

Social media as public sphere

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Social media as public sphere

An exploratory study of online political communication in Norway

Doctoral Dissertation

University of Agder
Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences

2013

Doctoral Dissertations at the University of Agder 65

ISSN: 1504-9272

ISBN: 978-82-7117-737-9

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Printed by the Printing Office, University of Agder
Kristiansand

Acknowledgement

The process of doing a Ph. D has without doubt been the most challenging and rewarding experience so far in my professional life. In this process I have grown both in academic and personal terms, in ways so numerous they will not fit in a short paragraph. Becoming a father at the same time as I sat down to write up the thesis did not make the process any less challenging, but perhaps even more rewarding.

Many people have made this possible, and deserve a heartfelt thank you.

First of all, thanks to my two excellent supervisors, Øystein Sæbø and Leif Skiftenes Flak, for giving me the freedom I needed to learn and for reining me in when I went astray, and for teaching me how to spend the time between and after sessions at academic conferences.

All my colleagues at the department of Information Systems in the University of Agder have been a great support, especially professors Bjørn Erik Munkvold and Maung K Sein for discussions and input, Hallgeir Nilsen for showing an introverted person that teaching can actually be a rewarding experience, Bente Holmen for being who you are, Tom Roar Eikebrokk for long discussions on the workings of academic life, and to all the rest of you for being good colleagues and teachers. A special thanks to my fellow Ph. D students Soffi and Karen, who have shared this journey with me since we were master's students, and to Calle (boss and fellow student), Ondrej, Christoph and Øyvind.

Thanks also to those I have worked with outside University: The Labour party, Arendal and Lyngdal municipalities, Asbjørn Følstad and Marika Lüders at SINTEF ICT, and everyone who allowed me to use their time so that I could finish my research.

Thanks to all my family and friends (yes mum and dad, that includes you), for your support and for understanding why I was preoccupied half the time you tried talking to me, and for keeping me grounded in the “real world”. Finally, thanks to my beautiful wife and lovely daughter for not throwing me out and for reminding me what the most important things in life are. Your smiles when I enter the house at the end of the day are what have kept me going in this last stage of my Ph. D.

Abstract

This thesis presents an exploratory study of the use of social media in the Norwegian public sector, and contributes to the understanding of how social media can be applied to improve deliberation. The study is situated within the eParticipation research field.

The motivation for the study is the reported challenges facing democracy, in the form of lower voter turnout, decline in political party membership, and a general lessening of interest for public issues and deliberation. Deliberation is seen as essential for democracy, and promoting deliberation could well lead to an increase in voter turnout, party membership and the general interest for public affairs.

In an attempt to increase political participation and thereby deliberation, government has introduced several Information and Communication technologies (ICT). In recent years, social media have also been introduced.

Many projects fail, in part due to an overly positive technological deterministic belief that simply introducing ICT would lead to increased deliberation and political participation. However, the introduction of previous communication technologies such as radio, TV and the early Internet has shown that while new technologies do lead to change, this process is a complex one, demanding a holistic, socio-technical approach.

Further, past introductions of new communication technologies have shown that new technology alone rarely lead to fundamental societal changes. After an initial outburst of radical optimism, followed by a similar pessimism, the new technology settles as part of the established order, introducing new ways of thinking and communicating. What was thought to be a revolution turns out to be part of evolution. While the technology opens up a number of possibilities, such as communicating across vast distances, the fundamental needs of the users remain the same. This demands that citizens and politicians need to understand and learn how to use the new technology to meet their needs, perhaps in a better way than the old technology allowed for.

The overall objective of this thesis is thus to contribute to the understanding of social media used for political participation and deliberation, as well as to show how social media is being used today, and how this use contributes towards the objective of increased deliberation.

This overall objective provides two different research problems:

1. How can social media be understood in the context of fostering deliberation?

This first question is answered through two sub-questions:

- A. How can social media be defined as IT artefact in the context of eParticipation?
- B. How can communication in social media contribute to deliberation?

2. How can the improved understanding of social media influence eParticipation projects?

The second question also has two sub-questions:

- A. How can social media and the needs of relevant eParticipation actors be matched?
- B. Which forms of social media communication contribute to increased deliberation?

These research questions are addressed through four case studies. The cases were selected to explore a broad spectrum of the research theme, while still remaining within the three year timeframe of the Ph.D.-project. The cases provided input from both the municipal and state level, and the opinions, objectives and actions of stakeholders such as political parties, activists, administrative officials and “ordinary” citizens were examined through interviews, observation, content analysis and social network analysis. The findings from the four cases are applied to Sæbø’s (et al., 2008) framework model of eParticipation, to illustrate that social media can support a wide range of eParticipation activities, and that some of these do in fact contribute to deliberation.

Concepts of the public sphere and social capital were applied to address research question 1a, resulting in an analytical framework to be applied in studies of social media communication. The framework is tested on an example case, and shows the conditions that should be present for online discussions to be seen as relevant for public debate.

Further, the first research problem addresses the socio-technical aspects of social media through question 1b. It is answered by examining social media as an ensemble view IT artefact, using information infrastructure and technological capabilities as analytical tools. This provides us with a theoretical lens for understanding social media in the context of eParticipation. This lens is also tested on an example case, revealing the challenges and opportunities provided by social media.

The first research problem is addressed with a conceptual approach. The next problem is more oriented towards practice and understanding. Research question 2a aims to provide a guide for media choice in a world where the number of media outlets is ever growing. Building on the results from research question two, I address this issue by creating a framework for media choice. The framework is based on the needs of relevant actors and an analysis of how the capabilities of each medium support these needs.

Finally, research question 2b examines how social media are being used, by different actors, for different purposes, with different outcomes. By applying content analysis as well as interviews, I show how different forms of communication are more or less relevant to the public debate. The answers provided can guide us in creating better discussion spaces in social media, by showing which types of communication supports a thriving public debate, and which do not.

The thesis provides 3 contributions to knowledge:

1. Increased understanding of how the socio-technical aspects of social media can contribute to deliberation, showing that
 - a. Social media can function as a public sphere and thereby facilitate deliberation when a certain set of characteristics is in place. The public sphere needs to be defined specifically for eParticipation, and this includes examining:
 - i. Criteria for the communication's content
 - ii. Network and community effects
 - iii. Social capital constructs
 - b. Defining social media as an ensemble view IT artefact provides valuable insights about the constraints and possibilities of using social media for deliberative purposes by analysing the technological capabilities of the

individual medium, and analysing social media as a whole, using information infrastructures

2. Based on the previous contribution, insights into how different actors perform different activities and have different objectives for social media, and how this leads to different deliberative outcomes
3. An analytical approach combining genre theory, stakeholder analysis and the public sphere for selecting social media suited to the objective of the actors, and for showing how to promote deliberation in the selected medium

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1 Introduction

This PhD thesis on eParticipation examines social media use in the Norwegian public sector, focusing on implications and capabilities of social media for democracy and public debate. The research is situated within the eParticipation (Sæbø et al., 2008, Macintosh, 2004) research field.

The motivation for this research is related to normative democratic ideals. Democracy can be conceptualised in a number of ways, depending on the actors' interests and beliefs (Markoff, 2011). This thesis adopts the position that a thriving democratic state should encourage citizens to participate in the democratic process, through voting, being members of political parties (Dewey, 1927, Oppenheim, 1971), and most important, by contributing to the public debate through participation in various discussion spaces and involvement in the political process within the confines of representative democracy (Brooks and Manza, 2007)

However, societal trends are moving away from these ideals. In Norway, where the research presented in this thesis is situated, party membership has gone down by 30 % from 1997 to 2008, leaving only 5 per cent of the population as members of a political party (Van Biezen et al., 2012). Governments throughout the world rely increasingly on expert assessment, leaving less room for public opinion (Rayner, 2003). Market forces and the increased judicialisation of politics is pulling power away from parliamentary democracy (Østerud and Selle, 2006). Fewer citizens vote in elections (Gray and Caul, 2000), citizens are losing interest in the broad social movements of the past, and the voluntary sector is moving towards a market-driven logic, becoming more professionalized, and less of an alternative democratic channel (Sivesind et al., 2002).

In an attempt to renew citizens' public engagement, governments have introduced a number of Information and Communication technology (ICT) projects. However, these projects have struggled to engage a sufficient number of citizens, or citizens have left the project after an initial burst of interest (Sæbø et al., 2009), often due to a lack of purpose, etiquette and rules for conversation (Hurwitz, 2003). Citizens appreciate the ability to communicate, but do not believe these ICT initiatives will improve democratic engagement (Kolsaker and Kelly, 2008), and many politicians do not want to participate in fear of losing power (Mahrer and Krimmer, 2005). Citizens do not feel

that existing projects are representative of their needs (Dahlberg, 2001), and few projects include tools for collaboration and feedback, which makes it more difficult to realise the potential benefits of ICT (Kolsaker, 2005).

There are those, however, who believe that civic engagement is not disappearing, but rather changing form: *To the extent that political and civic identity and modes of action are changing, civic engagement may also be changing shape rather than decaying.* (Bimber, 2003)(p.24). Government-driven traditional ICT programs often fail, but there is evidence that other forms of participation and civic engagement are emerging in social media. Citizens are not necessarily less civic minded today. Rather, their engagement finds new forms and new outlets. A recent survey from the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 39 % of Americans have performed at least one political activity in social media (Rainie et al., 2012) Activist groups and political parties alike gather support and spread information through social media (Segerberg and Bennett, 2011, Sen et al., 2010).

Various online spaces such as Facebook, Twitter and the blogosphere gather individuals who discuss political issues, spread ideas and seek support for their views on society, and government needs to utilize this to help create better services, disseminate information more effectively, and for democratic participation (Brandtzæg and Lüders, 2008) A new sphere for civic engagement, with a new form and tone of communication (Graham, 2008, Graham, 2011), is emerging in these online spaces (Chadwick, 2009a), and there is a need to understand how these new arenas for participation works, and how they can contribute to democracy.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine and understand these new forms of participation in social media, and to evaluate how they contribute to democracy. This is done through a four case studies of various levels of government and various civic activities, with an emphasis on understanding the social context in light of the public sphere, as well as the technological capabilities present in social media. The objective is to aid practitioners and researchers in understanding and applying social media in order to facilitate public debate.

1.1 Problem statement

This thesis presents an exploratory study of social media use in an eParticipation context. The research is framed as an interpretive case study. An interpretive approach rejects the idea that there is a universal truth waiting to be discovered (Crotty, 1998), and is suitable when trying to understand complex and emerging phenomena (Klein and Myers, 1999). Case studies allow us to study our phenomenon of interest in its natural setting, and to learn from practice (Benbasat et al., 1987). eParticipation is a complex field, involving several different levels of government, as well as different actors both within government as well as in the civil domain (Fang, 2002). The cases presented in the thesis were chosen to represent these different levels. The four cases covers the viewpoints and activities of municipal and state government levels, political parties, activists, administrative officials and “ordinary” citizens in order to explore the overall objective:

Contribute to the understanding of social media used for political participation and deliberation, as well as to show how social media is being used today, and how this use contributes towards the objective of increased deliberation.

Data collection and initial analysis of the cases were done using only this overall objective, and the thesis research questions were derived from a combination of literature and initial case findings.

When new technologies for communication are introduced, there are usually three phases involved in the analysis of the new technology: An early period of technological determinism, where the new technology is believed to be revolutionary for society (Barlow, 1996, Rheingold, 1993), followed by reports claiming that the new technology has failed to deliver on its promises and in fact has a number of negative consequences (Kraut et al., 1998, Andersen et al., 1998) before the final phase where analysts realize that the new technology has indeed not revolutionized society, but has instead led to some changes in the way people communicate (Shepherd and Watters, 1998), with some disruption to the established order (Kalnes, 2009) and a set of new rules that those using the technology needs to learn (Peña-López, 2008, Jackson and Lilleker, 2009).

While the technology opens up a number of possibilities, such as communicating across vast distances, the fundamental needs of the users remain the same, and studies comparing offline and online democracy finds that participation is predicted by the same factors (Saglie and Vabo, 2009). This demands that citizens and politicians need

to understand and learn how to use the new technology to meet their needs, perhaps in a better way than the old technology allowed for. The introduction of new communication technologies challenges the established order of things, leading to new practices. These changes are not brought about directly by the new technology, but rather by the interplay between the possibilities of the new technology and the efforts made by its users to restore the social equilibrium (Marvin, 1990). Findings from the cases showed that a lack of common understanding of social media was an obstacle for effective use, as citizens and politicians were not agreeing on how social media should be used, or what the outcomes should be. Thus, the first research question of this study is:

1 How can social media be understood in the context of fostering deliberation?

Researchers at the Tavistock institute found that organisational and human factors were equally important for performance than technological innovations (Trist, 1981), showing that in order to understand technology one must examine both the technology and the social structures surrounding it. The first research question is thus addressed through two sub-questions:

- A. How can social media be defined as IT artefact in the context of eParticipation?
- B. How can communication in social media contribute to deliberation?

The first sub-question is addressed by examining social media as IT artefact. There are several definitions and frameworks of social media, both general (O'Reilly, 2005, Boyd and Ellison, 2007) and specifically for eParticipation (Charalabidis and Loukis, 2011). While these provide good insights into social media, they do not provide us with the clear definition of social media as IT artefact. Defining the IT artefact being researched is an essential part of Information Systems studies, as it contributes to a better understanding of the technologies related to our research questions (Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001, Gregor, 2006). There are several ways of defining the IT artefact, ranging from simple examination of the technology itself, to viewing technology as the interplay between the technological artefact and the surrounding social world. Social media applications do not present anything inherently new in technological terms. The various parts that make up a social media application are well-known web artefacts. What makes social media special is the combination of the technological capabilities and the social expectations and norms surrounding the use of these media (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009, Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Thus, I seek to define social media in the

context of eParticipation as an ensemble view (Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001) IT artefact to provide a holistic view on, and analytical lens for, social media.

Sub-question B is addressed by applying the concept of the Public sphere as a tool for analysing communication in social media. The concept of the public sphere has been used as philosophical grounding for a number of eParticipation studies (Sæbø et al., 2008), but is often under-theorized in eParticipation. The public sphere is defined as “such a place where public opinion can be formed” (Habermas, 1989); a simple definition, yet operationalized in a number of different ways.

Conceptualising the public sphere, and creating a framework for analysing if an online space is or is not a public sphere, provides a theoretical lens for deeper understanding of the online spaces being examined. The public sphere concept also embodies the normative democratic ideals on which this thesis is built, by pointing out the importance of being included and listened to as part of a public.

Delespinasse claims that we can distinguish between three types of power; The power of the pen, the purse and the sword (Delespinasse, 2008). While only a select few have enough money to wield the power of the purse, and the state has the exclusive right to military action in most countries, everyone can wield the power of the pen by communicating and attempting to convince others of their position. The power of the pen can thus be a powerful tool, and is “the key to creating a participatory democracy” (Casteel, 2010).

Political communication involves three spheres: The political, society, and media, and has four different stages of interaction: public discussion of political ideas and issues; formal decision-making; implementation and execution of decisions; and public elections (Mahrer and Krimmer, 2005). This thesis is concerned with how media are being used for public discussion of political ideas and issues, and from this follows the second research question:

2. How can the improved understanding of social media influence eParticipation projects?
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The second question also has two sub-questions:

- A. How can social media and the needs of relevant eParticipation actors be matched?
- B. Which forms of social media communication contribute to increased deliberation?

Sub-question A is motivated by the need to understand what citizens actually want to communicate about. While there are many examples of online deliberation projects, these projects are often based on the needs and preconceptions of government officials and politicians (Ebbers et al., 2008) and fails to attract those who are not already represented through the channels implanted in the formal decision making process (Carr and Halvorsen, 2001). As long as this trend prevails, online participation will only increase the distance between those with influence and those without. As long as the stated political goal is to include more citizens, there is a need to both identify the individual stakeholder groups in a given context, as well as the communication needs of these stakeholder groups. Finding an answer to this question might help to include more people in government initiated participation projects through implementing this knowledge in the project planning stage.

Knowing which medium to use is only half the solution. In order to address the overall objective of increased deliberation, it is also necessary to examine how people communicate online, and if these forms of communication actually foster deliberation.

The introduction of new media over time leads to new communication practices and interaction forms (Shepherd and Watters, 1998). Mapping the communication practices in various eParticipation related settings and examining the outcomes of different practices provides a rich picture of which forms of communication foster participation, and which do not. The four cases cover several eParticipation areas; Activism, online campaigning and the online community of the Labour party. While these do not make up a complete picture, examining communication in these settings does provide insights into current communication practices in a number of different settings.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into four parts. The first part provides a brief introduction to the research topic and problem definition in section 1, presents relevant background

literature in section 2, and section three presents the research design and methodology of the study. The second part presents the four case studies and the findings from the cases in section 4, where the findings from the four cases are applied to Sæbø's (et al., 2008) framework model of eParticipation, to illustrate that social media can support a wide range of eParticipation activities, and that some of these do in fact contribute to deliberation. These findings are further developed in sections 5 and 6, in order to answer the thesis research questions. Finally, section 7 presents a summary of the thesis, with concluding remarks, implications and future research possibilities. The individual papers, interview guides and coding examples are found in the appendix. The structure of the thesis is presented in **Feil! Fant ikke referanseilden.**

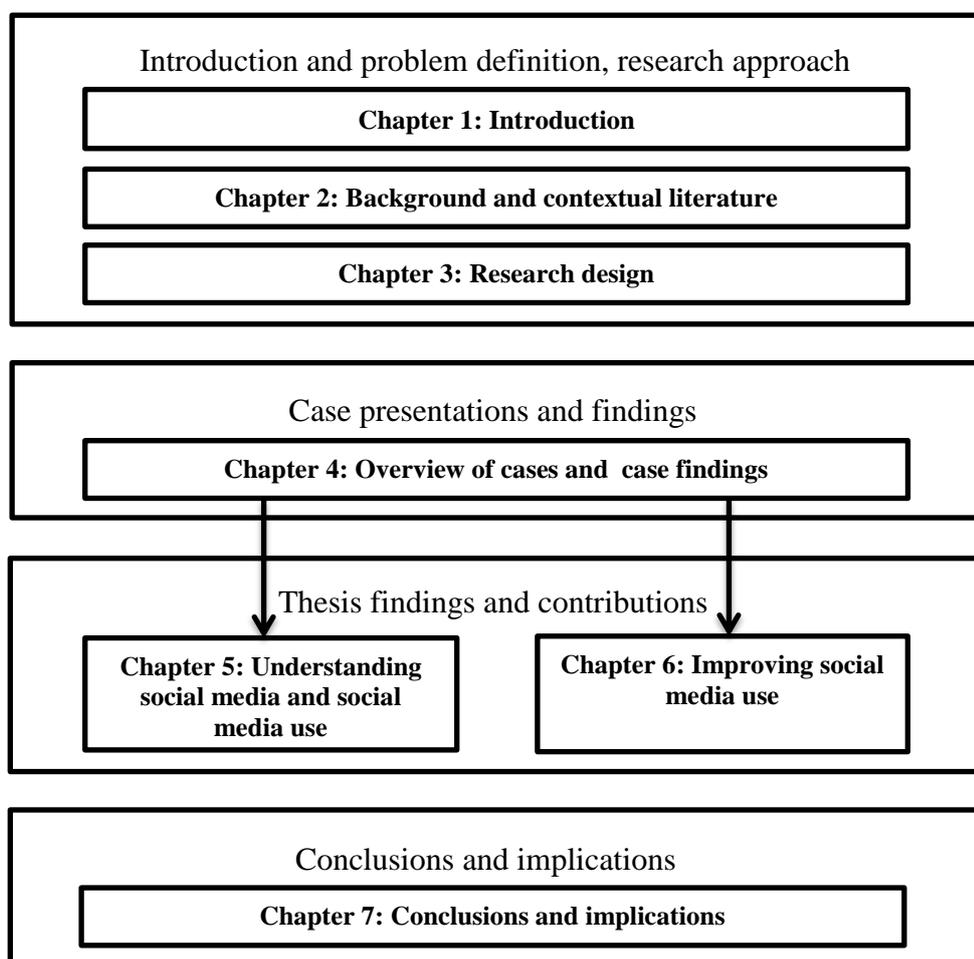


Figure 1: Structure of thesis

2 Background and contextual literature

This section of the thesis presents previous research and theories related to the research questions.

