

How Participatory Media are Changing the Meaning of Democracy

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Hope and Change: Yes We (Actually) Can is the name of a short YouTube video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPwR9eNH8qA>) that seeks to visually demonstrate how the nature of democracy has fundamentally shifted, giving users the opportunity to de-contextualize politics and share their own voice in a multitude of media heard across the globe. The video speaks to the power of remix culture, political remix, and citizen reporting.

I chose to examine the way digital platforms have altered the political landscape and meaning of democracy by compiling a number of public and historical moments juxtaposed with intimate and compelling scenes. The result is a four-minute video, made entirely with footage from YouTube, which challenges the viewer to think about what participatory media does to the democratic voice.

Opening with a Google search for the term “participatory media,” the video begins with a basic definition (found on the web) of the phrase: distinctly different media (such as blog, wikis, and music-photo-video sharing) with three interrelated characteristics—technical/structural, psychological/social, and economic/political components. In other words, participatory media have a “many-to-many” function, derive their power from active participation of many people, and are amplified through free social networks that provide broad, fast communication.

The scenes that follow reveal footage from past, recent, small, and momentous moments. From Martin Luther King’s I Have a Dream Speech and Obama’s announcement of Osama Bin Laden’s death, to citizen footage of the protests in the Middle East and a Gay Pride protest in San Francisco, the clips showcase how the ways in which historical moments are captured, distributed, and commented on, have drastically evolved. To illustrate this point more clearly, I conclude the video by publishing my iMovie to YouTube and tweeting the link to my personal Twitter account.

Taken together, I hope the combination of these scenes and soundtracks reveal the powerful and volatile nature of participatory media. While, on one hand, they provide the ability to celebrate our culture—

supporting a developing ecology with unprecedented reach and richness— at the same time, the value and legitimacy of these popular production means should often be questioned on the basis of their intellectual merit.

Ultimately, *How Participatory Media are Changing the Meaning of Democracy* raises the question: how has do-it-yourself-media and remix culture shifted the democratic voice and what does it mean for the future of politics and power?