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Digital Politics: Participation, Elections & Information

Feb 10 & 11, 2023 and March 10 & 11, 2023

The seminar explores how the digital age and particularly social media affect political expressions and behavior. Students gain insights into the constantly changing social media landscape and will learn to critically interpret and review recent scholarly work on political communication, digital politics, and democracy.

Political Participation

The mobilization and coordination of political participation and protest activities is increasingly done using digital tools and social media. Demanding less resources, and with a certain degree of autonomy and anonymity, citizens can network and get in contact easily. This raises questions on the genuineness, types, and effects of online political activities, especially when compared to offline activities.

Can tiny acts of political participation with a mouse click, electronic signature or a simple retweet be considered as genuine political participation? How do they differ from offline forms of political participation? Do they mobilize previously passive citizens for political activities? Which effects do they have on citizens' attitudes?

(Concepts: collective action, tiny acts, mobilization vs. reinforcement, slacktivism, clicktivism, digital divide)

Election Campaigning

The second part focuses on the role of social media in modern election campaigning. Social media and digital tools allow political parties and candidates to circumvent the traditional mass media and get in touch with their constituency directly, publish on and discuss policy proposals as well as news and campaign events. The salience of topics and issues can thereby be raised directly.

How does digital, data-driven campaigning differ from earlier forms of election campaigning? How do social media change and affect the relationship between voters and candidates / parties? What is the role of novel political actors, such as political influencers?

(Concepts: digital campaigning, normalization vs. equalization, electioneering, micro targeting)

Political Expressions & Deliberations
The third part of this seminar examines political expressions and conversations on social media in more depth. Oftentimes, they are criticized for lacking depth and truth, referring to notions such as "fake news", "echo chambers", "filter bubbles", "misinformation" and "disinformation".

How is the discursive quality on the web? How extreme or polarized are the opinions we encounter online? How do echo chambers evolve? What remedies are out there against disinformation and fake news?

(Concepts: e-expressive acts, echo chambers, filter bubbles, fake news, cyber-polarization, misinformation, disinformation)

Based on examples from democracies around the globe, the seminar enables students to critically reflect upon the questions just raised. Students gain insights into the constantly changing social media landscape and its consequences for political behavior and communication. Students learn the tools to analyze and interpret the consequences of the political usage of social media.

Goals and Outcomes
After taking the seminar, students will be able to:
A. Knowledge and Understanding:
  • give a knowledgeable account of issues, theories and research connecting digital media, political communication, and democracy
  • describe limits and opportunities of political expressions and participation online as well as digital strategies used by political parties and citizens during political campaigns
  • explain how social media platforms are influencing contemporary democratic processes with real-world empirical examples
B. Competence and skills:
  • interpret and critically review scholarly work on social media, political communication, and democracy
  • present, orally and in writing, how the knowledge gained from the course can inform future research

Course Design
Teaching consists of lectures, seminars, and individual presentations with three main thematic blocks (I. political participation, II. electoral campaigning, III. political expressions) that spread over the course of two weekends.

Grades / Credits
Response Papers (has to be passed)
As a preparatory task, students are expected to write **two response papers** (à 300-500 words), **one for each weekend**, in which they **reflect upon and discuss at least two(!) of the mandatory or optional readings** of their choice scheduled for the respective block. Students are expected to finish their response paper with a statement or question critically reflecting the readings.

The readings are listed in the schedule below and marked with "*Mandatory*" if everybody must read them. They are marked with "*Presentation Literature*" if their preparation is only mandatory for the student presenting the respective topic. Response papers must be **submitted 5 days in advance, i.e., on Feb 6 and March 6, 2023,** and via ILIAS.

Presentation (50% of final grade)

Each of the students must prepare a **presentation to answer pre-defined (research) questions.** The questions are listed in the class schedule below. Presentations are held **individually** and should **not exceed 15 min**.

For each presentation, **one mandatory reading is listed**, which is supposed to help students in approaching and answering their question. However, the reading does not suffice to answer the questions. Therefore, presenters are expected to **include at least two more scientific contributions** (e.g., journal articles, book chapters etc.) on the topic of their presentation, which they must search for and review themselves. Students may use their knowledge from the mandatory readings to further enrich their presentations.

Presenters should keep in mind that the rest of the students have not read the literature listed for their question(s). It is thus important to explain the concepts central to a question (e.g., negative campaigning, astroturfing, polarization etc.) as well as the relationship between them, so that a non-expert audience understands it. Giving real-world examples is always helpful. Presenters should be prepared to answer follow-up questions by their fellow students.

The presentations take the form of kick-off speeches that shall stimulate and provoke further debates in class. Therefore, each presentation is to **finish with at least 3 (e.g., controversial, provoking) statements or questions** to be discussed in class. The presenter is supposed to initiate the discussion and start with its moderation. The instructor may take over eventually.

