Comparing Media Systems and the Digital Age

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This article discusses a possible revision of the interpretative schema that was proposed in the book *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*, published in 2004 before the dramatic development of digital communication. In particular, the article focuses on the idea of the media system and its possible use in the digital age. Digitalization seems to foster a process of deinstitutionalization that undermines the role of institutions such as the state, political parties, and news outlet organizations that, in the era of legacy media, were affecting the feature of the media system and therefore represented important subjects of investigation and comparison as to the schema proposed in the book. Digitalization transfers, both in the field of news media and in politics, a number of functions that were played by these institutions to single, dispersed actors; today, the observation of these actors and their actions appears more complex also because of their volatility.

Keywords: media system, digitalization, institution, technology, globalization

With this article, I will try to answer a question that has been asked many times about the possible update of our book *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) for the new digital age. Since its initial publication, one of the most frequent criticisms that was advanced toward the book focused on our underestimation of the role of new media. We devoted few lines to this topic, and we did not include them as an important dimension to be investigated in comparative studies. As we wrote in "Ten Years After Comparing Media Systems: What Have We Learned?" (Hallin & Mancini, 2017), the main reason for such an underestimation was that in 2004, when the book was published—and even before, in 1997, when we started to work on the book—new media were not so developed and were not so relevant for the entire media system. At that time, digital communication was still in arms and did not represent such a crucial presence.

Today, we are facing a completely different situation, and digital media have become so important that, in some aspects, they challenge the entire interpretative framework that we suggested in *Comparing Media Systems*. Specifically, it seems to me that the idea of media system itself must be readapted and reshaped to the new media ecology. To put it extremely, this article discusses whether we can still apply the concept of the media system to observe and interpret the new 2020 media ecology. I will argue that many aspects and consequences of the digital revolution contrast in part with our usual understanding of the idea of

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the media system. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that, in spite of the rapid and dramatic development of digital media, legacy media—and television, in particular—still maintain a primary role in shaping the public debate. In this perspective, the idea of the hybrid media system introduced by Andrew Chadwick (2013) seems very appropriate to better describe the present communication environment.

The following pages will be devoted to discussing this question. More specifically, I will initially talk about the idea of the media system itself. Then, I will treat the digital revolution as a "critical juncture," and finally, I will focus on the possible consequences of what I call the "technology critical juncture." Another necessary caveat about the term "digital age" that appears in the title of this article and that is often used in the following lines is that I use this term (digital age, digital media, and similar) as it is very general, including all the forms of communication (social media, news platforms, and so on) that derive from digital technology and the Internet in particular.

The Concept of the Media System

The concept of the media system is, in some way, double-faced: It is not a contested idea, but at the same time, it lacks a clear definition. Actually, it is not correct to say that it is not a contested idea because, in some cases, it has received strong criticisms. Nevertheless, it is largely used by media scholars even if a shared and unanimous definition of the concept is missing. Norris (2009), in a review of our book, raised important issues about the idea of the media system. Her major criticism, about the "borders" of a system, addressed what to include and what to exclude from the observation when discussing media systems. What has to be considered a communication dimension, and what is a political dimension? She asks whether "political parallelism," which is such an important analytical dimension in *Comparing Media Systems*, should be considered a dimension of the field of politics or of the communication field. Moreover, she argues that "media systems" are very heterogenous, including very different types and genres of media outlets; a "media system" may include "tabloid papers" and "quality press" as well. These are very different "animals," she states (Norris, 2009), which challenge the idea of the media system itself. Despite these criticisms, the idea of the media system is widely used, but an exact definition of the concept is missing— confirming, in some way, the criticisms by Norris.

