

The co-evolution of media and politics in Taiwan: Implications for political communications

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Over the course of Taiwan's democratization, in response to the changing media environment brought about by liberalization, commercialization and technological change, politicians, social activists and election candidates have modified the ways in which they attempt to inform, persuade and mobilize citizens. The methods that diverse political actors use to communicate their preferences, delineate their positions relative to their competitors, explain their behaviours and attack their opponents have a substantial effect on the information environment available to voters, the tone of political discourse and political competition. Aside from the behaviour of political actors, the same processes have had a significant effect on all aspects of media production and consumption, *and* the behaviours and expectations of citizens. This article is an attempt to conceptualise the evolution of political communications from the start of democratization to the present and to assess the implications for public discourse, political participation and the vitality of Taiwan's democracy.

Taiwan is an illuminating case for studying the co-evolution of media and politics. Prior to the rescinding of 38-years of martial law in 1987 Taiwan was a textbook Cold-War anti-Communist dictatorship, with a highly circumscribed civil society, carefully managed

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political competition and a constrained media-sphere. The three terrestrial TV channels were operated by the ruling party, the military, and the government. Cable TV and opposition radio stations were illegal. All newspapers were pro-regime, with no new licences issued after 1951. A rigorous censorship regime prevailed over the publication of magazines, books and music. A national language was imposed by the ruling Kuomintang (中國國民黨, KMT) and Taiwan's other languages disappeared from public spaces, including the media and schools. Contestation over media use and access was a significant feature of the transition to democracy. In the 1970s, when Taiwanese intellectuals began agitating for reforms, their voices were expressed in a range of independent periodicals, including the short-lived but influential Formosa Magazine (*Meilidao* 美麗島). The closure of *Formosa* and arrest of activists involved in its publication in 1979 was a watershed for Taiwan's democratization movement, galvanizing the underground opposition and inspiring a generation of politicians who would later lead the Democratic Progressive Party (民主進步黨 DPP). The subsequent blooming of independent political magazines in the early 1980s led to commercial success and elevated the status of editors and writers, who often represented more radical tendencies in the opposition movement. The multiplication of street protests towards the end of the martial-law era were accompanied by a wave of documentary film production distributed on videotape, which challenged official narratives carried by state-run media. Taiwan's pro-democracy movement was partly a movement for alternative media, namely the creation of new spaces for social expression and "dissident" discourses that circumvented the state's monopoly on information. The differentiated media-scape that emerged in the 1990s was thus one of the inherent and most visible achievements of democratization.

During the past two decades, Taiwanese media has regularly ranked among Asia's freest (Sullivan et al., 2018). Among other things, sensationalism and questionable ethical practices for instance (Wang and Cohen, 2009), the contemporary media environment in

Taiwan is characterized by abundance, fragmentation and multiplicity, which facilitates and requires new modes of political communication. To help situate the interdependencies between media and politics, and identify the effects they have on political communications, this article draws on the concepts of media logics, mediatisation and media hybridity. It then proceeds with an examination of the evolution of the media environment and the adaptive communication practices of political actors through a series of case studies on election campaigning, social movement activism and the “hybrid” campaign of “political outsider” Ko Wen-je (Ke Wenzhe 柯文哲),² which was notable for blending communication and organizational methods associated with both election campaigning and social movements. The article discusses the implications of generational change and shows how the expectations and behaviours of different age cohorts affect both the information environment and Taiwan’s political culture. Ultimately, the article concludes that the political communications environment is in a state of flux, as actors across Taiwanese society adapt to new methods and cultures in the production and dissemination of information. The co-evolution of politics and the media is not predetermined and does not produce linear outcomes. For instance, the popularization of digital media has had both “normalization” (the (re-)assertion of established hierarchical dynamics online) and “equalization” (reducing the power asymmetry between state and society) effects, often concurrently. This complexity requires a conceptual approach long missing in the literature on Taiwan, to which I now turn.

Co-dependence of media and politics: Implications for political communication

The major focus on political communications in Taiwan has been on election campaigning (Rawnsley, 2004; Schafferer, 2006), campaign advertising (Sullivan, 2009; Sullivan and Sapor, 2012), media ownership (Chiu and Chan-Olmsted, 1999; Rawnsley M. and Feng, 2014)

² The term “political outsider” is used to denote “someone who gains political prominence not through or in association with an established, competitive party, but as a political independent” (Barr, 2009: 33).

and advances in government communications (Lee et al., 2005; Sullivan, 2013). Prior work has addressed the role of institutions (Rawnsley, 2003a), political culture (Mattlin, 2004), national identity (Hsu, 2014), party behaviour (Fell, 2005) and strategy (Sullivan and Sapir, 2012). Missing in the literature on Taiwan is an overarching framework for identifying the connection between the changing media environment and political communications. Two approaches to theorizing the interaction between political and media institutions facilitate bridging this gap: media logics and mediatisation.

