A Media-in-Practices Approach to Investigate the Nexus Between Digital Media and Activists' Daily Political Engagement

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In the past decade, literature flourished that investigated the nexus between social movements and media from a media practice perspective. The article draws on this body of work to show how we might apply practice theory following at least three different approaches on social movements and media: media-as-practices, media-related-practices, and *media-in-practices* approaches. Then, it proposes an operational definition of practice to investigate social movements and media from a *media-in-practices* approach, also introducing the method of *media practices maps interviews*. Finally, the article applies the *media-in-practices* approach at the analytical level focusing on the practice of coordinating the workflow in the daily grassroots political engagement of Greek, Italian, and Spanish activists.

Keywords: digital media, media practices, practice theory, social movements, Greece, Italy, Spain

Theories of practices date back about five decades, with the work of prominent sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and Anthony Giddens (1979) setting the basis for the first wave of practice theorists. These attempted to resolve certain prevailing dichotomies in the social sciences, including those opposing agency and structure, individuals and societies, and subjects and objects. A second wave built its knowledge on the previous one, while also expanding both the conceptual vocabulary and the fields of application of practice theories (Postill, 2009).

Despite theories of practices displaying a diverse ensemble of assumptions and postulations about the place and role of practice in societies, they share some relevant characteristics. To begin with, they all

consider practices as the most significant locus of the social. In so doing, the attention shifts from the actors to the things that the actors do. The understanding of societies passes through the analysis of how social actors enact, perform, and produce social actions, not through the analysis of the intentions of the actors (Cohen, 1996). Although they do not deny the existence of social actors, social processes, and social institutions, theories of practices look at practices as the constitutive elements of societies or, to use McMillan's (2017) words, "as one of the main building blocks of social reality: they are the basis upon which institutions persist, social structures depend, and historical processes unfold" (p. 21). From this viewpoint, practices—while they are, of course, inherently social—do not exhaust themselves in the social realm.

Another relevant commonality of practice theories is that authors do not consider practices as a reified and opaque conceptual construct, but rather as a dynamic and heuristic device that includes several elements. In this regard, despite the existence of many types of theories of practices, there seems to be an agreement among scholars, who tend to "understand practices as embodied, materially mediated arrays of human action (or activities), centrally organized around shared understanding" (Savolainen, 2008, p. 24). Andrea Reckwitz (2002) also provides a definition that points to the different elements that belong to a practice. He suggests that a practice is "a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (p. 250). Furthermore, according to Reckwitz, all these elements are interconnected up to the point that a practice cannot be reduced to any one element; it is not possible to understand a practice only by focusing on the mental activities that it entails, or the background knowledge that is mobilized to sustain it. It is only by considering a practice from the wholeness of its elements that we can access, analyze, and understand it.

Starting from this understanding of practices, several fields in social and political sciences have begun to explore the potential of practice theories. Scholars in international relations (Bueger & Gadinger, 2014), the sociology of consumption (Halkier, Katz-Gerro, & Martens, 2011; Warde, 2005), and organizational studies (Gherardi & Strati, 2012; Nicolini, 2013; Orlikowski, 2007) have developed their perspectives on how a practice approach might foster a more grounded understanding of the topics that pertain to each of their fields of reference. We find a similar move in the sociology of media, where scholars use the concept of media practices to investigate diverse media-related phenomena such as journalism (Ahva, 2017), video games (Roig, San Cornelio, Ardèvol, Alsina, & Pagès, 2009), and political communication (Driessens, Raeymaeckers, Verstraeten, & Vandenbussche, 2010), among others.

A terrain that proved fertile for the development of media practice approaches is the one related to the study of media and social movement, situated at the crossroads of media sociology and political sociology. This literature has three clear merits: It has contributed to render studies on social movements less centered on one specific type of media device or platform at a time, less inclined toward a generalist understanding of the relationship between media and movements, and less prone to a deterministic structural reading of the role of media in social movements (Mattoni, 2017). As a result, the extant literature on the subject matter acknowledges the interconnected use of different types of media within social movements, takes into account the contexts in which activists use media, and highlights the agency that social movement actors exert toward media, including mainstream media.

In so doing, however, such literature has predominantly endeavored to reveal taxonomies of media practices being used in social movements, hence listing all the different things that activists do with media. In other words, it has mostly focused on what media practices are in the framework of social movements' collective action, rather than on the consequences of media practices for activists and their grassroots organizations. Furthermore, it has done so by taking into consideration all those moments in which hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated, in the streets and online, against their governments and other protest targets. In short, the literature on this topic is predominantly descriptive and focused on the peak of mobilizations, rather than on the latent moments between peaks. This article, instead, builds on existing scholarly work to develop and discuss a way to employ practice theory to gain a deeper understanding of how activists' interactions with media change, or do not change, how they carry on the daily practices related to their grassroots political engagement in stages of latency.

