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Paola Sedda

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## **The digital mobilization of the Discord community supporting Jean-Luc Mélenchon's *La France Insoumise* and of Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement**

Paola Sedda

**Abstract:** Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are often considered as a vehicle for innovation in citizen participation and collective action. Indeed, while the renewal of representative democracy is long in coming, the actual changes appear to be at the margins of official political processes. By analyzing and comparing a corpus of digital debates hosted by the Discord community supporting the French political party *La France Insoumise*, this chapter focuses on the emergence of new forms of political engagement and mobilization. The meeting point between this 'digital third place' and the activist sphere contributes to reshaping partisan practices, the development of activist expertise and, in general terms, the forms of organization and coordination of collective action. The Discord of 'the rebellious' ('insoumis' in French) appears to be an autonomous space, relying on engaged information and communication practices and fostering recognition and appreciation of peripheral political activities. Its innovative effect is mostly associated with its liminal location: as a specific part of the wider galaxy of the 'protest internet', the community is torn between the new forms of 'informational mobilization' and the traditional forms of political activism. In the end, the new politicized communication practices contribute to moving the boundaries of politics and political engagement as well as those of the public sphere reconfigured by the new fragmentation and creation processes of on-line critical publics. Moreover, to understand the distinctive form of this Discord Community, its main characteristics will be compared with another on-line critical public: Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy. Links will be drawn to our previous work on the on-line activism within this movement, which will lead to a discussion on the permanent tension between (re)centralization and autonomy which links on-line publics and party leaderships.

## **Introduction**

Scientific works dealing with the impacts of digital technologies in the transformation of political participation goes back as far as the dawn of the internet itself. Anonymous and mediated communication practices within the first virtual communities seemed to create the conditions for the development of Habermas' normative ideal of an equal and broader participation in the public sphere (Rheingold, 1993).

However, the second era of the internet is clearly marked by the increasing importance of the market that appropriates users' creations (Dardot and Laval, 2014) and mostly shapes new communication and participation formats. Moreover, digital arenas appear to be fragmented and asymmetrical spaces that reflect or, even exacerbate, social, statutory and participative inequalities (Miège, 2010). Unlike the democratization power initially attributed to this new media, the internet has disappointed a certain number of its contemporary observers. Some of them point to the tendency of the internet to mold itself to social pathologies, to mirror individualism, to accentuate disinformation and flamewars (Turkle, 1997), by perpetuating, in the end, the actual forms of capitalist production and social domination (Fuchs, 2017).

But despite these negative trends, a relative techno-optimism has persisted over time: even now, the internet embodies the very essence of the public sphere in that it promotes a sort of conversational democracy (Dahlgren, 2005) based on the free expression of ordinary citizens' speech (Cardon, 2010). New participation and democratization challenges are thus fully understood by social movements and citizens' networks whose practices elude the conventional forms of political activism. If the ideal-type of the deliberative democracy preached by Habermas is difficult to achieve, political participation emerges in different digital spaces and often assumes unorthodox forms and formats (satirical contents and hashtags, alternative media, amateur videos, counter-expertise...).

Digital platforms can allow activists and ordinary citizens to debate, produce information and expertise and organize and coordinate collective action in the absence of other mediation. These initiatives can be independent or led by an organization as part of a specific political communication strategy that can be fully integrated into the organizations of the 'contentious politics'. Therefore, our theoretical framework suggests a connection between the 'contentious politics' model (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015; Snow and Benford, 2000) and the critical approaches of the

online public spheres (Negt and Kluge, 2016; Wright, 2012; Dahlgren, 2005). By merging these two perspectives, we will be able to observe the innovations pushed by the emergence of online critical publics engaged in the construction of new ‘collective action frames’. Containing ideological, cultural and political schemes of knowledge and experience, the frame of a specific mobilization is built through a micro-mobilization process based on both face-to-face and mediated interactions between people who are confronted with a specific form of social injustice (Gamson, et al., 1982). In this perspective, the contentious politics implies a communications conflict, as well as a struggle for the construction and the dissemination of mediated images and representations of political conflict.