The Norwegian mass media historian Henrik Bastiansen wrote in his reconstruction of the historical evolution of the concept that the expression "media system" appears to be "self-evident" (Bastiansen, 2008). He proposes a very simple idea: "The collocation of the terms 'media' and 'system' will thus etymologically focus on the fact that different means of communication are related to each other in different ways, creating a whole of cooperating parts" (Bastiansen, 2008, p. 95). In his investigation of the books and journal articles that use such a concept, Bastiansen does not retrieve any exact definition confirming his idea of "self-evidence."

The "self-evidence" issue seems to be a constant problem in many writings that refer to this concept. In a way, even in our book we neglected to offer a clear definition. As Bastiansen would say, in our understanding, there was no need to further discuss the concept. We were investigating, and then comparing, the whole of media outlets with their procedures, routines, and historical evolutions that we

could observe in each country; we did not feel the need to fix further borders and contents of what could be retrieved from each different context.

Undoubtedly, this has to do with the idea that, as De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989) wrote, systems do not exist in reality; they are abstract constructions proposed by the scholars, and therefore, their definitions may vary significantly in relation to the specific research aims and the scholars' experiences and backgrounds.

An important push toward the adoption of a system approach in media studies came from the writings of Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch. In their 1977 article, "Linkages Between the Mass Media and Politics," they strongly endorse the adoption of the system approach that, in their view, can bring into political communication research three main advantages. First, it allows a more general view of the subject under investigation, linking together what they define as "different communication phenomena" that more restricted studies on specific subjects are not able to enlighten. Second, a system approach may avoid the risk of overemphasizing or underestimating a single element over the others. Third, a system approach is very useful in comparative research and, indeed, a large part of today comparative media studies research is based on a system approach. This last point in particular seems to derive from the developments in political science and in sociology studies from which Blumler and Gurevitch derive their invitation to support the adoption of a system approach.

Indeed, mainly political science and sociology adopted, well before media studies, the idea of a "system" to compare different subjects, essentially nation-states. Starting with what sister sciences such as sociology and political science have reached in previous debates about the notion of system, media studies seem to abstain from further elaborations, accepting a plain definition such as that proposed by Jonathan Hardy (2012): "a media system comprises all mass media organized and operating within a given social and political system (usually a state)" (p. 185).

This is a plain, self-evident definition introducing another problematic element to which I will come back later. Indeed, in this definition, a media system is identified, such as it is in most of the previous definitions, with a single state. Is this identification still valid today in the era of digital communication?

Dan Hallin, in his contribution to this volume, proposes a definition of media system that I convincingly share with him even if I have different views on the consequences of digital revolution over the idea of the media system itself. In particular, it seems important to me to insist on some of the features that he proposes. Media system has to be conceived as a "whole"; it includes several features (not always coherent each other) that cannot be considered separately. We already insisted on this in our 2017 article, "Ten Years After Comparing Media Systems: What Have We Learned?" It is not possible to reduce the idea of the media system to just some of its components. For instance, several scholars compared different media systems looking at just the level of political parallelism: this is not possible, as political parallelism is just one of the components that has to be considered (and observed) together with other components that, all together, define a specific media system and determine the differences with other media systems. A media system includes, as Hardy proposes, the various media and outlets operating within a given environment, but it also includes a procedures, routines, and cultures that connect these outlets to the surrounding context.

In his definition, Hallin includes the idea of autopoiesis; this is another important feature of the idea of the media system. Autopoiesis means that a system re-creates and modifies itself through reactions to other social systems and to the consequences of their change. Systems maintain an overwhelming coherence even if they tend to continuously adapt themselves to the external influences.

Finally, in my view, media systems have to be conceived as abstract constructions, such as De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989) wrote; they do not exist in reality. They are our abstract constructions that are necessary to bring back to unity dispersed features of communication structures and cultures that are observable in a real world. As an abstract idea, the definition itself of a media system and its borders may vary in relation to the scholar's investigation goals.

