Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change
Volume 33

Media, Movements, and Political Change

Jennifer Earl
Deana A. Rohlinger

Editors

Ⓔ

Emerald

MEDIA, MOVEMENTS, AND POLITICAL CHANGE

EDITED BY

JENNIFER EARL
University of Arizona, AZ, USA

DEANA A. ROHLINGER
Florida State University, FL, USA

Emerald

MEDIA, MOVEMENTS, AND POLITICAL CHANGE

RESEARCH IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, CONFLICTS AND CHANGE

Series Editor: Patrick G. Coy

Recent Volumes:

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Edwin Amenta   Department of Sociology, University of California-Irvine, Irvine, CA, USA

Neal Caren   Department of Sociology, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA

Sarrah Conn   Department of Sociology, Hillsborough Community College, Tampa, FL, USA

Jason Lee Crockett   Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, Kutztown, PA, USA

Brittany J. Duncan   Department of Sociology, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

Jennifer Earl   Department of Sociology, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA

Thomas Alan Elliott   Department of Sociology, University of California-Irvine, Irvine, CA, USA

Sarah Gaby   Department of Sociology, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA

Beth Gharrity Gardner Department of Sociology, University of California-Irvine, Irvine, CA, USA

Larry W. Isaac   Department of Sociology, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, USA

Kay Jowers   Department of Sociology, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA

Ben Kail   Department of Sociology, Duke University, Durham, NC, USA

Melinda D. Kane	Department of Sociology, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, USA
Katrina Kimport	ANSIRH, University of California-San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, USA
Daniel Kreiss	School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA
Rachel V. Kutz-Flamenbaum	Department of Sociology, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, USA
Deana A. Rohlinger	Department of Sociology, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, USA
Suzanne Staggenborg	Department of Sociology, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, USA
Miles Taylor	Department of Sociology, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, USA
Amber Celina Tierney	Department of Sociology, University of California-Irvine, Irvine, CA, USA
Anaid Yerena	Department of Sociology, University of California-Irvine, Irvine, CA, USA

FOREWORD

It has become somewhat of a tired truism to note that there has been a revolution in media formats and technologies and that it is changing much about our lives. Of course it is also altering how social movements organize, communicate, and build communities, and how individual activists become active, contribute to communities online and elsewhere, and communicate about their activism. The truism about media revolutions is tired because it goes back at least 30 years – reflecting an unbroken, tightly linked chain of democratization in media technologies.

The current revolution in social media platforms is only the latest in a long series of significant media changes that have left noteworthy marks on social movements, dating back to the early 1980s and the widespread adoption by social movement organizations of the fax machine to communicate widely and "instantly" with traditional media outlets, and with each other. This was followed by e-mail which was followed by the internet which was followed by Indymedia outlets which was followed by YouTube and various social media platforms and by Twitter. These latest developments will soon be followed by yet other new information technologies that will impact how social movements communicate, mobilize, and build and sustain cultural communities of resistance.

Despite this long legacy of startling and impactful revolutions in information communication technologies – or perhaps because of it – scholarship about the roles of media in social movements has simply not kept up. We have far fewer focused case studies and comparative studies than we should have about many aspects of each of these revolutions; consequently our theorizing about media and movements is not as robust as we need it to be. This volume of *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, conceived and so ably edited and introduced by Jennifer Earl and Deana A. Rohlinger, does much to move us forward in these important areas. In doing so, it also fulfills the long-standing tradition of the

RSMCC series to publish cutting-edge research that builds on existing theory even while forging new theory born of data-driven scholarship.

Patrick G. Coy
Series Editor, *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*
Professor and Director, *Center for Applied Conflict Management,*
Kent State University

CONTENTS

PART III: ONLINE MEDIA

PART IV: GENERAL DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

Jennifer Earl and Deana A. Rohlinger

This volume includes chapters from a special focus call on social movements and media as well as one chapter from an open call. The motivation for this special focus on media and social movements is not simply a function of our own research interests, but also a response to global upheaval and media's purported hand in its emergence. Information communication technologies (ICTs) have been credited for the spread of protest over austerity measures and education cuts in Europe as well as for the popular uprisings in Middle East. In the United States, ICTs were given a nod for helping citizens form Tea Party groups in their communities and, more recently, for playing a key role in ongoing mobilizations of the Occupy Wall Street movement.

While ICTs play an important role in contemporary collective challenges, traditional media outlets such as newspapers, magazines, and books remain a critical resource for social movements. For instance, authors like Ralph Nader, Jonathan Kozol, and Naomi Klein write books in order to expose social problems and move their readers from the armchair to the street. Books like *Animal Liberation* (Singer, 1975) and *The Silent Spring* (Carson, 1962) become touchstones for movement, providing a common narrative and identity for activists (Jasper, 1997; Meyer & Rohlinger, 2012). Likewise, mainstream newspapers and magazines amplify social ills and circulate narratives regarding the causes of and solutions to the problems of the day (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). These narratives can gain steam and move into virtual forums where they

are roundly celebrated or criticized via Twitter and Facebook and responded to on YouTube. Media – new and old – are important to social movements.