The presentation is given using power point slides or comparable material. **The students must discuss the presentations and slides with the instructor beforehand and schedule a meeting**. Four windows of opportunity to do so are given: Friday, Feb 3, Monday, Feb 6, Friday, March 3, or Monday, March 6 between 10AM and 1PM. Students should contact the instructor well in advance via mail to make an appointment.

The slides must be uploaded to the respective folder on ILIAS before the presentation.

Seminar Paper (50% of final grade)

Students will write a **3.000-word paper** (+/- 10%) discussing the opportunities and challenges of digital tools for democracies and/or democratization. At least ten scientific references shall be given, at least five of which refer to the course readings.

Special attention will be given to a coherent and accurate reference style (author's choice).

The seminar paper must be submitted **by April 23, 2023**, via ILIAS.

Schedule (time schedule is tentative only and may be changed on short notice)
The literature is available on ILIAS in the dedicated folder.

Fri, Feb 10, 2023

09:30-12:00	**Introduction to the Course: Social Media and the Changing Political Communication landscape**
Mandatory	Coleman, S., & Freelon, D. (2015). "Introduction: Conceptualizing Digital Politics", in Stephen Coleman und Deen Freelon: *Handbook of Digital Politics*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, S. 1-13.
Mandatory	Van Dijck, J., & Poell, T. (2013). Understanding social media logic. *Media and Communication, 1*(1), 2-14.
Mandatory	Van Dijk, J. A. G. M., & Hacker, K. L. (2018). „Introduction", in Jan A. G. M. van Dijk und Kenneth L. Hacker: *Internet and Democracy in the Network Society*, Routledge, S. 1-27.

13:00-14:30	**Introduction to Theories and Concepts of Online Political Participation**
Mandatory	Cantijoch Cunill, M., & Gibson, R. (2019). "E-Participation", in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia: Politics*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
Mandatory	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.
Mandatory	Norris, P. (2001). "The Digital Divide", in Pippa Norris: *Digital Divide: Civic Engagament, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, S. 3-25.

14:45-17:00	
Kick-off speech 1	Are e-participatory activities genuine forms of political participation? Summarize arguments against and in favour of such a claim!
Presentation Literature	Morozov, E. (2009). The brave new world of slacktivism. *Foreign Affairs.* Retrieved from: https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/05/19/the-brave-new-world-of-slacktivism/
Kick-off speech 2	Do social media mobilize former passive or excluded citizens to participate politically or are traditional participation patterns reinforced?
Presentation literature	Van Dijk, J. A. G. M., & Hacker, K. L. (2018). „Political Participation and Inclusion", in Jan A. G. M. van Dijk und Kenneth L. Hacker: *Internet and Democracy in the Network Society*, Routledge, S. 49-82.
Kick-off speech 3	Do e-participatory activities have real-life consequences? (When) are they effective?
Presentation Literature	Margetts, H., John, P., Hale, S., & Yasseri, T. (2016). "Chapter 1: Collective Action Goes Digital" & "Chapter 2: Tiny Acts of Political Participation", in Helen Margetts, Peter John, Scott Hale und Taha

Yasseri: *Political Turbulence: How Social Media Shape Collective Action*, Princeton University Press, S. 1-73.

Sat, Feb 11, 2023

09:30-12:00	**Introduction to Theories and Concepts of Online Electoral Campaigning**
Mandatory	Gibson, R. K., & Römmele, A. (2020). „Scientific and Subversive: The two faces of the fourth era of political campaigning", *New Media & Society, 22,* 595-610.
Mandatory	Kreiss, D. (2016). "Party Networks and Political Innovation" AND "The Dynamics of Technology-Intensive Campaigning", in Daniel Kreiss: Prototype Politics: Technology-Intensive Campaigning and the Data of Democracy, Oxford University Press, S. 1-38; 204-220.
Mandatory	Hersh, E. (2015). "The Perceived Voter Model", in Eitan D. Hersh: Hacking the Electorate: How Campaigns Perceive Voters, Cambridge University Press, S. 24-44.

13:00-16:00	
Kick-off speech 4	What actors are involved in orchestrating political campaigns (on social media) and which role do they have? Who sets the (political) agenda?
Presentation Literature	Barberá, P., Casas, A., Nagler, J., Egan, P. J., Bonneau, R., Jost, J. T., & Tucker, J. A. (2019). Who Leads? Who Follows? Measuring Issue Attention and Agenda Setting by Legislators and the Mass Public Using Social Media Data. *American Political Science Review, 113*(4), 883-901.
Kick-off speech 5	Who are political influencers and what is their motivation to express themselves and campaign politically? Give examples! What opportunities and challenges does the rise of political influencers pose?
Presentation Literature	Riedl, M., Schwemmer, C., Ziewiecki, S., & Ross, L. M. (2021). The Rise of Political Influencers – Perspectives on a Trend Towards Meaningful Content. *Frontiers in Communication.* Retrieved from: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2021.752656/full
Kick-off speech 6	What is the role of negative campaigning in political campaigns? Give examples from recent campaigns! Has negative campaigning become more prevalent with the advent of social media?
Presentation Literature	Drews, W., Riedl, J., & Steup, J. (2023). Under pressure: Party-Level Strategies for Topical Negative Campaigning in a Multidimensional Space. *Working paper.*
Kick off speech 7	Do social media build or burn bridges between political actors and citizens? Give reasons / explanations for either statement!
Presentation Literature	Dvir-Gvirsman, S., Tsuriel, K., Sheafer, T., Shenhav, S., Zoizner, A., Lavi, L., Shamir, M., & Waismel-Manor, I. (2022). Mediated Representation at the Age of Social Media: How Connection with Politicians Contributes to Citizens' Feelings of Representation.

