

Abstract

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**From political to politicized- how
late night comedy became a sphere
of political activism in the
United States**

From the genesis of the genre, politics has always been a prominent source of comedic material for late night shows in the USA as well as in Europe: it gave a chance for viewers to laugh about the often troublesome stories dominating the news. Telling jokes about politicians and current affairs, making fun of key figures of the ruling government, acting out political parody skits – sometimes even while implicating partisan opinions – is what political humor has always been about. However, when a comedian starts using their platform to promote a specific issue and call for viewer action in the subject, the space becomes politicized as well as political. When a comedy platform becomes a place of political activism – and often resistance – it simultaneously becomes a public sphere in the Habermasian sense of the word: a discursive space aiming to influence political action. Politainment is not a new phenomenon by itself but with the shows of John Oliver, Stephen Colbert, Seth Meyers or Jimmy Kimmel to name a few, the genre is becoming the primary source of news and commentary for a mass number of people and a serious player in the political activism game. Meanwhile becoming news themselves.

In my paper I will attempt to look for the European equivalents of politainment phenomena affecting public opinion and driving political change. In addition, by presenting a case study, I will discuss how late night shows in particular have the

power to democratize politics and involve previously passive citizens in participatory democracy.