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Theorizing civic engagement and social media – the case of the ‘refugee crisis’ and volunteer organising in Sweden

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Abstract

While social media platforms have been praised for their capacity to facilitate civic engagement, they are increasingly also criticised for their commercial interests. In this chapter we suggest an analytical framework for examining the role of social media platforms’ commercial interests in relation to civic engagement. Rather than assuming particular tensions, our aim is to provide a framework that captures the specifics of the possibilities and constraints of social media platforms to civic engagement, paying attention to the materiality of social media platforms. The chapter is largely theoretical in scope and develops an analytical approach that considers technological, structural, discursive and practice-oriented dimensions of the intersection of civic engagement and social media. It goes beyond a focus on platforms to consider the wider power structures in which they are embedded as well as interrelations with offline conditions. Theoretically, we draw on notions of platforms (van Dijck and Poell, 2013), infostructures (Flyverbom and Murray, forthcoming), media practice (Couldry, 2012), and discourse (Chouliaraki and Vestergaard, 2019). Throughout the chapter, we illustrate the application of our framework with examples from volunteering initiatives to assist migrants arriving in Sweden at the height of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015.

Introduction

Social media have been vested with hopes that they can help reinvigorate civic engagement by providing new possibilities for bottom-up, self-organizing engagement (Castells, 2012; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010). The advent and increasing popularisation of social media has been noted as an important vehicle for these possibilities (Dobusch and Schoeneborn, 2015). Civic engagement here is understood as paying attention to political and social issues, an attention expressed in a variety of ways that often go beyond parliamentary politics (Uldam and Vestergaard, 2015). Following Dahlgren (2009), we understand civic engagement as subjective states that are the prerequisite for participation. This includes community-driven initiatives such as print shop collectives, community radio, protest camps such as Occupy, but also NGO campaigning and direct action (Baines, 2015; Cammaerts, 2009; Feigenbaum et al., 2013). Celebratory accounts of the Arab Spring uprisings, the Occupy and Indignados

movements often focus on technological affordances of social media such as instantaneous, dialogical communication (DeLuca et al., 2012). While these affordances are important to the emancipatory potential of social media, they are merely one part of a much bigger picture. We need to look beyond affordances and also consider user practices, discourses and media power. When we do so, we can move beyond the celebratory focus on technological affordances and better understand both the possibilities for and limits to civic engagement. We suggest an analytical framework for examining the role of social media platforms' commercial interests in relation to civic engagement, paying particular attention to the materiality of social media platforms.

To illustrate our framework, we draw on examples from volunteering initiatives to assist migrants arriving in Sweden. The role of social media platforms to volunteering has been shown to facilitate volunteers' engagement with NGOs, albeit in fickle ways (Uldam, 2010), especially, in relation to collective identity formation, but also for organising events including information dissemination and preparation of activities (Uldam, 2010; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Zooming in on volunteering and migration as forms of civic engagement, social media platforms have also been considered essential in organising both migrants and volunteers in the context of the so-called refugee crisis peaking in summer 2015. Gillespie et al. (2016), for example, reviewed the role of different applications for information dissemination among refugees on their way to Europe. They conclude that the access to information via digital media was essential in helping refugees navigate their changing physical surroundings. Chouliaraki and Georgieu (2017) show how major NGOs in Chios use social media, especially the chat application WhatsApp on their mobile devices, to constantly update each other about offline developments such as the nocturnal arrival of dinghies. Smaller NGOs were found to be excluded from the major NGOs' communication on WhatsApp and instead used Twitter. NGO communication with migrants was found limited to predigital modes such as leaflets and posters, even though an estimated 80 per cent of migrants owned smartphones. Contributing to these important insights, we focus on the role of social media for volunteers in Sweden to illustrate the application of our analytical framework.