The next section discusses three different approaches that scholars can follow to apply practice theory to investigate the relationship between media and movements: *media-as-practices*, *media-related-practices*, and *media-in-practices approaches.* Then, it proposes an operational definition of practice to investigate media and movements according to the *media-in-practices* approach, also introducing how the method of *media practices maps interviews*. As a third step, this article employs the practice of coordinating the workflow in the daily political engagement of Greek, Italian, and Spanish activists as a testbed for the application of the *media-in-practices* approach at the analytical level.

Media-as-Practices, Media-Related-Practices, and Media-in-Practices
Approaches in the Study of Social Movements

Taking on Nick Couldry's suggestion to look at media as neither texts nor institutions, but rather as a nexus of doings and sayings that go beyond the usual distinction between media producers and media consumers (Couldry, 2004, 2012), in the past decades, scholars with different disciplinary backgrounds have employed a media practice perspective to investigate the multifaceted relationship between media and social movements.

Scholars who employ a media practice lens have moved beyond an understanding of media as mere tools in the hands of activists. Instead, they acknowledge the existence of a multifaceted interaction between activists and media, social movement organizations and mediation, social movements and mediatization (Mattoni & Trerè, 2014). Additionally, this literature pushes forward an understanding of digital media in contemporary activism that manages to recognize the still important roles of older media, such as the print press, and nonmediated communication, such as face-to-face interactions. This move toward a more encompassing look at media in grassroots activism has been a relevant step in social movements studies, in that it allowed overcoming certain lasting biases in scientific literature, including the tendency to focus on just one type of media organization (i.e., mainstream media or alternative media) or one type of media technology (i.e., digital technologies or analog technologies) to explain the interaction between media and social movements. In a nutshell, the media practice lens has allowed scholars to understand how activists rely and have, in fact, always relied on a broad "repertoire of communication" (Mattoni, 2013), and how activists decide to use specific media in the pursuit of different

types of objectives, including the recruitment of new participants, the organization of protest actions, or the formation of shared discourses on contentious issues. In analyzing media practices concerning social movements, scholars moved away from a media-centric perspective that puts media—and digital media—at the forefront of theoretical explanations on how social movements develop in societies, hence avoiding deterministic conceptions of media technologies. This passage had its positive sides: Scholars not only stopped, to a great extent, treating digital media as a force capable of determining the shape of a social movement, but they also constructed rich narratives about the many types of interactions between grassroots activists and digital media. When looking at this body of knowledge, it is clear that those studies that embrace a practice approach do so in different ways. The remainder of this section, then, casts light on two of the most common ways to use a practice approach to media and social movements: first, *media-as-practices* in the social movement milieu; second, *media-related practices* of activists engaged in grassroots politics. Next, a third relevant yet little explored approach—namely, *media-in-practices* will also be introduced, which will be used as a reference framework in this article to demonstrate its potentials for the study of activists' interactions with media during latency stages.

First, some scholars look at *media-as-practices* in the framework of social movements and grassroots politics, hence focusing on certain types of media that are different from mainstream media—for instance, alternative media, citizen media, and radical media. Although not necessarily and not always embedded in the social movement milieu, these types of media have much in common with grassroots politics. Indeed, they imply a form of grassroots participation that takes place outside institutional politics, often guided by patterns of political organization that aim to go beyond the more hierarchical structures of representative democracies. Furthermore, they point to an immediate political project; creating alternative, citizen, and radical media means broadening the possibilities of communication beyond the dominant media that are available in societies. By looking at these media from a practice perspective, scholars pay attention to the practices that allow them to come into existence and continue to exist over time (Stephansen & Treré, 2019). From this viewpoint, then, media as "citizen media" are seen neither as texts that circulate in societies, bringing with them alternative ways of looking at the world, nor as organizations that make the existence of such specific types of media possible. Instead, "understanding citizen media as practice means moving beyond a concern with the capacity of such media to make visible alternative perspectives and experiences" (Stephansen, 2016, p. 29). It implies considering how, among other things, citizen media come into being through practices, how citizen media practitioners interpret these practices, and how citizen media as practices might orient other practices not directly linked to citizen media. Some studies of hacktivism share a similar approach and consider hacktivism not through the lenses of its direct intervention in so-called cyberspace but rather as a radical media practice based on certain types of technological objects, and entrenched with specific meanings related to what technologies are and should be (Milan, 2015).

