



Social media, political communication, and democracy (10 credits)

Workshop, 3rd term

2017-2018

14 and 15 May 2018

Please register with Adele.Battistini@EUI.eu

Organized by:

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Instructors

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Location

Seminar Room 2

Description

This two-day workshop explores the question: How is the rise of social media affecting democracy? EUI PhD students will be introduced to the state-of-the-art in social media research and investigate how social media is changing democratic processes such as protest mobilization, civic deliberation, and political campaigning. Students will also learn how scholars are approaching social media data empirically, and upon completion they will be able to apply the knowledge gained to their own research projects.

Overview

Over the past decade, social media use has become nearly ubiquitous in Western society and beyond. Every day, 500 million messages are posted on Twitter, 4 million hours of video content are uploaded on YouTube, and 4.3 billion posts are made on Facebook. The new modes of communication enabled by social media are changing traditional democratic processes and altering longstanding power relations between politicians, the media, and citizens. Politicians have novel, sophisticated methods for political campaigning based on big data analytics; the media are increasingly pressured to fit their reporting to social media logics; and citizens engage with politics through online platforms that can aid in the organization of large-scale protest mobilizations. This course will provide students with an

overview of the changing political communication landscape, in order to equip them with the knowledge to critically assess the democratic implications of social media use in contemporary politics.

Using examples of strategies from extra-parliamentary politics as well as in electoral campaigns in the US, UK, and EU Member States, the workshop will explore questions such as:

- How are citizens and parties using social media as platforms for political mobilization?
- To what extent do citizens discuss politics online in a deliberative and meaningful manner?
- How do the different designs of social media platforms affect digital political communication?

Learning Outcomes

A. Knowledge and understanding

Upon completion of the course, the PhD student shall be able to:

- give a knowledgeable account of issues, theories and research relating to the relationship between digital media, political communication, and democracy
- be able to describe the digital strategies used by political parties and citizens during electoral campaigns and extra-parliamentary mobilization activities
- be able to explain how social media platforms are influencing contemporary democratic processes with real-world empirical examples

B. Competence and skills

- be able to interpret and critically review scholarly work on social media, political communication, and democracy
- be able to incorporate theories from the course into their own research projects
- be able to present, orally and in writing, how the knowledge gained from the course can inform future research designs

Course design

Teaching consists of lectures, compulsory seminars, and individual projects. The workshop will be structured in two blocks across two days. The first block consists of a series of lectures introducing the predominant theories used in studying social media's political dimensions and presenting concrete cases of social media's role in: extra-parliamentary politics (citizen activism and protests), citizen participation and campaigns for elections and referenda. The second block, scheduled for the second day, consists of a series of seminars where course participants will break off into groups and discuss the methods and approaches used in studying political communication on social media. Students will then apply the knowledge gained from the course by presenting short, individual research plans on how social media can be incorporated into their own research. To assist students in the process, the research plans will be based on a grant writing template, and the course instructors will provide feedback for each proposal. The written version of the research plan will be due electronically one week after the course.

Assessment

Examinations take the form of oral presentations at the compulsory seminars and written project work (9600 characters including spaces, excluding references).

Programme

Day 1, Monday May 14 2018 – Seminar Room 2

9.30 – 11:00

Lecture (1): Introduction: Social Media and the Changing Political Communication Landscape

This session introduces the major themes and structure of the course by situating contemporary political communication against the backdrop of wider trends in the

political and media landscape.

Readings (obligatory):

Coleman, S. & Freelon, D. (2015) Introduction: Conceptualizing digital politics. *Handbook of Digital Politics*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Bossetta, M., Dutceac Segesten, A., & Trenz, H.J. (2017). “Engaging with European politics through Twitter and Facebook: Participation beyond the national?” in *Social media and European politics: Rethinking power and legitimacy in the digital era*, edited by Mauro Barisione and Asimina Michailidou, Palgrave.

Readings (recommended):

Shirky, C. (2011). The political power of social media: Technology, the public sphere, and political change. *Foreign Affairs*, 90(1), 28–41.

Fuchs, C. (2017). From digital positivism and administrative big data analytics towards critical digital and social media research!. *European Journal of Communication*, 32(1), 37-49.

11:00 – 11.30 Coffee break

11.30 – 13.00 Lecture (2): Social media and extra-parliamentary political activity: protests and social movements.

This session introduces theories and examples of how social media is used to organize large-scale mobilizations and protests, with empirical examples from around the world.

Readings (obligatory):

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5), 739-768.