In order to identify the changes encouraged by the activist use of digital media, we have investigated two original political laboratories: the Discord of the rebellious, a chat service that has recently hosted a group of activists supporting the French left-wing party *La France Insoumise*, and Beppe Grillo’s blog that has encouraged the development of the Five Star Movement in Italy. The comparison between the two different cases will shed light on the effects of new media on the reconfiguration of political mobilization practices in France and Italy. Unlike the Discord community, whose communication practices take place outside the political party’s structures, in the case of the Italian Five Star Movement, the online critical public is involved in the emergence and the development of the partisan organization. In this way, the innovations related to the integration of digital practices in the political apparatus could have the effect of reinforcing and restoring the legitimacy of politics instead of questioning and reshaping democracy.

## **Methodology**

After a long ethnographic immersion in Beppe Grillo’s blog from 2009 to 2013, another ethnographic observation of the Discord of the rebellious was carried out from May to September 2018 for the purposes of this research. Working outside the electoral period presents the benefit of showing the communities’ ordinary operation and priorities without the pressure of the electoral agenda. We signed in, created a pseudonym and connected to the platforms every day in the evening for between three and four hours. The immersion in the online environments revealed the functioning of these socio-technical devices: rules, values, practices and forms of collaboration and moderation. The analyses focused both on the morphology of the digital environment (prioritization of content, participation formats) and on the aspects related to the discourse (issues, registers and

cultural resources). The ethnographic analysis has been complemented by a qualitative corpus analysis. For the Italian blog, we worked on manually-created data while for the Discord we imported and treated our corpus of chat conversations<sup>1</sup> (four channels holding about 450,000 posts) with a specific tool, Record<sup>2</sup>. This application allows social science scholars to store different channels of debates and update them. Moreover, it is possible to index the posts by date, author or semantic fields, to easily import pertinent data, identify the whole content published by a single author, deal with a specific issue.

We also used this application to carry out lexicometry analysis useful to test some hypotheses based on the qualitative content and discourse analysis that we have conducted on smaller parts of our French and Italian corpora<sup>3</sup>. For the first case, the qualitative study was conducted on the chatroom #loi\_travail (#labor\_reform, containing about 900 posts). For the Italian case, we refer to a previous qualitative study based on a corpus analysis conducted on 53 political communiqués (about 26,200 words) published on the comedian Beppe Grillo's blog between 2008 (the period immediately preceding the launch of the movement) and 2013 (when it started to hold seats in Parliament after the elections).

### **The Discord community: a structured autonomy**

Welcome message:

“Discord allows activists, supporters and curious people to discuss, share articles, images, videos concerning the presidential campaign. These exchanges often lead to debates.

Different chat-rooms allow in particular to organize and launch projects aiming to promote in different ways the “A Common Future” program.

Drafting texts, graphic design, developing games and websites ... each volunteer is welcomed to support the campaign of *La France Insoumise*. Do not hesitate to join us and bring your competence.

To conclude, visit our portal where you will find a lot of things to discover and to share!”

By promoting new digital projects, producing online resources and expertise, the Discord of the rebellious is a place devoted to political debate and activist action. In the beginning, Discord was the place where the players of MMOG (Massively Multiplayer Online Games<sup>4</sup>) met each other to debate, fulfil common objectives and prepare their ‘raids’: important events involving a lot of gamers committed to accomplishing specific goals.

According to the French press, the initiator was a 21-year-old computer scientist (whose pseudonym is Midnight)<sup>5</sup> who proposed joining a new group on the Discord platform to a group of people who were showing their support for the ideas of Jean-Luc Mélenchon on another forum dedicated to video games<sup>6</sup>.

The Discord debates are moderated by expert users who regulate the discussions, sanction misconduct and ensure proper and smooth progression of the conversations. However, despite a high degree of control, the complex system of access and attribution of different statuses is also characterized by relative flexibility. Some channels are totally public and open to everyone's contribution; some others are public, but users are blocked from commenting.

These security measures allow the community to foster a selective social and political inclusion that is supposed to encourage motivated networks to bond through common values and ideals and truly commit to the project.