An illustrative case study: The migration crisis in Sweden

In 2015, the UNHCR reported approximately 60 million refugees worldwide, and 163,000 refugees were registered as asylum seekers in Sweden (Forsberg, 2015). Sweden's status as a transit country contributed to the importance of volunteer initiatives meeting the urgent needs

of arriving refugees. The groups explored in this chapter all started on Facebook. To draw on these groups to illustrate our framework, we have combined an analysis of the Facebook pages and groups with in-depth interviews with central organizers of volunteer initiatives in Sweden. We included organisations that featured prominently in the mainstream news reporting. The Facebook pages and groups were monitored in terms of the main activities of members and moderators as well as the structure of conversations. For each group, we interviewed the person who set up the Facebook presence and maintained it throughout the most intense periods. The interviews were conducted late summer and autumn 2016. Combining online observations with interviews has enabled us to go beyond a focus on platforms and illustrate all dimensions of our framework.

Four groups were dominant in organising urgent relief for migrants and refugees arriving in Sweden. The group *Al Tadamon* (solidarity in Arabic) was set up in May 2015 to provide urgent help for one of the biggest shelters in Sweden. The group mainly coordinated the collection and distribution of clothes and necessities for the shelter. The group collaborated with the Swedish Migration Agency and partly took responsibility for supplying newly arrived asylum seekers with necessities, which normally falls within the responsibility of the agency. The group *We who welcome refugees at Stockholm's central station (Vi som tar emot...)* started their Facebook group in September 2015 with the aim of coordinating urgent relief for arriving and transiting migrants in Stockholm's central station. The group grew rapidly in the first few days, reaching more than 15,000 members and coordinated the collection and distribution of food, clothes, tickets for onward travels, transport to transit shelters and legal support. The group *Refugees Welcome Stockholm (RWS)* was an offshoot from this group. RWS took over the coordination of relief work at the central station. Volunteers set up a transit shelter for refugees who needed to rest during their journey through the country while not wanting to officially register in Sweden. RWS continues to support protests against the new and stricter migration law that was introduced in summer 2016. *We do what we can (Vi gör vad vi kan)* was co-founded by playwright and director Paula Stenström Öhman and PR-strategist Petra Kauraisa. Initially they aimed to collect 500,000 SEK to travel with necessities to Lesbos in Greece to provide urgent relief. The initial goal was quickly reached and in total the initiative collected almost 11 million SEK and 250 tons of clothes and other non-food items.

An analytics of civic engagement and social media

To develop a better understanding of the possibilities and challenges that social media can offer civic engagement (including volunteering) we suggest an analytics of social media that goes beyond affordances. Our framework considers the materiality of platforms in relation to issues such as everyday organizing, struggles to mobilise for systemic change, and authority impediments to visibility among wider publics. Our aim is to avoid techno-determinism and media-centric focal points. Instead, the approach we suggest considers the context of civic engagement in social media, paying attention to (i) affordances, (ii) power relations, (iii) practices and (iv) discourses. In doing so, we draw on Couldry's (2012) model of a socially oriented media theory. Like Couldry's model, the analytics of social media that we suggest could be applicable to analysing civic engagement beyond social media platforms, since it is non-media centric. In outlining his model, Couldry proposes a pyramid with four apexes that each represents a focal point in media research:

We can turn the pyramid four ways up, with the type of research we want to prioritize at the top, while others form the pyramid base. No way of turning the pyramid is 'right', or 'better', since the apexes name different priorities for research: *media texts*; the *political economy* of media production, distribution and reception; the *technical properties* of each medium; and the *social uses* to which media technologies and media contents are put. (Couldry, 2012: 6, emphasis in original).

Paying equal attention to all four focal points is often not feasible. It is, nonetheless, important to consider their role, even if just one apex is in focus. We find this approach to studying media highly useful, because it acknowledges the interrelations between the four aspects of the role of the media while also allowing for pragmatic choices regarding delimitations. We therefore adopt this approach while fine-tuning it for studying civic engagement in social media. In the following, we outline our four-dimensional framework for studying civic engagement in social media and discuss the interrelated roles of each dimension. We find the following graphic (Figure 1) useful, because its circular connectors illustrate the four dimensions' continuous interrelations.

