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Nakon što je Donald Trump u studenome ove godine „neočekivano“ postao novi američki predsjednik, američki *mainstream* mediji našli su se na udaru kritika medijskih stručnjaka i politologa, ali i građana, kako iz SAD-a tako i iz ostalih dijelova svijeta. Postavljeno je pitanje kako je moguće da su istraživanja javnog mnijenja i medijske analize toliko pogriješili. Prateći predizbornu kampanju za američke predsjedničke izbore 2016. godine, kao i reakcije u medijima objavljene odmah poslije izbora, uvjerali smo se iznova koliko je važno znanstveno pristupiti istraživanju političke komunikacije. Riječ je o interdisciplinarnom području koje uključuje politologe, komunikologe i medijske stručnjake, a često u istraživanjima sudjeluju i lingvisti, sociolozi i pravnici.

„Komunikacija, demokracija i digitalna tehnologija“ (*Communication, Democracy and Digital Technology*) bila je tema konferencije koja se u listopadu 2015. održala u Rovinju u organizaciji IPSA-e (*International Political Science Association*), u suradnji s Fakultetom političkih znanosti Sveučilišta u Zagrebu. Tada je dogovoren i ovaj tematski broj časopisa istoga naslova. Interes autorica i autora za objavu članaka u ovom tematskom broju bio je veliki pa zadatak gostujućih urednica i urednika u selekciji radova nije bio nimalo lak. Ponaјprije želim zahvaliti Marijani Grbeša s Fakulteta političkih znanosti Sveučilišta u Zagrebu i Darrenu Lillakeru sa Sveučilišta Bournemouth iz Dorseta u Ujedinjenom Kraljevstvu na predanom radu pri uređivanju ovog tematskog broja.

U ovom tematskom broju, poslije uvodnog članka gostujućih urednika, donosimo devet članaka koji su podijeljeni u tri poglavlja: *E-demokracija, Javna deliberacija te Društveni mediji i politički diskurs*. Članci autorica i autora iz Italije, Španjolske, Ujedinjenog Kraljevstva te iz Brazila obrađuju teme koje se odnose na modele kojima vlade i javne administracije mogu poduprijeti građansku participaciju koristeći digitalne komunikacijske platforme. Riječ je o modelima kao što su e-vlada, otvorena vlada te specifično dizajnirani modeli digitalne demokracije. O javnoj deliberaciji pišu autorice i autori iz Grčke i Španjolske, naglašavajući koliko su pristup informacijama kroz deliberativne procedure te mogućnost stjecanja znanja o javnim politikama važni za formiranje mišljenja građana o pojedinim temama. U trećem poglavlju autorice i autori iz Španjolske, Finske i Češke donose rezultate svojih istraživanja o tome kako političke stranke, političari i građani koriste društvene mreže, prije svega Twitter i Facebook, za promidžbu svojih ciljeva i ideja, odnosno za pozivanje na javnu reakciju.

Na kraju ne smijemo ignorirati činjenicu da je Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja Republike Hrvatske odluku o financiranju znanstvenih časopisa u 2016. godini donijelo tek 14. prosinca 2016. U uvjetima bez stabilnog izvora pa makar i minimalnih sredstava za opstanak časopisa sve što činimo da *Medijske studije* zadrže postignutu razinu kvalitete selekcije i uređivanja članaka ne možemo nazvati drugim imenom do „gerilskog“ stila samoodrživosti.

Viktorija Car
glavna urednica

INTRODUCTION: POLITICAL COMMUNICATION, DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE 'NEW NORMAL'

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THE INTERNET, SOCIETY AND POLITICS

In his book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1963) Marshall McLuhan argued that when new media technologies are introduced they have the capacity to disrupt tradition and reshape social life. While focusing on the transition he was witnessing from print to television, his analysis is perhaps just as prescient when thinking of the impact of the Internet on social and political life. Digital technologies have been argued to have revolutionised everything they have touched in the last three decades; incrementally altering the processes of communication to lead to an age of interactive co-creation. The Internet and social media have multiplied the channels of political communication and created the new role of the citizen as content provider or “citizen journalist”, thereby changing communication patterns in a significant way. At the same time, digital media have opened up new opportunities for interaction between representatives and represented, between political and societal actors. Some scholars have pointed to the fact that power constellations have been changed by digitalization (Castells, 2009: 42–50; Meraz, 2009). Others emphasize the potential for changing citizens’ political behaviour by, for example, increasing interest in politics and the likelihood of voting (Kersting and Baldersheim, 2004; Mossberger et al., 2007) or the potential for increasing the capacity for political engagement (Rheingold, 1993; Luengo, 2009).

That innovations in information and communication technology (ICT) give rise to questions relating to the impact on politics and society is nothing new. Controversies in the different disciplines – political science, sociology, and communications – in the past oscillated between the more positive interpretation highlighting the potential offered by new technologies, e.g. for gaining information, as well as the more negative interpretation underlining the cultural levelling and the fragmentation of the public sphere. In respect to the Internet these controversies are echoed. Since the emergence of the Internet in the 1990s we can find net-optimists as well as net-pessimists – or in the words of Anthony G. Wilhelm neofuturists, dystopians and technorealists (Wilhelm, 2000: 14ff). Although there exists consensus about the fact that digital media have an enormous impact, opinions diverge on the direction and the quality of this impact. Hence, we find a considerable ambivalence when it comes to assessing the impact of digital media for political communication, political processes, interaction and decision making. A very good illustration of this avenue of debate is constituted by the polemic discussion around “fake online news” which is considered a serious threat to democratic processes, especially after the 2016 US presidential race. Fuelled by conspiracy theorists and posted on social media sites like Reddit, Facebook and Twitter, the story picked up so much relevance that both Google and Facebook have announced that they will ban fake news sites from using their ad networks to prevent the spread of false information. A majority of the so-called millennials rely on the Internet to get political news and their consumption of information is summary and fleeting meaning they might be caught in the trap of those who benefit from propagating half-truths or simply lies. Those communication dynamics in the social media environment likely had a prominent impact on the electoral outcome in the USA, they are also flourishing in other parts of the world: France, Germany, Italy, Brazil, India or Australia.

Although the disenchantment with politics and the political elite is not a new phenomenon but rather constitutes an incremental process we observe already for some decades, the feelings of disempowerment, disillusionment and the remoteness of the majority from the elite seems to have increased in many societies. The election of political outsider, property magnate and celebrity Donald Trump in America, the resurgence of right-wing populist movements in many nations and the UK's Brexit vote are the political outcomes of disaffection. Rather than feeling connected and empowered, many citizens feel quite the reverse (Gest and Gray, 2015). It seems that citizens may be better connected to one another, and have greater access to elites. To what degree however we equally find evidence of disconnection is a question which needs more examination. The emergence of "new" political parties in some parts of Europe can be interpreted as an example of the results of this disconnection. Far from being a phenomenon of "second order", the rise of these parties indicates a deep structural change in the political space. Mainstream parties face great difficulties in responding to citizen's new demands in this new communication context. The increasing medialization of politics is leading to greater visibility and importance of the candidate/leader to the detriment of the party apparatus. With new technologies of information and communication, party leaders/candidates can interact directly with the public, favouring charismatic personal leadership, which is a typical feature of populism (Luengo et al., 2016). Therefore, the increasing role of the Internet, online platforms and social media has been crucial in the proliferation of populist political projects, giving increased visibility and influence to extreme, radical, anti-establishment or outsider parties.

In sum, the impacts of the Internet are legion. The affordances offered by these technologies are able to accelerate ideas, connect people and build communities that can exact change. The impact is equally strong in the realm of political communication. The Internet has been found to have altered the dynamics of various areas of socio-politics: international relations, processes of policy making, governmental performance, citizen's demands, political accountability, electoral campaigns, and even geopolitical tensions (Kersting, 2012; Luengo, 2016). These changes have led scholars and researchers to pursue new approaches and reconsider theories, methodologies and strategies, in order to face these challenging and ever-evolving research conditions. The Internet and its diverse manifestations have reconfigured many of the processes which underpin the operation of modern society. However, we are not fully able to understand and explain the concrete direction: towards more or less democracy, more or less inclusion, more or less participation etc.

The conundrums and contradictions were at the heart of the motivations for a conference held in Rovinj, Croatia in October 2015. The topic was "Communication, Democracy and Digital Technology", organised by a committee formed from three research clusters of the International Political Science Association (IPSA) covering Electronic Democracy (RC10), Political Communication (RC22) and the Quality of Democracy (RC34). The contributors to the event, some of which feature in this volume, focused on the intersection between the three strands of political science represented; each of which ask questions of vital importance for the well-being of democracy globally. These questions

revolve around measures, standards and analyses of the quality of democracy, the role of political communication in enhancing democracy and the extent that the technological affordances claimed as implicit in digital technologies offer real potential for a richer, interactive and co-created politics. The work here therefore contributes to a broader enquiry on how communicative acts, particularly but not exclusively those which take place using digital technologies, contribute positively or negatively to the quality of the democratic experience citizens enjoy and so to building and sustaining active democracies.

COMMUNICATION, DEMOCRACY AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Electronic Democracy

There is an ever growing body of work on digital political communication and on online participation, with a particularly strong focus on how government, NGO's, political parties and candidates use technologies in the course of election campaigns and beyond. Evidence shows the latest tools, in particular social media platforms, are an embedded element of campaign and communication strategy (Lilleker et al., 2015). However any revolutionary impacts stem from the interactions of citizens not political actors (Vergeer, 2013). There is little evidence of a more interactive or consultative style of representative democracy emerging, rather campaigning on Twitter and Facebook resembles its pre-Internet broadcasting paradigm. Political communication online tends to follow a campaign logic, focusing on winning votes and not establishing lines of communication (Larsson, 2016). The more innovative political engagement occurs at the level of the citizen in so-called third spaces, forums where people can commune about issues of concern to them (Wright, 2012). The problem is that this highlights the disconnect between public political communication which takes place across a variety of spaces and elite political communication which occurs in a controlled manner in controlled environments (McChesney, 2015).

An important discussion in this context relates to the concept of e-government and online participation in the invited space (see Kersting, 2013). Here it could be shown that combining online and offline participatory instrument could enhance the quality of deliberation. OECD published a working paper on "Social media use by governments" in 2014 which stressed that social media can help governments to improve communications, both regular and emergency. Yet, in the same report it is argued that "much potential is still undiscovered when it comes to using social media to transform policy processes, make decisions more transparent and processes more inclusive, and develop more responsive and more efficient public services" (Mickoleit, 2014: 7). Moreover, it is argued that these new dialogic, co-creation platforms should produce active, engaged citizens congregating in codecisive, dialogic spaces 24 hours a day, seven days a week (Zavattaro and Sementelli, 2014: 262). However, the authors discuss that these dialogic potentials are often not fully realized. To the contrary, these new platforms may even increase public distrust (Im et al., 2014) and encourage political cynicism hence enabling "incompetent citizens" to engage in political processes (see discussion in Zavattaro and Sementelli, 2014, on Lippmann's omnicompetent citizen and social media).

Quality of Democracy

The emergence of the Internet has generated extensive debate about the potential effects on democratic processes and fuelled a range of different expectations, some of them associated with utopian hopes (Buchstein, 1997; Coleman and Blumler, 2009; Diamond and Plattner, 2012; Dahlgren, 2009; Hague and Loader, 1999; Hindman, 2008; Wilhelm, 2000). Against the background of increasing political disenchantment among citizens, the perceived disconnection between citizens and politicians and the loss of trust in political institutions that can be observed in established democracies in recent decades, e-democracy has been regarded (often overstated) as a panacea capable of curing democratic fatigue and revitalizing or modernizing democratic processes (Kersting and Baldersheim, 2004; Coleman and Blumler, 2009; Kneuer, 2013; 2016).

It is held that enhanced interaction online will increase transparency, making it possible to retrieve and offer more information; promote inclusion by giving social actors (especially marginalized ones) better opportunities to contribute to the formation of public opinion outside institutionalized channels and without the filtering function of the traditional media; open up alternative opportunities for participation, allowing people to be more involved in political decision-making processes over the Internet; and strengthening the responsiveness of political actors since represented and representatives can easily enter into dialogue on social media. Moreover, advocates of alternative forms of democracy such as deliberative or direct democracy see digital media as facilitating new opportunities for citizen deliberation and direct decision-making (Barber, 1998; see also Buchstein, 1997; Dahlgren, 2013; Kersting, 2013). Even the vision of citizens' self-government – evoking the Athenian ideal of a virtual agora or *ekklesia* – seems to have renewed relevance as a possible model for future democracy. Finally, digital media are credited with creating new opportunities for civil society, social movements or even new actors (grassroots movements) to make their voices heard and influence the public agenda (van de Donk et al., 2004; McCaughey and Ayers, 2003). A very good example of these new alternatives for citizen participation in political decisions is, among others, Appgree¹. It was created in 2013, and explores new possibilities of civil engagement in policy making, and has been used by some of those emergent parties mentioned before.

The study of the democratizing potential of digital media often follows a normative or prescriptive approach – either net-optimistic or net-pessimistic overall – that hypothesizes an improvement (or not) in the quality of democracy. By contrast, the premise here is that technology is not a democratizing force per se (Kneuer, 2013; 2016). Technology is *ex ante* neutral, and its effect on political structures, processes, actors, behaviour and norms depends on the motives of use, the content that is transmitted, the way the technology itself is used (quantitatively and qualitatively speaking) and finally on the political context in which the digital media are used. Quite a few scholars apply such a techno-realistic approach to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (Barber, 1998; Buchstein, 1997; Leggewie, 1998; Wilhelm, 2000; Kersting, 2012; Kneuer, 2013). They assume that

¹ Appgree is a platform that uses a technology that breaks away from the traditional communication model, giving groups a voice, no matter their magnitude, and offering an original and plausible way of reaching collective decisions (<http://www.appgree.com/appgree/en/>).

the impact of the Internet on the development or quality of democracy is ambivalent: it can enrich and enhance democratic values and processes, but at the same time it can constitute a stress factor for democratic processes and harm the quality of democracy and political discourse (Kersting, 2005). This stance toward the impact of digital media constitutes the point of departure of this special issue.

INTRODUCING THE CONTRIBUTIONS

The issue is divided into three thematic sections: *E-democracy*; *Public deliberation* and *Social media and political discourse*.

The first section contains four studies of open government and digital participatory platforms in several countries. They all build on the assumed potential of digital technologies to bridge the gap between political representatives and increasingly distrustful and disengaged citizenry. The opening article by Emiliana De Blasio and Michele Sorice is a comparative study of the open government agendas and participatory platforms in France, Italy, Spain and United Kingdom. De Blasio and Sorice apply frame analysis to examine key national policy documents related to open government and the actual implementation of those policies throughout a number of national digital platforms. They conclude that transparency and digital technologies are the most prominent issues within the open government agendas in all examined countries, whereas participation and collaboration remain less considered and less implemented. The article by Rebecca Rumbul examines the attitudes of citizens using civic technologies in the UK, South Africa, Kenya and the USA. She uses survey-based methodology to examine whether use of civic technologies – as platforms that operate at the intersection of e-government and civil society – increases personal external efficacy and alters the confidence citizens hold in their respective governments. Her study includes five civic technology sites available in the four examined countries. The findings point to significant and interesting demographic variance in the use of civic technologies (such as the domination of male users in most examined countries) and indicate that a citizen-audit of government information through civic technologies increases feelings of external efficacy and perceived government accountability in developed and developing countries alike. Marta Rebollo, Rocío Zamora Medina and Jordi Rodríguez-Virgili examine if and how the websites of 317 local councils in the Spanish regions of Murcia and Navarre fulfil the goals of transparency and participation. Despite some differences between the councils and the regions, the overall conclusion is that the examined local websites fail the test of transparency and that they offer only minimal incentives to encourage citizens' participation. In the last article in this section Ana Carolina Araújo, Lucas Reis and Rafael Cardoso Sampaio compare official websites of the five Brazilian cities with their associated "open data portals". The authors use two different scales to measure the transparency of the official websites and the quality of the open data initiatives. Their findings suggest that the official websites with higher levels of transparency are not necessarily those with the best open data initiatives.

The second section focuses on two cases of public deliberation. The Greek case is an example of a face-to-face public deliberation while the Spanish case is focused on the deliberative potential of digital platforms set up by political actors. Aside from their individual contributions, these two articles provide a valuable comparison between face-to-face and digitally facilitated public deliberation. The group of researchers led by Anastasia Deligiaouri implemented a variant of Fishkin's deliberative polling scheme to examine how public deliberation may increase political knowledge and consequently shift people's opinions. The deliberative event, evolving around the issue of political public opinion polling (its accuracy, accountability, the way it is being reported by the media etc.), took place in the Greek town of Kastoria and included 93 university students. The results of their study suggest that access to more information, deliberation and exchange of information between deliberators may inform people's opinion and consequently initiate a change in people's attitudes. Rosa Borge and Eduardo Santamarina Sáez offer insights into a new model of political engagement in their study of public deliberation in Spain. Their focus is on the platform created by Podemos, a political party whose roots are in the 15M movement, a grassroots protest organisation famous for occupying squares in order to directly challenge the authority of the government. Borge and Santamarina Sáez compare the style of deliberation within the Podemos platform to that within Barcelona en Comú (Barcelona in Common) a similar but smaller citizen platform launched in June 2014 that is currently governing in minority in the City of Barcelona. In both cases evidence suggests it is technically possible to set up online party spaces that are open, inclusive and self-managed by citizens and, when created, deliberation adheres to standards of discourse equality, reciprocity, justification and civility. However the more mainstream the party the less deliberative they are, and the less reactive they are to the public agenda.

The final section of this collection is concerned with the use of social media in debating highly polarizing political issues and mobilizing political support. Joan Balcells and Albert Padró-Solanet examine how Twitter was used in Spain to debate the issue of Catalanian independence. Their findings challenge the usual "homophily" pattern which assumes that people are inclined to communicate with only the like-minded. The researchers find that although Twitter users were clustered around two distinct poles, they frequently interacted with each other and crossed lines to exchange arguments and opinions. Moreover, Balcells and Padró-Solanet established that heterogeneous conversations (where opposing sides are engaged in a dialogue) tended to be significantly longer than homogenous ones (where all participants share the same view). The authors assign that to "genuine deliberation based on reasonably exchanging arguments between competing viewpoints". In her study of the 2014 Romanian presidential election, Laura Sibinescu's exploration of how voters and politicians interact through social media shows social media can provide an indication of which issues voters find salient. Similarly her data shows that politicians' responsiveness to these issues may have important consequences on their success or failure in high stakes political events, such as elections. The story is one where an insurgent challenger proved better able to tap into public opinion and beat an opponent who appeared out of touch. Social media was one vehicle for demonstrating the synergy between public opinion and the campaign agenda of Klaus Iohannis the winning candidate. In the closing article of the issue, Alena Macková and Vaclav Štětka

similarly show how some parties are more likely to engage with and attempt to mobilise support on social media. Perhaps again showing how insurgents attempt to leverage the affordances of digital technologies. However the uneven patterns of usage, particularly among candidates, indicates that not all citizens will be engaged by these activities and that some will be left behind as the party they feel close to might have a less interactive communication strategy. Macková's and Štětka's study reinforces the perspective of digital technology having the potential to have a positive impact on political engagement, but whether it does is in the gift of the political elite. Spanish grassroots parties, Romanian president Iohannis on his path to power and some Czech parties appear to be willing to challenge the traditional communication hierarchies; however they appear to be within a minority within the highest levels of electoral politics.

CONCLUSIONS

This issue provides a multidimensional comparative perspective on the role of digital technologies in contemporary democracies, which is particularly valuable given the significance of different media and political contexts in modern developments (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). It contradicts some of the dystopian scenarios that paint a picture of big data governance and the dominance of the algorithm and opens the mind for a more techno realistic perspective.

Online and offline political participation can be divided into four different political spheres: participation in representative democracy (elections, e-voting), participation in direct democracy (referendums, e-petitions), deliberative participation (forums, etc.) and demonstrative participation (demonstrations, expressive slacktivism) (see "the democratic rhombus", Kersting, 2016). Online participatory instruments seem to have as a strength mobilization and building up social networks (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). Offline participation seems to be more useful for deliberation and deeper social networks. The articles in this collection demonstrate some of the pros and cons of digitalization. Some experiences are frustrating given the fact that expectations from techno-optimists regarding the new open agora betray strong beliefs that citizens will learn better netiquette and show mutual respect in online communication. Here the need for social equality and a better education are important prerequisites. But the articles also show that online participation can contribute to a qualification of democracy if it is organized properly. From good practices we can learn what contexts are favourable and how online communication has to be developed. Here the criteria for the quality of democracies as well as the quality of political discourses such as openness, control of power, and transparency become relevant. So one trajectory focuses on better participatory instruments; another trajectory seems to mix different instruments of offline participation (blended or hybrid participation). Deliberation, demonstration of opinions and direct voting are coming together. Representative and direct participation are intermingling. Nowadays, innovations in online digital participatory instruments are leading to a convergence of online and offline instruments. Often these instruments are combined in a blended participation reinforcing the better of the two worlds.

To conclude, we can point out that in forthcoming years research in political communication and democracy is going to be articulated around the implications of new technologies of information and communication. The Internet and social media will decisively shape the standards of the new normal in political communication. Moreover, they will become central to debates on the future of democratic life.

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E-DEMOCRACY

E-DEMOKRACIJA

OPEN GOVERNMENT: A TOOL FOR DEMOCRACY?

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ABSTRACT *The growing disconnection between citizens and decision-makers is pushing politics towards a re-shaping of institutional design. New spaces of political participation are sustained and even reinforced by communication, especially by digital communication. Governments and public administrations can find and use different models to facilitate citizens' participation; e-government, open government and a specific design of digital democracy. In this respect, open government can constitute a way to re-connect citizens and political institutions, but at the same time, it can also be an "appealing" tool to institutionalize bottom-up participation and so anesthetizing it. The aim of this article is to present the first findings of an international research project about open government and participatory platforms in four European countries (France, Italy, Spain, the UK). The study tries to understand if participatory platforms can improve the quality of democracy, and if open government can contribute to democratizing democracy.*

KEY WORDS

OPEN GOVERNMENT, PARTICIPATION, COMMUNICATION, DEMOCRACY, DEMOCRATIC INNOVATIONS

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DISSATISFIED DEMOCRACY

Contemporary democracies have developed into party democracies. Political parties, “the key institutions of democratic governments,” in the words of Richard S. Katz, have held “a number of key functions in governing process, including mobilization and channelling of support, formulation of alternatives, recruitment and replacement of leadership, and, when in power, implementation of policy and control over its administration” (1987: 37).

The end of the twentieth century brought to light a number of problems and challenges for party governments, to the extent that Giovanni Sartori talked about “the era of confusion of Democracy” (1987: 3). Max Kaase and Kenneth Newton speak explicitly of the “crisis of democracy”, with “reference to the disenchantment of citizens with political parties, the emergence of anti-party attitudes, and the growing incidence of more general dissatisfaction and anti-establishment attitudes” (1995: 150, also cited in Morlino, 2011: 210).

In such *disaffected democracy* (Pharr and Putnam, 2000) contemporary parties failed in performing their core representational and governmental functions linked to the transmission of political demand (Easton, 1965). The gradual disaffection of citizens in political life and the consequent decrease in the degree of social participation are accompanied by new types of relationships between parties and citizens. Peter Mair (2000) introduces the expression *partyless democracy* to stress the progressive erosion of ties (or cleavages, in the words of Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) of parties’ legitimation and the rise of the “plebiscitary model of leadership and representation” (Fishkin, 1991: 46).

This trend led to the affirmation of political figures defined by Sergio Fabbrini as *democratic princes* (1999), whose “personalization of power” meant the shift of loyalty from parties to candidates and the consequent strengthening of the public role of the leader. The weight of individual actors in the political process increased over time (Rahat and Shaefer, 2007), with personalized structure of power. A refurbished plebiscitary leadership, which finds its roots in the processes of *mediatisation* of political life, with political systems “influenced by and adjusted to the demands of the mass media in their coverage of politics” (Asp, 1986: 359), whose main effect is the decline of “the capacity of political actors to act according to the interests and desires of citizens” (Dalton, 2000: 25).

The problem that strongly emerges here is that of *democratic quality*, as theorized by Larry Jay Diamond and Leonardo Morlino (2005), especially in regards to the fundamentals of *political participation*. Leonardo Morlino identifies a paradoxical consequence in this context of

declining parties: on the one hand, there is still an individual need for the external control of reality, as well as a desire for a ‘secondary control’, but on the other hand the parties no longer offer a credible response in terms of their organization, identification, and ideologies (2011: 133).

While party membership is declining and citizens become more and more disenchanted with traditional forms of participation, democratic innovations give

citizens the opportunity to influence political decision-making in an institutionalized setting of deliberative or direct democratic procedures. Participatory practices such as deliberative polls, participatory budgeting, the different types of mini-publics and so on, have the potential to respond to the deficits of the representative democratic system and thus contribute to its legitimacy. In fact, one of the implicit assumptions of democratic innovation is that a more active and massive citizens' participation is not only desirable, but that it constitutes the essential dimension so that a democracy can respond effectively to what we commonly call democracy or, in a more precise way, it can be consistent with the normative definitions of democracy. At the same time, however, the idea of democratic innovation tends to reject (or to deviate from) too normative definitions of democracy, since it stems from the practices of participation and not by a predetermined model of "desirable" democracy. Ian Shapiro (2003), in this regard, has effectively highlighted the deep gap between the normative theories (seeking to justify and legitimize democracy as a system of government) and explanatory theories (who seek to describe and understand the dynamics of the democratic system). Just out of the impasse represented by the gap between normative theories and explanatory ones, Morlino (2011) proposed to adopt a different analytical perspective, introducing the concept of quality of democracy. For the purposes of this paper when we speak about democratic innovation and collaborative governance we are referring to four main variables: a) specific procedures; b) means of collaborative governance; c) the adoption of participatory platforms (the Internet) and, finally, d) a more or less defined direct democracy.¹ These variables are also used to explain the concept of "open government," which is theoretically different from democratic innovation, but frequently overlaps with the latter concept.

The expression *open government* has relied deeply on an extensive debate about models of governance and decision-making for the last twenty five years (Crouch, 2011). A traditional definition of open government is based on transparency, access to information and accountability, but in recent times the concept has begun to be stretched further (Clarke and Francoli, 2014). As a point of reference, we can highlight two official documents defining it: in November 2009 European governments agreed on the Malmö Ministerial Declaration on e-Government, affirming that public administrations must be "open, flexible and collaborative in their relations with citizens and businesses." In December 2009, US President, Barack Obama, launched the Open Government Initiative, whose "principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration form the cornerstone of an open government." In particular, open government is thought to be challenging previous models of the public sector's agency and structure, such as the bureaucratic State and the New Public Management (Hood and Peters, 2004; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004), by defining new forms of relationship among government, citizens and digital technologies².

¹ The term collaborative governance refers to forms of cooperative management of public policies, through participatory tools: the best known example (and also most studied) of cooperative governance is the so-called "participatory budget".

² We have also to underline that the strong persistence of the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm has partially contributed to the semantic shifting from "government" to "governance," but at the same time it hindered the establishment of a collaborative governance approach, at least in some countries like the UK (and partially in Italy); on the opposite side, in countries like France, with a strong tradition of democratic participation and organized movements, collaborative governance was more easily established, despite (or perhaps because of) the presence of a strong central state. In other words, the abandonment of the NPM paradigm, partly happened in the UK since the first Blair government, facilitated experiences of deliberative democracy, but not necessarily in the frame of collaborative governance; on the opposite side, in France, collaborative governance has been established over traditions of participation and some formal institutions, such as that of "public debate" (*débat public*).

OPEN GOVERNMENT: BETWEEN EFFICIENCY AND PARTICIPATION

One of the rhetorical arguments that accompanied the advance of neoliberalism³ – or, more correctly, its resistance to the crisis it had itself provoked (Crouch, 2011) – found its strong points in two keywords: 1) quantity, and 2) efficiency.

The concept of *quantity* is closely linked to that of “accumulation,” but unlike the latter, it does not only involve the economic sphere. It does in fact relate to the need for a wide range of services, or rather an ample quantity of services, although this is actually just in theory. Consider, for example, the provision of complex services with high business costs, such as the exploitation of groundwater or energy supplies: entering the market involves facing strong competition, although this is not necessarily true because – precisely because of the costs and the know-how required – only a very few large companies are in a position to compete. Moreover, winning a contract means acquiring the right to a long-term concession (usually 20-25 years), which then becomes a *de facto* monopoly. In practice, a large *quantity of competitors* does not lead to greater consumer choice, but simply to increased opportunities for just a few corporations and to the re-establishment of a monopoly (a private rather than a state monopoly).

The concept of *efficiency*, however, is often defined through its temporal dimension; according to this definition, an efficient state would be one in which there is a very short reaction time between making policy proposals and carrying them out. In short, a state with rapid, effective decision-making procedures that are often legitimized by the spectacle of rules of the so-called “audience democracies” (Manin, 1995). An efficient state therefore requires a strong executive at the centre and has no need for the red tape of parliamentary procedures: this leads to the idea that parliaments should reduce their competencies (or perhaps even disappear or be replaced by more “lightweight” institutions).

In actual fact, these two concepts, though necessary for the development and affirmation of neoliberal ideology, are a long way from the idea of democracy as a political space capable of effectively meeting the needs, requirements and projects of its citizens. Democracy needs neither the imperfect competition that generates monopolies nor frantically reduced decision-making times; what it really needs is to see a growth in its own qualities, or rather in its responsiveness. In some theoretical perspectives – such as the New Public Management Approach – open government is used as a tool to replace the need for government and political debate with the rhetorical storytelling of “governance” (which is very often interpreted as a mere “collection” of public policies). This rhetorical use of the word “governance” is supported by the ideological use of the concept of efficiency.

³ Here, we refer to neoliberalism as it has been defined, among others, by Crouch, 2003, 2011; della Porta, 2013; Streeck, 2014.

OPEN GOVERNMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Since its earliest appearances in official discourses, policy programs and academic articles, open government has been defined by comparing it with previous models of administrative structure and agency. In particular, Beth Simone Noveck (2010) identified the core driver of change in *openness* vs. *closeness*: she juxtaposes open government to the closed, highly hierarchical and monolithic model of decision making that has served as a distinctive feature of bureaucratic systems since the description given by Max Weber (Weber, 2002). Having in mind the example of Barack Obama's 2008 electoral campaign, Noveck claims that with the advent of collaborative practices through the Internet, theories of direct and deliberative democracy regained their strength, sustained by a network approach to the study of society and organizations (Castells, 1996). Stephen Osborne (2010) takes this argument further, observing the emergence of a "networked governance" or "new public governance" rooted in government's ability to form communities and networks with private actors and citizens.

In effect, the bureaucratic state has already been challenged by the latter: the New Public Management doctrine spread across the world since the late 1970s and 1980s, especially in (but not limited to) the United States, the United Kingdom and several other countries,⁴ while the doctrine has been implemented less in most European countries (Osborne, 2010; Mulgan, 2014). It found a fertile ground in the context of administrative change driven by four "megatrends:" (1) the willingness to decrease public spending and staffing; (2) the shift towards privatization, quasi-privatization and subsidiarity between public and private actors; (3) the increasing use of automation and ICT; and (4) the process of the internalization of policies and of policy coordination at a supra-national level.

Since the mid 1990s and with more insistence through the 2000s, scholars increasingly started to talk about the New Public Management (NPM) being overcome. For example, Robert Denhardt and Janet Vinzant Denhardt (2000) wrote about a "New Public Service" rooted in theories of participatory and deliberative democracy; Archon Fung and Eric Olin Wright (2001) described cases of "empowered participatory governance;" Christopher Hood and Guy Peters (2004) claimed for the "middle aging" of NPM becoming paradoxical and generating unintended consequences; Patrick Dunleavy et al., (2005) asserted the death of NPM and observed the emergence of a "Digital Era Governance;" Stephen Osborne (2010) proposed the "networked governance" or "new public governance," as already cited. As this incomplete list suggests, a part of the scientific community has detected a crisis in the hegemony of NPM, and as a result become in favour of other models.⁵

⁴ The most important reason why New Public Management settled especially in United States and United Kingdom is that in such countries the neoliberal approach in economics has always been particularly strong. As Colin Crouch explained, NPM is part of a neoliberal approach to the economy and to the organization of the relationship between the State and the citizenry that stresses some of the propositions of classical liberalism, in particular the limitation of public intervention in the economy, pushing it towards more radical positions, such as the privatization of services and the transformation of all social relationships, including the concept of citizenship, by adopting an economic model (Crouch, 2011).

⁵ Notwithstanding, there are also some relevant exceptions: for example, Helen Margetts and Patrick Dunleavy (2013) account for the persistence of NPM helped by the austerity policies. Colin Crouch (2011) and John Michael Roberts (2014) have also expressed similar thesis. We have also to cite the resurgence of the Public Value Approach as an alternative to NPM.

In particular, as Lisa Blomgren Bingham (2010) claimed, open government programs (especially the White House “open government initiative”) rely heavily upon the collaborative governance model, insofar as they aim to involve actors like citizens, private companies and non-profit organizations in the policy-making process, through both in-person and online methods. In defining the concept of collaborative governance, Chris Ansell and Alison Gash (2007) stress six points:

- >Public agencies and institutions are the primary promoter of collaborative practices, in the sense that collaborative governance remains a way of exercising public authority;
- >Multiple non-state stakeholders are involved in the process, either in the form of associations representing relevant interests (associational multi-stakeholderism) or through the direct participation of interested and affected individuals;
- >Participants have a real decision-making power and are not merely consulted;
- >Collaboration has a formal framework, distinguishing it from informal networks and interests groups;
- >The process is oriented to reach the consensus of participants (although full consensus is difficult to achieve) as opposed to authoritative decision-making;
- >The goal is the formation of public policies or the management of public resources.

In collaborative governance, the process of governing is thus articulated in a network of actors who are partners in decision-making: the state can be best conceived as a platform (O’Reilly, 2010) providing resources, rules and skills in order to build a “facilitating framework” for all the other stakeholders to collaborate (Dunleavy et al., 2005). In addition to citizens and the government, another actor gains importance in contemporary collaborative governance: online participatory platforms can in fact serve as tools helping both citizens and institutions sustain a continuous dialogue, share knowledge and competences, and foster collaborative processes (De Blasio, 2014).

Table 1. Actors and models of governance

	Bureaucratic State	New Public Management	Open Government (or Collaborative Governance)
Government	Structure: unitary, hierarchical and professional Agency: dominance of rule of law	Structure: flexible and fragmented (autonomous units) Agency: managerial and private-sector models	Structure: network Agency: government as platform and facilitating framework
Citizens	External counterparts	Customers and clients	Partners
Digital technology	n.a.	e-government, e-service delivery	Participatory platforms to dialogue and collaborate

Source: Original elaboration

We think that open government should be considered as a policy agenda that looks towards models of deliberative democracy and collaborative governance for the best possible means of implementation, while remaining a policy that can also be adapted to other models of administration. As a governance model, it enhances transparency

through horizontal accountability mechanisms (Mulgan, 2014), such as the disclosure of public data (and recently, open data), the provision of tools to discuss and debate with administrators, while extending monitoring and enforcing powers of citizens. Participation can be achieved at increasing degrees: public consultations are just the first step for a fully shared decision-making. Deliberative arenas such as citizens' assemblies, citizens juries and public debates stand in an intermediate realm, because they open to a higher degree of participation than mere consultation, but still do not ensure that they are going to influence policy. Finally, collaboration can be actualized in three dimensions (De Blasio, 2014; Sorice, 2014): horizontal procedures involving multiple stakeholders; transversal policies shared by multi-level institutions such as supra-national, national, regional and local governments; and circular subsidiarity, notably in the form of public-private-civic partnerships and "collaborative administration." Hence, open government can be conceived as a progressive stage model, from the access to information (in transparency) to full collaborative governance, in which the power of decision-making is symmetrical among all the participants (Table 2).

Table 2. Variables and dimensions of open government

Variables	Dimensions	Examples
Transparency	Information and open data	Open data portals
	Training programs	Digital inclusion policies
	Public policies monitoring	<i>Follow-the-money</i> , access to information
Participation	Consultation	On line consultation
	Deliberative arenas	Public debates, on line forums
	Co-decision of public policies	Co-drafting, consensus-oriented procedures
Collaboration	Horizontality	Multi-stakeholderism
	Transversality	Multi-level governance
	Collaborative governance	Public-private-civic partnership, Shared decision-making

Source: Démocratie Ouverte, www.democratieouverte.org; De Blasio, 2014.

As a policy agenda, open government is composed of three variables or issues (transparency, participation and collaboration) and pays strong attention to the role of digital technologies in democratic processes. Although with relevant differences, this agenda indeed finds some common roots in the NPM ideal type⁶ (Table 3): in particular, NPM's approach to transparency emphasizes the accountability for results and the measurement of performance (Hood, 1991; Mulgan, 2014), while collaboration is exemplified in public-private partnerships and the "openness" to privatize administrative activities and to import market-style mechanisms (Hood, 1991; Osborne, 2010; Roberts, 2014), and the use of digital technology is mostly confined in a managerial logic of service provision (Reddick, 2011). Public participation in a deliberative perspective is somewhat neglected from the NPM agenda: basic feedback channels and direct democracy tools are only accepted as long as they provide insight into customer satisfaction (Hood, 1991).

⁶ Although we acknowledge that NPM is a highly fragmented "cluster of phenomena" (Osborne, 2010) rather than a coherent doctrine, we treat it as an ideal type (using the Weberian concept of ideal type).

Table 3. Comparison between NPM and open government.

New Public Management	Variables	Open Government (or Collaborative Governance)
Accountability for results, Measurement of performance (Hood, 1991; Osborne, 2010; Mulgan, 2014)	Transparency	Horizontal accountability Disclosure (open data), Debate (civic skills), Enforcement (monitoring)
Citizens as customers and clients; Feedback as measurement of performance; Direct democracy to counterbalance elitist character (Hood, 1991)	Participation	Consultation (conservative), Deliberation (innovative), Co-Decision (citizens as equal partners)
Market-style mechanisms (Hood, 1991; Osborne, 2010); Public-private partnership (Roberts, 2014)	Collaboration	Networked governance (Osborne, 2010); Collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash, 2007; Bingham, 2010); Public-private-civic partnership, circular; State-platform approach (O'Reilly, 2010)
Managerial model of e-government (Reddick, 2011); e-service delivery	Digital technology	Consultative and participatory models of e-government (Reddick, 2011); Digital democracy

Although all four variables of the open government agenda are interpreted in different ways, participation, collaboration and digital technology are the most challenging areas, because they imply a strong reform of public administration, whereas transparency goals (the disclosure of open data, the tools to debate and to monitor) can be easily achieved even without a major restructuring of government activity. Moreover, transparency is the only variable indicated in the earliest accounts of open government, dating from the 1950s, whereas participation, collaboration and digital technologies entered policy documents only in recent years (Clarke and Francoli, 2014). For those reasons, we would expect to find in different national policies more variance in the areas of participation, collaboration and digital democracy than in transparency.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Our basic research question seeks to understand how open government is framed and used in the four countries we have been studying. It is also important to understand what variables are implied in the design of the participatory platforms in each country. In order to answer to our research questions, we adopt a comparative perspective focusing on four crucial cases in European countries, following the most similar/most dissimilar logic (Morlino, 2005; Engeli et al., 2014): the cases – as said – are France, Italy, Spain, and the

UK. The dataset consists of a collection of three policy documents per country, selected on the grounds that each document represents a most common denominator, as they are derived from international, multilateral commitments:⁷ the national Digital Agenda Plans and the reuse of public sector information regulation derive from European Union commitments (absorbing respectively the European Digital Agenda and the directive 2013/37/EU on reuse of Public Sector Information)⁸, and the third document is the latest active *Open Government Partnership Action Plan* at the time of writing (July 2015).

Since our interest is in describing and analysing the different meaning and policy framing of open government among the selected countries, we have chosen an interpretive approach which considers policies as texts and communities of practices (Yanow, 2014): in particular, we focus on how policy-makers represent the problems they are facing, their way of solving them and the stakeholders they involve. This approach is relatively new in policy studies, but we were able to find some notable examples in the field of gender policies (Verloo, 2007) and climate change (Fletcher, 2009) in these fields the frame analysis is used to discover the motivations underlying the measures taken in the policy documents.

We made a first round of manual coding, applying frame analysis to the *Open Government Partnership Action Plan* of the four countries in order to build the codebook following a grounded approach, and to identify the whole spectrum of issues covered in the policy documents: we subdivided among specific measures undertaken or announced for each of the variables of open government (digital technology, transparency, participation and collaboration) and motivations for the adoption of such measures. We finally analysed the documents with qualitative, computer-assisted manual coding using the software QDA Miner in order to calculate the occurrences and co-occurrences of measures and frames through proximity plots, and to compare the different countries and policy documents. All the documents were retrieved from official sources in their entirety and analysed in their own native languages. Then we analysed the participatory platforms established by national and local authorities in Italy, France, the UK and Spain. Table 4 shows the dimensions, the variables and the indicators used in the analysis of the participatory platforms.

⁷ In the next phase of this research, we will analyze extensively the whole bodies of policies for each of the four countries.

	Nationals	Locals	Total
Italy	24	27	51
France	17	22	39
Spain	34	30	64
UK	34	16	50
Total	109	95	204

The 204 policies will be analyzed in the frame of a "narrative policy framework", using an evaluation grid composed by eight steps (identification of the problem, collection of findings, construction of the alternatives, selections of criteria, outcomes detection, cost-benefits analysis, decision-making mechanisms analysis, redefinition of the process). This paper, anyway, presents only the first step of our research.

⁸ United Kingdom had not implemented the directive yet at the time of writing: for this reason, we analyzed the most recent policy paper about open data, which was the 2014 Data Capability Strategy.

Table 4. Dimensions, variables and indicators used in the analysis of the participatory platforms

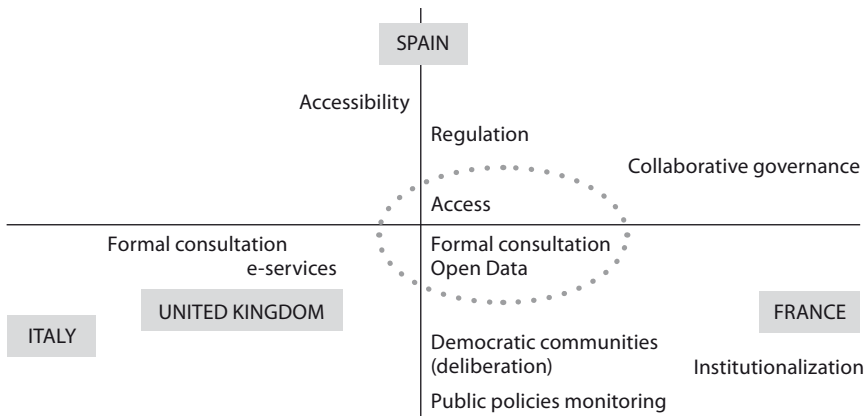
Dimensions	Variables	Indicators
Design		
	Properties	Code Fund raising Crowdfunding
	Accessibility	Entrance Authentication Social authentication Anonymity Inclusiveness (selection criteria)
	Regulation	Content policies Moderation Moderator role
	Discussion	Agenda Articulation
Information		
	Access	Organised information Private sources
	Production	Participatory production of contents
Transparency		
	Open data	Open Datasets
	Public policies monitoring	Open data reuse Information on policies goals Reports
Participation		
	Interaction	Contact channels Feedback channels (like, sharing buttons)
	Informal debate	Community spaces
	Formal consultation	Aggregation of the preferences Free comments Formal proposals
	Open community	Deliberative processes Multiple interactions Argumentation Respect and equality Orientation of the decision Experts Private actors (presence or not)
	Democratic communities	Endogenous or bottom-up processes



Collaboration	
Horizontality - symmetry of decision-making powers	Process reciprocity Continuity Output legitimacy Accountability
Transversality	Policies interoperability Actors and events interoperability
Collaborative governance	Presence of at least three social components (ie public, private and civic) Action topic Network communication and coordination
Institutionalization	Presence of a legal/institutional device as background of collaboration (issued by the same body that publishes the platform) Mutuality of the legal/institutional device Binding nature of the process (if a "device" is present) Binding nature of the process (if a "device" is NOT present)

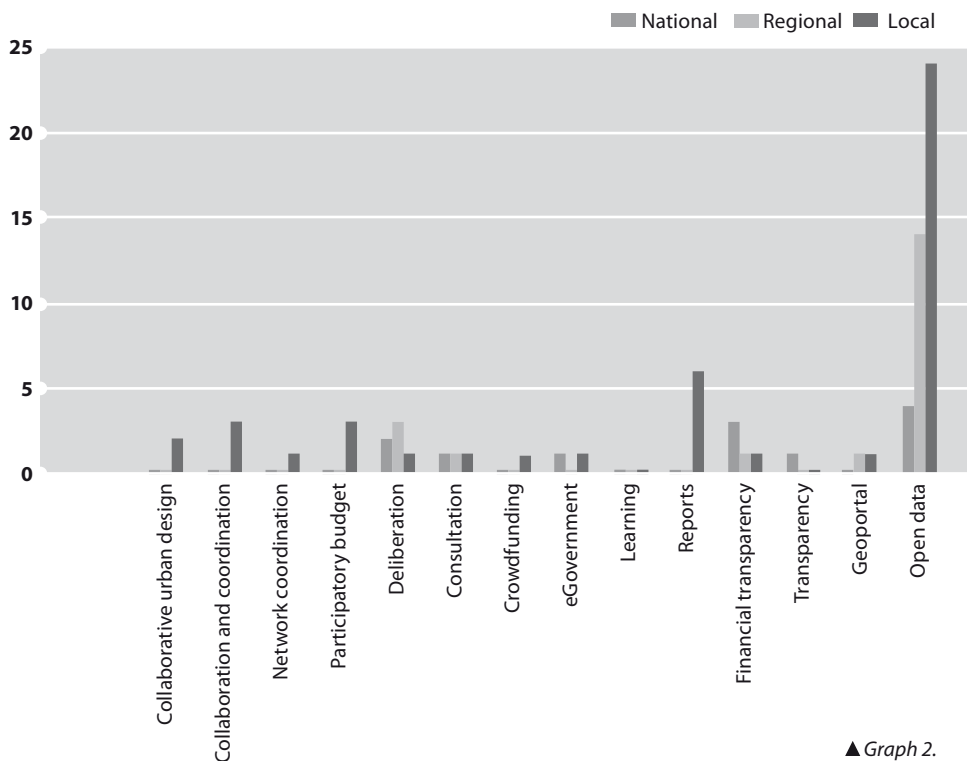
FINDINGS

Our analysis shows that the four European countries have similarities and differences in both the measures undertaken and the frames in which they deploy to motivate their actions (Graph 1).