Second, another way of looking at media and social movements from the perspective of theories of practice is through *media-related practices,* thus examining how activists develop specific types of practices that are related to the media, hence looking at how they simultaneously do things with and say things about a broad range of media, from mainstream to alternative, from digital to nondigital media. For instance, in his study of the activist network Dissent! and its actions during the 2005 Gleneagles G8 Summit, Patrick McCurdy focuses on the way activists reacted to the presence of mainstream media during their protest actions (2011). Starting from the well-known definition of Reckwitz (2002), Alice Mattoni has

analyzed a specific type of media-related practice dubbed activist media practices, and the implied interactions with media professionals and media objects, while also developing an understanding of the media environment in which activists act (Mattoni, 2012). Similarly, Sandra Jeppesen and her coauthors looked at the media-related practices of profeminist autonomous activists' groups in Canada. They found that for social movement actors the media practices that are related to alternative media go beyond the binary understanding of internal versus external audiences, given that these actors engage with "a spectrum of practices from hyper-local to global" (Jeppesen, Kruzynski, Lakoff, & Sarrasin, 2014, p. 24). Finally, when considering media-related practices, scholars also focused on those practices that imply specific actions to change media organizations, infrastructures, and technologies, hence emphasizing the power relations between media institutions and those who challenge them to change the very fabric of the mediated everyday life (Kannengießer & Kubitschko, 2017; Kubitschko, 2018).

Third, instead of looking at media as practices or media-related practices, it is possible to consider *media-in-practices* that sustain social movements. In this case, we should consider how different types of media devices and services intermingle with a given practice, hence examining how such technological devices and services are used in the reality of practices as they happen. These practices might entail different forms of engagements with media, both as technological objects and as specific professional figures that work within the media industry, such as journalists. Some practices might be related to the media in the first place: Activists, for instance, seek visibility for their groups and their protests, hence reaching out to different types of media and, in doing so, embedding in their visibility practices different types of media objects and subjects. In this case, mainstream media and social media might be crucial for activists, and hence at the center of their practices. Others might, instead, not be oriented or related to the media in the first place: Activists, for instance, continuously engage in the practice of organizing their political work, meeting fellow activists, discussing with them, making collective decisions and considering the strategies they might deploy to sustain their activists' groups. Some media technologies might help to reach this goal, but the practice of organizing might not entirely revolve around them.

This perspective seems to go beyond the elaboration of descriptive taxonomies of media as practices or media-related practices in social movements and reveals the explanatory potential that theories of practices have when it comes to the intricate relationship between agency and structure. Anne Kaun (2016), for instance, illustrates how activists belonging to social movements that developed in different periods of economic crisis, in Europe and the U.S., embedded media technologies into their practices. By "combining an archaeological analysis with protest activism," she explains "the media practices and their changes over time since the 1930s follow and confirm specific regimes of times that are inherent to media technologies" (p. 31). Focusing on the practices of information production, distribution, and consumption in the framework of activism, Kaun (2016) casts a light on the extent to which different types of media played a role in these practices. Similarly, Hilde Stephansen investigates the broad practices of communication of activist groups with limited Internet access and limited social media use in the framework of the World Social Forum. In so doing, she deconstructs the idea of global connectedness that is linked with transnational movements efforts and shows that the communication practices of indigenous activists are "a clear claim to globality—to being part of the global—but it is one that is grounded in a commitment to place and community" (Stephansen, 2019, p. 13). Furthermore,

while not engaging with a practice theory approach in a direct manner, other scholars also considered the impact of digital technologies on organizational dynamics in social movements. Literature on this subject matter focused on many movements across the globe, especially during their mobilization stage, including the Global Justice Movement that emerged late in the 1990s (Juris, 2008; Kavada, 2013), in Occupy Wall Street in the U.S. (Gerbaudo, 2017; Juris, 2012; Nielsen, 2013) and the #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico (Treré, 2015).

The remainder of this article will push this approach forward by looking more explicitly at the role of media in social movements from the viewpoint of a practice theory approach. More precisely, it will look at media in the practice of coordinating the workflow that sustain the daily political engagement of activists within their social movement organizations. This practice includes all those actions that make possible the coordination of social movement actors and their daily functioning, such as making decisions, formulating tasks, and assigning them to other members of their groups. Before applying such an approach to the practice of coordinating the workflow, though, it is essential to take a step back first to discuss how to: operationalize practices when following a *media-in-practices* approach; devise a method that is suitable to gather and analyze data on how media entangle with practices.