The "Technology Critical Juncture"

I suggest borrowing from political science the concept of the "critical juncture" to place and interpret the consequences of digital revolution on the study of political communication and on the adoption of the "system approach" too. To put it briefly, for political scientists (even if different definitions exist in this regard), political junctures are developmental events or situations that interrupt the expected course of events and the usual actions and decisions proceedings of actors without offering any certainty about the forthcoming developments (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007).

Adapting this definition to the media field, we can interpret "critical juncture" as something that dramatically affects the preexisting media environment (and society at large) and does not indicate the future developments. In a sense, the idea of the "critical juncture" is placed at the crossing point of the "path dependence" and revolution, and its sudden changes challenge the expected developments that are supposed to follow already existing paths. We can adopt the idea of the "critical juncture" to interpret the role of digitalization in shaping a new structure and a new framework of procedures for the media field. Digital revolution determines a possible deviation from the established structure of the media system, its usual procedures, and its modes of operation. Uncertainty about the future is particularly dramatic today because of the fast and dramatic changes that occur, we could say day by day, in the technology environment (Castells, 2007; van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018).

There is no doubt that, such as it was written in *Comparing Media Systems*, technology represents a "shaping force" for the media field. In particular in that book, we insisted on the role of television as a homogenizing force, pushing together with other forces toward the adoption of the liberal model of journalism, thus modifying the already-existing professional habits in journalism. Today, it is digitalization that constitutes a major shaping force for the entire communication field.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to be clear at this regard: Indeed, the idea of a "critical juncture" assumes that there exists a moment of dramatic shifting that causes a deviation from an expected path deriving from previous experiences, cultures, and established directions. This means that path dependence is at work together with forces that modify the expected trajectory. Technology is undoubtedly a shaping force, but it acts within specific contexts, and therefore, the consequences of the adoption of a new technology may vary dramatically in relation to different preexisting situations. This is to say that digital

revolution undoubtedly shapes the surrounding media environment, but it does this while being influenced by the already existing situation and its pushes toward specific directions.

Digital communication may be a liberating force such as it has been interpreted in large part of the western world even if today this sort of techno-optimism that was dominant at the very beginning of digital communication (Barlow, 1996; Rheingold, 1992) is mitigated by different views that highlight the strong controlling power of the Internet that may arrive up to censorship (Morozov, 2011). At the same time, depending on different economic and political contexts and their assumed future developments, digital communication may represent a powerful instrument for increasing control and censorship. This is what mostly takes place in totalitarian regimes where digital communication increases the possibility for controlling citizens and limiting their freedom of expression and more.

The Consequences of "Technology Critical Juncture"

Digital revolution does not change just the structure and the procedures of the existing media systems, but it also dramatically affects our knowledge at their regard. The changes that take place with digitalization seem to require the adoption of new paradigms able to observe and to interpret the new media environment and its development. As Silvio Waisbord (2019) has rightly written: "digital communication has revolutionized everything we knew about communication" (p. 3). Following Waisbord's statement, it seems possible to ask whether digital communication challenges the concept itself of "media system." In other words, can we still apply the concept of the media system in the new 2020 media ecology?

I see two major problems in this regard. The first one relates to the issue of globalization and if and how it challenges the adoption of the media system approach. Indeed, most of the existing literature is based on the identification of media system and nation-state such as it is in the definition proposed by Jonathan Hardy. The question has already been addressed by Frank Esser (2013) and more recently by Flew and Waisbord (2015). In his article, Esser discusses globalization in relation to comparative research. Esser is a well-known comparative researcher; nevertheless, he raises the question of what to compare in the era of globalization as national media systems, as "self-contained things" (Esser, 2013, p. 113) seem not to exist anymore because of what he calls "transnationalization." This, he argues, puts an end to the identification between nation-states and media systems. Therefore, he continues, comparative research needs to be adapted to the new reality also shaped by digital communication.