▲ Graph 1. Clustering countries according to measures (our elaboration with QDA Miner)

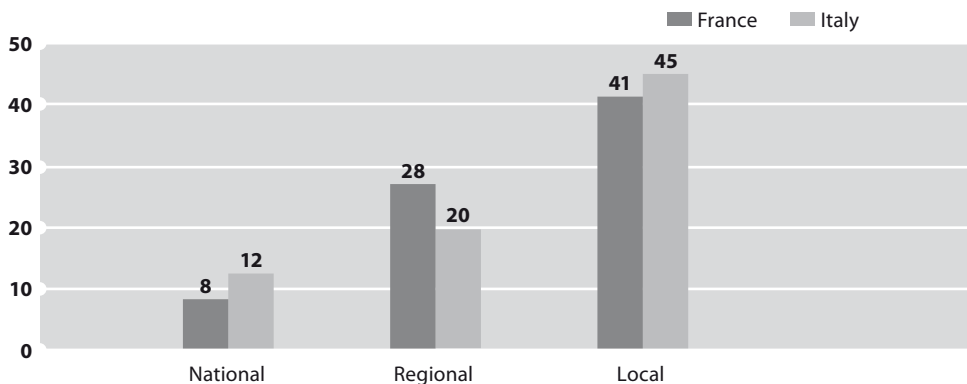
In particular, if we look at our measures, we find a least common denominator in issues about access, open data and financial accountability, confirming our assumption: all countries dedicate much more attention to transparency than to participation and collaboration. Another feature among all of the policies is the common reference to consultation practices. All countries are increasingly consulting the public and the private sector during the policy-making process, but again this convergence can be explained by looking at the requirements in the *Open Government Partnership*: all Action Plans must be elaborated in consultation with civil society organizations. Aside from that event, we found that most consultations do not imply a co-decision procedure nor a deliberative process, but are instead intended to come from the recommendations of private actors and civil society organizations, or via public survey. Deliberative processes are best implemented in French policies (both at the legislative and at implementation levels), notably in matters of environment protection and territory management. The government is currently adopting measures to make deliberation a transversal procedure.⁹



▲ Graph 2.
Platforms according to categories and levels of governance.
Italy N=77

⁹ In 1995 the French “Law Barnier” on environment protection introduced the public debate as a common practice for deliberative decision-making in specific sectors (notably infrastructure, territory management and energy) and instituted a specialized Commission (later enhanced to the status of authority). Currently the Commission is working to coordinate the deliberative design with digital procedures and to extend the matters of deliberation.

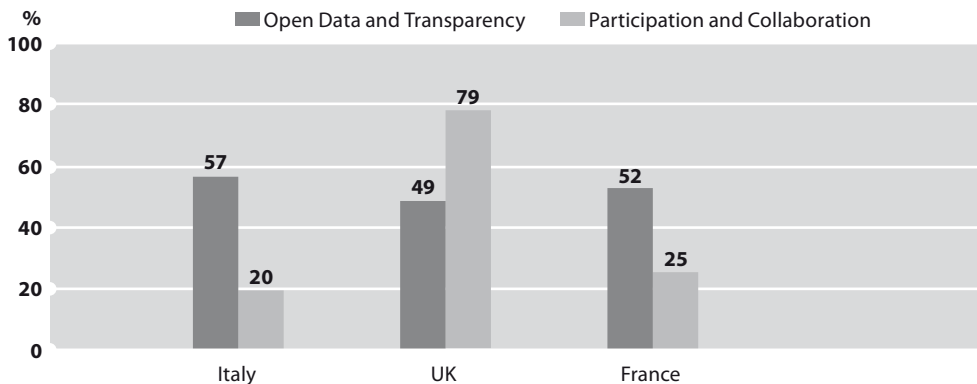
The policies' implementation (say, the digital participatory platforms) shows evidence of some differences when compared to the official documents.



▲ Graph 3.
Platforms for different levels. France and Italy

In Graph 2, the different categories of platforms are also considered from a geographical point of view. The difference among levels (national, regional and local) is better highlighted in the Graph 3.

Graph 3 shows the differences between France and Italy at the different-institutional level. Graph 4 describes the mere differences between open data platforms and participatory ones among France, Italy and the UK; at this step, it seems that the UK presents a higher percentage of participatory platforms (it is important to remember, however, that the definition of "participatory platforms" is wide and it deserves a more analytical, theoretical effort of understanding).



▲ Graph 4.
Open data vs. participation in UK, France and Italy

Platforms for open data (and transparency) are the most common, both in France and in Italy. If we consider geoportals (very often associated to tourism and leisure even from a “transparency perspective”) and transparency platforms as both framed in a specific macro-category (open data and transparency), we can easily see that they represent around the 60% of all the platforms in Italy and France. It means that only 40% of the platforms are specifically designed to improve participation and collaboration between citizens and institutions. This situation is evident if we compare data from France and Italy with those of the United Kingdom (Graph 4). In this case (and in considering open data and transparency we also include financial transparency, claims/consultations and network coordination) we can easily note as the platforms specifically designed for participation are in greater number in UK than in France and Southern Europe. It does not mean that participation is more efficient in the UK, but only that the national infrastructure for digital participation is more developed. At the same time, however the French websites for open data and transparency also call for participation (in the tradition of the *débat public*), while in Italy they have a prominent top-down communication model.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our study helps to clarify the meaning of open government by looking at policy implementation and at the policy content as it relates to transparency, participation, collaboration and digital technologies, all which constitute what we called the open government agenda. By studying policy documents from France, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom we found that transparency and digital technologies are the most prominent issues, whereas participation and collaboration are less considered and implemented.

This homogeneity can depend on a series of concurrent factors: first the time factor, in the sense that transparency can count on a longer tradition of implementation, notably the access to information. A legal factor is the common background of those countries, all of which are members of the European Union. The trend towards policy convergence is sustained by the regulatory activity of European institutions, which is still more focused on transparency than participation. A technological factor resides in the opportunities of digital technologies that contribute to enhancing the accessibility of information, thereby enlarging the quantity of information and widening the audience. And a final economic factor is evident in the frame used by all countries: data are considered resources for economic growth and the development of new businesses.

The study on policy frames highlights some differences among countries in the motivation for the adoption of open government policies. In particular, the scarce attention paid to participation and collaboration compared to transparency is reflected in the modest activation of what we called the democratic frame, containing references to democratic values such as participation, transparency, equality, inclusion, trust, and privacy rights.

Analysing the digital platforms (77 in Italy, 77 in France, 76 in Spain, 130 in the UK) we have to highlight some peculiar differences. First of all the higher number of platforms in the UK; then the peculiarities of the UK with respect to the other three countries. If France shows some specific issues in the policy documents, it is the UK that has a clear specificity in the platforms (or, in the policies implementation). The UK, in other words, appears to have issues not unassimilable to the other three countries.

At the moment, the model of collaborative governance is hardly being implemented into national policies and the open government agenda remains at the level of transparency measures (with some exceptions). Notwithstanding, we could detect different perspectives and motivations for the adoption of open government measures that constitute the proof of a vital debate currently ongoing: in particular, we expect to see different, main models of open government being discussed, adapted and changed in the next few years.

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OTVORENA VLADA KAO ALAT DEMOKRACIJE

Emiliana De Blasio :: Michele Sorice

SAŽETAK Sve veća nepovezanost građana i donositelja odluka gura politiku u smjeru koji će dovesti do preoblikovanja institucionalnog aranžmana. Komunikacijski alati mogu imati važnu ulogu u razvijanju novih prostora za participaciju građana. Postoje različiti modeli kojima vlada i javna administracija mogu poduprijeti građansku participaciju: e-vlada, otvorena vlada i specifičan dizajn digitalne demokracije. Otvorena vlada može biti jedan od načina za ponovno povezivanje građana i političkih institucija, ali u isto vrijeme može biti i „privlačan“ alat za institucionalizaciju participacije odozdo prema gore i njezino umrtvljivanje. Cilj je ovog rada predstaviti prva saznanja međunarodnog istraživačkog projekta na temu otvorene vlade i participacijskih platformi u četiri europske države (Francuskoj, Italiji, Španjolskoj i Ujedinjenom Kraljevstvu). Istraživanje nastoji otkriti mogu li platforme za participaciju poboljšati kvalitetu demokracije i može li otvorena vlada doprinijeti demokratizaciji demokracije.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

OTVORENA VLADA, PARTICIPACIJA, KOMUNIKACIJA, DEMOKRACIJA, DEMOKRATSKE INOVACIJE

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ICTs, OPENNESS AND CITIZEN PERCEPTIONS OF GOVERNMENT: HOW CIVIC TECHNOLOGIES CAN FACILITATE EXTERNAL CITIZEN EFFICACY

Rebecca Rumbul

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ABSTRACT *This article examines whether civic technologies deliver an effective technique for developing the political efficacy of citizens and altering their perceived accountability of governments. Employing a survey-based methodology, a quantitative analysis was performed on the users of civic technology sites in the USA, UK, Kenya and South Africa. The primary question posed is whether the specific citizen monitoring actions facilitated by these sites cause a related effect in altering the extent to which citizens believe that governments are responsive to citizen-audit. The results indicate an enhancement in citizen efficacy and perceptions of government accountability. Notable differences detected in the user demographics between the countries studied demonstrate a wide spectrum of citizen usage; however, with common confidence displayed by respondents in the efficacy of the ICT. The findings indicate that the publication and citizen-audit of government information through civic technologies in developed and developing countries increases feelings of external efficacy and perceived government accountability.*

KEY WORDS

DIGITAL DEMOCRACY, POLITICAL EFFICACY, CIVIC TECHNOLOGY, ICT

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INTRODUCTION

The potential of ICTs to address fundamental democratic and participation issues has been recognised by scholars (Groshek, 2009), in particular with regard to the facilitation of greater 'openness' in governance (Bertot et al., 2012). The logic of employing such digital tools, focused towards the concept of governmental openness is in the link between efficacy and participation (Zimmerman, 1989). The evolution and proliferation of civic technologies, a form of ICT, around the globe has gained pace since the advent of early participatory websites in the early 2000's, and significant funding is now being allocated to the NGO sector for the development and implementation of such sites in response to improvements in connectivity and access to hardware now occurring in many developing countries. The core purpose of such civic technologies is primarily to empower citizens through enabling some form of civic or political participation and in facilitating the flow of official information, whether that be on a specific policy subject, a specific citizen complaint, or information on parliamentary proceedings.

This study investigated whether civic technologies have an 'empowering' impact upon those individuals that use them, specifically, whether using civic technologies to access information increases, or alters in any way, the personal efficacy and belief of citizens in their ability to hold their governments to account. Research into the medium-long term impacts of civic technologies upon citizen attitudes is scarce, in part due to the small scale of organisations running these sites, in part due to their youth, and in part due to the transience of the user experience. A very early adopter and developer of civic technologies, mySociety, is based in the UK and operates a range of Open Source civic technology platforms that enable citizens to participate in civic activities, whether that is through a parliamentary monitoring site TheyWorkForYou, through making Freedom of Information requests via WhatDoTheyKnow, or through reporting maintenance issues to local authorities via FixMyStreet. This code is operational in over 40 countries globally. Tobias Escher (2011), examining mySociety website users in the UK, noted that a significant volume of users were first-time users with individual and 'particularised' (Cantijoch et al., 2015) interests. However, it has also been shown that, to a limited degree, such digital platforms demonstrate a correlation with increased community involvement in an offline capacity (Cantijoch et al., 2015). Marta Cantijoch et al.'s (2015) research demonstrates that, whilst individual interests drive initial online participation, the very act of online participation may alter the subsequent attitudes or actions of citizens.

What is not currently evidenced is what attitudes towards the use of these civic technologies themselves, and towards government, are developed by citizens in the process of their action. Civic technologies enable participation, but to what end? Civic technologists themselves describe their aims variously as enabling transparency to facilitate the accountability of, or the exertion of power over, government institutions (Rumbul, 2016).

This study examined the attitudes of citizens using civic technologies in the UK, South Africa, Kenya and the US. Quantitative data was collected via online surveys, as well as

via online analytics programmes to address the question of whether the use of civic technologies increases personal external efficacy, alters the confidence citizens hold in their respective governments, and whether specifically, that can be attributed to their ability to participate via civic technologies.

This research is both novel and significant in its approach. Civic technologies have been subject to a much lower volume of scrutiny in their role in citizen participation than social media platforms or dedicated petition sites, however, these websites have been recognised by governments and commentators as a potentially effective route to diversifying and broadening participation (Bertot et al., 2010; Olphert and Damodaran, 2007). This study sheds light on whether those assertions may be correct, and provides substantive evidence of attitudinal change in citizen's engagement with civic activities. This study also illuminates previously unexamined public attitudes towards civic technologies, delineating the confidence citizens have in the civic technologies they are using, and the confidence citizens have or develop in their governments through the use of civic technologies.

THE ROLE OF EFFICACY AND THE PROBLEM OF PARTICIPATION

Significant volumes of individuals now use the internet as one of their primary sources of news and political information (Graham and Metaxas, 2003; Johnson and Kaye, 2010; Kenski and Stroud, 2006), and many use it as their primary medium of personal administration, whether that takes the form of using online banking services, purchasing consumer goods, or arranging a family holiday. Internet users therefore have a reasonable level of efficacy in navigating their online environment. Citizens in many countries do not, however, exhibit high levels of personal efficacy in their civic or political spheres (Bromley et al., 2001; Forrest and Weseley, 2007; Francis and Busch, 1975). Political efficacy has been described by several authors as possessing two distinct constructs, distinguishing between 'internal' and 'external' dimensions of the concept of efficacy (Balch, 1974; Converse, 1972; Kenski and Stroud, 2006; Niemi et al., 1991). Whilst internal efficacy concerns the understanding of one's own ability to understand and participate, external efficacy refers to the extent to which citizens believe governments and authoritative institutions will be responsive to citizen demands or participation (Finkel, 1985; Niemi et al., 1991). The literature suggests that citizen *beliefs* concerning government responsiveness, in the absence of personal *experience*, directly affects the extent to which citizens will choose to participate (Abramson and Aldrich, 1982; Finkel, 1985; Sjoberg et al., 2015).

The digital availability of political and governance-related information does not necessarily mean that individuals will alter their approaches to engaging with civic activity (Kenski and Stroud, 2006), however scholars have pointed to internet connectivity as a tool for enhanced democracy and participation (Anderson, 2003). The study of political efficacy has historically centred around traditional forms of political participation (Craig and Maggiotto, 1982; Finkel, 1985), and in recent years, the equivalent actions conducted through digital means (Bennett et al., 2009; Dimitrova et al., 2011). Such activities include

verbal or financial support of political campaigns, dissemination of partisan policy messages, and participation in meetings and elections. Civic participation, however, encompasses a broader field of concern than that specific to party political ideals, providing space for individual participation and engagement in civic issues external to partisan boundaries. Individual citizens are able to raise issues, investigate them, and communicate them through digital means in a quicker and potentially more impactful fashion than in the pre-digital age. Whilst this form of political participation largely concerns organised issue-specific lobbying and campaigning, the digital ability to conduct such activities also enables citizens to pursue very individualised, participatory agendas, often referred to as 'particularised contacting' (Cantijoch et al., 2015; Teorell et al., 2007). Some authors have considered this as a diminished form of political participation, ranking it amongst routine administrative activities (Parry et al., 1992; Verba et al., 1995) or failing to distinguish these activities from larger-scale contact concerning macro-political concerns (Teorell et al., 2007), however these activities, conducted through civic technologies, have been shown to have specific impacts upon citizen behaviour in regard to both community-based civic activity (Cantijoch et al., 2015) and in engaging with government concerning micro-level individualised issues (Sjoberg et al., 2015). It is possible to posit, therefore, that this particularised form of civic engagement may impact the levels of confidence that citizens hold in government and its ability to account for its actions.

The concepts of confidence and trust in government have been examined by a number of scholars, many of whom have identified a trend in decreasing levels of trust and confidence in government (Levi and Stoker, 2000; Nye et al., 1997). In consideration of such findings, several authors have emphasised the role that accountability and transparency hold in potentially reducing levels of mistrust (Norris et al., 2001; Thomas and Streib, 2003; Tolbert and Mossberger, 2006). Scholars studying accountability and transparency have identified the role that the publication of official information plays in achieving what is perceived to be a more accountable government (Ball, 2009; Pasquier and Villeneuve, 2011). The citizens ability to review information about or produced by governments and politicians is one aspect of increasing personal external efficacy (Bundy, 2004; Kenski and Stroud, 2006; Usluel, 2007). The ability to see official information and use it to monitor or query governments and politicians is therefore important in engaging citizens in good governance and in impacting their own efficacy.

In considering the emergence of digital methods for accessing information, authors (Bertot et al., 2010; Norris et al., 2001) identified the potential of e-government in particular in facilitating an increase in transparency and accountability in government administration and service delivery, potentially resulting in increased efficiencies and better communication that would bolster citizen confidence in government overall. However, studies of the weaknesses or risks associated with e-government have also identified links between citizen trust in government and the propensity to use e-government systems (Bélanger and Carter, 2008), and the tendency of e-government initiatives to become bureaucratically rationalised rather than customer-focused (Colesca, 2009; Moon and Welch, 2005). E-government itself is, therefore, not a perfect tool for citizen engagement or increasing citizen efficacy, even though it is a tool for citizen audit (Margetts, 2011).

Civic technologies provide a potential solution to the concerns that citizens may hold in government-run digital services. Unlike e-government, civic technologies operate at the intersection of e-government and civil society. In the majority of cases, run by NGOs, civic technologies seek to expand the ability of the citizen to engage with governance mechanisms in a digital way rational to the user, whether in a form of particularised contacting in which the citizen interacts with an official individual, or in a citizen audit role in which the citizen is able to acquire and review official information on the activities of governments and politicians. In a controlled experiment, John Tedesco (2007) demonstrated the potential for effective interactive digital engagement to increase political information efficacy in young people. This paper seeks to build on Tedesco's findings by drawing and examining data from a diverse, real-world user base.

Building on the literature concerning ICTs, external efficacy and openness, this research seeks to uncover possible links between the use of civic technologies and efficacy. This study examines the external efficacy of participants through their 'particularised' use of civic technologies, and asks

- >Who is using civic technology platforms?
- >How are civic technology platforms altering levels of external citizen efficacy and confidence in governmental institutions?

The study examines any alteration in such levels of efficacy, analysing this alongside perceptions of government behaviour in relation to the existence of civic technologies. This study seeks to identify those individuals already using civic technologies, and therefore expects that the demographic spread of users may be uneven as a result of issues discussed in the literature such as the 'digital divide' (Norris, 2001) that exists within each country.

DATA AND METHODS

This study examined five civic technology sites operating in the UK, USA, Kenya and South Africa. These countries were selected for three common factors:

- >The presence of a well-used (above 5,000 individual users per month) and non-partisan civic technology platform;
- >The broad ability amongst the general population to hold sufficient connectivity in a personal capacity in order to access online services regularly;
- >A multi-party political system holding free and fair elections with a distinct executive and legislative form of government.

These countries were also selected for their differences. Technologies are used in different ways in different territories, and there was the potential for this study to compare attitudes and efficacy. The UK and the US represent highly developed countries with historic political and governmental systems, high levels of connectivity, and well

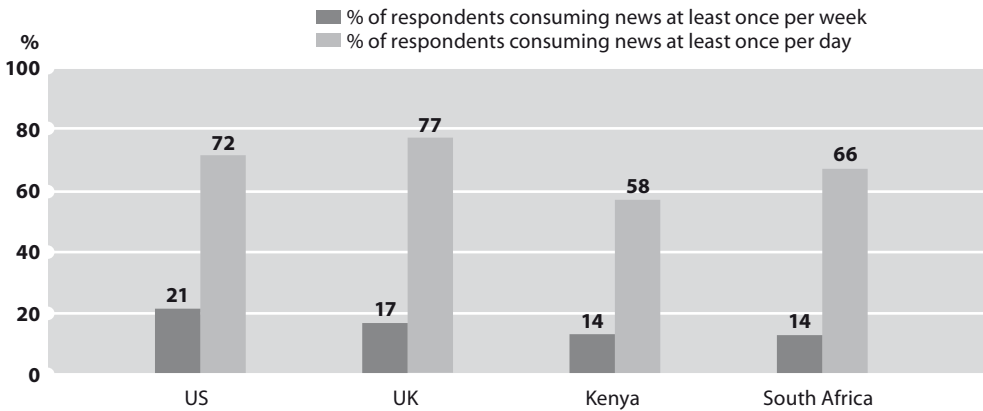
established methods of political engagement. Kenya and South Africa however, are developing nations. These countries have politically engaged populations, however their systems of politics and engagement are not as well established as those in the UK and the US, widespread connectivity is a relatively new phenomenon facilitated by recent advances in mobile technology, and access to political and governmental proceedings remains difficult. The differences in historic and political experience in these countries could potentially manifest in contrasting usage and attitudinal patterns within this study, and such data could be valuable not only in further study, but in the practical development of future civic technologies.

The study draws on 4,233 survey responses from civic technology users, and focuses on examining the basic demographic information and public attitudes data. The participating sites were FixMyStreet (UK), TheyWorkForYou (UK), GovTrack (US), Mzalendo (Kenya), and People's Assembly (South Africa). Each of these civic technology platforms provides users with either the opportunity for particularised contacting (FixMyStreet) or citizen parliamentary audit (TheyWorkForYou, GovTrack, Mzalendo and People's Assembly). The users of each site were asked if they would be willing to complete a survey for research purposes. This invitation would either be presented following a transaction, such as would occur following the submission of a report on FixMyStreet, or a pop up invitation would be presented to a user following a minimum time period on one site (for sites that were non-transactional, such as GovTrack). High-traffic sites, such as those operating in the UK and US, only invited a sample of visitors to take the survey. In the UK this was 50% of site users (or every other user), and in the US this was 25% (or every 4 users). Lower traffic sites such as Mzalendo in Kenya and People's Assembly in South Africa invited 100% of users to participate in order to ensure a sufficient sample. All surveys were conducted exclusively online, and consisted of between 17-21 questions (certain additional questions were added at the request of the participating platforms). No information on identification was requested. The first half of the survey requested personal demographic information such as age, level of educational attainment, economic activity, and employment sector. The second half of the survey included questions concerning the attitudes of individual users towards the civic technology they were using and their government and institutions. These questions sought to examine the perception of users concerning the benefits of the tools they were making use of above any other methods of providing or acquiring information from the government, their confidence in governance structures, and their perceptions of the effect of civic technologies upon government behaviour. Questions did not directly ask about levels of confidence or trust, rather, they focused on the individual's assessment of government behaviour, perceived ability to hold government to account, and the expectation of government behaving in a different manner in the event that the information and functionality of civic technology sites did not exist. The data was collected between February 2015 and October 2015.

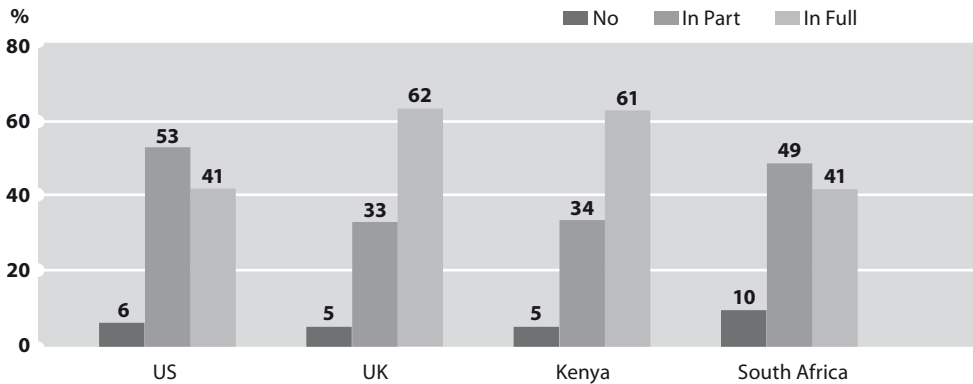
FINDINGS

Efficacy and confidence in governmental institutions

The data, somewhat unsurprisingly, shows that users of these specific civic technologies hold a pre-existing interest in politics, with over 70% of users confirming some daily consumption of political news in the UK and the US, and 58% and 66% in Kenya and South Africa respectively. This is perhaps unsurprising given the political and government content of such civic platforms, and reinforces previous research findings that show efficacy in an offline context translates into efficacy in an online context (Kenski and Stroud, 2006).



▲ Figure 1.
Political news consumption



▲ Figure 2.
Responses to the question 'Do you believe that being able to see this kind of information enables you to hold government/politicians to account?'

The number of users believing that such civic platforms enable them to hold governments and politicians to account was extremely high across all platforms surveyed. Over 94% of individuals in the UK felt that being able to see the information displayed through the civic technology site TheyWorkForYou enabled them, at least in part, to hold the British government to account. In the US, this was 95%, in Kenya 94%, and in South Africa 91%.

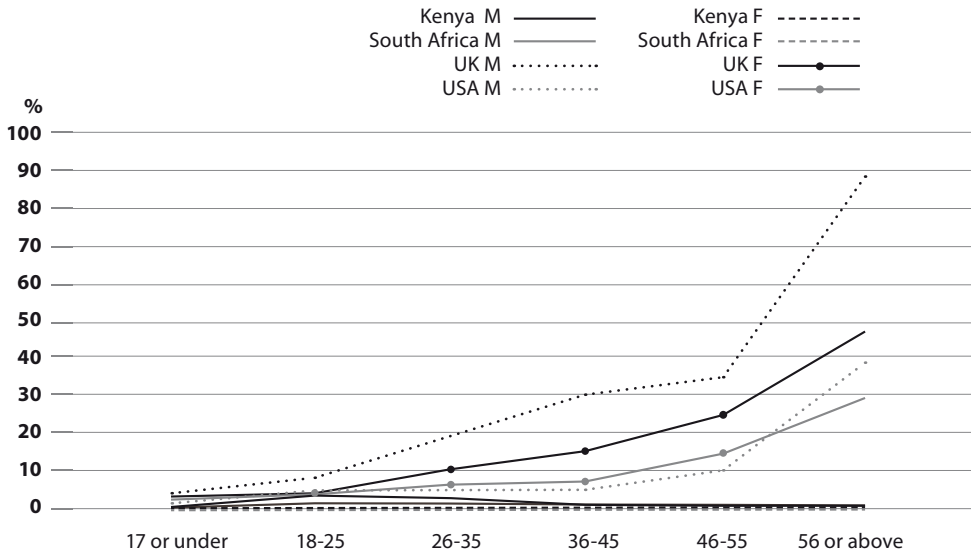
These figures are noteworthy, and strongly suggest a link between access to official information and external efficacy. Such beliefs indicate that individuals have confidence in their online actions serving a higher purpose than mere curiosity, in this case, viewing political and governmental information online through a civic technology platform. The data also alluded to a certain level of mistrust felt by many citizens in government behaviour. In Kenya, 83% of users believed that their ability to scrutinise government information via the Mzalendo platform directly affected how politicians behaved, and over 92% believed that those politicians would behave differently if the information displayed on Mzalendo was not available digitally in the public domain. These figures were mirrored in all five cases, demonstrating similar levels of belief in both developed countries (the UK and the US) and developing nations (Kenya and South Africa). The cross-tabulation of the responses shows a statistically significant difference in the beliefs of respondents with respect to their access to information being an influence upon government behaviour ($p < 0.0001$). These beliefs indicate a level of efficacy directly related to the user's ability to review political or governmental information online, and that action, in some way, affecting the behaviour of government.

Significantly, a high volume of users across the four parliamentary monitoring platforms were unaware of other methods of accessing the information contained on those sites. Fully 48% in Kenya, 55% in South Africa, and 68% in the UK were unaware of other methods of accessing parliamentary information. Similarly, 55% of users of 'particularised' contacting civic technology site FixMyStreet in the UK were unaware of any other method of reporting issues to their local authority. This is not surprising, as many official government and parliamentary websites are difficult to navigate, search or interact with, and many official organisations do not upload the volume or quality of information contained on the civic technology platforms. Whilst across the four countries studied access to official information is generally granted, it can also be a lengthy or cumbersome process to acquire, and the process itself is not widely understood. There is therefore the possibility that, prior to information being displayed via civic technologies, citizens were unaware that they were entitled to see such information. The findings of this study indicate that such information disclosure and public display may be valuable in raising personal external political efficacy.

Demographics

The data collected demonstrates a wide demographic spectrum of civic technology usage. Individuals responded within each of the age brackets surveyed, demonstrating that such digital tools are potentially useful for citizens of any adult age group. In the US and the UK, the majority of users were found to be from older demographic groups.

FixMyStreet in the UK registered 48% of users over the age of 55, and another 22.6% of users who identified as being in the 46-55 category. This means that the under 45's comprise under 30% of the user base. The US produced similar age-related results. The over 55 age group comprises 55% of GovTrack users, and adds another 19% into the 46-55 category, showing that 74% of the sites users are over 45. These results contrast significantly with the results from Kenya and South Africa, where only 14% and 34% of users respectively are over the age of 45.



▲ Figure 3. User demographics: Age and gender by country

Interestingly, the trend towards higher usage amongst older male and female users in the UK and the US is not seen among users in South Africa and Kenya, where there is a declining trend in usage towards the older age brackets. Overall, the average age of users across the entire sample was calculated at 53 years of age; however, the country-specific calculations paint a very different picture. Average user ages in Kenya are calculated at just 32, and in South Africa, 39 years.

The difference between the age and gender profile across the four participating countries is also noteworthy. The findings clearly show that individuals identifying as male comprise a disproportionate part of the civic technology user base. The gender balance of the civic technology user bases examined was much less evident in the US than in the UK, Kenya and South Africa. The data collected from South Africa showed a 68% male user base, and in Kenya, a 72% male user base. Whereas 64% of users of FixMyStreet in the UK

identified as male, the US site GovTrack had a more balanced 52% of users identifying as male. This male user bias is reinforced by previous studies by Tobias Esher (2011) and Gibson, Cantijoch and Galandini (2014) which examined a number of mySociety's UK websites. These studies detected a male user bias of 66% and 64% respectively. It is unclear what causes this imbalance in the gender of citizen users of civic technology, however the imbalance is concerning in light of any potential for civic technologies to demonstrate contributions to increasing efficacy. Differences in the gender and age identification may emerge as a result of a self-selection bias, which is a weakness in this method of surveying, however a comparison with previous research and with Google Analytics tools did not uncover differences in usage patterns.

In all four countries sampled women remain slightly less engaged in politics than men. Tools, such as civic technologies, have previously been theorised as helping reduce barriers to political participation. If these ICTs are not achieving this aim, further research into the gender imbalance of civic technology users would be valuable in understanding how such tools could be harnessed for the public good. Citizens using civic technologies in all the studied areas tended to be well-educated, with between 40-60% of citizens holding at least degree-level qualifications, however fewer were economically active, with less than 50% of users across all sites in full-time employment or education. In the UK and the US, economically inactive users tended to identify as retired, whereas in Kenya and South Africa, economically inactive users identified as unemployed and looking for work.

These findings, whilst for the most part being descriptive, nonetheless provide a brief overview of both the feelings of external efficacy, and the user profiles of politically-related civic technologies in Kenya, South Africa, the US and the UK. Whilst the data makes a distinction between user profiles in the UK and the US as users are mostly older, male and well-educated, and in Kenya and South Africa as users are mostly young, male and with a standard level of education, there are key similarities in the response rates of questions relating to efficacy. Such commonalities in these efficacy related questions suggest that civic technologies have some positive and discernible effect on efficacy.

CONCLUSION

This paper makes a novel contribution to the study of online participation through civic technology and e-democracy platforms. Substantively, it has provided a new insight into the question of which citizens currently use civic technologies, and how these platforms shape their attitudes and opinions concerning their respective governance structures. The comparative cases used demonstrate both the differences and the similarities in usage and attitudes in both developed (the UK and the US) and developing (South Africa and Kenya) countries. Through combining questions concerning attitudes to government, and the perceived effects of civic technologies upon government behaviour, the research has shown a clear indication of civic technologies facilitating political efficacy amongst civic technology users.

The overarching question posed by this research concerned individual external efficacy in civic engagement. In particular, the research examined whether citizens using civic technologies developed increased personal efficacy as a result of using these digital tools. The findings suggest that the use of civic technologies could contribute to increasing the external political efficacy of individual citizens. The majority of citizens using civic technologies in a citizen audit or particularised contacting role confirmed that the use of such platforms enabled them in their own way, and at least in part, to hold their respective governments to account. This self-reported level of efficacy does not confirm that these individuals would actually use the information or experience acquired via civic technologies for further political or civic activities. However, taking into consideration the linked findings concerning the majority of individuals that knew of no other way to engage with government, the data does indicate that the very ability to engage with governance mechanisms rationally, through digital means, is sufficient in itself to increase individual external efficacy.

The importance of this finding is emphasised by the low levels of trust exhibited by participants. The second question asked by this paper concerned the individual citizen perception of government actions and behaviours, and examined whether citizens felt that the availability of official parliamentary and administrative information online in any way affected the conduct of government officials. The majority of participants believed that their ability to engage with their respective governments through civic technologies affected how those governments behaved, and believed that those governments would behave differently if these methods of engagement were not available. This is an important finding in relation to the question of citizen efficacy. External efficacy concerns the extent to which citizens believe that the government apparatus is responsive to their demands and their actions. Through the use of civic technologies in this study and as a result of the existence of these technologies, citizens felt that government behaviour would in some way be different from government conduct in the absence of those platforms.

Lastly, this study examined the demographic and attitudinal spectrum of civic technology users comparatively, across both developed and developing nations. The comparative examination of such data is of practical importance given the increasing use of ICTs and civic technologies in improving citizen engagement in developing countries. It is quite possible that civic technologies and their users differ greatly between nations; however this has not been demonstrated in the literature. The data gathered for this research demonstrated the significant variability in demographic trends between the countries included in the research, and should serve as a caution to researchers examining tech such as this in generalising findings across countries. If the data taken from this study is grouped into one single data set, a moderately rounded picture of demographic spread is produced. This however, hides the significant differences in demographic spread when the data is broken down by country. Analysed at country level, the data evidences very deep demographic differences. The most stark comparative results concerned the age profile of ICT users, with older individuals of 45 and over dominating civic technology usage in the UK and the US, whereas individuals under 45 dominated usage in Kenya and South Africa. Female users were also under-represented in the study

in all countries with the exception of the US. These demographic findings demonstrate that the implementation of civic technologies cannot be standardised across borders and produce the same results. Whilst civic technologies have been shown in this study and by previous authors to have positive citizen outcomes (Cantijoch et al., 2015; Sjoberg et al., 2015), in practice their development, implementation, and usage will be nuanced and will need to accommodate local and national cultural differences in digital engagement, access and skills. The digital divide that exists in developed countries such as the UK and the US affects low income, lower educated, and minority ethnic groups of all ages (Liff et al., 2004; Sarkar et al., 2007), whereas in Kenya and South Africa, the divide affects low income, older, black, female, and more rurally located groups (Buys et al., 2009; Fuchs and Horak, 2008). These national differences in the digital divide will inevitably affect the extent to which civic technologies can be seen to empower those that are not already reasonably comfortable interacting with political information in an online format. Given the demographic differences in civic technology usage examined in this research, the ability of civic technologies to universally affect citizens' external efficacy will likely be limited.

This study operated as a pilot project in an operational environment of which very little was known or studied. It has a number of flaws, including the differences in sample size between participating nations, which required a comparative individual nation analysis rather than analysis of the complete data set. Many of the questions also tended towards descriptive measures and required self-reporting of subjective beliefs and feelings. These factors mean that no absolute certainty can be attributed to the findings; however, the findings were considered sufficiently robust and interesting to indicate that this is an area rich for future exploration. The enduring presence of a digital divide within each of the nations studied also limits the scope of the findings to those individuals with existing digital skills. Further rigorous research into this emerging area of digital activity is required to penetrate the indications of increased efficacy discussed in this article, and the results should also act as a practical and cautionary tool for practitioners designing and implementing civic technologies across borders.

This study has presented a novel approach to examining external efficacy and government transparency through ICTs; however, further study of this growing sphere of activity is needed to fully uncover the true potential of civic technologies in improving citizen participation. Such digital solutions are increasingly discussed by governments and NGOs as possible tools for citizen engagement; however until more is known about the people that use these platforms, the way they engage, and how they feel about their engagement, the overall impact of such technologies will remain limited.

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INFORMACIJSKE I KOMUNIKACIJSKE TEHNOLOGIJE, OTVORENOST I GRAĐANSKA PERCEPCIJA VLADE: KAKO „GRAĐANSKE TEHNOLOGIJE“ MOGU OMOGUĆITI VANJSKU UČINKOVITOST GRAĐANA

Rebecca Rumbul

SAŽETAK U ovom se radu istražuje mogu li „građanske tehnologije“ (tehnologije koje potiču aktivno građanstvo) na efikasan način razvijati političku učinkovitost građana i mijenjati njihovu percepciju odgovornosti vlade. Anketirani su korisnici „građanskih tehnologija“ na mrežnim stranicama iz SAD-a, UK-a, Kenije i Južnoafričke Republike. Temeljno je pitanje bilo jesu li određene građanske akcije nadzora, koje je moguće provesti putem tih mrežnih stranica, utjecale na promjenu mišljenja građana o tome reagiraju li vlade na građanski nadzor. Rezultati ukazuju na poboljšanu građansku učinkovitost, kao i na povećanu percepciju odgovornosti vlade. Između korisnika „građanskih tehnologija“ koji dolaze iz proučavanih zemalja uočene su značajne demografske razlike koje su povezane sa širokim spektrom načina na koje građani koriste informacijske i komunikacijske tehnologije (IKT). Ipak, svima im je zajedničko povjerenje u učinkovitost tih tehnologija. Rezultati upućuju na to da objavljivanje i građanski nadzor vladinih informacija putem „građanskih tehnologija“ povećavaju osjećaj vanjske učinkovitosti i percepciju odgovornosti vlade, kako u razvijenim zemljama tako i u zemljama u razvoju.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

DIGITALNA DEMOKRACIJA, POLITIČKA UČINKOVITOST, „GRAĐANSKE TEHNOLOGIJE“
(TEHNOLOGIJE KOJE POTIČU AKTIVNO GRAĐANSTVO), IKT

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TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SPANISH COUNCIL WEBSITES

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ABSTRACT *Citizens' disaffection with political institutions has resulted in an ever more pronounced distancing between the represented and their representative democratic institutions, with a commensurate increase in citizens' initiatives aimed at obtaining a higher degree of participation in public life. The imbalance experienced by representative democracy in this respect accounts for the need to improve the way in which institutions communicate. This study aims to assess local communication in the regions of Murcia and Navarre by analysing the level of transparency of their institutional websites. The 41 indicators that underpin Mapa Infoparticip@ (www.mapainfoparticipa.com) in Spain are used to see what similarities and differences can be identified when applying the criteria of transparency and participation in these two single-province Autonomous Communities. The findings show a deficit in implementing norms of transparency. This fact affects the role these institutions play as sources of public information and citizen participation, and it appears in a clearer way in municipalities with a smaller population.*

KEY WORDS

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION, TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY, PARTICIPATION, LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Authors note

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INTRODUCTION

Citizens' disaffection with public institutions has been increasing; initiatives have been developed by civil society to reflect this discontent, convey their message of protest and express their desire to participate in political decision-making. Given this changing and uncertain set of conditions faced by institutions as social entities that manage the assets and rights of citizens, communication is a key element in adapting to this new social environment. Communication is therefore more essential than ever in order for institutions to regain their credibility and citizens' trust (Norris, 2000). The management of transparency that fosters informed participation by citizens is an essential requirement in rehabilitating institutions (Bauhr and Grimes, 2014). With the approval of a transparency law on 28 November, 2013, Spain provides an interesting case study in order to assess the efforts of local governments in improving their relationship with citizens.

This local context is precisely the setting of choice for this research. The main objective of this study is to analyse how digital technologies are used on the websites of local councils, in other words, to study the resources, features and practices of online public communication by local councils. The choice of local institutions as an object of study is based on the fact that they are the closest to citizens and are strongly involved in their daily lives. They also enjoy a greater level of trust from citizens, compared to national institutions (Kim and Lee, 2012). This analysis will reveal how civic participation is facilitated (or weakened) by monitoring and evaluating the management of local governments.

The demand for transparency is a basic claim necessary to advance towards more participatory forms of democracy and to substantiate the act of participation itself. There are many organisations working in this direction, such as Transparency International, a non-governmental organisation founded in 1993 in order to take a stance against political corruption, and is now present in over 100 countries. Other organisations determine the criteria and characteristics that information should have. Open Government Data and The Open Knowledge Foundation, for example, have defined the principles for government data to be considered open.

This study shows the results of research from the Research and Development (R&D) project entitled "Public communication, transparency, accountability and participation in local government" (reference CSO2013-46997-R), a collaboration of several Spanish universities funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness within the National Programme for Research, Development and Innovation, included in the National Plan for Scientific and Technical Research and Innovation 2013-2016. This project seeks to examine communication in all local governments in Spain.

The project of which this study is part of, is in turn inspired by an earlier one entitled "Communication and Journalism for Citizen Participation in Monitoring and Evaluating the Management of Local Governments" (CSO2012-34687). This project used the Mapa Infoparticip@ platform (www.mapainfoparticipa.com), which shows how local public administrations make use of the Internet and new media to promote accountability and

transparency. The mission of this new project is to supplement the work previously done and continue the coverage of the Mapa Infoparticip@ platform in 10 other Autonomous Communities, in order to capture a complete picture of the Spanish national territory. This will provide comparable information that can then enable a set of concrete proposals developed for the improvement of good governance and local public data. The ultimate goal is the promotion of good practices among political representatives, communications professionals and journalists.

The project is relevant because it addresses the public communication of local governments empirically and proactively, with a view to encouraging the promotion of transparency and the quality of information, as well as government accountability and the enhancement of public participation.

In this particular case, the websites of the local governments in the Autonomous Communities of Navarre and Murcia (both consisting of only one province, known as simple communities) have been taken as a case study. In total, our sample included 317 websites. The analysis was conducted before the municipal election of May 2015.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

There is a direct relationship between journalism, public communication and democracy (Rodríguez-Virgili et al., 2011), and between communication strategies and the preservation of power. Along these lines, Paul Starr noted that "one danger of reduced news coverage is to the integrity of government. It is not just a speculative proposition that corruption is more likely to flourish when those in power have less reason to fear exposure" (Starr, 2009: 28).