Acting on the margins of Mélenchon's political organization, the *Discord of the rebellious* has organized some political raids in different social networks<sup>7</sup>, developed new online resources<sup>8</sup>, conducted different political debates in order to support the political program 'L'Avenir en commun' (which can be translated as 'A Common Future'). These actions have been favorably perceived by the official communication team who decided to show gratitude and recognition toward this community by promoting their online resources without trying to absorb or control it.

Even if the community appeared to be a citizens' autonomous organization, it is not completely disconnected from the party. Firstly, because it shows ideological biases, and secondly the communication strategy of the political party during the French presidential campaign certainly encouraged such initiatives. As it assumed the anti-system role in the political conflict, *La France Insoumise* has been a leader in using social networks communication practices efficiently setting up an online participation strategy. Indeed, Mélenchon's new party-movement feeds on digital practices related to different networks of the 'contentious politics' (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015).

Despite this, relative autonomy from the partisan organization is attested by a weak number of references to *La France Insoumise* and its leader especially in the channels dedicated to the development of communications projects. In the #labor\_reform channel, we have registered only 14 references to the party out of 900 total posts analyzed. The number of mentions is not higher in other channels such as the one dedicated to the discussion of the news or even in the channel #débat\_direct\_an (#live\_debate\_na) where users discussed in real time the National Assembly's

debate on Macron's 2017 labor reform. Here the number of occurrences is 183 out of 15,669 posts. This autonomy is also proudly displayed by the members. On this subject, one of the major contributors says:

#labor\_reform (09-2017)

User1: 'Hey guys, before starting to work on this new project during the weekend, I just wanted to say that I am very proud of the Discord. It's so beautiful, We are doing a f.u.c.k.i.n.g great job. It's really far above the norm. ❤️'

Beyond the partisan organization, what is really important is the program, the type of society that the members of the community construct through the online debates and want to defend<sup>9</sup>.

The ideals and principles, contained in the 'A Common Future' program, are also reaffirmed and appropriated by the users:

#discussion\_fi 04-2017 (in which fi is an abbreviation for *La France Insoumise*)

User2: 'I can clearly summarize it with a short line: the principle of the program 'A Common future' is not a man at the top and the pack who executes or waits for instructions, it is the thought of a mass of local groups who act for the common good.'

In order to better understand the new activist forms encouraged by the interaction with this specific social-technological device, we observed the development of one of the projects promoted by the community: decoding the five ordinances of the new labor law that came into effect in January 2018. As a French version of the flexicurity model, attempting to conciliate flexibility and security in the labor market, the law was questioned and contested by different segments of the French society (trade unions, student organizations, social movements, left-wing parties). These protests followed a previous strong mobilization which started in March 2016 against the labor law El Khomri introduced during President François Hollande's five-year term. A public chatroom named #labor\_reform was dedicated to this specific task: generating the content of a new website aiming to clearly explain the concrete changes that employees would face in their day-to-day work:

#labor\_reform (08-2017)

User3: 'The goal of this project is to translate the articles of the XXL labor law into a more accessible language that can be understood by all employees'. After that we will have to create a website where we will publish this content... We can translate the key articles then underline the consequences of this deregulation of labor?.'

Indeed, the description of the ordinances had to be as precise as possible while being accessible. The rejection of the reform did not have to be rooted only in an ideological posture (the political party *La France Insoumise* rejected the reform) but it had to appear informed, reasonable, accurate

and oriented to the common good. The activists' work is here assimilated to a professional activity: activists have to analyze data, put them into perspective, find valid sources and finally make results available<sup>10</sup>. The vocabulary used by the activists who are engaged in this project was often related to work environment:

#labor\_reform (08-2017)

User4: 'I am going to have a quick shower, then I'll sit down at my professional desk and I'll join you ^^'.

