NETWORKING DEMOCRACY?

Brian D. Loader [a] & Dan Mercea [b]

[a] Department of Sociology, University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD, UK

[b] Department of Sociology, University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD, UK

Available online: 02 Aug 2011

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Brian D. Loader & Dan Mercea

INTRODUCTION
NETWORKING DEMOCRACY?
Social media innovations and
participatory politics

Early conceptions of digital democracy as a virtual public sphere or civic commons have been replaced by a new technological optimism for democratic renewal based upon the open and collaborative networking characteristics of social media. This article provides an introduction to a special issue of the international journal Information, Communication & Society, *which attempts to present a grounded analysis of these claims drawing upon evidence-based research and analysis. A more cautious approach is suggested for the potential of social media to facilitate more participative democracy while acknowledging its disruptive value for challenging traditional interests and modes of communicative power.*

Introduction

The first wave of enthusiasm for internet-based visions of digital democracy was largely predicated upon the desire to produce virtual public spheres (Loader 1997; Tsagarousianou *et al.* 1998; Blumler & Gurevitch 2001). It was contended that democratic governance could be significantly improved through the open and equal deliberation between citizens, representatives and policy-makers, afforded by the new information and communication technologies. For cyberlibertarians, this could even be achieved without the need for governments (Barlow 1996). For left of centre progressives, it could enable stronger participatory democracy through the emergence of online Agoras and Habermasian forums (Habermas 1962; Hague & Loader 1999). The history of science and technology provides many

instances of the fanfare of transformative rhetoric which accompanies the emergence of 'new' innovations and which is then often followed by disappointment and more measured appraisal (Bijker *et al.* 1987). So perhaps, it should have been of little surprise that the utopian perspectives of the first generation of digital democracy were quickly replaced by findings that documented the myopia of such visions (Hill & Hughes 1998; Wilhelm 2000). Instead of transforming representative democracy, the new media, as Hill and Hughes suggested, was more likely to be shaped by the existing entrenched social and economic interests of contemporary societies (1998, p. 182). By the turn of the millennium, a more accurate picture of the influence of the internet upon democratic governance was emerging as the technologies were understood as a part of the mundane activities of 'everyday life' (Wellman & Haythornthwaite 2002). Here the factionalism, prejudice and abuse, which have all too often mired the aspirations of deliberative decision-making, were to be found (Doctor & Dutton 1998). But perhaps more significantly the very idea of a virtual Habermasian public sphere was subjected to extensive critiques from cultural studies scholars (McKee 2005) and feminist theorists (Van Zoonen 2005). They have revealed how such models of deliberative democracy frequently privilege a particular style of 'rational' communication that largely favours white, wealthy males to the exclusion of other identities (Pateman 1989; Fraser 1990).

Despite these setbacks to digital democracy, a fresh wave of technological optimism has more recently accompanied the advent of social media platforms such as *Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Wikies* and the *blogosphere*. The distinctiveness of this second generation of internet democracy is the displacement of the public sphere model with that of a networked citizen-centred perspective providing opportunities to connect the private sphere of autonomous political identity to a multitude of chosen political spaces (Papacharissi 2010). It thus represents a significant departure from the earlier restricted and constrained formulations of rational deliberation with its concomitant requirement for dutiful citizens. In its place is a focus upon the role of the citizen-user as the driver of democratic innovation through the self-actualized networking of citizens engaged in lifestyle and identity politics (Bennett 2003; Dahlgren 2009; Papacharissi 2010).