To the extent that the interests of the actors engaged in public communication are known and the results can be evaluated, the conditions of the democratic system are improved. The new technologies of the information society have given rise to a form of government that is more open, transparent and responsive to recipients, on the basis of a more democratic and less hierarchical society. A distancing from the principle of unilateral government thus emerges, in order to demand an alternative way of managing relationships and accountability. In this respect transparency is perceived as an ideal mechanism to replace the exclusive control of centralised government bodies (Chun et al., 2010).

New media have accelerated this accountability so that it is almost available in real time. In the case being discussed here, our interest is focused on the ability for citizens to influence local authorities and other local institutions through the intensive use of technology. This involves making actors look at themselves in the mirror in order to modify their behaviour. In the political sphere, communication policies study the legal and political conditions that affect the development of civil liberties. The doctrine of the Spanish Constitutional Court on freedom of information strongly advocates the special

importance of freedom of information in democracy, as information and its availability conditions public opinion. In a state that recognises the rule of law and is responsible for the social and democratic rights of its citizens, public authorities must guarantee the right of citizens to know how the public authorities act. Citizens must be free to ask about whatever they deem appropriate and to form their own opinions within an environment where the public sector, the private sector, and the citizens are constantly interrelated. In an increasingly complex society, the exercise of freedom of expression requires more access to data and sources.

A number of studies have been previously conducted with regard to the transparency and accountability of governments (Alguacil Gómez, 2006; Guerrero, 2006; Labio Bernal, 2006; Molina Rodríguez-Navas, 2008; Reig, 2009; Villoria, 2001). In addition, under the umbrella of the project entitled "Communication and Journalism for Citizen Participation in Monitoring and Evaluating the Management of Local Government" (CSO2012-34687) mentioned above, findings and conclusions have also been published on the topic (Molina Rodríguez-Navas et al., 2011; Moreno Sardá et al., 2013a; Moreno Sardá et al., 2013b).

Our research examines local government websites in hope that by noting how they make government action transparent and accountable we can promote improvements in the information provided and thus advocate the right of access to information and transparency, based on the principle of actively making information public. This principle appears in the Law for Transparency, Access to Public Information and Good Governance, access to public information and good governance, approved by the Spanish Council of Ministers on 27 July, 2012.

The principle, which advocates actively making information public as currently drafted reads:

Information subject to transparency requirements shall be published on the relevant electronic sites and webpages in a manner that is clear, structured, and understandable to all stakeholders. Appropriate mechanisms shall be established to facilitate accessibility, interoperability, quality and the reuse of published information, as well as its identification and location. (BOE, 2013)

If enacted correctly, this principle could be instrumental in transforming political action. It involves the mandatory publication of valuable information and affects local councils, county councils, regional governments and the national government. It must be considered that the publication obligation includes not only administrative contracts, the distribution of grants and their subsequent criteria, but also any signed agreements, details of activities carried out, the list of assets owned by senior officials, and the status of various legislative projects and their legal amendments, among other items of a more basic information (government action plan, the biographies of public officials and the list of professionals employed by the council who have been freely appointed). In particular, the proposed project calls for public institutions to become sources of healthily transparent information, and to begin working on communication at the local level as a type of experimental laboratory.

In addition, the set of practices employed by institutions aimed at bringing democratic usages to citizens are the foundations of future improvement in the management of public affairs. Transparency in public activities is a means of encouraging citizen participation in decision-making and in the management of relevant affairs, as well as reducing injustice and, ideally, corruption (Stasavage, 2003).

It seems of interest to investigate the potential that exists in social networks and other digital forms of online participation, as tools that extend the public sphere (Simelio and Molina Rodríguez-Navas, 2014). It is appropriate to consider what the current practices are (what is done) and what potential is consistent with added information and increased participation (what could be done).

In an increasingly complex society, the exercise of the freedom of expression requires more access to data and sources. This aspect is even better understood by taking the management of local communication as a starting point, since this close environment deals with and solves matters of everyday life, in contrast with national and global issues (Zamora, 2011).

The transparency project is already in the political, media and civic agenda. Therefore, a research project that links local public communication, accountability, management and participation is both relevant and necessary. It could represent a step forward to the extent that, thanks to public information, citizens can participate in public life and have the necessary knowledge to influence its development, prevent and control administrative inefficiencies, correct mistakes, denounce injustices, and establish deeper relationships within the local community.

HYPOTHESIS

As noted above, the websites of the local councils of two Spanish Autonomous Communities, Navarre and Murcia, both containing only one province, have been taken as the focus of our case study. The sample includes all of the municipalities of both regions, that is, 272 municipalities in Navarre and 45 in Murcia. In total, the sample size includes 317 local councils. The analysis was conducted before the local election held in May 2015.

This paper starts from a general hypothesis (H1). The websites of Spanish local councils show deficiencies when accounting for the management carried out by the municipal governments. These deficiencies are reflected in several ways: there is a lack of relevant information (legislative projects, agreements and contracts signed, action plans); the data appearing on government websites is not well-explained and poorly conveyed to the citizens; the information presented is not neutral, accessible and reliable; and there is no tool devoted to interact with citizens.

These insufficiencies affect the role these institutions play as sources of public information, sometimes hindering public debate and informed public participation, generating distrust among citizens.

Within this general hypothesis, we assume a second one (H2): the more populous municipalities will have a greater degree of transparency and encourage a more fluid relationship, thanks to the technologies used, than those with a smaller population, mainly due to the greater availability of resources. Moreover, an assumption has also been included that, in these two single-province regions, the model of local administration involved – Navarre is more decentralised, with a greater number of councils, while Murcia is more centralised, with fewer councils – can make a difference in terms of implementing the transparency and participation criteria identified.

METHODOLOGY

To test these hypotheses (H1 and H2), we conducted a quantitative analysis of the presence/absence of a set of indicators that measure the level of transparency and participation offered by the websites of the local councils selected in the sample.

To evaluate the information provided by the websites, 41 indicators related to four main questions were used: who the political representatives are; how common resources are managed; how information is provided about their management; and what tools are published to facilitate public participation. The results of the analysis were introduced into a digital platform where they were automatically allocated a color according to their score on a numeric scale. These indicators are based on the Map of Good Practices of Local Public Communication. Some of the indicators used are also listed in the Transparency Index of local councils (Transparency International Spain, 2010).

The data were initially recorded in an Excel spreadsheet and then transferred to the platform's content management tool. Once the differences and similarities were identified, a comparative analysis of the information provided on these websites was carried out. The purpose was to gauge in which cases journalistic treatment was given (or not), so that complex information was made intelligible to the public; and to see in what aspects, according to the indicators used, there was a greater lack of information and transparency.

Some specific considerations must be mentioned in connection with the analysis of the websites. Firstly, to evaluate the information posted on the websites of local councils in agreement with the indicators, the official website of each local council was identified, considering that it may not be the name of the municipality, but a touristic information website. And secondly, some official websites may have been divided creating other webpages that could be defined as virtual offices or some functional equivalent. The data we assessed were considered basic information and therefore, should be available in a maximum of three clicks.

In addition, it must be borne in mind that the data must be kept up to date. The website, once designed, set up and equipped with content, must have a process of constant updates. If this is not done properly, the information becomes obsolete, the links do not work and the opposite effect of the one desired when setting up a service of this type is achieved.

The indicators have not been designed so much to assess the transparency of management, but more to evaluate the provision of basic information, so that anyone can see who the political leaders of the local governments are and how they manage the common resources.

The 41 indicators, in turn, make up four thematic blocks: indicators aimed at identifying the composition of the council; indicators that provide information on how the administration and the local government operates; indicators linked to current information about the municipality, including their awareness of transparency; and indicators that provide public information about the local council and contact details.

RESULTS

In order to present the study's findings, the four blocks of indicators mentioned above will be analysed, based on an initial general assessment of performance against the indicators included in each block.

Before assessing the results, it is important to take into account the different distribution of municipalities according to size in of the each two cases. As shown in Table 1, in Navarre there is a large number of small boroughs with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, while in Murcia medium-sized boroughs predominate, with an average number of inhabitants of approximately 20,000.

Table 1. Navarre and Murcia population share of municipalities by size

Population size class	Autonomous Community of Navarre	Autonomous Community of Murcia
< 1,000 inhabitants	59.6%	6.7%
1,001-10,000 inhabitants	35.7%	26.7%
10,001-20,000 inhabitants	3.3%	28.9%
20,001-50,000 inhabitants	0.9%	28.9%
50,001-100,000 inhabitants	0%	4.4%
> 100,000 inhabitants	0.5%	4.4%

An important initial result is seen in the case of the total sample from Navarre (272 municipalities), about 22% of the sample (59 municipalities) had no website at all at the time of the study. Most of these municipalities are the smallest in terms of population size.

This contrasts with the Community of Murcia, in which 100% of the municipalities had a local council website.

Indicators of transparency related to the information on the composition of the council

Overall, the analysis identified significant shortcomings in both regions in terms of the basic type of information for any local government website, such as the composition of the government team. In most local council websites there was hardly any basic information that any citizen might need, such as who their local representatives were, or what their professional training was. Even the information provided on the website about the most visible face of the local political administration, the mayor of the city or town was insufficient.

As data shows, although this pattern was repeated in both of the regions included in the analysis, some differences were found. In Murcia, 75.6% of the municipalities did include some information on the mayor, such as their full name and/or a photograph. This contrasts with Navarre, where 77.9% of the local council websites did not include this information. However, the biographical data of the mayor was available in a very few cases in both regions (only in 1.4% of cases of Navarre and in 17.8% in Murcia). This lack of information means that citizens are deprived of the knowledge about the professional or political path of their highest representative in their village, town or city.

Information was also sparse on the rest of the representatives of the local administration, with both names and photographs lacking, and considerable differences between the two cases under study. In Navarre, in only 1.9% of the cases was information offered on both the government representatives and on those who make up the opposition, while in Murcia almost one in two councils identified the government representatives, although only 24% of the available websites did the same for members of the opposition.

The fact that this information and the biography of each of those political representatives in the local government was only offered in 0.9% of the cases in Navarre and 13.3% in Murcia, and information about members of the opposition was only available in 0.9% of the cases in Navarre and 6.7% in Murcia, clearly breaks the link between representatives and those they represent.

Transparency indicators related to information about the local government and administration

Another key issue in relation to transparency has to do with how collective resources are managed. While there are legal obligations whereby certain procedures and decisions are required to be public, there was a considerable information deficit in both regions.

Specifically, as shown in Table 2, information on the jurisdictional capacities of the governing bodies (plenary council meeting, council board and advisory committees)

appeared in only 4.7% of the Navarre municipalities, with a significantly higher proportion in the case of Murcia, where it was available in 40% of the cases.

Information on the composition of these governing bodies was slightly more widely available in both communities, with less than half of the municipalities making it available (45% in Navarre and 37.8% in Murcia). However, there was little information about the work schedule of these governing bodies, as this data appeared in only 5.2% of the cases for local governments in Navarre and in 2.2% for local governments in Murcia. This lack of transparency prevents citizens from exercising real control over the work of their political representatives.

In regards to plenary council meetings, an activity that attracts more media attention locally, we found that, contrary to what might be thought, the agenda for these meetings was not generally available on municipal websites (only in 3.8% of the cases in Navarre and in 15.6% of the cases in Murcia). The information provided was restricted to the minutes of the plenary sessions at the most, and even then the minutes were not uploaded in most of the examined municipalities (27.7% in Navarre and 33.3% in Murcia).

The plenary sessions are the fullest expression of the local government as a democratic institution, and this lack of information undoubtedly makes it unlikely for the municipality's citizens to be aware of the decisions made and resolutions adopted by the local government, which were also rarely published in either case (4.2% in Navarre and 13.3% in Murcia).

In every municipality there are a number of plans that affect different local government jurisdictional capacities and should also follow a criteria for transparency. This applies, for example, to the Government Plan (known by its initials in Spanish as 'PG') and the Municipal Action Plan (known by its initials in Spanish as 'MAP') and/or the Municipal Strategic Plan. Our analysis shows that only 3.8% of the local government websites in Navarre and only 6.7% of those in Murcia provided information about these plans. Information about the Urban Development Plan (known by its initials in Spanish as 'POUM') and other rules concerning urban planning was similar. In this case, we identified some significant differences in terms of the information published about this plan by the local governments in Navarre (only 12.7%) compared with those in Murcia (57.8%), mainly justified by the importance of the urban planning and the construction sector in the latter.

Information about other local government plans that may be of interest to citizens, such as Agenda 21, Youth, Participation, etc. was also more commonly found in Murcia (35.6%) than in Navarre (9.9%).

But undoubtedly the indicator that stood out as far as citizens are concerned was the list of local government posts and the salaries paid. It is noteworthy that in Navarre, only 0.5% of websites provided this information, with something similar in Murcia, where only 8.9% of the total websites providing this information. Another very interesting finding from a social perspective is the data on the remuneration of elected officials.

The information published online in this regard remained problematic, as only 1.9% of Navarre's local governments and 8.9% of those in Murcia surprisingly made this data public at the time of our analysis.

Something else that citizens need to know are the ordinances or regulations issued by the highest authority of a metropolitan district or a local council that are valid within the relevant metropolitan district or village/town/city. In this respect, while most municipalities of Murcia provided public information concerning ordinances (75.6%), in Navarre the percentage dropped to 37.1%.

Finally, the information provided about the municipal budget was of crucial importance. According to the data, this information is severely lacking and is absent from the majority of the local government websites in Navarre (23.5% of cases) and Murcia (42.2%). This is compounded by the fact that, when it comes to specifying the level of implementation of the budget, this information is fairly opaque in the municipality websites in Navarre, since it appears in only 1.9% of cases (compared with 28.9% in Murcia).

Other economic management reports, such as the reports on the annual general accounts and the financial management report, rarely appear on local council websites (in 2.8% of cases in Navarre and in 13.3% of cases in Murcia).

Table 2. Transparency concerning the management of collective resources in Navarre and Murcia

Compliance with transparency criteria	Navarre	Murcia
Information on the government bodies' jurisdictional capacities	4.7%	40%
Information on the composition of government bodies	45.1%	37.8%
Information about the work schedule of government bodies	5.2%	2.2%
Publication of notices for meetings (including the agendas) prior to holding plenary sessions	3.8%	15.6%
Publication of plenary sessions' minutes	27.7%	33.3%
Publication of local government or council board resolutions	4.2%	13.3%
Information about the Government Plan, Municipal Action Plan and/or Strategic Plan	3.8%	6.7%
Information about the Urban Development Plan and other urban planning rules	12.7%	57.8%
Information about other local government plans: Agenda21, Youth, Participation, etc.	9.9%	35.6%
Publication of the salaries of local government posts, by category	0.5%	8.9%
Publication of the salaries of elected officials	1.9%	8.9%
Publication of council ordinances	37.1%	75.6%
Publication of council budget	23.5%	42.2%
Publication of information about the implementation of the budget	1.9%	28.9%
Publication of the reports on the annual general accounts and the financial management report	2.8%	13.3%

Indicators of transparency related to information about current issues in local government and awareness of transparency

The third block of results presented here concerns how the councils in the study provide information about the management of collective resources. In general, some significant differences were identified between the regions. The websites of Murcia's local councils typically include news as a standard practice (93.3%) more often than the websites in Navarre's local councils (38%). Many of these pieces of news have to do with the activities of government's members level of accountability (46.7% in Murcia, and only 9.4% in Navarre) and, to a lesser extent, with the activities of the members of the opposition in connection with the monitoring of the local government's management (only 6.7% of cases in Murcia and 0.9% in Navarre).

Other valuable information of public interest is the granting of contracts and concessions signed by the local authorities with other institutions, companies or individuals, as well as the contractor's profile. While this information is scarcely present on council websites in Navarre (5.6%), it has a much greater presence and visibility on local government websites in Murcia (86.7% of cases).

Finally, a general lack of awareness of transparency issues was shown by local governments' websites in both Autonomous Communities. Only 6.7% of the councils websites in Murcia, and 0.9% in Navarre, show any kind of explicit support for the Decalogue for Good Practice for Local Public Communication (*Decálogo de Buenas Prácticas de la Comunicación Local Pública*), a similar proportion to that of councils that manage to make the referred Principles publicly available, or anything related to it on their webpages (0.9% in Navarre and 4.4% in Murcia). Despite the guidelines stipulated under Law 19/2013, on transparency, public access to information and good governance, it seems that local governments have not yet felt social pressure and do not show an awareness about such issues.

Transparency indicators related to public information about the local government and contact details

This fourth and last section examines what tools are offered by local council websites to promote citizen participation and democratic control. Table 3 shows the presence of relevant information (in percentages) shown for each of the applicable indicators.

The majority of the councils have information relevant to the status of the relevant village/town/city on their websites (73.2% in Navarre and 53.3% in Murcia), as well as its history (80.3% in Navarre and 80% in Murcia). This kind of information, shown on the local council website turns it, somewhat into a tourist portal for the relevant municipality.

However, information that would assist citizens in contacting their representatives or members of the opposition is less often found (only in 3.8% of Navarre's websites, compared to 26.7% of Murcia's websites for representatives, and 1.9% compared to 11.1% for members of the opposition). This limits any kind of direct interaction between citizens and local politicians.

Another way that a citizen could interact with the local institution is through their social media profiles. The transparency criteria in this regard are not met either, considering that only 17.8% of Navarre's councils offered access to this profile on their website, compared to almost half of Murcia's councils that did provide this data.

With regard to the real possibilities of exercising citizen participation in local decision-making, most local governments did not include in their websites any regulations on civic participation (only 2.3% of cases in Navarre, as opposed to 20% in Murcia). It was also unusual to find other mechanisms for civic participation, such as regional committees, city/town committees, sector committees, etc. (only 1.9% in Navarre versus 6.7% in Murcia).

There are other types of practical information that are usually present in municipal websites, such as information about the schedule of activities, sometimes clearly (with this being the case for 66.7% of the council websites in Murcia) and other times (as in the case of Navarre, with it being available in only 26.8% of cases) only in certain municipalities. Something similar applies to information about the directory of council bodies, which also tends to be very helpful for many citizens (present in 71.1% of Murcia council webpages as opposed to 31.5% council webpages in Navarre).

Through their website, councils have an opportunity to offer participation tools for the preparation and/or monitoring of the Government Plan, the Municipal Action Plan and/or the Strategic Plan. However, this is quite anomalous in light of the results of our study, as it happens in only 1.4% of the cases in Navarre and 2.2% of the cases in Murcia. When it comes to civic participation in the preparation of the municipal budget, local government websites are also rather opaque: only 3.8% of Navarre councils have this option available, as compared to 4.4% of Murcia councils.

Finally, every website should include a section to receive criticism or suggestions from the public, and should also provide the details to contact the institution through the communications manager. Although it seems that this first criterion of transparency is met by the vast majority of councils in both Navarre and Murcia (55.4% in Navarre and 80% in Murcia), the options available to directly contact the communication managers for each local council could be much improved. This has a negative impact not only on the relationship between citizens and the institution, but above all, in terms of the potential contact by the media with local, public institutions.

Table 3. Transparency regarding the management of collective resources in Navarre and Murcia

Compliance with transparency criteria	Navarre	Murcia
Information on the village/town/city location: territorial area, population size, social diversity, etc.	73.2%	53.3%
Historical information about the village/town/city	80.3%	80%
Information about the email addresses of members of the local government	3.8%	26.7%



Compliance with transparency criteria	Navarre	Murcia
Information about the email addresses of members of the opposition	1.9%	11.1%
Information about accessing the council's social networks	17.8%	48.9%
Information about regulations concerning citizen participation	2.3%	20%
Information about other participation mechanisms: regional committees, village/town/city committees, sector-related committees, etc.	1.9%	6.7%
Information/agenda about council and citizens' activities	26.8%	66.7%
Information/directory of council bodies	31.5%	71.1%
Participation tools for the preparation and/or monitoring of the Government Plan, Municipal Action Plan and/or Strategic Plan	1.4%	2.2%
Participation tools for the preparation and/or monitoring of the budget or other council plans	3.8%	4.4%
Tools to report incidents about the public thoroughfare, complaints or suggestions	55.4%	80%
Publication of the contact information for the local council's Press, Information and/or Communications manager	0.5%	15.6%

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this research we have presented some proposals on the theoretical and empirical aspects of transparency at the local government level, and the first overall results regarding two single-province regions (Autonomous Communities) in Spain.

From this analysis of 317 websites of local councils in Murcia and Navarre, the initial general hypothesis has been confirmed. At the time of the study (May 2015) it was estimated that there was a deficit in the implementation of the Law on transparency, access to public information and good governance, published by the Spanish Government on 9/12/13, which provided a broad framework for local administrations to update and improve their public information mechanisms. This need to improve transparency affects the role these institutions play as sources of public information, since they sometimes hinder public debate and citizen participation. Certainly, there is ample room for improvement and little time for it, because Law 19/2013 requires Autonomous Communities and local government bodies to adapt and comply before the end of December 2015.

Another consideration to be taken into account is the different organisation of the municipal map of the two communities. The sample included all the local councils, but Navarre, with a population size of 640,154 in 2014, has 272 municipalities; while Murcia, with more than twice the population (1,466,818) has 45 municipalities. This difference in the size of municipalities highlights an imbalance that makes the two difficult to compare and, therefore, the differences in the implementation of the transparency criteria should be considered in the light of this situation. Establishing minimum population sizes (for example, 20,000 or 10,000) was not viable, because this would not reach 5% of Navarre

municipalities. Perhaps that barrier could have been established at a minimum of 1,000, but almost 60% of Navarre's councils and only 6.7% of those from Murcia would fall outside of this limit. As the data shows, those municipalities with the largest population have a greater degree of transparency and encourage a more fluid relationship than those with a smaller population thanks to the technologies they offer, mainly due to the provision of more resources in the larger areas and the channelling of information by other analogue channels in the smaller ones.

With regard to the four main questions,

(1) In terms of the *transparency indicators linked to information about the composition of the local government*, it has been ascertained there is a serious problem for citizens to have access to information about the composition of councils and the professional and/or educational merits of the people who occupy posts in the local councils in both Autonomous Communities. The level of basic data provided by any council website about the composition of the team that made up the local government (including the opposition), in order for citizens to know who their political representatives were, did not reach 50% of the set criteria (50%).

(2) Concerning the *transparency indicators related to information about the local government and administration*, there are clear differences between the Navarre and Murcia municipalities. In both cases there was a remarkable lack of information available, even though there are legal obligations in place for certain procedures and decisions to be made public. This opacity seems particularly serious considering the lack of information on plenary meetings, Government Plans, Municipal Action Plans and the municipal budget. Still, the situation of the local authority websites in Murcia gives less cause for concern and provides more information than those in Navarre. Such is the case of data on the Urban Development Plan, which, perhaps due to the importance of the urban planning sector, appears in 57% of council websites in Murcia, in contrast with 12.7% in Navarre.

(3) Regarding *transparency indicators linked to information provided about the local government current affairs and awareness of transparency*, significant differences were also identified between the two regions. Local government websites in Murcia typically included news as standard practice more often (93.3%) than those in Navarre (38%). But much of this information referred to members of the local government, and rarely included news about the activities of members of the opposition related to the monitoring of government management (only in 6.7% of the cases in Murcia and in 0.9% in Navarre). Therefore, it seems that local authority information is intended to give visibility to the activities of the local government in power, and not perceived as a local council for all citizens, with useful information that covers all of the parties.

(4) And lastly, concerning the *indicators of transparency related to the councils' public information and contact details*, much better scores were obtained by websites, but only in terms of their use as dissemination channels. That is, on the indicators regarding location, history and local activities they scored well, but on those to do with participation or which allowed interactivity, such as email addresses, social networks and regulations

for citizen participation, much worse scores were obtained. Consequently, local council websites were perceived as tourism portals for the village/town/city, with little ability for interaction. Only the first criterion of transparency, which is to include a section for criticism or suggestions from the public, as well as offering information to contact the institution through the communications manager, was met by the vast majority of local council websites, both in Navarre and Murcia (55.4% in Navarre and 80% in Murcia).

In short, there are some relevant implications from this first look at the websites of the local governments in Murcia and Navarre that point to deficiencies in terms of accounting for the management carried out by local authorities. The websites of the local councils analysed did not offer, in general terms, the minimum resources necessary to promote informed citizen participation. We part from the idea that information is a fundamental right for the proper functioning of democracy. Citizens, in order to evaluate how their political representatives manage collective resources, contribute to public debate and make decisions based on solid criteria, need information supplied by transparent, high-quality sources. Just as there are two sides to every coin, for every right there is a responsibility. In this case, politicians and administrators are required to provide information that is both complete and trustworthy. Today, the Internet eases this task of providing information and enabling participation, as it reduces the limitations of space and time. But the information available from local authorities must meet a set of standards, because informed political participation demands criteria for managing transparency. For future research, other Spanish regions should be included in the sample in order to get an overall national view of the transparency level in local structures.

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TRANSPARENTNOST, ODGOVORNOST I PARTICIPACIJA U TIJELIMA LOKALNE VLASTI: KOMPARATIVNA ANALIZA MREŽNIH STRANICA ŠPANJOLSKIH VIJEĆA

Marta Rebolledo :: Rocío Zamora Medina :: Jordi Rodríguez-Virgili

SAŽETAK *Nezadovoljstvo građana političkim institucijama rezultiralo je sve izraženijim udaljavanjem demokratskih institucija od građana koje one zastupaju, ali i proporcionalnim porastom građanskih inicijativa usmjerenih prema zadobivanju većeg stupnja participacije u javnom životu. Zbog neravnoteže koja se javlja u okviru predstavničke demokracije pojavila se potreba za poboljšanjem načina na koji institucije komuniciraju. Cilj je ovoga istraživanja ocijeniti lokalnu komunikaciju u regijama Murcia i Navarre kroz analizu razine transparentnosti mrežnih stranica njihovih institucija. Primijenit će se ukupno 41 indikator, temeljen na španjolskoj platformi Mapa Infoparticip@ (www.mapainfoparticipa.com), kako bi se u te dvije autonomne zajednice, koje imaju svaka po jednu provinciju, utvrdile sličnosti i razlike na temelju kriterija transparentnosti i participacije. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju deficit u implementaciji normativa transparentnosti, što utječe na ulogu tih institucija kao izvora javnih informacija, kao i na građansku participaciju, što je osobito vidljivo u općinama s manjim brojem stanovništva.*

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

JAVNA KOMUNIKACIJA, TRANSPARENTNOST, ODGOVORNOST, PARTICIPACIJA, LOKALNA VLAST

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DO TRANSPARENCY AND OPEN DATA WALK TOGETHER? AN ANALYSIS OF INITIATIVES IN FIVE BRAZILIAN CAPITALS

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ABSTRACT *In the last few years, Brazilian municipal governments have launched their open data web portals. These initiatives have been taking place as part of the implementation of the Transparency Act, which sets forth deadlines and punishments concerning the adoption and performance of steps that focus on government transparency, such as the presence of transparency portals. Accordingly, this paper aims to check whether municipalities that keep portals with higher a Digital Transparency Index (DTI) will also prove to have the strongest open data initiatives. In order to achieve this goal we assess the official portals and open data initiatives in five Brazilian capitals by using the methodologies proposed by Paula Amorim (2012), and the prerequisites pointed out by the Open Knowledge Foundation (OKF, 2011), and Tim Berners-Lee (2010). The results indicate that there is no direct relationship between the Digital Transparency Index and the strength of open data actions in each municipality. The discussion of the results points to the absence of a concise public policy on digital democracy that is able to promote transparency and government data simultaneously.*

KEY WORDS

OPEN GOVERNMENT, OPEN GOVERNMENT DATA, E-TRANSPARENCY, E-DEMOCRACY, E-PARTICIPATION, BRAZIL

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INTRODUCTION

It has become more and more common to associate initiatives for enhancing public transparency with programs of government data disclosure, even on account of a legal obligation in some countries (World Bank, 1992). After thirty years of its re-democratisation, Brazil finds itself plunged into such a context as it experiences the consolidation of its democratic institutions and values. As a reflection of this, in the last three decades civil society, along with organisations, institutions, and governments, have complied less and less with secrecy relative to public business, aiming to consolidate democratic values (Bentham, 1843; Fung et al., 2007; Baume, 2013).

Although a number of studies have approached the topics of transparency and open data separately, a review of the literature shows an absence of studies that seek to establish connections between initiatives pushing for transparency and open data in Brazil. It is our belief that studying the intersection of these topics is valid in the Brazilian context for several reasons.

It is well-known that Brazil has been actively trying to become a key player in world politics and endeavouring to guarantee a seat in the United Nations Security Council. Thus, in the last twelve years, Brazil has sought to become an international conflict mediator and an important player in the world's economic issues (particularly by its participation in BRICS), while also maintaining an active presence in the world context by holding both the last FIFA World Cup (2014) and Summer Olympic Games (2016).

In line with this developments, Brazil was one of the first countries to sign the Open Government Partnership agreement in 2011, and it has promulgated several statutes and executive decrees in order to increase the availability of government data in order to promote transparency, which includes (but is not limited to): 1) the regulation of the Transparency Act, so as to make the Union, the states, the Federal District and the municipalities' budgets and financial executions available in real time (2009); 2) the regulation of the Access to Information Act, which compelled different government spheres to supply public administration data, implementing the guarantee of access to information set forth in the Federal Constitution (2011), and 3) the creation of the Open Data National Infrastructure (2012).

Furthermore, the Brazilian Access to Information Act (Brazil, Law nº 12.527, 2011) states in its guidelines the active publication of open government data by public agencies, which indicates that Brazilian public management encourages the combination of transparency actions with open data.

This paper intends to assess the use of digital tools by the five biggest municipal governments in Brazil to promote public transparency, as well as their open data actions, and ultimately answer the question: are municipal governments whose websites show a higher degree of transparency also the ones with more solid initiatives in data openness?

We use The Digital Transparency Index (DTI) proposed by Paula Amorim (2012), which assesses aspects such as information usability, accessibility, quality and diversity, in order to assess the transparency of the examined web portals. The method for the assessment of open data websites is as follows: 1) the tool developed by the Open Knowledge Foundation (OKF), which points out the basic prerequisites of an open data program, and 2) the Tim Berners-Lee's¹ (2010) five-star system, which ascertains the quality of formats, are used. Therefore, beyond the assessment by local governments themselves, one of the main purposes of this paper is to test the proposed methodology, which will be presented in detail.

We examine the five biggest Brazilian capital cities that had open data initiatives in 2015: São Paulo (SP), Rio de Janeiro (RJ), Curitiba (PR), Recife (PE), and Porto Alegre (RS), which together produce a GDP of R\$ 900 billion, corresponding to 20 percent of the wealth produced in the country, and have 25 million residents.

THEORETICAL GROUNDWORK

Open government data and transparency are similar in that they both deal with one of the citizens' basic rights in a democratic society: the access to information about the public administration. This idea was advocated by Harold Cross (1953:13), to whom "public companies are public business" and without access to information "citizens in a democracy have only changed their kings" (Cross, 1953: 13).

Despite this intersection, the literature on these topics runs separately. Studies of transparency in liberal democracies date back to at least the 18th century (Betham, 1843), and increase in the second half of the 20th century, gaining renewed impulse in the 1990's, with the increase in the use of digital technologies. Studies of open government data began only in the 21st century, with the expectation of making the state more transparent, augmenting the participation of civil society in politics, and creating a new economic field, enabled by the processing and analysis of government databases (Capgemini, 2013).

In the following sections, we give an outline of the current state of the theoretical discussions on these topics, showing the ideas and opinions that orient this work.

ON TRANSPARENCY

In a detailed historical survey, Christopher Hood (2006) makes reference to the term transparency from the 15th century, with its meaning being associated with *enlightenment*. The idea of transparency associated with public management for controlling the abuse of power does not emerge in literature until the French Revolution (1789). After that period, it is highlighted in the essay *On Political Tactics* (*Of Publicity* chapter) by Jeremy Bentham.

¹ British physicist, creator of the World Wide Web (WWW, or the Internet), founder of the World Wide Consortium (W3C), the Web technical development forum, and co-founder of the Open Data Institute, London. The purpose of his work is to maintain the privacy, freedom and openness of the web.

Bentham investigates notions that are the precursors of transparency: “a government that is conducted according to steady and documented rules; community life based on faithful and forthright communication; and a means of making the State and society accessible” (Amorim, 2012: 59).

A transparent government is that which makes public information available, except for security limits, and acts in order to guarantee that citizens have the right to know what the public administration does, or has done previously (Chevallier, 1988), and, in another view, what it will do (Piotrowski and Borry, 2010). Alon Peled, in turn, describes transparency as “openness to public scrutiny as defined by rights and abilities of organisations and individuals to access government information and information about the government” (Peled, 2013: 188). In any sense, transparency emerges as an agreement with solid and clear rules, with information and procedures that are available to the civil sphere and the market, and widely and previously known by the public, thus favouring isonomic relationships between the different social entities and governments.

Joseph Stiglitz (1999) put forward a new reason for the openness used in this work by advocating that if it is the population who bears the expense of information gathering by the government, the data belong to them. Therefore, citizens and institutions will have their capacity of democratically assessing and making public management members liable for their actions (accountability) increased (Piotrowski and Ryzen, 2007), which refers us to the discussion about open data.

ON OPEN DATA

The openness of government data may be described as the necessity that governments disclose “authoritative, high quality, complete, and timely data on the Web in a downloadable, non-proprietary, and license-free format” (Peled, 2013: 188). The idea meets the demands for information that were mentioned above, under the argument that the citizen shall be granted the right to access data that are of their property, but which are in the custody of governments (Margetts, 2011).

Open data constitute a methodology for the disclosure of government data in reusable formats, aiming at an increase in transparency as well as greater citizen political participation and wider societal collaboration (Open Knowledge Foundation, 2011: 4). In that respect, Geoffrey Bowker (2005) states that the value of such data is in its processing, so that it enables interpretation from different perspectives, favouring the democratic debate.

In an effort to help systematise open data actions around the world, the Open Knowledge Foundation (OKF), through its working group “Open Government Data”, established eight prerequisites that enable data to be considered open. These are: 1) They should be unprocessed; 2) They should be standardised and accessible (requiring

no adaptations by the user); 3) They should be structured; 4) They should be open to all (requiring no registration); 5) Their format should be non-proprietary; 6) They should have no copyright restrictions; 7) They should be current; 8) They should be heterogeneous, which means they should deal with different topics.

We admit that the term “open government data” is ambiguous in its use, for it may point to quite different directions that are not necessarily related to transparency, but which may be more strongly associated with innovation and/or economic gain, according to Harlan Yu and David Robinson (2012). Nevertheless, this ambiguity also admits that open data initiatives may have as their reason and ultimate goal the empowerment of citizens by boosting transparency in public management, favouring accountability, encouraging participation, or simply offering a wider set of information in order to enhance the formation process of society’s opinion (Hansson, 2014; Zuiderwijk and Janssen, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

Our purpose is to check whether the Brazilian municipal governments under analysis maintain websites that promote transparency and government data openness together. Thus, we purpose the first hypothesis:

H1: Municipal governments’ websites with higher degrees of transparency will also be the ones with stronger open data initiatives.

Five Brazilian capitals were chosen for this analysis – Curitiba (PR), Recife (PE), São Paulo (SP), Rio de Janeiro (RJ), and Porto Alegre (RS) (Table 1) – along with their respective official municipal portals and data openness program websites. The choice of the empirical corpus was based on two aspects: 1) the proposal to assess government spheres that have a direct relationship with the population, as is the case with municipal governments; 2) the need to assess municipalities that have both official portals and structured open data programs. Moreover, it must be remembered that the total GDP of the chosen cities equals R\$ 900 billion per year (about US\$ 300 billions), which is 20% of the wealth produced in the country, thus increasing the requirement for their transparency and openness.

Table 1 shows the addresses of the portals analysed during the period in which this study was conducted. The method of determining the DTI and the different prerequisites of open data is presented in detail below.

Table 1. List of municipalities and their respective portals

City (State) / Official Portal / Open Data Portal
Curitiba (Paraná) / www.curitiba.pr.gov.br / www.curitiba.pr.gov.br/dadosabertos
Recife (Pernambuco) / www2.recife.pe.gov.br / dados.recife.pe.gov.br
São Paulo (São Paulo) / www2.saopaulo.sp.gov.br / www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/dese_nvolvimento_urbano/dados_abertos
Rio de Janeiro (Rio de Janeiro) / www.rio.rj.gov.br / data.rio.rj.gov.br
Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul) / www2.portoalegre.rs.gov.br / www.datapoa.com.br

Source: Authors, 2016

The assessment of the portals, carried out between March 10 and 16, 2015, adopted the methodology proposed by Amorim (2012) so as to determine the DTI of each Brazilian capital through their portals. Browsing on each website took from one hour and twenty minutes to three hours and fifteen minutes, depending on their architecture, size and complexity. Data on the date and duration of the browsing activity, along with the analysis of each prerequisite proposed in the DTI and their respective assessment were registered in a worksheet tailored to this purpose (Figure 1) and supplied by the author of the methodology. Besides marking the numerical value corresponding to the analysis, detailed notes on the different items were made in order to support the description of each site and the discussion of the observation and results. As a complement to the browsing activity, some simulations of the use of services and applications available on the portals were made, so as to check their actual availability.

City/State

RESULT:	Advanced	Date:	24/11/15	
3,226	Transparency	Lasting:	de 14:15 a 17h15	
	Dimension I		4,00 TA	
1.	GENERAL INFORMATION			
	Category of analysis			
1.1	City			
	Indicators		Data	
1.1.1	Human Development Index (HDI)		0,000	
1.1.2	Gross Domestic Product (GDP)		0	
1.1.3	Population		0	
	Category of analysis		4,00 TA	
1.2	Internet			
	Indicators	Evaluation	Weight	Score
1.2.1	Broadband Access	s/c	-	0
1.2.2	Electronic address of the portal	4	2	8
1.2.3	Existence of transparency portal	4	4	16
1.2.4	Visibility of transparency portal	4	4	16

Dimension II				3,07 TS
2.	TECHNICAL SERVICES			
	Category of analysis			2,40 TS
2.1	Usability			
	Indicators	Evaluation	Weight	Score
2.1.1	Search engines	4	3	12
2.1.2	Site map	0	3	0
2.1.3	System's recognition and orientation	3	2	6
2.1.4	Interface	3	2	6
	Category of analysis			2,80 TS
2.2	Acessibilidade			
	Indicators	Evaluation	Weight	Score
2.2.1	Languages	0	1,5	0
2.2.2	Disabled access	4	2,5	10
2.2.3	Multiplicity of access	2	2	4
2.2.4	Portal's flexibility and efficiency	3	2	6
2.2.5	Source code and system developer	4	2	8
	Category of analysis			4,00 TA
2.3	Interoperability			
	Indicators	Evaluation	Weight	Score
2.3.1	Link to supporting bodies	4	3,5	14
2.3.2	Link to regulatory bodies	4	2,5	10
2.3.3	Link to transparencia.gov	4	2,5	10
2.3.4	Link to organized civil society bodies	4	1,5	6
Dimension III				2,83 TS
3.	SPECIFIC INFORMATION			
	Category of analysis			2,90 TS
3.1	Context Information			
	Indicators	Evaluation	Weight	Score
3.1.1	List of authorities	4	2	8
3.1.2	Dissemination of information	0	2	0
3.1.3	Municipal councils	4	3	12
3.1.4	Ombudsman	3	3	9
	Category of analysis			2,75 TS
3.2	Institucional Information			
	Indicators	Evaluation	Weight	Score
3.2.1	City history	4	0,5	2
3.2.2	Instructions for using the portal	4	1	4
3.2.3	Municipal legislation	2	1,5	3
3.2.4	Municipal operation	1	1,5	1,5
3.2.5	Means of participation	4	2	8
3.2.6	Municipal programs e projects	3	2	6
3.2.7	Urban Development Master Plan (UDMP)	2	1,5	3

Category of analysis				3,50 TS
3.3	Informações financeiro-orçamentárias			
Indicators		Evaluation	Weight	Score
3.3.1	Budgetary guidelines	4	1,5	6
3.3.2	Fiscal responsibility	2	1,5	3
3.3.3	Expenses and income in real time	4	2,5	10
3.3.4	Openness of financial data	3	2	6
3.3.5	Outline of the Budget Guidelines Law (BGL)	4	2,5	10
Category of analysis				2,80 TS
3.4	News information			
Indicators		Evaluation	Weight	Score
3.4.1	News	4	0,5	2
3.4.2	Statements	0	0,5	0
3.4.3	Payroll	4	1	4
3.4.4	Public tenders	4	1	4
3.4.5	Government decisions	4	1	4
3.4.6	Openness of administrative data	4	1	4
3.4.7	Administrative actions	1	2	2
3.4.8	Spaces for political participation	4	1	4
3.4.9	Monitoring of policies	2	2	4
Category of analysis				2,60 TS
3.5	Communication with the public			
Indicators		Evaluation	Weight	Score
3.5.1	Means of contact	4	1,5	6
3.5.2	Social networks	4	1	4
3.5.3	E-mail	4	2	8
3.5.4	Public agenda	0	1,5	0
3.5.5	Government schedule	4	2	8
3.5.6	Maintenance of dialog	0	2	0
Category of analysis				2,40 TS
3.6	Responsivity			
Indicators		Evaluation	Weight	Score
3.6.1	Proactivity	4	1	4
3.6.2	Online assistance	0	1,5	0
3.6.3	Replies from the authorities	0	1,5	0
3.6.4	Questions and answers	4	1,5	6
3.6.5	Prior debate	0	1	0
3.6.6	Assessment of government services	4	1	4
3.6.7	User support	4	1	4
3.6.8	Monitoring of requests	4	1,5	6

▲ Figure 1.
DTI worksheet

DIGITAL TRANSPARENCY INDEX (DTI) OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT PORTALS

We use the methodology proposed by Amorim (2012) to assess the portals, so as to determine the Digital Transparency Index (DTI) of each of them. This technique is based on a compilation of different methods of measuring digital transparency, and it was satisfactorily applied to research examining the municipal portals of the 27 Brazilian capitals (Amorim, 2012).

Our analysis is divided into four sections: city identification, general information, technical information and services, and specific information and services, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Dimensions that constitute the Digital Transparency Index

DIMENSION 1: general information
Category of analysis: city
Human Development Index (HDI)
Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
Population
Category of analysis: Internet
Electronic address of the portal
Existence of transparency portal
Visibility of transparency portal
DIMENSION 2: technical services
Category of analysis: usability
Search engines
Site map
System's recognition and orientation
Interface
Category of analysis: accessibility
Languages
Disabled access
Multiplicity of access
Portal's flexibility and efficiency
Source code and system developer
Category of analysis: interoperability
Link to supporting bodies
Link to regulatory bodies
Link to transparencia.gov
Link to organized civil society bodies



DIMENSION 3: specific information

Category of analysis: **contextual information**

List of authorities

Dissemination of information

Municipal councils

Ombudsman

Category of analysis: **institutional information**

City history

Instructions for using the portal

Municipal legislation

Municipal operation

Means of participation

Municipal programs e projects

Urban Development Master Plan (UDMP)

Category of analysis: **budgetary information**

Budgetary guidelines

Fiscal responsibility

Expenses and income in real time

Openness of financial data

Outline of the Budget Guidelines Law (BGL)

Category of analysis: **administrative information**

News

Statements

Payroll

Public tenders

Government decisions

Openness of administrative data

Administrative actions

Spaces for political participation

Monitoring of policies

Category of analysis: **communication with the public**

Means of contact

Social networks

E-mail

Public agenda

Government schedule

Maintenance of dialog



Category of analysis: **responsivity**

Proactivity

Online assistance

Replies from the authorities

Questions and answers

Prior debate

Assessment of government services

User support

Monitoring of requests

Source: Adapted from Amorim, 2012

Here, some aspects are taken into account, such as the existence and use of mechanisms that enable citizens to send and follow their requirements online (e.g. if a citizen requires some information, he or she receives a protocol number to follow up the process); information format and contents; applications that enable citizens in a neighbourhood or city to choose, vote, give opinions, and make proposals online regarding certain projects, and also that permit any social groups to follow the expedients of information about public business, such as different public hearings, whether deliberative or not.

The process of analysing portals, so as to determine the DTI, confers to each indicator two (found or absent), three (very good, regular, inexistent), or five (very good, good, regular, weak, inexistent) grades. In order to enable the treatment of data, these grades follow the codification below:

Table 3. Codification used in the process of analysing the DTI dimensions

Two concepts	Grades
Located	0
Not located	4
Three concepts	Grades
Absent	0
Regular	2
Very good	4
Five concepts	Grades
Absent	0
Weak	1
Regular	2
Good	3
Very good	4

Source: adapted from Amorim, 2012

To determine the final index with the appropriate amount of forethought, each indicator was given a specific weight for the different grades and categories under analysis.² By the end of the calculations, each municipality, considering its official tool to be in contact with population, could be given one of the following ratings: 4 to 3.2 - *AT* – advanced transparency; 3.1 to 2.4 - *ST* – significant transparency; 2.3 to 1.6 - *MT* – moderate transparency; 1.5 to 0.8 - *WT* – weak transparency; Below 0.7 - *IT* – inexistent transparency. The score presented in the table above was taken into account when conferring the global grade.

