



Youth political representation and access to the public sphere

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This presentation aims to provide some **theoretical framework** in order to analyse the **difficulties that young people face in accessing the public sphere** as political actors.

This presentation is partly based on the data obtained in the EURYKA's project. Concretely, results from work package 2 (media representation analysis) will be presented here.

Terren, L.; Clua, A.; Ferran-Ferrer, N. (2019). "Falling on deaf ears? An analysis of youth political claims in the European mainstream press", *American Behavioral Scientist*, 63 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764219885420>



Research questions

- Are all young people, in all their diversity, equally likely to have their political claims relayed by the mainstream press?
- Does the growing prevalence of social media communication have an impact on mainstream media agenda setting?
- Does social media contribute to more equality and diversity in mainstream media coverage?



Theoretical Framework

Key concepts:

- Public sphere
- Consent/Conflict
- Agonism/Antagonism
- Mainstream press
- Sources of information
- Young people as political actors



Theoretical Framework

Herman, E. S., & Chomsky, N. (1988). *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*. New York: Pantheon Books. ISBN: 0375714499.

Mouffe, C. (2005). *On the political*. London, New York: Routledge. ISBN: 0415305217.



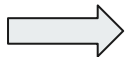
Theoretical Framework

- Public sphere and communicative action, according to [Habermas](#): Deliberative processes are opportunities for rational common sense .



Habermas: Political debate must be based on consensus

- [Agonistic](#) pluralism , according to [Mouffe](#): Consensus can only be built at the expense of the dissenters' voice. The constitution of citizens as political subjects goes through their identification with the values that give meaning to the different conflicting identities that make up society



Mouffe: Political debate must recognise conflict



Theoretical Framework

Agonism vs. antagonism (Mouffe, 2005).

With the recent growth of populism and the hate discourses, the evolution towards **antagonistic pluralism** becomes a new “normality” in the media agenda.

In fact, fragmentation of public sphere into isolated echo chambers is one of the threats that media discourses face today.

The conflict translates into a struggle for the hegemony of a given discourse by denying, injuring or merely silencing the "other".



Theoretical Framework

The role of mainstream media, according to Herman & Chomsky (1988):

Drawing on Walter Lippmann's concept of 'manufacturing consent', Herman and Chomsky (1988) analysed the way in which the mainstream media constituted themselves as tools of establishment propaganda. It is particularly useful to look back at their five filters of editorial bias:

1. the business structure,
2. the dependence on advertising,
3. [the nature of the information sources](#),
4. the external forms of control over content
5. [the antagonistic logic](#) with which reality is framed.



Theoretical Framework

Sources of information:

The mainstream media have established a routine of privileging information sources that are linked to governments' press offices, institutions or large companies. Within this context, **the actors that generate information outside these circuits are not considered as reliable sources and, therefore, their acts or claims are not recognized as newsworthy.** The mainstream media have thus managed to give the impression that the veracity of information is directly linked to the status, power and prestige of the sources.



Theoretical Framework

Antagonism:

The mass media eclipse realities that do not correspond to the normalcy established by the elites' hegemonic discourse. This means that **the voices that do not fit the hegemonic standards of 'normalcy' or 'correctness' are silenced**. The 'others', considered as anti-social or undesirable elements thus do not have the capacity of agency nor are represented in the mainstream media.



Methodology

WP2: Newspaper analysis:

- Content analysis of newspaper articles (mainstream press).
- 5 newspapers, 500 political claims per each of the 9 countries.
- Coverage 2010-16.
- Search terms: young people, adolescent*, student*, youth.
- Articles randomly selected and coded 100 political claims per newspaper.



Main findings

- Young people's voice represents a minority. **Young people is misrepresented in the European mainstream press**
 - Low proportion (20.8%) of political claims made by youth actors



Main findings

- Social inequalities seem reflected in (and reproduced by) the mainstream media, as we observed a clear tendency of the newspapers in our sample to relay the voice of young people who are more educated and socially included, at the expense of disadvantaged youth groups and diversity.



Main findings

- While the new media have developed and spread rapidly, and even though many scholars have claimed that social media are transforming journalism, our data suggest that their growing prominence is not reflected in the mainstream newspapers analysed here. This finding could suggest that, so far, the long-predicted **potential of the Internet and social media in the democratisation of the public sphere has not materialised**, at least when it comes to the mainstream newspapers analysed here.



Conclusions

- Retrieved data seems to support Herman and Chomsky's assertion that **the mainstream media have established a routine of privileging elite sources** that are linked to governments' press offices, institutions or large companies, at the expense of 'non-hegemonic' groups (in this case young people from a non-normative profile) and diversity.



Conclusions

- Findings relate back to Chantal Mouffe's view on hegemonic relations and agonistic pluralism, as well as to Herman and Chomsky's idea of the antagonistic logic of mainstream media discourses. They not only illustrate the **absence of an arena of democratic debate** in which this idea of agonistic pluralism can take place and in which differences can be confronted, but also mirror **substantial inequalities in the representation of different youth socio-economic groups in the mainstream newspapers** analysed



Conclusions

- Data points to Herman and Chomsky's idea of the **mainstream media's rigid understanding of news sourcing**. On the one hand, it remains to be demonstrated that the mainstream media have incorporated social media and its actors as 'serious' sources of information. On the other hand, the fact that social media discourse is more porous to 'non-hegemonic' information makes them less attractive from the perspective of the established canons of newsworthiness



... and challenges

- The fact that no significant differences were found between newspapers of different editorial lines (e.g., between conservative and liberal newspapers) should encourage further research, not on the ideology of different news outlets but on the business models that govern them.



... and challenges

- To be able to make a leap forward in mapping and understanding the representation of young people in the mass media today, it would be necessary to take into consideration all the journalistic projects that, while not identifying with the mainstream press or depending on the interests of the establishment, have a wide circulation on digital platforms.
- A more comprehensive study could go further and take into account what journalists themselves have to say about journalistic routines and the questions addressed in this article as well as how these mainstream media are run and function on a day-to-day basis.



... and challenges

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Thanks for your attention!

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