# Introduction

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Politics and the media have always been closely interrelated. The very dawn of democratic structures, in Ancient Greece, is inextricably linked to the gradual development of effective systems for the mediation of ideas between political leaders and the public. The formalisation of rhetorical strategies, the establishment of functional environments for public speech, and the creation of accountable systems for expressing the will of the *demos*, even if at the time that term encompassed only free, male members of the local *polis*, are all early manifestations of an interdependency between politics and the media.

The subsequent 2500 years have seen the – halting and unsteady, but in the long term unstoppable – development of ever more sophisticated frameworks and technologies for political communication, including the printing press, broadcast media, and the Internet in its various forms and formats. Indeed, the past century is marked by a notable increase in the frequency of the successive waves of such inventions, and thus by an acceleration of the processes of political change: if the fundamental structure of political systems in many countries had remained comparatively static over previous centuries, a person born in Europe at the dawn of the 20th century might have had the misfortune to live through the transition from feudal rule through fledgling democracy to fascist dictatorship before even reaching middle age (not to mention the small matter of two world wars, covered by and at times also fought through the media). And the

emergent media technologies of the day – newsprint and radio – would have played a crucial role in these political revolutions.

In their own ways, political science and media and communication studies – and allied disciplines beyond – have recognised this interdependency of politics and the media. In a number of cases, they have identified the catalyst moments that document a shifting of the balance between existing and emerging media forms: Franklin D. Roosevelt's 'fireside chats' to a nationwide radio audience, for example, which enabled him to speak directly to the American people and thus bypass editing and interpretation by newspaper journalists, or the first televised presidential debate between Richard M. Nixon and John F. Kennedy, which introduced a focus on the body language and personal demeanour of the candidates in addition to their spoken words. More recently, of course, Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign was widely highlighted as the breakthrough moment for the use of contemporary social media platforms in political campaigning – and in doing so also spawned a rapidly growing field of research that investigates exactly how social media intersect with the broader political and electoral process.

Yet these examples also point to a considerable, persisting limitation of much of the work that examines the nexus of politics and the media, historically as well as – especially – in the present moment: there remains in the literature an overrepresentation of studies that examine these phenomena in the United States, and (already to a lesser extent) in other large nations of the developed world. While excellent work has been done on the situation elsewhere, to be sure, it has failed to generate the same impact as the research emerging from more hegemonic contexts. Attempts to translate the insights gleaned from the U.S., U.K., and other leading western nations to local contexts elsewhere are all too often frustrated by the significant idiosyncrasies of the respective political and media systems: the convoluted U.S. primary and presidential election

system, for example, is without equal anywhere else in the world, and our understanding of how media are being used for campaigning there is consequently only of rather limited value for the analysis of media campaigning in elections in Scandinavia or sub-Saharan Africa.

Such imbalances in the literature on media and politics appear to be even more pronounced when we shift our attention exclusively to contemporary social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, as the latest wave of innovation in political communication. Created and first broadly adopted in the United States, these platforms are now used in many countries around the globe, although with widely varying levels of market penetration amongst different user demographics. These considerable localised variations, combined with important differences in political systems, make it even more difficult to translate, say, observations from the Obama 2008 campaign to another country context. What is necessary instead is a broad-based, cross-national investigation of social media use in political communication and campaigning that allows for a charting of the similarities and differences in social media adoption and application against the backdrop of specific national (and indeed, given the rapid ongoing development of social media platforms, temporal) contexts.

### Introducing the *Companion*

With this collection, we hope to make a constructive contribution to this continuing project. In compiling the chapters we present here, we have deliberately sought to avoid an overrepresentation of the United States and other global hegemons in the adoption of social media for political purposes; instead, we hope that this *Companion* provides a valuable overview of the no less important and fascinating ideas and innovations for the use of social media in political communication that are emerging from other corners of the globe as well. The energy

and enthusiasm with which our host of contributors have taken up the challenge of reporting on developments in their countries and regions, and have made these observations accessible and meaningful for an international audience, has been inspiring.

The *Companion* opens, however, with a selection of keystone chapters in Part I that provide an overview of current and emerging theory on the intersections of social media and politics. Our contributors in this section revisit existing and established theories from agenda-setting to the public sphere, and explore emerging frameworks for understanding the impact of online and social media on journalism, authenticity, mediation, and the political process. They present concepts such as hybrid media and third spaces as means to conceptualise the continuing transformations in the contemporary media ecology, and examine the impact of networked media logic on existing systems of political communication.

Part II moves to a close examination of the political uses of social media by movements around the world. Some of the studies collected here are concerned with specific events and actions, from the revolutionary protests in Egypt to the emergence of anti-austerity movements in Spain or Greece; others examine more broadly the various developments in their specific countries of interest, from the long history of civic movements in South Korea to the emergent opposition against Azerbaijan's authoritarian regime. While each of these chapters in itself has a fascinating story to tell about how the adoption of social media for political communication is flavoured both by a view towards international trends and a need to cater to local traditions and preferences, we particularly encourage a reading across these chapters, to explore the sometimes surprising inspirations and interconnections that emerge as activists look to learn from social media experiences elsewhere in the world.

Part III, finally, explores in detail the gradually increasing adoption and adaptation of social media for political campaigning, across a range of national and regional elections and referenda. This section of the *Companion* is organised broadly chronologically, opening with two longitudinal studies of campaigning in Swedish and U.K. elections and closing with a number of snapshots of social media uses in very recent campaigns, including the Brazilian presidential election, the Danish elections for the European parliament, and the Scottish independence referendum, all in 2014. Again, reading across these chapters with an eye towards chronological developments as well as national differences is supremely rewarding: at a general level, it reveals the growing sophistication of social media-based political campaigning approaches, but from case study to case study it also highlights the reinvention of wheels, the missteps and the dead ends that appear to also be an inescapable aspect of this continuing process.

A collection of this size is not designed to be read cover to cover in one sitting, of course, and so each individual chapter stands on its own to tell a compelling story. For those readers who are interested simply in finding out more about the role of social media in the political debates amongst Indian civil society, or the use of Twitter and Facebook in recent Israeli election campaigns, those chapters will offer valuable new insights. But we encourage you to trace the interconnections, the similarities and differences, the influences and inspirations that connect the many cases collected in Parts II and III, and to return to the theoretical frameworks outlined in Part I which underpin and enrich the empirical analyses. There is no right or wrong way to approach this collection: explore whichever way you prefer, and in doing so uncover the network of connections and complexities that exist at the nexus of social media and politics.

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Similarly, we are very grateful to Routledge, and especially Editorial Assistant Simon Jacobs, for their support for this project. There is in the literature in this field a tendency for studies of the 'usual suspects' – the U.S., U.K., and perhaps some other major European countries – to be overrepresented. While many of these studies are valuable and important, the world itself, and the world of social media, is a great deal larger and richer than this focus on leading western democracies lets on, and it has been a guiding principle of our work in compiling this volume to allow insights from a wider variety of contexts to find an audience. We are delighted by Routledge's strong support for this project – and while no one collection, however large, can claim to offer a comprehensive review of the uses of social media in political communication around the world, we hope that this *Companion* will contribute to putting a broader range of national and regional experiences on the map, and may inspire further studies of the fascinating developments which are unfolding in many of these cases.

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