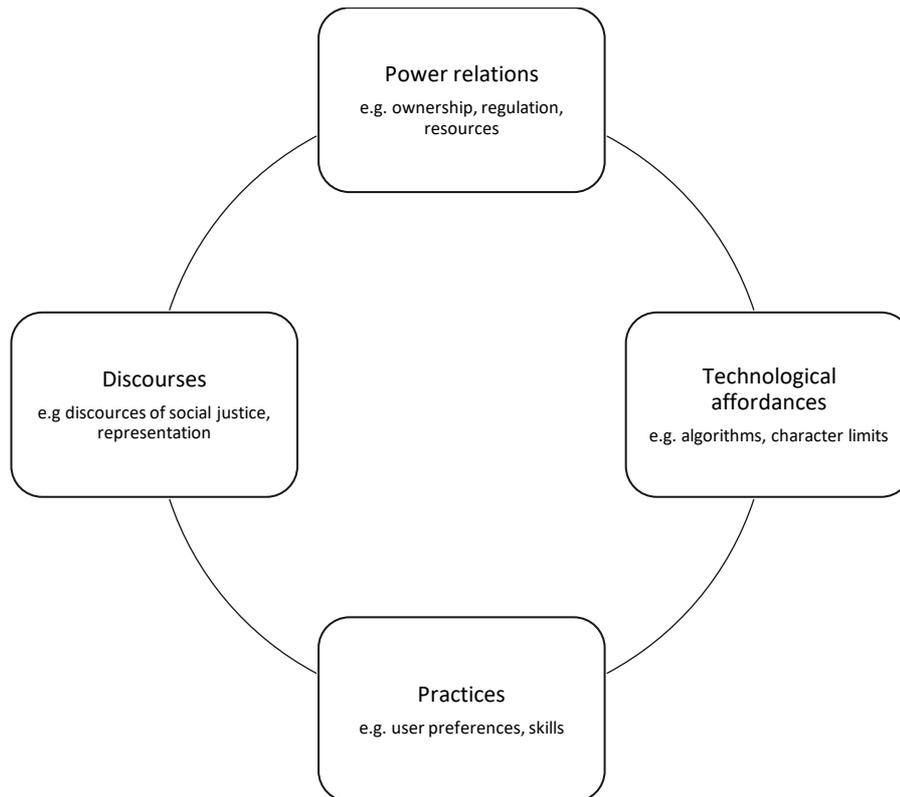


Figure 1: An analytical model of civic engagement and social media.

Power relations

Couldry labels one dimension ‘Political economy’ in order to address, critique and ultimately supplement the political economy research tradition and its focus on media production, often presupposing economic determinations. We find this errand an extremely important contribution to media studies. However, focusing on civic engagement and social media, we propose a dimension labelled Power relations. We do so to capture wider power relations beyond production and accumulation, and to include questions of visibility and agency. While social media can potentially help civil society actors access and circulate information in unprecedented ways, these technologies are embedded in unequal power relations that privilege government and corporate elites (Curran et al., 2012; Dahlgren, 2009). Our dimension of power relations includes issues of ownership and production, ethical implications for producers as well as producers (commercial, state, and civic) and implications for visibility. Social media platforms are characterised by increasing ownership concentration, with multinational media corporations such as Google and Facebook dominating the majority of social media platforms (Fuchs, 2015; van Dijck, 2013). Particularly government policies and regulation as well as platforms’ terms of service (ToS)

are important in this respect. Examples of Facebook deleting left-wing political group pages show that the platform is all but neutral (Gillespie, 2010). This is propelled by the commercial logics that underpin major social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube (Papacharissi and Fernback, 2005; Uldam and Askanius, 2013).

Youmans and York (2012) show how policies and user agreements of commercial social media platforms inhibit some forms of political participation by preventing anonymity and prohibiting certain content, such as Facebook banning the page *We Are All Khaled Said* which was used to mobilise protesters during the Egyptian uprising. The influence of policies and user agreements of commercial social media platforms has also been shown to curb civic engagement e.g. when the blog hosting site Wordpress.com referred to their policy of no anonymity and removed a website that criticised the oil company BP following a request from the company (Uldam, 2016). The commercial logic of popular social media platforms means that companies such as Facebook must cater for broad segments of users and advertisers (Youmans and York, 2012). This often entails ToS that impede anonymity and privileges copyright over creative subvertising, in some cases enabling corporations to censor antagonistic political participation (Uldam, 2014; Youmans and York, 2012). Access to the data gathered as well as tools for analysis are limited to the major commercial players contributing another layer of unequal power relations (Dahlberg, 2015). Interests and conditions of unequal power relations further asymmetrical visibilities, because the specifics of their collection and price are not made transparent. This obscures exactly what is being observed and on what basis and logics, enabling governments and corporations to monitor citizens' activities without being seen themselves and instilling uncertainty in those being watched (Brighenti, 2010). In this way, social media augment visibility asymmetries by rendering them less transparent and accountable (Brighenti, 2010; Flyverbom, 2016). To the extent that civic users are aware of these asymmetries of visibility, they risk impeding participation in radical politics by instilling self-censorship (Uldam, 2016).

