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3

Cross-Media Comparisons

Introduction

Fame Exceeds a Single Medium

Kylie Jenner, Kendall Jenner, and Khloé Kardashian hire professional makeup artists to transform their faces with prosthetic elements. Their goal is to go out on the streets of Los Angeles disguised as ordinary people and eventually buy a smoothie without being identified by the paparazzi. This is a scene from Season 12 of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, a reality show that aired on cable channel E! from 2007 until 2021. Originally conceived to present, amid the mundane and the sassy, the everyday life of a wealthy but initially not famous family, the show ended up launching each of its members into global stardom.

Keeping Up with the Kardashians is the product of an era in which the logic of traditional media was gradually beginning to coexist with that of new media (Bolter and Grusin 1999; Manovich 2002; Thorburn and Jenkins 2003; Chun, Watkins Fisher, and Keenan 2005; Jenkins 2006; Douglas and McDonnell 2019). Adding a twist to the aesthetics of the film *The Truman Show*, reality television proposed a novel format in the media ecosystem: It placed viewers at

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the center of the television stage, focusing on their everyday realities. As Susan J. Douglas and Andrea McDonnell (2019) argue about MTV's iconic show *The Real World*, "it reimagined for television a trope previously on display in cinema and radio—the ordinary person, plucked from obscurity, thrust into the spotlight" (230). Consistent with this innovation in television aesthetics, in 2006 *Time* published a historic cover in which it announced that it had named Person of the Year none other than the magazine's reader. It was around that time that Facebook opened its doors to any user thirteen years of age or older who had a verified email address, regardless of whether they were enrolled at a university.[1] Shortly before that, YouTube had launched with the video *Me at the zoo*. In it, an ordinary individual—in fact, one of the platform's founders—talked on camera about how cool the trunks of the elephants were at the San Diego Zoo.[2] According to the trend of being mundane that Dhiraj Murthy (2018) identifies for the inaugural messages of different communication technologies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the video had no purpose other than recording the ordinary (Strangelove 2010; Marwick 2013; Arthurs, Drakopoulou, and Gandini 2018; Burgess and Green 2018). The early 2000s marked the beginning of what Paula Sibilia (2008) calls the "show of the self," reinforcing the "me, me, me culture" examined by Silvio Waisbord (2020) in his analysis of the central myths and tensions of American society.

Despite the prosthetic makeup, the paparazzi finally spot the Kardashian sisters. Before the scene concludes, Kylie takes a selfie and says something that makes visible connections and tensions across media: "I think I'm gonna Snapchat before the paparazzi sell the photo . . . They can't get the first look." In the format of the typical reality television confessional, in which the protagonists stand in front of the camera and narrate in voice-over the events in the screen, the makeup mogul explains, "we are just gonna post on social media so that *we* get the story out there first and they can't twist it into their own words."[3]

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Native to the small screen, the Kardashians-Jenners have also been increasingly recognized as central figures on social media. At the time of writing this chapter they have more than 1.25 billion users on Instagram and top the lists of the most followed influencers in the world. Their uses of these platforms have been tied to significant changes in the construction and image of celebrities and micro-celebrities worldwide, from the normalization of the selfie to the application of filters, and from influencer marketing to the recording of lifestyles, in a practice that Lee Humphreys (2018) traces back to nineteenth century communication patterns in the United States. In 2020, it was announced that *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* would conclude after fourteen years and twenty seasons. However, it was quickly recognized that this would not end the careers of the sisters. A year earlier, the *New York Times* had published a related essay titled, "When Instagram Killed the Tabloid Star."[4] Another article in the same newspaper explained that Kim Kardashian accumulated more followers on her Instagram account than all the combined accounts of the *Condé Nast* media conglomerate—publisher of iconic titles of contemporary print culture such as *Vogue*, *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, *Bon Appetit*, *GQ*, and *Wired*.[5] Who needs ink on paper anymore when one can read stories on the 'Gram? As Henry Jenkins (2006) put it, "in the world of media convergence, every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms" (3).