Evidence from a Longitudinal Study. *Political Communication*, DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2022.2124335.

Summary of first block and outlook for next block

Fri, Mar 10, 2023

09:30-12:00	**Introduction to Social Media Research**
Mandatory	Stieglitz, S., Morbabaie, M., Ross, B., & Neuberger, C. (2018). Social media analytics – Challenges in topic discovery, data collection, and data preparation. *International Journal of Information Management, 39*, 156-168.
Mandatory	Ceron, A., Curini, L., & Iacus, S.M. (2017). "Chapter 1: Social media electoral forecasts: An overview", in Andrea Ceron, Luigi Curini and Stefano Maria Iacus: Politics and Big Data: Nowcasting and Forecasting Elections with Social Media, Routledge.
Mandatory	Mukerjee, S., Jaidka, K., & Lelkes, Y. (2022). The Political Landscape of the U.S. Twitterverse, *Political Communication, 39*:5, 565-588, DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2022.2075061.

13:00-14:30	**Introduction to Theories and Concepts of Online Political Expression I**
Mandatory	Drews., W. (2022). E-expression in a comparative perspective: contextual drivers and constraints of online political expression. *Political Research Exchange, 4*(1).
Mandatory	Sunstein, C. R. (2017). "Polarization" & "Cybercascades", in Cass R. Sunstein: #republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media, Princeton University Press, S. 59-136.

14:45-17:00	
Kick-off speech 8	How do researchers measure echo chamber effects? What are the main findings?
Presentation Literature	Terren, L., & Borge-Bravo, R. (2021). Echo Chambers on Social Media: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Review of Communication Research, 9*, 99-118. Retrieved from https://rcommunicationr.org/index.php/rcr/article/view/94
Kick-off speech 9	How do echo chambers form and evolve? Who and which topics are more prone to end up in an echo chamber?
Presentation Literature	Riedl, J., Drews, W., & Angelhuber, M. (2023). Avoiding the Elephant in the Room: The (De-)Politicization and Persistence of Covid-19 Echo Chambers during the 2021 German Election on Twitter. *Working Paper.*
Kick-off speech 10	The chicken and the egg: Do social media cause polarization or are polarized individuals more drawn to express themselves on social media? Why?
Presentation Literature	Kubin, E., & von Sikorski, C. (2021). The role of (social) media in political polarization: a systematic review. *Annals of the International Communication Association, 45*:3, 188-206, DOI: 10.1080/23808985.2021.1976070.

Sat, Mar 11, 2023

09:30-12:00	**Introduction to Theories and Concepts of Online Political Expression II**
Mandatory	Guess, A. M., & Lyons, B. A. (2020). "Misinformation, Disinformation, and Online Propaganda", in Nathaniel Persily und Joshua A. Tucker: *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 10-33. Available via Open Access: https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/social-media-and-democracy/E79E2BBF03C18C3A56A5CC393698F117
Kick-off speech 11	What are potential remedies of mis- and disinformation? How well do they work?
Presentation Literature	Walter, N., Cohen, J., Holbert, R. L., & Morag, Y. (2020). Fact-Checking: A Meta-Analysis of What Works and for Whom. *Political Communication, 37*:3, 350-375, DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2019.1668894
Kick-off speech 12	What is astroturfing? How is it used during electoral campaigns and with which impact?
Presentation Literature	Keller, F. B., Schoch, D., Stier, S., & Yang, J. (2020). Political Astroturfing on Twitter: How to Coordinate a Disinformation Campaign. *Political Communication, 37*:2, 256-280, DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2019.1661888.
13:00-14:30	
Kick-off speech 13	Argue in favor of the following statement: Digital tools serve as an opportunity for democracies and democratization! Underline your arguments with real-world examples!
Presentation Literature	Moore, M. (2018). „Democracy Re-Hacked", in Martin Moore: *Democracy Hacked: Political Turmoil and Information Warfare in the Digital Age*, Oneworld, S. 246-272.
Kick-off speech 14	Play the devil's advocate and argue that: Digital tools pose a threat to democracies and democratization! Underline your arguments with real-world examples!
Presentation Literature	Farrell, H. (2012). "The Consequences of the Internet for Politics", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 15, 35-52.
14:45-16:00	**Summary of seminar and discussion of next steps**