Developed during the earlier “mass communication era,” when broadcast TV and newspapers were dominant (Prior, 2007), the media logic approach did much to elucidate how assumptions, norms and routines associated with the operation of mass media influenced political actors’ communication behaviours (Altheide, 1979). Political actors desiring influence over public discourse were compelled to adapt their communication strategies to fit the dominant formats required by mass media. Mass media norms like “newsworthiness” (Shoemaker, 2006) and a preference for visuals and drama led political actors to hire spin doctors, campaign specialists and to deal in soundbites. In short, political actors tailored their communications “to the needs of the mass media” (Swanson and Mancini, 1996: 1). Mediatisation differs from media logic in that it emphasizes systemic long-term interactions between the media and institutions across all sectors of society. Distinct from a pervasive and singular media logic, which conceives politics and the media interaction as a one-way relationship and thus focuses on political adaptation and responses to developments driven by the media, mediatisation embraces the idea that media and party logics coexist in a relationship characterised by complex interdependence (Hjarvard, 2013). Mediatisation thus goes beyond a focus on agenda setting, for example, to analyse the feedback loops between media, public opinion and political institutions, and the interpenetration of norms and

behaviours. Mediatisation scholars identify numerous interfaces between media and politics; and conceive this cross-permeation as dynamic and mutable (Strömbäck, 2008).

The media environment in contemporary Taiwan is unrecognizably diverse, fragmented and profuse compared to the mass communication era (Sullivan et al. 2018). With over 300 cable and satellite TV channels, an internet penetration rate of 88%,³ and 29 million mobile phone subscriptions,⁴ economic competition and the proliferation of technology have created a significantly different communications environment for media and political institutions, and citizens. First, there has been a massive multiplication of “institutionalized structures, forms, formats and interfaces for disseminating symbolic content” (Couldry, 2012: viii). Keane (2013) characterizes the multiplication of media and high intensity media-use in people’s daily lives as “communicative abundance.” Second, there has been a shift in what we understand “media” to be. With the proliferation of multimedia platforms, social media and ubiquitous connectivity via WiFi and mobile data, distinctions between “print”, “broadcast” and “digital” are increasingly redundant: All forms of media are available anywhere, at any time, on any device, often via the same website or application, mixing, merging and blurring boundaries. Third, the potential for unlimited acts of mediated communication by anyone possessing a smartphone has altered behaviours and expectations to the extent that it represents “a fundamental shift in the way people interact with each other, obtain and process information, and ultimately use this information to choose who governs” (Gainous and Wagner, 2014: 1). Consider the differences in production, distribution and usage characteristic of the earlier era of mass communication and the “network logic” used to describe the structure of digital communications (Castells, 2011). Media production was once dominated by professional journalists and editors and distributed to a fee-paying audience of subscribers. These media gatekeepers are still there, but they have been joined by millions of

³ In 2017; compared to the world average of 52% <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm>

⁴ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/324616/taiwan-mobile-phone-subscribers/>

amateur content producers acting on their own preferences, free from professional constraints and often acting on the desire to maximize attention. Many traditional media institutions have adapted their practices and retain significant influence in the digital sphere (Howard and Hussain, 2011), but previously captive mass audiences are no longer limited to passively consuming professionally selected information. Through social media peer networks they can consume and share selectively, and become co- and post-creators through the “prosuming” inherent in hacking, mash-ups, memes, fan fiction and the manipulation of images and branding (Klinger and Svensson, 2015: 1246).

Conditions of complexity, abundance and multi-directional interdependence have rendered the notion that a singular media logic is operative untenable (Chadwick, 2013). Instead, contemporary media-politics interactions require an examination of “an ensemble of simultaneously operative media logics” (Dahlgren, 2009: 54). Under the conditions of “media hybridity” (Chadwick, 2013) and “communicative abundance” (Keane, 2013), opinion leaders, politicians, activists and citizens engage in a new form of multidimensional, instantaneous communication with a potentially global reach. It is the massive agglomeration of these behaviours and the socio-cultural attitudes and expectations they inculcate (sharing, transparency, cynicism, lack of deference, incivility) that are creating a new political communications environment. Hybridity democratizes information by minimizing or disguising dichotomies between professional and amateur, while also creating dogmatic echo chambers and “rabbit holes of special interests” (Honan, 2014: 49). Communicative abundance gives everyone a voice, but also creates disorientating “information cascades” that overwhelm people with rumours, trivia and spin (Sunstein, 2009). Theoretically, everyone has access to everything, but in reality, secret commercial algorithms determine the information people are exposed to, malicious bots generate “fake news”, the most divisive

content goes viral and anonymous online discussions descend into abusive partisan trolling (Gainous and Wagner, 2014).

In combination, these dynamics represent a major challenge to political communicators. Governments, parties and politicians have reduced control over what is said about them, by whom, and even the reproduction of their own words (Soroka, 2014: 75). On the other hand, the emergence of social media as a vehicle for unmediated communication has become established as a powerful means to reach voters and citizens directly. Infamously, in the guise of Donald Trump's Tweets, it has enabled attacks on opponents, determination of the media agenda, and is pored over for hints about American economic and foreign policy (Chadwick and Stromer-Galley, 2016). A former reality TV performer, a genre that has similarly exploited the affordances of hybrid media (Hill, 2014), Trump is an acute example of the changing parameters of political communications. While Taiwan has not, as yet, produced a Trump-like communicator (President Tsai Ing-wen's 蔡英文 tweets are a model of decorum in comparison), there is evidence of the "interplay between celebrity culture and the presentational strategies adopted by politicians" (Wood et al, 2016: 581), not least in the rise of former presidents Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) and Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), and literal rock star Legislator Freddy Lim (Lin Changzuo 林昶佐). The celebritization of politics in Taiwan is not as "advanced" as in many western democracies, but it is likely to intensify as a result of both the incentive structure of the new political communications environment and declining public trust in elected officials and increasing "anti-politics" attitudes. Ko Wen-je's presentational strategy of distancing himself from politics, using various media to construct the distinctive "Ko persona" (Yan and Heng, 2016) while attempting to appear "just like us" (despite his elite status as a famous surgeon) by travelling on public transport and eschewing the political correctness filter of the professional politician is one example.