Interpretive hermeneutic studies require an in-depth analysis of the society being researched (Myers, 1995). Thus, in order to answer the first research question, it is important to define democracy and democratic deliberation. Democracy can be conceptualized in a number of ways (Markoff, 2011), and in an interpretive study it is important to clarify the context of the study. Section 2.1 presents a brief history and definition of democracy and democracy in Norway, as well as providing an overview of the eParticipation research field.

Research question 1 aims at examining participation in social media from a deliberative and a technological perspective. The term social media includes a number of different web sites, services, technologies as well as ways of thinking and acting online (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Section 2.2 shows existing research and definitions of social media.

Deliberation is an important part of democracy. In order to answer sub-questions 2a and 2b, I look towards the concept of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989), which allows us to examine if the discussions in social media have deliberative qualities, and thus if they contribute to democracy. A number of eParticipation projects have applied the public sphere as their theoretical lens (Sæbø et al., 2008), but with little discussion of the nature of the public sphere. There are many ways of conceptualizing the public sphere (Dahlberg, 2001, Trenz and Eder, 2004) and different views on the nature of deliberation (Graham, 2008, Graham, 2011). Section 2.3 presents an overview of these differences, and the definition of the public sphere that is applied in this thesis.

2.1 Democracy and eParticipation

Communication between citizens and politicians is important for the democratic process (Casteel, 2010). However, current societal trends are showing signs that communication is not as good as it should be. Governments rely increasingly on expert assessment, leaving less room for public opinion (Rayner, 2003). Fewer people are members of political parties (Van Biezen et al., 2012), vote in elections (Gray and Caul, 2000), or participate in the voluntary sector (Sivesind et al., 2002). In an attempt

to renew public participation, government has implemented a number of ICT projects (Komito, 2005).

Working for increased citizen participation and the fear that democracy is failing is not a new phenomenon. In his account of the public sphere, Jürgen Habermas voices his fear that the spaces for public debate have disappeared (Habermas, 1991), and the need for citizen participation was a debated topic already in the 1960's (Arnstein, 1969). Until the 1990's, communication technologies such as paper letters, public gatherings and telephones limited the amount of people who could participate. This changed with the growth of the Internet, the first ICT that enabled many-to-many communication between geographically dispersed and numerous groups of people (Hansen and Reinau, 2006). In other words, the “e” in eParticipation refers to the use of ICT to facilitate public participation on a larger scale than was possible with older communication technologies (Sæbø et al., 2008). This section on democracy and eParticipation provides a brief summary of democratic theory and different types of democracy, to show the historical background that has influenced the eParticipation research field.

2.1.1 eParticipation

eParticipation is part of the broader research area of eGovernment. eGovernment can be broadly defined as “the use of Information and Communication Technologies for better public services for citizens and for businesses”(Codagnone and Wimmer, 2007).

eParticipation can be defined as “technology-mediated interaction between the civil society sphere and the formal politics sphere and between the civil society sphere and the administration sphere” (Sæbø et al., 2008). Most eParticipation studies focus on consultation and deliberation (Sanford and Rose, 2007), with the citizen as the most important stakeholder: “The focal point of eParticipation is the citizen, i.e., the purpose of eParticipation is to increase citizens' abilities to participate in digital governance” (Sæbø et al., 2008).

In recent years several reviews of the eParticipation field have been published, showing that eParticipation is a fast-growing field (Sæbø et al., 2008, Medaglia, 2012, Macintosh, 2004, Macintosh et al., 2009, Freschi et al., 2009). Up until March 2006, 131 articles on eParticipation was published in academic journals and conferences

(Sæbø et al., 2008), with another 122 identified between April 2006 and March 2011 (Medaglia, 2012). The real number is even higher, as some conferences were not included in the count (Sæbø et al., 2008). eParticipation is a multidisciplinary field, related to democratic theory, political science, communication studies and technology studies/information systems (Macintosh et al., 2009). This has led to a number of different research approaches, questions and methodologies (Freschi et al., 2009). Because of this, the focus of recent reviews has been to define the field (Sæbø et al., 2008), and examine which areas of the field are currently under-researched (Medaglia, 2012). The eParticipation field consists of different *actors* conducting several *activities* producing different *effects*. These effects are determined through *evaluation*, and there are several *contextual factors* influencing and being influenced by eParticipation activities (Sæbø et al., 2008).

The actors in eParticipation are citizens, politicians, government institutions and voluntary organisations. Identified ICT-supported activities include electronic voting, political discourse formation and decision-making, activism, consultation, campaigning and petitioning. The effects of eParticipation activities are seen as democratic (how eParticipation contributes to democracy), deliberative or related to increased civic engagement. The contextual factors that have been researched are the availability of information, ICT infrastructure and the underlying technologies used in a given project, accessibility, legal issues and governmental organization. Evaluation research in eParticipation has focused on quantitative measures, demographics as well as the tone and style of conversations (Sæbø et al., 2008).

The two reviews show that the research focus has changed for some of these areas. While early research leaned heavily towards eParticipation activities, the years 2005-2011 have focused more on evaluation and effects. Citizens and government institutions are the most researched actors in both periods. Research on activism and decision-making has gone down, while there has been a slight increase in research on electronic voting. The contextual factors studies since 2006 are almost exclusively related to the underlying technologies used in eParticipation, with some studies of government organization. There has also been a strong decline in the study of civic engagement effects, while research on deliberative effects have gone up (Medaglia, 2012).

The research agenda for eParticipation includes six areas of research (Sæbø et al., 2008): Normative research on the objectives of eParticipation, instrumental research on the tools and methods applied to reach these objectives, descriptive research of existing projects, research on evaluation methods, development of a set of theories and methodology for the field, and technological research focusing on defining the IT artefact, and. However, technological research needs to take a holistic approach and be integrated with the social, political and organizational context (Macintosh et al., 2009, Medaglia, 2012)

2.1.2 Democracy and deliberation

eParticipation discusses how to apply ICT to improve democratic deliberation, but does not in itself provide a definition of democracy. Democracy can be defined in a number of ways (Markoff, 2011), and research on the democratic effects of new media tend to under-theorize democracy and the democratic context the study is placed in, in favour of “models of direct democracy and other techno populist scenarios” (Coleman and Spiller, 2003). The purpose of this section of the thesis is to clarify the democratic context the study is situated in, by providing a brief summary of the history of democracy, leading up to current western democracies and the Norwegian democratic system.

Democracy comes from the Greek words *demos* (people/village) and *kratos* (rule), and was first used around 500 AD to describe the political system of Athens in ancient Greece between 508 and 322 BC (Blackwell, 2003). Athenian democracy had three pillars: *The assembly*, where every citizen could meet, speak his mind and vote on issues. Everyone present had the right to vote and speak (Hansen, 2005). *The council of 500* consisted of full-time politicians, elected for a year at a time, and *the people’s court*, where citizens would sit in the jury and decide on the guilt or innocence of fellow citizens brought to court. (Blackwell, 2003).

The Athenian democracy was very different from democracy as it is practiced today. While the assembly resembles what we would call direct democracy, only a small part of Athens’ population was actually allowed to participate. Women, slaves and non-citizens were excluded, leaving a small group of men who had the status of “citizen of Athens” and thus being entitled to contribute to public opinion (Hansen, 2005, Schreiner, 1992). In modern democracy the definition of citizens and the public is

wider: “the public consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for” (Dewey, 1927).

As these indirect consequences are far-reaching in the modern nation-state, “it is necessary that certain people be set apart to represent them, and to see to it that their interests are conserved and protected” (Dewey, 1927). Instead of every citizen speaking up for himself, we now vote for political parties to represent our interests in parliament. While there are differences between countries, most western countries follow some sort of representative democratic model (Anderson and Goodyear-Grant, 2005). Parliamentary debate is mainly aimed at informing other political parties about one’s own views. In Athens however, rhetoric skill was essential. As every citizen only represented himself, he had to convince the other citizens of his view, without the support of a political party. Rhetoric was seen as an art-form, and those skilled in the art were highly regarded in Athenian society (Schreiner, 1992). And it is this ancient skill that is held up as the ideal in many current eParticipation projects (Jenkins and Thorburn, 2003). Citizens today feel that representative democracy fails to respond to their needs, and call for increased citizen participation (Ataöv, 2007).

There are a number of ways to engage in civic participation, with different outcomes for different activities. Outcomes can be either symbolic or material. Symbolic actions might not lead to concrete results, but instead contribute to a sense of civic duty or participation (Bucy and Gregson, 2001). Symbolic activities include voting, discussing in online forums, following public affairs via the media, or attending public ceremonies. Material actions tend to provide more tangible results, and include actions such as direct lobbying of parliament or giving large donations to political parties. Material actions tend to be restricted to the financial, cultural or political elite (Bucy and Gregson, 2001). While it might seem that material actions are more effective, a thriving democracy needs symbolic actions such as voting, letter writing and an informed public in order to maintain an on-going relationship between the representative and the represented, so that the public are informed and can hold political parties accountable for their actions (Coleman and Spiller, 2003).

There is, however, debate on how much citizen participation society should have, and how much to expect. Elite theories assume that most citizens are not interested, and that government should not put too much emphasis on public opinion (Dahlgren,

2002). And government tends to be more concerned with how to make public policies more effective through participation and inclusion, than with normative democratic ideals of deliberation (Bevir, 2006). Further, the main concern of politicians is often to inform, while citizens want their participation to influence policy formation (Sæbø and Päivârinta, 2005)

Deliberative democracy implies close ties between citizens and decision making (Päivârinta and Sæbø, 2006). Reasoned debate is emphasized, and while politicians remain the decision makers, they use citizen input in the decision making process. Deliberative democracy has been promoted by those who emphasize the importance of citizen participation and free and open debate (Gimmler, 2001, Van Dijk, 2000).

There is, however, a difference between deliberative democracy as a form of government, and deliberation as normative ideal for a form of communication. This thesis is concerned with the latter, and sees deliberative democracy as a political system where citizens freely discuss public issues, and where this discussion is seen as essential for democracy (Kim et al., 1999). Deliberative discussions with a rational and inclusive way of forming discourse, has been promoted as a way to create better democracy by validating policy through inclusive discussion (Casteel, 2010), and simply as a better form of democracy: “politics...is the illness, and deliberative democracy can provide a cure” (Niemeyer, 2011). Deliberative ideals stress that everyone should be entitled to participate, but inequalities and differences in power makes this difficult (Karpowitz et al., 2009) and even when these inequalities are disregarded, there is the question of how to make room for everyone in a true deliberative process (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006). Even so, deliberation among participants in low power interest groups provides many benefits such as increased political knowledge and efficacy (Karpowitz et al., 2009) and the scale issue can be addressed by deliberative communication in “mini-publics”, small groups of ordinary citizens (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006). The outcome of deliberation in a mini-public can then be communicated to the remaining population, as input for the remaining population so they can make up their own minds on issues (Niemeyer, 2011).

A less rule strict approach to deliberation is to look beyond politics and formalized discussion spaces, and focus on everyday political talk. Graham (2008) claims that citizens discuss political issues everywhere, not just in political forums, and argues that researchers and politicians should broaden their ideas on what is seen as

deliberative in order to understand public opinion. In some cases, debates in non-political forums show strong signs of deliberation (Graham, 2011).

2.1.3 Democracy in the Norwegian context

There are differences in the democratic systems of different countries (Peters et al., 1977). Thus, eParticipation is a context-heavy field where the research focus, unit of analysis and research focus can vary between different countries (Freschi et al., 2009). It is therefore important to understand the political context of the country or region being researched.

Norway is a constitutional monarchy with three levels of government: 1) National government, which is elected by parliament. As of 2012, seven political parties are represented in parliament. 2) Regional government, 19 counties with elected officials. 3) Municipalities responsible for local government. There are currently 429 municipalities in Norway. The three levels of government have different, but often overlapping responsibilities. Elections for parliament are held every four years, as is elections for municipal and regional government. While the monarchy remains in place, it has only symbolic power today.

As Norway is geographically large, but with a small and scattered population except for the capital and surrounding area, one of the main political issues has long been the fight between national and local interests. Local democracy is held in high regard, and there is massive protest against centralization (Østerud et al., 2003). Norway has long had a strong voluntary sector, and broad social movements such as the labour movement has long held positions of power, even though these movements are less powerful today (Østerud and Selle, 2006).

While formal power lies with parliament, there are many ways to influence decisions. Corporations, activist groups, the media and various interest groups, as well as the many independent administrative functions, can all influence policy formation (Aalen, 2011), and the many local and regional newspapers provides an important channel for political debate about local matters. The media and ad hoc activist groups have become more powerful in recent years (Østerud and Selle, 2006), indicating that deliberative and partisan democracy are strong in Norway. Compared to other countries however, activism has traditionally not been an important part of the political

system. When activism does happen, it is related to ethical and religious issues, environmental protection and local issues (Aalen, 2011).

There are fears that the political system is weakening. As with many other countries, Norway too is experiencing lower voter turnout and less political interest (Østerud and Selle, 2006) and fewer people being members of political parties (Van Biezen et al., 2012). Partly in response to this, a number of government reports on ICT in the public sector have put out calls for research and application of eGovernment and eParticipation projects.

2.2 Social media

Throughout early history, family has been the organising unit in society. The state was a king far removed, who collected taxes. The family and village council took care of all other issues. Mountains, rivers and valleys created natural boundaries, and transportation was slow and difficult (Dewey, 1927). When new means of communication and work was invented this gradually began to change. Factories and the concentration of work in cities brought the population closer together, and the railway, telegraph and other communication technologies allowed people to communicate across vast distances and facilitated rapid and easy circulation of opinion and information (Dewey, 1927). Swiss philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau claimed that the state could be no bigger than the number of people who could have personal contact with each other. The introduction of communication technologies would change this dramatically.

There is little doubt that communication technology and the media have had an impact on democracy. From the printing press, via radio and television to the Internet and social media, the introduction of new technology has provided us with new channels of communication (Marvin, 1990).

While there is agreement that communication technologies influence us, there is disagreement about the nature of this influence. There are two opposing views on communication technologies' role for democracy. One view is that communication technologies, and the mass media in particular, are making us apathetic and emphasizes entertainment over public affairs, causing the public to be less interested in public affairs (Postman, 1985, Webster, 1995) or even blurring the lines between

reality and simulation, causing us to lose focus on what is important (Baudrillard, 1994).

The opposing view claims that communication technologies are very useful for public debate (Norris, 2000), and that especially the Internet and new media contribute to renew public debate rather than destroy it (Poster, 1997). Adherents of this view point out that ICT has the potential to include more citizens, as participation becomes easier when physical boundaries are removed (Tambini, 1999), and that two-way communication made possible by ICT can create a more active role for citizens, compared to traditional one-way communication technologies (Bucy and Gregson, 2001).

These potential benefits are even more visible in social media. Social media applications, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs, attract millions of visitors who interact and share content and information. In e-government and especially within the participation area, projects have failed to attract a sufficient number of participants over time. Some claim that as much as 70-80 % of all e-government projects fail (Misuraca, 2009). By moving participation from proprietary government platforms to social media applications, researchers see a potential for attracting more participants (Rose et al., 2007). Citizens have already begun using these channels to express themselves politically, through citizen journalism and activism (Eidem, 2009, Juris, 2004, OECD, 2007, Kahn and Kellner, 2004, Downey and Fenton, 2003), and governments should create discussion spaces in social media to address the challenges they are currently faced with (Gurevitch et al., 2009).

Social media, or web 2.0 as it was initially known as, emerged as a concept shortly after the .com-crisis. Observers saw that despite the recent crash, the web continued to grow, and was moving in new directions. The still thriving companies had certain characteristics in common (O'Reilly, 2005): 1) Focus on scalable services over software packages. 2) Control of data sources that become more valuable the more they are used. 3) The user as co-producer. 4) Harvesting collective intelligence. 5) Taking advantage of user's competence to reach the long tail. 6) Platform-independent software.

With "web 1.0", website owners provided content that was consumed by users. Web 2.0 on the other hand blurs the distinction between producer and consumer. Blogs,

wikis, Social networks and micro blog services have led to ever more user-generated content (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). Tapscott & Williams (2008) have formulated four principles for user generated content: *Openness* – Everyone is able to read and comment on the ideas of others. *Collaboration* – Working with others to create new content, using wikis, blogs and similar tools. *Sharing* – Sharing ideas with others, and allowing others to access your data. *Global thinking* – Publishing content in English reaches people all over the world, yet distribution costs remain the same.

Social media can be defined as web based services where users can create a public or semi-public profile, create a list of users they are connected to, and access their own and other users' list of contacts (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Social media can be further categorised into social networking Services (Facebook, LinkedIn), aggregation services (gather information from several sources and publish in one place), data mash-ups (using data from several sources to create a new service), tracking and filtering services (services that track and filter social media content), collaboration tools (wikis), web-based software tools (Online Office suites and other software accessed through the browser) and crowd sourcing tools (presenting a problem to web users and invite them to collaborate on solving it) (Anderson, 2007).

However, social media is not so much about technology as it is a cultural phenomenon, driven by the public's need for access to information, self-proclamation and collaboration (Rose et al., 2007) and the underlying concepts of listening, interacting and networking (Peña-López, 2008). The creation of a virtual identity and network creation and maintenance are important drivers for social media users (Medaglia et al., 2009).

2.2.1 Social media in eParticipation

There are several studies of social media use in eParticipation. Howard Dean's 2004 presidential election campaign is perhaps among the most well-known (Kreiss, 2009), along with Barack Obama's 2008 campaign (Robertson et al., 2010). Other studies on eParticipation actors and activities examine how political parties or single candidates use blogs and other social media applications to communicate with their voters (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009, Zittel, 2009), social media use in national elections (Johannessen, 2010a, Kalnes, 2009), specific social media applications being used by politicians (Sæbø, 2011, Grant et al., 2010), activist use of social media (Nielsen,

2009, Reed, 2005, Sen et al., 2010, Segerberg and Bennett, 2011), the citizen as co-producer of public services (Linders, 2012), and how social media has empowered health care users. (Andersen et al., 2012)

Studies of social media effects include an examination of social media use in national elections, showing that social media is seen mostly as an information channel where users do not expect to influence the party they are following on Facebook (Andersen and Medaglia, 2009) and the outcome of activism on Twitter, showing that social media has become embedded in the communication practices of some activist groups (Segerberg and Bennett, 2011). There are also some studies related to eParticipation evaluation, such as a framework for evaluation of citizen crowdsourcing (Nam, 2012), and an analysis of how social media impact voter behaviour shows mixed results between politicians' social media use and the number of votes received, with little influence in local elections, but some influence in national elections (Effing et al., 2011). Gonzales-Bailon, Kaltenbrunner and Banchs (2010) present an evaluation model of deliberation based on width and depth of discussion networks, to assess and compare different discussion spaces. Their model shows that even within the same online space, there are differences in the deliberative qualities of discussions. There are also a few studies discussing research methods and techniques appropriate for social media. Examples of methods include social network/hyperlink analysis (Park and Jankowski, 2008), automatic data mining from social media sites (Shah and Nia, 2011) to analyse the opinion formation process (Sobkowicz et al., 2012) and for analysing how social media is used in crisis management (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). Various forms of content analysis have also been applied (Vergeer and Hermans, 2008, Witschge, 2008). Lee and Kwak (2012) propose a five-stage maturity model for social media in government, and finally an analysis of risks and benefits of social media use for government shows the potential benefits of social media as well as pointing out the need for an implementation strategy and legal issues which needs to be addressed when introducing new ICT (Picazo-Vela et al., 2012).