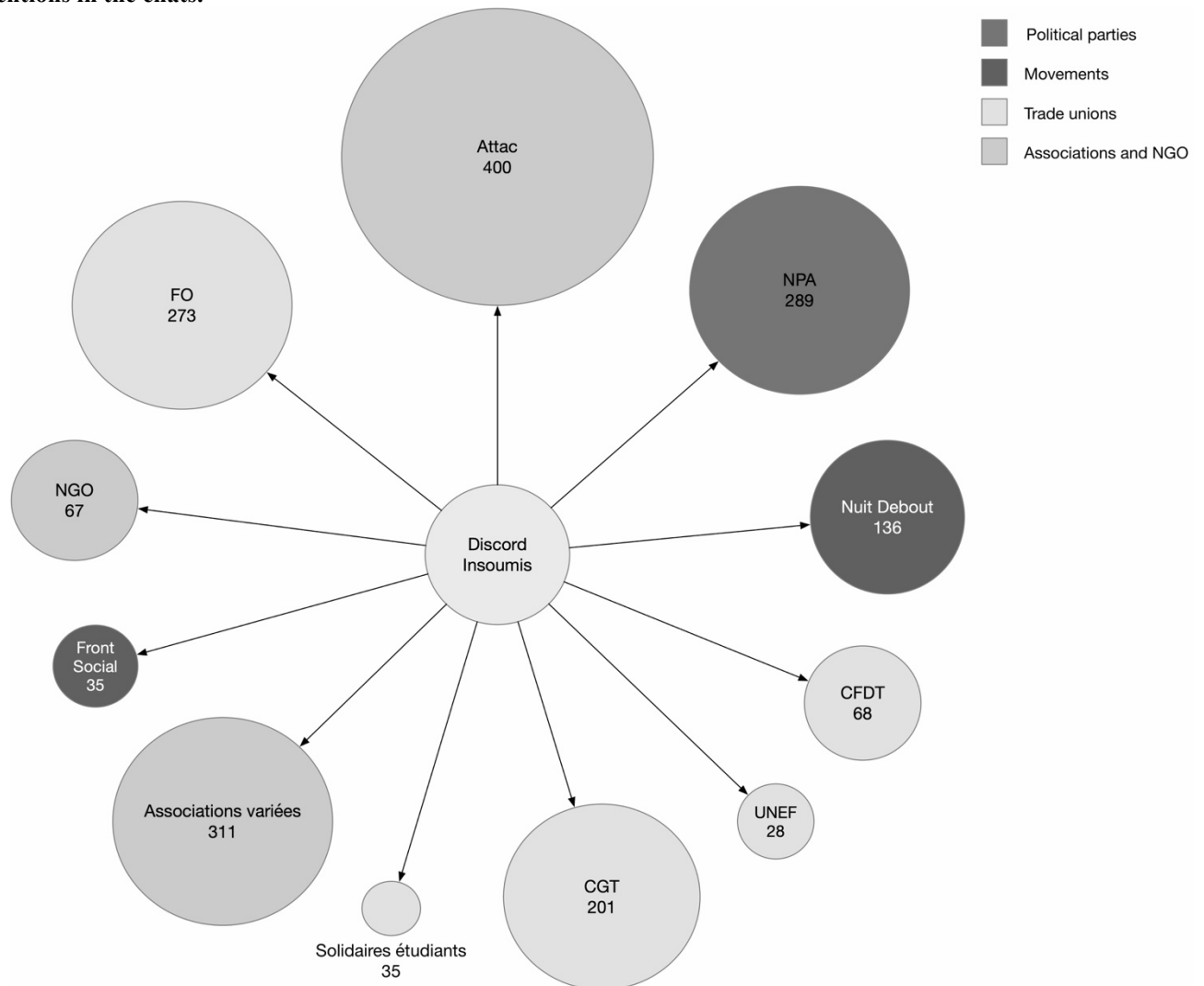
User5: 'I am available to work on the project this evening'.

The projects are developed during the users' free time, normally in the evening or during the weekend. They can be related to the user's professional profile or to his/her own personal interests. The Discord of the rebellious is therefore situated at the intersection of different sorts of communities: an activist community, a community of practice and of interest. Several types of expertise (computers, video-games, communications, video-editing, politics ...) were made available for collective action through this particular platform. But the operating mode of this device and the professional profiles that are spotlighted also suggest some selectivity and asymmetry in their participation in online activism. Indeed, we have identified six very active contributors who played an important role in the debate and in the production of information. In this perspective, the digital space encourages restrictive access to collective action as it is regulated by the user's status and competence.

The mobilization of the expertise appears to be still related to the social and ideological networks that contributed to building it: protest groups, trade unions and activist networks are mentioned in the channel #labor\_reform regarding the interpretation of the law and the production of content.