Social movement scholarship, however, is lagging behind in its understanding of movement–media dynamics. We hope that the chapters published in this volume will advance scholarly understanding of how activists and elites alike use a range of media to push forward their goals and, in turn, spur more research on this topic. We discuss chapters in each of the volume sections and then turn to a final discussion of overall volume themes.

But, before moving to the special issue chapters we want to highlight the sole piece being published from the open call for chapters. Crockett and Kane use event history analyses to examine the rise of the ex-gay movement in the United States. In a state-based analysis, they find that while threat is significantly related to the growth of the ex-gay movement, resources and political opportunities did not show significant relationships. They join a growing choir of scholars arguing that threat needs to be reconsidered as an important mobilizing factor (Almeida, 2003; Einwohner, 2001, 2003; Goldstone & Tilly, 2001; Johnson & Frickel, 2011; Maher, 2010).

NEWSPAPERS AND PRINT MEDIA

Much ink has been spilled about the selectivity and quality of newspaper data (Earl, Martin, McCarthy, & Soule, 2004; Oliver & Maney, 2000; Ortiz, Myers, Walls, & Diaz, 2005) and we do not intend to rehearse those arguments here. Instead, this volume focuses on pushing research forward by (1) expanding the domains considered in scholarly work and (2) providing a better understanding of the dynamics of social movement media coverage.

Scholars primarily examine mainstream media outlets when assessing a movement's influence on public and political debates (for exceptions, see Davenport, 2009; Mueller, 1997; Rohlinger, 2002). On one hand, this is a completely logical focus. Mainstream venues provide a "master forum" (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002) for political discourse and, therefore, it makes perfect sense to focus analytical attention on venues that reach broad swaths of the citizenry. On the other hand, scholars (particularly in Communication) increasingly point out that mainstream venues do not operate in isolation. While *The New York Times* plays an

important role in setting the agenda (Gamson, 1992; Gans, 2003), in doing so, they explicitly or implicitly respond to the ideas circulating in other news venues and cultural outposts (Atton, 2001; Bennett, 2003a; Meyer & Rohlinger, 2012). Social movement scholars generally ignore the relational dynamics that link mass media venues together and, as a result, fail to acknowledge (let alone understand) how ideas that are popular in ideological enclaves can crossover and gain traction with a broader public (Rohlinger, 2007). This scholarly oversight is particularly glaring in the contemporary age where the potential for crossover is high. Digital technologies quite literally put information at a citizen's fingertips in an instant; a development that has intensified competition among news outlets to report, "tweet," and post breaking news first.

Two chapters in this volume take a first step at addressing this gap in the literature. In the first chapter, Larry W. Isaac focuses on the importance of the novel in defining and articulating social movement claims. Through an analysis of labor novels published in the wake of mass strikes, riots, and rebellions in the United States, Isaac shows that by infusing social problems with names and history, activists can offer readers new social categories, collective identities, and motivations for collective action in an entertaining format. However, like other fields of action, the ideas put forth in novels are contested. Isaac finds that unrest and collective challenges can trigger a "narrative cascade" in which writers holding very different political positions compete with one another to define social problems and win the hearts and minds of the citizenry through fiction. Isaac's theoretical contribution is an important one. He illustrates the value of using field theory to understand how well-positioned actors leverage their reputations and influence in different arenas and diffuse (or dampen) the dissemination of movement causes, claims, and identities. Likewise, he reminds us that narratives have an enduring quality, which activists can draw on for generations to come.

Rohlinger, Kail, Taylor, and Conn also draw on field theory in their analysis of social movement media coverage in mainstream and partisan outlets. In this chapter, the authors argue that competition in the "journalistic field" causes news venues to differentiate themselves from one another in ways that affect occupational norms and practices as well as media coverage. As such, scholars should not assume that the factors that help social movement organizations (SMOs) get mainstream news coverage will attract the attention of partisan news outlets as well. Drawing on an analysis of twenty years of abortion coverage, the authors find that organizational characteristics, organizational frames, political

elites, and event type affect the rates of SMO media coverage in mainstream, conservative, and liberal/left venues in very different ways. The authors suggest that their findings serve as a cautionary tale for scholars studying social movements and mass media in the contemporary era. As the venues available to carry political messages continue to grow, scholars should not assume that other kinds of news outlets mirror the mainstream.

The chapters in this volume also provide a better understanding of the dynamics of mainstream media coverage. Research on the movement–media relationship typically focuses on the obstacles movements face in their efforts to get media attention (Amenta, Caren, Olasky, & Stobaugh, 2009; Andrews & Caren, 2010; Ferree et al., 2002; Gamson, 1990; Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993) and the tactics they can use to overcome these obstacles (Rohlinger, 2002; Ryan, 1991; Ryan, Anastario, & Jeffreys, 2005). Amenta, Gardner, Tierney, Yerena, and Elliott use a "story-centered" approach to take on central questions regarding when and how movements get covered in mainstream media. Drawing on coverage of the Townsend movement, the authors find that "assertive" action (e.g., litigation and legislative activity) earned movement groups better coverage than "disruptive" action. The most important contribution of the chapter is that it continues to push movement scholars to think about the quality of social movement media coverage in a more nuanced way, including considering how the political and newspaper context interact with movement action and affect the inclusion of the movement and its claims on the front page.