These studies show varying outcomes of social media use. While the Obama '08 campaign was hailed as a ground-breaking social media effort, others report that we are more in a state of transition, with some evidence that social media have contributed to more participation (Johannessen, 2010a). However, there is little correlation between time spent online by politicians and the amount of attention they receive (Hong and Nadler, 2012), and political use of social media still has not adopted the

culture of social media (Sæbø, 2011), and therefore should be seen as “web 1.5” rather than web 2.0 (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009, Kalnes, 2009). Political actors seem to have adopted social media mostly on a technological level (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009). This, combined with the mixed results of the various reported eParticipation activities, shows there is still a need to examine and understand the culture and underlying concepts of social media in an eParticipation context, as well as the contextual factors that might help explain these mixed results.

These existing publications cover a wide area, but many lean somewhat towards technology-focused studies. Data-mining and data-visualisation are important research topics, but these studies tend to put little emphasis on the context in which the system is being used or the limitations of computer-generated data. They also lean towards a consumerist view of government. While there is no doubt that current research provides valuable input for eParticipation research, there is still a need for a holistic approach examining how different activities, outcomes and results are connected.

The following two sections present theories that could be applied to a holistic, exploratory study of social media in eParticipation. Examining social media as an IT artefact in a socio-technical context allows for understanding the technology in the context of eParticipation, and the public sphere is applied as a lens for understanding and analysing the communicative actions going on in social media. In the following, related background literature is presented to aid in understanding the theoretical background for social media as technology and for deliberative communication in social media. Section 4 shows how this literature has been applied to answer the first research question.

2.3 Socio-technical IT artefact: Understanding social media

The findings in existing literature vary from concluding that social media has had little or no effect on democracy (Hong and Nadler, 2012), via pointing out the possible positive effects (Picazo-Vela et al., 2012) to findings that there is a correlation between high engagement with social media and the number of votes received in elections (Effing, van Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2011). This is perhaps not very surprising, as it reflects findings from earlier studies on the web and democracy. Then as now, studies show evidence of both positive, neutral and negative effects on democracy when new communication technologies are applied (Hurwitz, 2003).

One explanation of these varying results could be that few eParticipation studies are explicit about the authors' view on the impact of technology on society. There is a long and on-going philosophical debate on the nature of technology. One extreme claims technology is the main driver of societal change, and points to inventions such as the printing press and steam engines as proof. The other extreme claims that technology plays no role at all, claiming that it is only the ways technology is being used and the social structures surrounding technology that counts. In the middle is socio-technical theory, claiming there is interplay between technological capabilities and social structures, and that the impact of technology depends both on the technology *and* the social context. Technology alone does not revolutionise democracy, there needs to be a match between technological capabilities and the political climate in the individual country (Coleman, 1999). Reports on the “democratising effect” of technology tend to “assume that technologies are historically independent forces. In fact, technology is as much an effect as a cause of the context in which it is conceived” (Coleman and Spiller, 2003). Democratic participation must be analysed in the context of social and economic aspects, not only as a technological phenomenon (Roberts, 2009).

In Information Systems research, this debate has most notably been seen as a discussion about the nature of the IT artefact (Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001). The researchers' views on this issue are likely to influence their research findings. As few studies are explicit about this, there is a need to conceptualise the IT artefact both as a theoretical contribution to the field, but also as part of the context of the individual study. In Johannessen & Munkvold (2012), we define the social media IT artefact in the context of eParticipation, using socio-technical theory as our philosophical starting point in answering research question 1a. The remainder of this section presents the background material for our definition of the IT artefact.

The idea that technological impact is due to a mix of technological and social factors emerged in the 1950's, when researchers at the Tavistock institute found that organisational and human factors were equally or even more important for performance than technological innovations (Trist, 1981). This finding led to the development of socio-technical theory (Griffith and Dougherty, 2001). An early example of a socio-technical system is found in the British radar system used during WWII (Holwell and Checkland, 2002). Holwell and Checkland describes how the

British radar was technologically inferior to its German counterpart, but the socio-technical system of radar stations, relay stations, human creativity, and a central command hub to receive and distribute information made radar into a much more powerful and effective technology for the British.

In Information Systems, Bostrom & Heinen (1977) and Kling (1980) were among the first to discuss the importance of examining the social as well as the technological. Kling even goes a long way towards saying that technology is not at all important, moving towards a sort of “social determinism”: “computers by themselves “do” nothing to anybody...computing is selectively adopted in a given social world and organized to fit the interests of dominant parties. There is sufficient evidence that computing use is purposive and varies between social settings; little causal power can be attributed to computers themselves” (Kling, 1980).

Bostrom & Heinen are a bit more moderate, but still point out that many failed IS projects fail not because of technology, but because of social issues, such as organizational behaviour and the perceptions of systems designers. Therefore they call for a socio-technical approach to IS, where the technology and the organisation cooperate. Rather than having the organisation adapt to the technology, they call for a design process which “must deal jointly with the social and technical systems” (Bostrom and Heinen, 1977). Similarly, Alter addresses the need for systems thinking, where the technical and social system are addressed, along with their respective contexts (Alter, 2004). Cases from telecom and media show how both the social and technical world play crucial roles in the work environment (Tilson et al., 2010).

Defining the object of study in socio-technical theory has proven to be difficult, as a lot of studies tend to mix the social and technical and only discuss the socio-technical as a whole: “The root of the perceived complexity of the socio-technical object lies in the fact that we are trying to do two things in one breath, namely to describe structure and action as one object” (Bygstad, 2008). Bygstad proposes that the socio-technical network is separated into its parts, by examining technological affordances and use of the system as separate but connected entities. One approach to defining a socio-technical IT artefact is to look towards Information Infrastructures (II). An II perspective allows us to see technology not as single artefacts, but as a socio-technical network of technologies and people (Hanseth et al., 1996). The concept of Information Infrastructure is characterised by six key aspects, showing how II *enables* users to do

something without being specifically designed for that purpose, is one *shared* unit which cannot be split into separate parts, is *open* to an unlimited number of users and technologies, is *socio-technical* as it involves both technology and people, *heterogeneous*, with connected ecologies and layers, and finally has an *installed base* showing that an II cannot be built from scratch but rather functions as an ever evolving entity (Hanseth and Monteiro, 1998).

As the review of previous literature on the impact of technology and government shows, examining technology alone cannot explain how using the same social media can lead to very different results. Thus, section 4 of this thesis builds upon this existing literature to present social media as IT artefact in a socio-technical tradition.

2.4 The public sphere: Understanding communication

Jürgen Habermas' concept of the Public Sphere has been used as the philosophical background for a number of eParticipation studies (Sæbø et al., 2008, Sanford and Rose, 2007). The public sphere reveals the “intimate connection between a web of free, informal personal communications and the foundations of democratic society” (Rheingold, 2007), and this idea of the Public Sphere as a place for debate provides researchers with a concept that helps explain the importance of eParticipation studies. The public sphere can be applied both as a theoretical lens for understanding participation (Trenz and Eder, 2004), and for analysing participation against a set of criteria for deliberative qualities (Dahlberg, 2001).

However, few eParticipation studies provide an in-depth description and analysis of the public sphere. The public sphere is treated as a black box, even though there is a vibrant debate going on in other fields of research on what a public sphere is, how it is created and maintained, how to evaluate it, as well as its relevance for today's social landscape. As such, there is a need for theoretical clarification of the usefulness of the public sphere concept in eParticipation research. In Johannessen (2012) I present an outline of the networked public sphere and its implications for eParticipation research as an answer to research question 2b. The remainder of this section presents background literature related to the public sphere.

Jürgen Habermas presented the public sphere as “that domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed” (Habermas, 1989). The public sphere is “an essential component of socio-political organization because it is the space where people come together as citizens and articulate their autonomous views to influence the political institutions of society” (Castells, 2008). In other words, the public sphere is simply a place or space allowing citizens to interact and discuss issues of interest.

But who is the public, where are these spaces, and what are the rules for proper interaction?

The public:

Applying Dewey’s (1927) inclusive definition of the public as everyone who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions gives every citizen the right to participate in public debates. However, Habermas described the public sphere as a forum for elite thinkers, not as a space open to everyone. As the property-owning middle-class (the bourgeois) became more powerful during the 18th century, newspapers, newsletters and periodicals emerged to meet the new class’ needs for information, and the ruling aristocracy soon began using these media to address what was to be known as “the public”:

“The interest of the new (state) authorities..., however, was of far greater import. Inasmuch as they made use of this instrument to promulgate instructions and ordinances, the addressees of the authorities' announcements genuinely became "the public" in the proper sense.” (Habermas, 1991) “the bourgeois avant-garde of the educated middle class learned the art of critical-rational public debate through its contact with 'the elegant world'” (Habermas, 1991. p. 29)

Habermas claimed that in the 20th century the public sphere declined because of mass communication, the capitalist state and the growth of the middle classes, which meant the public sphere included too many people for it to be able to create a single public opinion (Webster, 1995). According to Habermas, the public sphere existed so long as the private individual maintained a private as well as public profile. With mass consumption and increased leisure, there was no longer room for this separation of private and public:

“[the public sphere] in the salons, clubs and reading societies [possessed] a 'political' character in the Greek sense of being emancipated from the constraints of survival requirements...a separation between on the one hand, affairs that private people pursued individually...and on the other hand, the sort of interaction that united people into a public. But as soon as and to the degree that the public sphere...spread into the realm of consumption, this threshold became levelled...When leisure was nothing but a complement of time spent on the job, it could be no more than a different arena for the pursuit of private business affairs that were not transformed into a public communication between different people” (Habermas, 1991, p. 160).

Habermas was criticised for his elitist approach that, according to the critics, only included a small percentage of society as entitled to be part of forming public opinion, and other philosophers have instead called for a more inclusive approach in order to include the voices of classes who were otherwise not being heard (Kluge and Negt, 1972).

The “correct” answer about who to include as legitimate public sphere participants depends very much on how the public is defined. In ancient Athens, only males with the status of citizen were seen as members of the public, meaning that the public was made up of about ten per cent of the population (Schreiner, 1992). In the 19th century, citizenship was granted only to property owners, effectively excluding women and the working classes, until universal suffrage for both men and women became the norm during the 20th century (Merriman, 1996).

This thesis adopts a broad definition of the public, effectively including every member of society, but a definition which also opens up the possibility of defining several publics, depending on the issue being addressed:

“the public consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for” (Dewey, 1927).

Publics can further be defined as having voluntary membership (even if you are affected by something, you do not have to do anything about it), being open to critical debate on any issue, independent, self-amending and deliberative, as opposed to more

formal organisations, where membership and communication are managed, and the discourse controlled (Fish et al., 2011).

The spaces:

Habermas saw the public sphere located in the “salons, clubs and reading societies” of the bourgeois middle-class, as well as in the media used by these groups (Habermas, 1991), while the mass media was seen as more of a threat to rational-critical discourse (Webster, 1995). Between World Wars I and II, there were fears that the mass media would be used by fascists to manipulate the public, and today there are fears that concentrated media ownership leads to less civic engagement, while the scattered population of the Internet combined with increased political polarization leads to a fragmented public, which is not introduced to the ideas of others (Butsch, 2011). Others claim that we are living in a network society (Castells, 2000), where the Internet and networks of publics have created a global, networked public sphere (Castells, 2008, Papacharissi, 2002). Social media, with its focus on sharing and participation, as well as a steadily increasing user base, could attract even more citizens to participate (Rose et al., 2007), if the social context is such that it fosters democratic participation (Roberts, 2009). Utilizing the power of the network by building communities of people who are willing to spend time participating in a public sphere (Svendsen and Svendsen, 2006), disseminating ideas and discussions from one small public sphere to another means that ideas are presented to a larger public rather than leading to a fragmented public (Benkler, 2006).

Several researchers have pointed to the Internet as the location of the modern day public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002; Poster, 1997; Dahlgren, 2005; Gimmmler, 2001). In earlier centuries a public sphere could easily fit within a physical space, but in today’s interconnected and global world mediating technologies are necessary in order to form an inclusive public sphere:

“as soon as your political entity grows larger than the number of citizens you can fit into a modest town hall, this vital marketplace for political ideas can be influenced by changes in communications technology. Communication media, and the ways the state permits citizens to use them, are essential to the public sphere in a large society” (Rheingold, 2007)

Envisioning an online public sphere also changes the balance of power among participants. While traditional media empowers editors, journalists and publishers, as they decide what people read, and how the texts are framed, digital media instead empowers those with high cultural and social capital (Habermas, 2006). This is perhaps especially true for social media, where the “wisdom of the crowd” (O’Reilly, 2005) decides whose opinions and ideas should receive attention.

However great the potential, there is some concern about the obstacles. A case study of a forum for women’s organisations in Ireland showed that the free exchange of ideas was hindered by the institutional affiliation of participants (O Donnell, 2001). Online activities tend to be focused around people’s interests. Interest-based communities and segregation can easily become a democratic problem. When people socialise only with others who have the same interests, we lose that space in society where people of diverse backgrounds can assemble, debate, and shape public opinion (Calhoun, 1998). And while the Internet is promising, not everyone agrees that we currently have a functioning Public Sphere. A lack of attention to issues of public interest has been flagged as one of the major challenges to the online Public Sphere (Muhlberger, 2005).

Others call for patience, claiming that the Internet has not revitalised the public sphere *yet*, but that there is hope for incremental changes that could revitalise the public sphere (Muhlberger, 2005), and studies have shown that online public spheres are indeed emerging (Gibson et al., 2005, Kaschesky and Riedl, 2009, Robertson et al., 2009), especially in social media such as Facebook, blogs and YouTube (Castells, 2008). And while segregation based on interest can be a problem, the opportunity to create new spaces for like-minded individuals could also be seen as facilitating counter-public spheres providing a voice to groups who are otherwise marginalised in society (Downey and Fenton, 2003).

The rules:

Having identified the public and spaces where the public sphere can be found, it still remains to identify the rules for interaction. At its most basic, the public sphere requires a set of judicial rights in order to function, rights which according to Habermas was first introduced in British law:

“A set of basic rights concerned the sphere of the public engaged in rational-critical debate (freedom of opinion and speech, freedom of press, freedom of

assembly and association etc.) and the political function of private people in this public sphere (right of petition, equality of vote etc.) “(Habermas, 1991, p. 83)

With these rights in place, Dahlberg has identified six requirements that need to be present for something to be called a Public Sphere, based on the original writings of Habermas:

- *Autonomy* from state and economic power.
- Rational-critical discourse involves engaging in reciprocal *critique* of normative positions that are provided with reasons and thus are criticisable rather than dogmatically asserted.
- *Reflexivity*. Participants must critically examine their cultural values, assumptions, and interests, as well as the larger social context.
- Participants must attempt to understand the argument from the other's *perspective*.
- *Sincerity*. Each participant must make a sincere effort to make known all information, including their true intentions, interests, needs, and desires, as relevant to the particular problem under consideration.
- Discursive *inclusion* and *equality*. Every participant is equally entitled to introduce and question any assertion whatsoever (Dahlberg, 2001).

The intention is not that one should tick off every single point in order to identify a Public Sphere, but rather to point out that in order to create a Public Sphere there needs to be of at least some form of rationality and open-mindedness from the participants. Yet, as social media is an informal space, our expectations should be lowered somewhat compared to the strict rules of deliberation (Chadwick, 2009b). Further, normative discussions of deliberation often fail to take into account the realities of discursive processes. As Hauser shows, dialogue often fails to follow the rules, but remains the phenomenon through which researchers attempt to understand social processes:

“In free societies, we seek public opinion because in it we discover how social actors are engaging in and engaged by the on-going processes of social production. This engagement is a dynamic enterprise enacted through the uninterrupted mutual interaction of dialogue. That these dialogues are not always noble, nor often suspend biases for the greater good, nor immune to

ideological distortions is immaterial to their significance for how we monitor and attempt to influence the shape of our world”. (Hauser, 1998)

While the rules of deliberation outlined by Habermas and further developed by Dahlberg present us with an evaluative tool for the public sphere, there is disagreement as to what should be considered a public sphere which goes beyond the discursive level of deliberation. Splichal (2006) discusses the public sphere of contemporary European politics, and draws a line between weak and strong public spheres. The former talks about enlightened individuals that meet and construct shared meanings, and who are “members of a complete commonwealth or even cosmopolitan society”, while the weak public sphere is concerned with freedom of the press, and the public’s right to access information and act as an “effective check on the legislature based on people’s distrust” (of the government) (Splichal, 2006).

The strong public sphere is the one that most resembles Habermas’ own visions, and is an idealised “space” for a small proportion of the public, based on ideals held by the ruling classes, and have been criticised for excluding certain social groups, and especially for not including the working classes (Kluge and Negt, 1972). Others reject the idea of enlightened thought altogether, claiming that modern day media consumers are active readerships who constantly form themselves, change and evolve into something new, and because of this constant evolution we cannot adhere to a set of principles from the past (Hartley, 1996). In the information society it no longer makes sense to talk about bourgeois or working class. We have all become “citizens of the media” (Hartley, 1996), and the public of today is different from the public of the past, and this means that one should not judge the present with the ideals of the past.

The modern day public sphere is not freed from rules, but in a globalised, fragmented and multi-faceted world, there is a need to allow for a variety of voices and forms of communication. Reflecting this view, Trenz & Eder (2004) presents four ideal-types of the Public Sphere: 1) discourse-based. This is the ideal-type closest to Habermas’ original ideas of a space for free thought and discussion 2) based on political protest, where we would typically find a group of like-minded people discussing for example strategies for protest. 3) Based political campaigning, as in campaign web sites for political parties or individual politicians. 4) Based on consensus, where there is little disagreement, and people support each other. By adding these ideal-types of public

spheres, we can extend the original concept to better fit with the complex and many-layered society we live in today.

Finally, social capital plays a useful role in setting the rules for a public sphere. Social capital refers to “connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them ... ‘social capital’ calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.” (Putnam, 2000), and the social capital constructs of bridging (connections between different communities), bonding (community formation within a public sphere) and maintained (connections between individuals who do not meet face to face) social capital can be applied to examine participation in a public sphere as well as the network effects of a public sphere (Ellison et al., 2007)

2.5 Summary

This section containing previous research has shown that communication between citizens and politicians is important for the democratic process, but current societal trends show that this communication is not as good as it should be. In an attempt to rectify this, government has applied ICT in a number of participation projects. The research field of eParticipation is concerned with these democratic ICT projects that in recent years have begun to include social media as well as traditional ICT.

eParticipation is part of the broader research area of eGovernment, and is concerned with the deliberative processes of democracy. The eParticipation field consists of different *actors* conducting several *activities*, producing different *effects*. These effects are determined through *evaluation*, and there are several *contextual factors* influencing and being influenced by eParticipation activities.

In order to understand participation, it is important to be aware that democracy can be conceptualised in a number of different ways. Athenian direct democracy is often implicitly applied to eParticipation studies, but most western democracies today are representative, receiving citizen input through deliberative debates.

Social media have increasingly been used by eParticipation actors in recent years. In social media, user generated content is a central element, and through blogs, wikis and social networks users come together and discuss a wide variety of issues. Existing

research of social media shows that the current status is that they are being used for political purposes, but that often the users do not understand the underlying culture and contextual issues of social media. As social media is as much about culture and context as it is about technology, a socio-technical lens is appropriate for understanding the technology and its use.

Finally, the section argues that in order to understand the communicative actions in social media the concept of the public sphere can be applied as analytical lens. Existing eParticipation research does this to a large extent, but seldom goes in depth about their view on the public sphere. There are many different and competing conceptualisations about the public sphere, related to how to define the public, where the public sphere is located, and what the rules of the public sphere should be. Together, the topics covered in this section provide a theoretical and contextual backdrop for the research questions. The remaining sections of the thesis will merge this theoretical knowledge with empirical findings.