A Proposal to Gather and Analyze Data When Applying the Media-in-Practices Approach

The first step needed to employ a *media-in-practices* approach is to construct an operational definition of practice that will then serve as a guide to devise strategies of data gathering and data analysis. A starting point toward this endeavor is to consider practices as nexus of actions: actions and practices are linked precisely because the former is the "concrete, particular, datable events" of which "practices are simply their generalized form—a class of such events whose various members share certain attributes" (McMillan, 2017, p. 21). However, limiting practices to a nexus of actions would be reductive, for when we look at them, we also see the body of those who perform the action, the objects they use, the other people they relate to, the motivations that lead to the action, and, additionally, the perceptions that guide them (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2002). From this perspective, practices hence become visible through the performances of specific actions. With this regard, as Reckwitz (2002) argues, practices are never simply focused on the individual who acts on them; knowing how to implement and understand practices is something that is shared not only by the individual who acts but also by those who observe that individual. Elisabeth Shove, Milka Pantzar, and Matt Watson (2012) also address the multidimensional aspect of practices and argue that each practice includes three different elements: materials and things, competences and know-how, meanings, and knowledge. These three elements are linked one with the other, and, when performing actions, people establish these links, change them into other types of links, and even break existing links, hence transforming the practice itself (Shove et al., 2012). A proper understanding of practices, then, does not merely pass from a recognition of its main elements, it also is an understanding of the connections between these elements. From this viewpoint, Susan Scott and Wanda Orlikowsky (2014) suggest going even further: Through their reading of Karen Barad (2007), they argue that practices should be understood not from the links that keep together their different elements, but rather as proper "constitutive entanglements" of such different elements, that present themselves as deeply interlaced, each being constitutive of the other.

This article draws on all these insights to propose an operational definition of practice that includes three dimensions. First, the social, which refers to the actions of which the practices are more general phenomena of and that is performed into a social world and by social actors that have the skills to perform them. Then, the material, that points at the many and various concrete objects that such actions involve. Finally, the symbolic, that is linked to the meanings, motivations, emotions, and knowledge that subjects assign to actions and objects, and that also speaks about how these actions should be performed and understood. When looking at practices, though, these three dimensions are not separate in that they constitute each other as people perform actions in specific contexts, linking objects and meanings, social roles, and skills into consistent entanglements. When employing a *media-in-practices* approach, the starting point certainly is the material dimension—that is, the media technologies embedded in practices that activists perform in their daily grassroots political engagement; but then the analysis also extends to the symbolic and social dimension to provide a grounded understanding of the connections between the different dimensions that characterize practices.

The second step is to think about which methods would be more suitable to gather and analyze data on media in practices to grasp the three dimensions mentioned above, and their entanglements, at the same time. Scholars employed participant observation, in-depth interviews and, to a lesser extent, archival analysis to study the media-as-practices and media-related-practices approaches in the framework of social movements (e.g., Jeppesen et al., 2014; Kaun, 2016; Mattoni, 2012; McCurdy, 2011; Stephansen, 2019). These ethnographic methods proved to be excellent for the collection of thick data on what activists do with the media and what they say about them. With their ability to allow space for the interviewees' self-reflection, in-depth interviews are certainly a good method to grasp data both on the social and symbolic dimensions of practices; however, they always risk leaving out relevant material aspects related to the practice. Similarly, participant observation might impart a wealth of data on the material and social dimension of practices, while leaving more in the background the meanings that activists attach to practices. These limitations become even more relevant when embarking in comparative research that wants to address the *media-in-practices* approach within different contexts. This article seeks to overcome these limitations by presenting a technique of data gathering called *media practices maps interviews*—devised in the framework of a research project that aimed at investigating how media interlace with grassroots politics when people are not in the streets, in Greece, Italy, and Spain.

This technique implied two stages within the same session, involving one research participant at a time. In the first stage, the interviewer drew a map based on the interviewee's answer to the open question, "If you think about an ordinary day, what is the first thing you do when you wake up that is connected with your political activity? Do you use any media or technological devices?" To contextualize the use of media in the interviewees' overall repertoires of communication, the interviewers also deliberately asked interviewees to include in their accounts those moments in which they employed face-to-face interactions. As Figure 1 shows, the resulting map represented activists' actions and linked them to the material elements, which are the media devices and the media services that activists employed in the course of their actions.
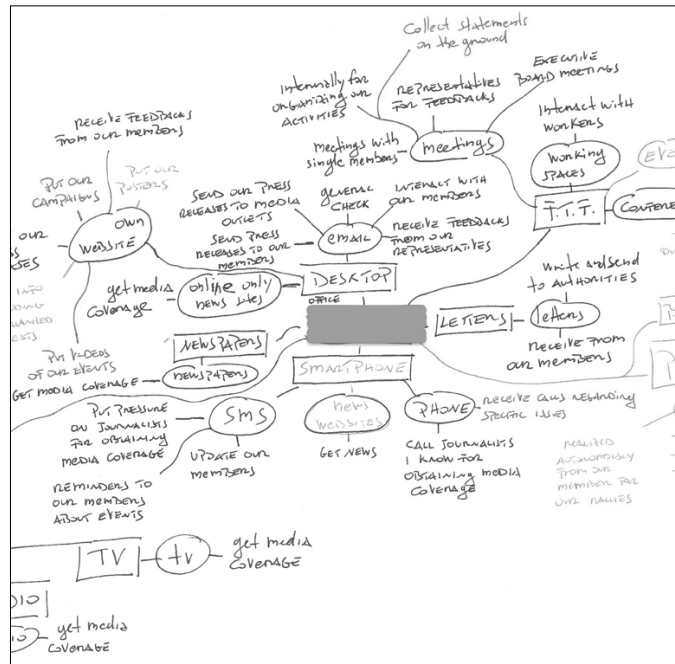
Figure 1. A portion of media practice maps interviews.