About Streamers and Reporters

It is 9:00 p.m. eastern time on Tuesday September 29, 2020. The first US presidential debate of that year's electoral cycle begins. Hasan Piker, a young progressive from New Jersey, is already live on his Twitch channel. He broadcasts from what appears to be the living room of his home, with a professional microphone, seated in a gamer-style chair. A portion of a Bernie Sanders poster can be identified within the cluttered background of his rectangular screen.

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Piker's goal that night, as well as throughout the week, will be to stream his reactions and political commentary for an audience that will probably interact in the form of texts, emoji, and memes.

He is joined by two streamer-commentators, also from their respective homes. Most of the time, the three participants remain in silence, listening attentively to the debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. Unlike television anchors, who are speaking from studios across the United States and many countries around the world, Piker does not rest his eyes on the camera to look at the viewer. His gaze is pointed at his own computer, with various tabs opened on the screen, from where he monitors multiple platforms, reads news aloud and, of course, follows the debate itself—which is being streamed live on *CNN*'s YouTube channel.

Piker has been a columnist for the *Huffington Post* and a producer, host, and journalist for the YouTube show *The Young Turks*. That show originally started as a radio program, then migrated to YouTube, and eventually got airtime on television signals and streaming services. According to Wikipedia, it streams on "Amazon Prime Direct, iTunes, Hulu, Roku, on Pluto TV through a 24-hour feed and on social media platforms Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter."[6] During the 2020 US presidential election week, Piker was Twitch's most popular streamer, racking up 6.8 million hours watched.[7] A significant portion of those hours were most likely tied to the stream he conducted remotely with Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to encourage voter registration in the United States. The meeting did not consist of a solemn debate on the civic responsibility of exercising the right to vote in a democratic election. Instead, it had to do with playing *Among Us*, one of the most popular multiplayer games of recent times.[8] This should not be surprising: Twitch is considered a gamer-friendly social media platform, where part of the core appeal lies in watching and interacting online with amateur and professional gamers (Taylor 2018). However, a significant part of the regular interaction on the platform has recently also turned toward politics and

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social activism. During the *Black Lives Matter* protests of mid-2020, Twitch became an important space for collective organizing and political activism.[9]

In 2020, the *New York Times* published a profile on Piker, contrasting the authenticity and closeness offered by figures like him on platforms such as Twitch with the more manufactured and distant personas typically associated with political presenters and commentators on traditional television.[10] Curiously, the domain of this platform, now bought by Amazon, is .tv, and its presentation resembles that of a television screen. One does not have to have an account or be logged in to scroll through Twitch's live streams—on the contrary, accessing the content is similar to turning on a television set. In the words of Andrew Chadwick (2017), "older and newer media logics in the fields of media and politics blend, overlap, intermesh, and coevolve" (5).

Engaging in Comparative Work across Traditional and Social Media

There is a common thread between the stories of the Kardashian-Jenner family escaping the paparazzi via Snapchat and Piker commenting from his living room about the US presidential debate on Twitch. From the national birthplace of global entertainment, celebrity, and showbiz culture (deCordova 1990; Gamson 1994; Glynn 2000; Murray and Ouellette 2004; Marwick 2013; McClean 2014; Douglas and McDonnell 2019), the personal becomes public in the case of the Kardashians-Jenners, and the public becomes personal in the case of Piker. In addition, the two situations not only reflect complex transmedia phenomena (Jenkins 2006; Scolari 2009; Evans 2011; Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013), where multiple interactions take place across media and platforms, but also illustrate the heuristic power of comparative work. This is because to understand the practices undertaken around one medium or platform, it is necessary to compare them with the practices enacted in relation to other media and platforms. Comparing forms of representation and practice of

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the Kardashian-Jenner family and Piker across various media and platforms reveals commonalities, differences, and particularities while also illuminating processes of cross-media transformation.