Three types of actors appear to be important resources and potential partners for protest actions: left and center-left trade unions, especially in regards to their expertise in the labor domain; associations, which were mentioned 722 times, (the most commonly mentioned of which was Attac<sup>11</sup> with 400 mentions); and social movements, with 264 mentions (such as *Front Social*<sup>12</sup> and in particular *Nuit Debout*<sup>13</sup>, which was mentioned 136 times).

**Figure 13.1: Connections with intermediary bodies and movements calculated on the basis of the number of mentions in the chats.**



The convergence is also encouraged by the leadership of the party as shown in the following extract:

#labor\_reform (09-2017)

User6: 'In his speech, JML (Jean-Luc Mélenchon) paved the way for common action against the ordinances, especially with other activists and other leftist political parties, trade unions and associations... This chatroom has never been more important! I think that we should find new methods and solutions to establish a link between different activists to build common actions, and also some tools allowing the recruitment of new people and directing them to existing networks of activists (such as the *Front Social* but not only that ...).'

What therefore emerges is a particular project-oriented activist approach, a sort of distant form of political engagement (Ion et al., 2005) focused on communication and information tasks including participation in debates, new website development, commenting on and share news. These new

activists implement an effective form of digital self-organization and cooperation regulated by very strict rules and a hierarchical management of different communication spaces.

### **Beppe Grillo's blog: framing new politics**

Developed by the Casaleggio Associati, a digital marketing company owned by the Five Star Movement's co-founder Gianroberto Casaleggio (recently deceased), the satirical blog<sup>14</sup> is a fine commercial platform aiming to stimulate political debates and new forms of citizen activism.

Since it was launched in 2005, it has served to build a new collective action frame through an effective work of mediatization of the political conflict in which the movement places itself in opposition to the old representative institutions and media. Serving as both the brain and megaphone of the movement, the blog operated as a counter-media providing a radical negative vision of the Italian political and journalistic spheres. Little by little, it encouraged the formation of a critical public inclined to participate in the birth of a new political movement. In this way, the debates hosted on the blog are closely connected to the emergence of the Five Star Movement. Beppe Grillo's blog became the headquarters of the party-movement, the place where all activities, strategies and contents converge; it had an important role in the framing processes, in the construction of a new political identity that is promoted by his outstanding and charismatic figure. Debates, surveys and projects are thus propelled from the top (through the blog) and then decentralized and developed in the different local territories and networks. The central information space of the blog sets the stage for the activist space of the M5S dedicated to political action (creation of civic lists in which people unaffiliated with traditional political parties run for election, and other forms of participation in policy-making activities). The internet plays an important role at all stages of the political process: socialization (through the online participation formats and the events promoted by the blog), membership (online registration), deliberation and election (debates and votes on the drafted laws).

It is a franchising democracy that is made available by Grillo through the investment in the blog-portal, that became progressively the technical and ideological architecture of the new organization. In Communiqué 38 (07-11-2010), Grillo encourages his supporters to stand as candidates for municipal elections:

‘... Create your list through the portal ... and stand as a candidate in order to implement our political project. It's a franchising democracy, the direct access to politics ... the zero-cost democracy ...’<sup>15</sup>

Each social-technological device has an expressive function and a cultural hold on the formats of communication as it reflects and shapes at the same time the organization mode, the features of the political debate and the forms of activist practices. Indeed, on Grillo's satirical blog, the debate is strongly oriented by the personality of the leader who shapes the ideological and communication environment.

The new faith in the power of technology to directly influence social change and go beyond 'old' political cleavages and passions constitutes the 'master frame' (Snow and Benford, 2000). If the interpretation of social injustice and the solution proposed is consistent with the principles rooted in civil society, the 'master frame' acquires a mobilization potential capable of fostering effective commitment (Snow and Benford, 1992).

The 'collective action frame' of the Five Star Movement has been built through the blog as the result of discourse and communication processes between the leader and the activists. Beppe Grillo's blog has given visibility to the problems affecting Italian politics. Faced with the corruption of the political class and with decades of inappropriate public policies, the users were gradually encouraged to react and get involved in a new project. The Five Star Movement provides a brand new digital democracy as a solution. By stressing the empowering potential of digital technologies, the discourse of the political communiqué focuses on a radical opposition between two poles: the past, connected to the old representative politics and mass media, and the future, related to the direct democracy project supported by the blog.