Once the map was drawn, the second stage of the interview consisted of a set of open questions that started from a broad reflection on the map and continued with other questions about actual and potential situations related to the use of media in the daily political work of the interviewee. This second stage of the interview includes the opportunity to: Reconstruct the meanings that activists assign to their use of media devices/services in the course of their actions; point out the social dimension that characterized their actions, with reflections on the activists' organizations features as well as on the activists' role within the organization and the broader social movement milieu.

With its focus on actions and the three related elements—material, social and symbolic—the drawing of the map and the subsequent in-depth interview allowed for a thick reconstruction of both the material and social level of practices.

In the framework of the abovementioned research project, we interviewed a total of 46 activists in three countries (N = 17 in Italy, 17 in Spain, and 12 in Greece), after being selected following a purposive sampling technique. The resulting sample included activists involved in the most relevant social movement organizations related to two contentious issues—anticorruption and labor uncertainty—and ranging from informal and resourceless activist groups to formal and resourceful activist organizations. The media practice maps interviews produced two datasets: 46 maps, which included chains of media devices, media services, and actions related to the daily political work of the interviewees; the corresponding 46 semistructured interviews, which included information on the meanings that the interviewees attach to their use of media in the framework of different practices.

We then digitalized the maps and imported them and the interview transcripts in the software MAXQDA. There, we coded the maps following an inductive strategy to obtain configurations of media devices, media services, and actions starting from what the interviewees told about their daily political engagement and the media they use with its regard. We then grouped these configurations into four different practices that inductively emerged from the first round of coding: coordinating the workflow, gaining visibility, seeking information, and sustaining connection. As for the 46 semistructured interviews, we applied a deductive coding strategy that started from the four leading practices identified in the previous stage of the analysis. Beyond the coding for stories that relate to specific types of practices, codes related to the meanings that activists assigned to the four different practices were also constructed, this time in an inductive way. To concretely speak about what such data analysis was able to bring on the surface, this article discusses the results related to the practice of coordinating the workflow as it has been defined above.

Analyzing Media in the Material, Symbolic, and Social Dimensions of Practices

When applying the *media-in-practices* approach to understand activists' interactions with media during latency stages, we first started from considering the three dimensions separately, gathering the most relevant insights on each of them concerning the practice of coordinating the workflow. Due to space limitations, and to the overall scope of this article, what follows sketches the main findings without discussing them in-depth and also treating its cross-country comparative angle only superficially. We will briefly explain which type of knowledge on activists' interactions with media during latency stages we can gain when considering each of the three dimensions that characterize the practice of coordinating the workflow and the role of digital and nondigital media in it.

The Material Dimension

When investigating the material dimension of practice from a *media-in-practices* approach, the emphasis is both on the objects that activists employ, like smartphones and laptops, and on the platforms and services that they use through these objects, like instant messaging platforms or phone calls. Considering which media devices and services activists use, or not, in the course of the routine organizational activities is relevant to understand which type of material elements are at the center of the practice and which others, instead, are at its periphery. In this regard, Table 1 shows which media devices and which media services activists mostly refer to when describing what they do to keep things moving and get things done within activists' collectives, associations, and organizations.

Table 1. Most Common Media Device/Service Combinations.

Greece	Italy	Spain
Phone call on smartphone	WhatsApp individual chat on smartphone	WhatsApp group chat on smartphone
E-mail on laptop	Face-to-face interactions	Face-to-face interactions
E-mail on smartphone	Phone call on smartphone	Telegram group chat via smartphone

As it is clear from Table 1, the smartphone is the center of the practice of coordinating workflow in Greece, Italy, and Spain. Often containing many types of applications, the smartphone is a highly versatile device, which allows the presence of a constant connection between activists, their fellow activists, and their political work. It does not come as a surprise, then, that this mobile device, always switched on and ready to be used, plays such a prominent role in organization practices. However, the focus on the material dimension and the combination of media devices and media services tell us more about the technological objects that activists embed in their practices. Despite this common role in all three countries, the media services that activists prefer to employ through their smartphones, are different. In Greece, activists use their smartphones to make phone calls and send e-mails. In Italy, they employ it to communicate individually through the instant messaging app WhatsApp, as well as to make phone calls. In Spain, the smartphone is almost a synonym of instant messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram, used mainly to communicate to groups of people rather than for one-to-one interactions. Additionally, in Greece, the use of the smartphone combines with the use of laptops to send e-mails, but in Italy and Spain, it is mostly face-to-face meetings that complement it.

