



Bettina Mottura, Letizia Osti,
and Giorgia Riboni (editors),
Media and Politics.
Discourses, Cultures, and Practices

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In contemporary societies, media play a decisive role in building and shaping public opinion. *Vox populi* reflects the opinions and beliefs of the majority ('the voice of the people,' indeed) but a twofold interpretation can be inferred; is mainstream opinion a truthful and objective vision of things, or is it shaped by the pivotal influence of media? The so-called *information era* we have been experiencing since the proliferation of digital and online data streams raises the doubt; the flow of information we have at our disposal gives us the opportunity to benefit from a plurality of voices, but at the same time the overflow available anytime may increase the risk to deceive reality. Media, perceived in a position of power, could trespass the boundary of providing knowledge, triggering a proper dependency role as pointed out by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur back in 1976 (when information was far away from being so digitally embedded in our everyday life), which could also be mutual—as people depend on media, but also vice versa.

In stating things, media represent the perfect echo chamber through which expressing and strengthening visions, rather than realities or truths. It derives that media are more likely to be associated with the most apt form of expression of topics that represent the pillars of democracies and societies in all four corners of the earth.



Such topics spark public debate and are divisive by their nature, since they drag a substantial share of people into heated stances. Some of the most discordant issues could be represented by religion or sports, but the most important category that benefits from (and is subject to) media power and influence is probably politics.

Politics is a long-standing belief in human beings (such claim recalls Aristotle's theory according to which "Man is by nature a political animal"), and this is the reason why it has a crucial role in public opinion—especially when contrasting views come into play. Therefore, a vast body of literature sheds light on the relationship between media and politics, which are closely intertwined. Every political-related event, no matter the country in which it occurs, no matter the language(s) involved, generates different stances from all stakeholders involved in it at different levels (from politicians to common people/voters), and media have a binding role in both denoting and representing facts from different facets. In this framework, language has a key role in providing such experience so that the ways through which politics is expressed (by means of words but also "other forms of representation from language," Taylor 3) have been studied in academic contexts with an incessant production that confirms the floridity of examples in this union.

The book *Media and Politics. Discourses, Cultures and Practices* edited by Bettina Mottura, Letizia Osti, and Giorgia Riboni is a case in point in this scenario. The book aims at describing the relationship between political issues and their representation via media outlets from different perspectives, thus providing a thorough review of the various forms of representation of politics and policies via different media, even from a multimodal perspective. The book is organised in three main sections (News production and Reproduction; Political Communication; Narrative and Counter-Narratives), but at the same time the contributions can be grouped following two main axes: the first is set in geographical terms, while the other is mode-dependent (following the deep-rooted scheme that makes up register according to Halliday). Being politics a global phenomenon, a criterion for interpreting the works in this book would depend on the countries—and their resulting languages—which have been considered by the authors to provide their empirical analyses. A proper 'Political World Tour,' then, comes out: there are eight papers dealing with China or Chinese-related issues, four involving Italian politics, two for US and Egypt, one for Belgium, Greece, Serbia, Turkey, UK, and Persian-speaking countries (such as Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan). There is also a contribution in a multi-language perspective involving five Western countries, and one paper focusing on transnational organisations (UN and WHO). From this geographical standpoint it is quite clear that one of the aims of the editors was also to include a vast range of realities in which the relationship between media and politics is somehow divisive and unclear, especially in providing common people with proper information (e.g., the controversial political situation and the blurred role of media in China; or the recent turmoil in Egypt with new media playing a decisive role in spreading uncensored information). It derives that all essays make a substantial contribution in providing a specific point of view from different standpoints involving politics & policies seen from an all-encompassing range of media—or *medium*, as Marshall McLuhan put it in 1964.



In this medium-based perspective, another alternative categorisation can be carried out: considering the diversity of channels through which politics can be performed, the contributions in this book analyse politics-based data in different ways. Therefore, an early partition would consider the kind of political language analysed starting from spoken vs. written vs. other media-related forms. Sixteen contributions take written data into consideration, while six analyse data from spoken interactions. There is also space for two contributions that investigate political communication deriving from other semiotic forms (i.e. images or mixed media), thus highlighting the choice to include an all-encompassing range of expressions in the dissemination of political views. A further subset would consider the dichotomy new vs. traditional media, with seventeen authors focusing on traditional and mainstream forms of political representation and six analysing new media for their contributions.

Media and Politics makes its significant contribution to the studies that involve two pillars of our societies. The interpretations in describing such relationship are many-sided and embrace different viewpoints; in particular, its most remarkable feature is to see how politics is represented in the media from both a micro-analysis of language (focusing on the use of grammatical, lexical and syntactical structures) and a macro-analysis that involves the definition of a proper genre with ideological implications. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is undoubted that the relationship between these two areas has strengthened to such an extent that an almost unified idea comes out. After all, in our era politics on a large scale is impossible without the supporting aid of media; and given its preeminent position, in many cases media have been embracing a political stance in creating enclaves rather than audiences.

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