With social media information flows have become more complex changing from a privileged position of broadcast media and mainstream press towards networked digital media, while other aspects of power relations are maintained or even reinforced. Investigating the Twitter news flows during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, Lotan et al. (2011) find that news is increasingly co-constructed by bloggers, activists and journalists. The embeddedness of social media platforms in existing power relations also presents constraints to civic engagement and

volunteering, for example when it comes to the visibility of corporate elites versus grass-root activism.

Another aspect of changing power relations is the centrality that social media platforms achieve. Our research on volunteers' uses of social media platforms to help migrants arriving in Sweden demonstrates the monopoly position of Facebook among Swedish volunteer groups. All the groups we studied chose Facebook as their main, and often only, platform for connecting with volunteers, migrants and wider publics. This turn to Facebook as a coordination platform is emblematic for this kind of initiatives and the choice has mainly been unquestioned by coordinators and administrators. Power relations play out not only in terms of choosing – or feeling the pressure to choose – a platform. The Facebook platform itself is structured through and reinforces specific power relations. There are, for example, clear hierarchies between administrators of groups and pages in relation to group members and followers. Administrators and moderators steer the forms of engagement, while posts by members often remain invisible due to the set-up of a Facebook group or page. The founder of *Al Tadamon* argues that donating time to volunteer activities makes volunteers reason more efficiently, and Facebook reinforces this division between people who envision and curate the exchanges and those who are at the receiving end.

Technological affordances

While we argue for the importance of looking beyond technological affordances, we still want to stress the importance of paying attention to them. Affordances are central to the materiality of media, encompassing their technological infrastructures, and the possibilities for action that they afford users (Gibson, 1979). Media technologies, including social media platforms, are constructed following a certain set of ideas (Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2014). Viewing the technological infrastructures of social media platforms as both conditioned by ideas and conditioning action potential enables us to consider the ways in which they are embedded in wider power structures and commercial interests. We approach affordances as technical features that enable and constrain possibilities for action (Bucher and Helmond, 2017). While we agree that imagined and perceived aspects of affordances are important, indeed key (e.g. Bucher and Helmond, 2017; McVeigh-Schultz and Baym, 2015), our focus remains on technical features as a starting point in order to pay attention to the minutiae of their workings. However, we do not suggest to background imagined and perceived aspects. In our framework, the interplay between affordances as technical features and the dimension of

practices captures social, imagined and perceived aspects of affordances. Moreover, the interplay with power relations helps capture social and societal aspects such as skills, regulatory and commercial interests.

Flyverbom and Murray (forthcoming) propose the notion of datastructures to capture the invisible workings and consequences of the strategic uses to influence public opinion and regulatory interests, and *vice versa*. They stress the importance of paying attention to inside processes of data organisation and structuring. Rieder and colleagues (2015) illustrate the technicity of Facebook's specific feature sets, database architectures, and interfaces with their standardised information fields; and the ways in which they filter and organise the data that can be retrieved from Facebook's API (e.g. using Netvizz), as well as their implications for the visibility of posts. These challenges are grounded in the market-driven logics of commercial social media platforms (Fuchs, 2017). Van Dijck and Poell (2013) discuss the commercial interests that influence platforms in terms of technocommercial materiality. Facebook and the possibilities for reach enabled by its news feed algorithm aptly illustrates the importance of commercial interests to technological affordances.