The Kardashian-Jenner vignette tells a story of feedback loops between the logics of the different media involved—consistent with one of the studies later discussed in this chapter (Dubrofsky 2011), which argues that the 1990s reality television partly created the ethos of social media platforms as we know it, and in turn the platform practices triggered recent innovations in reality television. The case of political commentators like Piker foregrounds dynamics of displacement whereby social media seem to occupy a place left vacant by traditional media. Neither the feedback loops nor the displacement dynamics would be adequately intelligible without a comparative gaze, which removes social and traditional media from self-contained analyses and places them in a relational perspective.

In what follows we present eight selected studies that showcase key issues of cross-media comparative work. We will organize them in relation to the four categories stated in chapter 1: themes, approaches, methods, and interpretations. We will conclude the chapter with an analysis of the contemporary relevance of traditional media in establishing the genealogy of the new and the continuing influence of the old, even in—or perhaps because of—a networked society (Castells 2004; van Dijk 2006; Rainie and Wellman 2012; Marwick and boyd 2014).

Topics

Two recurring topics in cross-media scholarship have been the relationship between different media and the political realm and the relationship between different media and journalistic practices. This is not entirely surprising if we consider the historical link between political science and comparative theory and its strong connection with

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some of the first comparative studies in the field of communication (Blumler and Gurevitch 1975; Gurevitch and Blumler 1990; Blumler, McLeod, and Rosengren 1992; Norris 2009; Esser and Hanitzsch 2012; Esser 2019). Research comparing traditional and social media and politics has explored electoral campaigns, public debates, and governmental communication, among others (Benoit et al. 2011; Skoric and Poor 2013; Kalsnes, Krumsvik, and Storsul 2014; Chadwick 2017). The relevance of cross-media matters to journalism practices is also unsurprising because media organizations have been experimenting with social media for well over a decade now. Some key areas of inquiry have been the refashioning of editorial routines, the dynamics of inter-media agenda setting, and the evolving practices of news reception, among others (Neuman et al. 2014; Schrøder 2015; Abdenour 2017; Harder, Sevenans, and Van Aelst 2017).

A germane topic within scholarship analyzing the relationship between media and politics has been the media mix that electoral candidates and their teams use to convey their messages in a context that Andrew Chadwick (2017) has characterized as a hybrid media system. This has evolved throughout modern history (Seidman 2008). In the twentieth century, a key turning point in this regard within the Global North had to do with the emergence of the televised presidential debate as a key institution for showcasing candidates to their voters (Druckman 2003). The 1960 debate between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy at WBBM studios in Chicago, the first televised debate in the United States, broke new ground in the repertoire of campaign strategies. *New York Times* reporter Jack Gould described it as "a dignified and constructive innovation in television campaigning. Undoubtedly it helped to quicken public interest in the Presidential contest."[11] Nixon and his team famously dismissed the importance of caring for the candidate's image on the television floor—which some argued might have contributed to losing the debate to a young Kennedy, more skilled at performing for the small screen.[12]

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The electoral campaign run by former president Barack Obama in the United States in 2008 marked another turning point (Johnson and Perlmutter 2011; Bimber 2014; Chadwick 2017): It made it clear that the world of politics could make use of platforms such as Twitter—and fourteen other platforms, according to Wikipedia[13]—to mobilize parts of the electorate.

To examine how candidates imagine the relationship between traditional and social media in presidential campaigns, Luc Chia-Shin Lin (2016) looks at the case of the presidential elections of Taiwan in 2012. He interviews people in either campaign staff, journalism, or political communication research positions. The question guiding his work is whether the growing popularity of the Facebook pages of election candidates alters the relationship between mass media and platforms during election campaigns. Lin finds that Facebook was of particular significance to both candidates and journalists. Candidates themselves "attempted to view their Facebook pages as headwaters of mass media; this view allows social media to operate as an intermediary between candidates and mass media" (Lin 2016, 211). Journalists, likewise, perceived Facebook as a source of news about the candidates. For instance, Facebook posts from candidates during the 2012 Taiwanese presidential campaign would in some cases be published before press releases were sent to traditional media. Ultimately, Lin (2016) observes a "parallel" relationship between social and traditional media during election campaigns: "From the perspective of journalists, this parallel relationship exemplifies the frame contest and enables them to perceive candidates' strategic purposes. Yet, from the perspective of the candidates, the parallel relationship points to a need to increase the influence of their Facebook pages because the pages' popularity indicates how online and off-line environments intertwine with each other" (208).