Major party election campaigning

Elections have played a major role in the consolidation of democracy in Taiwan, in terms of providing opportunities for the transfer of power, issue representation and promoting democratic norms (Chao and Myers, 2000; Lin et al. 1996; Wong, 2003). The confluence of top-down liberalization, grassroots political opposition, social demands and exogenous shocks led to incremental democratization processes over a period of two decades culminating by the mid-1990s in a competitive multi-party system with elections held for offices from the village and township level up to the Legislature and Presidency (Rigger, 2002; Tien and Chu 1996). Election campaigns have been an integral part and inescapable spectacle in Taiwanese politics for the past three decades (Fell, 2018). These communicative and mobilizational events represent “dynamic struggles between candidates to define the informational context for voters” (Carsey et al., 2007: 269). In contemporary campaigns these “struggles” operate simultaneously over different spheres: “Air wars” denoting television coverage and advertising, the “ground game” to mobilize volunteers and voters, and the use of polling and demographic analytics to target potential donors and increase turnout. Over time, the “struggle” has increasingly moved online into cyberspace. Within the contemporary campaign the interplay of modes of communication creates a cross-fertilizing ecosystem characterised by hybridity. Taiwanese elections are characterised by a mixture of traditional and “post-modern” communication efforts (Sautede and Liddell, 2000), a process of hybridisation “that allows formal institutions and traditional methods to absorb and coexist with new and streamlined techniques of delivering the desired message” (Rawnsley 2003a: 779).

Prior to the launch of the 24-hour news channels in 1994, election campaigning in Taiwan was dominated by traditional practices like flag planting, posters, sound trucks, social events, rallies and hustings (Mattlin, 2004). But when cable news channels gave candidates

potential access to voters' living rooms, name and face recognition, notoriety (*mingqi* 名氣) and personality became increasingly important to both the media and politicians. This focus on candidates (personality rather than policy) was a major driver of the “professionalization” of political communications in Taiwan (Rawnsley, 2003b). For instance, the first televised debates were held ahead of the 1994 Taipei Mayoral election, a campaign that marked the emergence of a more sophisticated type of campaigning led by DPP candidate Chen Shui-bian's team of creative consultants. In 2000, Chen's presidential campaign featured a candidate-focused, “soft sell” image-building campaign that privileged his celebrity over the DPP's policy program (Rigger, 2001).

With the advent of cable TV, footage of rallies, motorcades and sound-bites appeared regularly alongside campaign and stump speeches. Large rallies became the major televisual set pieces of the campaign, cast as spectacles with musical interludes, extravagant staging and rousing speeches. More recently, teleprompters, computer-generated graphics and celebrity performing artists have become routine. Parties now invest substantial resources in in-house polling to monitor and test the effectiveness of their messaging and as content to supply to the media. Parties place newspaper ads that look like official polls to increase turnout (Sullivan, 2008) and to “lend the authority of ‘news’ to the factual claims of the political ad” (Scammell and Langer, 2006: 771). Specialist communication consultants and data professionals are increasingly involved in candidates' campaigns, distancing them from the central party organization. The communication methods used by Taiwanese candidates and parties have multiplied and diversified, and “candidates who can afford it use every platform available” (Rawnsley, 2004: 219). Newer practices adopted in Taiwan have added layers of complexity to campaigns, with substantial repurposing, reinvention and “cross-cultural raids” (Chadwick, 2006: 29). Traditional electioneering practices like street canvassing (*saojie* 掃街) and community meet-and-greets have been repurposed as multimedia content for candidates'

social media. Larger scale campaign events (*zaoshi* 造勢) are broadcast by candidates and parties directly on video streaming platforms. Formal campaign rallies with “passionate speeches and political stunts taking place in front of huge crowds” (Schafferer 2006: 52) remain part of the traditional and televisual campaign, but as media consumers have increasingly moved online (Su, 2010), rallies now also stream live (to a global audience) on social media.⁵

Internet campaigning appeared in Taiwan during the first direct election for Taipei Mayor in 1994, when candidate Chen Shui-bian launched an online discussion forum. It proved sufficiently popular, especially on university campuses, that by the time of the legislative elections in 1995 the major parties had all established websites. Systematic polling was introduced ahead of the presidential election in 1996 and featured on the five candidates’ campaign websites. These rudimentary efforts were used solely for one-way dissemination of information. Interactive features appeared for the first time ahead of the 2000 presidential election, with Chen Shui-bian’s website inviting voters to submit ideas for Cabinet selections, make campaign donations online and purchase A-bian (阿扁) branded merchandise (Rawnsley, 2003b: 9). As President, Chen conversed with citizens online, an innovation taken up by candidates for the 2002 Mayoral elections, many of which built chat rooms into their personal websites. Ma Ying-jeou, then standing for re-election as Taipei Mayor, pioneered multimedia content on his website, including video images of himself swimming and jogging in a successful attempt to cultivate a healthy and vigorous image. His DPP opponent Li Yingyuan (李應元) also included video and Flash games on his campaign site. The trend towards personalization accelerated with the adoption of personal blogs, led by then-legislator Luo Wenjia’s (羅文嘉) blog (*Woshi Luo Wenjia* 我是羅文嘉) established in 2005.