Flew and Waisbord (2015) discuss at length all the recent criticisms that have been raised about the concept of national media systems in the era of globalization. In spite of their agreement with some of these criticisms, at the end of the article, they state that "nation-states remain critical actors in media governance and domestic actors largely shape the central dynamic of media policies" (Flew & Waisbord, 2015, p. 620). They support their thesis in favor of the maintenance of the identification between nation-states and media systems with data taken from studies on China, Brazil, and Australia.

To conclude, the idea of the national media system is challenged by globalization, but national borders still correspond to specific cultural attitudes, practices, and mostly regulations that determine relevant differences able to identify and limit specific national media systems.

As suggested, another consequence of the technology-critical juncture is represented by the crisis of the notion of media system itself and the changes that such a notion is requiring to be adapted to the digital age. Flew and Waisbord (2015) discuss the problem in this way:

> With the impetuous development of digital communication: The notion of "system" is seen as a conceptual leftover of mid-century functionalist sociology that envisioned society as constituted by interdependent parts with distinct functions, as components articulated around a common center and purpose that shape and reinforce a closed and stable order. (Flew & Waisbord, 2015, p. 622)

Despite this critical interpretation, at the end of their article, Flew and Waisbord support the adoption of the notion of media system and its identification with single nation-states.

In the following lines, I will try to discuss in which sense the idea of the media system may be seen "as a conceptual leftover of mid-century functionalist sociology that envisioned society as constituted by interdependent parts with distinct functions" and which adaptations it may require. Indeed, as already discussed, in adopting the idea of media system, media scholars—in particular, Blumler and Gurevitch (1977)—were influenced by the conceptual developments that were taking place both in sociology and political science, and they were influenced particularly by the rich production of functionalist theory and its promising results in interpreting social and political phenomena.

Their interpretative schema was strongly based on the idea of society as divided into different systems interacting each other. This was also the interpretation that we suggested in *Comparing Media Systems*: a large part of the book was devoted to observing the framework of relations between the political system and the media system. More specifically, in our book, one of the major components of the idea of the system were the "institutions." The problem is that the Internet and all the opportunities that it offers to news production and circulation (social networks, citizens journalism, blogs, and so on) implies a new idea of the role and importance of "institutions" in determining the shape and the functioning of a system. In other words, we need to rethink the idea of media system and the role of institutions in shaping this idea.

In our book, we devoted particular attention to the role of the state in shaping the structure of the media system as to legislation and norms and interventions into the media system itself with economic subsidies, if not with more direct ownership. We identified three roles that the state could assume in the face of the media system: the roles of owner, regulator, and funder. For instance, the main difference between the liberal model on one side and the corporatist and polarized ones on the other derived from the level of intervention of the state in the media system and in society at large. There are very important interventions of the state in the democratic-corporatist and in the polarized-pluralist models, while the liberal model—with the exception of United Kingdom—is featured by the almost complete absence of state intervention in the field of new media.

We devoted particular attention to political parties as they represented important institutions in determining the level of partisanship of the news media, in setting the level of political parallelism, and also in affecting the recruitment and professional education of the journalists.

We devoted particular attention to the media organizations and media outlets as institutions. Indeed, they established values, rules, and procedures that deeply influence the work of professional journalists. Newsrooms themselves were important institutions setting professional routines. We also conceived professional ethics as a whole of formal rules established and controlled by institutions (ethical committees, press ombudsmen, and so on). The presence or absence of these institutions marks different models of professionalism and different media structures.

One of the major consequences of the technology-critical juncture is that it produces a general process of deinstitutionalization and then of reinstitutionalization. The process of deinstitutionalization, which will be illustrated in the next lines, affects the field of news media and the field of politics as well. Deinstitutionalization is seen as major feature of digital communication in a large part of the existing literature, even if these exact words are not used. Deinstitutionalization was already highlighted in the 1996 pioneering book by Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*. Since this book, most of the following literature pointed out how digital communication was pushing a process forward of citizens' empowerment stealing power and functions from already established institutions. Up to a few years ago, this was the dominant view of the changes brought about by digital revolution.