Presidential candidates use a mix of traditional and social media to introduce themselves to their electorate and convince them to change their vote because it is assumed that the media have a certain

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degree of power to modify the behavior of their publics (Gerber, Karlan, and Bergan 2009). But far from having a direct impact, scholarship has shown that they influence the formation of opinion in ways that are not necessarily linear or self-evident (McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver 2014; Benkler, Faris, and Roberts 2018). As the canonical article by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) puts it, traditional media are not necessarily good at telling us what to think but about which issues to think; in other words, print and broadcast media have a certain degree of power in setting the agenda (Cohen 1963; Brosius and Kepplinger 1990; Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2008; McCombs and Valenzuela 2021). But what is the capacity of social media platforms to shape public opinion and set the agenda of their users? In addition, is it possible to understand this capacity in isolation, without relating it to that of traditional media?

Samuel Mochona Gabore and Deng Xiujun (2018) study how journalistic frames from online news impact public opinion expressed on social media. They undertake a comparative content analysis focused on the coverage of the construction of the Addis Ababa–Djibouti railway line in Ethiopia—which was considered to be, at the time of the study, the first modern railway in East Africa. Specifically, the authors compare traditional media coverage and Facebook posts. In doing so, they find a pattern whereby traditional media influences the frames and issues discussed on Facebook: "[S]ocial media users are affirming or criticising issues in a similar tone as they are presented by traditional media. This implies that evaluative opinions of social media users are formed as the result of exposure to news media's labelling of issues" (Gabore and Xiujun 2018, 35).

However, Gabore and Xiujun note a discrepancy within that trend that is worth mentioning: traditional media coverage with a neutral tone show a nonsignificant relationship with posts published on Facebook. This, to the authors, indicates that "information presented in neutral tone has weak influence on social media opinion formation" (Gabore and Xiujun 2018, 35). As we suggested in chapter 2,

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there has been considerable interest in investigating the relationship between political content and ideological polarization (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan 2013; Benkler, Faris, and Roberts 2018; Fletcher, Cornia, and Nielsen 2020). Although different studies have yielded dissimilar results (Bondes and Schucher 2014; Johnson 2018), the approach of Gabore and Xiujun (2018) is of particular interest because it illustrates how one aspect of the phenomenon—which factors contribute to potential polarization in social media—acquires greater clarity when examined from a cross-media perspective.

In the two studies we discussed in this section, a comparison between traditional and social media enabled the analysis to make more visible and understandable communication dynamics that would otherwise have remained less visible and intelligible. The work of Lin (2016) comparing the media mix in an electoral campaign showed that a parallel relationship between traditional and social media emerged, whereas Gabore and Xiujun (2018) indicated that traditional media had relatively more capacity to frame coverage than a social media platform.

Approaches

Two common alternative ways of approaching the comparison between traditional and social media have been emphasizing either continuities or discontinuities. The first approach is partly based on the idea that traditional and social media are not only part of a historical continuum, but they can also be thought of as complex sociotechnical artifacts that belong to a single information ecology of mutual influence (Dubrofsky 2011; Hermida 2014; Chadwick 2017; Humphreys 2018). The second approach is premised on the notion that traditional and social media can be examined separately by contrasting their capacity to affect one or more outcome variables (Sayre

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et al. 2010; Stefanone, Lackaff, and Rosen 2010; Kalsnes, Krumsvik, and Storsul 2014; Valenzuela, Puente, and Flores 2017).