What are we then to make of these latest claims for digital democracy arising from the second generation of social media applications? Are they best interpreted as a further commercial incarnation of internet mythology making (Mosco 2005) destined to become ameliorated through ubiquitous everyday incorporation? Or do they offer new opportunities for challenging dominant discourses and privileged positions of power? Is there evidence for the emergence of a more personalized politics being played out through social networks? This special issue of *Information, Communication & Society* is intended to provide an opportunity for a more grounded appraisal of the potential of social media for a second wave of digital democracy.[1] The articles in this issue have all been selected for their respective critical insights and articulations with contemporary

debates about citizenship and democratic culture(s). Our objective in this intro-ductory article is to provide a wider context to these analyses by outlining some of the existing claims made for the democratic potential of social media and laying out a number of issues and questions informing our own thinking on the subject. In summary, it is our contention that with the more widespread use of social media and internet technologies and their absorption into the mundane practices of lived experience, their potential to shape social relations of power becomes all the greater. Yet, such influence is likely to be in ways that are indeterminate and contingent upon a multitude of clashes between social agents, groups and institutions that have competing conceptions of net-working democracy. Such contests are becoming very familiar, for example, with the use of social media platforms for disclosing government secrets through *Wikileaks* (Leigh & Harding 2011), organization of student protests in the UK, mobilization of opposition in Egypt, orchestration of election cam-paigns, challenging of privacy laws through Twitter, lampooning of politicians on YouTube and other manifestations. Such disruptive activity can play an impor-tant role in democratic politics, but what is less clear is how social media is shaped by and, in turn, influences the social relations of power.

Social media democracy

Much of the hyperbolic rhetoric heralding the catalytic prophesies of social media arises from its marketing origins (O'Reilly 2005). Yet, this should not obscure the enthusiastic assertions made by a number of prominent commentators (Benkler 2006; Jenkins 2006; Leadbeater 2008) that this latest generation of communi-cation technologies has inherent democratic capacities. In contrast to traditional mass media, these writers share a common view that networked media has the potential to re-configure communicative power relations. By facilitating social net-working and 'user-centred innovation' (von Hippel 2005), citizens are said to be able to challenge the monopoly control of media production and dissemination by state and commercial institutions. Freed from the necessities of professional media and journalist skills or the centralized control and distribution of industrial mass media organizations, social media is instead seen to be technologically, financially and (generally) legally accessible to most citizens living in advanced societies. Equipped with social media, the citizens no longer have to be passive consumers of political party propaganda, government spin or mass media news, but are instead actually enabled to challenge discources, share alternative perspectives and publish their own opinions.

The openness of social media platforms facilitates the potential of what Charles Leadbeater (2008) called the 'mass-collaboration' of individuals and groups who become the source of new innovations and ideas in democratic prac-tices. This view has an affinity with the work of scholars in the field of science and

technology studies who have long argued for recognizing the central role played by 'social groups' in shaping the design and diffusion of new technologies (Winner 1985). The fluid and contingent nature of technological innovation has been further exposed through the insights of feminist, actor network and domestication approaches, which have all in their respective ways emphasized the importance of the 'user' in the co-construction of technologies (Oudshoorn & Pinch 2005). Through such perspectives, the flexible and contested development and experimentation with social media technologies can themselves be seen as democratic opportunities. But they also crucially dispel the deterministic idea that social media are themselves inherently democratic and that politics is dead. The acquisition of an *iPhone* or access to a social networking site does not determine the engagement of citizens. As the first generation of digital democracy experiments demonstrated, the use of new media for deliberation was strongly influenced by a complex range of socio-cultural factors. In all likelihood, virtual public spheres and civic commons (Coleman & Blumler 2009) met with limited success not because of the deficiencies of the technologies but rather because the Habermasian model was incongruent with the contemporary political and social culture of many societies. In evaluating the democratic influence of social media then, a more fruitful approach may be to adopt the co-construction model with its more open, interpretive and contingent explanatory power, one that also recognizes the influence of social diversity, inequality and cultural difference as important sources of power influencing democratic innovation.

User-generated democracy?