Deinstitutionalization means that today we observe the development of no formal organizations (if not those of the providers, as we shall discuss later) that produce and circulate news, comments, and evaluations. At least much less formal organizations are at work; rules for those who produce and circulate news become less pressing if they do not disappear at all. Geographical borders within which to apply formal rules as to several aspects of news media (e.g., property) become much weaker as well. I am referring to the activity of social media, blogs, citizen journalism, and so on. These are not stable organizations (at least they are much less stable than those that existed before); they operate without being submitted to established hierarchy, rules, and proceedings. They are not restricted within fixed national borders and therefore do not have to comply with specific legislations and cultural or ethical frameworks. Single citizens can take an active part in political life and may become important sources of news and opinion. They can interact with each other without being inserted within fixed proceedings.

In his last book, John Lloyd, mixing together his experience as a professional journalist and his scientific expertise, writes as to the new tendencies in journalism: "There is a new vision of journalism, call it the auteur school, in which the business shifts from being organized by institutions to being organized around single journalists with discrete following" (Lloyd, 2018, p. 326). By deinstitutionalization, I intend exactly this shift from organized, hierarchically rigid institutions toward single individuals, more or less experienced in journalism, who produce and circulate news able to motivate and affect public debate. Digital communication offers many opportunities for such a shift: bloggers (either more or less experienced) and citizen journalists spread news that are then taken by legacy media and become major topics of public discussion. Twitter and Facebook are other sources that are used by single citizens most often outside of any sort of institutions: with either their short messages or long posts, they mobilize other citizens and set the main important topics of public discussion.

A very similar process of deinstitutionalization takes place in the field of politics. This is a much "older" process that began decades ago with the gradual weakening of mass parties, while mass media,

television in particular, were increasing their political socialization functions (Mair, 2005, 2013; Manin, 1997). Digital communication, with its supply of immediate and direct relations between political figures and citizens, has pushed the crisis of traditional mass parties further.

The expression that Mattoni and Ceccobelli (2018) use to highlight this progressive weakening of mass parties in the face of the increasing digitalization seems appropriate. They talk of a dramatic shift from politics organized around stable and long-lasting institutions toward what they call "non-elite and more unconventional politics" (Mattoni & Ceccobelli, 2018). Traditional mass parties are disappearing because citizens can take an active role in political life through the different instruments offered by digital communication. In this way, they are able to give life to new forms of political engagement that many scholars have already underlined (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009).

In particular, we can observe two consequences of deinstitutionalization in the field of politics. On one side, the possibility of direct contact with the citizens has made superfluous the work of established organizations such as the mass parties were. Today, there is no need for party members and activists to communicate with the citizens; Internet offers many possibilities for such direct contact. Obviously, television already offered such a possibility. In 1996, David Farrel discussed the transformation from "labour intensive campaigns" (campaigns that were conducted essentially through the support of party activists) into "capital intensive campaigns" to indicate how television was offering the possibility of buying air time, therefore requiring a great amount of economic resources to communicate with the voters. Television was replacing the work of thousands of political activists to spread the message of the party and its candidates (Farrel, 1996). In 2016, Daniel Kreiss added to the ones outlined by Farrel a new type of campaign, the "technology intensive" one (Kreiss, 2016), to highlight how technology experts are now replacing the work of activists requiring money but mainly technological competencies to use all the opportunities offered by digital communication.

At the same time, digital communication, together with a number of other factors, has increased party volatility. Indeed, the possibility of direct communication between candidates and citizens has made possible the establishment of new parties within a very short period of time replacing the older and more established ones. In many cases, these are unconventional parties, such as the Five Stars Movement in Italy and Podemos in Spain. At the same time, new, even more conventional parties may be established in a short time; this is the case of En Marche, established in 2016 by Emmanuel Macron, who was able to win a presidential election the following year. The Blue and White Party in Israel has an even shorter and more successful life.