One example of approaches emphasizing continuity can be found in a study by Robin Rymarczuk (2016), who links discourses of resistance to social media to the resistance to the landline telephone in the early twentieth century. The literature on non-use has a long history in communication studies and science and technology studies (Fischer 1992; Kline 2000; Wyatt 2003; Foot 2014; Syvertsen 2017; Hesselberth 2018). It reveals not only alternative forms of reappropriation of media artifacts but also ways in which identities are constituted around the rejection of technology. Rymarczuk explains that "the intrusion that social media makes on the individual, be it user or non-user, has added a layer of complexity to daily life comparable to the decision to whether to answer the phone or not in the 1900s" (2016, 46).

Through an archival analysis of American, British, and Dutch press between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the author examines the alleged intrusions of privacy generated by the emergence and subsequent massification of the telephone. He argues that "The reason that the collapse of social relations because of technology is thought of as a new issue, is because different people, experts and fields of science speak loudest on the subject today. These arguments and concerns are, however, not new at all. They are just repackaged by contemporary paradigms. The state of resistance to social media is certainly evidence for the fact that the non-user of old wasn't heard accordingly: because contemporary concerns reign, hardly impacted by those same early arguments for non-use" (Rymarczuk 2016, 47)

An alternative approach to the comparisons between traditional and social media has been to highlight areas of discontinuity. In the context of the Arab Spring (Lotan et al. 2011; Wolfsfeld, Segev, and Sheafer 2013; Kraidy 2016), what types of narratives and discourses did circulate in print journalism versus on Twitter? Stefanie Ullmann

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(2017) aims to answer this question through a discourse analysis of articles from six newspapers in the United States, the United Kingdom, and the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, and a sample of 1,000 tweets which, during the days of protest in January 2011, had used the hashtag #Jan25. Distinguishing between the ways in which demonstrators, the police, security forces, and the Egyptian government were talked about, Ullmann finds that "While there does exist a certain lack of clarity or even ambiguity in the portrayal of police forces and their behaviour in mass media, . . . the tweets display a clear tendency to portray the police as the weaker entity that is unwillingly overwhelmed by and thus inferior to the protesters" (2017, 175).

The author observes, then, significant differences in the discourses that circulated within traditional and social media in the face of a phenomenon of the magnitude of the Arab Spring, supporting the notion that "when compared to mass media, social media may contain ideologies that are less institutionalized, while at the same time enabling the limitless expression of political and social opinions" (Ullmann 2017, 166).

In this section we reviewed two alternative approaches to cross-media scholarship. In both cases a comparative sensibility elicited findings that would have been less visible in platform-only accounts: the historical continuities in representations of the rejection of new technologies, as Rymarczuk (2011) showed, and the lower levels of institutionalization in protest discourse on Twitter versus traditional media, as illustrated by Ullmann (2017).

Methods

There is a productive distinction that organizes methodological matters in comparative cross-media work and that also relates to the continuity–discontinuity pair mentioned in the previous section: the

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distinction between diachronic and synchronic approaches to communication phenomena. While diachronic or longitudinal methodologies underscore the importance of attending to the passage of time, the synchronic or cross-sectional counterparts focus on a given phenomenon at a particular moment. Both methodological strategies have been deployed in cross-media comparative scholarship: qualitatively through in-depth interviews, discourse analysis, and focus groups, among others (Lin 2016; Törnberg and Törnberg 2016; Schmidt et al. 2019); and quantitatively through surveys, experiments, and social network analysis, among others (Kwak et al. 2010; Schultz, Utz, and Göritz 2011; Abdenour 2017).

A generative implementation of a diachronic research design is undertaken by Sebastián Valenzuela, Soledad Puente, and Pablo M. Flores (2017) to examine the relationship between the agenda of traditional and social media in the coverage of the earthquake that occurred in Chile on February 27, 2010, and that resulted in more than 500 fatalities. Just as Lin (2016) conceived of news and platforms as parallel media systems, and Gabore and Xiujun (2018) were interested in understanding the agenda-setting power of online news over social media, Valenzuela and colleagues compare the evolution of topics covered by journalists on broadcast television and Twitter during the first week after the earthquake. In the case of television, they analyze the content of the newscasts in the country's most important networks during the prime-time slot; for Twitter, they look at a sample of 270 messages produced by journalists working in Chilean media. Their research design seeks to counter the trend whereby "most published research takes a platform-centric perspective, in which the impact of Twitter on journalistic practice and news coverage is studied in isolation from other media" (Valenzuela, Puentes, and Flores 2017, 616).