Regardless of these differences, it is vital to go beyond specific devices in investigating the material dimension of practices in the three countries. The practice of coordinating the workflow certainly rests on hybrid materiality: As such, activists perform it in a space that is neither entirely the physical space of face-to-face meetings nor exclusively the online space of WhatsApp group chats. This hybridity is not a novelty, and many scholars already pointed at the hybrid nature of current media systems (Chadwick, 2013) and contemporary activism (Treré, 2018). When looking at the combinations of media devices and services across the three countries, the analysis also shows that while hybridity can come in many shapes, with many potential combinations of media devices and services, certain recurrent combinations, and hence shapes of hybridity, give a specific nuance to the material level of practices in each country.

The Symbolic Dimension

Focusing on the work of signification that activists do when performing actions related to the coordination of the workflow, allows to develop and analysis of the symbolic dimension of practices from a *media-in-practices* approach; more specifically, the analytical attention lays on how activists understand different types of media in the framework of such actions. Activists do not limit themselves to employ media devices and services: in fact, they continuously assign specific meanings about what they are accomplishing. In so doing, they do mobilize certain imaginaries that concerns the particular media devices and services that they use; also, more broadly, they develop a deep understanding of the whole spectrum of media services and devices they interact with (Treré et al., 2017).

When speaking about the media devices that they employed, activists often evoked specific semantic worlds. Although some of them were unique and highly dependent on the particular experience of the interviewed activists, other semantic worlds recurred across different interviews. For instance, Spanish activists never attached univocal meanings to commercial instant messaging and social media platforms: On the one hand, some activists depicted them as providing the needed efficiency to organizational activities; on the other hand, activists considered these platforms as threatens to their privacy and security. Italian activists, on the contrary, only rarely linked WhatsApp and similar platforms to surveillance; rather, they mostly focus on the quick communication these platforms allowed. Concerning this, in all three

countries, activists tend to interpret their daily organizational activities through media as an ensemble of different temporalities. The immediacy of instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram couples with the slow pace of mailing list messages, hence imparting the impression that the practice of coordinating the workflow lives in-between moments of accelerations and moments of decelerations.

In this regard, the symbolic configurations of meanings that activists attach to media are never univocal. Instead, they reflect the hybridity that marks their material configurations and assigns different meanings to different media to create a patchwork of senses that is never entirely resolved. Also, such symbolic configurations are always crossed by some kind of tension because activists constantly compare the media technologies that are here today and the ones that were there yesterday. In so doing, they are operating a work of resignification on the latter in the light of the former. For instance, whereas at the end of the 1990s, the mailing list allowed for quick consultations and rapid decision-making processes, today activists see the same service as allowing slow-pace communication. What is at stake, then, is not just the creation of imagery related to the present time, but the rewriting of the imagery that emerged in the past about specific media devices and services.

The Social Dimension

Practices cannot, of course, exist beyond the social actors who perform them day after day. These social actors, with their experience, preferences, and resources, bring to life the same practice in different ways. When considering the social dimension of practices, the analysis pointed at how different types of social movement organizations perform the same practice of coordinating the workflow. The interviews held with activists also offered an entry point into how social movement organizations as a whole, rather than specific activists within them, contribute to the performance of practices. Despite the profiles of social movement organizations being quite diverse in the three countries, we detected a similar pattern: the availability of material resources as well as the level of structuration of social movement organizations seems to be particularly relevant for the actual enactment of the practice of coordinating the workflow. As Table 2 shows, the practice remains the same, but how activists perform it through digital and nondigital media devices and services vary.

Table 2. Most Common Media Device/Service Combinations Across Formal and Informal Organizations.

Resourced and structured	Resourceless and unstructured
Face-to-face meetings with coworkers/collaborators	Phone call on smartphone
WhatsApp individual chat on smartphone	WhatsApp group chat on smartphone
Phone call on smartphone	Software VoIP on laptop

Only the more structured social movement organizations, those able to economically support their members, include daily physical meetings into their daily practice of coordinating the workflow, hence combining direct and mediated practices in the daily, repetitive unfolding of their political work. The rituality of these daily physical face-to-face meetings with fellow activists is relevant for at least two reasons. First, it enables activists to fully appreciate the dynamics of power established in each social movement

organization. Then, and linked to the previous point, it renders the experience of being part of a collective organization more pleasant and less frustrating. Social movement organizations that cannot afford frequent face-to-face meetings, mostly relying on digitally mediated communication, run the long-term risk of producing in its activists an affective detachment.