In April 2010, in the political Communiqué 33, Grillo explains the status and the goal of the movement:

"The *MoVimento 5 Stelle* is not a political party nor does it hopes to become one of them in the future. It wants to testify and show that it is possible to provide an efficient exchange of views and a democratic confrontation outside associations and political parties and without the mediation of elective and representative organizations, by investing all internet users with the power of governance normally attributed to a few elected people."<sup>16</sup>

Then, in the political Communiqué 46 (09-2011), Beppe Grillo stated that:

‘The Internet produces the sum of the citizens’ intelligences and it is more valuable than any professional politician’.<sup>17</sup>

The internet is considered as a suitable means to guarantee pluralist and free information. The theme of freedom of the press has been always very important on Grillo’s blog. In the 53 political communiqués that we analyzed, this theme occurred 93 times while the number of the occurrences of the lexicon referring to information in general was 300. Informed people constitute the active base that the comedian wanted to mobilize, the people to whom he addressed his communiqués in the first place:

Political Communiqué 15 (08-2008):

‘The Italians, the most informed, the youngest, the precarious workers, the students, the unemployed people who asked for a change received a fuck you as an answer from the Italian government’<sup>18</sup>.

The comic wanted to assemble a large and diversified community. In Grillo’s movement, bringing together in the first instance the disappointed voters of the center-left, the digital community is not ideologically fixed. There is a real willingness to rise above the political divide in order to encourage wider participation. Even though some points of the two political programs and of the two rhetorical strategies may converge, such as the importance dedicated to democratic processes and to the ecological transformation of society, the Five Star Movement conveys a post-ideological and technological utopia where informed and connected citizens are supposed to build a better democratic society:

Political Communiqué 33 04-2010

‘The MoVimento 5 Stelle does not have ideologies but only ideas. It doesn’t want a leader (for what?) or professional politicians but citizens elected by other citizens in order to manage public things’.

However, the democratic rhetoric clashes with the participation formats developed on the blog. Our observation shows that the ‘collective action frame’ is mostly prefabricated by the editors (especially through the communiqué format that we have analyzed) while the users’ appropriations and contributions are not visible or recognized as they are confined in the chaotic space dedicated to comments.

## **Political parties and digital counter public spheres: a difficult cohabitation**

Unlike the many differences registered between the two digital environments that we have analyzed on two different timescales and contexts, we tried to examine similar elements of each in order to suggest a wider reflection on the role of the new digital communication practices in the transformation of the forms of political participation within partisan organizations in Europe.

Both the Discord and Beppe Grillo's blog are new digital places hosting political debates and stimulating users' mobilization and collaboration on specific projects. The two activist communities express the wish to do politics in a different way, by using their own forces and skills and acting outside the sphere of influence of mainstream media and traditional parties.

Moreover, both on the blog and in the Discord, the critique of the official media pushes the activists to produce information themselves. Information practices are thus considered essential to stimulate citizen activism. The information shared in the chat service and on Grillo's blog are considered a precious common good produced thanks to the users' engagement in the new activist practices. These information activities constitute a fundamental resource for the new party-movement model capable of externalizing some communications functions and encouraging the autonomy and the development of decentralized forms of cooperation between different related activist networks. The Italian comedian encouraged people to get information through the internet and to not trust official media. In the same way, Mélenchon used the internet in order to short-circuit the dominant media which he accused of producing manipulations and distortions of reality. Indeed, most of the Discord's projects are based on media activism and aim to decipher political information by avoiding representations provided by traditional media.

The new form of party-movement thus wants to stimulate the participation of engaged citizens in the production and in the dissemination of information processes. This strategy allows the new partisan organizations to outsource the tasks related to digital communication and to stimulate the sense of belonging within the community through an active and immersive user experience. As a consequence, the communication and information practices become at all levels an essential part of the activist experience.

However, the nature of the debate, the forms of participation and the way digital mobilization is embedded into the political process are slightly different: one is a political blog where the debate is strongly oriented by the personality of the leader who shapes the ideological and communication environment, the other is a chat service used by activists in order to achieve common goals.