Contrary to the findings of Gabore and Xiujun (2018), their attention to dynamics happening over time enables them to show "a reciprocal but asymmetrical relationship in which television news

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shows are more likely to 'adopt' the issue agenda of journalists' on Twitter than vice versa" (Valenzuela, Puentes, and Flores 2017, 631). It is thanks to their perspective, focused on how the media agenda evolved over the course of one week, that the authors are able to identify inter-media dynamics between traditional and social media. According to Valenzuela and colleagues, "this is consistent with prior evidence that online platforms, including social networks, discussion forums, and search engines can influence news coverage of traditional media" (2017, 631).

A fruitful example of a study adopting a synchronic research design instead is that of Rebecca Nee and Valerie Barker (2020), about the social impact of coviewing in situations of second screening. The authors define the phenomenon of second screening as "using another device (laptop, cellphone, tablet) to text, go online, or use social media in a complementary manner to what is being watched on television. . . . Second screening implies that the viewer's focus is on both screens simultaneously" (Nee and Barker 2020, 3). This practice, which since 2013 has been measured by the Nielsen rating system, has been associated with younger age groups and in many cases is referred to as "social television" (Chorianopoulos and Lekakos 2008; Giglietto and Selva 2014; Selva 2016; Wohn and Na 2011). Nee and Barker draw upon surveys with teenagers and university students in Qatar and the United States in 2017 and 2018 to examine cases of second screening with both traditional television and streaming services. They are interested in understanding, among other things, whether the experience of consuming content in this way ends up being "lonely" by force or whether social benefits can arise from consuming content via YouTube and television while also using other platforms or messaging services to communicate with people who are also consuming that same content physically apart from each other. Nee and Barker (2020) find that second screening "promotes a sense of community for users in both contexts, even if the viewing is not taking place simultaneously with others. Although some differences were found based on age, gender, and ethnicity in

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second screening, the most surprising results are not the differences, but the similarities of co-viewing outcomes for both traditional television and streaming services" (13).

Regarding potential social benefits the authors note that for both traditional television and streaming services, such as YouTube, "even when people are using another device without the intention of communicating with others, they could be achieving a sense of community as a byproduct of their search for information about the show" (2020, 14).

In this section we considered two typical methodological strategies regarding the role of temporal matters that converge in showing the descriptive and explanatory potential of comparative work. Because Valenzuela and colleagues (2017) compared the agenda-setting power of both television broadcasting shows and posts on Twitter over time, they were able to illuminate inter-media dynamics that would have been otherwise left opaque. Since Nee and Barker (2020) contrasted the social effects of coviewing in second screening practices between television and YouTube, they shed light on the fact that social media could also produce prosocial effects—contrary to the idea of smartphones being isolating.

Interpretations

Scholars have enacted several interpretive frames to make sense of findings obtained from cross-media comparisons. We underscore two common ones: reinforcement and displacement.

According to the idea of reinforcement, not only do social media present a logic with antecedents in traditional media, but also both types of media mutually shape each other in ways that end up creating feedback loops. As we suggested in the opening vignette about the Kardashian-Jenner clan, there seems to be a relationship between the culture of selfhood conveyed in early reality television shows, on the one hand, and the cult of self-image and the

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daily accounting of the self that is part and parcel of platforms on the other hand (Stefanone and Lackaff 2009; Kraidy 2009; Marwick 2013; Khamis, Ang, and Welling 2017; Psarras 2020). These platforms, in turn, end up shaping the ways in which content is produced and formats are designed for traditional media. This can be seen not only for entertainment but also for news because journalists increasingly source and communicate on social media (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013; Canter 2015; Brems et al. 2017; Mellado and Hermida 2021). Sometimes these transformations occur at the intersection of entertainment and news, for instance, when articles about the passing of a celebrity are filled with the reactions on social media by other celebrities, a dynamic which we will elaborate further in chapter 5.