THE QUALITY OF OPEN DATA ACTIONS

As to the assessment of the open data quality, it should fill the eight prerequisites proposed by OKF: 1) complete, 2) primary, 3) timely, 4) accessible, 5) machine processable, 6) non-discriminatory, 7) non-proprietary, and 8) license-free.³ The so-called Open Data Portals of the municipalities under analysis were browsed in light of the table of eight prerequisites. During this process, a binary qualification of those aspects was employed: 1 when the prerequisite was minimally fulfilled and 0 when it was not. Thus, the maximum score possible was 8, which represented a fully satisfactory database, and the minimum was 0, which represented a database that does not minimally fulfil the criteria to be called an open database.

The next stage proceeded to an assessment based on the “Five-Star System by Berners-Lee” – which has already been used for academic purposes by Alejandro Barros (2013) – a system that classifies in five levels the openness that can be found in open data websites. It was introduced by Tim Berners-Lee in May 2010, at the ExpoGov 2.0, an event that gathered important academic and market names interested in discussing the new possibilities of electronic government.

The proposal was to redesign the Harold Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943), but with its focus on government data openness and connection. The five stars correspond to the following requirements, in order: to make license-free data available on the Web; to offer data that can be processed by computers and earlier means; to use non-propriety formats (.csv, not .xls, for instance) and earlier ones; to use URIs in order to help connect data with other websites, databases and earlier means; and to supply additional context by linking data to data from other sources and earlier ones. According to the table below, any database that fulfils the OKF criteria will be ascribed at least a 3-star level in the Berners-Lee system.

² The detailed transparency index formula can be found in Amorim (2012).

³ In this paper, websites were considered heterogeneous whenever they held open data of at least three distinct government spheres.

Table 4. Five-Star System

Rate	Definition
1 star	Available on the web (whatever format) but with an open license
2 stars	Available as machine-readable structured data (e.g. XLS instead of image)
3 stars	All the above plus, non-proprietary format (e.g. CSV instead XLS)
4 stars	All the above plus, use URI's to favour data referencing
5 stars	All the above, plus link the data to other data sets to provide context

Source: Adapted from Berners-Lee, 2010

RESULTS

The data obtained and consolidated in Tables 5 and 6 below indicate the absence of a clear relationship between the DTI and the scores in the Open Data aspects analysed on the portals of the observed municipalities, which does not support the main hypothesis of this paper. In other words, municipalities whose official websites show a higher degree of transparency are not necessarily those with better open data initiatives.

The table below shows that São Paulo, the municipality with the highest registered DTI, obtained the lowest index in the fulfilling of open data requirements. In fact, it fulfilled only three out of the eight OKF prerequisites, and obtained only two out of the five stars in the Berners-Lee scale, which generally indicates the mere presence or availability of some datasets.

Table 5. Results on DTI and open data prerequisites

Capital	Digital Transparency Index	Open Data requirements	Five Stars System	
Curitiba	3.115 (77.9%)	5 (62.5%)	2	-40%
Porto Alegre	2.702 (67.5%)	6 (75%)	2	-40%
Rio de Janeiro	2.891 (72.3%)	7 (87.5%)	5	-100%
Recife	2.654 (66.3%)	8 (100%)	5	-100%
São Paulo	3.190 (79.7%)	3 (37.5%)	2	-40%

Source: Authors, 2016

In a similarly incongruous situation is the municipality of Curitiba, which was in next to last place in the classification regarding open data quality, although it had the second highest DTI. As in São Paulo, the databases on the Curitiba Open Data portal are not systematically updated, and many of them were offered in propriety formats. On the other hand, the city obtained the maximum grade in some DTI criteria, such as General Information. This is also the reason why this paper shows an index that is superior in 0.2 to that obtained by Amorim (2012). It means the city has improved its portal in the transparency prerequisite, but it has not launched a very strong Open Data initiative.

Reversely, the city of Recife registered the worst DTI, while it fulfilled all of the defining open data characteristics, with a maximum grade in all of the analysed prerequisites. Just like Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre, Recife's municipal government uses the CKAN platform, whose specialty is the Open Government Data Portals. The databases are continuously updated and offered in non-propriety formats, which also happens in Rio de Janeiro. On the other hand, in Porto Alegre, most of the datasets are offered in formats that can be read only by licensed programs.

Moreover, concerning Recife's case, the visibility given to applications created according to available data is noteworthy. There is a section called Hacker Cidadão 2.0 for that purpose. Rio de Janeiro's municipal government, in turn, has apps developed by citizens hosted in a specific website, Rio Apps. This choice for separate websites also repeats itself in the DTI assessment. For instance, there is the Rio de Janeiro Transparency Portal, but it does not have a link on the municipal government's homepage. However, that website shows a link to the Mobility Transparency Portal, a website that gives operational information on public transportation in the city. Such a granulated browsing, without well-established links, makes it difficult to find information. Nonetheless, in the specific information and services dimension, there has been significant improvement in the access to government decisions and administrative data, in the availability of participation spaces, dialogue with the executive power, and means for following public policies. Therefore, in our scale, Rio de Janeiro has Significant Transparency.

The tables below show not only that there is no relationship between the DTI of official portals and the quality of Open Data Portals, but also that, in fact, there is the reverse relationship: the higher the DTI, the lower the quality of the open data initiative.

Table 6. Municipalities ranking

Ranking by DTI		Ranking by Open Data quality	
1.	São Paulo	1.	Recife
2.	Curitiba	2.	Rio de Janeiro
3.	Rio de Janeiro	3.	Porto Alegre
4.	Porto Alegre	4.	Curitiba
5.	Recife	5.	São Paulo

Source: Authors, 2016

DISCUSSION

Our data confirm that good open data initiatives do not seem to derive from a wide and well-constructed policy of digital democracy, at least not in the context of the bigger Brazilian capitals. In all of the cases, the collected data indicate a lack of integration in the management of the programs, and even a deficient assimilation of the notions of

transparency and open data, as it becomes evident in the example of São Paulo, where only three out of the eight prerequisites for the latter are fulfilled. This situation raises doubts about the sustainability and evolution of such actions over time.

On this point, Alissa Black and Rachel Burstein (2013) emphasise the necessity of a mentality change in the governmental sphere, identifying the failure in perceiving publicity as a public policy to be among the main hindrances to transparency and open data. This understanding is supported by Evans and Campos (2013) who point to the lack or low quality of training and qualification of officials and managers as a barrier to the full achievement of the goals of transparency and open data availability.

Above all, one can notice that elected public agents usually fail to understand that such initiatives are not only capable of enhancing the results of a government/ management, but they can also consolidate themselves into a state policy that is of service to the public interest, encouraging the democratic development of a whole community in the long run, as advocated by Anneke Zuiderwijk and Marijn Janssen (2013). The absence of a relevant evolution in the DTIs when comparing the calculations in this paper (made in 2015) and those made by Amorim (2012) might be a reflection of these obstacles. The comparison shows steadiness in Recife, Curitiba and Rio de Janeiro (variations of 2%, -4%, and 4%, respectively), and significant changes in the other municipalities studied. São Paulo exhibited a 19% increase in its index. Curitiba, in turn, registered a 14% decrease in the same period. This means that six years after the promulgation of the Transparency Act in Brazil no process for the enhancement of this democratic value can be noticed on municipal portals.

It is still not possible to apply the same reasoning to open data, for they are as yet very recent initiatives that were launched in 2013 or 2014. However, the low volume of databases made available, in general, and specifically the fact that they are not updated constantly might show that some municipalities have been following a world tendency (of making databases available online) without having clearly defined the institutional goal and motivation of this movement.

Although the corpus was limited, our study indicates that this irregular performance occurs regardless of the matrices of the municipal mayors' party's political spectrum (from right centre to left centre), and whether it is the mayor's first or second term. For example, in 2015, São Paulo had as its mayor a left-centre politician in his first term, and so did Recife. Nonetheless, these cities occupy alternately the first and last places in the Transparency and Open Data assessments. In other words, there is no clear relationship between the politician's time in the office or their ideological orientation and a good or bad performance in the measurements in this study.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The aim of this paper was to verify whether cities with higher DTIs also had the best open data initiatives. The main limitation to the results obtained is the low number of cases, which impedes the study's ability to generalise. The option of using a small group of municipalities was motivated by the possibility of assessing methodologies that determine DTI and open data quality in their capacity of leading to clear and reliable results. It is our goal to increase the volume of portals to be analysed and carry out a statistical analysis of the collected data (something that proved to be barely useful with such a limited number of cases). Thus, the creation of a single index would be ideal, and it will call for the establishment of weights for each of the three groups of indicators analysed so as to have a scale of comparison that is more similar to the DTI.

That said, after gathering and assessing data from all of the five cases under analysis, no direct relationship between the Digital Transparency Index and the offering and quality of open data of each municipality was observed. These data indicate that transparency initiatives and data openness initiatives are not directly associated as expected. Particularly in view of the limited number of open data databases and the fact that most of the data do not follow the recommendations by Angela Evans and Adriana Campos (2013) and OKF (2011), it is our belief that open data policies are not as yet attuned to those aiming at government transparency as a whole.

It is the opinion of the authors of this paper that the cause of this lack of synchronisation is the absence of a state policy that is focused on the promotion of digital democracy. Transparency and open data actions are incoherently taken by separate teams that do not keep in contact with each other and receive financial resources and political support in a dissimilar way. This perception has crystallised itself after a discussion of the research results with members of different municipal governments. Therefore, the absence of a state policy for the systematic implementation of digital democracy projects would be responsible for the inconsistencies indicated in this paper.

However, future research could carry out in-depth interviews with members of the government teams that are responsible for the Official and Open Data Portals in order to better understand the reasons for such a disharmony. Peled (2013) is one of the authors who shows the importance of the existence of a specific policy for the creation and liberation of open government data databases in order to encourage greater state transparency, as well as facilitate the participation of citizens and civil entities that are willing to process such data, which in turn might be of service in guiding still other public policies.

Furthermore, our research also indicated that the transparency index of municipalities, except for São Paulo, did not reveal a significant improvement after the publication of the Transparency Act, but even decreased in certain places, as was the case with Porto Alegre. Such a result has to be carefully analysed.

On the one hand, it tends to indicate stagnation in transparency, which may imply that those governments are not giving priority to the promotion and improvement of this value, but “simply” following rules. On the other hand, according to our study, even the city with the lowest score may be seen as having shown significant transparency according to the criterion by Amorim (2012), which might be one explanation for the “stagnation”. Whence follows the importance that future studies watch over those indexes in order to check whether there will be progress or more severe decreases in the Digital Transparency Index.

Therefore, in its present condition, this paper achieves the goal of preliminarily investigating the relationship between transparency in municipal portals and open data initiatives in the Brazilian scenario,⁴ offering investigative groundwork and improvement for future research.

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⁴ In 2016, after this research was carried out, Brazil went through a fast-paced and troubled impeachment process, which is considered a parliamentary coup d'état by many experts. In its first months, the new government has reversed a considerable number of public policies approved by the then suspended president. Transparency policies have not been affected yet, but now it becomes even more important to constantly assess the transparency and open data situation in Brazilian context.

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IDU LI TRANSPARENTNOST I OTVORENI PODACI ZAJEDNO? ANALIZA INICIJATIVA U PET BRAZILSKIH GRADOVA

Ana Carolina Araújo :: Lucas Reis :: Rafael Cardoso Sampaio

SAŽETAK U posljednjih nekoliko godina brazilske gradske vlasti pokrenule su portale s otvorenim podacima. Njihove inicijative pojavljuju se u trenutku kada se počinje primjenjivati Zakon o transparentnosti, koji propisuje rokove za usvajanje i primjenu mjera usmjerenih na povećanje transparentnosti vlasti, kao što su „portali transparentnosti“, ali propisuje i sankcije za neprihvatanje i neprovođenje tih mjera. U skladu s tim u ovom se radu istražuje hoće li gradovi koji imaju portale s višim indeksom digitalne transparentnosti (engl. Digital Transparency Index, DTI) imati i najkvalitetnije inicijative za otvaranje podataka. Kako bi se ostvarili ti ciljevi, službeni portali i inicijative za otvaranje podataka vrednuju se uz pomoć metode koju predlaže Paula Amorim (2012) i uz uvjete koje ističu Open Knowledge Foundation (OKF, 2011) i Tim Berners-Lee (2010). Rezultati ukazuju na to da ne postoji izravna veza između indeksa digitalne transparentnosti i kvalitete inicijativa za otvaranje podataka u pet istraživanih gradova. Rasprava o rezultatima ukazuje na nepostojanje precizne javne politike o digitalnoj demokraciji koja bi u isto vrijeme promicala ne samo vladine podatke nego i transparentnost podataka.

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DELIBERACIJA

BECAUSE POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE MATTERS: THE IMPACT OF DELIBERATION ON YOUNG CITIZENS' OPINIONS

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ABSTRACT *This paper addresses the importance of “knowledge” and “access to information” in the formation of young citizens’ opinion through deliberative procedures. The research presented in this paper is grounded in the theoretical framework of deliberative democracy as a democratic model and procedure that allows participants to be engaged in a rational and open dialogue before deciding on a particular issue. Our research draws empirically upon a deliberative event that took place in October 2014 at the Western Macedonia University of Applied Sciences in Greece. The topic of deliberation was “Political Public Opinion Polls.” The results of this study are commensurate with the dominant thesis in the relevant literature, which underlines that the deliberative procedure enriches the knowledge of citizens and thus enables them to participate effectively in the decision making process.*

KEYWORDS

DELIBERATION, PUBLIC OPINION POLLS, DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY, KNOWLEDGE,
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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INTRODUCTION

In modern representative democracies one of the topical key questions refers to the strengthening of peoples' power in democratic procedures. Academic studies underline the shortcomings of current democratic procedures and governance systems, while analysing possible ways to reinforce citizens' involvement in politics and henceforth move towards more participative models of democracy (see for example different aspects of this discussion in Barber, 2004; Torfing and Triantafillou, 2011: 169-277).

One of the components of effective political participation is political knowledge as it is crucial for citizens ability to shape informed opinions. Political knowledge matters for an additional reason. Any decision that may result from a procedure in which a participant is exposed to a plurality of well supported arguments, such as those contained in a deliberative procedure, will probably be more balanced and well justified.

For the purpose of testing the role of knowledge in the formation of citizens' opinions we have conducted a face-to-face deliberative study for the controversial political topic: "Political Public Opinion Polls" (henceforth PPOP). This topic was chosen among others because: a) PPOP's appearance in media outlets constitute for citizens a significant source of information for political issues; b) PPOP are not only a tool for "measuring" public opinion trends, but they may as well shape public opinion; c) The number of PPOP and their importance in political life increases during election periods as pollsters strive to forecast the electoral preferences of voters. The increased number of elections in Greece in the last years, coupled with several failed attempts of pollsters to accurately predict the election outcome, made PPOP a topic widely discussed in political life and raised several concerns about the credibility of the information provided by PPOP and the role of media as a conduit of circulation and dissemination. Hence there was a great likelihood that this topic would attract students attention and enhance deliberation among the participants, by raising questions to the panel and potentially causing attitudinal shifts.

The deliberative (research) event took place on October 17, 2014 with a sample of 93 students at the Western Macedonia University of Applied Sciences in Greece. The procedure consisted of a pre-deliberation and a post deliberation questionnaire (with the same questions) written material, containing balanced information on the topic of PPOP and, in the end a discussion with three experts (a politician, a professor with expertise in elections and polling, and a journalist).

Our research results provide interesting insights and evidence in relation to the impact that "increased knowledge" has on participants' attitudes and how it may cause a shift in their (pre-deliberation) opinion on several issues.

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC DIALOGUE

Deliberative democracy consists of many approaches and different strands (e.g. Dryzek, 1990; Fishkin, 2004; Benhabib, 1996; Bohman, 2000; Cohen, 1996; Gutmann and Thompson, 2003). The philosophical foundations of deliberative democracy were established by the works of Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1990, 1996, 1997) and John Rawls (1993). Deliberation theory approaches rely on common principles and values such as: the need for citizens' engagement in political procedures, the prerequisite for an open, accessible and egalitarian public sphere, the importance of a fair procedure in democratic dialogue, the significance of public reasoning for the articulation of arguments, and the absence of power relations that would threaten equality in participation. Notwithstanding a shared commitment to the above principles and values, there still exist controversies both regarding the conceptual framework and the consequences of deliberation in democratic politics (for an overview of the different interpretations of deliberation as a term see Jonsson and Astrom, 2014). Some scholars seem to pay more attention to the philosophical contestation of deliberative concepts while a significant number of scholars is concerned with the proceduralism in the analysis of deliberation (for an overview see Deligiaouri, 2011: 13-17). Doubtless, deliberative democracy has made considerable strides both conceptually and empirically (Thompson, 2008). The emerging diversity in the field is welcomed provided that sufficient care is taken to avoid conceptual confusion and "concept stretching" of the term "deliberation" (Bächtiger et al., 2010: 33).

The most profound applied deliberative theory "project" is the well-known "Deliberative polling" scheme introduced by James Fishkin (1991). Fishkin implemented basic features of deliberative theory for the purpose of conducting deliberations for a specific topic under the basic premise that enriching the knowledge of deliberators on a specific topic would have an impact on their opinion. Results illustrate that due to deliberation "opinions often change" and "the participants gain information" (Fishkin and Luskin, 2005: 290-291). The same premise informs this paper as we contend that "knowledge matters."

Democratic dialogue is one of the main cornerstones of democratic politics as citizens can exchange their views, acquire a plurality of information on a specific topic, form well justified arguments and perhaps resolve possible conflicts. Participation in public discussion may enrich participants' political knowledge, and hence it may produce a significant impact on their opinion. This impact may be either the *reinforcement* or *shift in the opposite direction* of the opinion the participant held before the deliberation. The impact depends on several factors, such as the socioeconomic status of the participants, education level, experiences and other personal factors. Recent empirical studies confirm that reactions of participants to deliberation are contingent on the varying capacities and characteristics of individuals, as "those who are older and are more knowledgeable – tend to change their minds less than those with lower levels of knowledge or who are younger" (Suiter et al., 2014: 11). In addition, procedural factors may also interfere, such as "group polarisation" which reinforces the existing attitude tendencies of participants (see Sunstein, 2003 for group polarisation in deliberations).

Presumably, the outcome of democratic deliberation, which abides by all the preconditions mentioned above, should be respected by all participants. The majoritarian rule would naturally prevail in reaching a final decision albeit respecting the opinion of the minority. Even though deliberation, especially through the lens of Habermas (1984) leads to consensus, it is likely that disagreements will arise and hence in the end a successful resolution should accommodate all these conflicts in the best possible way. A basic disagreement is nonetheless essential in the deliberative process as the exposure to opposing views may inform the opinion of the participants and strengthen or question their previous views (Thompson, 2008: 502).

Deliberation is highly associated with the ability of citizens to form well-justified opinions. Studies in the field demonstrate that deliberative procedures increase the level of knowledge and "civic virtues" of the citizens (Gronlund et al., 2010). Deliberation is also associated with significant changes in citizens' opinion and sometimes with vote switching either in favour of a political party or against it (see Bernhagen and Schmitt, 2014). In relation to young participants – as in the case of our research – Jane Suiter et al., observe that "younger people and those with less initial knowledge are more likely to change their views on salient issues" (2014: 11).

POLITICAL PUBLIC OPINION POLLS, MEDIA AND THE FORMATION OF PUBLIC OPINION

Public participation in decision making is essential in democratic politics. Consequently, it is important for citizens to have access to the relevant information and to be provided with all the answers they need in order to form a well-justified opinion. To fulfil this requirement, pluralism of opinions and multiple sources of information constitute essential preconditions in ensuring impartiality, objectivity and transparency in the final decision making.

People tend to derive political information mainly from the media and according to long-standing communication theories people are usually inclined to follow the dominant opinion presented in the media (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). It is important to consider that "the information provided by the media can be fundamental for citizens' understanding and analysis of political issues" (Fraile, 2013: 123). Public opinion research identifies the so called "bandwagon effect" broadly conceived as the tendency of people to modify their opinions in order to conform to what the majority believes (Ragozinno and Hartman, 2014; Hardmeier, 2008), an "effect" which seems to favour the leading party in attracting voters on its side. On the other hand, a number of studies refer to the opposite "underdog" effect (Bhatti and Pedersen, 2016: 137) which amounts to the shift of opinions in favour of parties that are underperforming in polls.

The influential character of PPOP increases during electoral periods as people tend to be more interested in politics and search for more information about contestable issues in politics. PPOP are widely considered a methodological tool – especially during electoral

periods – for the purpose of sketching public opinion trends and tendencies regarding political parties, politicians and other topics of political interest. They supposedly reflect citizens' preferences on a particular topic and provide an overview of the fluctuations of opinions in specific time intervals. Thus, they can lead to reasonable estimations of public sentiment on several issues and the voting preferences of citizens. In a sense, PPOP depict an instant snapshot or representation of public opinion at a time. Adam Berinsky (1999) raises concerns about the ways public opinion polls aggregate public opinion, as they may "poorly reflect collective public sentiment" (1999: 1210) and hence provide an inaccurate aggregative result of public opinion. This is due, he argues, (Berinsky, 1999) to the fact that some respondents are hesitant to express a divergent view from the dominant one.

PPOP are indeed a tool for the "measurement" and "reflection" of public opinion trends. However, they can similarly be instruments of influence on public opinion as "people regularly learn about the views of the majority via public opinion polling" (Rothschild and Malhotra, 2014: 1). Several factors are critical for how and at which level the influence of public opinion may occur, e.g., the time of the publication of PPOP, the methodology followed, and how the media report and present them.

PPOP reach the audience through media and consequently the way the medium presents them remains crucial on how audiences perceive the results of a PPOP. As Michael Ragozinno and Todd Hartmann conclude "the media's use of public opinion polls can shift individuals' policy preferences" (2014: 11). The academic literature underlines several aspects and consequences of how media portray public opinion through PPOP. These aspects may refer to the effect of published polls on the attitudes and behaviour of the audience, political parties' strategies and several related issues (Holtz-Bacha and Strömbäck, 2012). Therefore it is evident that media do not function only as outlets for the publication of PPOP, but they have the potential to shape public opinion *by the manner* in which they report and frame their results. Several concerns are raised regarding the journalistic interpretation of poll results in terms of accuracy and statistical significance. As Yosef Bhatti and Rasmus Pedersen argue "a large share of the interpretations made by the journalists is based on differences in numbers that are so small that they are most likely just statistical noise" (2016: 136).

The role of PPOP in democratic politics, as well as issues of validity and accuracy, especially in the context of election polls, always constitute a current topic of discussion in the literature (see Donsbach, 2016). Sunshine Hillygus (2011) mentions three functions of public opinion polls in US election politics, which may as well apply to any country: forecasting election outcomes, understanding voter behaviour, and planning campaign strategy. Some scholars – mainly echoing the pollsters' viewpoint – present PPOP as means of providing additional, useful information with the aid of scientific methods for the purpose of enriching citizens' knowledge before they reach their final decision (for an earlier discussion on these topics, see Converse, 1987; Yeric and Todd, 1989; Crespi, 1989). A noticeable number of scholars on the other hand, maintain a critical stance towards the validity and accuracy of PPOP or their intended outcome, which in some cases is not considered to be the enrichment of citizens' informational resources (Bourdieu, 1979;

Jacobs and Shapiro, 1995; Champagne, 2004; an overview of both arguments can be found in Ragozinno and Hartman, 2014: 3-5).

Based on the preceding discussion, several questions and concerns are raised regarding the role of PPOP in political life. Our research will try to shed light on a) how citizens respond to these questions and b) if their opinion changes after they acquire more information pertaining to the discussion about PPOP.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

We expect that deliberation has an impact on citizens' attitudes. Specifically, this study will examine the effects of deliberation in terms of:

- (a) direction (i.e., reinforcement or opposite shift), and
- (b) valence (i.e., "positive" or "negative") of significant changes on citizens' attitudes.

The "positive" valence signifies a positive attitude for the role/reliability of PPOP in democratic procedures and in the formation of public opinion.

The "negative" valence signifies a negative attitude for the role/reliability of PPOP in democratic procedures and in the formation of public opinion.

METHODOLOGY¹

Deliberation topic and experts

The subject of the deliberative poll was "Political Public Opinion Polls." This subject matter included five main areas for discussion: (1) reliability-accuracy of opinion polls; (2) data manipulation of public opinion polls by media organisations, pollsters and politicians; (3) use of public opinion polls by politicians in the decision making process; (4) impact of polls on political participation, and (5) impact of polls on voting behaviour. The deliberation topic was chosen bearing in mind that the participants were students.

As previously noted, the three experts were carefully chosen and comprised of a well-known politician, a well-reputed expert and pollster, and a renowned journalist.

Procedure

In order to achieve the objectives of the present study a real deliberative event was conducted on October 17, 2014, at the auditorium of the Western Macedonia University of Applied Sciences in Kastoria, Greece. The discussants were 93 students who volunteered to participate in the deliberation.

¹ This paper is part of a larger research project. A similar methodological framework was used in conducting an online deliberation on the same topic using the same questionnaire for the purpose of comparative analysis between online and offline deliberation (see Triantafyllidou et al., 2015a and Triantafyllidou et al., 2015b).

Participants were informed at the beginning about the purpose of this deliberative event. On the first page of the questionnaires (which were anonymous) the first two paragraphs explained the context of the research project in which the deliberative event was included, and assured participants of the anonymity of the data and the use of the returned questionnaires solely for the purposes of the current academic research. In this way, the consent of the student participants was secured for the whole procedure.

Upon arrival, students completed an initial (pre-deliberation) questionnaire based on their bare knowledge on the topic without being provided any further information. Then, the students were given a 19-page written report which organised information around the issues under deliberation into pro and con arguments, thus presenting a two-sided view of the issues in a balanced manner.

At the next stage the three experts presented their opinions, engaged in a dialogue with the other panellists, and responded to the questions posed by participants. Discussion was supervised by a moderator whose responsibility was to (a) make sure that the discussion proceeds in an orderly fashion; (b) address and guide the panelists; (c) encourage audience participation, and (d) keep the discussion focused within specified time limits. In this way we wanted to minimise the influence of the moderator on the outcome of deliberation. The presentation of the arguments by the experts fuelled the interest of students regarding the role of PPOP considering the many questions that were addressed to the panel, and the lively discussion that ensued.

At the last stage of the research, which took place after the conclusion of the discussion, the students answered the post deliberation questionnaire.

We should point out that our methodology departed significantly from Fishkin's "Deliberative polls" in the following ways: a) the sample was not divided into small groups and hence all discussions were held in a plenary session and no small group discussions took place; b) the role of the moderator was limited in just coordinating the procedure; c) the sample comprised of students only and therefore it was not a representative sample.

Questionnaire and measurement of opinions

Students were provided a pre and a post deliberation questionnaire, which was divided into 7 sections. Section 1, consisted of 3 questions aimed to examine the familiarisation of participants' with PPOP. Section 7, consisted of 7 questions requesting general and demographic information of the participants. Sections 2-6 represented the main body of our research. These sections included in total 31 questions that measure the attitudes of participants around the five main thematic categories about polls. For the purpose of including in the questionnaire questions that were the most proper and relevant to the political agenda we previously conducted an extensive study on the basic characteristics of PPOP, and assembled the major arguments in favour or against their role in democratic politics in a written report given to the students, as stated above.

More specifically, the first thematic category included questions that measured participants' attitudes about the reliability – accuracy of opinion polls (see Table 1); the second category included questions referring to issues of data manipulation in public opinion polls by media organisations, pollsters and politicians; the third thematic category examined issues related to the use of public opinion polls by politicians for decision making; the fourth category measured the impact of polls on political participation and the fifth category examined the impact of polls on the voting behaviour of citizens.

Responses to all questions were elicited through five-item Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Five-item Likert scales were chosen with a neutral middle point instead of four or six point scales in order to avoid "forcing" the participant to take a specific position (i.e., agree or disagree) prior or after the deliberation, thus influencing the outcome (changes in attitudes) of deliberation.

In order to compare pre-deliberation and after-deliberation results paired-samples t-tests were conducted.

DISCUSSION/RESULTS

The effects of deliberation

The sample was 69.9% female and was 30.1% male, while the majority of the students were seniors (78.5%). In addition, 86.2% of the respondents, as they stated, spent less than one hour a day reading newspaper or online articles about politics and watching political television programs. Using independent t-tests we checked the differences between pre and post-deliberation mean attitudes of students in order to examine the effects of deliberation on citizens' opinions regarding polls. The results of the tests are presented in Table 1. Moreover, the standard deviations prior to and after the deliberative event are reported in order to better interpret the changes in attitudes and determine whether deliberation resulted in greater diversity or consensus among participants.

As Table 1 demonstrates, deliberation affected a number of attitudes. Overall, seven out of 31 attitude statements exhibited statistically significant changes.

In regards to participants' opinions about the *accuracy and reliability of opinion polls* respondents after the deliberation session were significantly more likely to agree than before (exhibiting a higher mean value after deliberation) that "a sample of 1000-1500 people can accurately represent the universe of potential voters." This difference found in the above statement was small, indicating deliberation reinforced slightly, but significantly, participants' opinion regarding the representativeness of opinion polls.

Table 1. Effects of deliberation

	Pre Deliberation		Post Deliberation		T-Statistic	Significance of the T-test
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation		
Reliability-accuracy of opinion polls						
In general, the process of polling as conducted in Greece is reliable	2.88	0.80	2.83	0.81	0.542	0.589
Polls always produce reliable results	2.44	0.82	2.38	0.79	0.560	0.577
<i>A sample of 1000-1500 people can accurately represent the universe of potential voters</i>	2.20	0.95	2.49	0.98	-2.753	0.007*
Polls are an accurate snapshot of public opinions at a particular point in time	3.18	0.98	3.15	0.99	0.276	0.783
Answers given by respondents in polls reflect their true beliefs	2.38	0.93	2.19	0.85	1.719	0.089
Respondents will give their answers based on what they believe is the most socially acceptable/favourable or the most popular, rather than their true opinions	3.19	0.98	3.08	0.867	0.920	0.360
Respondents have the particular knowledge required to answer the questions of opinion polls	2.56	0.82	2.64	0.82	-0.776	0.440
Data manipulation of public opinion polls by media organizations, pollsters and politicians						
<i>Media organizations, most of the time, fairly present and publish the results of opinion polls</i>	2.83	0.86	2.60	0.86	2.497	0.014*
Media organizations manipulate and selectively publish the results of opinion polls in order to satisfy the interests of their sponsors	3.66	0.79	3.61	0.87	0.540	0.590
Media organizations manipulate and selectively publish the results of opinion polls in order to exert influence on public opinion	3.72	0.85	3.69	0.79	0.235	0.815
Many polling organizations selectively report opinion poll results in order to influence public opinion in a certain direction	3.66	0.78	3.79	0.79	-1.365	0.176

When the clients of opinion polls are either parties or politicians, then the chances of reporting results which favour them are increased	3.76	0.85	3.69	0.81	0.726	0.470
The results of opinion polls are manipulated by the political offices of parties or candidates in order to influence public opinion	3.49	0.81	3.52	0.77	-0.336	0.738
Polls reported often conceal the real opinion of respondents	3.23	0.95	3.43	0.80	-1.751	0.083
Use of public opinion polls by politicians for decision making						
Politicians need surveys to pursue the right policies	3.50	0.93	3.39	0.82	1.043	0.300
<i>Politicians and political parties use public opinion polls to assist them in the development of their election campaign strategies</i>	3.90	0.69	3.51	0.70	4.340	0.000*
<i>Election campaigns are dominated by public opinion polls</i>	3.75	0.84	3.37	0.85	3.556	0.001*
Politicians use polls to specify the top issues which concern the electorate and set their political agendas	3.49	0.87	3.42	0.76	0.617	0.539
Politicians use polls to persuade the public for or against a certain political position	3.80	0.85	3.59	0.81	1.973	0.052
Politicians use polls to make the right political decisions	2.63	0.89	2.74	0.85	0.971	0.334
Politicians use polls as a source of accurate information about the expectations and preferences of the electorate	3.18	0.94	3.00	0.88	1.495	0.138
Impact of polls on political participation						
Polls provide a way for citizens to stay informed about the top political issues and the opinions of the public towards them	3.55	0.75	3.37	0.87	1.804	0.075
<i>Opinion polls facilitate a better communication between citizens and politicians</i>	3.04	0.83	2.84	0.85	2.195	0.031*
<i>Opinion polls serve as a communication channel between citizens and government and an indirect form of public participation</i>	3.22	0.91	3.02	0.88	2.273	0.025*



Polls create a more democratic society	3.07	0.96	3.06	0.99	0.118	0.906
Through polls citizens can make their voices heard and participate in the policy making process	2.87	1.00	3.47	0.85	-1.325	0.189
Impact of polls on voting behaviour						
Results of election polls may affect the voting behaviour of the public	3.74	0.71	3.73	0.81	0.127	0.899
Polls affect undecided voters and help them vote	3.64	0.87	3.53	0.80	1.079	0.283
Polls may lead people not to vote for the party or candidate that appears to be losing the elections	3.37	0.91	3.47	0.83	-1.000	0.320
<i>Polls may lead people not to vote for the party or candidate that appears to be winning the elections</i>	3.24	0.93	3.50	0.76	-2.345	0.021*
Polls may lead people to abstain from voting since they believe that their vote will not make a difference to the election outcome	3.34	0.97	3.44	0.90	0.791	0.431

*Significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

Questions with statistically significant mean differences prior to and after the deliberation are in italics.

As far as, participants' attitudes about *data manipulation of public opinion polls by media organizations, pollsters and politicians* are concerned, results suggest that deliberation caused small changes in one out of seven opinion statements. Respondents after the deliberation were significantly more likely to disagree than before (exhibiting lower mean values) that "media organisations, most of the time, fairly present and publish the results of opinion polls." Thus, in regards to citizens' attitudes about the media's presentation of polls, deliberation shifted – but to a small extent – citizens' attitudes in the opposite direction from their initial attitudes. Hence, after the deliberation, discussants held slightly more negative views about the mediatisation of polls.

Regarding attitude statements about *the use of public opinion polls by politicians in the decision making process*, respondents after the deliberation were significantly more likely to disagree than before (exhibiting lower mean values) that "politicians and political parties use public opinion polls to assist them in the development of their election campaign strategies" and "election campaigns are dominated by public opinion polls." Again, the significant changes found were small. Hence, deliberation somewhat changed respondents' attitudes in the opposite direction from their initial opinions about the use of polls by politicians and moderated their unfavourable opinion regarding the use of polls by politicians and parties during election campaigns.

The deliberative effect was found to be significant in the pattern of change in regards to citizens' attitudes about the *impact of polls on political participation*. Participants after the deliberation were significantly more likely to disagree than before (exhibiting lower mean values) that "opinion polls facilitate a better communication between citizens and politicians" and "opinion polls serve as a communication channel between citizens and government and an indirect form of public participation." Thus, deliberation changed marginally but significantly respondents' attitudes in the opposite direction compared to their pre-deliberation attitudes and made them hold, to some degree, more negative views about the impact of polls on citizen-government communication.

Lastly, deliberation caused minor but significant changes in students' attitudes about the *impact of polls on voting behaviour*. Specifically, respondents after the deliberation were significantly more likely to agree than before (exhibiting a higher mean value after the deliberation) that "polls may lead people to abstain from voting out of certainty that their candidate or party will win." Again, the deliberative experiment reinforced to a small level students' negative views about the de-motivating effect of polls during elections.

Looking at the standard deviations before and after the deliberation of the items in which significant changes were observed, it can be argued that most of the time deliberation marginally increased the diversity of opinions. On the other hand, minor decreases in the standard deviations after the deliberation were found in the opinions of participants about polls' (a) ability to act as a communication channel between citizens and government and an indirect form of public participation, and (b) the underdog effect (voters are influenced by polls to support a party or a candidate that seems to be losing the elections). In the above cases, deliberation was able to homogenize attitudes but only to a small degree.

Based on the preceding analysis, it can be concluded that the present deliberation has not dramatically changed participants' attitudes but rather caused minor variations in their opinions about the majority of issues on public opinion polls. Similar findings were reported by Robert Luskin et al., (2016: 19) in which deliberation "variegated rather than homogenized attitudes".

At this point we should underline that it is not clear whether the effects of the deliberation session were the result of the information material the participants received, the presentations of the experts, the discussion that followed or any other factor. The role of experts and how they influence deliberation effects is a point of contestation. Similar studies highlight an impact related to the experts' involvement, but it is difficult to detect at which level it occurs and it is not an all-encompassing effect (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps, 2014: 20-21).

Valence (positive or negative)

Results suggest that deliberation had an effect on participants as it induced changes in their opinions either by reinforcing their existing opinion or by changing it (opposite shift). This change (direction of shifts) was either positive or negative towards the role of

PPOP. Table 2 summarizes the changes found in terms of direction and the valence of their impact on participants' attitudes towards the five statistically significant Statements/Questions of deliberation.

Table 2. Direction of attitudes' shift and valence of impact across the five deliberation topics

Participants' Attitudes About (Number of Statements/Questions)	Direction of Shifts (Number of Shifts)	Valence of Impact
Reliability-accuracy of opinion polls (7)	Reinforce ^a (1)	Positive ^c
Data manipulation of public opinion polls by media organizations, pollsters and politicians. (7)	Opposite Shift ^b (1)	Negative ^d
Use of public opinion polls by politicians in decision making process. (7)	Opposite Shift (2)	Positive
Impact of polls on political participation (5)	Opposite Shift (2)	Negative
Impact of polls on voting behaviour (5)	Reinforce (1)	Negative

a: Post-deliberation mean values > Pre-deliberation mean values

b: Post-deliberation mean values < Pre-deliberation mean values

c: Participants held more positive views of polls than prior to the deliberative event.

d: Participants held more negative views of polls than prior to the deliberative event.

Several fruitful insights derive from our findings. Deliberation caused more shifts in attitudes in the opposite direction (5) than the reinforcement of initial attitudes (2). This result indicates that in our deliberative experiment the phenomenon of group polarization found in prior deliberation studies was reduced. Moreover, even though our sample was largely homogeneous and consisted of like-minded respondents, results suggest that deliberators were exposed to competing views and a diversity of perspectives that limited the elicitation of the polarization phenomenon. Arguably, our study enhanced the exchange of different viewpoints and arguments.

Regarding the valence of the deliberative impact on attitudes, it should be noted that in 4 out of 7 attitude statements it was found to be negative. Specifically, participants held more negative views about the mediatisation of polls and the impact of polls on citizen-government communication, as well as on voting behaviour. On the contrary, a positive impact was found in 3 out of 7 attitude statements as respondents were more inclined to believe that polls are accurate and that polls are not used that much by politicians to manipulate public opinion by designing appropriate strategies during election campaigns.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether an increase in the existing knowledge of citizens and deliberation had an effect on their attitudes about the several issues concerning the role of Political Public Opinion Polls in politics. Towards this end a real deliberative event was conducted. Results show that access to more information,

deliberation and exchange of information between deliberators informs their opinion, and in some cases causes a shift in their attitudes either in favour or against their existing beliefs. Although the attitudinal shifts that we found were not numerous or large in magnitude, we can establish that “knowledge matters” and has even a modest impact on citizens’ opinions.

This project contributes fresh insights to the vast and growing literature of deliberative democracy *in action*. It provides important evidence that increased knowledge really matters in the formation of citizens’ opinions and especially younger citizens, who are usually more willing to be exposed to different views. Our findings indicate that a shift in deliberators’ opinion may occur due to increased knowledge.

Our study also questions the “group polarization” effect. Our deliberation session took place among participants with a proclivity of being likeminded. However, although our sample was highly homogeneous, deliberation did not force participants to take extreme positions in the same direction as prior to the deliberative event, but rather produced small changes in their opinions in the opposite direction implying that discussants broaden their perspective after being exposed to different viewpoints. This result could be regarded as an indication of deliberation’s potential even among like-minded participants, who even though they had very little prior knowledge about the issue under deliberation, they changed their attitudes after being exposed to the different viewpoints.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

The main limitation of the present study stems from the nature and size of our sample. Specifically, our sample consisted of 93 discussants who were students. Moreover, the study’s sample was overrepresented by female participants. Due to these shortcomings generalization of the results should be avoided.

Another limitation of the present design stems from the absence of a control group. Additionally since we measured participants’ opinions only prior and after the deliberation we cannot be sure at which point and stage of deliberation (i.e., after reading the material, after experts’ presentations, or after plenary discussion) significant changes took place. Hence, possible reasons for the changes in discussants’ attitudes could be the written material or the experts’ presentations and answers to the questions.

The application of Discourse Quality Index (DQI) (Steenbergen et al., 2003) could be the next step in reaching valuable conclusions. Finally, the correlation of the results with demographic elements could possibly disclose important evidence regarding which people are more likely to change their views and accept a different view or not.

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ZATO ŠTO JE POLITIČKO ZNANJE BITNO: UTJECAJ DELIBERACIJE NA MIŠLJENJE MLADIH GRAĐANA

**Anastasia Deligiaouri :: Amalia Triantafyllidou :: Prodromos Yannas :: Georgios Lappas
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SAŽETAK Ovaj rad bavi se važnošću „znanja“ i „pristupa informacijama“ u formiranju mišljenja mladih građana o pojedinim temama kroz deliberativne procedure. Deliberativna demokracija, kao demokratski model i demokratska procedura koja dopušta sudionicima uključivanje u racionalan i otvoren dijalog prije odlučivanja o određenoj temi, teorijski je okvir na kojem se temelji istraživanje predstavljeno u ovom radu. Empirijski dio našeg rada temelji se na deliberativnom događaju koji se odvio u listopadu 2014. na instituciji za visoko obrazovanje Western Macedonia University of Applied Sciences u Grčkoj. Tema deliberacije bila je „Anketna istraživanja javnog mnijenja o politici“. Rezultati ovog istraživanja potvrđuju tezu iz relevantne literature koja naglašava kako deliberativne procedure obogaćuju znanje građana i tako im omogućavaju da učinkovito sudjeluju u procesu donošenja odluka.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

DELIBERACIJA, ANKETNA ISTRAŽIVANJA JAVNOG MNIJENJA, DELIBERATIVNA DEMOKRACIJA, ZNANJE, POLITIČKA PARTICIPACIJA

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FROM PROTEST TO POLITICAL PARTIES: ONLINE DELIBERATION IN NEW PARTIES IN SPAIN

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ABSTRACT *The new parties that emerged following the 15-M movement and against the austerity measures in Spain want to build parties open to the participation and deliberation for all the citizenry. To what extent are these ideals being fulfilled? The aim of this article is to describe and assess some of the main online deliberative processes of the two most important parties, Podemos and Barcelona En Comú, following commonly accepted criteria in the literature for measuring online deliberation. Specifically, we have examined the two most-voted proposals from the online platform Plaza Podemos and the online development of the electoral programme of Barcelona En Comú. Thus, we have conducted a content analysis of 713 (Plaza Podemos) and 563 (Barcelona En Comú) posts. Both platforms meet the structural and technical criteria for fostering deliberation, but the external impact is high only in the case of Barcelona En Comú. The deliberative quality of the communication is good but not the criteria of reflexivity, inclusion and plurality.*

KEY WORDS

ONLINE DELIBERATION, DELIBERATIVE CRITERIA, 15-M, PODEMOS, BARCELONA EN COMÚ, SPAIN

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INTRODUCTION

The 15-M movement¹ and its political offshoots, such as *Podemos* or *Barcelona En Comú*, seek a more participatory and deliberative model of democracy than the extant representative model. In many cases, the participatory and deliberative practices implemented within these new parties had been previously deployed during the protest cycle started in 2011, and continue to play an important role in the model of democracy these parties envisage for the political system². Both parties and their varied coalitions have gained important electoral representation in Spain at the local, regional, state and European level.

However, to what extent are these new parties meeting these deliberative ideals? The main objective of this paper is to describe and assess some of the deliberative practices of the two main parties that emerged from the 15-M movement, *Podemos* and *Barcelona En Comú*, following the framework of the deliberative model of democracy and its corresponding criteria that have been developed by relevant political scientists (Dahlberg, 2004; Dahlgren, 2005; Stromer-Galley, 2007; Hendriks et al., 2007; Steiner, 2012; Kies, 2010; Friess and Eilders, 2014; Klinger and Russmann, 2014). Specifically, we have analysed the two proposals most voted on from the online platform *Plaza Podemos* and the online development of the electoral programme of *Barcelona En Comú*. All in all, a content analysis of 713 (from *Plaza Podemos*) and 563 (from *Barcelona En Comú*) posts was carried out.