The Discord seems to achieve one of the most important aspirations of the public sphere which is, according to Habermas, encouraging the emergence of a ‘society engaged in critical public debate’ and seeking the common good (Habermas, 1989, p. 52). Structural, cultural and design features of this specific socio-technical device facilitate the development of argumentative political debates focused on mutual understanding and on the construction of a shared vision of social justice. In the case of Grillo’s movement, the new organization form is propelled from the center and enhanced by a technological infrastructure specifically conceived to achieve political purposes and power. In the case of the Discord, these initiatives are peripheral and contribute to reinforcing the political center without being led by it.

In contrast to the Italian Five Star *Movement* that refuses any type of intermediation and shows a particular mistrust towards trade unions, the members of the Discord keep some connections with traditional organizations while they promote new forms of cooperation and convergence between old and new actors, ordinary citizens and specialists and between left-wing traditional organizations and new social movements (such as *Front Social*, *Nuit Debout*, and more recently, the *Gilets Jaunes* to which the Discord has dedicated an entire channel).

In the end, if the debate on Beppe Grillo’s blog aims to build and reinforce (through both top-down and bottom-up communication mechanisms) the collective action frame, the debate of the Discord is focused on specific communication tasks and aims to support the societal vision that the digital debates gradually contribute to shaping.

## **Conclusion**

In contemporary societies, ‘the flow of commodities, technologies, and populations, of information, images, and narratives, of lifestyles, means of expression, and mode of representation has also enriched the arsenal of alternative public spheres that continue to emerge and organize at the local level ...’ (Negt and Kluge, 2016, xiv foreword). The Discord of the rebellious represents one of these attempts to build an autonomous public sphere that the activists have created by themselves without the mediation of the political organization. On the contrary, on the Italian political blog, digital mobilization is governed and embedded into the political party as an essential part of its functioning, organization and political action.

But the two platforms merge in that they are both hosting a counter public who is likely to get engaged in new political mobilization dynamics (Sedda, 2015a). As a result, the online critical

publics' communication processes can represent the antechamber of new social mobilizations that can challenge the polity's sphere (like for Beppe Grillo's online community) or provide an external resource to existing partisan organizations (as in the case of the Discord of the rebellious). The two cases are emblematic of the emerging forms of digital mobilization characterized by the importance of activist information practices and by a new project-oriented and ideologically fluctuating approach to political engagement. In both cases, digital mobilization becomes essential to build a new political identity and provide new communication and organization resources to partisan actors in a context marked by a deep disaffection with regard to traditional politics. By both challenging and reinforcing the existing political organizations, the two European phenomena stress the emergence of a democratic participation demand that comes from civil society and seems to be only partially satisfied with representative mechanisms. Participation is indeed constantly regulated and harnessed for instrumental purposes. The mistrust caused by this broken promise of participation fosters the emergence of counter-public spheres that can be mobilized under very different political grounds and purposes.

But the two experiences also appear to be hybrid phenomena revealing the complexity of the impacts of new technologies in political change processes. Indeed, they show that digital media have conflicting characteristics as 'they are embedded into contradictions and the power structures of contemporary society' (Fuchs, 2017, p. 248). As new party-movement organizations, the Five Star Movement and *La France Insoumise* combine traditional political communication forms with new practices based on the citizens/users' involvement in the construction of the information space. This strategy falls within a conflicting dynamic: the new political participation practice collides with representation and leadership models of the political apparatus.

As a consequence, an effective conversion of representative mechanisms into a radical and participatory democracy is far from being achieved. In the case of the the Five Star Movement, the communication model of the blog creates frictions with the idea of citizens' emancipation as the public's desires and intentions are predetermined by the technical and discursive structure of the blog. But the complex relationship between the Discord and *La France Insoumise* conveys a certain ambiguity too. The Discord of the rebellious is a peripheral tool encouraging autonomous activist action that is supposed to reinforce the political center. If the Discord corresponds to a more genuine and autonomous counter public sphere, its action is in a way absorbed by the global communication strategy of the party without a real guarantee of an effective change of the form of militancy within the partisan organization.