3 Research approach

A coherent research approach consists of four basic elements that inform each other: Epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods (Crotty, 1998). Epistemology describes our assumptions about knowledge (Bhattacharjee, 2012), and is closely related to ontology, our understanding of the world. While some researchers keep epistemology and ontology separate, the two are closely interconnected and therefore it has become increasingly common to only refer to one's epistemological position (Crotty, 1998). Theoretical perspective refers to "the philosophical stance informing the methodology, and thus providing a context for the process" (Crotty, 1998).

Epistemology and theoretical perspective can be considered as the *paradigm*, the researchers' mental model of the world, informing and influencing the research (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The methodology is the overall design of the research, and methods the individual research methods being applied to collect and analyse data (Crotty, 1998). The research methodology needs to describe the type of study, research methods being applied, the unit of analysis and the techniques applied for data collection and analysis (Butler, 1998).

The purpose of this thesis is to examine and understand these new forms of participation in social media, and to evaluate how they contribute to democracy, so that researchers and practitioners can have a better foundation for both describing and critically reflecting on the phenomenon of social media use in eParticipation. The research approach has been to conduct four exploratory case studies following an interpretive paradigm.

The cases cover various levels of government and various civic activities, with an emphasis on understanding the social context as well as the technological capabilities present in social media. Data collection and analysis has followed a multi-method approach, in order to achieve method triangulation. The overall analytical approach has been hermeneutic, as hermeneutic analysis provides a deeper understanding through multiple iterations of analysis.

Table 1 provides a summary of the research approach of this thesis, and the remainder of this section presents the arguments for why this approach is suitable for the purpose and objectives of the thesis.

Research approach components	Description
Paradigm	
Epistemological stance	Social constructionism: Knowledge is constructed in interaction between human beings, and transmitted within a given social context. Ontology: There is no objective truth to be observed in social relations, truth is an intersubjective construction.
Theoretical perspective	Interpretivism/hermeneutics: As knowledge is a social construction, there can be no “true” representation of knowledge. Interpretation of knowledge comes from the intersubjective understanding between researcher and participant, the context of the study and the prior knowledge of the researcher.
Methodology and methods	
Type of study	Exploratory case study with four Norwegian cases: The Labour Party’s social media platform, The 2009 parliamentary election, a municipality in southern Norway and municipal urban planning in a Norwegian municipality.
Research method	Hermeneutic approach, where the public sphere and socio-technical theory were applied as grand theories in analysing the cases.
Unit of analysis	Varies depending on the cases. Labour case: Social media sites of three local party groups. Parliamentary election case: Individual information workers in the political parties, and the online presences of each political party. Municipal case: eParticipation stakeholder groups. Urban planning case: individual actors representing political parties, government administration, media, activist groups and their online presences.
Data collection techniques	Semi-structured interviews, content analysis of social media spaces, social network analysis, observation of public meetings, Delphi method
Data analysis techniques	Genre analysis, stakeholder analysis, public sphere and IT artefact frameworks

Table 1: Research approach components. Based on Crotty (1998) and Butler (1998)

3.1 Epistemology

Epistemologically, the study is grounded in the constructionist tradition. The central idea of constructivism is that “human decision and human culture exert profound and often unnoticed influence” (Mallon, 2007). Where positivism claims that there is an objective truth to be uncovered, and subjectivism claims that meaning is a pure social construction, constructionism places itself in the middle. In constructionism, the object being studied is important, but constructivists acknowledge that a diverse range of meanings can be attached to the same object, based on the observer’s preconceptions, knowledge and beliefs (Crotty, 1998). The truth about the object

cannot be discovered. We can only strive to interpret the meaning of the object in ways that are useful to ourselves and others (Crotty, 1998). Constructionists are less concerned with the object itself, and more interested in the time and place-specific conventions and practices of individuals and groups that influence our perceptions of the object (Mallon, 2007). The ontology “attached” to social constructionism is the view that there exists an objective world to be observed, but we can only understand the world through language and interpretation. There is no objective truth to be observed in social relations. Truth is rather an intersubjective construction, created and negotiated through interactions between people (Crotty, 1998). This position is located in the middle between the positivist view that objective facts can be uncovered, and the postmodern view that the entire world is a social construction.

Hacking explains constructionism in the following way: “The existence or character of X is not determined by the nature of things. X is not inevitable. X was brought into existence or shaped by social events, forces, history, all of which could well have been different” (Hacking, 1999)

For eParticipation, this could be taken to mean that the constructionist researcher is more concerned with democratic practices, usage areas of technology, and the social context affecting our perceptions of technology than of the technology alone. The outcome of eParticipation is not necessarily determined by the “best” technological solution, but by the way technology is implemented, marketed and perceived by those involved in creating and using it. Constructionists would argue that there is no “nature of eParticipation, and that eParticipation is indeed being shaped by social events, forces and history. Understanding eParticipation means choosing and applying one or more theoretical lenses that provide insights into the problem areas the researcher finds interesting. For this thesis, these areas are the technology and the communicative aspects of eParticipation.

Hacking (1999) adds another dimension to constructionism: “In the present state of affairs, X is taken for granted, X appears to be inevitable” (p. 12). The subject which is taken for granted, but should not be, is an interesting area for constructionist research. While I do not claim that eParticipation technologies or communicative acts are taken for granted, there is a tendency towards taking technology for granted, or at least not explicitly discuss how the proposed eParticipation technologies in section two influence and is being influenced by, the wider context. Likewise for communication,

much of the literature seems to take for granted that communication in eParticipation should lead to some kind of influence in the decision making process.

The constructivist concern with the object prevents us from treating ICTs as a “black box” (Mitev, 2000), and forces us to explicitly define ICT. Orlikowski and Iacono (2001) present five different definitions of ICT. Of these, the ensemble view is best suited to a constructivist approach. Like constructivism itself, the ensemble view stresses the importance of the object (system characteristics and features), as well as the “social structures...which presumably have been built into the technology by designers during its development and which are then appropriated by users as they interact with the technology” (Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001).

Likewise, communicative actions can be understood from a number of different perspectives. Should communication have a direct influence on the decision making process, or is it good enough to have a debating public? Should the discussion taking place have a specific set of rules, or do we adhere to the format of “anything goes”? Applying the concept of the public sphere provides some answers to these questions, as discussed in the literature and paper sections of the thesis.

3.2 Theoretical perspective

Interpretivism is usually paired with constructionism to form an interpretive research paradigm (Goldkuhl, 2011). This perspective emerged as a paradigm during the 19th century in opposition to the prevailing positivist paradigm, and has been linked to Max Weber’s concept of *Verstehen* – understanding, as opposed to the concept of *erklären* – causal explanation (Crotty, 1998, Hovorka and Lee, 2010). The roots of interpretivism can also be traced back to the Sophist tradition in Greek philosophy, where reality was seen not as an objective truth, but rather as something created through argumentation and individual beliefs and attitudes (Gundersen, 1998).

Interpretive studies assume that meaning creation is a subjective or intersubjective process, where either the individual (subjective) or group (intersubjective) create their own version of reality (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991, Walsham, 1995, Myers, 1997). Research findings are generated through the interaction of researcher and phenomenon (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Thus, the interpretive researcher attempts to understand phenomena through examination of the meanings attached to them by the participants,

and the objective is therefore not to create an objective description, but rather to interpret and understand the structure of the phenomenon. (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991, Goldkuhl, 2011). This process can be separated into first and second level constructs. First level constructs are the meanings held by those being observed, and second level constructs are the reported and theorised elements presented by the researcher based on observation of the first level constructs (Lee, 2004).

Interpretive studies are recognised by their focus on complex conceptual structures, that cannot easily be understood without focusing on the study context and meanings exchange between participants. Further, they should focus on thick descriptions of the phenomenon, so that the reader of the research report can gain enough insight to make his/her own interpretations (Walsham, 1995).

This thesis adopts an interpretive perspective based on the author's belief that reality is an intersubjective process, as well as the thesis' objective of exploration and understanding of the cases. As the section on existing research shows (as well as plenary discussions at recent eGovernment conferences such as ICEGOV 2012), there is a knowledge gap related to contextual understanding in eParticipation, and several scholars call for more research in this area (Macintosh et al., 2009, Medaglia, 2012) .

While some draw a strict line between pure interpretive studies and critical studies (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991), or between understanding and explaining (Hovorka and Lee, 2010), others claim that interpretation should also include a critical and evaluative element (Hacking, 1999). This thesis supports the latter view, and hence provides analytical frameworks based on the work of critical researchers such as Habermas, and aimed towards the normative objective of fostering democracy (as reported in the introduction).

The fundamental principle of interpretive research is that of hermeneutics (Klein and Myers, 1999), which can be seen as both a theoretical perspective and a research method (Butler, 1998). Hermeneutics aims at understanding texts, or anything that can be treated as texts (text analogues) such as technology, culture or actions(Myers, 2004). The word text is used in this thesis to describe both texts and text analogues.

The basic element of hermeneutics is the hermeneutic circle, where one moves iteratively between examining the parts and the whole (Klein and Myers, 1999). The

case (the whole) is understood by analysing the concepts, technologies, meanings and people (the parts) that are parts of the case. But we also understand the parts through analysing the whole, the context of the case itself (Myers, 1997).

The concept of historicity points out that understanding is situated in an historic context, and explains why the hermeneutic circle aids our understanding (Myers, 2004). Understanding is not an objective measurement, but rather an iterative and intersubjective process between interpreter and research object, coloured by the pre-understanding of the interpreter and the historic context in which the research object is situated. Through new iterations of the hermeneutic circle, we can achieve an increasingly more informed intersubjective understanding (Hirschheim et al., 1995). Further, there are four basic concepts that underscore why the iterations between the parts and the whole are so necessary for understanding, while also pointing out that objective understanding is not possible:

- Prejudice: our attempt to understand is coloured by our preconceptions and prior knowledge. Therefore, we must critically examine our understanding by returning to the data and re-examining our sources and prior knowledge.
- Distance and autonomy: distance in time and space between the text and the author of the text creates a disassociation with the original meaning intended by the author, and the instant something is published it takes on a life of its own and can be used in ways the author [or software programmer] did not intend.
- Appropriation: To understand a text, we must make it our own, but in doing so we contribute to the text's autonomy.
- Double hermeneutic: We are not studying a phenomenon from the outside, but from the inside. The researcher is a subject, who interprets the situation just as much as the person being studied. Hence the need for multiple interactions both between the researcher and researched, and an examination of the researcher's own prejudice (Myers, 2004).

The double hermeneutic implies that the researchers needs to be aware of his own prejudices. The interpretive researcher cannot take a value-neutral stance. The prior assumptions, beliefs and interests of the researcher always play a part in interpretation (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). My own background from media studies and working in the media industry has shaped both the content and interpretations of the thesis

Researcher's horizon	Phenomenon's horizon and research activities	
	Whole	Parts
1. Pre-understanding of social media and democracy based on my own earlier studies, readings and experiences (prejudice and historicity)	Examine Social media in a democratic context, as represented in the research literature	Concepts, theories, research themes and findings presented in various research outlets.
2. A more informed pre-understanding based on literature review	Gain improved understanding of social media	"ethnography of the self" with participation in online forums, Facebook, Twitter, becoming a blogger in order to understand the technology
3. Fusion of experience with the technology and understanding of the research literature, leading to a better understanding of the research area.	Identifying research problems and case selection	Talking with government officials, supervisors, academics from other institutions and examination of research literature. Multiple iterations before cases were selected.
4. Having identified problems and gained an understanding of technology, can begin sense making process	Conceptual studies of the public sphere and socio-technical theory	Concepts and theories related to technology and democratic deliberation (the public sphere, social capital, importance of stakeholders, genre as an analytical tool), research methods
5. Conceptual understanding of democratic deliberation through social media	Empirical studies of the four cases	Interviews with participants from the different cases, content analysis of communication, Delphi study, document analysis, previously developed conceptual frameworks,
6. Testing the frameworks by applying empirical evidence. Increased understanding of different eParticipation actors, activities and outcomes	Accumulated research artefacts and research papers	Individual papers with presentation of research findings, thesis.

Table 2: Research project as a hermeneutic process (Based on Butler, 1998)

findings, as well as the issues I have chosen to focus on. Further, in an attempt to achieve a better understanding of social media, I conducted a virtual "ethnography of the self" (Kozinets, 2010, Hine, 2008), where I have been (and still remain) part of many online communities, contributed to several blogs, run my own research blog, contributed to discussions on numerous other web sites, and taking part in the discussion in some of the sites I have studied. This has given me some insights, such as the time and motivation it takes to run a blog, the psychological process you undergo when posting comments online without really thinking about what you are

writing and how being forced to comment using your real identity stops you from posting these types of comments, and a general understanding of the motivations for participating online. If we do not spend time in the online spaces we are exploring we risk applying our own prejudices and predispositions to the case instead of understanding it from the perspective of the actors (Larsen, 2007), thereby failing to adhere to the principles of the hermeneutic circle.

Butler (1998) shows a practical example of how the hermeneutic circle can be applied for increased understanding by showing how he moved through five “circles of understanding” from his own pre-knowledge, through various stages of data gathering and analysis, towards a deep understanding of the case. Table 2 shows my own hermeneutic process in working with the thesis, starting with my own pre-understanding of the topic and showing the parts and the whole that led me to the next stage of understanding.

3.3 Methodology

Having covered the paradigm in which the research is situated, the remainder of this section will focus on the research methodology. I present the reasons for choosing the case study approach, the cases selected for the study, the time frame, data collection and analysis methods that were applied in the cases.

3.3.1 Type of study

While the paradigm is the researcher’s mental model of the world (Bhattacharjee, 2012) and therefore can be said to be “set” for the individual researcher based on previous experience and philosophical beliefs, the research methodology is more a matter of conscious choice based on the research topic and the research phenomenon itself (Myers, 1997), and thus the choices made by the researcher needs to be presented and defended.

The research presented in this thesis was conducted as a case study. The case study can be defined as “*an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used*” (Yin, 2009). The case study allows us to study our phenomenon in its natural setting and learn from practice (Benbasat et al., 1987), is considered a good

way of combining empirical data with concepts and theory (Zartman, 2005), and is suitable for “How” and “why” research questions where exploration and understanding is the objective (Yin, 2009). How and why questions contribute to the understanding of the complexity of the processes that occur within the phenomenon we are studying (Benbasat et al., 1987). For ICT-related research topics, the case study allows us to understand the interaction between the technology and the context in which the technology is situated (Darke et al., 1998).

These characteristics of the case study are in accordance with the objective of this thesis, that is to conduct an exploratory study with the aim of understanding social media used for political participation and deliberation, as well as to show how social media is being used today and how this use contributes towards of increased deliberation. As the starting point of the research was conceptual and case studies are good for combining data and concepts, the choice of case study as methodology was seen as appropriate.

It is important to define the unit of analysis, the actual case, which is being examined (Yin, 2009). The unit of analysis is defined through the research questions, and as the research questions are concerned with both technology, communication and the perceptions of users this study has three units of analysis: The technologies called social media, the communication taking place in these technologies, and the people (citizens) using them.

Having chosen case study as the overall research methodology, and defined the unit of analysis, the next step is to decide on whether to use one or several cases in the study (Yin, 2009). Single cases are usually applied when the case is revelatory or unique, while more than one case is applied for replication or contrasting purposes (Yin, 2009), allows for cross-case comparison (Darke et al., 1998), allows us to test concepts and theories on several cases (Zartman, 2005), and allow us to understand the phenomenon better by examining the same phenomenon in multiple settings: “Different cases often emphasize complementary aspects of a phenomenon. By piecing together the individual patterns, the researcher can draw a more complete theoretical picture.” (Eisenhardt, 1991).

This research project applies data from four different cases in order to examine social media use in eParticipation from different viewpoints. In a review of the eParticipation

area, Sæbø (et. Al, 2008) presents a model of eParticipation, showing relevant actors, activities and outcomes in eParticipation. By examining more than one single case, this thesis is able to examine different combinations of actors, activities and outcomes, as well as relevant contextual factors. Further, examining more than one case allows for testing and evolution of the conceptually developed frameworks in different empirical settings.

3.3.2 Case selection

Selecting cases that provide relevant and rich data for the research topic and can extend theoretical knowledge is an important part of the research design (Eisenhardt, 1989). As the case study method tends to introduce changes in the research design as the research progresses, there is also a need to be flexible and remain open to new leads or even new cases (Yin, 2009), as part of the hermeneutic process of understanding. For this thesis I examined eight cases related to eParticipation and social media before making the final selection. The initial plan was to conduct a longitudinal study of social media use during the elections of 2009 and 2011. This was however not in line with my broad objective of understanding, so I instead opted for cases that provided data from different actors and activities.

Miles and Huberman (1994) present an overview of case selection strategies, showing that there are many valid reasons for including a case in a research project, and that these are not mutually exclusive. These criteria include variation/deviation, uniqueness, importance for theory/society, meeting research objectives, snowball sampling or simply convenience, if all else should fail. The case selection process for this thesis was driven by the aim of learning as much as possible about the various ways in which social media is being applied in eParticipation, within the three year time frame of a PhD project. In relation to the above criteria, the selection strategy was to find cases that showed a variety of eParticipation actors and activities, that were important to society or at least the case population and that made it possible to answer the research objective of the thesis. With the number of social media initiatives currently being undertaken, the deciding factors were pragmatic; Access, time frame and interest shown by the case population thus were important in the final selection.

3.3.3 Case descriptions

To allow others to draw their own conclusions from a case study report, the researcher should report on issues such as the time period being investigated, data collection

periods, access to a sufficient number of informants and if the data was collected during or after the event in question (Dubé and Paré, 2003). Table 3 provides an overview of the cases used in this thesis, and the remainder of this section will provide a brief description of the cases (hereafter labelled case 1-4). For a more comprehensive description I refer to the individual research papers in appendix a.

The four selected cases are linked by their focus on social media in an eParticipation setting. The exploratory nature of the study led me to choose cases that were situated in the same broad context (Norwegian public sector, social media use and related to democratic deliberation), but which provided different insights into other contextual areas (level of government, eParticipation actors and activities).

Case	Norwegian parliamentary election 2009	Labour party social media site	Social media in urban planning	Norwegian municipality
Theme	Political parties' expectations for, and use of, social media in the election campaign	1) a Public sphere (PS) analytical framework 2) Analysis of site's communication and implications for PS	1) The role of stakeholder salience in media choice 2) Genre comparison of new and old media	Stakeholder expectations to eParticipation and how to use these in project planning.
RQ relation	1b , 2b	1a, 1b	1b	2a
ePart. activities	Campaigning, deliberation	Deliberation, information	activism	Citizen communication
Level of government	Political parties (national)	Political parties (local, regional)	Municipal (local)	Municipal (local)
Data collection	Interviews content analysis	Interviews, social network analysis Content analysis	Interviews observation content analysis	Survey Delphi method
Analysis	Genre analysis, IT artefact framework	Genre analysis, social network analysis PS framework	Genre analysis Stakeholder analysis PS framework	Stakeholder analysis Delphi method Genre analysis
Time	Feb.-May 2009	February-May 2011	March-November 2011	April-September 2011

Table 3: Overview of the cases

The first case was the Norwegian Parliamentary election of 2009. This was the first time social media was strategically applied for political campaigning in Norway, and the political parties had great expectations for their social media campaigns. The seven major political parties had established a presence in several social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, Flickr and blogs, and while some had more resources than others

and activity levels varied, the 2009 election established social media as a campaigning platform in Norwegian politics.

The second case was an evaluation of the Norwegian Labour Party's self-developed social media site, *mittarbeiderparti.no* (My Labour). The site's objectives are to act as a source of information for members of the Labour party and to facilitate debate and information sharing among party members and sympathisers. This case was conducted in cooperation with researchers at the SINTEF research institute, and the Labour party provided partial funding for the SINTEF researchers. The objective given to us by Labour was to evaluate and propose improvements to the site, based on the site objectives.