Although in the last decade several studies have examined empirically online deliberation processes with political content or within political institutions (Steenberger et al., 2003; Hendriks et al., 2007; Zhou et al., 2008; Standberg and Berg, 2013; Klinger and Russmann, 2014), very few have focused on intra-party, online, deliberative processes (Kies, 2010).

It is important to consider that, in many cases, the transformation from social movement to political party has led to the restriction of the original ideals of inclusion, openness and deliberation for the sake of organisational efficiency and electoral competition (Goldstone, 2003). Also, applying deliberative ideals can create friction with principles such as participation and equality (Fishkin, 2011). Along these lines, another aim of the paper is to ascertain if this evolution could have affected the development and quality of the two parties' online deliberative processes.

The outline of the paper is as follows: first, the most important criteria for analysing the deliberative capacity of online forums is set out; second, the relevance of the two parties in studying participatory and deliberative processes is explained; next, deliberative criteria are applied to the assessment of the deliberative capacity of two debates held on the

¹ Also known as *Indignados*.

² By way of example, the local governments of Barcelona and Madrid, headed by *Barcelona En Comú* and *Ahora Madrid* have launched two online platforms, *Decidim Barcelona*, *Decide Madrid*, for participation and deliberation based on technical devices and principles similar to those used for internal processes.

main online deliberative space of *Podemos*, the so-called *Plaza Podemos*, and the process to draw up the municipal electoral programme of *Barcelona En Comú*. Lastly, there is a discussion of results, followed by a conclusion.

ONLINE DELIBERATION AND ITS EMPIRICAL CRITERIA

In order to evaluate the deliberative capacity of the forums launched by the two parties, we apply the widely acknowledged criteria from the literature on online deliberation. Most authors pinpoint that there are three levels that should be considered to assess the deliberative capacity of online tools (Dahlgren, 2005; Wessler, 2008; Kies, 2010; Friess and Eilders, 2014): 1) the institutional or technical dimension; 2) interactive or communicative traits; and 3) collective and individual outcomes or the impact of the deliberative process. The most common criteria for every dimension will be drawn from the literature, taking into account that, while different criteria systems have been applied empirically (Stromer-Galley, 2007; Kies 2010; Steiner, 2012; Klinger and Russmann, 2014; Friess and Eilders 2014), many times authors have used different labels for the same criterion or principle. Therefore, in general we will follow the criteria systems developed by Raphaël Kies (2010) and Dennis Friess and Christiane Eilders (2014), as they have sufficiently integrated the criteria of previous studies.

Below is an explanation of each dimension, the meaning of the related criteria and how they can be operationalised.

The institutional or structural dimension

This dimension refers to how online spaces should be structured to foster deliberation (Friess and Eilders, 2014: 6, 15). There are several institutional and technical characteristics that must be taken into account, such as inclusion (Kies, 2010: 42-44), asynchronous communication, content visibility, moderation, identity, division of labour into smaller units, relevant information and horizontal interaction (Friess and Eilders, 2014: 6-8).

The criterion of inclusion means that all those who are affected by and/or interested in the issues under discussion should be able to participate (Kies, 2010: 42). Thus, inclusion should be assessed by observing the ease of access in terms of connectivity and ICT skills, and by observing discursive rules such as moderation, registration and identification that should not be perceived as barriers (Kies, 2010: 56).

In addition, an asynchronous communication space is needed to allow participants to spend time reflecting and justifying their contributions (Friess and Eilders, 2014: 6-8). User content should appear immediately to motivate contributions. Moderation is also crucial to ensure deliberation in terms of civility and rationality, and for promoting inclusive participation and good organisation of the discussion. Furthermore, empirical evidence shows that personal identification has positive effects on the deliberative quality of online debates. The technical design should enable a division into smaller units focused on different issues and debate areas in order to enlarge the opportunities for deliberation.

Finally, the designed structure of the online forum should enable horizontal interaction and communication with other users.

The communicative dimension

This refers to the deliberative attitude of participants (Kies, 2010: 42) and what the communication process should look like, mainly in relation to participants' reactions to each other's ideas (Friess and Eilders, 2014: 8). Deliberation should be rational, interactive, equal and respectful. This is the core of deliberation theory's normative claims (Habermas, 1990). The most crucial feature of deliberation is rationality; that is, to state positions substantiated with arguments and empirical evidence, expecting critical exchange and diversity of arguments, and being willing to change one's own opinion in light of better arguments (Friess and Eilders, 2014: 8). Therefore, rationality involves criteria such as reciprocity, justification, reflexivity, empathy (including civility), plurality, discourse equality and sincerity (Kies, 2010: 44-54).

In the following table, we present the most important criteria that characterise whether communication in an online platform can be considered deliberative.

Table 1. The communication process in an online forum: deliberative criteria, their meaning and operationalisation

Deliberative criteria	Meaning	Operationalisation
Discourse equality	Participants should have equal opportunity to introduce and question any assertion, and to express attitudes, desires and needs.	Analysis of discursive concentration and whether this concentration leads to control of the debate.
Reciprocity	Participants should listen and react to the comments formulated by other participants.	Measured through content analysis by assessing the proportion of posts that are part of a thread, versus the ones that initiate a thread, and by measuring the extent to which posts take into consideration arguments and opinions of a preceding post.
Justification	The opinions and propositions should be accompanied by reasoned and accessible justifications.	Measured using content analysis by observing whether opinions and suggestions are justified and how complex the justifications are. Analysis of whether the justification's arguments are internal (based on personal viewpoints and values) or external (based on facts, figures, links to other information and evidence).
Reflexivity	Participants should examine critically their values, assumptions, and interests, as well as the larger social context.	The content analysis identifies visible instances of changes in opinion, conflict resolutions or participants' acknowledgement of being better informed after participating.



Empathy or civility	Participants should be sensitive to other views and opinions.	Measured though content analysis by counting the cases of disrespect, insults and wry comments.
Sincerity	Participants must make a sincere effort to make known all relevant information and their true intentions and interests.	Measurements based on content analysis are: inconsistency in speech, rhetorical forms of speech and complaints by other participants regarding the insincerity of other participants.
Plurality	A deliberative context should be a context in which a plurality of voices is heard even if those voices are critical of the dominant opinions/ ideologies.	Content analysis determines the degree to which the debates refer to different political ideologies and whether there is disagreement and conflicting standpoints. The registration system, if it is not anonymous, could provide information about gender.

Source: Own adaptation based on Kies, 2010: 42, 56-57.

The outcome dimension

This dimension alludes to the results or impact of the deliberation, which could be individual or collective. At the individual level, participation in deliberative forums can contribute to increased tolerance, political knowledge and efficiency, public-spirited attitudes, willingness to compromise or a shift in preferences (Friess and Eilders, 2014: 10; Hendricks et al., 2007). At the collective level, there are benefits related to the quality of decisions such as the generation of consensual decisions or, at the very least, decisions without errors, with high epistemic qualities, as they are based on relevant reasons and evidence. Thus, the final decision will be more legitimated and supported by a wider public (Habermas, 1996; Friess and Eilders, 2014: 10).

In addition, Kies (2010: 54-55) highlights the relevance of the external impact of the deliberative process. That means that decisions resulting from online forums should have an impact on public debates and political decisions and even shape binding norms to contribute to the participation of citizens and guide official decision-making processes (Dahlberg, 2004; Hendricks et al., 2007).

The next section presents the two main parties that are the object of study. The aforementioned deliberative criteria and operationalisation, through content analysis, are applied to the assessment of two online platforms developed by the two parties.

FROM SOCIAL MOVEMENT TO POLITICAL PARTIES: THE TWO PARTIES AS A CASE STUDY

Podemos and *Barcelona En Comú* have clearly stated that they aim to open themselves to the participation and deliberation of all the citizenry. They have tried to reproduce the 15-M movement's structure through neighbourhood assemblies, different issue groups

and working committees, and by giving the general assembly or plenary established in the party statutes a dominant position.

The *Podemos* party was officially registered three months before the 2014 European elections. *Podemos* entered the European Parliament with 5 MPs. In the local elections held on 24 May 2015, the citizen left-wing coalitions that included *Podemos* won control of the municipal governments in Madrid, Barcelona, A Coruña, Cádiz and Zaragoza. Finally, in the Spanish general elections held on 20 December 2015, *Podemos* obtained more than five million votes and nearly a 21% share of the votes. As a result, *Podemos* became the third largest political force in Spain.

The *Barcelona En Comú* coalition appeared in June 2014. The promoters built a new left-wing coalition for the 24 May 2015 local elections and this influenced the emergence of similar coalitions in different cities throughout Catalonia and Spain. Their leader, Ada Colau, the former spokesperson of the PAH (Platform for People Affected by Mortgages), became the first female mayor of Barcelona when *Barcelona En Comú* won the 2015 local elections.

In less than a year, these political formations have carried out an enormous amount of activity in order to develop participatory and deliberative processes to define their internal structure and electoral programmes, and to select candidates, leaders and executive boards. Regarding membership anybody can easily register online or offline³ as a member of the party with no fee. Party officials and electoral candidates are selected by primaries and can be removed by party member demand. Specific consultations or referendums on important decisions are established in the statutes and there are channels for individual members to issue any kind of proposal (i.e. citizen initiatives in *Podemos*).

Moreover, these new parties make an intensive use of new technologies. Apart from social media, such as Facebook and Twitter⁴, the new formations use different free online tools, such as Appgree, Agora Voting, Loomio, Reddit or DemocracyOS, for internal communication and organisation, and voting and deliberation on proposals, political issues and candidates.

The aim of this article is to assess the deliberative capacity of two relevant, online, deliberative processes taking place within *Podemos* and *Barcelona En Comú*. In the case of *Podemos*, we focus on *Plaza Podemos* (*Podemos Square*), the main online space for deliberation, hosted on Reddit. Reddit functions as an open and public discussion board where users can post comments and hyperlinks, and also give votes to the posts submitted. The platform enables thematic discussions organised in a tree-like arrangement of nested threads. At its peak (November 2014), *Plaza Podemos* received 280,000 unique visitors and more than 2.4 million page views.

³ Offline registration is not currently possible in the case of *Podemos*.

⁴ *Podemos'* party profile has more than 1 million followers on Facebook and Twitter, between seven and three times that of the two main "traditional" parties, PP and PSOE.

As for *Barcelona En Comú*, we will analyse the online participation process in the preparation of the municipal programme, which was based on DemocracyOS. The online development of the electoral programme began with 44 priority actions divided into 4 blocks: (1) Social emergency; (2) Structural changes; (3) A more human Barcelona; and (4) Let's open up the institutions. These proposals, which had been previously drafted by the thematic committees of the organisation, were hosted on the DemocracyOS online tool. The aim of the online process was to improve the 44 priority actions and to generate new proposals which could then be voted on and receive comments.

DATA AND METHODS

We assessed the deliberative quality of these two parties' most relevant online deliberative processes by examining the three dimensions that constitute a deliberative space: the institutional, the communicative, and the outcome or impact dimensions. Following the criteria explained in previous sections, for the first dimension we ascertained how the two online platforms were structured and technically organised. For the third dimension, we determined whether the results of the debates analysed were accepted by the party.

Regarding the second, or communicative, dimension, we carried out a content analysis of three discussions. In the case of *Podemos* we examined two online debates, held on *Plaza Podemos*, that achieved a high number of votes in April 2015. The first one was about the Universal Basic Income (470 posts and 144 participants), and the second was on the improvement of the party's registration system (243 posts and 99 participants). In the case of *Barcelona En Comú*, we analysed the online deliberation process to prepare the municipal electoral programme, which took place from 19 February to 2 March 2015, with the participation of 181 people. In total, our content analysis examined 713 (*Plaza Podemos*) and 563 (*Barcelona En Comú*) posts.

Among the deliberative criteria analysed (see Table 1), the criterion of sincerity was not studied, as its measurement is extremely complex (Kies, 2010: 57).

The coding of the posts was double-checked. One author did all the coding, once the coding scheme had been agreed on previously with the other author. After the coding was completed, the other author randomly sampled 10% of the posts to check for consistency and inter-coder reliability. Krippendorff's alpha was >0.8 for reciprocity, reflexivity and civility on both platforms. In relation to justification, the figures were 0.72 for Universal Basic Income, 0.77 for the registration system and 0.81 for the *Barcelona En Comú* electoral programme debate. Therefore, the coding carried out was reliable.

RESULTS

Assessment of the degree of deliberation on *Plaza Podemos*

First we examined the institutional dimension. Regarding *Plaza Podemos*' subreddit, most of the technical criteria are satisfied. The platform allows asynchronous participation by users. Conversation is open, so users can contribute with their post at any time, and user content appears immediately, allowing horizontal interaction either by commenting on other users' threads and comments or voting on their contributions. The moderation team only participates occasionally, deleting comments that contain insults or disrespectful words. The platform is subdivided into different categories and every debate refers to a specific subject, so large tasks are divided into smaller units, which usually contain relevant information concerning documents, links to explanatory videos or articles. User identification only requires a user name (or nickname) and a password: it is not necessary to introduce an email address or to be registered as a member of the party.

Regarding the third level, which refers to the outcome dimension, *Plaza Podemos* could theoretically have a high external impact. It regularly hosts important debates concerning the party's organisation and public policies, and allows the deliberation of proposals that could be selected to be put to a vote in a binding referendum. The objective of the debates generated in the "Proposals" section within *Plaza Podemos* is to find the necessary support for a proposal to be voted on as a "citizen initiative" in a binding referendum for the whole party. To achieve this, the citizen initiative should be approved in successive stages by 0.2%, 2% and 10% of the registered members (Podemos, 2014: 42-43). Taking into account that the number of registered members is around 350,000 people, after almost two years in operation, none of the proposals have reached the last threshold of 10% of the registered members.

With regard to the communicative dimension, we have focused on the debates generated by the two most popular proposals from *Plaza Podemos*, which achieved 0.2% of those registered *Podemos* members' votes. The first one related to the incorporation of a Universal Basic Income into the party's programme (with 833 votes), and the second one was aimed at changing the census thresholds for approving proposals (with 814 votes).

Basic Income proposal

The thread about the Universal Basic Income was posted on *Plaza Podemos* on 10 April 2015 by the Basic Income Circle (Plaza Podemos, 2015a). The aim of the proposal was to include the Universal Basic Income in the electoral programme for the 2015 general elections⁵. The Basic Income proposal, with 833 votes, generated a total of 470 posts on *Plaza Podemos*, divided into 146 initial threads and 324 comments.

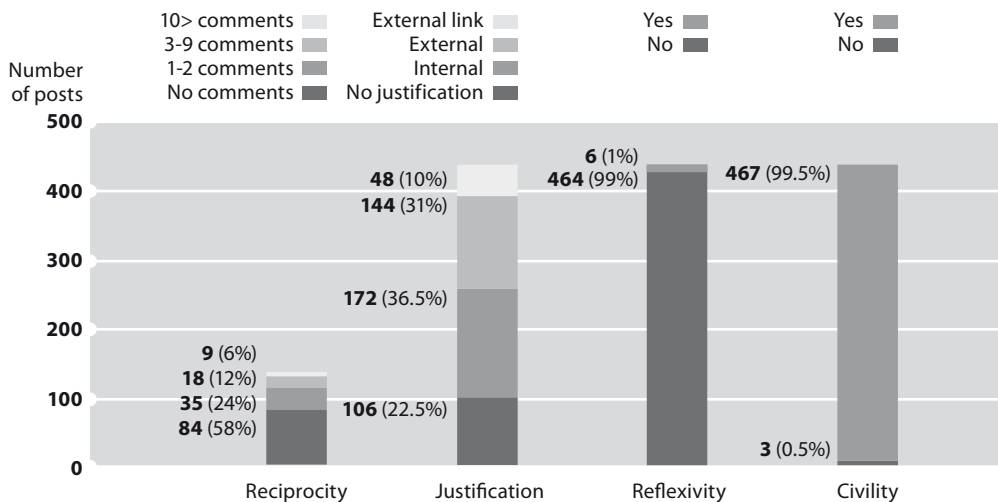
Regarding the first criterion on discourse equality, there were 144 participants, with four users contributing more than 20 posts, amounting to a total of 119 posts (25% of total entries), and another 4 users contributing from 10 to 20 posts (10% of entries). However,

⁵ Finally, the Universal Basic Income was not included in the electoral programme because it did not reach the last threshold, that is, votes from 10% of the registered members.

the rest of the posts were fairly distributed: 105 users added 1 or 2 posts (28.5% of the posts), and 29 users generated 3 to 9 posts (34%). The mean number of posts per user was 3.1, with a standard deviation of 5.4 posts, showing a highly skewed distribution.

Although this situation could be viewed as discourse concentration, the most active participants made more of their contributions to conversations with a greater number of threads, in which they expressed their opposition to the proposal and different points of view. These threads generated discussions with a high level of rational thinking and civic and constructive dialogues. In any case, the concentration was lower than in other political forums examined by other authors (Kies, 2010: 125; Zhou et al., 2008: 764-765).

Figure 1 shows the levels for the other four criteria (reciprocity, justification, reflexivity and civility).



▲ Figure 1. Basic Income proposal by deliberative criteria

With regard to reciprocity, of the 146 threads initiated, 35 (24%) of them generated 1 or 2 comments, 18 (12%) generated 3 to 9 comments, and 9 (6%) incited 10 or more comments. Therefore, 62 of them (42%) generated at least one comment and 84 (57.5%) did not produce any comments. These figures reflect a high reciprocity level, since the reciprocity is usually lower in online political forums (Kies, 2010: 157).

As for justification, of all the entries, 364 (77%) were justified with arguments. Most justifications – 172 (48%) – were internal (referring to personal experiences or opinions),

and the remaining 144 (39%) presented arguments based on calculations and references to specific points of the proposal document. Moreover, 48 of the entries (13%) had at least one link to external sources and articles. It is remarkable that 52% of the justifications were external and not as centred on personal experiences or anecdotes as is common in other political and non-political deliberations (Stromer-Galley, 2007: 15, 19).

Some of the participants demonstrated a broad knowledge of legal, economic and tax issues, creating a rich debate based on examples, figures and information resources. Although most of the interventions were in favour of the Universal Basic Income proposal, there were users who were against the proposal, justifying their opinion and offering different reasons.

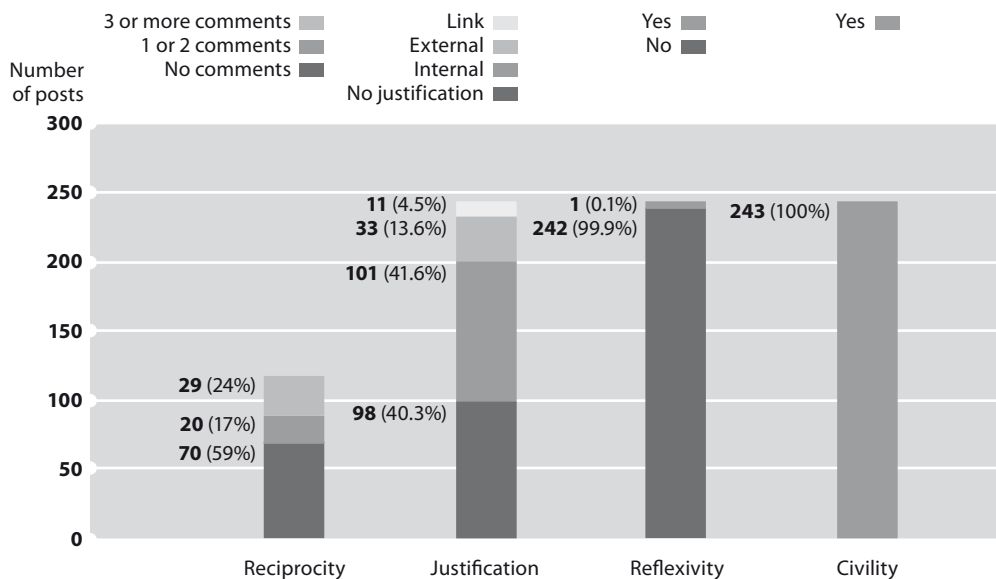
In relation to reflexivity, only six users expressed a change or modification of their opinion about the Basic Income based on the general conversation. Regarding civility, only three comments could be considered disrespectful.

The proposal to improve the registration system

The proposal to improve the registration system and enhance real participation in *Podemos* (Plaza Podemos, 2015b) was based on the assumption that "many people who are registered in *Podemos* do not want to participate anymore, or they registered but never voted, and that negatively affects the participation of the rest". To deal with this situation, the proposal's initiator suggested that the census should be divided between active and non-active profiles during the last four months, with only the first being used to calculate the high thresholds necessary to implement processes such as citizen initiatives, revocation processes, or the call for consultations by the circles.

The proposal generated a total of 243 posts in *Plaza Podemos*, divided into 119 initial threads and 124 comments, and received 814 votes. With regard to discourse equality, the concentration of the discourse was not large, but higher than in the Basic Income debate. One of the users contributed 49 entries (nine threads and 40 comments) to the debate, representing 20% of total entries. Most of these entries consisted of encouraging other users to vote in favour of the proposal or announcing the number of votes received. The second user with the most comments, 15 posts (6% of total), was the author of the proposal, which is logical since he answered some of the questions related to the topic posed by others users. The majority of users (86%) posted only one entry. The mean was 1.6 posts per user with a standard deviation of 3.4 posts, showing a skewed distribution due to the activity of these two key contributors. These figures also show less conversation than in the Basic Income debate.

Figure 2 on the next page shows the levels for the other criteria (reciprocity, justification, reflexivity and civility).



▲ Figure 2.
Proposal to improve the registration system by deliberative criteria

In regard to reciprocity, 20 threads (16.6%) generated one or two comments, 29 threads produced 3 or more comments (24.4%) and 70 (59%) did not lead to any comment. Therefore, the level of reciprocity is significant if we compare it to other online political forums (Kies, 2010: 157), although it was lower than in the case of the debate on the Basic Income.

The discussion had a high justification level. Of all the entries, 145 (60%) were performed justifiably. The justifications were mostly internal: 101 (41.6%) referred to personal experiences; among the remaining 44 posts, 33 (13.6%) referred to external facts; and 11 (4.5%) had a link to different external documents or articles. Some of the users who did not agree with the proposal, suggested other ways of improving participation, giving rise to a rich debate on the channels of participation and registration laid down by the party.

Regarding reflexivity, a user expressed a change of opinion about the proposal deciding to vote in favour of it. As for civility, the debate had no disrespectful comments.

Assessment of the degree of deliberation in the preparation of the municipal programme of *Barcelona En Comú*

Barcelona En Comú's online space for the preparation of the electoral programme was divided into four thematic blocs and two areas within each block⁶. The first area (the amendments area) allowed annotations to be made to the previously developed document. In the second area (new proposals), located at the bottom of the document, participants could make new proposals that could then be voted on and receive comments.

In line with the framework established previously, the results of the analyses of the deliberative capacity of this process are the following:

The institutional dimension involving the structural and technological conditions was examined first. The DemocracyOS platform satisfied the conditions considered, as it allows asynchronous participation by users and the immediate appearance of the users' comments and provides horizontal interaction by allowing users to comment on other users' threads and to comment or vote on their contributions. The process had moderators who facilitated the discussions by placing the proposals or improvements in the appropriate sections, grouping together similar proposals and eliminating the comments that were repeated or offensive. The documents on the platform included highly relevant information, as they consisted of all the proposals for the electoral programme. The activity was divided into four thematic blocks, with large issues being subdivided into smaller ones. User identification was done using the name and surname of the participants.

Regarding the third dimension to test the deliberative capacity of an online forum, the process and space examined had an important external impact, since the proposals and contributions made through the platform were included (after being voted on) in the party's electoral programme.

The online process involved a total of 181 people. However, participation was skewed in terms of gender, pointing to problems of inclusion and plurality: 120 of the participants were men (77%) and only 60 were women (33%)⁷. Nevertheless, these proportions are similar to other political online deliberative settings (Kies, 2010: 128; Klinger and Russman, 2015: 476). A total of 563 entries were generated, divided into 392 initial threads and 171 comments. Regarding discourse equality, the participation of users in the conversation was fairly distributed. Although three users contributed a total of 59 posts (10.5% of total entries), and 20 users generated from 6 to 14 comments (29.5%), the rest of the posts were highly distributed: 83 users (46% of total users) contributed 2 to 5 posts, amounting to almost 47% of the total entries, and 75 users raised only one comment (13% of the posts). The mean posting rate was 2.9 posts per person, with a standard deviation of 2.9 posts, a distribution which is not as skewed as in the case of *Plaza Podemos'* debate.

⁶ 1. Social emergency: <http://preprograma.barcelonaencomu.cat/law/54e4ca47b690493300a94308> (07.11.2016).

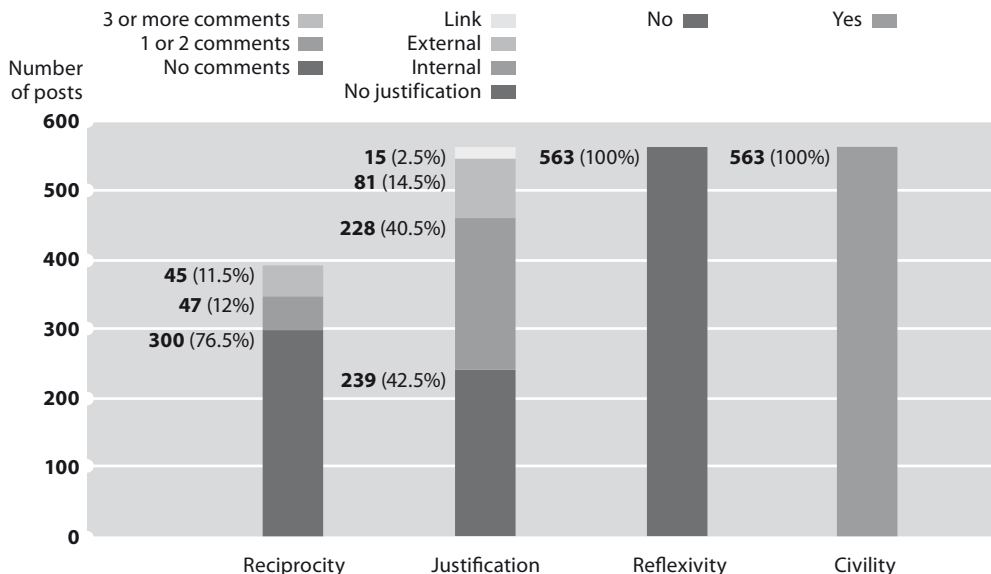
2. Structural changes: <http://preprograma.barcelonaencomu.cat/law/54e4d3b02d6bfa3500d369ab> (07.11.2016).

3. A more human Barcelona: <http://preprograma.barcelonaencomu.cat/law/54e4d5fdf455314b00718051> (07.11.2016).

4. Let's open up the institutions: <http://preprograma.barcelonaencomu.cat/law/54e4d8adb690493300a9431a> (07.11.2016).

⁷ The gender of one of the users could not be determined since he/she took part on behalf of a neighbourhood group.

Figure 3 shows the levels for the other criteria (reciprocity, justification, reflexivity and civility).



▲ Figure 3. Debate on the municipal programme of *Barcelona En Comú* by deliberative criteria

In regard to reciprocity, of the 392 threads initiated in total (both in the amendments area and the new proposals area), 47 (12%) of them generated one or two comments, though only 45 threads (11.5%) generated three or more comments. Thus, 300 threads (76.5%) did not yield any comments.

The part related to the amendment of documents generated a total of 50 threads and 73 comments. The comments were concentrated into certain specific topics that raised some doubts (i.e. the use of the feminine in the generic, the restriction of people's participation in the municipal budget to only 5% of the total budget, etc.), but none of the comments were in radical disagreement with party proposals. In the section reserved for new proposals, 342 new proposals were made, yielding 98 comments. Sixty-three proposals (18%) generated at least one comment, most of them aimed at the extension or detail of the proposal. Therefore, reciprocity was low. Most of the threads in both areas failed to generate any comment because they either amended or clarified the proposals presented by the party or were new proposals that the rest of participants did not discuss.

As for justification, within the area of new proposals, there were a total of 440 proposals and associated comments, but there were only 123 contributions in the amendment area. In total, 324 (57.5%) were supported with arguments, so the process could be considered as having a high justification level. Most of these justifications – 228 (40.5%) – were personal or internal opinions. There were also external justifications, referring to examples or cases concerning the city and its institutions – 81 (14.5%) – or with external links to documents or websites – 15 (2.5%) –. Of the 98 comments addressing the new proposals, 89 of them (91%) agreed with the proposals generated by users and were aimed at improving the proposals, indicating that the participants were more focused on contributing to the programme than on enriching the debate with different points of view.

With regard to civility, participants showed respect for the other participants, with a complete absence of incivility or insults. As for reflexivity, the number of comments opposed to the proposals made by the party or by other users was very limited and did not generate a change of opinion, indicating a low level of reflexivity. Only four of the entries stated opposing views, and participants failed to start a debate on them. Furthermore, only four proposals received negative votes, showing little disagreement.

DISCUSSION

The institutional design of both online spaces positively fulfils the majority of the structural and technical criteria for fostering deliberation. With relation to the criterion of inclusion, these two spaces perform very well at the technical level, since everyone can participate with only a full name or a nickname. Regarding the criteria of identification, on the *Barcelona En Comú* online space, citizens must identify themselves by name and surname, which is felt to ensure the quality of the deliberation and increased civility, while in the case of *Plaza Podemos*, only a nickname is needed to actively participate. The role of the moderators in the threads and proposals was not intrusive and they took part on very few occasions. Moderation, registration and identification were no barrier to promoting inclusive participation on these two spaces (Kies, 2010).

Nevertheless, with relation to registration, several problems were detected with *Podemos*: first, the easy online registration system has suffered several failures that have invalidated primaries, caused dismissals, and been misused on one occasion by right-wing intruders (Alvarez, 2015). Secondly, some active members (see the proposal to improve the registration system) and circles (the Basic Income Circle) have raised concerns about the weight that the huge census of registered members could have in the approval of bottom-up initiatives.

In terms of the external impact, it is theoretically high on both spaces, as the proposals with the most votes are supposed to be accepted by the party as part of the programme. A binding outcome is a significant incentive to participate and deliberate (Kies, 2010) and an important source of legitimacy for the decision-making process (Habermas, 1996). However, in the case of *Podemos*, until now none of the proposals have reached the

number of votes required to be considered for a binding referendum. Notwithstanding, there are signs of some effects of the deliberations examined here (Kies, 2010: 57): only the active registered members were allowed to participate in the elaboration of *Podemos'* 2016 electoral programme, and this programme included a measure for a minimum income for people with earnings below the poverty threshold.

With regard to the communicative dimension, the examination of the two most-voted proposals from *Plaza Podemos* shows a high level of discourse equality, reciprocity, justification and civility. Although there are repeated users that represent around 1/4 of the threads and comments, this is due to their being the initiators of the threads, and their corresponding explanations and answers to other users. Most of the conversations showed multiple sources of information based on different points of view. Possible solutions and alternatives were discussed. However, the level of reflexivity is low, as very few users expressed a change of opinion or position. Also, the content of many comments referred to the direction of their vote or to encourage other people to vote, but not so much to debate.

In the case of *Barcelona in Comú's* DemocracyOS platform, the majority of participants limited themselves to presenting proposals or corrections without questioning the other participants or stimulating debate among them. The process generated an "aggregative" and "competitive" activity, based on making proposals that were voted on, rather than questioning or improving them through deliberation. There is also an absence of disagreement or conflict, which often acts as a trigger for deliberation (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004). The entire situation produced a low level of reciprocity and reflexivity, although justification and civility were very high. Three institutional features could have undermined the disagreement degree and the level of deliberation of the online process: first, although the proposals were divided into blocks and sub-themes, the topics were too broad; second, the online discussion was open for only 12 days; and third, the main proposals for the municipal programme had already been discussed offline by thematic and neighbourhood groups. In the case of *Plaza Podemos*, the initiative was totally in the hands of the online participants.

In summary, the deliberative quality of the communication in both online forums can be considered good in terms of the generally high level of discourse equality, reciprocity, justification and civility. The discourse seems less concentrated (between two and four users concentrated around 1/4 of the comments in the case of *Plaza Podemos*, and only 10.5% in the case of *Barcelona En Comú*) than what is indicated by figures found in studies on the websites of newspapers (Zhou et al., 2008: 764-765). The level of reciprocity was high in the case of *Plaza Podemos*, but the online debate on *Barcelona En Comú's* electoral programme aroused less reciprocity, below the level of other online political forums, where around 40% of the threads received a comment (Kies, 2010: 157). Around 60% of the posts were justified with arguments, and politeness and civility were definitively higher than on newspaper websites (Zhou et al., 2008: 766; Strandberg and Berg, 2013: 143). Usually studies of online forums show that the majority of justifications disclosed are internal (Stromer-Galley, 2007). However, the majority of arguments in *Plaza Podemos'*

debate on the Universal Basic Income were external, based on figures, documents, links to videos, websites, etc.

Nevertheless, the criteria of reflexivity, inclusion and plurality (with regard to gender composition and ideological disagreement) were not sufficiently met. In any case, the lack of reflexivity and ideological plurality are typical problems for partisan forums or "enclave" deliberation which have not been specifically designed to avoid them (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004; Kies, 2010). The gender gap is similar to that found in other online political forums (Kies, 2010; Baek et al., 2012; Klinger and Russmann, 2015), where men usually represent two-thirds of participants.

In our opinion, the levels of reciprocity, reflexivity and the quality of the justification could have been undermined by a mixed-up design where the online processes are at once deliberative and participatory spaces. Proposals were being discussed and voted on at the same time. This "procedural duality" seems to have caused user contributions to lean towards the competitive voting side. For example, in the case of *Plaza Podemos*, a high number of participants made contributions only to communicate that they had voted in favour of the proposal or to encourage others to vote for it without providing any justification or adding content. In the case of *Barcelona En Comú*, posts did not reflect such fierce competition for votes, but the proposals and amendments were not discussed extensively. It possibly would have been better to separate the processes step by step following a sequential path, just as James Fishkin (2011) and Jon Elster (2013) have defended in their proposed participation in and deliberation of constitutional reforms and public policies (Balcells and Padró-Solanet, 2015). Furthermore, Fishkin (2011:248) argues that ensuring simultaneously equality, participation and deliberation at a mass level is difficult. Both online platforms did not achieve important aspects of equality, such as having similar proportions of men and women taking part, or a plurality of opinions and ideologies. Although the debates analysed from *Plaza Podemos* showed a broad diversity of opinions and opposing views, in the case of the elaboration of the *Barcelona En Comú* electoral programme, diversity of opinion was scarce.

All these problems point to the tension between openness and restriction that is typical in a new party coming from a popular movement that also faces a tight electoral schedule (Goldstone, 2003). *Barcelona En Comú* has promoted quick participatory processes without the required tranquillity and time for deliberation. *Podemos* has an easy, but not necessarily very safe online registration system that has resulted in a partially flawed census and a large numbers of inactive members.

CONCLUSION

The examination of the three dimensions of an online deliberative setting (institutional, communicative, outcome) has proven useful in assessing the deliberative quality of the debates taking place on the two parties' online platforms. Therefore, this comprehensive perspective could be applied to other cases and replicated in other online forums (Freiss and Eilders, 2014).

The online deliberative processes taking place in *Podemos* and *Barcelona En Comú* show that if there is political will, it is technically possible to set up online party spaces that are open and self-managed by citizens on a large scale. In addition, when compared with other political deliberative settings, the deliberative quality of the communication in both online forums can be considered high or average in terms of discourse equality, reciprocity, justification and civility (Stromer-Galley, 2007; Zhou et al., 2008; Kies, 2010; Strandberg and Berg, 2013).

However, the criteria of reflexivity, inclusion and plurality (with regard to gender composition and ideological disagreement) were not satisfactorily met. Opinion shifts (reflexivity) and ideological pluralism seem to be difficult to achieve in a party forum, which is much more homogeneous than other forums such as newspaper websites or debates on local policies (Kies, 2010; Gutmann and Thompson, 2004). Also, a lack of gender equality seems to affect most online political forums around the world (Baek et al., 2012; Klinger and Russmann, 2015). Moreover, we detected certain pitfalls in the institutional design of the debates that could undermine the deliberative capacity of the processes: the fact that deliberation and voting take place at the same time; the limitation of the impact on party decision-making due to voting thresholds; or the short amount of time assigned to discussion given the electoral deadlines.

Both parties acknowledge in their internal documents that the deliberative processes deployed imply high experimentation and learning by doing, and that they could be subjected to future changes and adjustments.

Echoing Jane Mansbridge, the deliberative model of democracy is a "regulative" ideal, which "is unachievable in its full state but to which a practice should be judged as approaching more or less closely" (Steiner, 2012: 3).

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OD PROTESTA DO POLITIČKIH STRANKA: ONLINE DELIBERACIJA U NOVONASTALIM STRANKAMA U ŠPANJOLSKOJ

Rosa Borge Bravo :: Eduardo Santamarina Sáez

SAŽETAK *Nove stranke, koje su se pojavile nakon pokreta 15-M te kao odgovor na mjere štednje u Španjolskoj, žele se razvijati kao stranke otvorene za sudjelovanje i deliberaciju svih građana. U kojoj se mjeri ostvaruju ti ideali? Cilj je ovog članka opisati i vrednovati procese online deliberacije dviju najvažnijih stranaka u Španjolskoj, Podemos i Barcelona En Comú, na temelju uobičajenih kriterija u literaturi kojima se mjeri online deliberacija. Konkretno, analizirali smo dva prijedloga o kojima se najviše glasovalo na online platformi Plaza Podemos te online razvoj izbornog programa stranke Barcelona En Comú. Provedena je analiza sadržaja 713 objava s online platforme Plaza Podemos i 563 objave koje se tiču izbornog programa stranke Barcelona En Comú. Obje platforme posjeduju strukturne i tehničke kriterije za poticanje deliberacije, ali je vanjski utjecaj vidljiv samo u slučaju stranke Barcelona En Comú. Kvaliteta deliberativne komunikacije je dobra, ali kriteriji refleksivnosti, inkluzije i pluralnosti nisu zadovoljeni.*

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

ONLINE DELIBERACIJA, DELIBERATIVNI KRITERIJI, 15-M, PODEMOS, BARCELONA EN COMÚ, ŠPANJOLSKA

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SOCIAL MEDIA

AND POLITICAL

DISCOURSE

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I POLITIČKI

DISKURS

TWEETING ON CATALONIA'S INDEPENDENCE: THE DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL DISCUSSION AND GROUP POLARISATION

Joan Balcells :: Albert Padró-Solanet

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ABSTRACT *This article provides evidence in favour of social media serving as facilitators of public deliberation, in contrast with the hypothesis that emphasises the dominance of the “echo chamber” effect. It focuses on conversational interactions on Twitter between supporters from opposite sides in a potentially highly polarised political issue, i.e. the debate on the independence of Catalonia, which is used as a case study. Methodologically we rely on a random sample of communications on the Twitter reply network, involving for and against independence supporters. Remarkably, despite the tendency of forming homophilic networks, we find that communication across political lines is relatively frequent. Furthermore, heterogeneous conversations (where opposing sides are engaged in a dialogue) tend to be significantly longer than homogenous ones (where all participants share the same view), which can be seen as a sign of genuine deliberation based on reasonably exchanging arguments between competing viewpoints.*

KEY WORDS

SOCIAL MEDIA, TWITTER, PUBLIC OPINION, DELIBERATION, POLARISATION

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INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, the processes of secession from a state tend to be highly polarising as they imply redefining the social contract that bounds citizens together in a political community. Referenda on secession, like those in Scotland and Quebec, have been accompanied by intense debates and have attracted massive levels of political involvement and participation. However, the case of Catalonia is quite peculiar, as the debate has not formally taken place as of yet. The conflict has not been channelled officially through a political discussion on the pros and cons of independence in the setting of a referendum campaign, nor has it lead to a process of political negotiation, but instead finds itself in a cul-de-sac. The debate is actually taking place among citizens and has found in social media a space for confronting arguments and ideas.

This case provides a singular scenario in which to understand the dynamics of deliberation on social media (and specifically on Twitter) between two opinion communities who are highly attentive and mobilised over an issue. We assume that participants in this debate will tend to form homogenous groups according to their political preferences. Assuming "homophily" – i.e. the propensity to group oneself together with similar people (Lazarsfeld et al., 1954; McPherson et al., 2001; DiPrete et al., 2011) – and taking into account the level of political polarisation implied by the issue under study, we expect individuals to cluster around two opposing poles, forming two segregated and clearly differentiated opinion communities. Taking this premise into account, we measure and describe both the level of interaction and the kind of communication – particularly, in terms of deliberative engagement – that take place on Twitter between these two poles.

Our research question is twofold. (1) How frequent is communication across political lines? The confrontation of opposing viewpoints is a necessary condition for public deliberation to occur, a principle encapsulated in the Latin phrase *audi alteram partem*. Without the interaction with the "other side", deliberation lacks one of its essential features, i.e. the possibility to test one's own arguments by exposing them to competing lines of reasoning and rationales (Fishkin, 1991; Mutz, 2006). However, communication across political lines of difference does not guarantee *per se* the potential benefits of public deliberation. This point leads to our second research question: (2) How is cross communication between poles characterised, and what is the dialogical quality of these communications? This question introduces a crucial nuance. Discussion between opposing sides of the debate can lead towards different results depending on how the other side is approached. It can lead towards more tense and irreconcilable positions (especially if based on insults, threats, etc.); but it can also lead towards recognition of the other side as a valid interlocutor, someone with whom it is possible to reasonably dialogue and exchange arguments in spite of disagreement. Public deliberation is expected to flourish only if this second kind of communication prevails.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Deliberation has become the “Holy Grail” of recent political science. From a theoretical point of view, it is expected that a discursive or deliberative public sphere will work as a kind of Hegelian *tertium datur* that can reconcile equality with liberty, unity with diversity, or the right of the majority with the right of the minority – i.e. all the contradictions that confront liberalism and radical democracy (Habermas, 1985). Normatively, ideal deliberation must be free – in a procedure that guarantees that each part is treated equally, formally and substantively – and reasoned, requiring the parties to state their reasons for advancing proposals and supporting or criticising them.

Following this logic, one line of research has operationalised the normative conditions of deliberation in order to develop indices of discourse quality (Steenbergen et al., 2003). Ideal and actual practices of deliberation can be thought as points in a continuum (Mansbridge, 1999; Dryzek, 2000). Despite lacking some logical and procedural requirements of the ideal Habermasian model, everyday deliberation that emerges in the real-world forms of communication might be able to achieve certain standards of quality, such as preference structuring and intersubjective rationality, that can be measured and analysed (Bächtiger et al., 2010).

The analysis of deliberation in digital environments has become a fertile and prolific field of research both theoretically and empirically. The new digital environment represents a step further in the empirical analysis of public deliberation, passing from a scarcity to an abundance of data. The Internet has not only widened the repertoire of communication tools in the hands of citizens but has also made interactions and information flows more available and transparent for researchers who study the dynamics of deliberation and public opinion. This has given rise to a plethora of studies that try to assess the quality of online deliberation as compared with face-to-face communication, taking into account the specificities of information and communication technologies (e.g. Stromer-Galley et al., 2015).

In contrast with deliberative spaces in controlled environments such as forums with moderation and personal identification requirements (Wright et al., 2007; Graham, 2008; e.g. Ruiz et al., 2011), social media like Twitter provide a more immediate and spontaneous way to communicate with other people. The emergence of debate in Twitter is driven by a market mechanism with no central direction or control, similar to what happens with informal talk between citizens, but with the possibility of potentially reaching unlimited audiences. These conditions make Twitter an interesting case to test how individuals freely engage in online conversation over a specific issue, whether deliberation tends to be encapsulated in “echo chambers” of like-minded individuals in homogenous groups or whether there is actual discussion across lines of political difference in heterogeneous groups as would be expected in a public-sphere-like environment.

Social media and public deliberation

It is a matter of discussion whether social media communication increases the so-called “echo chamber” effect or whether it makes contact with dissimilar views more likely to occur. This research question has been a *leitmotif* in the literature on the political effects of the Internet on public opinion since the early development of the Internet as a communication tool (e.g. Dertouzos, 1991; Rheingold, 1993; Ess, 1996), although, with the widespread prevalence and success of social media and Web 2.0, it has certainly taken on a new dimension.

Social media can contribute to the formation of more balanced and judicious public opinion depending on whether they resemble an echo chamber or whether there is the experience and expectation of being challenged by rival opinions. Admittedly, actual or potential exposure to counterargument forces individuals to revise their own ideas, to consider the position of the other person, and to sharpen their arguments in order to build more persuasive and convincing claims (Holbert et al., 2010).