In any case, the possibility to really challenge the representative model depends much more on the complex intertwining between political changes and socio-technological innovations than on the technological potential itself. Subaltern publics, empowered by technology, can suggest and experiment alternative political forms. However, their capacity to reshape the democratic frame is also related to the openness of political spheres for realizing the meaning of participatory democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> The channels that we have selected are : #loi\_travail — labour reform (890 posts, now closed); ##discussion\_fi — the general debate of the *La France Insoumise* (430,961 posts, this channel is still ongoing); #debat\_direct\_an — the live discussion during the national assembly debate on the labour reform (15,228 posts, now closed) and, finally, #réseaux\_sociaux — dedicated to the social networks (4,044 posts, still ongoing).

<sup>2</sup> The application was programmed by Esteban Lorenzano, the architect of *Pharo* (<https://pharo.org>), an open source system developed by the laboratory of applied informatics INRIA (Lille 1 University). The tool is available here <https://github.com/estebanlm/record>.

<sup>3</sup> The extracts of chats and of blog posts have been translated by French and by Italian to English.

<sup>4</sup> Originally called MUD (Multi User Dungeon), the first role-playing games appeared at the end of the 70's, they were based on textual exchanges, allowed the creation of complex characters and the experimentation of multiple facets of the player's personality.

<sup>5</sup>Source: <http://www.20minutes.fr/high-tech/2051815-20170418-comment-fonctionne-discord-insoumis-outil-numerique-pro-melenchon>

<sup>6</sup> It is a forum hosted in the French website [jeuxvideo.com](http://jeuxvideo.com), an important media entirely dedicated to video games.

<sup>7</sup> We refer to a technique aiming to bring media attention and visibility to an issue by inflaming social networks in an artificial way.

<sup>8</sup> Among the different initiatives, there were some parodic channels, video-games such as *Fiscal combat* where the hero Mélenchon is engaged in a fight for redistributing resources among poor people, and other websites providing political information to understand and decode the issues of the campaign. All projects are available at the following link: [http://deconsommation.org/index.php/Sites\\_et\\_reseau\\_-\\_France\\_Insoumise\\_\(politique\)](http://deconsommation.org/index.php/Sites_et_reseau_-_France_Insoumise_(politique)) (last visit 0-10-2019).

<sup>9</sup> On one of the websites developed by the Discord, the activists assert that *La France Insoumise* “is not a political party and it doesn’t support any of them. It defends a collective and deliberative work carried out by circles of citizens during 8 months that led to the program A Common Future”. <http://melenchonouimais.fr/candidat.html>. The program: <https://avenirecommun.fr> (last visit 01-10-2019).

<sup>10</sup> The members of the group engaged in this specific project had to fill the information related to their specific domain in a Google document : <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1hsvCz7D-G1IYv2E4wklZoOKuBskBc8-Ps--FqwFjnHg/edit?usp=sharing>

<sup>11</sup> Attac is an association fighting against neo-liberalism politics and defending the protection of the environment and the social justice.

<sup>12</sup> *Le Front Social* is a coordination composed by trade unions, associations, citizens’ networks, alternative media, activists, women and men trying to build an alternative to President Macron’s liberal politics” <https://www.frontsocialuni.fr/qui-sommes-nous/>. (last visit 01-14-2019).

<sup>13</sup> *Nuit Debout* (Up All Night) is a French citizens’ social movement which began in March 2016 due to the labor reform proposed by François Hollande’s socialist government.

<sup>14</sup> We worked on the previous version of Grillo’s blog ([www.beppegrillo.it](http://www.beppegrillo.it)) that in January 2018 has been replaced by a new personal blog hosted on the main domain and deliberately separated from the movement’s blog (<https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it>) and website ([movimento 5 stelle](http://movimento5stelle.it)).

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.beppegrillo.it/comunicato-politico-numero-trentotto/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/materiali-bg/Regolamento-Movimento-5-Stelle.pdf> (last visit 12-12-2018).

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.beppegrillo.it/comunicato-politico-numero-quarantasei/> (last visit 12-12-2018).

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.beppegrillo.it/comunicato-politico-numero-quindici/> (last visit 10-27-2018).