⁵ In 2017, the Reuters’ Institute for the Study of Journalism Digital New Report showed that 77% of respondents got their news from TV and 88% online. Available at: <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2017/taiwan-2017/>

Through mid-decade many politicians progressed from homepages to blogs and nascent social media. Of the 126 representatives serving in the Seventh Legislative Yuan from 2008, 70% tried their hand at blogging (Sullivan, 2010). Standing for Taipei Mayor in 2006, Frank Hsieh (Xie Changting 謝長廷) ran his campaign through his blog, eschewing a campaign website altogether.

After the DPP's heavy defeats in 2008 presidential and legislative elections, and former president Chen's conviction on corruption charges, the party enthusiastically adopted social media to reconnect with voters. In 2009 Frank Hsieh published a book (translated as "Frank's Plurk Diary") based on the messages he posted on the Plurk social network site,⁶ priming Taiwan for its first "social media campaign" ahead of the 2010 special municipality elections. Campaigning for Taipei and Xinbei City respectively, the DPP's Su Tseng-chang (Su Zhenchang 蘇貞昌) and Tsai Ing-wen set up Facebook pages that accumulated around one hundred thousand likes. Su created a dedicated social media team, a first for a Taiwanese election candidate, while Tsai also organized a separate digital communications team. Previously these functions were conducted under the party's culture and communications unit. Both candidates lost but maintained their Facebook pages through the DPP primary for presidential nomination. Seeing the success of Su and Tsai's Facebook pages, President Ma, who would run against one of them for re-election, established his own account in December 2010. It soon surpassed one hundred thousand likes and included such enticements as an application for joining a band and playing a virtual song with the president. Ma was effective at integrating his social media presence, including an active YouTube channel for delivering unmediated personal video messages, into the government communications infrastructure (Sullivan, 2013). Ma wrote on Facebook that "it is the government's responsibility to let the

⁶ See <http://reut.rs/guCGBE>. Xie's Plurk feed is accessible at www.plurk.com/frankcthsieh.

people clearly understand it's policy ideas [...] wherever the people are the government should be too.”⁷

In dozens of interviews conducted with Taiwanese politicians, digital media is invoked time and again as the key to reaching young people, an increasingly influential voting cohort that parties perceive as less ingrained partisans and thus more open to persuasive communication efforts. Per capita usage of Facebook in Taiwan is among the highest in the world,⁸ and it is cheaper than other media and often more effective in driving media attention than formal communiques (Wen, 2013). It also enables rapid response, for rebutting attacks or redressing media stories or unfavourable framing. Politicians explain that social media is important for giving the appearance of direct communication and interactivity with voters. Politicians have also found “humanizing” effects and greater message control in “the evolution from blogs to YouTube” (Tso, 2014: 173), circumventing the media initially by producing personal videos, which are sometimes then remediated by news channels. Shareable multi- and social media content with personal, emotional, funny or behind-the-scenes has a greater chance of going viral and delivering the benefits of internet “buzz”: substantial audiences, organic grassroots energy and media pick up.

Politicians often use social media to seed ideas for journalists who scour the internet for stories, either through issuing robust opinion on opponents or contemporary events, or by creating content resonating with human interest, personality and emotion. As a candidate for the presidency in 2012, Tsai Ing-wen leveraged a cute human-interest story (young twins offering their piggybank savings, which the KMT pointed out would technically be a campaign finance infraction) into a wildly successful campaign to collect donations. Social media statistics in the form of likes and follows are a useful indicator of popularity and are

⁷ My translation of 民眾清楚知道政府的施政理念，是政府的責任 [...] 民眾在哪裡，政府就在哪裡。
<http://www.facebook.com/MaYingjeou> Accessed 6th Feb 2011.

⁸ Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/295611/taiwan-social-network-penetration/>

used as a source of data for tailoring the message, in effect a huge focus group letting campaigns see what policies and messages resonate.

Social movement activism

Grassroots, citizen-led social movements re-emerged in Taiwan during Ma Ying-jeou's first term, reflecting discontent across diverse social sectors prompted by a range of discrete issues (Fell, 2017).⁹ The resurgence of protest activism coincided with breakthroughs in digital communications, including the popularization of smartphones and the launch of Facebook's traditional Chinese platform in 2008 (Hsiao, 2018). Ma's assumption of presidency in May 2008 ushered in an era of conservative government that threatened progressive reform achievements. Student movements, dormant since the Wild Lily Movement in 1990, reappeared with the outbreak of the Wild Strawberry Movement in November 2008. The revival of student protests began in response to perceived excessive policing surrounding the visit of a Chinese envoy and was initiated by a single post by an activist professor on Taiwan's largest bulletin board system, PTT (Hsiao, 2017: 39).¹⁰ The use of digital media as a mobilizing channel compensated for the long-term decline of campus clubs and student associations which had sustained movement participation in the 1990s. Although the Wild Strawberry Movement eventually failed to elicit responses from the government, it nurtured a cohort of digital-savvy student activists who made up the core leadership in the subsequent Anti Media Monopoly and Sunflower Movements.

