they are practices that are explicitly aimed at political participation and that are eventually supported by media. In other cases, the civic value of these practices is considered to reside more on their constitutive features than on their explicit purposes, more specifically on the relational spectrum they are able to activate in their practical deployment. Media are seen as able to directly affect the relational features of the practices, making them more individualized or, on the contrary, more participatory. Depending on the different conceptions of the political, this process is seen as detrimental or beneficial for democracy. The controversial issues that are most debated in this area deal with the emergence of new styles of civic engagement that are centered around single-issue campaigns and personal responsibility-taking, the persistence of collective endeavors in a context of ego-centered network and the transformative potential of process of media production informed by participatory logics.

In the second area, the interpretation and making sense of media are considered as having civic consequences insofar as they allow audience to build or reinforce pre-existent communities, to develop the awareness of others inhabiting the same civic space and to take part in the democratic system. Discursive engagement within fan communities, the revival of listening aiming at offset the diffused emphasis on having a voice and the interpretation of user-generated news, constitute the most definite themes that have emerged in this area.

At last, in the third area we find all the contributions that place the synergies and the intersections between audience and publics at a more complex level that encompasses the materiality of practices and the symbolic essence of meaning making. This level is constituted by both the culture that surrounds and shapes the relationship that people have with the media, and the spatial echo that media engender in their social diffusion. From this perspective, media matter for civic engagement firstly because their reception activates some of the cultural processes on which citizenship is grounded, as identity, self-positioning, public expression, commitment to values. Secondly, because they constitute a space of recognition where the boundary between the private and the public is gradually bridged and public visibility must be achieved with agonistic efforts. The most debated issues here draw upon the rich strand of reflections around the changing forms of cultural citizenship but also deal with how the space of political action has been transformed by the diffusion of digital media. The new forms of literacy that are required by increasingly mediated civic culture, the dynamics of subactivism and of counter-publics, the challenges of cosmopolitanism, are the main themes that have been detected by our literature review.

Analysing in details the three areas, we have thus shown that a great variety of concepts and research priorities exists in the field, even beyond the overarching paradigms that guide the current understanding of how media intertwine with citizenship. The discussion of the different approaches has demonstrated how the orientation of the focus towards the practices, the meaning-making or towards the interdependence between them, not only brings different issues into the foregrounds but also envisages different figures of presumed citizens, depicted in their individuality or in their collective membership, as engaged in purposeful civic acts or in subjective and submerged dynamics of self-positioning.

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Annex:

Collection of literature

Literature collection has been organized in two rounds.

In the first one, we looked for those articles and books that contain the following keywords:

KEYWORDS	SUB-KEYWORDS AND COMPLEMENTARY KEYWORDS
alternative media	
Citizenship	
civic agency	
civic culture/s /mediated civic cultures	truth claims, trust, knowledge; identity; multiculturalism; diaspora; diversity
civic empowerment	
civic engagement	
Communities	
cosmopolitanism	
cultural citizenship	playful citizenship; political consumerism; ordinary citizenship
Democracy	
digital democracy	
Globalization	
intimate citizenship	
literacies (civic/social literacies/civic learning)	
media ethics	
mediated public sphere	
mediated publicness	self-mediation; (public) visibility; performance; recognition
networked publics	
news media/journalism and participation	
online public sphere	
participatory culture /participation	
political communication	personalization; political legitimacy
social movements/ contentious politics	media strategies of protest; mobilisation in protests and activism; collective action
Voice	
young people and participation/civic engagement	

Those keywords that are non-specific to audience research were combined with terms that are more related to the field: 'audiences', 'media' and 'communication'. The list of sub-keywords and

complementary keywords contains both complementary keywords and thematic sub-articulation of main keywords that were used as complementary but not as substitute of the main keywords.

As sources, we used the following: journals databases (Sage, Taylor and Francis, Routledge), search indices (Google Scholar, Ebsco, Social Science Citation Index), key-journals of the field.

Besides search through keywords, we carried out a critical and conceptual search, using the literature review offered by bird-view articles to identify other research strands and related references, and going manually through tables of content of key-journals, selecting relevant articles and identifying Special Issues dealing with assigned themes.

We thus collected 240 articles (see Zotero list).

In second round, we further selected the sample of the studies to be reviewed, keeping only those references with the keywords 'cizenship' or 'civic' in the full text. This further selection was done using the Zotero service of 'search for', both in 'abstract' and 'content'. The final analysis was conducted on a sample of 131 articles.

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