A number of early indications suggest that we should be cautious in proclaiming the democratic potential of social media for significantly challenging the existing commercial and political dominance of many social groups. In the first place, if we consider social networks, in contrast to an even distribution of links representing a wide diversity of interests, we find instead that individual preferences reveal an unequal spread of social ties with a few giant nodes such as *Google, Yahoo, Facebook* and *YouTube* attracting the majority of users (Barabasi 2011). Such concentrations of hyperlinks to a few dominating spaces could be seen to grant a disproportionate authoritative influence over information sources for users. The potential for competition between political discourses may be restricted, for example, by mechanisms such as search engine ranking algorithms which privilege access to information (Halavias 2009). Richard Rogers (2004) in his work with the *Issue Crawler* has suggested that the strength of social ties and the density of their clusters can provide a visualization of information politics as relational sources of power. While such analyses do not preclude the influence of citizen-users, we need more detailed and nuanced examinations of the actual use of social media before we can assess its democratic affordances.

What evidence we do have about social media platforms suggests that the most active political users are social movement activists, politicians, party workers and those who are already fully committed to political causes. Adopting the commercial model of social media as a means to target consumers, these users are attracted by its perceived cost-effective scalability to spread their ideas and attract recruits. Even the potential of citizen journalism appears to be restricted by the domination of a limited number of political bloggers (Rettberg 2008). Instead of facilitating an increasing host of active citizen-users, social media perhaps more typically facilitates online shopping, gossip and file sharing between friends already known to each other.

While clearly a cause for concern for those optimists wishing that more of their fellow citizens would join them in political discussions online, should we conclude that the everyday use of social media has limited potential for democratic innovation? In part, the answer to the question depends upon what we regard as democratic activity. If we move beyond the traditional engagement with mainstream politics, such as voting, party membership, petitioning representatives and the like, and adopt a more open conception of democratic citizenship, a different focus and set of questions emerge. Those which are more attuned to the potential changing perceptions of citizens less inclined to be dutiful and open instead to a more personalized and self-actualizing notion of citizenship. An approach that does not valorize the more rigid one-dimensional political identities of previous times but instead recognizes the multiplicity of identity positions that citizens are required to grapple with in contemporary societies, where the spheres for democratic engagement reach into the private spaces to enable the personal to become political (Squires 1998). In this framework, it may be possible to interpret the democratic potential of social media in a new light.

Papacharissi (2010), for example, pointed out how citizen-users can participate in campaigns while simultaneously enjoying television and/or chatting with family in the privacy of their own home. Moreover, the very malleability of social media offers the prospect of innovative modes of political communication that may go beyond the constrictions of rational deliberative exchanges. It might facilitate Iris Young's exhortation that testimony, story telling, greetings and rhetoric can all be employed as discursive forms of democratic engagement capable of enabling a more inclusive democracy (2000). Thus, we could look for the kinds of political self-expression more widely experienced and performed through a variety of text, visual, audio and graphic communication forms. The playful repertoires of innovative *YouTube* videos, mobile texting language, protest music and the celebration of trivia may all be regarded as aspects of the political.

Those sceptical of such broad definitions of politics are likely to reject the democratic potential of social media and instead point to its capacity to undermine serious rational deliberation. Instead, they will cite its use for negative campaigning and encouraging populist rhetoric and even extremism, as a future means to sensationalize the public sphere and foster celebrity politics.

Moreover, the very 'networked individualism' (Wellman 2001) which character-izes social media can be regarded as further evidence of the social fragmentation which is seen as corroding collective action and social responsibility (Putnam 2000).

To date, perhaps the most obvious impact of social media upon democratic politics has been its disruptive capacity for traditional political practices and insti-tutions. Divisions have become blurred, for example, between mainstream news media increasingly reliant upon political blogs and citizens-user content. While the potential power of collaborative sharing has been demonstrated by the *Wiki-leaks* disclosure of US government foreign policy statements online. Different in style from earlier forms of civic participation, such disruption is effected by enabling citizens to critically monitor the actions of governments and corporate interests. It could potentially enable political lifestyle choices to be informed through shared recommendations from friends, networked discussions and tweets and direct interaction with conventional and unconventional political organizations. What the more lasting effects of these disruptions might be remains to be seen, and we are yet to know what the response will be from governments, corporations or judiciaries to such user-generated challenges.