The third case concerned urban planning and development of an attractive seaside area in a mid-sized Norwegian municipality. This case has been going on for thirty years, and at the time of writing is still an issue in the municipality. In this period, a number of different plans have been made, ranging from developing a harbour and hub for goods transport, via property development to green and recreational parkland. The case is controversial, as it involves both a heritage aspect due to the historical surrounding areas, as well as a private vs. public utilisation of attractive seaside property. This was a rich case, including many elements which could be of interest to eParticipation, and my efforts were focused at examining how the different stakeholders used social media, as well as comparing deliberation in traditional and social media.

The fourth case was an examination of the communication needs and media preferences of eParticipation actors in a small Norwegian municipality, and was part of on-going eGovernment collaboration between the University of Agder and the municipality. The objective of the case was to examine stakeholder expectations to communications with the municipality, so that the municipality could apply their limited resources to communication projects that were actually wanted by citizens. The actors were asked which issues they wanted to communicate, and what medium they preferred for each individual communication need.

3.3.3 Time frame of research activities

Time wise as shown in Table 4, the research project has iterated between literature reviews, examination of social media and empirical work. Table 4 presents an overview of the research activities conducted in the project. Planning, case research, social media “self-ethnography” and initial literature review was conducted in the first year, the second year was mainly problem formulation and data collection, while the remainder of the period has been analysis and paper writing. As the individual cases and papers required their own literature reviews, this activity is marked as on-going throughout the study period. Case 1 was a continuance of my master’s thesis, which is why this case was handled early in the project.

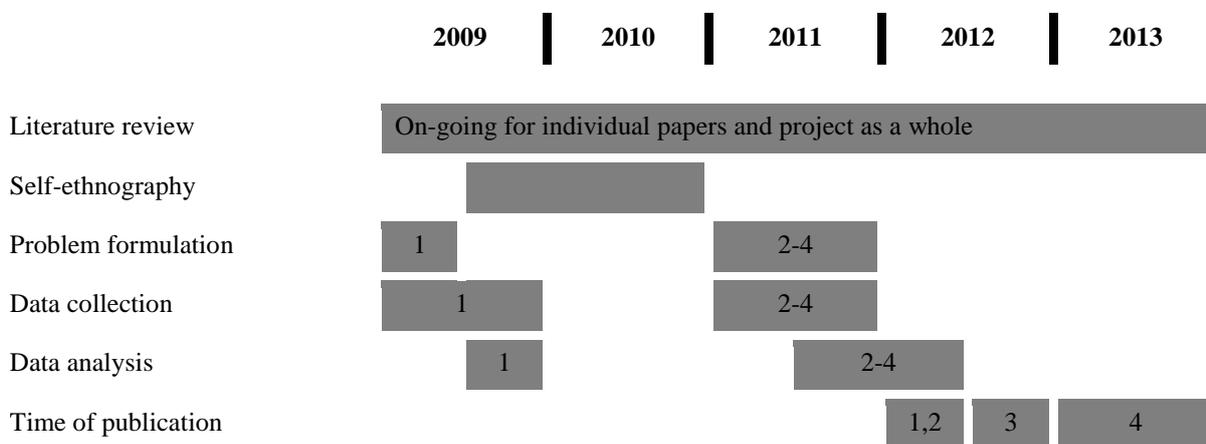


Table 4: Overview of research activities. Numbers refer to the cases

3.3.4 Data collection

Case study research can involve many different data collection methods, both qualitative and quantitative. This thesis primarily applies qualitative methods. The objective of qualitative research is to gain understanding of a particular issue (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994). Due to its focus on depth of analysis, qualitative research aid us in understanding the context of our object of study (Myers, 1997). Qualitative data are mainly textual and focused on people’s opinions and experiences (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994). Qualitative research provides large amounts of rich data, which can be used for thorough, in-depth analysis of the phenomenon being studied (Miles and Huberman, 1994). As the purpose of this thesis is to explore and to understand social media in eParticipation, a qualitative approach is appropriate, as

understanding requires rich data, deep analysis and interpretation of different meanings that various actors apply to the phenomenon.

While Interviews, observation and documents can each be the single source of data for a study, it is recommended to use more than one data source. Multiple sources of evidence is a form of data triangulation that allows for investigation of a broader range of issues (Yin, 2009) and can improve the accuracy of data by verifying data from other sources (Jacobsen, 2003). Using multiple methods ensures a richer picture of our case than what only applying one method would provide (Yin, 2009). Method triangulation is especially useful in studies of online activities (Sade-Beck, 2008). This thesis has therefore applied several data collection methods in all the cases. The following data collection methods have been applied:

- Interviews (Myers and Newman, 2007)
- content analysis
- social network analysis
- observation
- Delphi method

In addition, document analysis was applied in case three, mainly in order to understand the scope and richness of the case, as well as for background data for the case description. The rest of this sub-section will introduce the various data collection methods and describe how they have been applied in the four cases.

Interviews

The interview is the most common and versatile method in qualitative research, providing access to people's attitudes, purposes and beliefs. Conducting interviews in a semi-structured and flexible manner provides richer data, as respondents are allowed to talk more freely (Myers and Newman, 2007). On the other hand, a flexible interview guide makes cross-case comparison more difficult (Miles and Huberman, 1994). As this thesis is exploratory and attempts to analyse the subject matter from many angles, direct comparison for the purpose of theory testing is not an issue. Therefore, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews where I allowed the respondents to talk as freely as possible within the topics in the interview guide. This provided me with a better picture of what the respondents themselves were concerned with on the topic of social media in eParticipation.

Myers and Newman (2007) suggests the interview is treated as a drama, where the interviewer sets the stage and props, invites actors, and creates the script which is then acted out. As a minimum, interviews should follow four steps: 1) Opening, where the researcher introduces himself. 2) Introduction, where the purpose of the interview is explained. 3) key questions that needs to be covered by the interview and 4) closing, where you ask permission to follow up with more questions, or ask about other possible interview candidates (snowballing) (Myers and Newman, 2007).

For cases 1 and 3, interviews were a primary source of data. I also had access to interviews in case 2. However, these were conducted by my research partners at SINTEF, and mainly used as a secondary data source for validation of results. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed, and selected quotes were translated from Norwegian to English and used in the research papers.

In case one, the parliamentary election case, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with the person responsible for communication in online media in each of the seven parties represented in parliament. Of these, five were conducted face to face, and two via e-mail. The Interviews lasted between 40 and 77 minutes, and loosely followed an interview guide with topics related to the social media strategy, use and experiences of the political parties. In addition, I also had informal e-mail correspondence with various practitioners. This correspondence informed me on a general level, but was not included as part of the research findings.

For case three, the urban planning case, I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with representatives related to the case: Members of the city council (4), officials from the city administration responsible for developing the plans (2), the private investor's representative (1), local media (1), representatives from the three main activist groups (3), and one representative from the regional government's heritage department. I gave a brief introduction to the research project, and asked the respondents to talk freely about their thoughts on the case. I had an interview guide I used to steer the conversation in order to cover the aspects I was interested in. The interviews lasted between 40 minutes and two and a half hours, with most lasting a little more than one hour. Interview respondents were selected from the list of stakeholders provided to me by the municipality. I contacted everyone on the list, and was able to make appointments with 12 of them. In addition, I attempted snowballing by asking every

respondent about additional people that could be interesting for the case. In addition, I had informal meetings and e-mail conversations with 2 representatives from the media, which provided valuable general input related to the case.

Content analysis

Content analysis is a data collection method aimed at textual information, and allows for research on the producers and receivers of a message, as well as the message itself. Content analysis can be applied for many purposes: Comparison of content across different contexts, analysis of medium or different levels of communication, identify cultural patterns, reveal the focus/discourse of various groups of people or simply to describe communication content and form (Weber, 1990). While content analysis can be as simple as conducting a word count to identify the most frequently used words in a text, it is far more common to use content analysis with some form of coding or categorizing (Stemler, 2001). While content analysis was initially a quantitative technique where the researcher counted words, phrases or the number of posts, it has become more and more common to do qualitative analyses of content (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). Defining the unit of analysis is important. This can be on a very micro level (individual words or sentences) or on a broader level (individual comments or posts, different themes) (De Wever et al., 2006).

For this thesis, I have applied both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. As an example, counting the number of comments in different blog posts combined with a qualitative analysis of the content in the posts can provide insights into which topics or what forms of writing style are most likely to generate discussion. The unit of analysis has been individual posts, such as a blog post, a posting on Facebook or a Tweet on Twitter, and individual comments to these posts. Individual posts and comments are a good trade-off between detail and overview. They help identify themes and topics, and are on a small enough scale that you can get valuable insights into the nature of the communication. An even smaller unit of analysis, such as sentences, would provide even more linguistic detail, but would also mean analysing a smaller amount of content. The content analysis applied a coding scheme from genre theory (Yates and Orlikowski, 1992). Content analysis has been applied in cases one through three.

In case one, content analysis was applied after the interviews. The purpose was to compare what the political parties said they were doing with what was happening in social media. This allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the interview

respondents' interpretations, as well as making me able to conduct my own analysis of how social media was used during the election campaign. Content analysis was conducted on the Facebook pages of each political party and their party leaders, as well as official blogs, YouTube videos and Twitter accounts from the individual party or leading party members. Content types, update frequencies, number of friends/followers/comments and visitor activity were recorded, and the genre theory coding allowed me to create a list of communication genres being used in the various sites.

In case two, content analysis was my task as part of a larger research project conducted by SINTEF. Three social media sites belonging to local branches of the Labour party were examined following the same procedure as case one. The three sites are sub-sections of the My Labour social media site.

In case three, content analysis was applied to both on- and offline media, in order to compare the case-related discussion in print and in social media. Letters to the editor published between 2007 and 2011 were examined and compared with the content in Facebook groups that were created in relation to the case. In this case, the content analysis was only coded as genres. No quantitative data was recorded.

Social network analysis

Social network analysis (SNA) helps us understand individual behaviour and social relationships in online communities by identifying social roles and structures, as well as dissemination patterns (Hansen et al., 2009). SNA can be used to visualize and analyse various types of networks, through examining how individual nodes are connected to each other. The strength of individual ties, as well as the number of interconnected ties, determines the strength of the network. A large number of connections between different nodes indicate that information is disseminated in a networked rather than one-to-one fashion, thereby reaching more nodes. What the researcher chooses to see as nodes varies depending on the research question. Nodes can be both people and objects, such as a post or a comment (Smith et al., 2009).

SNA was applied in case two, mainly for exploratory purposes to identify discussions and topics of interest. It also allowed for an examination of if and how information spread from one community to another. The network analyses were coded in NodeXL, a free plug-in for Microsoft Excel. The software allows for the examination of two

nodes and the relation between them, such as *person A addresses person B*. In addition, you can include metadata such as name of site, title of post for which the comment was made, or type of relation. Three types of analysis were made: 1) People explicitly addressing other people in the comment sections of posts, coded as *person a [addresses] person B*. 2) topics being commented on, coded as *person1 [commenting on] topic X* and 3) People commenting in more than one of the sites being examined. These analyses, combined with the content analysis of the posts and comments, provided rich insights into what topics led to the most debate within each site. Further exploration of the underlying reasons was done by examining local media outlets, which showed that these topics were typically important to the local community.

Observation

Observation means that the observer participates in the activities of those being studied, openly as a researcher or covert. The objective is to observe the things that happen, people's reactions and actions, and listening to what people say and how they say it (Becker and Geer, 1957). Observation allows us to capture data from real-time situations and can help the researcher to understand people's interactions and behaviour in a given situation (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). There are several degrees of participation in the observation technique, ranging from being a passive observer to full immersion in the case. A well-known example of the latter is the case where the researcher became a full member of a biker group in order to understand biker culture (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). The value of observation depends to a great extent on the richness of the researcher's field notes and a systematic recording and coding of data (Barley, 1990).

Observation was primarily applied in case three, the urban planning case. I attended two workshops where the case was discussed and plans for development presented, and two city council meetings where the city council voted on first the percentage of the area to be developed, and later on the actual architectural drawings. I talked informally to various actors, and observed the reactions when opposing groups presented their plans. Both workshops and city council meetings provided valuable contextual data related to case, and showed how the different actors reacted to each other, as well as making clear the strong emotions held by people invested in the case, which meant the activists and developers were so opposed to each other's views that any kind of compromise would be difficult. In both workshops and council meetings I remained a passive observer. This was partially because the case is so laden with

emotions that participating actively would have placed me in one camp or the other, making access to interview respondents more difficult, and also because city council meetings only allow members of the council to speak.

Delphi method

The Delphi method is a technique used to collect and sort data from a panel of experts. The objective is to create a ranked list of issues that the participants agree on (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). The Delphi method is appropriate for studies where people's value-laden information is important (Okoli and Pawlowski, 2004), and the method has been applied to eGovernment studies related to public policy development (Rayens and Hahn, 2000). The method consists of three phases: Brainstorming, consolidation - where the list of issues from the brainstorming is narrowed down, and finally the ranking phase, where the participants attempt to reach consensus on which of the identified issues are most important (Okoli and Pawlowski, 2004, Schmidt, 1997).

The Delphi method was used in case four to collect and sort stakeholder groups' communication needs in relation to local eParticipation. The respondents were asked to provide a qualitative answer to the question *what do you want to communicate with government about, and which media would you prefer to use?* In addition, there was a short text explaining the purpose of the study. The question was distributed to 80 participants, using freely available software from the University of Pennsylvania. 22 people chose to participate. We were not able to reach consensus and form a definite ranked list of communication needs, as the participants lost interest in the study after the first round of ranking. This is a common problem with the Delphi method, but fortunately the amount of data from initial rounds is often rich enough that we can draw some conclusions, as shown by Päivärinta & Dertz (2008). In our case, both the brainstorming and first ranking phases provided insights into the communication preferences for the different stakeholder groups, as well as their preferred communication technologies for each form of communication. In addition to this, we distributed a survey to the municipality's inhabitants, that resulted in 36 additional respondents. The survey was made based on the results from the Delphi, and provided some additional insights into the communication needs in the municipality.

3.3.5 Analysis

Case studies can be theorised through different strategies, such as narratives, grounded analysis, applying different theories to the same case or visual mapping (Langley, 1999). While many researchers opt for a grounded approach to case study analysis, I have applied an approach that Walsham (1995) describes as an iterative process of data collection and analysis, in line with the principles of hermeneutics. As Table 2 shows, I have been moving back and forth between theory and empirical studies, and considered different approaches such as Langley's (1999) application of different theories, where I wrote a workshop paper (Johannessen, 2010b) examining how different theories could be applied to social media research, before finally choosing to focus on the public sphere and IT artefact as my analytical theme, while genre theory and stakeholder theory have been applied as tools for data analysis. Social network analysis and the Delphi method can also be seen as analytical techniques, and these are described in the previous section on data collection.

The public sphere and IT artefact as socio-technical phenomenon are covered by section two of the thesis, as well as in the research papers (Johannessen and Munkvold, 2012, Johannessen, 2012). The public sphere framework was applied as a tool for evaluating communication in social media, while the IT artefact paper was used to describe the socio-technical possibilities and challenges of using social media for eParticipation, as well as being the basis for the framework used in Johannessen et al. (2012).

Genre theory

Genres can act as a tool for studying the role of communication in social processes (Yates and Orlikowski, 1992). Genres develop over time, in the interaction between predefined rules for communication and the people that are communicating. Genres are useful when studying social media use in eParticipation, as the introduction of new media over time often leads to new communication practices (Sæbø and Päivärinta, 2005). Further, analysing genres reveals if there are differences between the genres preferred by different stakeholder groups, and identify the genres that are most used by participants in an eParticipation project (Sæbø and Päivärinta, 2005). Applying genre theory in the study of new media forms provides a more comprehensive analysis compared to only looking at the functionality of the technology behind the new medium (Orlikowski and Yates, 1994)

The 5w1h-method is a simple yet powerful tool for studying genres. Asking *where, why, when, who, what* and *how*, uncovers the purpose, contents, placement in time, location, participants, structure and medium for communication (Yoshioka et al., 2001). Genres are further identified by having a common content (themes and topics of the conversation) and form (physical and linguistic features), as well as technological functionality in genres enacted through electronic media (Shepherd and Watters, 1998).

Interpretive research holds that the language we use to describe practices *is* the practice. Thus, in order to understand the research phenomenon we need to understand how the language use of the actors in our research area affects practice (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). Genre theory is a tried and tested approach to gain this understanding of communicative practices, and the theory has been applied to all four cases. In cases one, two and three, genre theory was applied to understand the communicative practices of various eParticipation actors, in different settings and activities. Combined with the public sphere framework, this provided valuable insights into the relationship between communicative practices and deliberative outcomes. In case four, genre theory was used to describe and categorise the communication needs of eParticipation stakeholder groups, and combined with my definition of the IT artefact used to create a framework for media choice based on communication needs and media capabilities.

Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory (ST) emerged during the 1980's in response to the increasing complexity of managing complex businesses. Originally proposed as collection of tools and techniques to identify and manage stakeholders (Freeman, 1984, Mitchell et al., 1997), ST expanded in three directions in the 1990's: descriptive (who are the stakeholders, how do we manage them), normative (moral issues related to inclusion) and instrumental (using ST to improve management) (Donaldson and Preston, 1995).

There are several frameworks for identifying and categorising stakeholder groups, one framework is based on proximity to the subject matter. Those directly involved are most important, but peripheral stakeholders should also be considered (Podnar and Jancic, 2006). This framework was applied in the identification of stakeholder groups in case 4. Another framework groups stakeholders according to their salience. Salience refers to the question of why some stakeholders are attended to while others are not.

According to Mitchell et al. (1997), salience is composed of the attributes power, legitimacy and urgency. Stakeholders possessing all three attributes are more salient, and thus more likely to be heard than stakeholders possessing only one or two of the attributes. For example, in eParticipation, the city council would be a stakeholder with the power to decide something, a legitimate reason for making the decision, and an urgent need to do so (in order to be re-elected), while one interest group might have both a legitimate and urgent reason for presenting their arguments, but not the power to make their wishes happen.

As the actors in eParticipation play an important role, ST was applied to cases three and four in order to understand the actors as stakeholders. In case three, stakeholder theory was used to analyse the salience of the various stakeholder groups in the case, in order to examine if there was a connection between stakeholder salience and the use of social media. In case four, stakeholder analysis was important in order to identify the relevant eParticipation actors in the case municipality, and to identify the communication needs of these different stakeholder groups.

3.4 Validity issues

Interpretive researchers are not reporting facts, but rather present their interpretations of the interpretations of others. There is no true interpretation, but constructionism still talks about more or less valid interpretations (Crotty, 1998). Valid interpretations can be achieved through a number of more or less systematic approaches, some of which involves a great deal of creativity (Crotty, 1998).

One validation approach is the authenticity-plausibility-criticality approach (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993), where authenticity refers to how well the text convinces the reader that the researcher was actually present in the case, plausibility refers to how well the text can present itself as providing a valuable contribution, and criticality the degree to which the text manages to make the reader re-think his/her own prejudices and assumptions. Of these, a valid interpretation should fulfil at least the first two criteria (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993).

I have strived to reach authenticity throughout this thesis and the accompanying research papers by presenting thorough and detailed case descriptions, presenting the research approaches I have applied and providing examples of rich data in the form of

direct quotations or examples of genre content. Plausibility is addressed by the sections describing the contributions from the research papers and the thesis, while I leave it to the reader of this text to decide whether or not it fulfils the criticality objective and changes perceptions.

Another, more detailed approach to validation is found in the seven principles of interpretive research (Klein and Myers, 1999), based on the principles of hermeneutics. The principles and how I have addressed them is presented in Table 5.