The reinforcement relationship between the logic of reality television formats and social media such as Facebook is the subject of a study by Rachel E. Dubrofsky (2011). According to the author, reality television programs seem to have fostered subjectivities that support surveillance schemes, in which the life of the subject is placed at the service of consumption and presentation in front of mass audiences. Thus, in reality television "participants are habituated to putting the self on public display for entertainment purposes" (Dubrofsky 2011, 124). Furthermore, in the case of Facebook, Dubrofsky argues, it has become routine to resort to "using surveillance technologies in the service of producing consumable products (bits of data), suggesting the desirability of living a life that can withstand being under surveillance, as well as a life that can be broadcast to an audience" (Dubrofsky 2011, 124).

Finally, Dubrofsky (2011) finds important differences between reality television and Facebook: "[T]he hands-on shaping of the reality television subject by television workers differs from Facebook's processes of subjectification. On Facebook, users largely mediate their own subjectivities without third-party intervention" (Dubrofsky 2011, 117).[14] The discussion of the relationship between information

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and communication technologies and surveillance, however, is far from settled. A prominent example of the ongoing relevance of this open-ended debate is Shoshana Zuboff's *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019). In this book, Zuboff proposes that the production logic of the world's most successful technology companies and platforms is based on a scheme of surveillance and expropriation of personal data. Complementing this examination with comparative perspectives could certainly shed light on the institutional histories of modern media that provided key conditions for this logic to emerge and consolidate.

The interpretive frame of displacement when it comes to cross-media studies can be seen, for instance, in research about the growing reliance on social media for seeking information about current affairs (Zhou et al. 2019; Lewis 2020). Sayre et al. (2010) study the coverage of Proposition 8 in California during 2008 and 2009. Proposition 8 was a referendum to constitutionally repeal the right to same-sex marriage; it was passed in the California state elections of November 2008 and was afterward overturned in court.[15] Sayre and colleagues compare the press coverage of California media, news indexed by Google News, and YouTube videos. Their aim is to understand the potential mutual influence between traditional and what they call "online media" in terms of opinion formation and agenda setting. Their ultimate interest is "the question of whether these new social media forums produce different agenda-setting cues than those the public is already exposed to in other, more established media" (Sayre et al. 2010, 15). To this end, they track content mentioning Proposition 8 across newspapers, Google News, and YouTube videos during a period of fourteen months between 2008 and 2009. Sayre and colleagues examine these data via a time-series analysis, concluding that "It was opponents of Proposition 8 who accounted for nearly all of the activity on YouTube following the election. . . . YouTube was being used as a platform for people to register opinions that they felt were not being represented in the mainstream" (2010, 24).

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They add that this "is symptomatic of a traditional media system that may be losing some of its agenda-setting ability to emerging social media" (Sayre et al. 2010, 26).

This section focused on two common interpretive frames to make sense of comparative cross-media dynamics: reinforcement and displacement. Beneath the differences, an issue that cuts across the studies surveyed is the power of comparative analysis to question assumptions such as that social media are the first technological artifacts to impose constant exposure of the self, in the case of Dubrofsky (2011), and to uncover the capacity of YouTube to work as a political space for self-expression that is unparalleled by mainstream media, as shown by Sayre and colleagues (2010).

Conclusions

We opened this chapter with a vignette about a reality television program in which the strategic management of scoops reveals a web of connections across traditional and social media. We paired it with a second vignette about the reconfiguration of the genre of political commentary in Twitch to engage with audiences in ways that appeal to those not interpellated by how journalists present this content in newspapers and television. Then, we discussed eight studies that illustrate the descriptive fit and explanatory power of scholarship that aim to make sense of social media practices in relation to those that are typical of traditional media. The selected studies dealt with a range of historical periods from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century, spanning several key moments of the twentieth century. They also examined different media and communication technologies, from the landline telephone to Twitch, including television, Facebook, and YouTube.

