Media Capital in the Political Field

Esa Reunanen
Tampere 14.4.2015
1. **Question:** The media’s role in politics

2. **Theory:** Mediatization, policy networks, field theory, systems theory

3. **Results:** “Media in Power” (2009) and “Experiencing Political Publicity” (2012)
The media’s role in politics?

**MEDIATIZATION:**

1) The media’s institutional differentiation (independence)

2) The media becomes integrated into the operations of other institutions

Stig Hjarvard, 2008
Policy networks

Motivation for action:
- Mutual benefits and dependencies
- Parties have different resources

Types of policy networks:
- Policy community (closed)
- Issue network (open)

Martin J. Smith, 1993
Hugh Compston, 2009
Field: laws and capital
Cross-field effects: e.g. mediatization

Pierre Bourdieu: *Field of power: meta-capital?*
Friedrich Krotz (2009): *Mediatization as a meta-process?*
Cross-field effects: systems approach
Political capital: credit and power

Bourdieu: "Political capital is a form of symbolic capital, credit founded on credence or belief or recognition, or more precisely, on the innumerable operations of credit by which agents confer on a person."

Parsons: *Power* is the "medium" of politics similarly as money is the medium of economy

- In policy networks those can use power who are believed to have it: power must be communicated
- Power is not a synonym with the resources (wealth, physical force, institutional position) on which it is based on
- Power makes different power resources commensurate similarly as money makes different goods commensurate.
Media capital: Attention control

The medium of media is attention

- The media targets attention according to its logics or rules
- The ability to control attention is a power resource for the media
- Politicians may try to control and use media attention for their purposes
- Politicians may try to shield themselves from media attention

John B. Thompson (1995; 2005): Control of visibility is indispensable for understanding contemporary society
- The importance and risks of media exposure: 1) gaffes and outbursts, 2) performance that backfires, 3) leak, 4) scandal.
- Increased need for PR-efforts. The media complicates operations of other institutions

Ari Adut (2012): The semiotics of general visibility
- 1) Division into actors and spectators, 2) Reduction to appearances and generalizations
- Attention/publicity creates facticity and unavoidability
- Attention/publicity enhances collective action or may cause panic
- Status effect of attention/publicity
### Media field and media capital

Forms of media capital generated by political actors in the **media field**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEDIA FIELD</th>
<th>Institutionalized media capital</th>
<th>Individual media capital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal media capital:</strong> ability to control public attention</td>
<td>Institutional position increases possibilities for networking with journalists and thus accumulates internal media capital</td>
<td>Personal charisma, contacts with journalists, and knowledge about news culture accumulate internal media capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External media capital:</strong> public attention gained through media publicity</td>
<td>Institutional position increases media publicity.</td>
<td>Personal charisma and &quot;media appeal&quot; increase media publicity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Modified from Davis 2010, 89)
Media capital in the political field

Medium of the media: attention

Medium of politics: power

How does media capital (public attention) transform into political capital (credit, power) in the political field?

• How do the media affect how the politicians evaluate each other’s power?
• How do the media affect how the politicians and other actors act in policy networks?
Media in Power

- Project started 2007 and was completed 2009
- Decision-makers’ view to media power
- Risto Kunelius, Elina Noppari, Esa Reunanen
- Policy networks as sites for using power
- Mediatization of society
- Three case studies: "Nurse strike", "Innovation University", "Smash Asem"
- Media-contents, interviews of 60 decision-makers, elite-survey (N=419)

Experiencing Political Publicity

- Project started 2010 and was completed 2012
- How parlamentarians and activists experience political action and publicity?
- What personal consequences political activity may cause?
- The role of emotions and personality in politics and activism
- Theme interviews of politicians (N=14) and activists (N=12)
- Esa Reunanen and Auli Harju
The media’s influence to power-estimates of decision-makers (1)

How much do these things contribute to your personal authority?

- Own expertise and know how: 48% Very much, 49% Quite much, 30% Quite little, 1% Not at all
- Own activity and earned trust: 51% Very much, 43% Quite much, 5% Quite little, 3% Not at all
- Personal contacts and networks: 33% Very much, 50% Quite much, 14% Quite little, 3% Not at all
- Official position and legal rights: 29% Very much, 45% Quite much, 18% Quite little, 7% Not at all
- Support from public opinion: 24% Very much, 50% Quite much, 21% Quite little, 5% Not at all
- Media publicity for issues: 22% Very much, 48% Quite much, 24% Quite little, 6% Not at all
- Membership in working groups: 22% Very much, 48% Quite much, 25% Quite little, 6% Not at all
- Media publicity of my organization: 21% Very much, 47% Quite much, 26% Quite little, 6% Not at all
- My organization’s economic resources: 11% Very much, 33% Quite much, 33% Quite little, 16% Not at all
- My own media publicity: 7% Very much, 39% Quite much, 39% Quite little, 20% Not at all

Source: Media in Power (2009)
The media’s influence to power-estimates of decision-makers (2)

”I have noticed that appearing in the media has increased my own or my organization’s authority in working groups, negotiations or in other such occasions.”

- 25% agrees totally, 54% agrees somewhat (N=371)

”It [media publicity] has significance. We want to be visible because we are such a small group. If we are not mentioned, we do not exist.” (NGO)

”He compared the situation in some working group now and a year ago [before the great media publicity]. Even though he speaks exactly the same bullshit as before, the others listen to him much more.” (trade union)
Media capital and political capital

"There is a trend towards increased publicity-orientation. However, the whole political system (...) reacts against this slightly, because our collegial community do not very much respect those who sell themselves to the media. (...) Those who have expertise are nonetheless valued inside politics. (...) Many of the best politicians, like for example, Alexander Stubb, can, of course, combine these both." (politician)

- Media publicity does not necessarily increase politician’s authority
- The rules of the political field specify how media capital is transformed into political capital
"We issue experts” vs. "those publicity-oriented”

- Much media publicity
  - Wannabe
  - Star
- Little expertise
  - Useless
  - Diligent

Experiencing Political Publicity (2012)
Rules of the political field

• External media capital (publicity) only transforms to political capital if it is supported by other components of political capital, like expertise, talent, and social networks

• In spite of the trend towards publicity-orientation, politics is still teamwork, and talented team-players are respected on the political field

• Political field is internally divided: on different arenas media capital is valued differently (see Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013)
  • The electoral arena: external media capital and personal style are important
  • The parliamentary arena: expertise and strategic media publicity are important
  • Party’s internal arena: shielding internal cohesion from media publicity is emphasized
Two views on democracy

1. Politician represents voter’s opinions
   – Voter is interested in political issues and has opinions on them
   – Politician’s expertise and success in working groups are important
   – Media capital is of secondary importance

2. Politician representing "political style” (Pels 2003)
   – Politician relates to a voter symbolically and estetically: the voter evaluates the person
   – Like celebrities, politician is "one of us" but comes from "another world”
   – Personal media publicity is important
   – Media capital is of primary importance
Media capital on the political field

”We live totally in a different kind of world [than before]. People demand openness. Politics is very much done using one’s personality. The idea that we could retain in some stone-age practices simply doesn’t work anymore.” (politician)

Nevertheless, issue-oriented view on democracy still dominates on political field - especially on the parliamentary arena

Media capital is an important component of political capital. However, alone it is not enough, and it is valued differently on different political arenas
The End

References:


http://tampub.uta.fi/