Theocharis, Y., Lowe, W., van Deth, J. W., & García-Albacete, G. (2015). Using Twitter to mobilize protest action: online mobilization patterns and action repertoires in the Occupy Wall Street, Indignados, and Aganaktismenoi movements. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(2), 202-220.

Readings (Recommended):

Bruns, A., & Burgess, J. (2015). Twitter hashtags from ad hoc to calculated publics. Available at: <http://snurb.info/files/2015/Twitter%20Hashtags%20from%20Ad%20Hoc%20to%20Calculated%20Publics.pdf>

Bastos, M. T., & Mercea, D. (2016). Serial activists: Political Twitter beyond influentials and the Twittertariat. *New Media & Society*, 18(10), 2359-2378.

Valenzuela, S., Correa, T., & Gil de Zúñiga, H. (2017). Ties, Likes, and Tweets: Using Strong and Weak Ties to Explain Differences in Protest Participation Across Facebook and Twitter Use. *Political Communication*, 1-18.

13.00 – 14.30 Lunch

14.30 – 16.00 Lecture (3): Social media and political engagement: Information, expression, and political participation

This session focuses on citizens' engagement with political content on social media. We discuss how citizens discuss politics on social media, the role of algorithms in shaping exposure, and how citizens use social media as a platform for mobilization during elections.

Readings (obligatory):

Cantijoch, M., Cutts, D., & Gibson, R. (2016). Moving slowly up the ladder of political engagement: A 'spill-over' model of internet participation. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 18(1), 26-48.

Boulianne, S. (2017). Revolution in the making? Social media effects across the globe. *Information, Communication & Society*, doi:10.1080/1369118X.2017.1353641

Dutceac Segesten, A., & Bossetta, M. (2017). A typology of political participation online: How citizens used Twitter to mobilize during the 2015 British general elections. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(11), 1625-1643.

Readings (Recommended):

Kalogeropoulos, A., Negredo, S., Picone, I., & Nielsen, R. K. (2017). Who shares and comments on news?: A cross-national comparative analysis of online and social media participation. *Social Media+ Society*, 3(4), 2056305117735754.

Trilling, D., Tolochko, P., & Burscher, B. (2017). From Newsworthiness to Shareworthiness: How to Predict News Sharing Based on Article Characteristics. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 94(1), 38-60.

Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement and political participation. *Journal of Computer - Mediated Communication*, 17(3), 319-336.

16.00 – 16.30 Coffee break

16.30 – 18.00 Lecture (4). Social media and political campaigning:

During this session, we look at how political actors (and their hired digital consultants) use social media for contemporary political campaigning. We also discuss how social media is changing traditional campaign structures.

Readings (obligatory):

Cogburn, D. L., & Espinoza-Vasquez, F. K. (2011). From networked nominee to networked nation: Examining the impact of Web 2.0 and social media on political participation and civic engagement in the 2008 Obama campaign. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 10(1-2), 189-213.

Kreiss, D., Lawrence, R. G., & McGregor, S. C. (2017). In their own words: Political practitioner accounts of candidates, audiences, affordances, genres, and timing in strategic social media use.

Political Communication, 1-24.

Readings (recommended):

Gibson, R. K. (2015). Party change, social media and the rise of ‘citizen-initiated’ campaigning. *Party Politics*, 21(2), 183-197.

Penny, J. (2017). Social media and citizen participation in “official” and “unofficial” electoral promotion: A structural analysis of the 2016 Bernie Sanders digital campaign. *Journal of Communication*, 67(3), 402-423.

Bossetta, M. (2018). The digital architectures of social media: Comparing political campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. Elections.” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*

Day 2, Tuesday May 15 2018 – Seminar Room 2

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| 9.30 – 11.00 | Seminar (5): Methodological approaches to social media data
The course participants are required to review the literature assigned to the course and present, either individually or in pairs, an overview of the specific methodological approaches used to conduct social media research. |
| 11:00 – 11.30 | Coffee break |
| 11.30 – 13.00 | Seminar (6): Group discussion.
The course instructors present and distribute the project description template. Divided into small groups, the course participants discuss and give each other feedback on an idea for a research project relevant to their own research and inspired by the course’s topics. |
| 13.00 – 14.15 | Lunch |
| 14.15 – 16.45 | Seminar (7): Presentation of project ideas
The course participants present their course-related projects. |
| 16.45 – 17:15 | Coffee break |
| 17.15– 18.00 | Feedback session (8)
The course teachers provide feedback and recommendations to each presenter, based on their presentations. |

Tuesday May 22 2018, 5:00 pm – Written group project descriptions (9600 characters) due electronically