In their diversity, the vignettes and studies highlighted the relevance of cross-media comparative work to better understand social

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media phenomena and to question approaches that tend to overdetermine the power of one technology just because it is "newer" than others (Czitrom 1982; Marvin 1988; Bolter and Grusin 1999; Gitelman 2006; Peters 2009; Bourdon 2018). The comparative perspective thus helped to discern significant similarities and differences that otherwise would have been less visible—or perhaps altogether invisible. As with the studies discussed in chapter 2, the breadth of the methodological and theoretical strategies pursued by the authors indicates that the comparative turn advocated in this book consists of an epistemological stance flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of approaches regarding how to gather and process data as well as explain the potential variance in the findings.

In a historical media context characterized by what Henry Jenkins (2006) calls "participatory culture" and "transmedia storytelling," a comparative cross-media approach allows us to move toward more relational and holistic views that ultimately enable us to refine our understanding of social media. Our perspective is consistent with the arguments that media theorists have repeatedly made since digital and networked information technologies began their ascent in everyday life in the mid-1990s to better analyze the relationship between older and newer media (Manovich 2002; Jenkins 2006; Chun 2008; Gitelman 2006; Hayles 2007; Peters 2009). As we noted in chapter 1, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's (1999) relational theorizing about the dynamics of remediation underscores a central point emerging from this chapter: the continued relevance of traditional media in establishing the genealogy of what we associate with the new—in this case, social media platforms—and the persistent influence of what we conceive of as old. For instance, we observed the influence of television aesthetics, in particular reality television, in common modes of information presentation on platforms, where the cult of the self coexists with strategic image management and standardized forms of surveillance, in a logic of constant production of aestheticized selfhood

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(Marwick 2013; Duffy 2017; Brydges and Sjöholm 2019; Arriagada and Ibáñez 2020).

Our approach builds upon theorizing of both cultural and institutionalist lineage. While Henry Jenkins (2006), as noted in chapter 1, characterizes convergence culture in terms of content flow, industry cooperation and audience behavior, Andrew Chadwick's "hybrid ontology" to understand the contemporary media system "eschews dichotomous modes of inquiry and instead invites us to focus on the overlaps and the in-between spaces that open up between older and newer media technologies, genres, norms, behaviors, and organizational forms" (Chadwick 2017, xii). What is especially evocative in the context of this chapter is how both theorists, while arguing from divergent traditions of inquiry, nonetheless converge on the idea that analyses of social media isolated from their relationships with traditional media and the wider social environment lack both descriptive fit and heuristic power. That is, they fail to illuminate the everyday practices of users and to account for variations across them. This is because, as we saw throughout this chapter, people appropriate platforms often in relation to traditional media practices—even the absence of the latter provides relevant information, as in the case of Piker's coverage of presidential debates on Twitch. It is through comparative perspectives that this media coexistence and the particularities that mark the uptake of each medium can begin to be foregrounded in the analysis.

Building upon cross-national and regional, and cross-media comparisons, research also shows that users appropriate a given social media platform in relation to other platforms (Zhao, Lampe, and Ellison 2016; Boczkowski, Matassi, and Mitchelstein 2018; DeVito, Walker, and Birnholtz 2018; Valenzuela, Correa, and Gil de Zúñiga 2018; Tandoc, Lou, and Min 2019). Although we have so far used the term *social media* to refer generically to the set of platforms available, in the next chapter we turn our gaze to scholarship that has compared across platforms, thus further underscoring the inherent plurality of social media technologies.

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To Know Is to Compare

Studying Social Media across Nations, Media, and Platforms

By: Mora Matassi, Pablo J. Boczkowski

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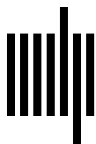

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