The Anti Media Monopoly Movement arose in response to pro-Chinese conglomerate Want Want Group's attempt to increase capacity in Taiwan's print and cable sectors, and to expand operations as a content producer and service provider. Having acquired the venerable *China Times* newspaper in 2008, and radically altered its editorial line (Rawnsley and Feng

⁹ Large-scale popular demonstrations and marches in 2004 and 2006 were led by political parties and politicians

¹⁰ Taiwan is unusual in the continuing popularity, especially among students, of bulletin board systems, simple text-based discussion forums that emerged in the early days of the web (Hsiao, 2018: 3464)

2014: 107–108), Want Want proposed purchasing China Network System (CNS, 中嘉), a major cable TV provider, and Taiwan Next Media (*Yi Chuan Mei* 壹傳媒), a popular tabloid. The acquisition would have given Want Want a substantial share of Taiwan’s media market. As the Ma administration signalled support for Want Want, civic groups organizing via online networks joined student events under the aegis of the “Anti Media Monster Youth Alliance” (*Fan meiti jushou qingnian lianmeng* 反媒體巨獸青年聯盟), which subsequently evolved into the Anti Media Monopoly Movement (*Fan meiti longduan yundong* 反媒體壟斷運動). A grassroots online campaign was complemented by campaigners traveling around Taiwan to address crowds at markets and transport hubs, combining online and physical space (Rawnsley and Feng, 2014: 107). The movement was ultimately successful, influencing the National Communications Commission decision to reject Want Want’s proposed acquisitions and leading to a draft Anti Media Monopoly Act (*Fan meiti longduan fa* 反媒體壟斷法). The movement involved not only contention over media, but also the younger generation’s defence of Internet freedom. Prior to the summer of 2012, the opposition to the Want Want’s expansion bid was primarily led by a small group of scholars without attracting a mass following. The misguided decision by Want Want to file a libel suit against Chen Wei-ting (陳為廷), a student leader, over a Facebook post, sent a shockwave through Taiwan’s student population, which feared that social media platforms were being monitored by a pro-China media organization. The anti-Want Want campaign thus evolved into a bona fide student movement with large-scale rallies and disruptive protests, which increased political pressure on government officials and set a precedent for further mobilizations.

Further social movements were inspired by the death of Hung Chung-chiu (Hong Zhongqiu 洪仲丘), a national service recruit whose physical punishment for bringing a smart phone onto base ended in fatality. His death was suppressed by the army, until a small

number of concerned people initiated an internet campaign on PTT, which evolved into a physical protest organized by the Citizen 1985 Action Alliance (*Gongmin 1985 xingdong lianmeng* 公民 1985 行動聯盟; “1985” being the Ministry of National Defence complaints line). An initial demonstration attracted thirty thousand people, greatly eclipsed by another march after Hung’s funeral which saw 250,000 people gather in Taipei. Citizen 1985 Action Alliance was started by a small number of middle class professionals with no political or activist experience who met by chance online. Non-partisan, youth-led, sharing knowledge and skills and using digital tools for internal and external communications, fundraising and mobilization, Citizen 1985 illustrated how “Taiwan’s civil movement has entered into a new phase and has adopted a new mode of internet-empowered social movements” (Hung, 2014: 73).

This new mode was evident in the subsequent outpouring of discontent manifest in the Sunflower Movement in 2014. The student occupation of the legislature exemplified both the mobilizing power of new modes of communication and the hybridity inherent in a movement that was launched and maintained online at the same time as it was operating in physical space. As Castells describes the Occupy Wall Street movement, so the occupation of the Legislative Yuan was “a hybrid networked movement [linking] cyberspace and urban space in multiple forms of communication” (Castells, 2011:177). Social media were crucial to the initial mobilization of students, to the crafting of a self-mediated narrative, to put demands to the Ma government and communicate to the watching world. Digital platforms were used for generating the logistical support needed to sustain the occupation, and to protect the students from potential violent interventions by the authorities. The occupiers self-mediated through a livestream, while collaborative online multimedia workspace and constant social media updates that allowed them to tell their side of the story without refractions by traditional media, of which the occupiers were highly suspicious (Rowen, 2015:

1). In the first few hours after students entered the legislature, a software engineer set up a makeshift broadcasting station with his cell phone, iPad, and a pair of sandals which were used to shore up the tablet, which later evolved into a full-scale intervention by g0v.tw (*Lingshi Zhengfu* 零時政府), a freeware activists' organization founded in 2012.¹¹ The g0v.tw programmers orchestrated a powerful online platform that not only provided real-time images inside and outside of the occupied legislature, but also helped to coordinate logistical efforts in terms of material donations and distribution of manpower over the duration of the sustained confrontation with the authorities.

One episode during the Sunflower Movement illustrated the power of hybrid media. Internet activists worried about public opinion and the generational digital divide since they found Taiwan's older citizens were not receiving online information and were thus more likely to be influenced by pro-government TV stations and newspapers. They thus decided to raise funds via online crowdfunding websites to buy advertising space in the major domestic newspapers. Taiwan's first political crowdfunding campaign turned out to be a phenomenal success, amassing NT\$6.3 million (US\$200,000) from 3,621 donors within three hours, more than four times their planned goal. These contributions funded three waves of local newspaper advertisements plus an additional pamphlet and even a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* on March 29. Sunflower participants were thus able to leverage their advantage in digital media to shore up their weakness in traditional media outlets.