Our analysis regards the length of conversations as an indicator of deliberative engagement (cf. Gonzalez-Bailon et al., 2010), which captures the involvement of participants in a reciprocal exchange of arguments. Deliberative quality has been measured by a range of parameters derived from normative theories of deliberative democracy (Steenbergen et al., 2003; Stromer-Galley, 2007). Deliberative engagement points to the dimension of “reciprocity” (Graham et al., 2006) and provides a clear and robust measure to summarise the give-and-take of conversations between individuals. A lengthy conversation is a sign of genuine deliberation since it implicitly entails the recognition of the other as someone with whom it is worth spending time discussing an issue. A short conversation may indicate a lack of involvement with what is being said by other interlocutors. This may happen because of several reasons, e.g. the nonexistence of disagreement – which makes further elaboration of arguments unnecessary; or the abrupt interruption of the conversation due to an insult or a provocative statement.

The analysis of Twitter

Twitter’s microblogging service has become an open and massive public marketplace to exchange opinions and views, with a series of distinctive particularities. Some of them tend to exacerbate exposure to likeminded information (e.g. the suggestions to follow users according to one’s following profile), while others tend to facilitate contact with heterogeneous and opposing viewpoints (e.g. the hashtag, retweet and mention functions can help to easily circulate tweets across different networks).

Several studies have provided evidence of Twitter’s twofold nature. In their analysis on the US left-right divide on Twitter, Michael Conover et al. (2011) find a clear difference between the retweet and the mention networks. Whereas the retweet network is highly polarised, with users clearly divided along partisan lines, the mention network appears to be more porous, with intense cross-interactions between the two poles. Other studies confirm that retweet interactions tend to be concentrated predominantly among

users with similar ideological positions, transforming Twitter into an “echo-chamber environment” (Barberá, 2015). Sarita Yardi and Danah Boyd’s (2010) analysis of the pro-choice vs. pro-life debate showed that, despite a general tendency towards homophily, conversations between opposing views are far from being rare on Twitter. The level of homophily also seems to differ between the network of reciprocated followers and the non-reciprocated one, with the former being more homophilic than the latter (Colleoni et al., 2014).

Our research targets “reply interactions”, which are the basis of Twitter conversations, instead of simply tweets or retweets. Reply interactions are the most similar to a dialogue on Twitter, as they are actually a response to a tweet posted by another user. Sending a reply presupposes that the user feels compelled to respond to a post by providing his or her point of view. By doing so, we are focusing the attention on a potential resource at the hands of users to potentially approach and interact with individuals with dissimilar ideas and points of view.

Conversations on Twitter imply the participation of two or more users who engage in a dialogical activity. Because they are public, these conversations’ audience is potentially much wider than the individuals involved. The limit of 140 characters certainly conditions the structure of conversations and fixes certain rules in interactions. Twitter favours short sentences at the expense of paused, long, well-developed arguments (although links to blog posts or webpages can be added to provide additional information). Although these constraints can jeopardise the qualities expected in an ideal deliberative environment, Twitter has certain features that promote and potentiate dialogue. Anyone can respond to someone else’s tweet regardless of her position, status or reputation and initiate a conversation. The costs of participating are relatively low, as writing a tweet is less demanding than developing elaborated and complex speeches or even writing a post or a comment on a blog. The space limitation also makes the exchange of opinions very agile and dynamic, forcing users to be concise and focused.

We distinguish two forms of communication (inter-group and intra-group), depending on whether they involve dialoguing with users with similar or dissimilar opinions. These two forms of communication can be associated with different functions. Intra-group communication is important to keep group cohesion and morale, share a sense of participating in a common endeavour, manage and solve internal disagreements and doubts, and reinforce their own position with new arguments and ideas, or with the re-elaboration of the old ones. Inter-group communications are instead oriented at responding to opposing views and have a stronger component of rivalry and competition. They can be a genuine effort to cross ideological and political lines to try to face the other side (by persuading, convincing, counter-arguing, attacking, defending, etc.), but some users can cross the lines simply to find easily beaten arguments or examples of what can be interpreted on one’s own side as proof of the evilness or stupidity of the other side.

Excessive intra-group communication is usually associated with the “echo chamber” effect, as there is the exclusion of “the other side” (among others, Adamic et al., 2005;

Yardi et al., 2010; Garrett et al., 2014). Either the exclusion of conflicting opinions or the social pressures inside the group can radicalise positions and lead towards higher levels of opinion polarisation (Sunstein, 2002). Nevertheless, polarisation can also be induced by inter-group interactions, depending on the terms of the communication between individuals on opposite sides of the debate. Admittedly, the tactic of the “gladiators” of both sides that search for repulsive examples of the enemy’s arguments or behaviour can promote the polarisation of groups. This effect can also be cancelled paradoxically, when the gladiators share the rival arguments within one’s group, they are also facilitating access to the complete arguments of the other side – because the architecture of social media makes it very easy to cross lines – and, therefore, they are facilitating exposure to counter-attitudinal information, even between the less-committed members of the group, which potentially can reduce polarisation.

The debate on the independence of Catalonia

The increasing discontent towards the Spanish political establishment, aggravated because of its inability to accommodate demands for self-government, has fuelled the desire for independence in Catalonia (Guibernau, 2013). Public opinion polls show that, in a relatively short period of time, citizens’ political preferences in Catalonia have radically shifted towards more polarised positions between supporters of the status quo and supporters of a new independent state¹. Part of this shift is physically visible in the streets of many Catalan towns and cities, where the number of pro-independence *estelada* flags has increased palpably as a sign of protest.

In contrast with the Scottish case, where political parties have played a major role, the debate on the independence of Catalonia has entered the political agenda because of persistent grassroots pressure and mobilisation, which started with a wave of unofficial consultations on independence at the local level (see Muñoz et al., 2013). The main Catalan political parties were uncomfortable and reluctant to address this issue directly, and did not lead the demands for an independent Catalan state until later on. The issue has become so pervasive in Catalan society that the main social and political actors have been forced to take sides on the debate. This situation has completely redefined the political landscape (e.g. Rico et al., 2014; Orriols et al., 2016), with the emergence of new political forces, the reinforcement of political parties focused on this cleavage and the split of mainstream political parties, which have so far sustained an ambiguous position, into pro- and anti-independence factions.

The organisation and mobilisation capacity of the pro-independence political movement has relied strongly on a combination of local support and network coordination through the Internet as a means of empowering collective action (such as campaigning, sourcing for financial support, organising demonstrations, etc.). It has had the capacity to mobilise a large number of individuals – the human chain across Catalonia was one of its more powerful icons. Though initially less organised, detractors of independence have

¹ According to survey data from the *Centre d’Estudis d’Opinió* (2006, 2016) support for independence has grown from 15% (July 2006) to 42% (July 2016), being the most preferred alternative in a four-option question including the options of becoming an ‘independent state’, becoming a ‘state in a federal Spain’, preserving the status of ‘autonomous community’ and being a ‘region’. See surveys REO 358 and REO 826.

also gathered support to campaign against secession, especially through the Internet, where they are increasingly active. However, they have had more difficulty in organising massive support. Unionists understand the situation as a clear manipulation of the real preferences of a substantial part of the Catalan population and claim to represent the "silent majority" of Catalans.

The debate is presently polarised around two political organisations: the Catalan National Assembly (ANC – *Assemblea Nacional de Catalunya*), in favour of a Catalan independent state, and the Catalan Civil Society (SCC – *Societat Civil Catalana*), which is against. Both of them have become nodal actors in their respective networks and actually work as a hub of communication among supporters and detractors of a new Catalan state.

DATA AND METHODS

Samples

Our dataset consists of a random selection of replies to someone else's tweet, sent by users who are following the ANC Twitter account (@assemblea), the SCC account (@Societatcc) or both. The decision to follow either account has been regarded as an indicator of being interested in this political issue.

The dataset was constructed on a two-step process of sampling. First, we randomly selected a group of followers of ANC (N=2,000) and a group of followers of SCC (N=2,000), according to parameters of Twitter activity². For a period of 15 days (between 21/04/2015 and 04/05/2015), we captured, via streaming, all tweets sent by these users. Second, we randomly selected a number of these tweets that happen to be replies. We sampled 1,500 replies, 750 from each group, to work with manageable data and to have more control over the content analysis.

Most analyses on Twitter are based on identifying the main hashtags (#) of a particular debate as a means of gathering a collection of tweets (Small, 2011; Rambukkana, 2015). In our case of study, there are no hashtags shared by defenders of both sides (like the Scottish #indyref), and, furthermore, the use of hashtags tends to be rather fragmented and circumstantial.

Alternatively, our analysis takes advantage of the fact that the two major accounts behave as hubs for each side of the debate. The first account belongs to the ANC, the association built with the specific purpose of mobilising support for independence. This account is older than the account of the SCC, created explicitly to bring together and coordinate the individuals and organisations that oppose independence and counter the pro-independence mobilisation. This age difference is explained by the reactive function

² We selected accounts according to the frequency of updated status per day, excluding excessively productive accounts (i.e. those that belong to the first percentile) in order to eliminate outliers. In the case of ANC, 75% of the accounts were selected from among users that belong to the first quartile in the indicator of updated status per day, and the other 25% from the rest. As for the sample of SCC followers, 75% of the accounts were selected from among users that belong to the first two quartiles and the other 25% from the rest.

of SCC, but it is also explained by the classical strategy of ignoring the other side in order to minimise the debate. The creation of this account was promoted by unionist leaders who – unconvinced that the strategy of ignoring the debate was adequate – claimed to speak up to defend Catalonia as an integral part of Spain. The wide gap in the number of followers of each account reflects in part the age difference as well as the difference in popular support³.

To start with these two accounts has allowed us to extract a random sample of followers less likely to be biased than filtering by hashtags. We have designed a stratified random selection of followers from the two main accounts that structure the debate, extracting the same number of users from each opinion community, to keep the balance between both sides and ensure the robustness of the results.

Measuring the position in the debate

From each tweet-reply we have collected information at three different levels, i.e. (i) the replier who sends the tweet, (ii) the interactions between the replier and the addressee/s of the tweet, and the (iii) conversation in which the tweet is inserted.

The content of each reply has been manually coded to determine whether users were actually talking about the issue of independence. Tweets that were issue-related have been examined, in the context of the conversations they belonged to, and coded according to parameters such as the length and the dominant topic of discussion. To guarantee the reliability of the coding process, several tests have been undertaken with the collaboration of external coders⁴. Both repliers and addressees have been manually classified as pro-independence, pro-union or neutral/undefined, based on information available in the profile description and Twitter timeline. By clarifying the position of the nodes and excluding neutral and non-identified users, we have been able to distinguish homogenous interactions from heterogeneous ones as well as differentiate between homogenous and heterogeneous conversations.

Interactions are the connections between two nodes (i.e. the replier and the addressee of the reply). Homogenous or intra-group interactions involve users who share the same position in the debate, while heterogeneous or inter-group interactions involve the contact between two users with opposing views. Interactions form part of more complex communicative structures, i.e. conversations, which potentially involve a continuous exchange of arguments, opinions and ideas. Conversations can be very short (e.g. containing only one reply), but they can also encompass complex dialogues involving several users and a relatively high number of interactions and references (links, photos, maps, etc.) and so on. We define heterogeneous conversations as those containing at

³ The ANC account, created in 2011, has ten times more followers (138k against 13.9k) than the SCC one, created in 2014. Information checked on 02.09.2015.

⁴ Tests consisted of comparing the level of agreement between coders (n=3), using Krippendorff's alpha (Hayes et al., 2007), for a random sample of tweets (whether they are issue-related or not), users (by differentiating between pro and against supporters) and conversations (by identifying the dominant topic of discussion). The results show an acceptable level of agreement in specifying tweets ($\alpha=0.95$) as well as the users' position in the debate ($\alpha=0.94$), while the identification of the dominant topic has achieved less consensus ($\alpha=0.74$), due to the unavoidable degree of complexity and subjectivity involved in the process of coding groups of tweets.

least one user with an opposing point of view, while homogenous conversations involve only individuals who share the same position.

Additionally, we have also gathered information on the accounts followed by the users in our sample. On Twitter, users decide to follow whom they want to hear from. That is a powerful filter that provides information on the user's interests and preferences (Bode, 2016). This structure determines which tweets are displayed on the user's timeline and, therefore, the primary informative content s/he is exposed to. Users tend to follow other users who are following them – a norm of reciprocity is part of the netiquette rules on Twitter; especially if there is some affinity. This reinforces the appearance of homophily (Lazarsfeld et al., 1954; Huberman et al., 2008).

We have generated an indicator to locate the following behaviour of each user along a continuum. Extreme values in this indicator show a stronger affinity with one of the two sides. This measure can be understood as a proxy for the degree of homophily of the user's following behaviour.

To build this indicator, we have taken into consideration the most popular Twitter accounts among followers of ANC and SCC, listing the 100 most-followed accounts for each group. The algorithm clearly discriminates the most influential accounts since the level of overlapping is rather low, showing that both publics have different referents. The seminal accounts of each group are relevant key actors in the Catalan/Spanish public sphere, such as journalists, the media, politicians, political activists, political institutions, political parties, sportsmen, etc. By counting which of these seminal accounts were followed by each of the users in our samples, we have generated a matrix and summarised the information in an indicator that synthesises one's following behaviour, i.e. whether one is more inclined towards one pole or the other, or a mixture of both. This indicator has been built applying MDS (multidimensional scaling), where following an account indicates proximity to this account. The individual value of each account in the bi-dimensional solution gives its relative distances to the seminal accounts in a common space. This strategy methodologically differs from the Bayesian estimation proposed by Pablo Barberá (2015), but is similar in spirit. The main difference is related to the fact that we do not take into account the total number of accounts following each user to weight the relative importance of the seminal accounts followed.

Description of the data

Overall, our sample (N=1,500 replies) contains 2,762 interactions, sent by 526 repliers. Each interaction involves a tweet written by a replier and addressed to a poster. There can be other addressees together with the original poster, since the reply can also target additional users, which explains why the number of addressees is higher than the number of repliers. After dividing repliers into pro-independence and pro-union supporters, issue-related interactions can be aggregated into 259 different conversations.

Table 1. Number of interactions, repliers, addressees and conversations in the sample

	Total	Issue related
Interactions	2,762	724 (26%)
Repliers	526	144 (27%)
Addressees	1,954	448 (23%)
Conversations	-	259

Approximately 1/4 of the users and interactions in our sample are related to the debate on independence. Although some users are specialised and focused on a single issue (especially if they are militantly committed), Twitter users tend to manifest a plurality of different interests. They can talk about a wide range of topics, and it is very usual to change from one to another. That is the reason why, despite selecting users interested in the debate, we have captured many tweets and interactions not actually connected with the issue under consideration, which have been excluded from the analysis.

ANALYSIS

Characterising the two sides of the debate

Regardless of the side of the debate they favour, users who reply on the issue of independence are rather active ones. They frequently post information on Twitter (an average of 10 posts per day), and a relatively high proportion of them (22%) link their account to a blog or webpage. These users, for whom Twitter involvement is a way to channel their political activism, are likely to be 'influentials', better informed and more interested and aware of politics than the average citizen (the classical formulation of the hypothesis of the influentials can be found in Katz et al., 1955; updated in Keller et al., 2003; although Watts, 2007).

Differences between both opinion communities can be grouped into three main areas, i.e. the following behaviour, the location and language of communication, and the intensity of Twitter activity on this issue.

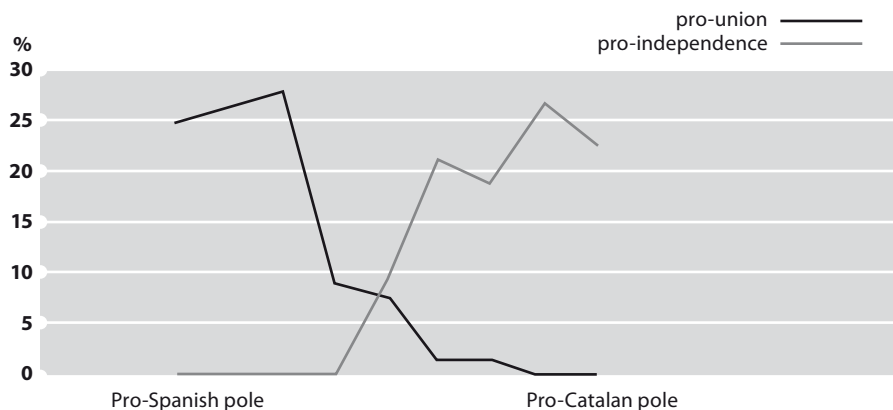
First, individuals who share similar political views on the issue tend to exhibit a similar pattern of preferences in their following behaviour compared to individuals on the opposite side of the debate (see Figure 1). The area of intersection between both communities is rather small, whereas the extremes are more populated. This evidence supports the hypothesis of a "natural" tendency towards homophily in social networks, i.e. a major propensity to follow accounts and form networks that are more consistent with one's own position. The user's following behaviour thereby becomes a good predictor of the position in the debate, as both variables are highly correlated.

Second, pro-independence repliers are mostly located in Catalonia and tend to use Catalan as the language of communication (69%). Even though pro-union repliers are

mostly located in Catalonia, a considerable proportion of them are also located in other parts of Spain. The language used by pro-union repliers in their communications is mainly Spanish (67%). As survey studies have repeatedly shown, although the recent support for independence in Catalonia is not related perfectly with having Catalan as a mother tongue and there is even remarkable support among respondents with a Spanish and Catalan dual identification (e.g. Serrano, 2013), it is also clear that there is a relation between the language spoken, national identity and the degree of support for independence.

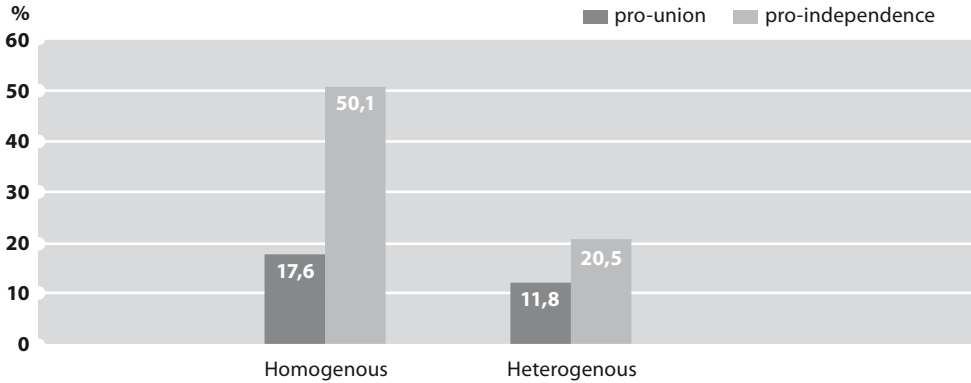
Third, although pro-independence users only represent 54% of the total amount of issue-related repliers, they produce 2/3 of the interactions, while pro-union repliers produce only 1/3 (see Figure 2). Intra-group dialogue is relatively more frequent on the pro-independence side, whereas inter-group dialogue becomes relatively more important on the pro-union side. This asymmetry is hardly surprising, as the pro-independence side is the “active” one and has the burden of proving that the status quo has to be changed and that it is possible to do it. Meanwhile the pro-union side is the “reactive” one, and has only to disqualify the arguments of the other side, showing the risks independence incurs – arguably, on this side, there is a less acute need to prove the general desirability of the world as it is.

Pro-independence mobilisation has been more numerous and crowded, sharing the characteristics of social movements which explains the more intense level of interactions. There is also much internal debate, as the pro-independence side is a coalition of diverse ideological positions ranging from the alternative left to the conservative right. Much energy is spent on reinforcing a network of mobilised supporters and trying to expand it by crossing lines.



▲ Figure 1.
 Distribution of the users of both opinion communities according to their following behaviour (more pro-Spanish following behaviour on the left and more pro-Catalan following behaviour on the right)
 N=144 repliers

In contrast, defenders of the status quo have less incentive to be active in the debate. This disinterest is in part the result of the unionist strategy focused on minimising the issue, and discrediting its value by considering it an illegal cause. Pro-union supporters tend to talk between themselves about other political issues, not the secession of Catalonia. Comparatively, they are more focused on replying to pro-independence users than internally discussing the issue (see Figure 2).



▲ Figure 2.
Percentage of homogenous and heterogenous interactions by opinion community

Cross-communication between opinion communities

If, in terms of following behaviour, both opinion communities clearly differ from each other, forming two separate and polarising poles, there is much cross-talking between these two blocks. In fact, 40% of conversations contain heterogeneous interactions, which indicates a certain willingness to cross political lines and discuss with individuals holding opposing viewpoints.

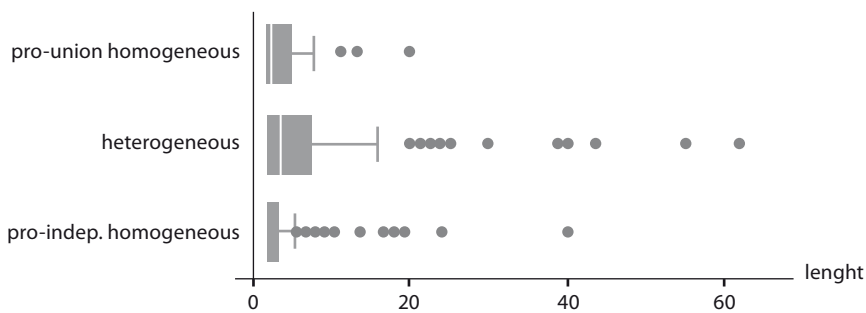
Some evidence points to the existence of a genuine deliberative effort to debate with the other side. In heterogeneous interactions, there is an effort to adapt oneself to the linguistic behaviour of the other. In terms of language, intra-group interactions are mostly written in the dominant language of each opinion community: 75% in Catalan on the pro-independence side, and 75% in Spanish on the pro-union side. Significantly, these percentages are lower in heterogeneous interactions, decreasing to 64% and 56% respectively. Even more interestingly, conversations between opposing views tend to be longer compared to homogenous ones, which can be regarded as a symptom of deliberative engagement.

Heterogeneous conversations tend to be more controversial, tense and confrontational than homogenous ones. This can be confirmed observationally by the thematic orientation of tweets (more focused on controversial and divisive issues) and the tone of the conversation (more pugnacious). However, this more confrontational environment

also coexists with the development and the exchange of rational arguments. This finding is consistent with a more positive assessment of new social media, which in fact enable the emergence of a more complex political life. Remarkably, heterogeneous conversations tend to be significantly longer than homogenous ones (see Figure 3). Heterogeneous conversations are expected to be longer especially if they are based on the exchange of arguments, since confronting, balancing and discussing the premises of the debate requires a more intensive and demanding dialogical activity. Discussions in homogenous debates, in which participants agree and sympathise with the ideas, are instead more likely to be less extensive.

Thematic interests and priorities vary depending on the nature of the conversation (see Table 2). Heterogeneous conversations focus on confrontational and divisive issues such as identity and ethno-linguistics. The debates on the definition of “nation” in terms of who has the right to decide what and the use of the language are present. These debates are mainly focused on drawing the lines between “us” and “them”.

On the pro-union side, language is used as the defining boundary between the two communities dividing Catalan society into two parts (between Catalan-speakers and Castilian-speakers) and accusing the pro-independence side of language discrimination. This typical wedge issue (Hillygus et al., 2014) tries to divide the Spanish-origin community between their cultural loyalty and their loyalty to their host community. Pro-independence homogeneous conversations are more focused on the dimension of politics in a broader sense (political mobilisation, political actors, etc.), with the aim of reinforcing and mobilising as widespread support as possible for a social coalition. This strategic necessity of maximal inclusivity explains the dominance on the pro-independence side of a civic-like nationalism that minimises ethnic nationalism. On both sides there is special interest in the media. Both sides are very critical with the media aligned with the opposite side, with frequent accusations of partisanship and manipulation by the political institutions. This issue is comparatively more prominent in pro-union homogenous conversations, where the debate on independence is usually attributed to the mass manipulation of political preferences carried out through the media and the school system.



▲ Figure 3.

Length of conversations by groups of conversations⁵

⁵ The difference in means between the length of heterogeneous and homogeneous conversations is significant at the 95% confidence level in a comparison of means tests (t-test).

Table 2. Length (mean number of tweets) and dominant topic of discussion by groups of conversations

	Pro-union homogeneous (20%)	Heterogeneous (40%)	Pro-independence homogeneous (40%)	Total
Length (<i>mean</i>)	4.4	8.5	4.5	6.1
Topic (%)				
<i>Ethnolinguistic</i>	31.4	37.5	20.2	29.3
<i>Politics</i>	45.1	40.4	61.5	49.8
<i>Media/manipulation</i>	23.5	14.4	16.3	17.0
<i>Other</i>	-	7.7	2.0	5.6

CONCLUSIONS

Despite being clustered around two distinct poles, Twitter users on opposite sides of the debate on the independence of Catalonia frequently interact with each other and cross lines to exchange arguments and opinions. Although these interactions tend to be more pugnacious and confrontational than interactions among individuals with similar ideas, they do not exclude a genuine exchange of argument. Heterogeneous conversations tend to be longer than homogeneous ones, partly because these dialogues require further involvement and more intense dialogical activity in order to discuss the premises of the debate and participate in a dynamics of arguments and counterarguments.

With the data at hand, we cannot measure the impact of these communications on the user's behaviour (for instance, in terms of ideological or political polarisation). That would require a longitudinal analysis of the behaviour of the users or an experimental setting to be tested. However, it is possible to speculate that a more rational exchange of arguments is likely to have certain de-polarising effects, at least in the sense of recognising the "other side", not as an enemy, but as a valid interlocutor with whom it is possible to exchange views in a reasonable way. Some of the long conversations we have analysed point in this direction, as some users, in spite of seriously disagreeing, end by congratulating each other on the discussion.

Even in a potentially polarised issue such as secession, these results point to the possibility of social media as a locus for serious deliberation between opposing sides. Against the hypothesis that associates the Internet with the threat of segregated and fragmented opinion islands, social media can positively contribute to open new deliberative public spaces where arguments and ideas can actually be discussed and contrasted across lines of political difference. There is, however, the need to investigate further the motivations and the incentives that can lead individuals to engage with other users in such a way. For future research, we plan to both extend the study to a longer period of time and delve into the dynamics of conversation, by providing a deeper analysis on the discursive interaction between users through a more qualitative research strategy.

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TVITANJE O KATALONSKOJ NEZAVISNOSTI: DINAMIKA POLITIČKE RASPRAVE I POLARIZACIJE SKUPINA

Joan Balcells :: Albert Padró-Solanet

SAŽETAK *Ovaj rad pruža dokaze koji govore u prilog tome da društveni mediji omogućavaju javnu deliberaciju, što je u suprotnosti s hipotezom koja naglašava dominaciju učinka „eho-komore“. Rad se bavi konverzijskim interakcijama na Twitteru između podupiratelja suprotstavljenih strana u debati o katalonskoj nezavisnosti. Ta tema, o kojoj mišljenja mogu biti snažno polarizirana, upotrijebljena je za studiju slučaja. Istraživanje je provedeno na slučajnom uzorku komunikacija na Twitterovoj platformi za odgovore i uključuje zagovornike i protivnike nezavisnosti. Unatoč tendenciji stvaranja „homofilnih mreža“ koje okupljaju ljude sličnih stavova, utvrdili smo da je komunikacija između suprotstavljenih političkih tabora relativno česta. Nadalje, heterogene konverzacije (u kojima se suprotstavljene strane upuštaju u dijalog) značajno su duže nego homogene (u kojima svi sudionici dijele isto mišljenje), što se može smatrati znakom prave deliberacije, utemeljene na racionalnoj razmjeni argumenata između suprotstavljenih perspektiva.*

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

DRUŠTVENI MEDIJI, TWITTER, JAVNO MNIJENJE, DELIBERACIJA, POLARIZACIJA

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PROTEST, CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND THE COPRODUCTION OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: THE CASE OF ROMANIA'S 2014 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT *This article examines how voters and politicians interact through social media to communicate salient issues in highly mobilising contexts, such as elections and protests. It analyses the case of Romania's 2014 presidential elections, where voters played an active role in promoting themes that candidates had not initially addressed in their campaigns. Two topics emerged as particularly important from the voters' perspective: systemic corruption and accusations of the government deliberately hindering the voting process in Romanian diaspora communities. A mixed approach of automated and manual content analysis of user comments and campaign materials on social media reveals that, while it is difficult to make precise causal claims, voter demands with regards to these topics had an active role in influencing changes in candidates' campaign strategies.*

KEY WORDS

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION, SOCIAL MEDIA, PROTEST, ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS, TEXT MINING

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INTRODUCTION

On the evening of November 2, 2014 several thousand Romanian citizens were gathered in front of the Romanian Embassy in London, chanting 'It's our right to vote!' Minutes earlier, the Embassy – an important polling station organised abroad for the ongoing presidential elections in Romania at the time – had closed its doors before many of those queueing up to cast their ballot were able to do so. Accusing bureaucratic hurdles and delays caused by insufficient staff in London, as well as Paris, Vienna, Munich and other European cities, spontaneous protests broke out among Romanian diaspora communities. They quickly took an anti-government turn, with allegations that presidential candidate and incumbent Prime Minister Victor Ponta deliberately hindered voting (Oşan et al., 2014). These protests, which participants documented extensively on social media, had far-reaching consequences: on November 8, a massive wave of demonstrations started in Romania in solidarity with diaspora communities, calling for a more efficient organisation of the runoff. In the two weeks leading up to the decisive round, both social-democrat Victor Ponta and his counter-candidate, liberal Klaus Iohannis, carried out active social media campaigns and participated in televised debates. A climate of hostility towards Ponta's government remained in the diaspora until the runoff, which saw a repeat of the situation in the first round: while some bureaucratic obstacles had been removed, many Romanian citizens were once again unable to cast their vote. Despite this, overall turnout was significantly higher (64.1%) compared to the first round (53.2%) and more than twice as many votes were cast in the diaspora (BEC, 2014a). Victor Ponta lost to Klaus Iohannis with an 8.87% difference – the highest gap between runoff candidates in the history of post-communist elections in Romania. Most notably, Klaus Iohannis won 98.73% of the diaspora votes, compared to 46.17% in the first round (BEC, 2014b). The 2014 elections protests fit into a wave of civic unrest that started in Romania in 2011. However, they are unique as the first protests to make extensive use of social media, not just as a platform for documenting and organising protests, but also as a means to bring their concerns directly to the two presidential candidates.

In this article I argue that voters may be able to influence electoral campaign strategies through direct, low-cost, online interaction with candidates. Romania's case illustrates this argument at the intersection of information technology and political communication in a climate of protest. Thus, I examine the coproduction of political communication through social media based on two assumptions. The first is that voter demands formulated in the highly mobilising context of presidential elections go hand in hand with the direction of communication. Coproduction implies that a transfer occurs between candidates' programmes and voters' demands as candidates respond by adapting their campaigns. The second assumption is that coproduction implies a certain degree of flexibility in the roles that voters and candidates assume. Typically, candidates are initiators and providers of communication, while voters take on a more passive role, acting as recipients. However, these roles may be reversed, shifting the process from a one-way exchange or a stream of information with limited feedback, to one where both sides take an active role.

The article's aim is twofold: to examine how citizen demands can be extracted from unstructured textual data generated online, and to explore how voters may influence candidates' campaign strategies in unplanned situations. In the following parts I give a brief overview of protests in post-communist Romania and the use of social media to support street demonstrations from 2012 on. I then examine the nature of coproduction of political communication and how it occurred in the 2014 elections by analysing textual data from candidates Victor Ponta and Klaus Iohannis, as well as voter comments on their respective campaign Facebook pages. And finally, I briefly address how this intersection of street protests and the direct social media engagement of politicians is situated in the ongoing wave of protests in Romania.

PROTEST AND INTERNET-FACILITATED POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ROMANIA

There are two types of studies on the relationship between Internet use and political engagement. One examines the Internet, and social media especially, as a new form of public space encompassing political debate, participation and governance (McLeod et al., 1996; Krueger, 2006; Delli Carpini, 2000; Tichenor et al., 1970; Bonfadelli, 2002). The other emerged more recently, with the arrival of the Arab Spring in particular, and focuses on the role of the Internet in protest and crisis (Morozov, 2009; Wolfsfeld et al., 2013; Bohdanova, 2014; Khondker, 2011; Juris, 2012). The case of Romania's presidential elections arguably fits into both of these types, using social media as an organising mechanism that fulfils a twofold function: a networking agent for organising protests and a window into the protest space (Segeber and Bennet, 2011).

A look at the history of protest in post-communist Romania reveals a long spell of civic apathy: between 1990 and 2011 Romanians were significantly less engaged with their communities and less likely to protest compared to other, former communist countries such as Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland (Burean and Bădescu, 2013). Low engagement in public life can be explained by the lack of money, time and skill, in addition to low levels of trust in institutions and other citizens. As a consequence, Gabriel Bădescu et al. (2004) find that by the end of the 1990s less than 10% of Romanians were said to belong to at least one association. This is a low percentage in comparison to other countries in Eastern Europe, where in some cases participation in associations is easily comparable to Western Europe (for example 47% in Slovakia and 30% in the Czech Republic).

A wave of civic unrest has been ongoing in Romania since 2011. That year alone saw over twenty protests against austerity measures, layoffs, healthcare reforms and environmental issues. These were mainly organised by students and trade unions, but while covering a wide variety of topics, they saw relatively low participation overall (Domnişoru, 2011). Protests extended into 2012 and 2013, focusing on environmental issues – notably the Roşia Montană Gold Corporation mining project and Chevron's plans to use hydraulic fracturing in shale gas extraction (Euronews, 2013).

While environmental protests were able to mobilise larger amounts of citizens compared to previous years, it was 2014 and 2015 that decisively broke the pattern of diffuse issues combined with low participation, and brought about large-scale, widespread and often spontaneous protests around concentrated issues. The 2014 presidential elections are one of the two prominent cases. The other occurred in November 2015, after a fire at the Colectiv night club in Bucharest killed over 60 people. Massive protests erupted under the slogan 'Corupția ucide!' ('Corruption kills!') accusing the local administration of allowing the club to operate without authorisation from the fire department (ProTV, 2015). Similar to the 2014 demonstrations, these also took an anti-governmental turn and led to Prime Minister Victor Ponta's resignation shortly after the protests started.

The use of social media as a dedicated tool for protests is quite new in Romania, but has played an essential role in organising and documenting them. For example, 2013 saw the creation of an online community, Uniți Salvăm (United we save), which was established during the demonstrations against the Roșia Montană Gold Corporation mining project. Similar online communities, such as the Pungești Resistance Movement, were created around the same time to support the anti-fracking protests held against Chevron in the commune of Pungești. Camelia Cmeciu and Cristina Coman (2016) examine issue framing using data from these communities and find that the use of visual rather than verbal framing devices was prevalent. They identify five specific themes used to frame anti-fracking resistance: land struggle, conflict, solidarity, political opportunity and ecology.

Facebook emerged as the main online platform to organise, disseminate and document protests. This was possible thanks to its quickly growing user base in the country: between 2011 and 2015 the number of Romanians using Facebook nearly quadrupled, and in late 2014, at the time of the presidential elections, there were approximately 7.2 million Facebook users (36% of the total population). Among these, the 18-44 age group accounted for over 75%, almost half of which were aged between 25 and 34 (Facebrands, 2016). Politicians' reach through social media in the 2014 elections was, however, more limited. By the end of the second round Klaus Iohannis' campaign page had surpassed one million likes (making him, at the time, the most popular European politician on Facebook) while Victor Ponta had amassed a more modest 720,000 likes (Facebrands, 2014a, 2014b).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE COPRODUCTION OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

How did the use of social media facilitate the coproduction of communication in Romania's case? Electoral campaigns typically offer grounds for a one-way transfer of information to occur in the form of candidates communicating their programmes to voters. Judith Trent and Robert Freidenberg (2011: 65-67) identify three functions of electoral campaigning at the level of general elections. From a cognitive perspective campaigning should present voters with information about candidates. The second function refers to legitimisation, both of the political system (the campaign is proof that

the system works) and of candidates (by further strengthening their relationship with voters). Finally, electoral campaigns are meant to meet voters' expectations. Trent and Freidenberg suggest that candidates who fail to fulfil this function in particular are more likely to face difficulties at the polls.

The ability to respond to voters' expectations was the main drive behind the coproduction of communication established during the Romanian presidential elections. In relation to this function, I treat candidates as the supply-side of electoral communication, while voters represent the demand-side. This is a fairly straightforward relationship that integrates well with Sally McMillan's model for cyber-interactivity (2002), where the direction of communication and the receiver's degree of control over it determine different types of information flows. Mutual discourse, where senders and receivers are both active participants with interchangeable roles, describes the case examined in this article. One particular characteristic here is that the direction of online communication and participants' roles in controlling the content of the message went hand in hand. Prior to the first round of elections, communication took place in the form of a monologue controlled by candidates, while content was transmitted through electoral programmes. However, the climate of protest turned voters into the supply-side of communication by giving them the ability to promote certain concerns that had not initially been part of the candidates' programmes.

Thus, a two-way channel was established, with a high degree of asymmetry in favour of voters' control over the process. However, due to the nature of social media platforms and the atomised character of the supply-side, this mutual dialogue was more constrained in practice than McMillan's definition suggests. For instance, while both Iohannis and Ponta were active online between rounds, they did not (and indeed could not) respond directly to individual comments. Their responses addressed the broad forms of the issues raised by dissatisfied voters. Therefore, this type of voter-candidate interaction is best characterised as a form of coproduction of political communication that takes into account limitations specific to social media.

With this in mind I suggest that, while McMillan's dimensions of direction and control are useful for identifying types of communication, they do not allow us to examine the full repertoire of actions undertaken during the elections' protests, and how control over content shifted when the supply and demand side switched places. Two additional factors are useful for this purpose: the costs of participation and the target of communication. People are more likely to become active participants if these costs are low (Krueger, 2006; Norris, 2000). Since Internet use has a positive impact on reducing participation costs, online actions in this model are understood to have low participation costs, while offline actions are characterised by high participation costs. The target of communication is important from the perspective of Trent and Freidenberg's expectation function of electoral communication. When voters address their expectations regarding candidates' behaviour and reactions directly to the candidates in question, we may expect candidates to adapt their behaviour if they are aware that to do otherwise will cost them at the polls. Thus, I distinguish between direct (specifically targeting candidates) and indirect (the

untargeted statement of issues) communication. Based on these two dimensions, several types of voter action can be identified, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of communicative actions in Romania's 2014 presidential elections

Targeting	Participation Costs	
	Low	High
Indirect	Signing petitions, participating in discussion groups, low-engagement 'Facebook protests'	Street protests, including documenting street protests online
Direct	Direct online engagement of candidates through comments on their Facebook campaign pages	Direct offline engagement of candidates (e.g. addressing questions during televised presidential debates)

Events taking place between rounds (November 3 – November 15) included actions from the indirect-low cost, direct-low cost and indirect-high cost categories. The protests that broke out in the diaspora were documented on Facebook, which triggered immediate low-cost actions, both in the form of discussions and petitions, and directly addressing candidates on their Facebook campaign pages. These were followed by several waves of organised protests in Romania, supported by the constant, direct online engagement of candidates. Finally, the runoff was thoroughly documented on Facebook, both in Romania and in the diaspora. The repeated failure to ensure that all citizens queuing at the polls would be able to vote on time triggered another wave of protests which continued until the preliminary election results were made public.

I suggest that, while examining the nature and content of protests may give valuable insight into issues of mobilisation and participation in Romania, focusing on voters' direct-low cost actions is more worthwhile. People are more likely to be politically active in an environment where they do not incur large costs in terms of time, information seeking or personal safety. True enough, cost reduction is not a guarantee that the Internet's mobilising effect will extend beyond citizens who are already pre-disposed to action (Norris, 2000). However, we must consider the fact that these events are taking place within the already mobilising context of elections. Furthermore, the targeted nature of direct online engagement will give us a better account of voters' own demands in the elections.

ONLINE COPRODUCTION IN THE CASE OF ROMANIA'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Data and method

This study is conducted in three stages and uses two types of material, as detailed in Table 2. The overall outcome is a comparison between candidates' electoral programmes prior to and after protests, to determine how citizen demands transferred into candidates' campaign strategies.

Table 2. Stages of analysis, data and outcomes

Stage	Data	Outcome
Stage 1: Electoral campaign prior to first round (October 3 – November 1)	Candidates' electoral programmes and content of Facebook campaigns	First version of candidates' electoral programmes
Stage 2: Electoral campaign between rounds from voters' perspective (November 3 – November 15)	Voters' comments on candidates' Facebook campaign pages	Voters' demands
Stage 3: Electoral campaign between rounds from candidates' perspective (November 3 – November 15)	New content on candidates' Facebook campaign pages	Modified version of candidates' electoral programme after voter demands

All material used in this study is text-based, comprising of Facebook posts and user comments, and transcripts from campaign clips posted to candidates' pages. In the first stage, I examine the electoral programmes of candidates Klaus Iohannis and Victor Ponta in order to identify the main topics they propose. I also analyse the content of their Facebook campaign pages prior to the first round of elections to find additional themes that may appear. In the second stage, I look at user comments posted to candidates' Facebook pages between rounds in order to find topics and issues that were directly communicated by voters. Finally, in the third stage I examine the candidates' online campaign materials in the period between rounds and compare them against the voters' demands to determine how they were addressed.

The methodological approach combines automated and manual content analysis. In the first stage I apply text mining, an interdisciplinary approach that combines techniques from linguistics, statistics and computer science to extract information from large, unstructured amounts of text (Bergman et al., 2013; Clark, 2013; Dyas-Correia and Alexopoulos, 2014). The three main units examined in text mining are words, documents (defined as a collection of words) and corpora (defined as a collection of documents). Text mining has multiple applications, such as information retrieval, sentiment analysis or document summarisation (Hashimi et al., 2015), but here I use it to extract key terms which are then manually grouped into more general topics. For the analysis I use the R package 'tm' (Feinerer and Hornik, 2015).

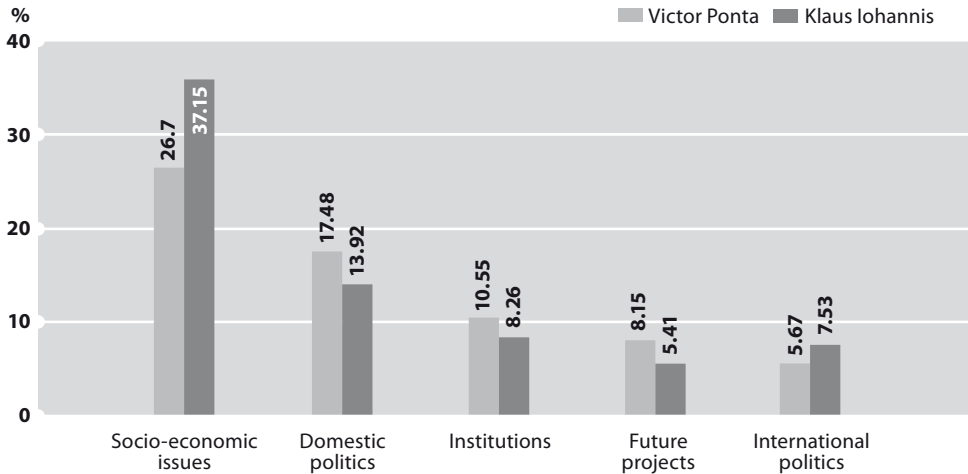
In the preparatory stage I collect all available campaign material and user comments, and then group them into six separate document corpora (electoral programmes, voter comments and post-protest campaign materials for Iohannis and Ponta respectively). Editing the corpora for analysis requires reducing the amount of 'noise' in the text by eliminating numbers, punctuation and stop words. The next step is to create a document term matrix, which maps out the frequency of words inside each document in the corpus. The document term matrix is usually very sparse, which requires that we reduce it before proceeding further. To do this, a new document term matrix is created using a weighing method called TF-IDF (term frequency-inverse document frequency) which

counts the total frequency of each word in each document offset by its overall frequency in the corpus. The aim of this step is to further reduce the number of terms that appear frequently in general and extract the ones relevant to the research question.

Once these terms are obtained, I group them together into topics manually instead of applying statistical clustering methods, in part because the number of terms is relatively small and, as detailed below, because I am interested in particular types of terms. In the following sections I discuss the main topics emerging from the corpora and how they may have influenced candidates' campaign strategies.

Analysis of candidates' programmes

Unsurprisingly, topics between the two candidates are similar, but vary in proportion and the attention given to several individual terms, as shown in Figure 1.