As a commercial platform, Facebook follows a business model that is largely based on the near impossibility of organic reach (Collister, 2015). This business model is structured around technological affordances. The algorithm that determines the visibility of posts and tweets in social media platforms impede organic reach to motivate users to pay for boosted reach (Dahlberg, 2015). It does so, through a combination of metrics and machine learning, which structure the visibility of content in users' news feeds and are kept undisclosed and constantly moderated to ensure that they stay undisclosed (Rieder et al., 2015). In addition to revenues from advertising, commercial social media have developed business models based on the collection of data that are re-analysed and sold to third parties (Andrejevic, 2013). As a consequence, organisations and social actors with resources (either capital to pay for reach or people with skills to circumvent the algorithm) are privileged in struggles for visibility in Facebook. This illustrates the interplay between affordances (the algorithm), power relations (the business model), and practices (skills).

In our study of volunteer groups, we found that the structure of pages privileges the visibility of posts of administrators over posts by members and followers. For the volunteer groups, this asymmetrical visibility established another layer of power relations within the platform giving

voice to group members organizing relief while marginalizing the voice of the receivers (the refugees). Another consequence of Facebook's algorithm is that much information we receive via social media platforms presents one aspect of an issue, bits of information or factoids that often connect likeminded users rather than challenging our presumptions or offering new perspectives.

Technological affordances also have organisational implications. Scholars have shown how social media affordances enable decentralised, networked forms of organising and fluid organisation (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Dobusch and Schoeneborn, 2015; Kavada, 2015; den Hond et al., 2015). These possibilities are also evident in our study of volunteers in Sweden. In this specific context, particularly fluid organising emerged as prevalent. In addition to this, the technological affordances of Facebook provided certain constraints to organising, as the fluid volunteer organisations evolved over time, professionalised and changed their focus from their initiation. The structure of Facebook, however, does not allow for adaptations to organisational evolution. This is captured by the founder and administrator of *Al Tadamon*:

The only thing that I experienced as a constrain was that we started as group and then we had so many members and we realized that it would have been better to have page instead... We didn't know that we would become an organisation with a budget and everything. (Interview 2016-08-26).

Another aspect of the ways in which the Facebook algorithm steers visibility in users' newsfeeds relates to temporality. The algorithm privileges interaction over recency, which means that posts that trigger new replies gain more visibility despite their datedness. This has implications for the possibility to coordinate people and help efforts. Carefully curated threads and posts might be messed up through comments on older posts that give the impression that these are the most recent and most urgent requests (see also Rieder et al., 2015). In our study on volunteers, the curated thread structure was particularly important for the group *Vi som tar emot...*, since this was the only way to distinguish between different needs and areas of works. As the initiator explains:

So, the whole Facebook structure is rather strict... So if you go for the thread structure, you have to stick with it... It really is not meant to be used in that way... We tried to

limit the number of threads, but anyway in between it was like that people started writing in one thread, for example the mosque thread and then all of a sudden everything became much more general and didn't have anything to do with the mosque anymore. (Interview 2016-09-16)

Practices

The notion of media practices refers to what we do with media (Couldry, 2004). What we do when we use media is not necessarily what we were intended to do. Just think of text messaging on mobile phones which was intended as an emergency communication tool and not the popular everyday communication channel that it is today. Couldry (2012) develops the notion of media practices as an “open set of practices relating to, or oriented around, media” (Couldry, 2004: 117). He argues that media practices are concerned with specific regularities in actions relating to media and regularities of context and resources that enable media-related actions. Resources include media literacy and civic agents' capacity for navigating the possibilities and challenges that social media provide e.g. in terms of technology, norms, and regulation (Livingstone, 2008). In that sense, media practices provide a fruitful link to questions of civic engagement. They open up for considering issues such as skills and assumptions that activists and volunteers evoke in their uses of social media platforms for organisation, coordination, campaigning, interaction, and community-building.

In our study of volunteer groups, skills were reported as extremely important to visibility. All groups either had professional social media communicators or professionalized during their operations to handle communications efficiently. Even though the initiatives analysed here all gained relatively high visibility on Facebook in a very short time, only one person expressed surprise about the fast-growing success. All other interviewees were rather conscious about the logics of visibility and power in social media that are related to size and strength of pre-existing networks. Particularly successful – in terms of gaining followers and collecting donations – was the initiative *Vi gör vad vi kan*. One of the initiators of *Vi gör vad vi kan* stated that the group consisted of volunteers with strong writing skills who could express themselves and knew the logics of social as well as mainstream media. Group members already had a rather large circle of followers including so-called influencers with equally strong positions and visibility in the network of the Swedish cultural industry. The capacity for expression contributed to the fact that the initiative was perceived as comparatively professional. The Swedish volunteers' capacity for navigating the visibility logics of

mainstream media and Facebook's algorithm shows how skills resulting from well-educated backgrounds and professions can facilitate visibility and benefit individuals and groups from privileged backgrounds. In this way, volunteer practices were also shaped by affordances, as groups positioned people with media skills and insights to secure visibility, illustrating the interplay between practices, power and affordances.