Grounding the analysis

The foregoing debates and issues provide the context to the contributions that follow. They represent an attempt to investigate in detail how these competing claims may be playing out in concrete situations. In the opening article, Bennett and Segerberg propose that in a political environment increasingly marked by the individualization of choice (Giddens 1991; Bauman 2000), a dissipation of estab-lished solidarities and an entrepreneurial mode of engagement (Flanagin *et al.* 2006), collective action is growing new roots. At the heart of such renewal lie the social media of personalized, network-based communication (Hogan & Quan-Hasse 2010). Bennett and Segerberg's comparative analysis examined two contrasting protest networks that took shape in the run up to the 2009 G20 meeting in London. 'Put People First' was both ideologically and organiza-tionally the more loosely articulated of the networks. By contrast, the 'G20 Meltdown' coalition united an ideologically consistent radical front of anti-capi-talist and environmental organizations. Their deployment of social media stood in stark contrast. 'Put People First' placed an emphasis on the personalization of both participation and collective goals. Its mobilization strategy foregrounded the empowerment of prospective participants by harnessing the collaborative capacity of social media. 'Put People First' was able to both maintain its political focus and attain a level of cohesion that rivalled that of the more homogenous activist coalition. The latter, however, was not equally competent in its use of social media, relying on them principally for the distribution of calls for

action. Most importantly, Bennett and Segerberg make a persuasive case that social media may contribute to the reconciliation of the competing pressures of achieving both personalization and solidarity in collective action.

The inquiry into the G20 protests raised other crucial questions which cross-over into deliberations of the relationship between social movements and media organizations as well as the power held by the media to re-present a movement's public agenda. The allowances that 'Put People First' made for personalized communication did not seem to dilute its core message or hinder the dissemination of its appeals in the mass media. Their example may lend empirical support to the claim made in this volume by Donatella Della Porta that social movements are beginning to stand on a more equal footing with media organizations in their capacity to depict their actions in their own desired light. This may be a recurring assertion made in relation to social movements' use of the internet (Atton 2004; Castells 2007). However, Della Porta locates its wider significance within the context of the power differential in the relations between social movements and more resourceful social actors such as the media or the state. Her theoretical exposition is an invitation to place social movements at the heart of the power dynamic which keeps democracy in an organic state of perpetual transformation. In this way, one is reminded that democratic institutions do not act only as structural conditions for social movements. On the contrary, social movements have the agency to place democratic institutions at the centre of a normative debate which they can engender through networked communication. By doing so, social movements come to actively shape the structural conditions in which they operate, previously defined exclusively by the more powerful social actors.

Yet, the media remain the main stage where public discourse is formed and, as Castells (2007, p. 241) contended, 'what does not exist in the media does not exist in the public mind'. In her article, Joanna Redden, brings empirical evidence to bear on this assertion in her consideration of media representations of poverty in Canada and the UK. People's shared depictions of poverty are drawn from the media (Park *et al.* 2007). The media in the two countries, Redden argues, are systematically constructing representations of poverty which legitimate market-type evaluations of public policy interventions. Highlighting individual responsibility for material disadvantage and reifying statistical calculations which evidence public spending on poverty seem to leave little space for a reasoned assessment of its structural causes. Alternative discourses may, nonetheless, be bubbling up online where poverty activists are organizing their contestation of the mainstream coverage of poverty. However, Redden reminds us that established media outlets have a much more prominent presence also online. Activists are, therefore, faced with the uphill struggle to reset the debate and bring new democratic scrutiny over institutional responses to poverty. Ultimately, the networked communication that comprises tools for both interaction and dissemination may gradually enable resource-poor political actors not only to gain a foothold in the public realm but also perhaps to have a larger imprint on democratic politics.

As noted above, social media may be at the forefront of the shift towards a more participatory political culture. This culture may be manifesting itself in the form of increasingly visible political vernaculars that contest expert valuations of democratic processes. Ampofo, Anstead and O'Loughlin examined the conversation that erupted on *Twitter* in the wake of the prime ministerial debates in the UK 2010 general election. They followed the polemic that ensued on *Twitter* around the statistics for who won one of the three debates. Their analysis revealed that the purposeful deployment of social media to enhance the consumption of broadcast content can become hijacked by a 'viewertariat'. The 'viewertariat', according to these authors, is a growing constituency of 'citizen-users' who actively engage in an often critical conversation about political content and its expert interpretation furnished to them by the media. Such engagement can produce the unintended consequence of generating competing expertise to that aired by media and political elites.