Principle	Addressing the principle
the hermeneutic circle: Understanding is reached through iterating between the parts and the whole. This principle is fundamental to the other principles	The hermeneutic process of the research is shown in Table 2, and also described in the section on theoretical perspective.
Contextualisation: Critical reflection of the research setting's historical background, so the audience can understand the present situation.	The historical context of the cases is presented in the individual papers, and the theory section of the thesis provides a historical account of democracy in order to better understand current democratic practices.
Interaction between researcher and subjects: Critical reflection on how the data was socially constructed by the researcher and participant	This was addressed by method triangulation (interviews and content analysis), and interview situations I tried to not influence the respondents by providing my own opinions. Yet, even the fact that I told respondents what kind of project I was working on is likely to have affected their responses.
Abstraction and generalisation: Requires relating the details revealed by the data interpretation through the application of principles one and two to theoretical, general concepts that describe the nature of human understanding and social action.	As the research project progressed, I went back and forth between the data and the theories I applied, and I have presented discussions of the relations between theory and data in the research papers.
Dialogical reasoning: Awareness of possible contradictions between theory and actual findings	I have attempted to be aware of my own prejudices when doing research, and in my literature review I have included opposing views to my own, so I could argue for my own position based on opposing arguments. I have also examined alternative theoretical approaches.
Multiple interpretations: Be aware of possible differences in interpretations between study participants	This was not an issue in my research, as the respondents with similar backgrounds were consistent in their accounts. Multiple interpretations were only found between opposing stakeholder groups.
Suspicion: Awareness of possible biases and distortions in the narratives collected by participants	In cases two, three and four the data was analysed in cooperation with co-authors, which should lessen the risk of bias and distortion.

Table 5: Principles of interpretive research, based on Klein and Myers (1999)

3.5 Research publications

This thesis is based on six research publications, which have either been accepted for publishing, or under review in peer reviewed conferences and academic journals.

Figure 2 shows the relation between the individual paper and the research questions, and Table 6 provides an overview of the papers.

#	Title	Published	theme
1	Johannessen, M.R & Munkvold, B.E. (2012) Defining the social media IT artefact for eParticipation: An ensemble view	European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS), Barcelona	Defines social media as an ensemble view IT artefact in the context of eParticipation. Presents framework for analysing social media capabilities for supporting eParticipation
2	Johannessen, M.R. (2012) Social Capital and the Networked Public Sphere: Implications for Political Social Media sites*	Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-45), Maui, Hawaii	Presents a public sphere theoretical lens and framework for eParticipation research. Argues that working social media public spheres can contribute to increased political debate.
3	Johannessen, M.R. Flak, L.S. and Sæbø, Ø.(2012) Stakeholder expectations for municipal eParticipation: Choosing the right medium for communication	Fourth International Conference on eParticipation (ePart), Kristiansand	Identifies local eParticipation stakeholder groups, and the groups' communication preferences. Based on this and paper #2, outlines a framework for media choice
4	Johannessen, M.R., Flak, L.S & Sæbø, Ø. (2013) Social media as Public Sphere: A stakeholder perspective	Government Information Quarterly (forthcoming, under review since 07/2012)	Examines how different stakeholder groups use ICT for communication. Examines how stakeholder salience influences the extent to which social media functions as a public sphere.
5	Johannessen, M.R (2012) Genres of communication in activist eParticipation: A comparison of new and old media*	The 6th International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance (ICEGOV), Albany, NY	Compares genres used in print media and social media to examine maturity of social media and type of public sphere found in print and social media.
6	Johannessen, M.R. & Følstad, A. (2013) Political social media sites as public sphere: A case study of the Norwegian Labour party	Communications of the Association for Information systems (forthcoming, review round 2)	A genre and social network analysis of a political social media site. Discusses how these types of site should communicate in order to facilitate a public sphere.
* = nominated for best paper award			

Table 6: Overview of research publications.

Defining the social media IT artefact for eParticipation: An ensemble view

This paper uses empirical data from case 1, the Norwegian parliamentary election. The objective of the paper was to define social media as IT-artefact in the eParticipation context. It does so through analysing the technological capabilities of social media, as well as applying Information Infrastructure theory (II) to describe the socio-technical aspects. II was chosen because it focuses on the network, and therefore acts as a natural continuation of the first paper.

This paper contributes to clarify the underlying concepts of social media by analysing the social media IT artefact as a socio-technical object. By presenting social media as

an ensemble artefact, we show that both the technical capabilities and socio-technical characteristics of social media needs to be taken into consideration when using social media for eParticipation purposes. The example case shows that the effects of social media on the 2009 election campaign were lessened because the political parties did not consider the underlying concepts of the technology, which led to frustrated users. The framework presented by the paper can aid practitioners in understanding social media, and provides some guidelines about how social media should be used in order to reach deliberative objectives.

Social Capital and the Networked Public Sphere: Implications for Political Social Media sites

This paper uses empirical data from case 2, the Norwegian Labour party. The objective of the paper was to create a theoretical lens which could address the objectives of the thesis. The paper presents a review of relevant literature on the historical development of the public sphere, and discusses the public sphere in relation to the network society, community and social capital in order to examine how and why people participate.

This paper makes two important contributions to the thesis. First, it provides an in-depth discussion of the public sphere in the context of the digital, networked society, thus providing eParticipation researchers with a definition of the public sphere adapted to current societal trends. This contributes to clarifying a concept often used, but rarely discussed in our field, and as such answers the call for research on contextual issues. Second, the theoretical framework can be applied to understand the outcome of various forms of communication, as the example case shows. Analysing communication using the public sphere and social capital criteria provides insights about which forms of communication contribute to a deliberative discourse, and which do not. This knowledge can be important for the planning and moderation of online discussions.

Choosing the right medium for municipal eParticipation based on stakeholder expectations

This paper is based on empirical data from case four, and is also a continuation and concretisation of the first paper. The objective of the paper was to examine stakeholder expectations to eParticipation. We identified local eParticipation stakeholders and administered a Delphi study to the stakeholder groups, asking them how they wanted

to communicate with the municipality. Adapting the framework from paper #1, we apply these findings to create a framework for media choice, based on stakeholder expectations and technology capabilities. The communication categories reported by the stakeholder groups are translated into genres of communication, and the genre attributes are compared to the technological capabilities of each preferred medium in order to find the best match.

This paper provides two important contributions. First, it contributes to increased knowledge about what the stakeholder groups in eParticipation want to communicate about. Few existing studies have empirical data on this, even though the user is an important stakeholder. Second, the paper applies this knowledge to create a framework for media choice that could aid practitioners in municipalities in choosing the appropriate medium for various communication needs. While there has been a trend in recent years that “everyone” should move to social media, the Delphi study shows that this is not necessarily true for all forms of communication.

Social media as Public Sphere: A stakeholder perspective

This paper is based on empirical data from case three, and is informed by the findings from paper #2. The objective of the paper was to examine how communication technologies are used by different stakeholder groups, and if there were differences between stakeholder groups, examine the implications of these differences for the public sphere. The interests of the various stakeholder groups are presented, and the stakeholder salience analysed and compared with the media use of the stakeholder groups. Through this, we found that power was the most important factor determining social media use. High power stakeholders were less likely to use social media, while those with high urgency and low power were more likely to use social media in an attempt to gather support.

The paper makes three important contributions. First, our research shows that in order to attract high power stakeholder groups to social media, there is a need to motivate these groups to participate. At present in this case, the role of social media is limited to that of being one more channel where those without power attempt to reach out and influence public opinion. Second, the paper addresses the call from Mitchell (et al., 1997) to investigate how the stakeholder salience perspective can be applied. The findings show the usefulness of analysing stakeholder salience, as these attributes provided important insights about social media use in the case. Finally, the paper

contributes to a better understanding of who participates in social media, and why they choose to do so. The stakeholder salience analysis showed that power is a determining factor in this context, especially when you combine low power with high urgency.

Genres of communication in activist eParticipation: A comparison of new and old media

This paper is based on empirical data from case three, and applies the findings from paper #1 in the discussion. The objectives of the paper were to 1) Examine the maturity of social media as a medium for political communication by comparing genres in social media with established genres in print, and 2) Examine what kind of public sphere exists in social media vs. print media. The genre analyses showed that the same genres were used in both social and print media, and that the genres in social media have begun to take advantage of the medium's capabilities. In addition, social media showed evidence of new genres. Content-wise, posts in social media tends to be shorter, more improvised and emotional, and less fact-based. The public sphere analysis shows that print media is somewhat better at facilitating deliberation and a rational discourse, while social media functions more as a meeting place for like-minded people and functions as a political protest type of public sphere.

This paper makes three important contributions. First, it shows that social media are emerging as mature media, where the genres being used takes advantage of social media's multimedia and network capabilities in order to raise awareness about the issue being discussed (in this case the local urban development project). Second, it links the genres being used to the stated objectives of politicians, showing which communication genres should be applied in order to facilitate these objectives. Finally, it shows that in this and similar cases of activism, social media cannot be considered to be a traditional deliberative public sphere. Rather, social media functions as a political protest type of public sphere where like-minded individuals meet, discuss, support each other and make plans.

Political social media sites as public sphere: A case study of the Norwegian Labour party

This paper is based on empirical data from case two. The objective of the paper was to understand communication and participation in a social medium run by a political party, and to examine if such a medium, owned by a group with a specific agenda, can be a deliberative public sphere. The paper applies social network analysis (SNA) and

genre analysis to address the objective. The SNA showed some evidence of community formation, and the genre analysis identified 12 different genres, showing that a mix between factual dialogue and genres where the purpose is to support and acknowledge the opinions of others contributed to longer and more deliberative debates, while genres with a negative tone, such as harassment and sarcasm had the opposite effect.

Combining SNA and genre analysis is an effective way of analysing whether or not the examined community is a public sphere. SNA provides a valuable tool for visualising the flow of information between participants, showing if there is a dense network of people engaging each other in conversation, or if the ties between participants are weak. A strong, dense network indicates thriving discussions. The genre analysis provides additional information about the nature of the information being exchanged, showing which forms of communication contribute to deliberation and which do not.

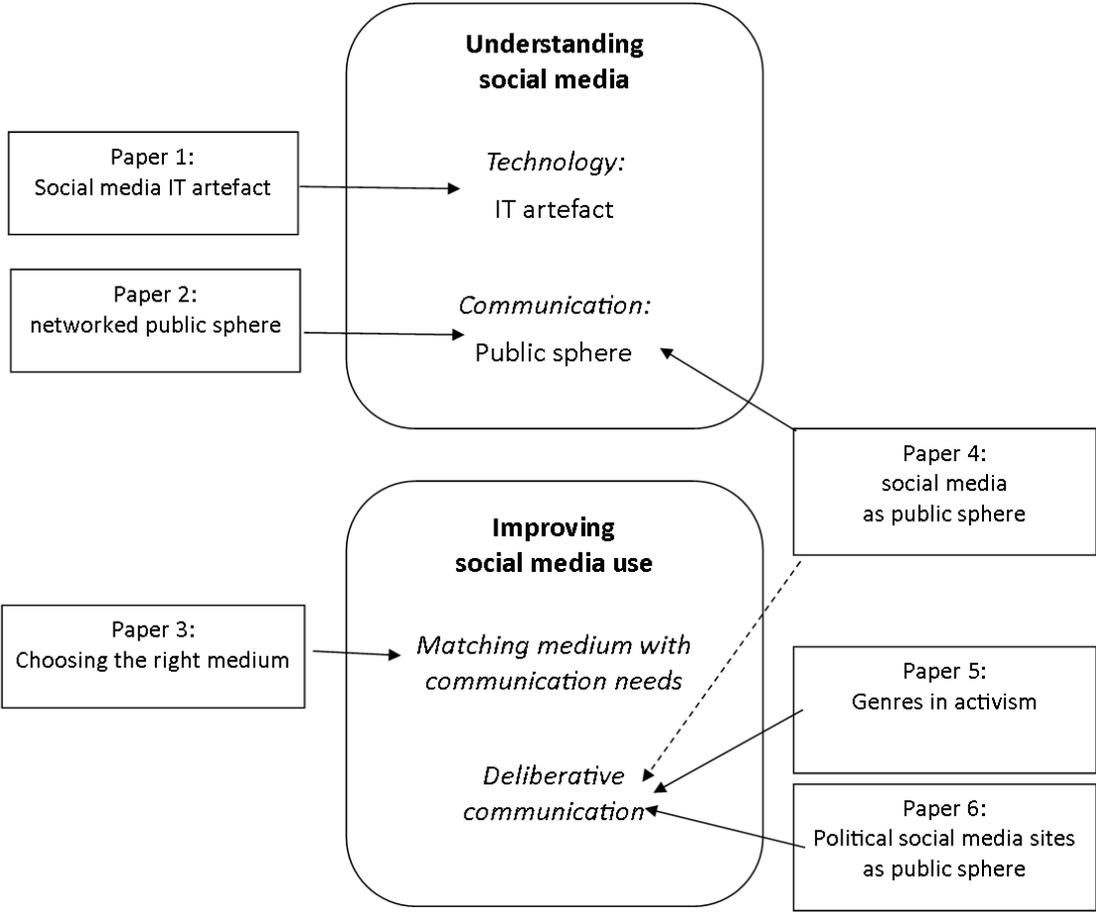


Figure 2: Research papers’ relation to research questions

4 Case findings

In this section I briefly present the main findings from the three cases which involved observing user behaviour and communication, and summarise them in a visualisation based on the model in Sæbø (et al., 2008. Description of items in section 2.1.1). This contributes to the thesis' objective of contributing to understanding how social media is used for political participation by showing how various combinations of actors, activities, genres and communication media lead to different outcomes related to political participation, and thus to understanding how social media can contribute to democracy in various contexts. The fourth case involved asking citizens how they preferred to communicate, and the findings from this case are briefly presented here, and compared to the observations made in the other three cases.

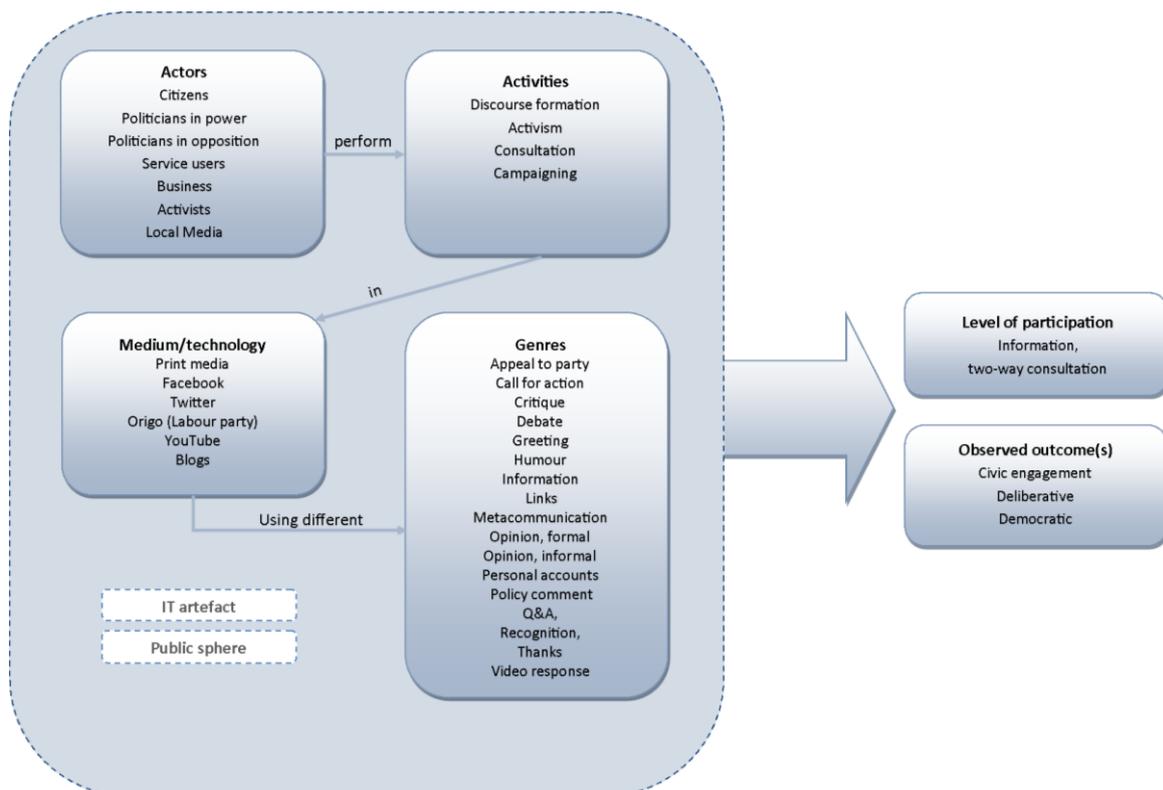


Figure 3: Summary of case observations

This section lists all the actors, activities, media and genres observed in the cases, as well as the outcomes and level of participation observed. The IT artefact and public sphere are included as contextual items which need to be included in the discussion of

how to improve eParticipation projects. In the following, I present the observations from the individual cases, including a short version of the genre repertoire (the set of genres being used, see (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994) used in each case. More comprehensive genre descriptions are found in appendix B.

As shown in the theory section and in publications 1 and 2, social media should be approached with a socio-technical mind set. The IT artefact and networked public sphere are placed as contextual factors in figure 5 because the findings from these papers points out the socio-technical nature of the technologies. This has implications for the usage areas and possible outcomes of the technology, and is discussed in more detail in section 5 in the answer to research question 1.

2009 election campaign

In Norway, the election campaign has a massive influence on the outcome of the election. The case respondents reported that as much as 40 % of the voters wait until the final weeks of the campaign before deciding who to vote for, and a lot of voters change their minds several times before making their decision. Norwegian political parties have been campaigning online since 2001, and in the local elections of 2007 there were already some examples of social media campaigning.

Inspired by Barack Obama's success in 2008, and wanting to expand on the early trials in 2007, the seven political parties represented in parliament all decided that social media was an important campaign arena in the 2009 election.

The respondents reported that “having a presence in the places where potential voters are” and in “the social media that can contribute in some way to the campaign” were important selection criteria, as well as financial and other resource limitations. The objectives for using social media were reported to be “maintaining a dialogue with voters”, “engaging citizens” and “getting sympathisers to volunteer for campaign activities”.

While the parties reported they were eager for a two-way dialogue, the content analysis revealed this only happened to a limited degree. A possible explanation for this could be that the parties did not have time for training politicians, reported issues related to age (older politicians were not comfortable with social media), and activities which were not targeted to specific groups of voters.

Genre	Description
Policy comment	Citizens commenting on party policy, with the intent to influence policy formation or criticise policies of parties they do not like.
Q&A	Citizens asking questions of politicians. Often no response from politicians
Greeting	Citizens sending congratulatory messages to individual politicians or party, aids in creating a positive atmosphere and a bond between voter and party
Call for action	Politicians call for citizens to contribute their input in a specific case, or to get citizens to volunteer for campaign activities.
Appeal to party	Citizens making appeals for the party to act on something, often based on the individual experiences of the citizen. Often no response from politicians.
Personal accounts	Citizens responding to call for action genre asking people to provide personal histories related to specific issues. Used to receive citizen input in health reform policy.
Video response	Video-“interviews” where citizens respond to a statement from a politician, response to competitions where parties ask sympathizers to create videos for the party, or politicians responding to other politicians.

Table 7: Genres identified in 2009 election case

The 2009 election campaign case consisted of citizens and politicians (both in power and opposition) engaging in campaigning and consultation in all the technologies listed in Figure 3. The genres being used were Policy comment, call for action, Q&A, appeal to party, greeting, personal accounts, and video response. The outcome of this activity was mainly civic engagement, as many citizens left comments and user histories, but there was little evidence of deliberation in the case. Participation was on the level of information, with some two-way consultation when politicians specifically asked for input. The genres identified in the case are presented in Table 7

Labour Party social media site

The Norwegian labour party is one of Norway’s largest political parties, ruling the county in a coalition government since 2005. They run their own online community for party members and sympathizers, called *MyLabourParty*. The objective of the site is to spread information about the party’s policies and events, facilitate debate and information sharing, and to act as a resource for party members in their work in local party groups.