▲ Figure 1.
Percentage of topics in candidates' electoral programmes

Over one third of Iohannis' programme is focused on socio-economic issues, compared to a little over one quarter of Ponta's. One notable difference here is that Ponta explicitly addresses issues of poverty and unemployment, which are absent from Iohannis' programme. The candidates also have different approaches to the 'Domestic politics' topic: Iohannis includes mentions of corruption, albeit to a limited degree, whereas Ponta does not. On the other hand, Ponta's programme mentions a few politicians by name, most importantly then-incumbent President Traian Băsescu. Victor Ponta's conflictual relationship with Băsescu is a recurrent theme reflected both in the content of Facebook user comments and Ponta's online campaign between rounds. This is related to how the candidates describe politicians' interactions with each other. Iohannis frames this in terms

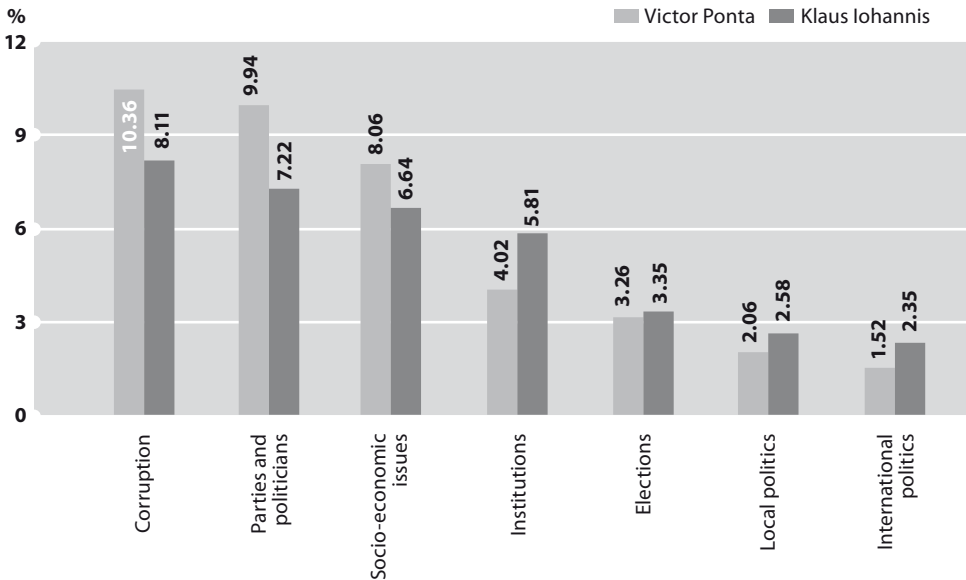
of debates, while Ponta uses words such as ‘scandal’, ‘conflict’ and, less frequently, ‘dialog’ to describe the current political scene in Romania and how he proposes to change it. With regards to the ‘Institutions’ topic, one important difference is that Iohannis focuses more on aspects related to justice (rule of law, courts, judicial independence). This, along with his brief mention of corruption, transfers further into the content of his Facebook campaign, both in user comments and campaign materials. Finally, the order of the two remaining topics, ‘International politics’ and ‘Future projects’ is reversed, with Ponta giving more attention to the idea that the presidential mandate should make explicit a coherent strategy and vision. On the other hand, Iohannis focuses more on aspects of international politics, particularly Romania’s relationship with NATO and the EU, and its role as a security provider in the region. Overall the most significant differences among the two programmes lie in approach rather than content. The take-away points here are Iohannis’ strong focus on socio-economic issues and his, albeit limited, attention to justice and corruption; and Ponta’s proposals for improving the ways politicians collaborate to reduce conflictual relations, along with the idea that the head of state should have long-term coherent strategies to fulfil his duties.

Analysis of Facebook user comments

According to Figure 2, seven major topics can be extracted from comments posted by voters on the candidates’ Facebook pages. One interesting thing to note here is the concentration of demands in these corpora compared to terms indicating opinions, values and feelings: less than 40% of the content is covered by voter demands (36.06% and 39.22% for Iohannis and Ponta respectively). This is not entirely surprising considering that comments made in the context of an electoral campaign tend to be either strongly supportive or strongly critical of candidates. Furthermore, we must keep in mind that we are not dealing with a coherent text in terms of content and, perhaps more importantly, that there is no explicit, coordinated intention from voters to put forward their demands.

Both user comment corpora yield similar results in terms of the nature of each topic and their order. While topics such as ‘Socio-Economic issues’, ‘Institutions’ and ‘International politics’ largely reflect the candidates’ electoral programmes, voters also introduce new topics that merit attention.

‘Corruption’ is the most prominent among both Ponta and Iohannis’ user comments, with a higher proportion in Ponta’s case. I grouped three mid-level terms under the topic of corruption: ‘Acts of corruption/corrupted individuals’ comprises of words such as ‘steal’, ‘fraud’ and ‘mafia’. The term ‘legal measures’ encompasses words such as ‘prosecuted’, ‘(criminal) record’ and ‘indicted’. Finally, ‘Legal consequences’ refers to the outcome of these legal measures, including words such as ‘prison’ and ‘convicted’. Corruption is strongly related to the second topic, ‘Parties and politicians’. This is most evident in the case of viral comments circulating lists of indicted politicians associated with the parties backing Iohannis (ACL – The Christian-Liberal Alliance) and Ponta (PSD – The Social-Democratic Party).

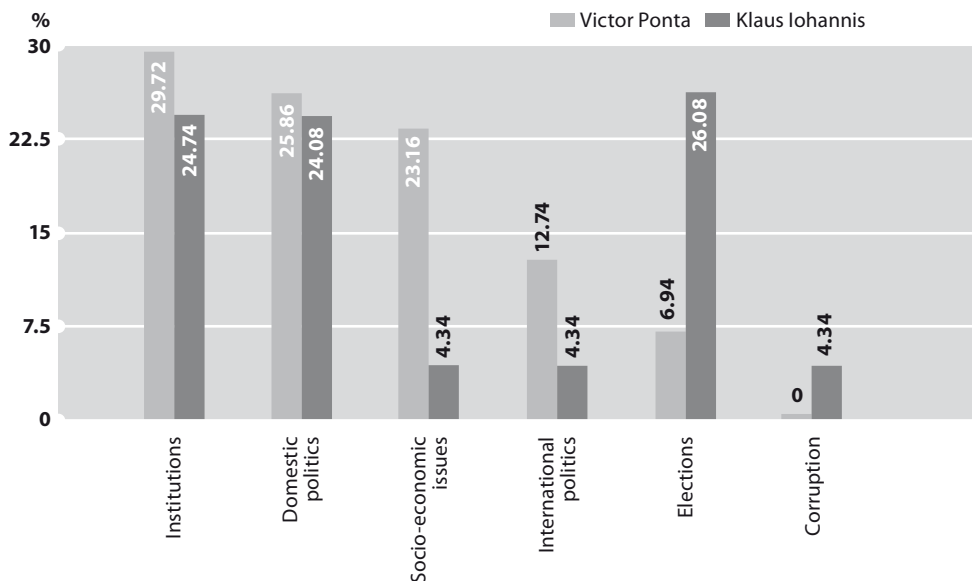


▲ Figure 2.
Percentage of topics in user comments

Finally, 'Elections' is one of the most significant points of contention among commenters. However, its low position on the list is a consequence of excluding very general terms, such as 'vote' and 'elections', which would have placed the topic much higher in both cases, but without adding any relevant information. Instead I chose to focus on two more important aspects: campaign organisation and diaspora voting. Concerns related to the latter include the insufficient number of polling stations abroad and complaints that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is deliberately hindering the voting process abroad. Another issue extensively discussed in the comments is the organisation of a presidential debate between rounds. Initially Iohannis and Ponta failed to agree on a set of rules for holding a televised debate and declined invitations from several TV channels, questioning their neutrality. Both candidates expressed these complaints on their campaign pages between rounds, but eventually agreed to participate in two televised debates.

Analysis of candidates' post-protest campaigns

Interestingly, in both cases, the newly introduced voter demands – corruption, politicians and elections – make up more than half of the overall topics in user comments. It is of course difficult to make precise causal claims about the impact of these topics on campaign strategies, but due to their strong prevalence, we must examine the changes they may have impacted. Figure 3 below shows the themes present in the candidates' Facebook campaign in the wake of the protests.



▲ Figure 3.
Percentage of topics in candidates' Facebook posts between rounds

The most significant change occurs in Iohannis' campaign strategy, which was previously based on encouraging a young, urban electorate to start grass-root initiatives of support and promotion for Iohannis and complement his image as a reserved and private individual (Vasile, 2014). However, in this final stage of the campaign Iohannis presents himself as an active supporter of protesters and diaspora voters and explicitly adopts two of the three new topics they introduced. His main focus is on elections, with particular attention being given to diaspora voting and, to a lesser degree, the presidential debate. Relatedly, he addresses the topic of corruption from the electoral fraud angle, calling for Victor Ponta to address the accusations of hindering diaspora voting.

On the other hand, Ponta's campaign strategy does not undergo any significant changes. While he does pick up the topic of elections, it is much lower on the list compared to topics that carried over from his original electoral programme. Here, he focuses more on the presidential debate and less on diaspora voting. Unlike Iohannis, however, Ponta does bring up the topic of politicians, once again in reference to his opposition to Traian Băsescu. Most importantly, he overlooks the topic of corruption altogether, including the failure to respond to the accusations of fraud put forward by his counter-candidate.

CONCLUSIONS

This article addressed two issues – the extraction of coherent voter demands from a body of text that lacks both thematic unity and the explicit intention of communicating such demands, and their impact on campaign strategies in a climate of protest. With regards to the first issue, I have shown that a list of demands can indeed be identified, with two caveats. Firstly, when dealing with data originating from social media content, we must keep in mind that the ‘noise’ in the text can include terms and topics that may be relevant to the subject matter, but are better suited for other types of research, such as sentiment analysis. The aim of this study was to uncover a list of topics that are similar in form to candidates’ electoral programmes in order to examine how they reflect one another.

The second caveat refers to the fact that it is not possible to make confident causal claims about the relationship between voter demands and changes in candidates’ campaign strategies. This relates to the other issue posed in this paper: overall Victor Ponta and Klaus Iohannis’ campaign strategies went in different directions in the runoff. Initially their electoral programmes were similar both in the content of topics and the relative importance given to each of these, but differed in approach, emphasising certain issues over others. In the runoff Iohannis changed his strategy to explicitly adopt new topics promoted by voters, while Ponta maintained his original strategy and only addressed voters’ concerns to a limited extent. While these observations are convincing, it is nevertheless difficult to claim that Iohannis’ victory in the elections was a direct consequence of adapting his strategy to reflect voters’ issues. However, the fact that he did so to a significant degree, with one third of the corpus covering the topics of elections and corruption, compared to less than 10% in Ponta’s case, is evidence that his capacity to adapt worked in his favour. Thus, the higher degree of responsiveness shown in Iohannis’ campaign strategy feeds back into the function of political communication that relates to meeting voters’ expectations and being rewarded with success at the polls (Trent and Freidenberg, 2011).

Finally, it is worth noting that the types of communicative action used by citizens in 2014 (direct-low cost, indirect-low cost and indirect-high cost) also occurred in subsequent protests in Romania. A similar mechanism of promoting specific citizen demands using a combination of street protests and social media as a platform for communicating directly with politicians was used effectively in 2015, following the Colectiv night club fire. In this case protesters compiled several lists of demands and addressed them to President Klaus Iohannis, calling for political reform and anti-corruption measures, such as reducing the number of MPs, eliminating politicians’ special immunity from criminal investigation while in office, and a new Prime Minister from outside the current political elite (Mixich, 2015). The latter in particular proved successful when Victor Ponta’s cabinet was replaced by a government of technocrats shortly after.

Overall, this article highlights the mechanisms and effects of citizens and politicians co-producing political communication in the mobilising context of protest. In particular, it

shows how two-way communication takes place when the roles of senders and receivers are reversed: voters may promote salient issues that politicians overlook or give little attention to. In turn, politicians' responsiveness to these issues may have important consequences on their success or failure in high stakes political events, such as elections.

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PROSVJED, UKLJUČIVANJE GRAĐANA I SUKREIRANJE POLITIČKE KOMUNIKACIJE: SLUČAJ PREDsjedničkih IZBORA U RUMUNJSKOJ 2014.

Laura Elena Sibinescu

SAŽETAK *U ovom se članku istražuje kako birači i političari putem društvenih medija komuniciraju o važnim temama u situacijama koje mobiliziraju veći broj ljudi, kao što su izbori i prosvjedi. U radu se analizira slučaj predsjedničkih izbora u Rumunjskoj 2014. godine, kada su birači imali aktivnu ulogu u promoviranju tema koje kandidati u početku nisu spominjali u svojim kampanjama. Dvije su teme proizišle kao osobito važne iz perspektive birača: sustavna korupcija i optužbe da vlada namjerno ometa proces glasovanja u zajednicama rumunjske dijaspore. Automatska i ručna analiza sadržaja korisničkih komentara i materijala iz kampanje u društvenim medijima otkriva, iako je teško precizno dokazati kauzalnu povezanost, da su zahtjevi birača koji se tiču spomenutih tema imali aktivnu ulogu u promjeni strategija kampanja kandidata.*

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

POLITIČKA KOMUNIKACIJA, DRUŠTVENI MEDIJI, PROSVJED, IZBORNE KAMPANJE,
ANALIZA I PRETRAŽIVANJE TEKSTA

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WALKING THE PARTY LINE? THE DETERMINANTS OF FACEBOOK'S ADOPTION AND USE BY CZECH PARLIAMENTARIANS

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ABSTRACT *The last few years have witnessed an intensified academic debate on the potential of online social networking sites (SNSs) in the Czech Republic. However, the ensuing academic discussions focused mostly on the SNS pages of political parties. Politicians in particular have recently become the focus of attention in the shift towards research exploring the use of SNSs. The aim of this paper is to provide insight into the role of Facebook in the communication of parties and candidates during the Czech parliamentary elections in 2013. We analyse the adoption of Facebook as a mobilization tool by seven parties as well as by 200 individual deputies, looking for similarities and differences in terms of the adoption, strategy and engagement of users. Although party influence seems to be a significant predictor of Facebook adoption, our data also indicate that using other digital channels increases the chances of higher engagement on Facebook at the individual level.*

KEY WORDS

FACEBOOK, ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES, PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION, THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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INTRODUCTION

Social media have made an impressive entry into the realm of politics over the course of the last several years, significantly enriching the ways politicians and political parties can reach out to and engage with voters, and substantially transforming the established patterns of communication between political actors, journalists and citizens in general (see Howard, 2006). Online social networking sites have created new opportunities for politicians and parties to mobilize supporters, bypass mainstream news media in their effort to spread political messages, and even set the news agenda as journalists are increasingly relying on social media as sources for news. These – and other – obvious benefits have contributed to the growing adoption of social networking sites as instruments of political communication across the world, particularly in the context of election campaigns.

Consequently, the academic research on the adoption and use of social networking sites for political communication has recently blossomed. However, in Central and Eastern Europe the academic reflection of this phenomenon has been somewhat delayed when compared with Western Europe or the US, at least when considering studies reaching the international community, as those have only started mushrooming within the last couple of years, mostly as single country case studies (e.g. Baranowski, 2015; Merkovity, 2014). In Czechia, the interest in social networking sites as instruments of campaign communication was sparked by the presidential campaign of Karel Schwarzenberg in 2013, which demonstrated the potential of social media (and Facebook in particular) to mobilize young voters (Štětka et al., 2014). However, even though the subsequent 2013 Czech Parliamentary elections and the 2014 European Parliamentary elections brought opportunities for empirical investigation (Štětka and Vochocová, 2014), these studies focused mainly on the analysis of the adoption of SNSs at the party level, while devoting no attention to the use of social media by individual candidates. In this respect, the scholarship exploring the role of new media in campaign communication in the Czech Republic (and in CEE region in general) still displays notable gaps, particularly when compared to the state of research in Western Europe and the US (Carlson and Strandberg, 2008; Gibson, 2010; Gulati and Williams 2013; Larsson and Kalsnes, 2014).

This study aims to fill this research gap and empirically examine the adoption and use of social media by political candidates during the campaign for the 2013 Czech parliamentary elections, while focusing on individual, contextual and technological factors influencing the level of SNS adoption and impact in terms of users' engagement. In doing so, we are attempting to explore the extent to which candidates' Facebook strategies are congruent with their own parties' use of the same social media network for the campaign, or whether there are any individual divergences from the patterns of use and engagement observed at the party level. Given that most studies conducted in this area so far have focused either on the party level or the individual level of use, we are hoping that this innovative research design, in combining the two approaches, can surpass the geographical scope of this particular case study, and enrich the existing scholarship on the role of social media in campaign communication.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Within the literature on the use of new media by political actors, there is a predominant orientation towards exploring patterns of the use of digital technologies as tools for electoral communication (e.g. Larsson and Kalsnes, 2014; Williams and Gulati, 2013). A significant number of studies investigating the role of SNSs in electoral communication has been designed with the aim of answering the question, whether the patterns of political communication established in the offline environment is replicated in the online domain (the so-called normalization thesis, see Margolis and Resnick, 2000), or whether the new digital platforms have some transformative potential and offer opportunities for the otherwise marginalized political actors to level the playing field ("equalization thesis"). While the latter perspective assumes that the online media give voice and visibility, particularly to those groups and actors who have been struggling to get heard in the traditional media space, according to the normalization thesis new media merely reinforce power relationships that existed prior to the digital age, with the stronger, resource-rich parties and individual actors benefiting the most from the arrival of these new technologies (Gibson et al., 2000). This view is also complementary to the diffusion of innovations theory as presented by Everett Rogers (1986, 1995), according to which early adopters of new media are more often male, young, with a higher socioeconomic status – and they likely utilize other media channels as well.

In line with Rogers's theory, some studies have confirmed that the age of the politician determines how she approaches new media. As Anders Larsson and Bente Kalsnes (2014) and Kim Strandberg (2009, 2013) observe, perhaps unsurprisingly, young politicians in Norway, Sweden and Finland adopt and use Facebook more often than their older counterparts. Some older studies identified differences between genders in the use of new media channels by politicians and candidates (for review, see Larsson and Kalsnes, 2014), while according to the newer research, these differences have been diminishing (Larsson and Kalsnes, 2014; Strandberg, 2009; Vergeer and Hermans, 2012).

Another factor researchers have paid attention to in their search for determinants of SNS adoption has been the incumbency of the candidate and their position on the candidate list. While some studies (e.g. Carlson and Strandberg, 2008; Williams and Gulati, 2013; Strandberg, 2013) tend to rather confirm the normalization hypothesis (incumbents being more active in their usage of new media), Larsson and Kalsnes (2014) found the opposite pattern in the candidates' use of Twitter. One of the most commonly tested factors has been the size of the party, with evidence pointing in the direction of the normalization hypothesis (Carlson and Strandberg, 2008; Lilleker and Koc-Michalska, 2013; Strandberg, 2009, 2013; Williams and Gulati, 2007), the newer study by Larsson and Kalsnes (2014) suggests that in 2013 candidates from smaller parties adopted and used SNSs more frequently than their competitors, even though the effect of this link was fairly limited.

While studies looking at parties and candidates' processes of adopting new communication technologies initially suggested the predominance of the equalization effects, contemporary research tends to gravitate towards the confirmation of the

normalization thesis, although the literature is still far from fully conclusive. Given the quickly approaching saturation point in the adoption of new media by the political parties and individual politicians, the literature's attention has shifted from studying the mere adoption of new technologies, towards the more detailed examination of their use, exploring the size of the networks, the ability to mobilize and engage potential voters, and the overall effect on citizens' political behavior. Research shows that it is usually just a few candidates who are able to generate a large number of followers online (Nielsen and Vaccari, 2013: 2351; Vaccari and Nielsen, 2013). In terms of parties, it seems that those that are either bigger (Larsson, 2015) or display populist or progressive features (Graham et al., 2016; Larsson, 2016; Vergeer et al., 2013) tend to be more successful in reaching fans on social media, as they are generally, also more active in communication on SNS (Grant et al., 2010; Vergeer et al., 2013).

The interaction between politicians/parties and social media users is another popular research domain, even though studies tend to primarily examine the direction from political actors to citizens (Graham et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2015; Sorensen, 2016). It is often pointed out that politicians and party/campaign managers are very keen on talking about the importance of interaction, rather than actually engaging in them (Enli and Skogerbø, 2013; Sorensen, 2016). There are hints from existing research that it is particularly the candidates from the main political parties, as well as incumbents, who manage to stimulate higher engagement on the side of users, rather than candidates from alternative or non-parliamentary parties and challengers for the office (Williams and Gulati, 2013; Xenos et al., 2015).

In summary, research into the factors that lie behind the intensity and form of political parties and candidates' adoption of social media for electoral communication has been rather inconclusive. This can be partly explained by the fact that the data has often come from different political contexts and systems, as well as from different types of elections. Notably, most of the studies have been from a very limited number of countries and regions, while others have been largely neglected so, including the CEE region, which further underscores the importance of broadening the geographical research scope in order to obtain more diverse base for comparison and for testing the above quoted theories. Also, to our knowledge, there have been no systematic attempts to simultaneously examine the use of new media at both the party level and the level of individual candidates. Together, by investigating the relationship between parties' and candidates' social media adoption *and* the engagement of users, our paper hopes to fill the existing lacuna in the literature. We believe there is a theoretical incentive for such a research design, namely the fact that the normalization theory – despite often serving as the main theoretical framework for the study of SNS adoption and use – has mainly been tested with regards to adoption, while engagement has often been left out of the picture.

METHODOLOGY

In order to add to this growing, but still fragmented research field, we have designed an empirical analysis of the adoption and use of Facebook by political candidates and parties during the 2013 Czech parliamentary elections. The study was driven by two main research questions:

- >How did the intensity of Facebook use and user engagement, differ between parties and individual candidates?
- >What were the main determinants of the adoption and use of Facebook by the candidates?

We decided to operate with two dependent variables for both individual candidates and parties. The first one was the *adoption* of Facebook, defined as the possession of an active Facebook account (min. 1 public status at least 11 days before the elections). The second dependent variable was *engagement*, defined as the ability of the party or candidate to stimulate action on the side of the other Facebook users, measured by the number of "likes," comments and shares related to individual statuses. We assume that the greater intensity of such activities indicates higher engagement, and therefore a potential impact on those messages on fans, friends and other users of this social networking site.

Given the exploratory character of the first part of the research, we have refrained from formulating a hypothesis related to the first research question, also because of the lack of previous research, which would indicate a particular type of relationship to test. However, we do expect to find similarities, rather than differences, in the patterns of usage of Facebook by the candidates and their parties; in other words, we believe it is likely that parties which are themselves active on Facebook will also have candidates that are more active in terms of Facebook adoption and also use (because of party pressure, peer pressure, the access to know-how and expertise available at the party level). Drawing on the previous research, we also expect some variability in the adoption and engagement among candidates' Facebook activity – variability that could be explained by other than party factors. With regards to candidates' Facebook activity we have included three types of independent variables into our research design: individual, contextual and technological. The first group of individual variables are sociodemographic ones – *age* and *gender*. Based on the previous research and inspired by Rogers's diffusion of innovation theory (1995) we formulated the following hypotheses:

H1: Younger candidates will display a higher level of adoption (H1a) and engagement (H1b) (see Larsson and Kalsnes, 2014; Strandberg, 2013).

H2: There will be no difference between male and female candidates in adoption (H2a) and engagement (H2b) (see Strandberg, 2009; Vergeer and Hermans, 2012).

The other sub-group of individual variables consists of political ones: *incumbency* and *leadership position*. We suppose, following the normalization thesis, that incumbents

and leaders (the first person on the list of candidates in the region, that is, the regional leader) will be more active, either because of the internal distribution of resources within the party, because of greater experience, and also supposedly higher public prominence.

H3: Incumbents will display a higher level of adoption (H3a) and engagement (H3b) than challengers (see Gulati and Williams, 2013).

H4: Leaders will display a higher level of adoption (H4a) and engagement (H4b) than lower-ranked candidates (see Strandberg, 2009).

We also considered the influence of broader party context which might have an impact on the levels of Facebook adoption and engagement by individual candidates. In this respect, we examine *party position* and differentiate between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary parties. We suppose, in accordance with the normalization thesis that due to the (financial and organizational) resources available to candidates from parliamentary parties, those candidates will be comparatively more active on Facebook.

H5: Candidates from parliamentary parties will display a higher level of adoption (H5a) and engagement (H5b) than those not represented in parliament.

The third and last type of independent variable concerns technological factors. We suppose (in line with the diffusion of innovation theory) that using other new media platforms will positively influence candidate's activity on Facebook.

H6: Candidates that actively use multiple new media platforms will display a higher level of adoption (H6a) and engagement (H6b) than those relying only on Facebook (see Williams and Gulati, 2013).

DATA

Since the study aims to analyse new media activity by individual candidates as well as parties, it relies on a combination of two separate data sets, both collected within the period of 11 days before the snap 2013 Parliamentary Elections (October 25-26). The sample consisted of all elected parties (7) and candidates (N=200).¹ Data from Facebook were manually archived, partly using the plug-in ScrapBook for Mozilla Firefox (in case of parties). Altogether, 1954 statuses produced by 105 deputies with active Facebook accounts (both profiles and pages with public statuses) and 504 statuses by parties, both with metadata about engagement with statuses, were collected. Additional information

¹ The decision to include only the elected candidates was based on the necessity to reduce the sample to a manageable size and, at the same time, to implement clear and efficient selection criteria. Given the nature of the electoral system in the Czech Republic where parliamentary elections take place in 14 regional constituencies with separate candidates' lists, the construction of a representative sample of the individual candidates represents a major research challenge. In addition, the objectives of our research required the collection of candidate's socio-demographic data which would have been much more difficult to obtain for many lower-ranked candidates who did not enter into the Parliament. Still, we are fully aware that the scope of our sample poses certain limitations for the interpretation of our study's outcomes.

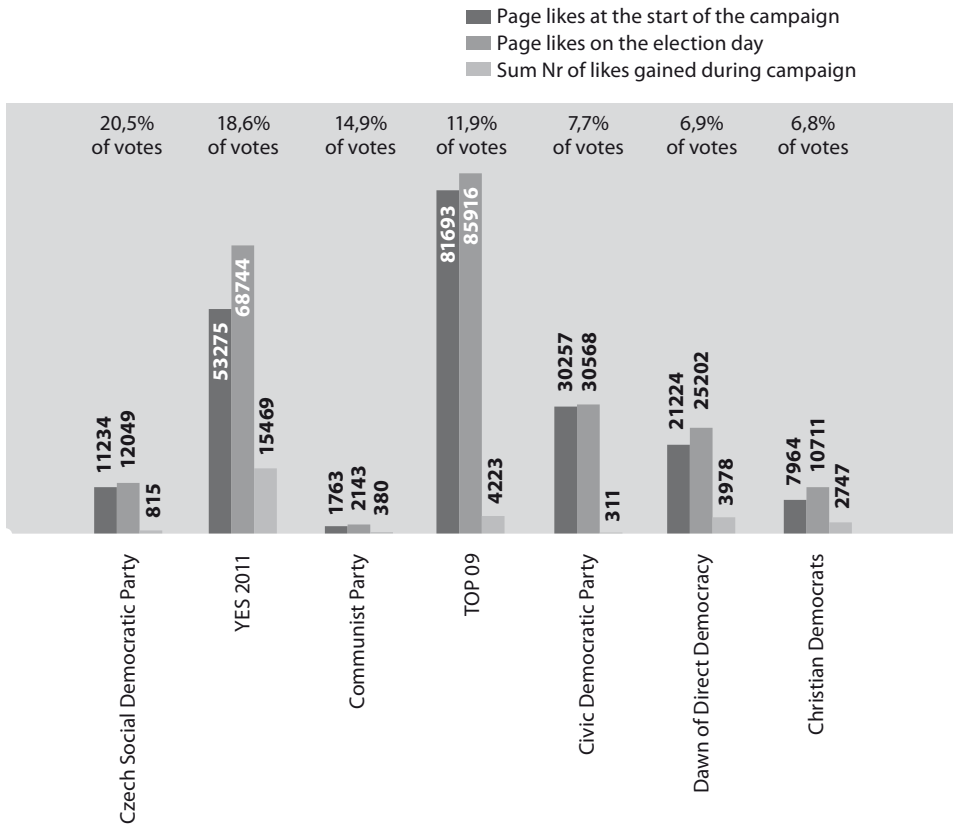
about the candidates (socio-demographic profile, position on the list, etc.) were collected using publicly available sources, like their websites or the website of their political party, or from the website of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament.

RESULTS

Adoption and voters' engagement at the party level

The Czech party political system has been regarded as relatively consolidated since the late 1990s, with two dominant parties regularly alternating power (the Civic Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party) and two other parties with stable electoral support and representation in Parliament (the Communist Party and the Christian Democratic Party). However, this system started becoming fragmented in 2010, due to the formation and electoral success of new parties, including populist ones. The subsequent instability culminated in the 2013 snap elections, which were marked by a near-victory of the new populist movement YES 2011 led by the businessman and billionaire Andrej Babiš. The YES 2011 movement managed to gain 18.6% of the vote, less than 2% behind the winner, the Social Democratic Party (20.4%). Apart from YES 2011, another new populist party which entered the Parliament after the 2013 elections was Dawn of Direct Democracy led by Tomio Okamura (6.9% of votes).

The majority of Czech political parties first adopted social media during the campaign for the 2010 Parliamentary Elections. Since 2010, social media have been used by parties and candidates ever more intensely; two years later more than half of the candidates in the Senate elections already had their Facebook account (Macková et al., 2013). As evidenced by a survey among party communication managers, for most parties Facebook became an important communication tool (Lilleker et al., 2015). In 2013, all the seven parties which exceeded the 5% threshold and entered the Czech Parliament had an official Facebook page at the time of the elections, even though some of them established it relatively recently (e.g. Dawn of Direct Democracy or the Communist Party). As it is apparent from the Graph 1, while the conservative TOP 09 had far the biggest base of Facebook fans before the election campaign, it was the new populist YES 2011 party that made the most out of the online campaign, having gained 15 thousand new fans during the period of one and half weeks before the elections. Likewise, the Dawn of Direct Democracy managed to attract new supporters, adding nearly four thousand fans to its Facebook page during the campaign. The TOP 09 party gained even slightly more fans in the same period (4223). The established parties (Social Democrats, Civic Democratic Party, and Communist Party) did not manage to mobilize almost any new supporters, a result consistent with a relatively low effort invested into their Facebook campaigns, as evidenced by the number of statuses posted per day (Table 1).



▲ Graph 1.
The development of the number of fans of political parties on Facebook and parties' electoral results (% of votes) Period October 14 – 24, 2013.

Overall, the new populist parties were also comparatively more successful in stimulating users' engagement, as measured by the standard metrics (likes, shares, comments). YES 2011 led the table in both the amount of likes and comments per post (Table 1), while the Dawn of Direct Democracy had the second highest amount of shares per post, behind only the Social Democrats whose frequency of party posts was however three times as low. Apart from these two populist parties, it was only TOP 09 – the party established only in 2009 and aiming at the younger, urban electorate – which managed to achieve similarly high levels of engagement, while the traditional parties lagged behind in the attention received from Facebook users (see Štětka and Vochocová, 2014).

Table 1. Activity and engagement on the Czech political parties' Facebook pages

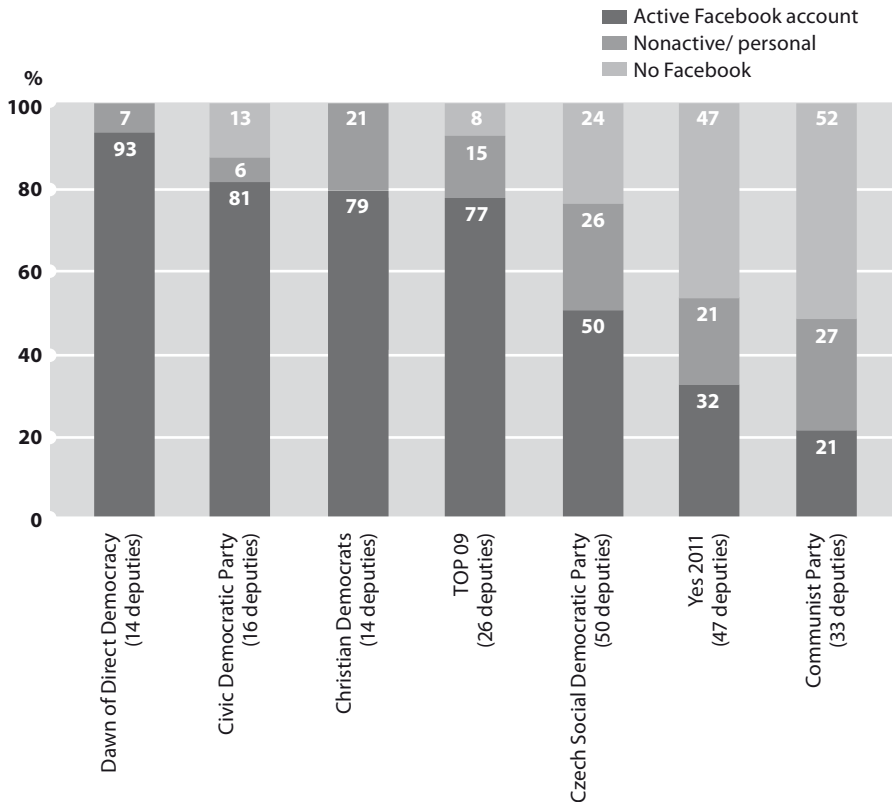
	N	Posts daily	Likes		Comments		Shares	
			Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Czech Social Democratic Party	30	2.7	148.6	55.2	86.9	25.7	119.8	54.5
YES 2011	89	8.1	462.7	446.6	121.6	97.3	70.4	91.4
Communist Party	7	0.6	105.7	49.2	53.1	28.4	20.9	19.5
TOP 09	110	10	272.5	369.3	83.4	94.8	43.5	62.1
Civic Democratic Party	63	5.7	128.5	102.9	45.3	55.6	26	37.4
Dawn of Direct Democrats	97	8.8	251.6	211.3	47.1	35.9	86.6	96.2
Christian Democrats	108	9.8	77.4	81.2	24.4	26.1	26	45.5

Period October, 14 – 24, 2013; n=510.

Levels and determinants of Facebook adoption by candidates

The analysis of Facebook activity and users' engagement on the level of individual candidates reveals a rather different picture. Arguably the most visible divergence between the central party strategy and elected MPs' own approach to this online platform was observed in the case of YES 2011, whose Facebook party profile came out as the liveliest of all the parties elected to the Parliament; however, only a third of the elected MPs used Facebook in the election campaign (see Graph 2) – the second lowest number of all the parties, leaving behind only the MPs from the Communist Party. On the other hand, almost all the MPs from the Dawn of Direct Democracy had an active account, with a very centralized design.

It is apparent that the party's approach towards the management of its own social media platforms does not fully determine the candidates' adoption and level of activity on these networks; therefore, they must be also influenced by other factors. Almost one quarter of the Communist Party MPs found their way to Facebook sooner than the party itself, as the party established its official Facebook profile only just before the elections. On the other hand, the YES 2011 candidates did not turn to Facebook in great numbers, despite the fact that the party had a very active and diverse fan base on this social network.



▲ Graph 2.
Adoption of Facebook prior to the 2013 election campaign by newly elected MPs.
Period October 14 – 26, 2013; n=200.

Therefore, in order to explore other factors which could influence candidates' willingness to use Facebook, we use a regression model involving three clusters of variables – individual, contextual and technological. The model (see Table 2) reveals that there is no relationship between gender and adoption (H2a confirmed), but surprisingly also no relationship between either age (H1a not confirmed) or a candidate's incumbency (H3a not confirmed) and the adoption of Facebook. The position of the leader of the candidate's list, however, comes out as a significant predictor of adoption – there is a 2.3 times greater chance that leaders of the candidates' lists will use Facebook than the others; however, it has to be noted that when accounting for technological factors, this link disappears (H4a partly confirmed).

In terms of our contextual variable, the parliamentary or extra-parliamentary status of a candidate's party seems not to have played any role in his/her decision to adopt

Facebook (H5a not confirmed). The adoption of other communication platforms – representing the third, “technological” cluster of the variables in our model – turns out to be a positive predictor for the adoption of Facebook (H6a confirmed), with Twitter showing the strongest link (and blogs, the weakest one). It is apparent that those candidates who already have experience with one such medium have a tendency to add more to it.

Table 2. Factors influencing the adoption of Facebook by MPs (binary logistic regression)²

	B	Exp(B)	S.E.	B	Exp(B)	S.E.	B	Exp(B)	S.E.
Gender	0.35	1.43	0.38	0.36	1.44	0.38	0.53	1.69	0.42
Age	-0.03	0.97	0.01	-0.03	0.97	0.01	-0.03	0.97	0.02
Incumbents	0.18	1.20	0.30	0.28	1.32	0.38	0.15	1.16	0.46
Leader	**0.83	2.29	0.30	**0.81	2.24	0.31	0.04	1.05	0.38
Parliamentary parties				-0.16	0.85	0.38	-0.46	0.63	0.46
Website							2.95	0.37	**1.08
Twitter							18.07	0.80	***2.89
YouTube							1,08	0,82	0.07
Blog							3.59	0.59	*1.28
-2 Log likelihood			264.03			263.86			212.34
Nagelkerke R Square			0.082			0.083			0.367

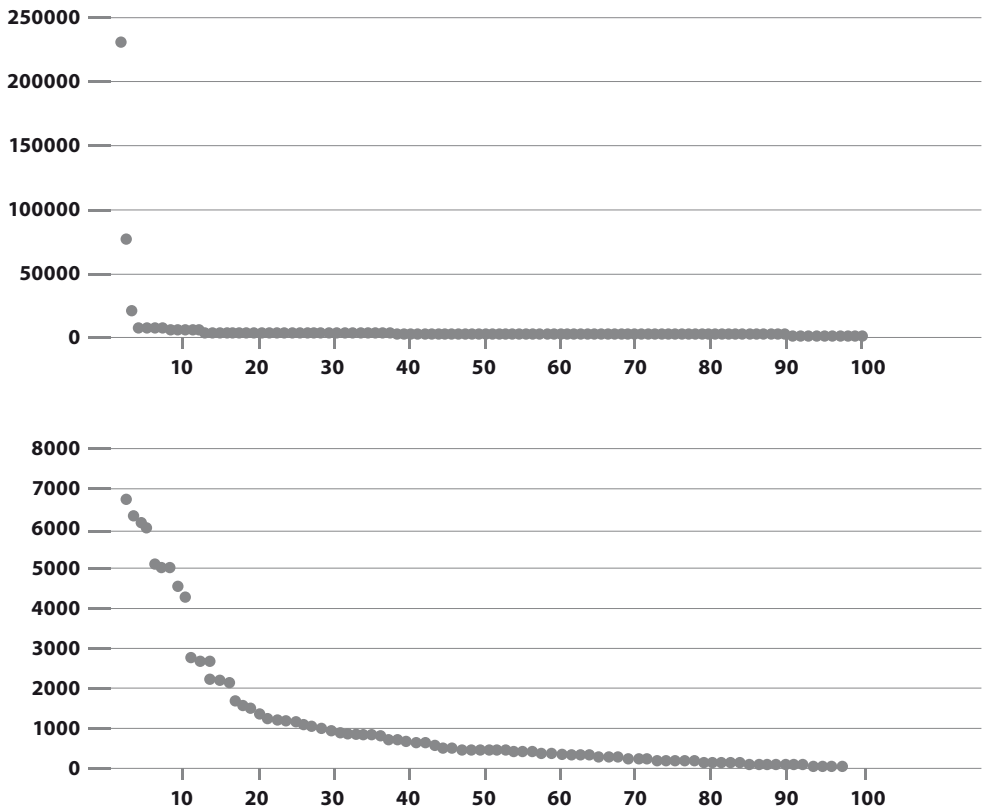
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001; N = 200.

The important role of other channels is confirmed not only in the case of the mere adoption of Facebook, but also, and more significantly, when it comes to the candidates' Facebook activities and the intensity of user engagement with the MPs' profile.

However, before elaborating on the actual data, it has to be mentioned that three of the candidates had to be excluded from the analysis due the fact that they were significant outliers in terms of engagement.³ Only one third of the newly elected MPs with an active Facebook account had more than one thousand fans/friends (see Graph 4), and – as in the case of the study by Rasmus Kleis Nielsen and Cristian Vaccari (2013) – the majority of politicians were rather ignored by citizens on Facebook.

² Multicollinearity test was performed, with the VIF statistics being lower than 2 for each of our independent variables; therefore we can say that there is no multicollinearity in our model.

³ The most followed politician – Karel Schwarzenberg – had over 200 thousand friends. It would have been therefore misleading to compare the average activities or engagement on his profile with the other candidates, just as in case of Tomio Okamura (leader of Dawn of Direct Democracy, almost 80000 fans) or Miroslav Kalousek (the leader of the TOP 09 candidate list, more than 20000 fans).

▲ *Graphs 3 and 4.*

The distribution of the number of friends/fans on the candidates' profiles – with and without the outliers (the values on the X axis represent percentages)
Data from 26 October 2013 (second election day).

Candidates' activity and users' engagement

In terms of the activity and engagement with posts among candidates from different parties, there is also a certain discrepancy in the case of YES 2011 at both the party and individual level. Although the public profile of YES 2011 was very active during the campaign period in terms of the number of statuses and user engagement as well (see Table 1), the candidates from this party were among the less active ones (see Table 3), and engagement with their posts was rather average. Relatively higher activity and also higher engagement was displayed by the candidates from the Civic Democratic Party, who could be seen as political "veterans" in comparison with newcomers from YES 2011 or

the Dawn of Direct Democracy. It also must be noted that the campaign communication of the two populist parties was very much centred on the party leaders, which might have contributed to the lower motivation of the other candidates to express themselves and seek engagement via the social networking sites. Lower engagement was also recorded by the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party candidates, in correlation with the figures displayed at the party level.

Table 3. Candidates' activity and engagement on Facebook, by parties

	Posts per deputy	Posts daily	Likes		Comments		Shares	
			Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Czech Social Democratic Party	20.7	1.9	14.6	20.9	4.4	6	3.1	27.3
YES 2011	14.7	1.3	12.3	28.9	5.8	12	1.6	2.1
Communist Party	11.4	1	12.3	11	4	3	2.2	1.6
TOP 09	21.1	1.9	11.4	17.2	2.1	3.6	1.2	1.6
Civic Democratic Party	23.1	2.1	24.6	21.8	8.4	10.3	3.9	5.2
Dawn of Direct Democrats	14.2	1.3	12	10.9	2.5	2.6	4	4.9
Christian Democrats	19.9	1.8	7.4	4	1.2	1.5	1.8	2

N = 102

Apart from finding notable variances between the Facebook activities of parties and their individual candidates, a difference of means test confirmed⁴ (see Table 4) that there are significant differences in the engagement of other Facebook users on the profiles or pages of candidate list leaders and those who are positioned in less favourable places on the candidates' lists. The statuses of the leaders were more likely to be "liked," commented and shared more often (H4b confirmed). No other individual or contextual variables had any significant effect on the dependent variable (H1b, H3b, H5b not confirmed; H2b confirmed). However, this is not the case when testing for the influence of technological variables (H6b confirmed, with the exception of blogs) i.e., the simultaneous adoption of other social media by the candidates. It turns out that those who have a website, use Twitter or YouTube get more "likes" to their Facebook statuses, which are also more often commented on (and more shared as well, in the case of Twitter and YouTube). This could be explained by the greater online visibility of those MPs who are active on multiple platforms, whose content can also be used for sharing and cross-promotion across platforms.

⁴We used the Mann-Whitney U Test and Kruskal-Wallis Test for testing the means among groups.