If such developments perhaps allude to another instance of political empowerment galvanized by social media, *Twitter* hashtags may bolster the position of traditional media outlets online. In her article, Tamara A. Small provides an insight into how hashtags — keywords attached to a posting designed to assign it to a running thread and expedite its retrieval — may link up the media to audiences previously outside their reach. #cdnpoli is the most prominent and perennial Canadian political hashtag which Small found to be a site of diverse interaction among elected representatives, journalists, individual bloggers and interest groups. Particularly notable were indications that the information flow generated through the #cdnpoli hashtag was at the forefront of a fast-paced transformation of political newsmaking. Thus, in spite of not advancing the democratic virtues of political deliberation (Dahlgren 2003), this political hashtag served the function of aggregating, distilling and directing political information. Last but not least, Small contends that contributions to the hashtag's flow of information may be regarded as another invigorating form of participation in democratic politics.

A persistent question in the research on political participation is whether it may be extended beyond a narrow constituency of politically active and informed citizens (Bimber 2003; Iyengar & McGrady 2007). Henrik Serup Christensen and Åsa Bengtsson visits this on-going discussion, which, for some time now, has had the internet at its heart (Dahlgren 2009). Considering the case of Finland, which we are reminded stands out as a trailblazer of internet penetration and computer literacy, Serup Christenssen and Bengtsson's rigorous empirical study raises a number of stimulating observations. On the one hand, their article supplies further confirmation that it is chiefly politically active and cognizant citizens who are utilizing the internet as a vehicle for political participation. On the other hand, and more surprisingly, the internet acts as an arena for political participation for people who are otherwise unengaged in politics. Thus, the internet appears to contribute to a rise in political participation. At the same time, online

political engagement may foster the deepening of people's overall political competence. Finally, the article also asserts that social groups that are politically marginalized, such as young people, are more likely to become politically active through the Internet. Given the mounting evidence (Loader 2007; Baron 2008; Bae Brandtzaeg & Heim 2009; Livingstone *et al.* 2011) that social media are especially popular among young people, we may expect that a significant part of their political actions will unfold on social media platforms.

In her article that looked at youth organizations from the UK, Janelle Ward makes the case for a comparative analysis of the political engagement that they facilitate through websites or social media. Ward shows that in spite of aspirations to increase interactivity – particularly the co-productive type geared to co-opting young users in content creation – the vast majority of the 21 organizations in her sample did not attain that goal. Moreover, only one-third of these organizations had established a presence on social media platforms. The social media users among the youth organizations were primarily employing them for top-down dissemination. Thus, organizational practices seemed slow to adapt in the face of changes in their online communication environment. Ultimately, Ward suggests that youth organizations may chiefly seek to inculcate a ready-made notion of citizenship through their online communication. Based on this logic, social media would tend to be used strategically to serve that or other predetermined purposes.

Returning to Serup Christensen's piece, he posits that politically marginalized groups may find a renewed impetus to become more active through digital media. He further points out that Finnish women also seemed to be heartily embracing the opportunity for digital participation. Examining a different national context, Cohen and Raymond focus on a social group whose concerns they describe as often downplayed within the mainstream of the US medical culture, pregnant women. The authors seek to map out digital networks of empathy and social learning for pregnant women who are articulated through online discussion fora. They review evidence which suggests that American women tend to be socialized into a deferential attitude towards medical professionals which precludes them from voicing some of their anxieties about physical and mental experiences that they associate with their pregnancy. Online forums may afford pregnant women the latitude to express the entire gamut of questions and emotions that they have about their condition and empower them to challenge entrenched medical practices in this way. Cohen and Raymond view online forums as one type of digital networks among a myriad of existing and emerging platforms for remote socialization.