Investigating questions of media as practice allow for links to larger societal processes of mediatization and mediation that are crucial for political engagement aimed at social change. Mattoni and Treré (2014) show how media practices are intertwined with questions of power in complex media ecologies that go beyond media as texts and media as industries and have come to include formats such as social media. While social media provide new platforms for expressing various forms of civic engagement, they privilege formal modes of civic engagement (e.g. major NGOs) over informal modes of civic engagement (small NGOs, networks and informally organised groups) such as bottom-up volunteering and anti-systemic activism (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010); and privilege individual over collective participation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Fenton & Barassi, 2011). For example, increasing surveillance from government and business has led many activists to avoid social media for uses that relate to organising for protests (Gerbaudo, 2012). Activists and volunteers with insight into online surveillance risks and possibilities for circumventing surveillance (i.e. a high degree of media literacy, see Livingstone, 2008) instead use alternative social media platforms such as Crabgrass and RiseUp, or they use social media platforms in alternative ways (Uldam, 2016). While face-to-face meetings remain crucial in organising protests or volunteering, this highlights the interplay between media practices in terms of literacy and power relations.

These dynamics of transparency and practices also emerged in our study of volunteer groups. Here, a distinction between inbound and outbound communications is important. While the volunteer initiatives appear curated and professional in their outbound communication, there is always a messier backstage. *Vi gör vad vi kan* started out with two secret groups – one for the steering committee and one for the volunteers already engaged. The latter was only open for those approximately 20 people travelling to Lesbos. For raising additional funds, the public page was started and attracted much attention. Only later, internal communication was moved from Facebook to Slack in the process of professionalizing the organization. Having both internal and external communications on one platform makes the initiatives very vulnerable. For example, Facebook pages or groups being taken down because of trolling

from right-wing groups and coordinated reporting to Facebook have been successfully employed to silence earlier campaigns (see Dencik, 2014). Since there are potential dangers for both volunteers and migrants connected with visibility in social media, openness was in some cases regulated externally. The management of the shelter in Stockholm implemented a strict media protocol including the restricted access for media to the building as well as posts in social media. This had implications for the outreach and possibilities to engage broader publics in *Al Tadamon*'s relief work as they were not allowed to post pictures of the building, the clothes shop or residents in the public group on Facebook.

Discourses

While we believe that studying content related to civic engagement such as campaign material or interactions in social media platforms is an important contribution, we propose a shift in focus to discourse. Discourse encompasses textual acts in the broadest sense and as inherently connected to power (following Chouliaraki, 2006 and Vestergaard, 2008; see also Chouliaraki and Vestergaard, 2019). The discourse dimension in our framework enables researchers to pay attention to aspects of civic engagement such as campaigns and interactions in social media platforms (Madianou, 2013), while also acknowledging their constitutive and performative power which stresses ethics. From this vantage point, discourses condition our understandings of the world, and thus importantly also our possibilities to act in that world. In that sense, discourses have performative power to condition civic engagement, including volunteering. However, for discourses to be given a kind of reality that they would not have otherwise, they need to be seen and heard by others in the space of appearance (Arendt, 1958). The rival discourses of hospitality and hostility that characterise debates and coverage of refugees entering Europe condition the possibilities and predispositions of publics in responding to the situation and taking responsibility (Chouliaraki, 2016). Social media can potentially help civic actors access this space of appearance.