Table 4. Candidates' activity and engagement on Facebook

	Nr. of posts		Likes		Comments		Shares		N
	Mean	Std.dev	Mean	Std.dev	Mean	Std.dev	Mean	Std.dev	
Gender									
Male	19.1	18	14.6	20.5	4.6	7.8	2.7	5	80
Female	17.2	13.8	10.6	13.6	2.1	2.6	1.8	2.9	22
Age									
21-34	20.2	13.8	11.9	9	3	2.4	1.5	1.3	9
35-49	21.1	17.7	12	11.6	3.7	4.3	3.3	6.1	45
50+	16.1	17.1	15.8	25.4	4.6	9.4	2	3.2	48
Position									
Incumbent	19.7	16.6	16.3	20.8	4.3	5.4	2	2.8	43
Challenger	17.9	17.9	11.9	11.9	3.9	3.9	2.9	2.9	59
Leader	19.3	15.7	***18.6	24.2	*4.8	7.6	***3.1	3.7	48
Not leader	18.1	18.4	***9.4	11.9	*3.4	6.5	***2.1	5.4	54
Party position									
Parliamentary	20.3	16.4	15.6	19.4	4.5	6.6	2.6	5.3	39
Non-parliamentary	16.1	18	10.7	18.8	3.4	7.7	2.4	3.3	39
Website									
Yes	*20.4	16.2	*15.5	19	*4.8	7.6	3	5.6	63
No	*15.8	18.4	*11	19.4	*2.8	6	1.8	2.3	39
Twitter									
Yes	**21.5	12.7	**18.8	24.8	**6.8	10.6	**3.3	3.8	31
No	**17.4	18.6	**11.5	15.9	**2.9	4.3	**2.2	5	71
YouTube									
Yes	24.8	22.5	***27.7	20.6	**9.4	11.9	**9	11.7	9
No	18.1	16.5	***12.4	18.6	**3.5	6.3	**1.9	2.7	93
Blog									
Yes	**26.6	18.7	16.9	18.5	4.7	6	2.5	3.2	25
No	**16.1	15.8	12.7	19.4	3.9	7.4	2.6	5	77

Mann-Whitney U Test and Kruskal-Wallis (age); *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001; n=102.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Even though research on factors influencing adoption and intensity of use of new media has recently been multiplying, in the CEE region this topic has been largely neglected so far. In an attempt to help close this research gap, we tried to offer a concise picture of how the most widespread social networking site, Facebook was used by parties and candidates during the campaign for the 2013 Parliamentary Elections in the Czech Republic. The first

goal of our research was to look for similarities or discrepancies between Facebook use at the party and individual level, to explore the potential effect of the parties on candidates (in terms of adoption and activity, as well as in terms of the engagement of their potential voters' networks). The Czech Facebook users clearly paid considerable attention to the two brand new populist parties, YES 2011 and the Dawn of Direct Democracy, but at the individual level the YES 2011 candidates displayed the lowest adoption rate and also a very low ability to attract the attention of Facebook users. We believe this can be to a significant extent explained by the leader-oriented campaign strategy of both populist parties, organizing most of the online communication around the leaders who gain the bulk of SNS users' attention. When looking at the more traditional parties, the picture is quite different – there seems to be a more visible connection between party strategy and the activity of the candidates. These observed patterns imply the existence of different strategies among the parties as such.

The second aim of our research was to examine other factors that could influence the adoption, activity and engagement with Facebook posts written by the candidates. We assumed that candidates with certain characteristics – corresponding with the assumptions of the normalization thesis and the diffusion of innovation theory, as well as with the findings of previous research – would be more likely to use Facebook, more active in contributing to their account, and also that their posts would gain more attention. The data from our study confirm in some aspects the findings from earlier research (e.g. Carlson and Strandberg, 2008; Strandberg, 2009), showing that sociodemographic factors are generally a weak predictor of the use of SNSs by politicians. In our case we found no significant effect of age and gender on the adoption or engagement (H1a/b not confirmed, H2a/b confirmed). Neither an incumbent position at the individual level nor the parliamentary status of the party played any role in terms of adoption and engagement, either (H3a/b and H5a/b not confirmed). Out of the individual and contextual variables, only the status of the leader turned out to be in some aspects a significant factor in the candidates' use of Facebook. While the mere adoption of Facebook by leaders seems to be moderated by other technological factors (H4a partly confirmed), leaders do gain more attention and their posts on Facebook display higher engagement in terms of likes, comments and shares as well (H4a confirmed).

An interesting finding is the apparently high importance of using other digital channels for success on Facebook (H6a/b confirmed), which gives an advantage to those more technologically savvy candidates who are able to utilize and alternate between multiple platforms. These results are in concord with Philip N. Howard's thesis about the rise of the "hypermedia campaign" (Howard, 2006) as a response to the multi-channel environment politicians have to adapt to in the 21st century, by trying to diversify their communication portfolio, rather than focusing on just one or two channels. Future research should, therefore, focus specifically on the type of politicians who are extensive users of new media, in order to better understand their strategies of adoption and use of these technologies. It can be assumed that the individual motivations of politicians' use of new media will also play an important role here. The key to understanding politicians' attitudes and their approach towards new media could therefore be found by focusing

more on the routine, off-campaign, everyday forms of use, as Anders Larsson and Jakob Svensson (2014) have suggested, possibly employing more in-depth, qualitative research strategies which would counterbalance the natural limitations of the kind of quantitative macro-level perspective used in this study.

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NA STRANAČKOJ LINIJI? KAKO ČEŠKI PARLAMENTARCI PRIHVAĆAJU I KORISTE FACEBOOK

Alena Macková :: Václav Štětka

SAŽETAK Posljednjih godina svjedoci smo intenzivnih akademskih rasprava o potencijalu društvenih medija u Češkoj Republici. U fokusu tih rasprava uglavnom su stranice političkih stranaka na društvenim medijima, a u posljednje se vrijeme fokus akademskih rasprava o upotrebi društvenih medija pomaknuo na političare. Cilj je ovog rada pružiti uvid u ulogu Facebooka u komunikaciji političkih stranaka i kandidata za vrijeme čeških parlamentarnih izbora 2013. Analiziramo kako je sedam političkih stranaka i dvjesto političara prihvatilo Facebook kao mobilizacijski alat te tražimo sličnosti i razlike u smislu prihvaćanja, strategije i uključivanja korisnika. Iako se utjecaj političke stranke čini važnom varijablom, naše istraživanje upućuje na to da je za uspjeh na Facebooku na individualnoj razini vrlo važno korištenje drugih digitalnih kanala.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

FACEBOOK, DRUŠTVENI MEDIJI, PARLAMENTARNI IZBORI, ČEŠKA REPUBLIKA

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PRIKAZI KNJIGA

BOOK REVIEWS

Ruxandra Boicu, Silvia Branea and Adriana Ștefănel (eds)

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN TIMES OF CRISIS: PERSPECTIVES FROM CENTRAL AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

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Political Communication is the lifeblood of democracies. Communication is particularly important where democracy is in flux, fragile, or indeed in crisis as is the case across many of the newer, Central and South-Eastern European (CSE) EU Member nations. This edited collection of empirical research papers focuses on understanding democratic processes through a study of the election campaign communication and its impact. Authors exploit the opportunities for comparative research offered by the 2014 European parliamentary election and so are able to encompass an exploration of the campaigns in Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. While this does not represent all nations it offers insights across countries of varying sizes, population densities, cultural and political experiences and so provides an overview of the electoral terrain of the area.

The collection is usefully divided into four sections. The first section 'Media Coverage and Political Marketing' of six chapters explores electioneering strategies and tactics with the main focus being on how media outlets covered the campaign. The second section broadens the focus of tactics to explore the question of whether these represent second-order campaigns. The three chapters collectively find mixed results suggesting the European parliamentary contests can be both a tactical testing ground as well as a contest of marginal importance. The third section develops this debate to explore how contests are framed around either a European or National political agenda. The four chapters in this section similarly offer mixed findings, where some parties focus purely on national issues where others promote a European agenda. The final section, entitled 'Ideological premises, candidate recruitment, and vote results' contains five chapters which link tactics to outcomes, here the issues of the role the elections play within democratic culture are explored.

The volume highlights a variety of challenges for the development of democracy, raising important questions for scholars of elections. In particular the role of media, with coverage largely focusing on the mainstream broadcast media, is explored and the studies show the varying interest, style of coverage and editorialisation which occurs. With these media consistently being the primary source of information on politics to many citizens, and particularly those least interested in politics, this focus is justified and insightful offering a salutary reminder of the potential political power of a minority of editors and, in some cases, the political actors to which they align.

Similarly we also see a range of questions posed regarding engagement with the European project, an issue that many of the nations of the EU face. European parliamentary elections often can be used as a platform to attack the idea of the EU and so lead to the election of right-wing Eurosceptic party representatives. This phenomenon undermines the functioning of the European parliament and so the relationship between the EU, its member nations and their citizens. While this proves problematic within countries with fragile and at points corrupt democratic institutions, it also undermines the external

forces of democracy which attempt to raise the average level of democratic standards across the continent.

In raising these issues, and many others relating to the conduct, reporting and impact of election campaigns across the CSE nations, this collection is important for understanding the progress of democratization in a more global perspective. While the EU has its own specific challenges, the issues relating to the conduct of campaigns and the reporting of politics by media are universal to democracies globally.

Overall this collection of essays offers unique snapshots of national contests within nations facing challenges for the embedding of democracy. Each of the chapter authors provide the reader with rich insights into the diversity of the campaigns and common issues and challenges faced by campaign managers, journalists and voters. The studies also adopt a multi-disciplinary perspective, so the volume interweaves work from political marketing, psephology, media analysis and electoral sociology to offer a rich series of insights into the study of this election. These insights make Boicu et al's volume an important addition to the fields of election campaigning, the CSE nations, broader EU politics as well as offering lessons for all scholars interested in the interplay between elections and democratic culture. The rich coverage and insightful data within the essays raise particularly important questions for consideration for the study of the future of democracy in Europe. Hence this work represents a must read for scholars and practitioners in this important field of human endeavour and the book a timely and welcome contribution to the Palgrave Political Communication and Campaigning series.

Darren G. Lilleker

Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann, Jesper Strömbäck and Claes H. de Vreese (eds)

POPULIST POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN EUROPE

Routledge, London, 2017, 402 pp
ISBN 978-1-138-65479-2

Populism has been increasingly pervasive phenomenon that has reached its crescendo with the vote in the UK to exit the EU and the victory of Donald Trump in the USA. The term has been used in public discourse to describe a plethora of different political actors (candidates, parties, movements) who come both from political left and right and who claim to speak in the name of the people and against the political elites. Common to all of them is the use of simple and direct language that is aiming at the common sense of average people and that is rejecting the intellectualism of elites.

Contrary to the fluidity of colloquial uses of the term, scholars have been struggling to introduce more structure and clarity into the research of populism. The growing amount of literature on populism has been primarily focused on providing a solid definition of the phenomenon, identifying and measuring different types of populism, discussing its relation to democracy and understanding causes for its rise. One of the key academic debates evolves around the issue of ideology: is it justified to treat populism as a coherent political ideology or is populism just a political communication style?

The book *Populist Communication in Europe* edited by Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann, Jesper Strömbäck and Claes H. de Vreese focuses on communicative aspects

of populism. This dimension has been unjustifiably neglected in the research of populism even though "communication plays a significant role in the rise of populism" (p. 3). Aside from the discursive nature of populism, which has been the focus of numerous studies, authors of this book provide several other reasons why populist communication should be given serious attention in the studies of populism. First, populist actors are dependent on the media that serve as their "oxygen of publicity"; second, media give attention to populists because they represent attractive and 'sellable' media products, as was the case with Donald Trump; third, populist communication is not to be studied only with political actors but also with the media who gladly adopt populist frames when reporting about certain issues, such as immigration; finally, mainstream leaders also resort to populist rhetoric when reaching out for voters (p. 4-5).

The book provides 24 country cases and groups them geographically. In the introductory part the authors outline key discussions in existing research of populism. They align with the scholars who consider populism a 'thin' ideology (e.g. Mudde, 2004; Freedon, 1996) and they single out three key elements of populist communication: references to the people, anti-elitism and anti-group messages (p. 15). 'Anti-group messages' are in the literature also known as the references to 'dangerous others' (see Grbeša and Šalaj, 2016). These 'dangerous groups' pose a threat to the efforts to bring power back to the people. For instance, resentment towards immigrants who might take away jobs from the domestic populace or hostility towards ethnic and religious minorities, who threaten the way of life of the domestic people, are common features of right-wing populism. On the other hand, dangerous others may also be detected among financial elites; when we talk about left populism. The authors lay down their conceptualization of populism by proposing that construction of "the people" should be regarded as the central component of populist messages while anti-elitism and identification of "anti-out-groups" should serve as "optional additional elements" (p. 24). Various combinations of these elements can point to "different types of populism" (p. 24). The second part of the book focuses on Northern Europe and contains cases of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. The third part deals with Western Europe and contains cases of Austria, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands, Switzerland and The United Kingdom. The fourth part is about populist communication in Southern Europe, specifically in France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Portugal and Spain. The fifth part is concerned with Eastern Europe and contains the cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovenia. The final, sixth part, brings conclusions. Stanyer et al. first sum up the results of country-specific analyses and conclude that 'in Europe, populist actors are often equated with extreme-right, anti-immigration attitudes and nationalism' (p. 356). However, populist actors position themselves across the political spectrum, from right to left, which is why Stanyer et al. conclude that 'a clear, distinctive ideology is (...) not a distinctive feature of populist political actors across Europe' (p. 356). Esser et al. in their concluding remarks come up with a challenging threefold conceptualization of "media populism". The first dimension is "populism by the media" which captures the way in which media engage in "their own kind of populism" (p. 367). This perspective builds on the in-built media "anti-establishment bias" detected in several analysed countries (p. 356). The second dimension is the "populism through the media" (p. 369) which focuses on the attractiveness of populist messages and inclination of the media to promote populist players to catch the

attention of the audiences. The third dimension is “populist citizen journalism” (p. 371) which refers to the tendency of the media to open the gate to populism through readers’ comments which are often populist in nature. Finally, in the last chapter of the book Reinemann et al. sketch the uses and effects of populist political communication (p. 386) which calls for integrated research of populist messages and their effects.

This book is a valuable contribution to studying populist political communication. Its biggest value, aside from being a very useful and thorough overview of the state of populism in Europe, is that it points to a number of communication-related topics that have been emerging in the studies of populism but so far have not been given adequate scholarly attention. Although all concluding chapters build on comparative findings, they do not say much about differences between different groups of countries with similar socio-political background or for that matter, between the countries with similar background. This type of comparative insight might have contributed to the discussion on foundations and nature of populism. Nevertheless, this does not undermine the quality of this important reading.

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Marijana Grbeša

 Kristin Skare Orgeret and William Tayeebwa (eds)

JOURNALISM IN CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT CONDITIONS: WORLDWIDE PERSPECTIVES
 NORDICOM, University of Gothenburg, Göteborg, 2016, 202 pp
 ISBN: 978-91-87957-24-6

The book *Journalism in Conflict and Post-Conflict Conditions: Worldwide Perspectives*, edited by Kristin Skare Orgeret and William Tayeebwa, consists of ten articles related to different post-conflict areas, media reporting and journalists’ experiences from conflict and post-conflict areas. Skare Orgeret states that the aim of this book “is to provide both empirical and theoretical input to the discussions of the role of journalism and media in conflict and post-conflict situations and in the often rather muddy waters between them” (p. 16). The first chapter of the book, Elisabeth Eide’s “Afghanistan: Journalism in pseudo post-conflict. A clash of definitions?” explores the concept of post-conflict using Afghanistan as an example. Eides discusses the development of journalism as an institution and analyses the stories published by two important websites – NAI (*Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan*) and IWPR (*Institute for War and Peace Reporting*) in 2014. Both media organizations “seem to strike a balance between reporting ongoing conflicts and war activities and reporting which takes citizens’ concerns in the everyday seriously”, seeking a peaceful solution in a war-ridden country (p. 36). In her chapter “Justified mission? Press coverage of Uganda’s military intervention in the South Sudan conflict” (Chapter

Two), Charlotte Ntulume discusses neighbouring Uganda's press coverage of the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF)'s involvement in the conflict in South Sudan using the frame theory, indexing and the notion of the fourth estate. The majority (72%) of manifest frames portrayed UPDF's involvement in the war as justified (p. 48), and 85% of the sources identified in the coverage were official sources (p. 55). "The New Vision and Daily Monitor coverage of the UPDF intervention in the South Sudan conflict in the early days following the deployment toed the government line on the justifications" (p. 57). In the chapter "Who's to blame for the chaos in Syria? The coverage of Syria in Aftenposten, with the war in Libya as doxa" (Chapter Three), Rune Ottosen and Sjur Øvrebø examine how the civil war in Syria can be discussed as a post-crisis-crisis. Using the dichotomy between *war journalism* and *peace journalism* the article analyses frames used in reporting on the gas attack in Ghouta and examines which of the parties involved were blamed for its escalation. Ottosen and Øvrebø claim that Aftenposten's coverage leans towards a war journalism approach, with some elements of peace journalism and mostly blames the Assad regime for the attacks (p. 68). The peace journalism frames were found in only 15% of the articles. In 12 of the 72 examined articles, where the word "Libya" is mentioned in the text, there is a willingness to draw historical lines to the Libyan war as at least a contributing factor to the War in Syria. Chapter Four "Framing peace building: Discourses of United Nations radio in Burundi" by William Tayeebwa discusses how in its post-conflict, peace-building operations in Africa the United Nations has been accused of promoting the Western model of "liberal peace building" as opposed to exploring alternative approaches proposed by national actors. Tayeeba uses the "conflict-sensitive-journalism" and "peace building" concepts to analyse six selected programs broadcast from national RTNB, from October to December 2009. Tayeeba states that principles of conflict-sensitive reporting and peace journalism found in the analysed content is the kind of model of journalistic practice that should see conflict-prone countries (such as Burundi) transition to a stable nation that aspires to play a more prominent role in the peace-building architecture (p. 95). Chapter five "Women making news – conflict and post-conflict in the field" is based on the experiences of female reporters and journalists from seven countries around the world. "Kristin Skare Orgeret discusses what challenges and opportunities women journalists face when covering conflict related issues either at home or in a foreign context where gender roles may be very different from those of their home country" (p. 20). First, the author states the role of journalists in the conflict area and gives a definition of two central strands of feminism – *equality feminism* (or liberal feminism) which focuses on the basic similarities between men and women, and *difference feminism* (or cultural feminism) which accentuates the inherent differences between men and women. Female reporters interviewed in this chapter agreed that men and women cover the war and conflict differently. An awareness of cultural norms and practices is considered to be particularly important along with the need to fight the victimisation of women. Through two case studies Chapter Six "Experiences of female journalists in post-conflict Nepal", by Samiksha Koirala, explores the participation of women journalists in Nepali media, including their experience of reporting during and after the conflict. Babita Basnet felt isolated the first few years she worked, and as the only female reporter she was often questioned about the credibility of her reports. Maina Dhital, "being one of the few women working in Kantipur, was often subject to gossip and subtle harassment" (p. 123). Data presented in this chapter

show an increase of women journalists in Katmandu-based media by 100%, from 12% in 2005 to 24% in 2014. "The case studies presented suggest that women journalists in media organisations (and female sources) are more highly valued than previously. It seems that the growing number of female journalists make women feel more comfortable with their occupation." (p. 125) In Chapter Seven, "Intercultural Indigenous Communication of the Indigenous Communities of Cauca in the Context of the Armed Conflict", Henry Caballero Fula explains and analyses the emergence of a diverse indigenous media in Columbia, answering questions of representation, debate and indigenous autonomy. Local media groups, some their own radio stations, were formed in the 1990s giving a voice to the community and their organisations. Caballero Fula argues that "when it comes to a position diverging from that of their organisation and/or community, a healthy aspiration for a collective indigenous communication would be to generate an internal debate to seek a solution" (p. 144).

Claiming that the Norwegian media were not capable of producing independent, quality journalism on the significance and meaning of the killings in relation to the conflict and the peace process in Colombia, Roy Krøvel states that the "Global and Local Journalism and the Norwegian Collective Imagination of "Post-Conflict" Colombia" (Chapter Eight) seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between Norwegian foreign policy and Norwegian journalism. The chapter explores how global media made sense of the assassinations of indigenous leaders in Toribio. Opposite to an indigenous media which put associations in historical and social context, media around the world used frames and narratives considered to be suitable for their audience (p. 148). "Media coverage was entirely subsumed within the dominating narratives and discourses produced by the state department and the NGOs. Only much later did a few critical voices begin to be heard." (p. 156) Krøvel concludes that education, knowledge and willingness are an important part of the production of creative and critical journalism on peace-related issues. Chapter Nine "Improving post-conflict journalism through three dances of trauma studies", by Elsebeth Frey, explores the possibilities for interaction between post-conflict journalism and trauma studies. The study is based on qualitative in-depth interviews with two Tunisian journalists and two Norwegian journalists. Using Newman and Nelson's framework of three tensions, Frey shows how the concepts of crisis journalism, conflict sensitive journalism and post-conflict journalism may overlap. The three tensions or so-called dances are based on traumatic stress studies: the dance of approach and avoidance, the dance of fragmentation and integration, and the dance of resilience and vulnerability. Frey states that the knowledge learned from these three dances "could mean a more realistic perspective on post-conflict situations, and a better understanding of how journalism may help to strengthen resilience in people and society" (p. 184). Anne-Hege Simonsen's "Moving forward, holding on. The role of photojournalistic images in the aftermath of crisis" shows how, in post-conflict situations, photographs may work as triggers of collective as well as individual emotions with their power depending on where in the post-conflict process their users find themselves and how far the process of negotiating the past has come (p. 20). Simonsen argues that the reading of the image is always individual and, using the example of Richard Drew's "falling man", photographed on 11 September, points out that the impact and the role of photography depends on the audience and the moment of publishing. "Photographic meaning is never fixed, but

fluid and multivocal, and photographic agency is thus best studied through concrete photographs in concrete contexts.” (p. 198)

The book offers an insight to the role of the media in post-conflict areas, “to report on the conflict but also to build a consensus on the way out of it” (p. 16) along with the discussion on the changing conditions for the journalistic profession in post-conflict areas. “At the same time, the contributions problematise the concept of post-conflict and powerfully illustrate that the phase between war/conflict and peace is neither unidirectional nor linear, as the use of the concept sometimes seems to imply.” (p. 16)

Zrinka Viduka

Jan Fredrik Hovden, Gunnar Nygren and Henrika Zilliacus-Tikkanen (eds)

BECOMING A JOURNALIST. JOURNALISM EDUCATION IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

Nordicom, Göteborg, 2016, 334 pp

ISBN 978-91-87957-34-5

Students’ motivation for journalism studies, their views on journalism as a profession and themselves as future journalists has lately been in the focus of scientific research. Ever changing technology and trends has made journalism a dynamic profession with circumstances and prospects that differ significantly from the situation just 10 years ago. All this justifies further research in terms of gathering valuable data for understanding as well as developing (improving) not just journalism studies but the practice as well.

As pointed out by the editors, the book is “strongly rooted in the Nordic Conferences for Journalism Teachers” and the “research tradition on journalism education in the Nordic countries” which “by 2012 had become the largest survey of this kind in the world” since almost five thousand students at thirty institutions participated. This amount of data and experience should be of interest to a far reaching (scientific) audience.

The book is divided into four sections that group individual papers (chapters) by different authors. The first one entitled *A Nordic model* offers four chapters, including an introduction written by the editors Jan Fredrik Hovden, Gunnar Nygren and Henrika Zilliacus-Tikkanen. Their chapter provides an insight into the “Nordic model” of journalism education – a product of similarities between the Nordic countries in terms of history, media systems and education as well as intense cooperation between (journalism) educators. The second paper written by Elin Gardeström entitled “Educating Journalists. The Who, When, How and Why of Early Journalism Programmes in the Nordic Countries” gives a comparison of journalism education systems in the Nordic countries, but also discusses the origins of this education and the way it was developed through the years.

The paper ‘We All Think the Same: Internship, Craft and Conservation’ written by Ida Willig is about Danish journalism education and the specificity of a relatively few formal educational institutions and the focus on journalism as a craft. The fourth paper “New Times, New Journalists? Nordic Journalism Students Entering an Age of Uncertainty” by Jan Fredrik Hovden and Rune Ottosen gives a summary of a series of surveys conducted with journalism students (almost five thousand students in Nordic countries).

The second section is entitled *Professional (re)orientations* and consists of six papers. The first paper “Journalism Education and the Profession. Socialization, Traditions and Change”

by Gunnar Nygren presents the results of two surveys conducted in Poland, Sweden and Russia to compare attitudes towards professional values and integrity between students and journalists. The paper "Perfect Profession. Swedish Journalism Students, Their Teachers, and Educational Goals" written by Gunilla Hultén and Antonia Wiklund provides insight into both students (survey about their future professional roles) and teachers' reflections (interviews about their professional attitudes). "From Politics on Print to Online Entertainment? Ideals and Aspirations of Danish Journalism Students 2005-2012" by Jannie Møller Hartley and Maria Bendix Olsen is a survey about students' ideal workplace and roles, and "Finnish Journalism Students. Stable Professional Ideals and Growing Critique of Practice" by Henrika Zilliacus-Tikkanen, Jaana Hujanen and Maarit Jaakkola questions students' motives for studying journalism along with their perceptions of the profession. Ulrika Andersson's paper "The Media Use of Future Journalists and How it Changes During Journalism Education" deals with media forms students use and whether it changes as they progress in their education. The last paper in the second section written by Erik Eliasson and Maarit Jaakkola is entitled "More Mobile, More Flexible. Students' Device Ownership and Cross-Media News Consumption, and Their Pedagogical Implications" and examines students' media habits to see how educational institutions could adapt their teaching to build upon such habits.

The third section *Meeting the challenges* offers six papers. The first "The Gap. J-School Syllabus Meets the Market" written by Arne H. Krumsvik talks about the development of journalism school syllabi in Norway. Why many women leave journalism just a few years on the job is discussed in Hege Lamark's paper "Women Train In – and Out of – Journalism". The paper "Burdens of Representation. Recruitment and Attitudes towards Journalism among Journalism Students with Ethnic Minority Backgrounds" written by Gunn Bjørnsen and Anders Graver Knudsen deals with the problems students and young journalists with minority backgrounds face when entering journalistic profession.

Terje Skjerdal and Hans-Olav Hodøl's paper "Tackling Global Learning in Nordic Journalism Education. The Lasting Impact of a Field Trip" analyses curricular profiles of journalism programmes in Nordic countries to trace the footprint of global learning, and "Dialogues and Difficulties. Transnational Cooperation in Journalism Education" by Kristin Skare Orgeret looks at the possible involvement of global learning in journalism through international cooperation. The last paper in the chapter bears a similar title to the book itself "Becoming Journalists. From Engaged to Balanced or from Balanced to Engaged?" Written by Roy Krøvel, it deals with the understanding of the role journalism education.

The fourth section is entitled *Meeting the field* and consists of four papers. Jenny Wiik's paper "Standardized new Providers or Creative Innovators? A New Generation of Journalists Entering the Business" provides an answer to how journalism (student) interns perceive the practices of professional journalism. "Is This a Good News Story? Developing Professional Competence in the Newsroom" by Gitte Gravengaard and Lene Rimestad questions the differences (discrepancies) in practices students learn during their education and at the beginning of their internship. In the paper "Internal Practical Training as a Teaching Method for Journalists Students" by Hilde Kristin Dahlstrøm focuses on internal practice training as the essential pedagogical tool for the training of journalism students. The last paper "Developing Journalism Skills through Informal Feedback Training" by Astrid Gynnild discusses the use of a new feedback tool to develop journalism skills.

The importance of the book lies in the breathe of the tackled topics and all the collected experiences from different Nordic countries. It certainly provides interesting reading that could be of potential interest to any journalism teacher, professional or student.

Dunja Majstorović

 Viktorija Car, Miroљub Radojković and Manuela Zlateva (eds)

REQUIREMENTS FOR MODERN JOURNALISM EDUCATION – THE PERSPECTIVE OF STUDENTS IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Sofia, 2016, 207 pp
 ISBN 978-3-95721-255-9

25 years after the seismic changes with the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and Western Balkan, the question of adequate media policy and journalistic standards remains highly relevant in all of the countries in the region. To improve the situation and to solve some of the issues, the issue of quality journalistic education seems one of the key potential solutions. Therefore the programmes of journalistic education at universities in these countries present one of the potential ways to educate ethical and professional journalists of the next generation – but they might also represent an obstacle to evolution if these programmes are old-fashioned, out-of-date, or focused on wrong topics and problematic perspectives.

The new book *Requirements for Modern Journalism Education – The Perspective of Students in South East Europe* therefore addresses a highly relevant and topical issue of processes in five different countries in SEE: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Serbia. There are similar patterns from the past: in most of these countries, the education of journalists developed only after the World War II and in some cases even decades after that. The education was in all of these countries during those years under extremely high control of ruling communist parties, emphasizing the role of journalists as ‘social-political workers’ (as in Yugoslavia) and as part of larger propaganda system. Only after the 1990s and the fall of communism did more open systems of journalistic education develop. There were certainly important differences between different countries, with Albania and Romania representing some of the harshest example of communistic hard-line systems which did not leave space for any sort of democracy, open discussion, watch-dog function and other characteristics of critical journalism. On the other hand, journalism and journalism education in Croatia and Serbia as former parts of Yugoslavia was more open to critical perspectives and Western influences, due to the softer version of socialistic rule.

These countries thus had some similar starting points in 1990 and 1991, but also faced some different historical and political circumstances which led to quicker or slower democratization, both in politics and in media and journalism. This is reflected also in todays situation, with Croatia, Rumania, and Bulgaria being members of European Union, and Serbia and Albania not. However many of the issues in their media and journalism are similar. The five national reports and final comparative chapter show many similar problems, including political capture, high levels of corruption, lack of transparency in many aspects of societies etc., resulting in media that is connected or often intertwined with political actors, particularly ruling parties; media that is financially weak and thus

more prone to political or economic (advertising) pressure; and journalists that have weak social and financial position in a society, that are often threatened or that function less as watchdogs and more as PR representatives of partial interests.

This specific position of journalists and media results also in specific expectations of young students who decide to study journalism: a relatively high percentage of them is seeking fame and recognition, and would like to work on television, but very few of them talk about financial motives for their study and profession. A number of countries report the feminization of this profession which can also be seen as a result of weak financial position of today's journalists in these, but also many other countries. And in most of the countries, post-graduate students show higher level of scepticism about the potential or power of their profession, confirming that older students with more practice in the media identify the weak position of journalists and their media compared to the owners, advertisers, or politicians.

The research in five different countries shows also some similar problems of today's journalistic education – for example in all of the analysed countries, one of the key issues as identified by students is a technical one: a modern, up-to-date media equipment that allows students to produce content on their own. In all of these countries, students emphasize the need for more equipment and for more practical knowledge or experience. In all of these countries, state owned universities generally have weaker economic position, however some countries (Croatia, Albania) also show that private faculties or universities did not provide quality education or positive feedback from their students due to lack of staff and low quality. It seems thus that private faculties at least in the area of journalistic education did not reach an adequate level that would enable the high-quality education of new generations of journalists, showing that state owned universities remain highly relevant in keeping or upping the standard and influencing the future of countries' journalism.

All five country studies use same framework of research based on questionnaire among the undergraduate and post-graduate students, looking for their opinion and experience with their studies. The book thus offers significant contribution and insight to the complex picture of today's media, journalism, but particularly future generations of journalists and what can be expected from them. It packs this answers in a context of country history and wider social and political framework, explaining country particularities and experiences. It also shows differences from the 'enthusiastic' 1990s when the promise of democratic change led to extremely high and obviously quite naïve expectations about the brave new world of media and journalism in such new democracy. Today's picture is much more down to earth, showing the potential but also the wider obstacles (from finances to political system and international influences, including the role of EU and international organizations and donors).

The area of journalistic education thus represents the area of continuous changes and continuous need for research. And of course a research of students and their perceptions and expectations represents one part of the wider educational landscape. A further research on other issues would also contribute to the SWOT analysis of journalistic education: what are the strengths and weaknesses, what are opportunities and troubles? Semi-structured in-depth interviews with specific students might provide additional insight and provide clues to improvement. A research among the journalistic professors

and educators would be another potential area of further research, showing the problems and dilemmas that educators face (some aspects are mentioned in the research, but to hear about these issues from educators themselves would enable more complex picture). And a research among the faculty managers, financiers (state, donors) would offer an insight into the management and financial aspects of journalistic education. Finally, the perspectives and experiences of media companies who later employ or offer contracts to new journalists would add another stone to the mosaic of different perceptions with journalistic education in South East Europe – a more practical aspect that is often controversial and ethically problematic (due to political or economic pressures and controversial practices or relationships), but would still help researchers (and wider society) to gain new set of results and opinions.

The book on journalistic education in South East Europe, researching attitudes and expectations of students, represents a significant contribution to such wider picture. It is highly important that this sort of research (and reflections) from the region continues to be produced, as the media and journalism itself is affected by economic, political, and technological changes and disruptions, changing the role of future journalists, their identity, and particularly their expected knowledge.

Marko Milosavljević

 Edgar Gómez Cruz and Asko Lehmuskallio (eds)

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND EVERYDAY LIFE: EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON MATERIAL VISUAL PRACTICES

ECREA, Routledge, London and New York, 2016, 296 pp
 ISBN 978-1-138-89981-0

The book *Digital Photography and Everyday Life: Empirical studies on material visual practices* does exactly what its title asserts. It investigates practices by people around the world that revolve around the use of photography in the digital age. Comprised of three parts: "Variance in use in everyday photography", "Cameras, connectivity and transformed localities" and the final section "Camera as the extension of the photographer", this interdisciplinary book has the visual social sciences as the common denominator for all of its chapters. As the editors Edgar Gómez Cruz and Asko Lehmuskallio write in the introduction, the core of this volume is in the "pictorial practices" that ground the use of digital photography in everyday life.

It is no novelty that sight is our most important sense (Jenks, 2002)². What is new, however, is the massive proliferation of images in our world, whether on posters, billboards and ads or in the digital realm – on various websites, applications and social media especially. As Paolo Favero states in this book, every *two minutes* our contemporary world produces more images than the entire 19th century accumulated throughout its course! (p. 209). Possessing a camera equipped phone is the norm nowadays, and coincidentally, the onset of 2016 had the iconic Kodak launch a first primarily camera-oriented smartphone, dubbed Kodak Ektra. Besides social media such as Facebook and the primarily visual Instagram,

² Jenks, Chris (2002) The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture: An Introduction, pp. 11-47 in Jenks, Chris (ed.) *Visual Culture*. Zagreb: Naklada Jesenki i Turk, Hrvatsko sociološko društvo.

special websites have constituted online communities that revolve around photography: Flickr, Tumblr and National Geographic's *Your Shot*, to name the most popular ones. BBC, the British public service media has too converged its services and now offers a Visual Radio Production and short Instagram news videos. In such a mediascape, where the visual has asserted itself quietly, but abundantly as the norm, this book is a welcomed collection of texts that begins to uncover the usage and meaning of photographs in our daily lives.

Ethnography is an often mentioned method here, as case studies on pictorial practices from Ireland, Austria, Tanzania, Portugal and the United Kingdom are presented by the authors, each with a different take, a different niche on the usage of photography. The chapters of this book analyse the shaping of long-distance relationships by communicating visually on messaging platforms and applications, the notions of space and locality related to photography, the selfie culture that has taken the world by storm, as well as the political and activist dimensions that comprise picture taking/making but also the mere presence of the camera itself. The notion of age is touched as well: as it would seem to be common sense to assume that the elderly are not quite apt to the technological pace (the 'digital natives' versus the 'digital immigrants'), research in this book uncovers that this is not exactly the case. It also investigates how digital photography communicates a myriad of topics, from raising awareness on mental health issues to selling clothes on Facebook. It is quite common (and taken for granted) that people keep pictures in family photo albums, hang them on the wall and post them on Instagram. Besides the academic community and media studies and visual culture scholars, this book is the right one for every person that has ever pondered why people take pictures of their meals served in restaurants and post them online. Scientifically, yet cleverly written and straight forward, it is welcomed at just the right time, as the interest in the visual that surrounds us has never been higher. A wonderfully exciting read.

Emil Čančar

INFORMACIJE

INFORMATION

7th Conference on Media Accountability: Journalism and Human Rights

An Overview

The Faculty of Political Science at the University of Zagreb hosted the 7th *Media Accountability* conference in Zagreb from May 19th to 21st. Media Accountability is a conference that gathers social scientists from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia and Serbia. The conference's founders are Viktorija Car and Igor Kanižaj, from the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Zagreb. They organised the first Media Accountability conference back in 2010, connecting scientists from nine regional universities. The last six conferences were held in Zagreb, Belgrade, Sarajevo, Dubrovnik and Mostar.

Following recent trends and events, according to recent debates in the domestic, professional and academic spheres, the main focus of this year's panels were journalism and human rights. Media was observed from the perspective of freedom of speech, values of contemporary democracy and the development of the highly active media audiences. The main theme was stimulated by the relevant media reporting about the migrant crisis, which became more intense during the second half of 2015. The media's portrayal of migrants, and the position of minorities and children in the media were also analysed. Vulnerable social groups, and children's privacy and rights were also in focus.

The conference was opened on May 19th, with an opening speech by the organisation committee and the keynote words of the committee members, which included Viktorija Car, Igor Kanižaj, and Gordana Vilović from the Faculty of Political Sciences, also with Danijel Labaš and Nada Zgrabljic Rotar from Croatian Studies. The opening was accompanied by the dean of the Faculty of Political Sciences, Lidija Kos-Stanišić and Aleksandra Markić Boban, the director of the Zagreb's office of the Hanns Seidel Foundation. The Hanns Seidel Foundation was the co-organiser of the conference.

The Conference consisted of lectures, structured in six panels, with an introductory panel and a "round table" debate. This year's conference represented a collaboration between regional researchers, professors, and students, and professors and students from different German universities, thanks to the Hanns Seidel foundation scholarships. Gabrielle Goderbauer-Marchner, a journalism and media professor from the University of Munich, introduced the guests with her speech about crisis communication and the problems with publications during a crisis era. She addressed the big issues and challenges of crisis communication, which has to maintain its consistency during such a hard time.

A "round table" debate moderated by the veteran of Croatian radio journalism, Marina Mučalo, followed. The debate's participants were established Croatian investigative journalists Nataša Škaričić, Slavica Lukić, Melisa Skender, Berislav Jelinić and Željko

Peratović. They discussed the problems of their profession and career, such as verbal and physical threats, the violation of the labour rights of journalists. This discussion was followed by one of current events and the background of the political system in Croatia. They especially noted the complications in their way of getting relevant information in order to provide their story. This is a complicated process as their investigative journalism may take them a couple of months or even up to a few years to start publishing their story. Their work has revealed many irregularities in the spheres of politics, economics, and even the media in Croatia.

The first panel, "The socially responsible role of journalists and editors", was dedicated to the profession of journalism in five lectures. It was about hate speech that dominates through the virtual media's comments. Gordana Vilović from Zagreb University gave the introduction. Media literacy was connected to media convergence with a lecture by Gabrielle Goderbauer-Marcher. She talked about high technology, like "smart houses", that require constant activity from their users. The following panel was introduced by Rade Veljanovski from the University of Belgrade, discussed human rights and media activities in Serbia. The panel discussed digital media services that provide more active participation of the media audiences. The next panel was about citizens' participation in the public sphere via comments and their complaints about the content of media texts. The lecture was based on research from Helena Popović, which focused on active media audiences. An interesting panel about the current state of Serbian media was presented by Mirosljub Radojković.

The following panel, "The media's portrayal of refugees and migrants" was moderated by Viktorija Car from Zagreb University. She provided a theoretical framework for the visual portrayal of individuals and migrant groups in media, while presenting recent research by Anja Stević, who analysed photographs of the migrants on Twitter – tweeted by the five most prominent newspapers in America. The sample of her research was selected using big data analysis. The iconic photos were emphasised because of their direct impact on their audience. The photos were shown to have the power to symbolise the entire migrant crisis. In the next lecture Boris Beck analysed media humour and satire, based on the emotional narratives of cartoons. Jelena Kleut and Brankica Drašković from the University of Novi Sad, presented the narrative and semiotic analysis of the photographs that provide certain meanings to articles about the refugees. The panel was concluded with research and a presentation by Dunja Majstorović and Martina Soko, who analysed the representation of child refugees in the mainstream Croatian media, *Jutarnji list* and *Večernji list*.

The theme of the next panel was "The media's portrayal of the refugees and crisis communication". This panel focused on the creation of the media's agenda and contained an analysis of the representation of the Croatian migrant crisis in the media. Nikolina Borčić discussed how some media metaphors can affect audiences, stimulating a change in their political attitudes. This was analysed via the German media discourse and an analysis of the interviews with Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor.

The forth panel “Media and marginal groups” was moderated by Lejla Turčilo from the University of Sarajevo. The focus of the panel was the invisibility of marginal groups in mainstream media. The marginal groups are defined as non-constitutive social and public sphere participants. The pictures of minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina were the focus of the analysis, but also, the lecture was based on new media trends and online communities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was thematically connected to the credibility of influential media in the contemporary public sphere, according to human rights. The position of disabled people and gender issues were also in focus.

The second day of the conference was dedicated to the recent methods of education and media literacy. The purpose of all of these methods is to increase the new generation of participants in the public sphere. Those new methods should be implemented in educational programs, starting with institutions of elementary education. The focus should be on media literacy, and demands a critical response to media use. Danijel Labaš moderated the panel “Media and information literacy”. The first lecture analysed an e-mail correspondence between professors and their students in Italy. Based on that, the main differences between Italian and Croatian academic communication were noted.

The final panel was about children and young adults as one of the most vulnerable social groups. Nada Zgrabljic Rotar moderated the panel “Media and children”. This panel discussed children’s privacy in the media and the mechanisms of self-regulation that are dedicated to the protection of children’s rights in the media and the social networks.

At the end of the conference there was a promotion of a new book with selected papers from the previous *Media Accountability* conference. The book’s title is *Media and the public interests* and it was edited by Viktorija Car, Marijana Matović and Lejla Turčilo.

In their closing statements the participants expressed their satisfaction with the success of the conference based on its organisation level, the content of the conference and how the presented research adds to media studies’ body of knowledge. This successful conference should provide the motivation for the eighth conference on Media Accountability, which is likely to held next year at the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Belgrade.

Vjekoslav Šago

IPSA Joint Conference RC22 and RC10 with CICOM

**Political Communication in Uncertain Times:
Digital Technologies, Citizen Participation and Open Governance**

University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain
7th and 8th September 2017

Application deadline: 30th January 2017
Contact: ipsacicom33@unav.es

The unexpected British exit from the European Union, the migration crisis, the rise of Isis, conflicts in countries as Syria, the emergence of populism and unpredicted citizens' reactions (such as the rejection of Colombia Peace Plan or the election of President Trump) are only some of the events that are taking place nowadays; they all have in common the uncertainty that brings with them and that characterize the current era.

The purpose of this conference is to consider the state of media and communications research in a political period marked by a variety of events that take place within an uncertain context. The conference theme focuses on the intersection between the role of political communication and digital technologies, both understood as potential pillars that may enhance democracy in a communication context characterised by continuous crises and their transnational consequences.

Papers should make a contribution to the development of theoretical or empirical studies regarding digital political communication conducted by diverse actors that range from governments, political parties, media organisations, to non-governmental actors, citizens and social movements. Scholars, researchers and professionals are encouraged to submit paper proposals that either broadly or specifically deal with the aforementioned issues, be it by addressing national or comparative studies, theoretical or empirical ones.

We welcome submissions that cover one or more of the following questions:

>New challenges for journalism and communication in a digital society: What changes have journalists and the media in general gone through? Do digital technologies change traditional concepts of media power? Do media and communication technologies support the formation of community?

>Media coverage and journalist behaviour during moments of political turmoil: What role can media play at times of crisis? Which frames appeared repeatedly while media reported about an event? Is there any danger regarding the empowerment of certain voices while others are ignored?

>Digital technology in election campaigns: How have election campaigns changed in styles, strategies, tools and with what impacts on voter engagement? What factors are shaping election outcomes in the digital age, and to what extent?

>Relationship between representatives and citizens: How do governments and institutions deal with the opportunity and challenges introduced by digital technologies? Do they help to promote a real conversation between both sides? To what extent do they reduce the gap between them?

>New parties in the political scene: Are new technologies promoting the emergence of populist parties? To what extent communication from a new party is different to those from traditional parties? Is there any visible pattern shared by new political actors?

>Political actors and new technologies: To what extent are new technologies shaping political parties? Can we distinguish different practices and uses depending on the countries? Are those different practices somehow driven by any ideological perspective?

>Digital Technology in public diplomacy: How digital media are shaping international political communication? How should international political actors adapt communication to the new digital audiences? Do digital media allow dialogue and interaction with international publics?

>New voices, a multiplicity of agents in the public sphere: Can digital technologies transform the characteristics of the traditional public sphere? Is it possible to have an online public sphere? Will an online public sphere enhance democracy? Do media technologies constitute a new public sphere?

>Mobilization and participation: Are digital technologies really able to empower citizens' political participation? Do they empower specific voices in detriment of others? To what extent social media play a relevant role on social movements? Can we talk about social media echo chambers in some results of recent political events?

Key note speakers

JAN ZIELONKA (University of Oxford)

ANDREW CHADWICK (Royal Holloway University of London)

Further information at:

<http://www.unav.edu/web/facultad-de-comunicacion/cicom33>

Marta Rebolledo, chair of the organization committee

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