Conclusion

The articles in this special issue documenting some instances of the influence of social media upon democratic politics reveal a complex picture that should lead

us to be wary about celebratory accounts. It is clearly necessary to avoid the utopian optimism of the earlier experiments in digital democracy. Yet, they do also point to the potential of disruptive moments and actions which open the possibilities for some co-construction of networks and platforms where the formation, maintenance and defence of political positions may be played out. Such relational sources of power may be shaped through access to or exclusion from lifestyle choices, their degree of inclusion to or exclusion from nodes of authoritative meaning and the opportunities that they provide for competitive advantage over other groups and interests. Their mapping and analysis in future research could, therefore, provide important understandings of our contemporary political landscape.

Note

1   The articles in this special issue were selected from a range of papers presented at the *iCS* symposium on *Networking Democracy* which took place in July 2010 in the Romanian city of Cluj.

References

Atton, C. (2004) *An Alternative Internet*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

Bae Brandtzaeg, P. & Heim, J. (2009) 'Why people use social network sites', in *Online Communities, LNCS 5621*, eds A. A. Ozok & P. Zaphiris, Springer-Verlag, Berlin, Heidelberg, pp. 143–152.

Barabasi, A. (2011) 'Introduction and Keynote to a Networked Self', in *A Networked Self: Indentity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, ed Z. Papacharissi, Routledge, London, pp. 1–14.

Barlow, J. P. (1996) 'Declaration of the independence of cyberspace', [Online] Available at: http://projects.eff.org/~barlow/Declaration-Final.html (3 February 2011).

Baron, N. (2008) *Always On: Language in an Online and Mobile World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Bauman, Z. (2000) *Liquid Modernity*, Polity, Cambridge.

Benkler, Y. (2006) *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, Yale Press, New Haven.

Bennett, L. (2003) 'Lifestyle politics and citizen-consumers: identity, communication and political action', in *Media and the Restyling of Politics: Consumerism, Celebrity and Cynicism*, eds J. Corner & D. Pels, Sage, London, pp. 137–150.

Bijker, W. E., Hughes, T. P. & Pinch, T. J. (eds) (1987) *The Social Construction of Technology Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

Bimber, B. (2003) *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Blumler, J. & Gurevitch, M. (2001) 'The new media and our political communication discontents: democratizing cyberspace', *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 1–13.

Castells, M. (2007) 'Communication, power and counter-power in the network society', *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 1, pp. 238–266.

Coleman, S. & Blumler, J. (2009) *The Internet and Democratic Citizenship: Theory, Practice and Policy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Dahlgren, P. (2003) 'Reconfiguring civic culture in the new media milieu', in *Media and the Restyling of Politics: Consumerism, Celebrity, Cynicism*, eds J. Corner & D. Pels, Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks, pp. 151–170.

Dahlgren, P. (2009) *Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication and Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Doctor, S. & Dutton, W. H. (1998) 'The First Amendment online: Santa Monica's Public Electronic Network', in *Cyberdemocracy: Technology, Cities and Civic Networks*, eds R. Tsagarousianou, D. Tambini & C. Bryon, Routledge, London, pp. 125–151.

Flanagin, A., Stohl, C. & Bimber, B. (2006) 'Modelling the structure of collective action', *Communication Monographs*, vol. 73, no. 1, pp. 29–34.

Fraser, N. (1990) 'Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy', *Social Text*, vol. 25/26, pp. 56–80.

Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford University Press, Standford.

Habermas, J. (1962/1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Hague, B. & Loader, B. D. (1999) *Digital Democracy: Discource and Decision-Making in the Information Age*, Routledge, London.

Halavias, A. (2009) *Search Engine Society*, Polity, Cambridge.

Hill, K. A. & Hughes, J. E. (1998) *Cyperpolitics: Citizen Activism in the Age of the Internet*, Rowman & Littlefield, Oxford.