Like Occupy Wall Street, the occupied legislative chamber was "a space of conviviality, debate and autonomy" mutually constituted by the merging of hybrid spaces online and in the physical world (Castells, 2011:168), and symbolized by the *Island Sunrise* anthem recorded by the Taiwanese band Fire Extinguisher (*Miehuoqi* 滅火器) inside

¹¹ The organization describes itself as "a decentralized civic tech community from Taiwan" that advocates "transparency of information and build[s] tech solutions for citizens to participate in public affairs from the bottom up". Available at: <https://g0v.tw/zh-TW/>

the occupied Parliament building (Wang, 2017). After the resolution of the occupation, the New Power Party (NPP, *Shidai Liliang* 時代力量) evolved as a de facto political successor to the movement (Ho, 2018), competing in the 2016 legislative elections and joining a parliamentary majority on the progressive side of the political spectrum after winning 5 seats. After the DPP's victory in presidential and legislative elections in 2016, many Sunflower activists took advantage of the favourable political opportunity structure to enter government (Ho, 2015; Rudakowska and Trojnar, 2016). Taiwan's protest scene subsequently witnessed a noticeable transition, with conservative groups mobilizing against proposed DPP government reforms. As newcomers to movement politics, and generally representing an older demographic, conservative opponents of equal marriage rights for example, were disadvantaged in the prevailing communications environment. Anti-gay marriage protesters complained about "bullying" by hostile opponents on Facebook and other digital platforms, and generally ceded the online battlefield to younger, digital-savvy LGBT activists. They complained, too, about the purported liberal bias of TV and newspapers, which they said "under-reported" the size of anti-gay marriage rallies. Soon these conservative activists discovered that LINE, a Japanese instant communication app popular among older people, could be a useful channel to spread their messages. Unlike publicly accessible Facebook accounts, LINE was characterized by discrete chat groups based on invitation. The more decentralized and secluded communication design facilitated conservative mobilization, particularly since it was primarily led by Protestant pastors and Catholic priests who maintained close relationships with their followers. Here Taiwan's media hybridity gave rise to a fractured scene, as different tendencies attempted to capitalize on their most favourable information channel. Taiwan's recent protest scene reveals the multifaceted entanglement between media and movement activisms, both progressive and conservative.

The hybrid campaign of a political outsider

Election campaigns run by major parties increasingly act as though they are selling the candidate like a brand or product, with voters imagined as customers. Image and emotions are frequently privileged over policy because candidates who “speak the language of emotion have a better chance of connecting with the electorate than those who do not” (Jerit, 2004: 566). Candidates are urged by campaign consultants to repeat a small number of simple talking points, believing that simple cues have “greater salience and inferential power than more detailed messages” (Tessin, 2007). The quality of the information environment, enriched by the multiplicity of channels and content, has been degraded by these features of professional campaigning. For example, although candidates have incorporated digital communication tools with horizontal, interactive and participatory affordances, they are being used as “instruments that can be harnessed in new ways to work on behalf of the campaign” (Stromer-Galley, 2013: 12). Instead of offering real participation in campaigns, use of interactive widgets, social media and associated rhetoric merely create a simulacrum of interactivity. Ostensibly participatory tools are new ways to achieve the traditional goals of raising money and increasing turn out in targeted districts and cohorts. Contemporary democratic election campaigns thus tend to be top-down, data-driven exercises in “structured interactivity” (Kreiss, 2012).

The priorities of many electorates have also changed over time, putting greater importance on “post-material” issues associated with lifestyle rather than material wellbeing and physical security (Inglehart, 1997). In post-industrial societies, “lifestyle politics” connected to issues like the environment, housing, consumption and recreation have increased in salience, with greater emphasis on identity, representation and expression among individuals and groups challenging the legitimacy of hierarchical political elites (Bennett, 1998). Further realignments on the political left and right in response to economic recession,

austerity and the fallout from globalization across advanced democracies has given rise to numerous “non-traditional” political movements and candidates, from Spain’s Podemos to the Tea Party in the US and En Marche in France. Heterogeneous candidates in diverse contexts (from Beppe Grillo in Italy to Bernie Sanders in the US and Jeremy Corbyn in the UK) have in common a strong digital campaign, netroots support and citizen-initiated campaigning to facilitate “community building, getting out the vote, generating resources and message production” (Gibson, 2015: 187). As an antidote to disempowering “structured” election campaigns, numerous grassroots “outsider” candidates have challenged the campaigning methods of traditional major parties, learning and adopting the mobilizational methods commonly associated with social movements. Taiwan’s own “outsider” candidate, Ko Wen-je, a surgeon and media commentator, won the Taipei City Mayoral election as a DPP-endorsed independent in 2014. Ko was emblematic of an anti- “politics-as-usual” candidate, and his disruption of established major party competitors was well-served by a hybrid digital media campaign. Running against a KMT candidate in what is regarded a KMT stronghold, Ko’s indifference to politicking and commitment to transparency captured the post-Sunflower Movement Zeitgeist. Both candidates were political neophytes, but whereas Sean Lien’s (*Lian Shengwen* 連勝文) gaffes made him look like an ignorant young princeling, Ko’s unfiltered verbal faux pas were interpreted by his supporters as indicative of a non-politician’s “authenticity”.¹² While Lien used his superior resources to fund attack ads, Ko delivered his vision for a better functioning and more participatory city free from the malice and machinations of partisan politics, proposing improved social security, affordable housing and food safety. The manifesto he released online in the final week of the campaign, in response to his opponent’s criticism about empty rhetoric, was painstakingly detailed.

¹² For instance, while Lien’s ignorance of basic facts about the geography of Taipei was interpreted as evidence of being out of touch (Hsiao, 2014), Ko’s sexist dismissal of a female election candidate and gynaecologists was framed as the unpolished plain speaking of a political outsider (Loa, 2014)

Ko's campaign was notable for several features. First, he eschewed traditional campaign methods, refusing to produce usually ubiquitous campaign paraphernalia like flags and signs, and foregoing physical-space campaign rallies, a long-time staple of Taiwanese campaigns. Second, his campaign team made digital media the major battleground, marshalling young volunteers, soliciting online donations and crowd-sourcing policy inputs. Third, Ko's campaign was, in Taiwanese terms, radically transparent. When Lien accused the campaign of financial irregularities, Ko posted complete records online. Fourth, Ko distanced his campaign from big business and stopped fundraising once he reached the stipulated limit— unheard of for Taiwanese candidates. The “Ko-P phenomenon” (Yan and Heng, 2016: 300),¹³ based on progressive policies, transparency and grassroots mobilization, applied mobilization techniques characteristic of social movements and generated the kind of organic “Yes, we can” buzz that surrounded Barack Obama's campaign for US President in 2008. In his victory speech and in interview with the author, Ko was unequivocal about the contribution of digital media as the driving force of his campaign.