Increasingly, social movement scholars analyze how political opportunities and threats, critical events, and routine political moments (e.g., anniversaries and political conventions) shape the media strategies of SMOs (Rohlinger, 2002, 2006; Sobieraj, 2010, 2011). Kutz-Flamenbaum, Staggenborg, and Duncan add to this literature by documenting the strategies movements can use during those political moments when the movement–media relationship favors activists rather than journalists. Drawing on an analysis of media–movement interactions surrounding anarchist protests during the G-20 meetings in Pittsburgh, the authors show that activists can use tactics and frames to attract positive media coverage, particularly when activists employ strategies that do not exclusively focus on attracting the media spotlight. Like the Amenta et al. chapter described above, this chapter finds that the unruly do not always get the front page and context can profoundly shape what tactics get movements covered in mainstream outlets.

NEW MEDIA AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The last decade has seen an explosive level of growth in online protest. Although early examples of online protest seemed isolated and exotic (Gurak, 1997; Gurak & Logie, 2003), online protest has become a very common feature of social movements (Bennett, 2004; Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht, 2004; Earl, Kimport, Prieto, Rush, & Reynoso, 2010; Garrett, 2006; McCaughey & Ayers, 2003). Moreover, even when movement actors aren't using the web to mount actual campaigns, Internet activity may nonetheless play an important role in cultivating movements and diffusing their messages. In fact, while scholars not so long ago wondered whether the dynamics of online spaces would have any lasting impact on protest and social movements at all (e.g., Tarrow, 1998), it is now clear to most observers that the future of social movement studies must include serious and rigorous research on online protest and the online environment more broadly.

The chapters selected for this volume push forward research on the relationship between online media and movements in several ways. Kimport's chapter builds on work examining the role of SMOs in online protest, particularly examining how more professionalized SMOs may use the web. Caren, Jowers, and Gaby's chapter reexamines the extent to which the web may serve as a free space or cultural greenhouse for movement action. Kreiss's chapter forces scholars to seriously consider the blurriness of distinctions between movement actors and institution-alized political actors. We discuss each of these intellectual innovations in turn.

Social Movement Organizations and Online Protest

Since the introduction of resource mobilization (McCarthy & Zald, 1973, 1977), SMOs have been a preoccupation of social movement scholarship (Clemens & Minkoff, 2004). Whether tracing the trajectories of individual SMOs within larger movements (e.g., Staggenborg, 1988, 1991), or trying to map an overall field of SMOs (e.g., Minkoff, 1993, 1995), research on the actions of SMOs has been a bread and butter research enterprise (Clemens & Minkoff, 2004). It is not surprising, then, that early work on *online* social movement activity often began by identifying popular offline SMOs and tracing their adoption of Internet-based technologies (e.g., Ayers, 2003).

This research design, after all, just reapplied an existing concern for SMOs to Internet-related research. Certainly there was much to be gained from this work. For instance, early leaders in the field, such as Bennett, made important strides in understanding how the web could be used to alter relationships between SMOs (e.g., through effects on coalition formation, see Bennett, 2003a, 2003b). This focus on SMOs has continued to the present. Indeed, some of the most innovative contemporary work builds in a fundamental focus on SMOs' as Stein (2009) does in her examination of a random sample of SMOs' online presence.

However, across the same period, other researchers have begun to question whether the SMOs are likely to be as critical to protest in the online arena as they have been offline. For instance, Flanagin et al. (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2005; Flanagin, Stohl, & Bimber, 2006) argue that the free rider dilemma, which was at the theoretical wellspring of resource mobilization's concern for organizations, is actually a special case of a larger collective action problem. Further, because costs for many types of action have dropped so low online, Flanagin et al. argue that the free rider dilemma is no longer relevant to online protest. Other authors have empirically compared the behavior of websites that are organizationally affiliated with those that are not and found few differences in behavior (Earl & Kimport, 2011).

Kimport's chapter in this volume speaks directly to this brewing debate by examining new data on online activity from the pro-choice and pro-life movements. She finds that the relative share of online movement activity driven by organizations differs between pro-life and pro-choice activism online, with pro-choice action being much more organizationally driven. Despite that, and despite expectations that one might have about the volume of claims-making based on that finding, Kimport finds that there is overall a larger volume of pro-life claims-making online. This finding would seem to support work that suggests that there are fewer advantages to formal organizations online. However, Kimport also finds that pro-choice sites run by organizations were more likely to offer online protest opportunities. This is in contrast to findings reported on by Earl and Kimport (2010) from an earlier dataset. Taken together, Kimport's findings suggest a new puzzle for social movement scholars: do the advantages of organizing through formal organizations vary by the type of action, such that the advantages (or lack thereof, according to Kimport) in claims-making differ from the advantages to organizing action?