Hogan, B. & Quan-Hasse, A. (2010) 'Persistence and change in social media', *Bulletin of Science and Technology*, vol. 30, no. 5, pp. 309–315.

Iyengar, S. & McGrady, J. (2007) *Media Politics*, W.W. Norton, New York, London.

Jenkins, H. (2006) *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, New York.

Leadbeater, C. (2008) *We-Think*, Profile Books, London.

Leigh, D. & Harding, L. (2011) *Wikileaks: Inside Julian Assange's War on Secrecy*, Guardian Books, London.

Livingstone, S., Olaffson, K. & Staksrud, E. (2011) 'Social networking, age and privacy', *EU Kids Online Enhancing Knowledge Regarding European Children's Use, Risk and Safety Online*, [Online] Available at: http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/Home.aspx (9 May 2011).

Loader, B. D. (ed.) (1997) *The Governance of Cyberspace: Politics, Technology and Global Restructuring*, Routledge, London.

Loader, B. D. (ed.) (2007) *Young Citizens in the Digital Age: Political Engagement, Young People and New Media*, Routledge, London.

McKee, A. (2005) *The Public Sphere: An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Mosco, V. (2005) *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power and Cyberspace*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

O'Reilly, T. (2005) 'What is Web 2.0?,' *www.oreillynet*, November 2005, [Online] Available at: http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html (20 May 2011).

Oudshoorn, N. & Pinch, T. (2005) *How Users Matter: The Co-construction of Users and Technology*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

Papacharissi, Z. (2010) *A Private Sphere: Democracy in a Digital Age*, Polity, Cambridge.

Park, A., Phillips, M. & Robinson, C. (2007) 'Attitudes to Poverty; Findings from the British Social Attitudes Survey', [Online] Available at: http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/1999-poverty-attitudes-survey.pdf (22 April 2008).

Pateman, C. (1989) *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Rettberg, J. W. (2008) *Blogging*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Rogers, R. (2004) *Information Politics on the Web*, MIT Press, Cambrideg, MA.

Squires, J. (1998) 'In different voices: deliberative democracy and aestheticist politics', in *The Politics of Postmodernity*, eds J. Goog & I. Velody, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 126–146.

Tsagarousianou, R., Tambini, D. & Bryon, C. (1998) *Cyberdemocracy: Technology, Cities and Civic Networks*, Routledge, London.

Van Zoonen, L. (2005) *Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, MD.

von Hippel, E. (2005) *Democratizing Innovation*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

Wellman, B. (2001) 'Physical pace and cyber place: The rise of networked individualism', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 227–252.

Wellman, B. & Haythornthwaite, C. (eds) (2002) *The Internet in Everyday life*, Blackwell, Oxford.

Wilhelm, A. (2000) *Democracy in the Digital Age: Challenges to Political Life in Cyberspace*, Routledge, London.

Winner, L. (1985) 'Do artifacts have politics?', in D. MacKenzie & J. Wajcman, *The Social Shaping of Technology*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, pp. 26–38.

Young, I. M. (2000) *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Brian D. Loader is Associate Director of the Science and Technology Studies Unit (SATSU), Department of Sociology, University York, UK. He has written extensively on new media and socio-political and cultural change. More

specifically he is interested in young citizens, civic engagement and social media; social movements and digital democracy; community informatics and the digital divide; e-Government and new media. He is founding Editor of *Information, Communication & Society* (Routledge) his most recent books include *Cyberprotest and Young Citizens in the Digital Age* and *Social Media and Democracy*. *Address*: Department of Sociology, University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD, UK. [email: brian.loader@york.ac.uk]

Dan Mercea has recently received his doctorate in Communication Studies from the University of York where he is currently a Teaching Fellow in Political Sociology. His thesis was a comparative examination of the possible contribution of internet-mediated communication to fostering greater participation in social movement protest events. He is currently in the process of publishing the main empirical results from his PhD research while he continues to pursue his interests in the application of digital media to political participation and engagement in extra-parliamentarian politics. *Address*: Department of Sociology, University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD, UK. [email: dan.mercea@york.ac.uk]