As Taipei Mayor, Ko has retained a social media team and continued to use digital media to engage Taipei citizens, drive traditional media coverage and frame his governance efforts. And he has retained relatively high levels of public support despite continued faux pas, including remarks that could be interpreted as sexist and racist, and losing the support of the DPP following a series of mixed signals about Taiwanese identity. Despite fluctuations in public opinion polls, Ko's “brand” has so far proven to be surprisingly resilient. With his trademark black trousers, short-sleeve shirt with a pen in the pocket and gold rimmed glasses, Ko's non-descript image (riding the Taipei subway Ko is indistinguishable from a software engineer or middle school teacher) is the essence of “just like us”, a presentation strategy used by politicians and celebrities (Kane and Patapan, 2012; Turner, 2013). As a successful

¹³ “Ko-P” refers to Ko's designation by students in his former role as medical professor.

social media communicator, Ko and his team produces content for a multiplicity of different media and embraces the likelihood that material may be repurposed by supporters and opponents. He routinely interacts with citizens, streams on Facebook Live and is unafraid of putting himself in embarrassing situations, like filming silly videos with Internet celebrity (*wanghong* 網紅) Tsai A-ga (Cai Aga 蔡阿嘎), in order to reach youth audiences.

Political communications and generational change

One of the major developments in Taiwanese society, thus-far unexamined in the context of political communications, is generational change. In the cases described above, party efforts to develop online campaigning were primarily driven by the hope of reaching younger voters; largescale social mobilizations since 2008 were organized by young people; and the dynamism of Ko Wen-je's election campaign was in large part generated by the enthusiasm of young volunteers and supporters. A generation gap has emerged in Taiwanese society in terms of national identity, socio-economic opportunities and political attitudes (Le Pesant, 2011; Liu and Li, 2017; Zhang et al, 2005). Common to many societies, a similar generation gap exists in attitudes and usage patterns of newer technologies and the internet (Salkowitz, 2008), not least because young Taiwanese have long exhibited very high levels of internet usage and technological competency (Ishii and Wu, 2006). Media use varies by age cohort, not merely in the type of media consumed, but in the attitudes and expectations that are nurtured by the practices, affordances and norms associated with different media. This has the dual effect of incentivizing political actors to adapt and diversify their methods of communication, and changes users' (i.e. citizens and voters) expectations and behaviours.

The legacy of one party rule and instrumental quasi-Confucian discourses (Chang, 2009: 44-5) did not expire with the coming of elections. Political elites retained their sense, and carefully framed narrative, about knowing what was best for the people. Many, particularly older citizens, conditioned by decades of priming through the media and

education systems, continued to have a narrow understanding of what democracy meant, sometimes complaining to pollsters that democracy was too messy, divisive and complicated. Political scientist Tianjian Shi (2014) argued that many Taiwanese came to understand democracy via the idea of *minben* (民本), a restricted form of government by benevolent elites that he labelled “guardianship democracy”.¹⁴ While survey research shows some older Taiwanese still hold to this idea, younger cohorts that have grown up with norms like freedom of speech, accountability and transparency, have different expectations (Dalton and Shin, 2014). The challenge to the foundations of “guardian democracy” is magnified by the popularization of digital and social media and the norms associated with Taiwan’s deeply embedded internet culture, where there is little deference to authority or patience for grandstanding and politicking in the face of the huge socio-economic challenges facing Taiwanese youth. One of Ko’s major selling points was his refusal to engage in political theatre and attack politics, along with his “authenticity” and commitment to transparency; positions that were communicated directly through his own digital channels rather than mainstream media. The case of another mode of political communication demonstrates why this resonated.

Once at the cutting edge of political communications in Taiwan and a staple of primetime cable news schedules in the 1990s and early 2000s (Chu, 2004), political call-in shows (*kouyingxiu* 扣應秀) are now the preserve of older viewers. When Taiwan’s media market was liberalized, through deregulation of the newspaper market in 1989 and legalization of Cable TV in 1993, political TV coverage gradually moved away from issue-oriented “hard news” to “soft news” and “infotainment” formats with greater mass appeal. The blurring of news and entertainment, with a significant dose of sensationalism and partisanship, created a hybrid form of “reality” and “performance” (Fell, 2007) manifest in

¹⁴ The western corollary, epistocracy (“rule by the wise”), has long been critiqued for leading to undemocratic outcomes (Runciman, 2018).

call-in shows representing most points on the ideological spectrum. Hosts determined the framing of an issue, often starting with a controversial question to be addressed by carefully selected guests, usually journalists, public intellectuals and politicians. The call-in circuit was lucrative for famous speakers (*mingzui* 名嘴), incentivising those with the personality and rhetorical eloquence to indulge in performative political theatrics. Orchestrated “saliva wars” (*koushuizhan* 口水戰) prompted the pejorative description of “putting on a show” (*zuoxiu* 作秀) widely applied to Taiwanese politicians, some of whom gained celebrity via the call-in show circuit.¹⁵ Shows delivered ratings-driving scandals, often baseless, and fragmented into highly partisan outlets. Although some scholars argued that call-in shows provided a forum for deliberation and were a force for transparency and accountability (Lee, 2011: 64), the veneer of participation was a simulacrum of interactivity belied by scant opportunity for dialogue and railroaded by “call-in squadrons” organized by partisan surrogates and supporters. The positive potential of dialogic political programming was negated by excessive politicking and a “polarized public sphere” (Li, 2004). As TV audience figures declined,¹⁶ producers began to ditch the public participation element and most shows reverted to a studio format with discussion restricted to invited pundits, marking the victory of the self-contained “political talk show” (*tanhuaxing zhenglun jiemu* 談話性政論節目).