To sum it up, I may refer to another statement taken from the last book by John Lloyd. He writes, quoting the historian Jill Lepore:

> The Internet, like all new communication technologies, has contributed to a period of political disequilibrium, one in which, as always, party followers have been revolving against party leaders. It is unlikely but not impossible that the accelerating and atomizing forces of this latest communication revolution will bring about the end of the party system and the beginning of a new and wobblier political institution . . . at some point does each of us become a party of one. (Lloyd, 2018, p. 333)

Deinstitutionalization implies a move from institutions with their framework of established procedures and routines, a fixed hierarchy, and rules toward an empowerment of single and dispersed citizens who can take an active role both in news media production and circulation and in politics.

Often, deinstitutionalization goes together with a process of reinstitutionalization: the place of the old institutions is taken by new institutions of a different nature. This is particularly clear in the field of news production and circulation with the development of gigantic corporations like Google, Facebook, Amazon, and more that undermine the power of the state and all the framework of rules that the state produces. These new institutions tend to replace the old media corporations as well (Moore & Tambini, 2018). The successful title of Shoshana Zuboff's book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019) underlines how the production of capital is shifting from the "old," traditional corporations toward new ones whose commercial logic is completely different from that of the previous corporations: It is no longer based on the exchange of producers and consumers; rather, the consumers themselves become the goods to be circulated.

Reinstitutionalization moves the power to set the rules from the state toward newborn institutions; without exaggeration, we observe how, in spite of all the criticisms and requests coming from governments all around the world and from other international organizations, Facebook, like other new media platforms, still maintains the power to set the ways and the limits of the circulation of content on his platform, overcoming all the national borders.

Reinstitutionalization may be observed in the idea of the present hybrid media system as well; very often, the messages of digital media are able to affect public debate mostly if they are taken and recirculated by legacy media reaching in many cases a very large audience that is not seated within the digital environment. Media systems become more complex and multifaceted.

Some Ideas on How to Adapt *Comparing Media Systems* to the New Media Age

What has been said so far implies some afterthoughts on the notion of the media system. As mentioned previously, *Comparing Media Systems* suggested that institutions such as the state, political parties, and news organizations played an important role in shaping the structure and functioning of the media system. Today, their role needs to be reconsidered in face of the consequences of the technology critical juncture.

In our book, political parallelism represented one of the major dimensions determining the differences among systems. This dimension loses a large part of its importance. Political parallelism was mostly based on the closeness between the news media institutions on one side (e.g., newspapers and television companies) and political organizations on the other. First, there were close links of ownership and partisanship with the mass parties; later, these links became more volatile and less direct being based just on common ideological and cultural frameworks.

On both sides, that of politics and that of the news media, institutions tend to become weaker and less organized, up to the point of disappearing. Today, social media involve single citizens who, most of the time, are not part of established organizations, while mass parties all around the world are weaker and less

ideologically recognizable. I do not intend to say that newspapers and TV corporations are completely out of the play, but now they are supported by many less structured, more dispersed sources of information. In the previous lines, I stressed the importance of "hybrid systems," but there is no doubt that today, digital media are able to establish more direct and faster networks of communication with the citizens and at the same time they establish networks of connection among the citizens themselves.

Similarly, "non-elite and unconventional politics" are based on the initiatives of single citizens or poorly organized movements. Even when they end in organized political parties, their volatility rarely allows the establishment of close links with existing news outlets to build up networks of political parallelism. The case of the Italian Five Stars Movement is a good example: its short existence has not allowed the construction of strong links with the existing news organizations, and moreover, its unconventional nature and structure refuses any placement on the traditional axes left and right, and liberal and conservative (Biorcio & Natale, 2013; Corbetta & Gualmini, 2013). Political parallelism is becoming less important in the face of a fragmented, less institutionalized, and more volatile political and media landscape.