We therefore need to pay attention to the discourses and counter-discourses that circulate in social media – and the ways in which they are facilitated and constrained by social media affordances, power relations and practices. One of the key democratic potentialities of social media platforms relates to their capacity for circulating counter-discourses to wider publics (Dahlberg and Phelan, 2013). It is not only the affordances, power relations and practices that situate possibilities for gaining visibility for discourses that are important, but also the discourses for which social and political actors struggle to gain visibility and support

(Chouliaraki, 2006). For example, competing discourses establish different causes, identify different villains and different solutions to the Euro crisis (Kyriakidou et al., 2018). Other discursive struggles and representations include climate change (Uldam and Askanius, 2013), corporate responsibility (Etter and Vestergaard, 2015) and movements of the dispossessed (Kaun, 2015). Specifically, in relation to the influx of migrants in Europe, counter-discourses of hospitality attempt to challenge dominant discourses of fear, financial constraint and nationalism (Dahlgren, 2016), while discourses of rights, policy mandates, solidarity and management circulate and compete at the site of reception, as migrants arrive in Europe in the Greek island Chios (Chouliaraki and Georgiou, 2017). Social media have become a key arena for these struggles.

In our illustrative case study, volunteers not only wanted to help migrants with the practicalities and logistics of arriving unsettled in a new country. They also challenged discourses of security and nationalism that dominated the debate on migrants in mainstream media (Dahlgren, 2016). The group *Vi gör vad vi kan* considered their work explicitly as political and in support of pro-migration politics. As one of the main initiators of *Vi gör vad kan* told us: “We also had an opinion building role. We for example invited different politicians to follow with us to Lesbos to show them the situation” (Interview 21 November 2016). With the changing political situation also other groups – particularly Refugees Welcome Stockholm – increasingly shifted their focus from relief work to promoting counter-discourses of care and human rights, especially following the closure of the Swedish border, the EU-Turkey agreement and the shrinking numbers of incoming migrants. Their engagement ranged from sharing certain articles and writing op-eds promoting safe passage for refugees to Europe and supporting petitions against stricter migration policies to participating in expert hearings with political decision makers. This illustrates the significance of discourses as an aspect of the role of social media in civic engagement with constitutive and performative power.

Conclusion

Power relations, practices, affordances and discourse are the key dimensions of our model for the analysis of civic engagement in social media. As each dimension plays a vital role, research focusing on any of the four dimensions is important. At the same time, we want to stress the significance of considering their interrelations, even when highlighting one of them. It is precisely the interplay between the four dimensions that allows us to understand the

conditions of possibility behind questions such as: Who participates? Who listens? It allows us to better understand phenomena such as virality and spreadability, the interplay with the mainstream press and between online/offline dynamics.

In our study of volunteers' uses of social media to assist migrants entering Sweden, this framework uncovers such issues, including questions about materiality: What different media assemblages of software, hardware, bodies, sites and objects can we trace in civic engagement? Here, the framework we have suggested would identify specific components and consider the power relations at play in their roles in various assemblages. Facebook was reinforced as the one dominant platform used to organise migrant assistance, rendering volunteer initiatives dependent on Facebook policies and algorithmic logics of visibility. Questions of power might include: How do material resources, including digital platforms, technological infrastructures, physical places and objects, affect the power dynamics of contentious politics? The power dimension draws attention to issues such as the privileged white, middle-class, professional backgrounds of volunteer users. The practices dimension in our framework further facilitates probing questions about media literacy and assumptions of volunteers, revealing a clear tendency to critically reflect on their choices of Facebook as their central platform, even if this choice remains uncontested. The affordance dimension hints at questions of visibility and automated sorting within the infostructure that has material implications for help efforts of volunteers for arriving migrants. The discourse dimension raises questions about what is being said about migrants and the need to help in volunteer groups and pages, but crucially, also the ways in which this challenges dominant discourses of nationalism and security on a wider societal scale.

Attending to this mix of material, discursive, practice and power configurations enables us to show that although social media have been heralded to diminish power relations and hierarchies, Facebook reproduces existing divides and power relations. This raises questions about the ways in which Facebook establishes itself and is increasingly seen as civic infrastructure. Taken together, the four dimensions of our framework can help examine such questions, including the conditions of possibility behind social media and participation, (in)visibility, and public opinion. It is our hope that this framework's attention to the minutiae of the workings of social media materialities in relation to their interplay with discourse, power relations and practices can help researchers capture the possibilities and constraints to using social media for civic engagement and activism – both at the level of everyday

organising and a wider societal scale.

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