The declining fortunes of the call-in format, itself a modern reboot of opposition pirate radio shows of the 1970s, coincided with the rise of digital and social media where much of the discussion has been displaced. While the level of dialogue between citizens and politicians remains low (Sullivan, 2010), the affordances for both ensure that social media, video sharing and streaming platforms and internet forums are the major site for political

¹⁵ KMT Legislator Qiu Yi (邱毅) revelled in the nickname “Master of the Exposé” (*Baoliao Tianwang* 爆料天王) as he revealed the financial improprieties of President Chen, which led to the Million Voices against Corruption campaign (*Baiwan renmin fantanfu daobian yundong* 百萬人民反貪腐倒扁運動; also known as the Red Shirt campaign) (Shih, 2007).

¹⁶ Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, <http://www.ios.sinica.edu.tw/sc/cht/scDownload2.php#seventh>, accessed on October 14, 2017.

communication with young people. Political actors recognize this, but they have discovered that this space, with its constant scrutiny, incivility, misinformation and scepticism, is a complex terrain to negotiate. For example, the subversion of the production of political imagery via user generated content has been a major challenge, as any politician who has had their campaign ads modified by Photoshop or seen a poorly worded statement or stumble become a meme can attest. Politicians are keen to harness this kind of voter engagement for their own mobilization purposes, but the nature of user generated content makes it unpredictable. The democratization of information production and dissemination, and the interplay of different media and viewpoints, create a rich information environment for voters, but one that is difficult for politicians to manage and harmful to whatever notion of the “benevolent and wise guardian” remains among the younger generation.

Conclusion

The hybrid media setting that is emerging in Taiwan is characterised by its complexity and heterogeneity, interdependence and transition. The dichotomies and power asymmetries that were once firmly embedded in the structures of Taiwanese politics and society are in flux and are generally being eroded. The gap between newer and older modes of political communication, traditional and online media, professional and amateur is getting smaller and a new system of co-evolving media, civil society and political spheres is taking shape. More fundamentally, actors who seek to influence public discourse are compelled to adopt modes of communication that are consistent with changing hybrid media demands. This represents a challenge to political actors in Taiwan. It also has implications for Taiwan’s political culture. Democracy theorists like Simon Tormey (2015) argue that representative democracy is changing as norms associated with the internet like openness, multiplicity, sharing, anarchy and abundance are internalized and shape citizens’ political cultural expectations. However,

while communicative abundance, democratization of information and constant public scrutiny have the potential to monitor public officials, they can also be corrupted (Keane, 2009). The glut of media content and constant presence of media messages in Taiwan, from always-on TVs and via ubiquitous connected devices, means that Taiwanese daily lives are disrupted by a flow of mediated events where adversarial and sensationalist styles of commercial journalism make politics seem more dishonest than it is and reducing public trust. Tso (2014) argues that the reduction of distance between politicians and the people through constant mediation and a “permanent battlefield in cyberspace” led to the rapid decline in popularity of Ma Ying-Jeou and Chen Shui-bian. A similar rapid decline in support for Tsai Ing-wen soon after her landslide election victory in 2016 suggests that maintaining support under conditions of permanent scrutiny and the continuous mobilization of low-cost discontent online is difficult.

Content hunger, driven by intense commercialization and over-saturation, has eroded the quality of Taiwan’s media through advertising-led business models that encourage sensationalism, click-bait and “churnalism.” Coverage of politics is obsessed with storylines and scandal, and guilty of producing “pseudo-news” that obfuscates the information environment available to citizens (Davies, 2011; Schudson, 2008). After a hesitant initial response, political actors in Taiwan have worked to re-assert their control of the information environment, often working with established media operations to exploit hybrid media logics. As co-elites in Taiwanese political culture, parties and the media share the incentive to adapt together to the new conditions, which they have done by slowly colonizing cyberspace and in continuing to influence public opinion through the broadcast and print media. Ultimately, “politicians recognize the power of the media in forming their reputations and, therefore, in making or breaking their political careers” (Rawnsley and Gong, 2011: 330). Keane (2013) describes this “symbiotic relationship” between politicians and producers as a component of

“media decadence”, where politicians seek to increase their name recognition by exploiting the communication space on offer from the media, and journalists seek scoops and inside information. However, deference to political authority and consequences for speaking truth to power have diminished. Whereas Chiang Kai Shek and Chiang Ching-Kuo were immune from scrutiny, in the democratic era “everyone including the president is fair game, and the private lives of Taiwan’s most prominent politicians are open to inspection and (the most damaging) speculation” (Rawnsley, 2004: 218). Ordinary citizens, like in the social movements described above, have in many cases used their expanded access to information and capacity to reach and mobilize large numbers of fellow citizens to uncover malfeasance and push for their rights.

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