In the field of politics, one dimension remains an important matter of analysis. This is the level of political polarization: in the new media ecology, it assumes specific features. New media and legacy media commercialization have produced a dramatic increase of political polarization in many parts of the world (Prior, 2007). This has to do with the more dispersed (and less institutionalized) structure of the news producers that do not have to go under any process of control and do not necessarily have to give life to procedures of negotiation. Hate speech and incivility, which represent good indicators of the level of political polarization, often derive from modes of news production and circulation that are based on the direct relation between single persons and net consumers missing any form of mediation by institutions.

In our book, professionalism was another important, differentiating dimension. Today, it becomes hard to talk about professionalism when news are produced and circulated by single citizens, such as bloggers and Facebook and Twitter users, who lack any professional experience and training in journalism; they are not part of any organization, and therefore they are not forced to comply with rules, controls, or hierarchical decisions. Many of the more established news providers tend to recruit professionals who are more experienced in digital technology than in journalism. Codes of conduct and self-regulation were the parameters measuring the level of professionalism in legacy journalism; they were deriving from institutions whose area of action is now dramatically narrowing as full-time journalists mix together with people who circulate news for very different reasons and because they perform different jobs and professions (Bruns & Highfield, 2012; Keen, 2008). In a way, digital communication re-creates the situation that existed at the origin of journalism when it was performed by individuals who had other, more remunerative professions (Chalaby, 1996).

Obviously, the state as an institution maintains an important role in shaping media systems but with interventions that are partly different from the ones played in the era of legacy media. In *Comparing Media Systems*, we suggested that the state could play three important roles as owner, funder, and regulator. It seems that in digital communication, the role of owner has almost disappeared, although the state can maintain quite important functions as funder and regulator.

The normative role remains important even as it is contrasted by the enormous power of corporations that go beyond the national borders, rendering, in many cases, useless national regulations. In many authoritarian cases, the state is intervening in this field with censorship aims that obviously may limit or deeply affect the development of digital communication.

An important area of intervention of the state in the era of digital communication is the construction and maintenance of communication infrastructures. This has become an important task of the state and therefore an important differentiating dimension between contexts of where the state is providing good and efficient frameworks for digital communication (such as broadband), and contexts where the state is slow in providing such a framework if is not limiting the possible development of digital communication infrastructures (Cornia, 2016).

The level of market fragmentation is an important distinguishing dimension in the new digital ecology: in *Comparing Media Systems* we paid particular attention to the diffusion of mass press and television. Today, scholars need to observe how new media develop in the face of legacy media, paying attention to the possible connections between legacy media and new media and the level of concentration and fragmentation of property. The level of media hybridity becomes an important theme of research. Big corporations, such as Facebook and Google, have to become subjects of analysis as they embody the process of reinstitutionalization I was talking about.

Rational legal authority remains an important differentiating dimension, even in the era of digital communication. Clientelism, media instrumentalization, particularism, and low respect for the existing rules do not disappear because new media have become an important source of information and relation among citizens. Indeed, these are part of the cultural heritage of each country that is deeply inserted within the political culture of the country itself; it affects society at large and not just the field of news media. Path dependence meets the "critical juncture" caused by digital revolution.

And nevertheless, digital communication may affect the area of rational legal authority as well. There is no doubt that digitalization increases all the possibilities of control over behaviors and actions that contrast with public interest. In this way, particularism and the violation of social norms may become subjects of public control and discussion.

The digital age seems to require some adaptations of the interpretative schema that we proposed in our 2004 book. In particular, the attention of the researchers has to move from the institutions—such as the state, political institutions, and media organizations—toward a field of investigation that appears to be more dispersed and therefore more difficult to be inserted within clear borders, established procedures, and routines. This is the field where single citizens may take an active role as communication producers and political actors. At the same time, the role of new media corporations needs to be placed under investigation together with the whole of interactions between legacy and digital media.

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