The site is run on the Norwegian social media platform *Origo*, and the site structure is quite complex. Users log in with their Origo profile, and attach themselves to different areas of the Origo platform, called zones. A zone is a section of the Origo platform, and each zone can have one or more sub-zones. Most local and regional branches of the party have their own zone. User profiles are assigned to their local and regional zone if the user is a member of the Labour party.

Zones are structured as a blog. Contributors write a post, and each post can be commented on. The comments section is where most of the discussion takes place, as only some user profiles are allowed to publish posts. There are also pages with information about party activities, election campaigns and other party-related issues, and a calendar with events in the region or city. The postings and comments are considered to be the most important part of the site.

This case was done as collaboration between the SINTEF ICT research institute and me. My role in the case was to perform a content and social network analysis of posts and comments, and to analyse how the content facilitated deliberative dialogue.

Genre	Description
Recognition	Labour politicians provide positive, supportive statements to other Labour politicians, in order to show support for a comment, or for a person who has been attacked by other commenters.
Debate	Politicians and citizens present factual arguments related to an issue being discussed, with the purpose of convincing others that a certain position is correct.
Harassment	Politicians from opposing political parties present aggressive, unjustified statements in order to ridicule Labour party politicians and to show strong disagreement with Labour policy.
Humour	Politicians provide humorous comments in an attempt to lessen tension or aggressive tone in an on-going debate.
Information	Politicians address citizens or other politicians, with factual information related to the issue being discussed. The reason is most often to provide facts the author believes are missing in the debate.
Call for action	Politicians call for citizens to contribute their input in a specific case, or to get citizens to volunteer for campaign activities.
Critique	Citizens or opposing politicians presents negative, but factual statements. Purpose is to reprove input of other discussants.
Policy comment	Citizens commenting on party policy, with the intent to influence policy formation or criticise policies of parties they do not like.
Metacommunication	Participants in the zone discuss rules and code of conduct in discussions.
Sarcasm	Opposing politicians making bitter, sharp accusations and negative statements about the receiver's intellect in order to ridicule Labour politicians and/or policy.
Q&A	Citizens asking questions of politicians. Often no response from politicians
Thanks	Citizens and politicians signal agreement and gratitude for something someone has said or done.

Table 8: Genres identified in Labour party case

The Labour party case involved mainly politicians. Some citizens, service users and business actors were commenting on specific topics, but the majority of discussions were between politicians from opposing parties. The observed activities were discourse formation and campaigning. The genres being used were Recognition, harassment, debate, humour, information, call for action, critique, policy comment, metacommunication, sarcasm, Q&A and thanks. The outcome was mainly deliberative, as there were examples of long and deliberative debates in the case. Civic engagement could also be seen as an outcome, as the most active discussants were not

centrally placed in the political party. The site thus fulfils its intention of being an arena for debate for party members and sympathisers. Participation was on the level of two-way consultation and information. Some users reported they preferred to be passive. The genres identified in the case are presented in Table 8

Urban planning

The case concerns development of a five acre cove, close to the city centre of a Norwegian mid-sized city. Over the past 30 years, there have been a number of plans for development of the cove, all of which stranded as the city council was unable to reach decisions. In 2010, the municipality started the process from scratch. After being criticised for not listening to the citizens when the past plans were laid out, the municipality decided to run this as an inclusive process. This included organising three workshops and distributing a survey to the city's inhabitants. In addition, the local newspaper conducted an additional survey. Both surveys were open to interpretation, which lead developers and activists to argue a great deal about what was the true public opinion in the matter.

The municipal administration used the input from the workshops and survey, and came up with 9 alternatives for the new area development plan. The municipal administration supported an alternative where 75% of the area was to be developed, and the city council voted in support of this in council meetings held in March and August 2011.

In the autumn of 2011 there was a new municipal election. The activists created a pamphlet showing how people could vote if they wanted “park-friendly” politicians in the new city council, who could re-open the case. The lists were distributed online, through a web site, were promoted on Facebook and also spread through physical means and word of mouth. Throughout the case history, the activists have been active users of the Internet and social media, creating several Facebook groups and blogs for gathering support. One of the Facebook groups had more than 2000 followers at its peak.

Although not a complete success, the activists were once again able to influence who got elected to the city council. About 400 people seemed to follow the activists' advice. There is no doubt that citizen initiated participation has had considerable influence in this case. The activists have, through their targeted efforts, managed to

influence the composition of two city councils, have made the city council swing against development several times, and through this they have delayed development for almost 5 years, and forced the city to concessions such as the workshops and survey, as well as the creation of several reports on noise, pollution and other issues.

Interviews with the activists revealed social media was seen as an important communication channel for reaching out to potential sympathisers, gathering support and for distributing the “how to vote” pamphlet. The genres used in social media are presented in Table 9.

Genre	Description
Opinion, formal	Activists addressing other activists, citizens and politicians, using facts and rational arguments to convince addressee on a certain position
Opinion, informal	Activists addressing other activists, citizens and politicians, using emotional statements unsupported by facts, to convince addressee on a certain position
Call for action	Activists calling for other activists and citizens to meet at demonstrations, cast their vote in a certain way, or to perform other activities furthering the activists’ agenda.
Personal attacks	Activists commenting on individual politicians’ or developers personal characteristics, with the aim of discrediting the receiver in the public opinion.
Links	Activists post links to content supporting their position, such as environmental reports, blog posts or news. Aimed at other activists or sympathetic citizens
Greetings/cheers	Activists congratulate each other after a victory or successful event. Aimed at community formation and raising morale.

Table 9: Genres used in the urban planning case

In the urban planning case, the main actors in social media were the activists and citizens sympathising with the activist groups. Business and politicians were present to some degree, but mainly as observers. The main activity was activism, using the Opinion (formal and informal), call to action, personal attacks, links, greetings and poem genres. The outcomes were democratic, in the sense that the activists used social media to reach out and be heard in a case where they had little formal power, and also included civic engagement, as the activists managed to put the case on the agenda and engage citizens over a period of many years.

Actors’ expectations to communication in a Norwegian municipality

While the first three cases aimed at uncovering the communicative activities going on in social media, the purpose of the last case was to examine what different actor groups want to communicate about. This case was part of an on-going collaboration between the university and a municipality in southern Norway. The municipality has about 8000 inhabitants, and relies heavily on agriculture. Three large fjords have led to a scattered population, with about half of the inhabitants living in the centre, and the

rest spread out across the municipality. The municipality is part of a regional collaboration with the surrounding municipalities, who are also small. Located between two major cities, the region has been active in promoting themselves and seeking innovative solutions through technology.

The research team conducted a workshop together with members of the municipal council and administration, where a list of relevant eParticipation actors was created. Using stakeholder analysis techniques, this list was consolidated to 11 stakeholder groups. Table 10 lists these groups, as well as three additional stakeholder groups identified in the urban planning case.

Sphere		Stakeholder groups
Political		Municipal executive board
Government Administration		Administration officials from city hall Municipal employees from health and education <i>Regional government offices with speaking rights in local matters</i>
Civil Society	Business	Business association, Tourism, Primary industry <i>Local media</i>
	Organizations/ citizen groups	Service users: PTA, Health care patients
		Associations: Residents, religious groups, sports
		Expats
		Immigrants and new residents
		Youth (15-25 years old)
		Senior citizens (65+)
		Citizens with no organizational attachment
		<i>Activist groups</i>

Table 10: Stakeholder groups in eParticipation

A Delphi study was distributed to the stakeholder groups, in order to identify their communication needs. This resulted in a list of 31 communication-related issues, which were consolidated to ten issues in the categories Information dissemination, public services and dialogue (Table 11).

Except for municipal surveys and evaluation of services, there was agreement among the stakeholder groups that all these needs were at least somewhat important. The most popular categories were tailored information, which everyone reported to be important, business dialogue (77 %), being able to report problems and issues related to the physical infrastructure (69 %), and receiving information about issues concerning the local community (62 %). Only 31 % reported that a generic forum for debate was high on their agenda.

Information dissemination	Public services	Dialogue
Generic information	Service dialogue	Forum for debate
Information tailored to individual needs	Evaluation of existing services	Business dialogue
Local information	Report problems with services	Municipal surveys
	Report problems with infrastructure	

Table 11: List of eParticipation communication needs

The respondents were then asked to report through which media they preferred to communicate for each of the reported needs (Table 12). Overall, the Internet, represented by the municipality’s web site, is by far the most popular medium, followed by e-mail.

Preferred medium	Percentage for each communication need									
	Generic information	Local information	Tailored information	Service dialogue	Evaluation of services	Report problems w/infrastructure	Forum for debate	Business dialogue	Municipal surveys	
E-mail	66	60	75	47	47	74	39	38	63	
Internet	78	62	58	56	61	53	61	62	69	
Social media	22	24	14	22	17	15	42	44	20	
Mobile devices	16	19	25	14	9	35	6	18	14	
Service bureau	8	16	14	14	12	32	12	18	6	
Public meetings	8	5	6	19	12	6	46	41	9	

Table 12: Preferred medium for different communication needs

Comparing the reported communication needs with the observations from the other three cases provides some valuable insights. First of all, social media seems to be mostly valued as a two-way channel for communication, as it is only in the dialogue categories that social media receives a high score for preferred medium. Second, tailored and targeted information is important, as is being able to report on concrete issues important for the well-being of the individual citizen. Putting up a Facebook page or blog and asking people to discuss freely is not high on people’s agenda. These findings are reflected in the cases. In all three cases there were complaints about unresponsive politicians, more responses to concrete calls for input or action, and feedback from social media users that unless their comments were addressed, they did not see any point in participating. These findings could be applied to improve social media efforts, and sections 5 and 6 will present a discussion on how this could be done, through understanding social media as technology and as communication space and through applying this understanding in order to improve the use of social media.

5 Contributions RQ1 - Understanding social media

As stated in the introduction, this thesis has an explorative focus, and aims at 1) understanding participation in social media, and 2) to apply this understanding to aid practitioners in improving their social media efforts. The main objective is to contribute to understand how citizens can be more involved in the democratic process and public debate. Thus, there are two elements standing out; Communication practices, which may or may not facilitate deliberative ideals, and the technology behind the media being used for participation.

As section two of the thesis shows, contextual issues play an important part in understanding democracy and civic participation. Democracy is a complex phenomenon, so there is a need to be specific about the type of democracy and participation that is being discussed. This thesis contributes to two areas which can be called contextual in the model of eParticipation presented by Sæbø (et al., 2008), as they are not directly related to actors, activities or outcomes, yet play an important part in the process. Defining social media as IT artefact in a democratic context contributes to understanding potential usage areas for the technology, and makes visible the limitations and possibilities of social media. Applying the public sphere as lens for analysing communication in social media is not in itself a contribution, as this has been done in several studies of eParticipation. The contribution here lies in the discussion on the nature of the online public sphere, as well as in the combination of concepts which provide insights into who participates, how they participate and the reasons for participating.

5.1 Research question 1a – Social media as IT artefact

RQ 1a: How can social media be defined as IT artefact in the context of eParticipation?

From a pure technological standpoint, social media is quite simple when it comes to technology. Social media technology consists mainly of well-tested Internet technologies: HTML and dynamic web programming languages such as PHP or.NET, web form elements and the technological infrastructure that makes up the Internet. The novel aspects of social media do not lie in the technology alone, but rather in the way

the technology is being used, and in the mind-set of social media users. Thus, the approach to answering RQ1a has been to examine it as an ensemble IT artefact which combines technology with the social context the technology is placed within. This question is answered mainly through publication # 1, and contributes to knowledge by defining the social media IT artefact, and by showing the insights gained by this conceptualisation through the application of an example case.

The IT artefact is conceptualised through examining the technological capabilities of individual social media applications, and by a holistic view of social media as Information Infrastructure. The technological capabilities are mapped by combining elements from existing frameworks for analysis of eParticipation (Tambouris et al., 2007, Sæbø et al., 2008). This hermeneutic parts (individual social media application) and whole (social media as phenomenon) approach shows how social media as a phenomenon influences the possibilities provided by social media, as well as providing a more detailed analysis of the individual social media application. Table 13 and Table 14 show the technological capabilities, exemplified through an analysis of Facebook, and II-analysis.

Analysing the individual social medium’s technological capabilities provides a clearer picture of the usage areas of social media. The level of participation and stage in decision making process-columns are derived from analysing existing political use of the medium, as well as examining the possible fit between available functionality, activities and the desired level of participation and stage in the decision making process. Expected outcomes are derived from the combined analysis of the other elements in the table. For example, using a social medium that supports information sharing only is most likely not suited for an eParticipation project where the objective is increased deliberative effects.

Name of medium	Facebook
Functionality	Personalised front page, Profiles, Groups, Networks, "wall" for message posting, Photo uploads, Notes/links, status updates, events, Video, Chat, 3rd party applications, internal private messaging system, search, Sharing of content, mobile app for smartphones
Level of participation	Information, two-way consultation, possibly involvement in the political process (legal constraints need examination)
Stage in decision making process	Agenda setting, Analysis
Actors	Party information workers, politicians, NGOs, individual citizens. All can be both sender and receiver of information.
Activities	Information, activism, consultation, petitions
Expected outcomes	Civic engagement

Table 13: Capabilities of individual medium. From publication #1

This technological capability analysis provides solid understanding of the individual medium, but social media is as much a social phenomenon as it is a set of technologies, and there is a need to understand the phenomenon as a whole. Information Infrastructures is one way of examining this. While the term Information Infrastructures was originally used to describe the physical infrastructure of telecommunication, it has evolved into a more general theory for thinking about technology. Information Infrastructure is defined through six key aspects developed by Hanseth and Monteiro (1998). This thesis applies these somewhat differently from the intention of the original authors, as some of the aspects are used to discuss social rather than technical concerns:

Enabling

- Infrastructures have a supporting or enabling function, as opposed to systems that are specifically designed for one single purpose.

Use in thesis: While originally describing the physical infrastructure, this aspect also points out that use of the system is an enabling factor. A system already being used for political purposes is more likely to be accepted as a medium for political debate, and other usage areas are likely to compete for the users' attention.

Shared

- An infrastructure is one irreducible unit shared by a larger community, it cannot be split into separate parts, except for analytical and design purposes. Sharing demands standards for proper communication.

Use in thesis: Includes culturally related issues. In the case of social media, the culture of sharing and participating described by O'Reilly and others.

Socio-technical

- IIs are socio-technical networks. Not just technology, but also users and producers.

Use in thesis: In line with original interpretation.

Open

- There are no limits on the number of users, stakeholders, network nodes and technical components. One cannot draw a border for one single infrastructure.

Use in thesis: In line with original interpretation.

Heterogeneous

- IIs are connected in infrastructure ecologies, layered upon each other, and similar functions may be implemented in different ways.

Use in thesis: Refers to heterogeneity in both the technical and political communication domain. As shown by several scholars (such as Graham, 2008), the definition of political communication should be expanded to include a greater variety of communicative practices.

Installed base

- You cannot change an entire infrastructure, or build it from scratch. New things must be attached to the old, and the old (the installed base) influences how the new can be designed.

Use in thesis: In line with original interpretation.

Table 14 describes how each of these six aspects is relevant for social media use in eParticipation. The enabling and shared aspects show that to use social media for a specific purpose, one must adapt to both the technical possibilities and the social norms of the infrastructure, as well as compete for attention with other forms of content. Social media is not designed for political deliberation, but the enabling factors of social media, such as content sharing, two-way communication and network effects has led political actors to adopt the technology. The technical constraints of social media are also reflected in the aspect of installed base, where the social media platform decides what you can and cannot do. The socio-technical aspect shows us that both researchers and those wanting to use social media need to map and understand the culture of these media in order to fully understand how to use or conduct research on them effectively. The open aspect addresses delimitation issues. As IIs are borderless, researchers need to find ways of delimiting their object of study. Finally, the heterogeneous aspect is related to the above mentioned technological constraints, but also has a social meaning. Political communication online takes on many different shapes, and we might need to look in new places when examining the online public sphere

Enabling	Infrastructures have a supporting or enabling function, as opposed to systems that are specifically designed for one single purpose.
	Relevance for EP research: The enabling function of IIs is very important in this research context. Social media are not designed to support political deliberation. Users rather choose to use the enabling functions of social media for this purpose. This has at least two consequences: The system might not be ideal for the purpose, and users will have to make do with what is there, and adapt to the limits of the medium. Second, social media are used for a number of purposes, which leads to political issues having to compete with other topics, and users need to find ways of getting attention in this stream of information.
Shared	An infrastructure is one irreducible unit shared by a larger community, it cannot be split into separate parts, except for analytical and design purposes. Sharing demands standards for proper communication.
	Relevance for EP research: This is connected to the previous aspect. As most social media are not designed for political deliberation, users need to adapt to their environment. One user group cannot change the way an entire infrastructure functions. Studies of political parties' activity on Facebook show that the political parties have attempted to use social media as a one-way channel, which is not in line with the culture of social media (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009)
Socio-technical	IIs are socio-technical networks. Not just technology, but also users and producers.
	Relevance for EP research: Introducing the socio-technical perspective further strengthens the argument that the culture of social media needs to be taken into consideration when using these media for political purposes. Researchers and practitioners need to map and understand the culture of social media in order to become effective social media users. For example, it is not considered proper behaviour when a politician uses his/her blog to republish press releases, or as a one way communication tool (Johannessen, 2010a), and acting in this way could lessen the impact of social media.
Open	There are no limits on the number of users, stakeholders, network nodes and technical components. One cannot draw a border for one single infrastructure.
	Relevance for EP research: The open nature of infrastructures means it becomes difficult, but also necessary, to find ways of delimiting our object of study. Researchers need to be specific about which parties, groups, web sites or connections they are researching. There is also a need to discuss how, when and why we should stop adding new research sites.
Heterogeneous	IIs are connected in infrastructure ecologies, layered upon each other, and similar functions may be implemented in different ways.
	Relevance for EP research: Heterogeneity in the political context not only refers to the technical, but also to the social world. Viewed through the II lens, and taking the culture of social media into consideration, means that the form of the political debate is changing online (Graham, 2008). The heterogeneous nature of infrastructures influence the form of debate, and this should be taken into consideration when we make decisions on where to look for public spheres.
Installed base	You cannot change an entire infrastructure, or build it from scratch. New things must be attached to the old, and the old (the installed base) heavily influence how the new can be designed.
	Relevance for EP research: The installed base aspect reflects the technical side of needing to adapt to the artefact, and makes visible the social characteristics that are embedded in the technology. As with the enabling aspect, the installed base to some extent controls, or guides, what can and cannot be done with social media. For example, Facebook discussions are influenced by the way information is presented on Facebook, and might not be a good fit with the needs of political parties due to issues such as compliance with archiving regulations.

Table 14: Social media as information infrastructure. From publication #2

When presenting publication #2 at the ECIS 2012 conference, I received feedback from the audience that the concept was interesting, and that defining the social media artefact was a good contribution to knowledge. However, I was criticised for not showing more clearly how the two tables were connected. Thus I present a model here that shows more clearly the connection between the technological capabilities and information infrastructures, in order to present a more holistic picture of the social media IT artefact.

The model applies Facebook as an example system, and consists of three layers. The outer circle represents social media as an information infrastructure, and the inner circle the individual system, which is split up into two parts: The activities going on in the system, and the outcome of using the system.

Within the system, there are actors performing various activities that are both supported and enabled by the system's functionality. This combination of actors, activities and functionality lead to one or more outcomes, which are reflected in different levels of participation, and where it can be placed in the formal decision making process.

The surrounding social media information infrastructure has implications for social media as a whole, but is also related to parts of the individual system. The open aspect shows that there are no limits on the number of users and stakeholders, which has implications for the possible number of actors, but also for the activities being performed by these actors. The shared aspect relates to activities, as it points out the cultural attributes of social media. The culture of sharing, collaboration and content creation should be a good match with eParticipation activities. The installed base reflects on functionality, showing that users are "stuck with" the functionality present in the system, even though it might not be the most optimal solution. The enabling aspect reflects on both the technical functionality and the activities being conducted. Social media enables us to do certain things through the functionality present in the system. The socio-technical aspect shows that the outcomes of social media use depend on both the technology and the way the technology is being used. Finally, the heterogeneous aspect reflects on the outcomes of participation by pointing out that political communication online consists of much broader communicative practices than is common in traditional communication.