The Construction and Deconstruction of Boundaries

This section moves forward in the analysis, going from the investigation of media in specific dimensions of practices to the understanding of media in practices seen as constitutive entanglements of the material, symbolic, and social dimensions.

Beyond facilitating the workflow of activists' daily political work, the use of digital media sets in motion the deconstruction of the boundaries that characterize activists' lives. Although many of the interviewees acknowledge that a life devoted to activism often requires putting everything else aside, many of them also observe that the presence of digital media contributes to further blurring the lines between time devoted to politics, family, work, and leisure activities, among other things. These lines, which may already be perceived as thin when engaging with activism regularly, given the intensity that this kind of engagement requires, seem to become even thinner when digital media come into play. The immediacy granted by the use of WhatsApp on the smartphone might then turn into a trap of constant connection to the sphere of politics and political engagement. Activists of all three countries share this understanding, as the following three emblematic extracts suggest:

> There is one thing that is a disgrace: the smartphone ties you down 24 hours a day, or social networks and e-mails tie you down, or tweets and the mobile phone always accompanies me until late at night, and that includes WhatsApp, mail, networks. . . . It flows all day, every day, including weekends, because some companies don't close. (Spain INT–01)

> [Not long ago] I was the spokesperson of our trade union's secretary-general, and I have to confess that at that stage, even on a Sunday, going to see a movie with my wife became complicated. But it was by deformation, not because the secretary-general asked me to, but because it seemed to me that it was taken for granted in any case. Even in the cinema, I checked the information on the news agencies every 20 minutes. It is true that being always connected can create more stress. (Italy INT–03)

> I am connected 24 hours a day. You cannot disconnect yourself, of course not. Something may happen, hotels are working 24 hours a day. . . . I still have memories of the time before mobile phones. I think my life was better. Maybe it sounds a bit romantic. I have never been against technology; I am a gadget guy. But I think my life was better. I had more time with my friends. . . . My personal life is worse, but for my political work it is much better. (Greece INT–05)

In the experience of the interviewees, digital media—and the smartphone more specifically—can move political engagement into spaces and times that were once devoted entirely to other activities, such

as spending time with friends and family. Many of the interviewees clearly remember a time of their life in which they were already politically active, but without using any digital media, because they did not exist. They are thus able to recall how the organization practices were then and compare them with the way they are today. The stories they told did not necessarily give a negative connotation to digital media: As it also becomes clear from the interview extracts reported above, the use of mobile phones allow for many actions to be performed more efficiently than in the past, and just at the right time. However, we can indeed interpret them as stories of boundaries that become more blurred among different types of practices; practices pertaining to the political sphere find their way through, and hence even briefly interlace with, practices that belong more to the sphere of leisure and affects. This is even more evident if we think of specific types of services, such as instant messaging platforms, as this interviewee from Spain explains when speaking about his work for an activist association:

> The worst thing for me is that you have your friends writing to you about social stuff in the same tool that you use for work, which is Telegram or WhatsApp. So, you look at WhatsApp to tell your mum or your brother something, but then you get a message from a group you are part of, about something that needs to be answered straight away, and you answer it. So, you end up working everywhere. You work on the streets when you are walking home, you work at home when you are cooking, and you work before you go to sleep and when you wake up in the morning. (Spain INT–08)

The use of smartphones, coupled with instant messaging platforms, contributes to dissolve the boundaries between political engagement and everything else that activists might be doing—including walking home, as the interview cited above points out. Digital media—some more than others—connect practices that would otherwise remain separate, such as cooking dinner, watching movies, and taking care of children. There is a combination of mundane practices, like those listed above, and more politically oriented practices, like the practices that sustain the daily life of activists' collectives, associations, and organizations. Furthermore, although it is undoubtedly true that being politically engaged in grassroots politics is time-consuming and might become an all-encompassing experience, the interviewees note that the presence of digital media dramatically contributes to the transformation of practices that only sustain activism into all-encompassing practices, which infiltrate other types of practices. In other words, the practice of coordinating the workflow that is sustained by actions occurring through digital media develop in spaces and times that would otherwise be devoted to other practices. The stories of the deconstruction of boundaries that activists told demonstrates that digital media might function not just as connectors of people (e.g., by linking activists with their fellow activists, supporters, and audiences) but also as a fastening device for the many practices that we find in our societies.

This story, however, also introduces an opposite process than the one described so far: the reconstruction of boundaries. Indeed, the analysis lets emerge a strong tension between the employment of media devices or services beyond the sphere of grassroots political engagement, and their deliberate use, instead, for activists' daily political work alone. This, in turn, happens not just because some digital media might sustain some actions better than others and activists therefore perceive them as more efficient, or because they ensure activists' need for privacy. Indeed, activists might use such services only concerning

their grassroots political engagement, also as a way to reconstruct the boundaries between the different domains of life that they live.

The entanglement among the material, symbolic, and social dimensions constitutes the practice of coordinating the workflow that, in turn, sustains both the reconstruction and the deconstruction of boundaries, passing through the same types of digital media, which hence reveals an intense ambivalence. The reconstruction of boundaries, for instance, might take the form of an imagined disconnection that is obtained through the use of specific devices or services only in the framework of grassroots political work. Additionally, we can link this to the refusal to use a particular device or service during specific times of the day:

> I'm learning to make better use of my smartphone. When we have meetings here, we used to look at our mobile phones all the time, and we established a rule, which is: "You are not allowed to watch your mobile phone while we are in a meeting." And I try to do that by myself when I am home, like after work hours, but it's not easy. (Spain INT–05)

> If I did not lower the volume at night, I would hear noises at every irruption of messages or news. . . . From my point of view, if I don't want to be interrupted and constantly assaulted by the arrival of messages, the only solution is to lower the volume. (Spain INT–09)

> I have a personal policy: I stop reading and respond mainly to political messages and e-mails at 10 p.m. I cancel the data connection because it is the only way not to receive messages, especially those of the WhatsApp chat that are particularly pressing for making decisions or commitments regarding my political activity. (Italy INT–11)

Finally, the constitutive entanglement might give rise to sophisticated appropriations of the different media devices or services that activists employ daily, with each of them acquiring a role that goes well beyond its communicative function. In what follows, for instance, an activist explains that she allows certain services on her laptop to exceed the boundaries between her working time and the time she devotes to activism. Instant messaging services are quick interruptions that activists can manage easily:

> I [use the] chat a lot more because with the chat, even while I am working, I answer you in a moment. Whereas if one calls me during the day, most times my answer is "No, look I'll call you tonight." Also, because I usually tend to go home on foot and then at half past six, seven o'clock, when I go home and have three or four phone calls to make, I do them while I walk home or by bike. Maybe I would waste less time calling, but I have the idea that I'm working now and I don't want to lose half an hour on the phone, also because here you work with other people, you might disturb them [with a phone call]. (Italy INT–09)

The phone call, instead, is perceived as a more severe intrusion, and for this reason, it has a different role in the organizational routines of the activist: Placed in the liminal space and time after leaving work and before arriving home, the phone call is an in-between action that protects the boundaries between two different spheres

Conclusions

This article seeks to enrich the literature that employs a practice theories lens to understand how activists engage with media. It does so proposing to employ a *media-in-practices* approach that operationalizes practices through three dimensions—material, symbolic, and social—and their entanglement, that is constitutive of practices themselves; it then introduces the method of *media practices maps interviews* to explore practices from a *media-in-practices* approach. Finally, the article uses the analysis of data gathered in Greece, Italy, and Spain related to the practice of coordinating the workflow as a testbed to show the potentials of the *media practices maps interviews* in the framework of a *media-in-practices* approach.

The analysis of the three separate dimensions illuminates the hybrid combination of different media devices and services, the elaboration of an imaginary that oscillates between the embracement of communication immediateness and the confessed fear for surveillance, as well as the relevance of resources to sustain an activists coordination that also relies on the strength of face-to-face meetings. The analysis of each dimension, then, revealed a relevant aspect of the use of media in the practice of coordinating the workflow. When focusing on practices as constitutive entanglements, instead, the analysis illuminates how the use of digital media in one practice has the potential of generating other practices. In this specific case, we illustrate how two other practices emerge as being relevant in the daily political engagement of activists. The practice of boundaries deconstruction and the practice of boundaries reconstruction, referring to the dissolution and then the rebuilding of the boundaries between activists' political engagement practices and activists' practices that pertain to other spheres of their lives, including leisure, paid work, and family care.

It is hence the analysis of media from the viewpoint of the constitutive entanglement linked to the practice of coordinating the workflow that can reveal the media structure in which activists move daily, the agency that they exert toward the media, and the interaction between the two. While the practice of deconstructing boundaries points to digital media as structural forces for activists when they organize their daily political engagement, the process of reconstructing boundaries highlights the agency that activists have in shaping their organizational routines, also going beyond the use of digital media. Indeed, as shown above, theories of practice allow solving the dualism between agency and structure in our societies, seeing them as dynamic forces that interplay at the level of practices.

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