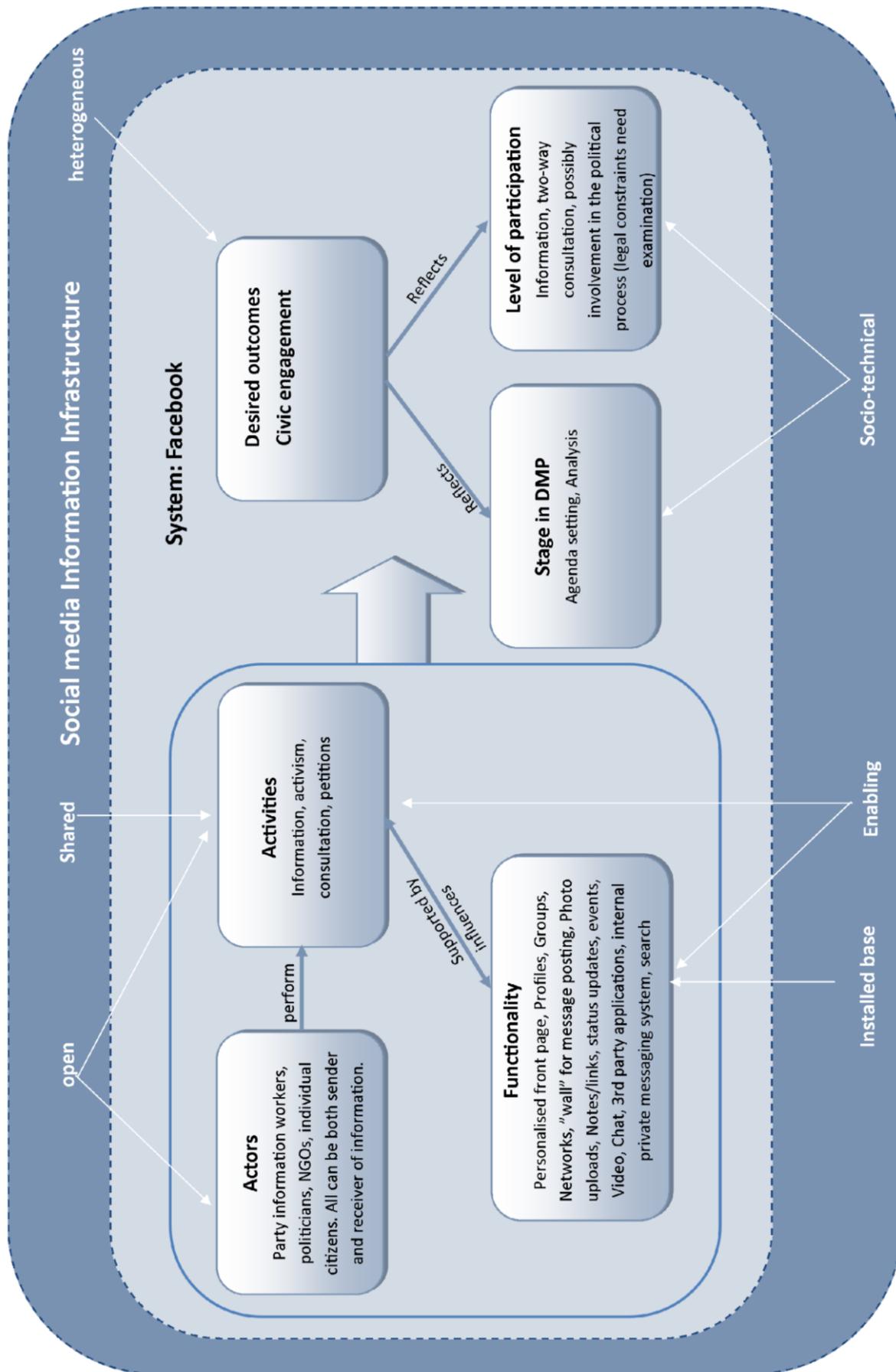


Figure 4: The social media IT artefact

5.2 Research question 1b - The networked public sphere

RQ 1b: How can communication in social media contribute to deliberation?

For communication to effectively address the normative democratic ideals presented in the introduction of the thesis, it needs to be enacted in a way that fosters debate, opinion- and discourse formation as well as free and open exchange of ideas. The notion of the public sphere provides us with a set of ideas and concepts that are useful for understanding the relation between communication and democracy. However, the public sphere concept was created in a time before the Internet and networks, and thus needs to be adapted to our age in order to be useful as a theoretical lens.

The public sphere is a topic receiving much scholarly attention. In November 2012, ISI Web of knowledge returns 3.751 hits on articles and conference proceedings with the keyword “public sphere”. In addition, there are a number of books written on the subject. However, in the review conducted during the work with publication #1 a gap was identified in the eParticipation literature; many papers apply the public sphere as their theoretical lens or philosophical grounding, but do not discuss the wider implications of applying the public sphere, or provide a solid definition of the public sphere. This is a problem, as the critics of the original concept claims it discussed a very different time when universal suffrage was not yet in place and society was ruled by a small elite of upper-class citizens.

Research question 1b is mainly answered by publication #2, and contributes to knowledge by presenting a definition of the public sphere set within a modern context of digital networks, the Internet and social media. Further, it contributes to the analysis of communication spaces by providing a framework for the examination of public sphere-related attributes.

Based on the review made for publication #2, a set of concepts was applied to define the public sphere in social media that could be applied to analyse how different communication spaces contributed to deliberation. This is summarised in Table 15. The concepts are all related to how and why people participate in online discussions. The following paragraphs present a summary of the conceptual discussion in publication #2. The type of public sphere category has been expanded by including the four ideal-type public spheres created by Trenz & Eder (2004)

Theory	Concept	Description
Public sphere	Dahlberg's criteria	Autonomy, critique, reflection, perspective, sincerity, equal opportunities
	Type of public sphere	<i>Weak</i> : freedom of the press, access to information. <i>Strong/ discourse based</i> : enlightened individuals constructing shared meaning and public opinion <i>political protest</i> : Like-minded people in opposition to existing policy <i>Consensus</i> : Little disagreement among participants. Support group.
	Network society	Incoming and/or outgoing links to other discussion spaces – Utilise the network and the long tail
	Community	Voluntary, value-based communities. Trust, solidarity and fraternity are important values.
Social Capital	Bridging	Connections between individuals in different groups
	Bonding	Connections between individuals in the same group
	Trust & reciprocity	Individuals trust each other and/or related institutions, and actions are reciprocated.
	Maintained social capital	the ability to keep one's connections even when physical proximity is removed

Table 15: Concepts defining the public sphere

Dahlberg's seven criteria for deliberative communication

Dahlberg (2001, see section 2) created a list of seven criteria for deliberative communication, based on the original writings by Jürgen Habermas. This list is the starting point of defining a public sphere, as it describes how people should communicate in order to lead a rational discussion with the aim of creating public opinion. While all seven criteria do not need to be present for a public sphere to be created (see for example Graham, 2008), there should at least be some evidence of them being present in the discussion.

Different types of public sphere

While Jürgen Habermas presents one ideal-type public sphere, other scholars point out that there are different types of discussion spaces, which contribute to democratic dialogue in various ways. The weak public sphere refers to ideals such as freedom of the press and the right to access information. These are important values in a democratic society. The strong or discourse-based public sphere is the one resembling Habermas' ideal, where "enlightened" individuals meet and construct shared meaning and public opinion. The political protest public sphere is where like-minded people meet in opposition to existing policy. This type of public sphere is typically seen in activist campaigns. Finally, the consensus-based public sphere is a space where there is little disagreement among the participants. This space functions more like a support group.

The first two concepts relate to how people communicate. The following ones are more related to why people participate, and to factors facilitating deliberation.

The network society and community

Through the concept of the network society, Manuel Castells describe the age we are currently living in. Society is organised through networks, and it is important to be connected. In the past, when decisions were made by a few “upstanding members of society”, reaching out was not a major issue. Today, when political decision makers are tuned in to public opinion, reaching out is more important. Thus, an online public sphere should have ties to other discussion spaces in order to spread information and ideas and thereby contribute to public opinion formation. Within the single discussion space, community formation is an important factor in facilitating discussion.

Voluntary, value-based communities where trust, solidarity and fraternity are important values are more likely to facilitate discussions following the criteria made by Dahlberg. Empirical examination of network effects is presented in publication #6, showing the effects on information dissemination of having people acting as bridges, as well as community formation shaped by the way in which the people in the case are addressing each other through genres that facilitate both on-going debate as well as the maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

Social capital

Social capital is related to community and networks, in the sense that it analyses connections between people, and makes visible the benefits of thinking about the public sphere as a network of small interconnected discussion spaces. High amounts of social capital have been found to facilitate community and cooperation, and aid us in measuring connections between people. The discussion section of publication #2 concludes by saying “social capital could act in two ways, both as a determinant of participation, and as an outcome of participation. High levels of social capital strengthen participation, and participation in turn leads to even higher amounts of social capital”. Social capital can be broken up into four elements: bridging (connections between different communities), bonding (connections within the community) and maintained social capital (connections with people you do not see face to face, facilitated by technology), as well as trust and reciprocal actions.

In summary, communication in social media can contribute to deliberation if and when the communication follows at least some of the criteria for a public sphere, and can be situated within or close to one of the ideal types of public sphere. The creation of a public sphere is facilitated by social capital and community building, and reaching out through the network is important to spread ideas across communities and thereby contribute to a more informed and deliberative discourse formation.

Table 16 shows the analysis of the Labour party’s social media site as public sphere, and reveals that it to some extent does contribute to deliberation. Some of the discussions fulfil Dahlberg’s criteria, and there is some evidence of a strong public sphere. Likewise, there is evidence of network effects and community formation and of the social capital concepts. The communication is far from perfect according to these concepts, but in some cases the discussions are in line with public sphere ideals, and these discussions can be brought forward as examples of how one should communicate in order to conduct a deliberative discussion.

Theory	Concept	Case observations
Public sphere	Dahlberg’s criteria	Partially present: autonomous discussions, inclusive debates, some reflection and some rational-critical discourse
	Type of public sphere	Has aspects of strong public sphere, but not all of them
	Network society	Ties between internal core actors and between different zones contribute to maintain a networked community
	community	Metacommunication and tone between participants contribute to community formation
Social Capital	Bridging	A total of ten people contribute in more than one zone, acting as bridges.
	Bonding	Each zone has a core community that contributes regularly, and who seem to know each other
	Trust & reciprocity	Plays a big role. Trusting relations and reciprocal actions contribute to participants’ staying. Lack of reciprocity makes participants leave.
	Maintained social capital	A fair proportion of the participants only meet online, but still address each other as if they have a “real” relationship

Table 16: Example of public sphere analysis

5.3 Summary: Understanding social media as artefact and communication space

How can social media be understood in the context of fostering political participation?

Research question 1 has been answered by presenting social media as an ensemble view IT artefact and by defining communication in social media as a public sphere. Combined, these contribute to greater understanding of how social media can facilitate political participation and fulfil political objectives such as increased deliberation.

The technology acts as the space within which communication takes place, and the public sphere presents a set of concepts describing how to communicate and who are most likely to participate. Together, they contribute to a socio-technical understanding of the relation between social media and political participation, and how they contribute to the desired outcomes of political participation. Figure 5 shows a visualisation of this understanding. The term communicative actions refer to the form and content of the activities taking place in social media.

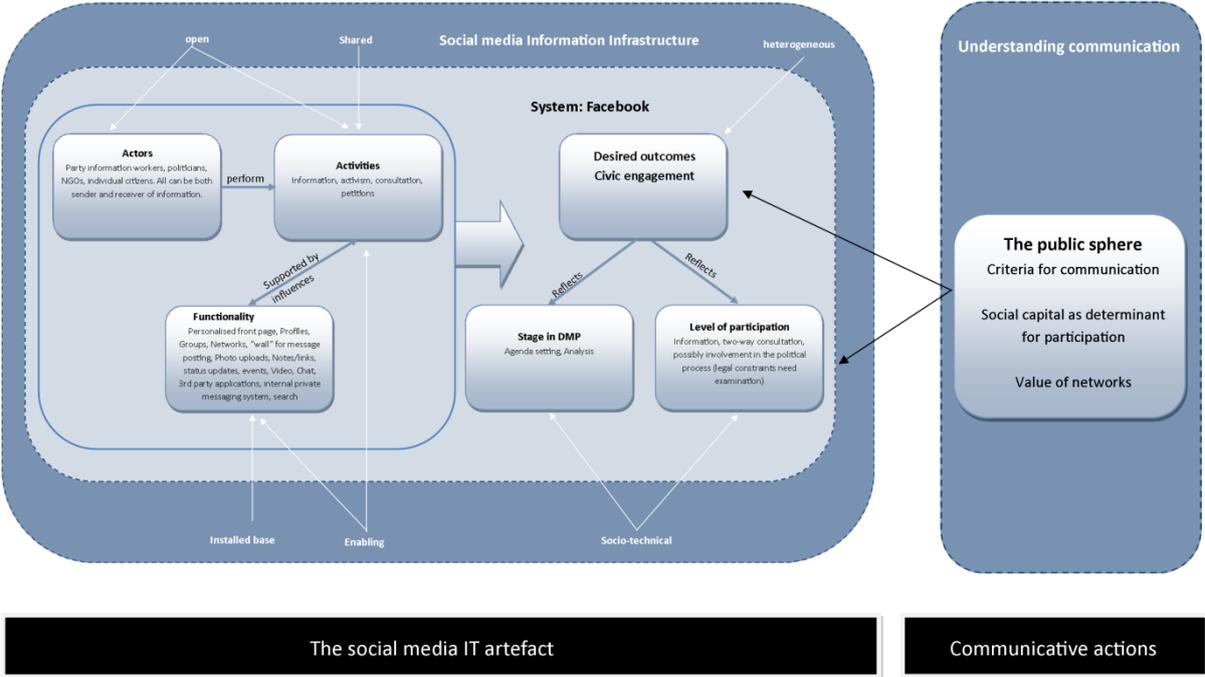


Figure 5: Research question 1 visualisation

6 Contributions RQ2 – Improving social media use

While the first research question examines contextual issues aimed at greater theoretical understanding of social media use in eParticipation, the second question is more practically oriented, and applies the findings from the first question to examine how to improve eParticipation projects using social media.

Focusing on media choice and communicative practices, the answers to research question 2 contribute in four areas. It shows the communication needs of eParticipation stakeholder groups, and provides a framework for matching social medium with communication needs. It shows which stakeholders are more likely to participate in social media. It provides an analysis of communication genres, and examines which genres contribute to deliberation and which do not. Finally, it contributes to uncovering the observed outcomes of different actors and activities, showing how social media use in different combinations of actors, activities, genres and technologies leads to different eParticipation outcomes.

6.1 Research question 2a – Matching medium and communication needs

2a) How can social media and the needs of relevant eParticipation actors be matched?
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The literature review reveals that an important reason why eParticipation projects fail is a combination of a more technocratic and expert-opinion focused government and the fact that participation projects are often biased towards the socio-cultural background of government officials, with little or no information about the actual needs of citizens. Research question 2a contributes towards solving this problem, by asking eParticipation stakeholder groups about their actual communication needs. Further, it contributes to practice by combining these findings with the IT artefact framework to create a framework for media choice based on stakeholder communication preferences.

The basis for answering this question was made in publication #3, which identifies eParticipation stakeholders, their communication needs and preferred communication technologies. The next step was to apply these findings to create a framework for

media choice. This was created based on the theoretical insights gained from answering RQ 1a. The framework consists of three steps:

1. Identify communication genres
2. Analyse capabilities of available technologies
3. Identify technologies that best fit genre requirements

Identify communication genres

Genres have been successfully applied in structuring communication-related projects in the past. The communication genres are derived from the reported communication needs, and translated into genres through the following steps:

Genre :	[name]	
Stakeholders	Producers	Who is the one producing information/ the sender
	Users	Who is the receiver of information?
Genre properties	Why	What is the purpose and expected outcome of the genre?
	What	What is the information content and level of participation addressed?
	When	In what time-period, and where in the decision making process should the genre be enacted?
	Where	What is the reported preferred technology for the genre?
	How	What are the technological needs, how should the genre be produced? What activities are involved?
Genre metadata	Meta 1	Metadata is collected through user input
	Meta 2	Metadata can also be related to compliance issues such as archiving laws

Table 17: Identifying genres based on communication needs

Identify stakeholders and producers and users of information. A stakeholder analysis, such as the one presented in table 1, tells us who should participate in the communication. The next step is to identify producers and users of information, so that we know who should initiate and who should respond to the communicative act.

Identify communication genres. For eParticipation, the first step has too often been based on the needs of government. Our identification of the communication needs of various external and internal stakeholder groups, allows us to create genres that are grounded in citizen and other stakeholder needs. Identifying genres based on these communication needs can be done through the 5W1H method. *Who/m* is excluded from 5W1H, as it is addressed in the stakeholder analysis. The data for the 5W1H analysis is extracted from the qualitative first round of the Delphi study.

Define and gather metadata about the various genres. This should be done in collaboration with the stakeholders. Typical metadata varies depending on the type of communication. The responses in the Delphi study shows that in this case metadata could include preferred medium, response time, reference number. For government, issues such as archiving and access might also be necessary for compliance with law and regulations. The genre analysis is shown in Table 17.

Analyse capabilities of available technologies

The second step applies the same approach as in publication #1. The technology evaluation begins by analysing the functionality of the medium, and this provides us with the basis for examining the level of participation, stage in decision making process, and activities the medium can accommodate. Actors include everyone who has access to the technology, and should include an examination of issues such as the need to create a profile and related privacy concerns, if the technology is open for everyone or if you need to be invited to sign up (as was the case with for example Google’s Wave service), accessible to people with disabilities and other issues which may influence who has access.

Name of medium	Facebook
Functionality	Personalised front page, Profiles, Groups, Networks, "wall" for message posting, Photo uploads, Notes/links, status updates, events, Video, Chat, 3rd party applications, internal private messaging system, search, Sharing of content, mobile app for smartphones
Level of participation	Information, two-way consultation, possibly involvement in the political process (legal constraints need examination)
Stage in decision making process	Agenda setting, Analysis
Actors	Party information workers, politicians, NGOs, individual citizens. All can be both sender and receiver of information.
Activities	Information, activism, consultation, petitions
Expected outcomes	Civic engagement

Table 18: Technological capabilities

Identify technologies that best fit genre requirements

In publication #3, matching technology with communication need is done by examining the two tables and looking for possible conflicts and matches. For example, if a genre’s metadata shows that it is important to receive a case number, Facebook and Twitter is likely not suited for the purpose unless you develop an in-system app for the purpose. Here, I introduce a figure contributing to make this process easier, as it allows for a more direct comparison between genre and medium, and allows the user to list possible issues between the two. In order to facilitate the identification of issues, the genre properties have been extended to include activities, expected outcomes, stage

in decision making process and level of participation. Actors and stakeholders are also directly comparable. The figure shows an example comparison of the requirements of the genre “Report problems with physical infrastructure” and the capabilities of the system.

The *why* property, the purpose of the genre, have been linked with expected outcomes as there is a close connection between the purpose and expected result of an action. The *how* property, which addresses the practicalities of how the genre is enacted, have been linked with activities, because both address what is actually happening or what is supposed to be happening. The *when* property, which addresses the time and setting in which the genre should be enacted, has been linked with stage in the decision making process, since both are concerned with temporal qualities. Finally, the *what* property has been linked with level of participation, as the actual information content of the genre is closely related to the possible level of participation in decision making.

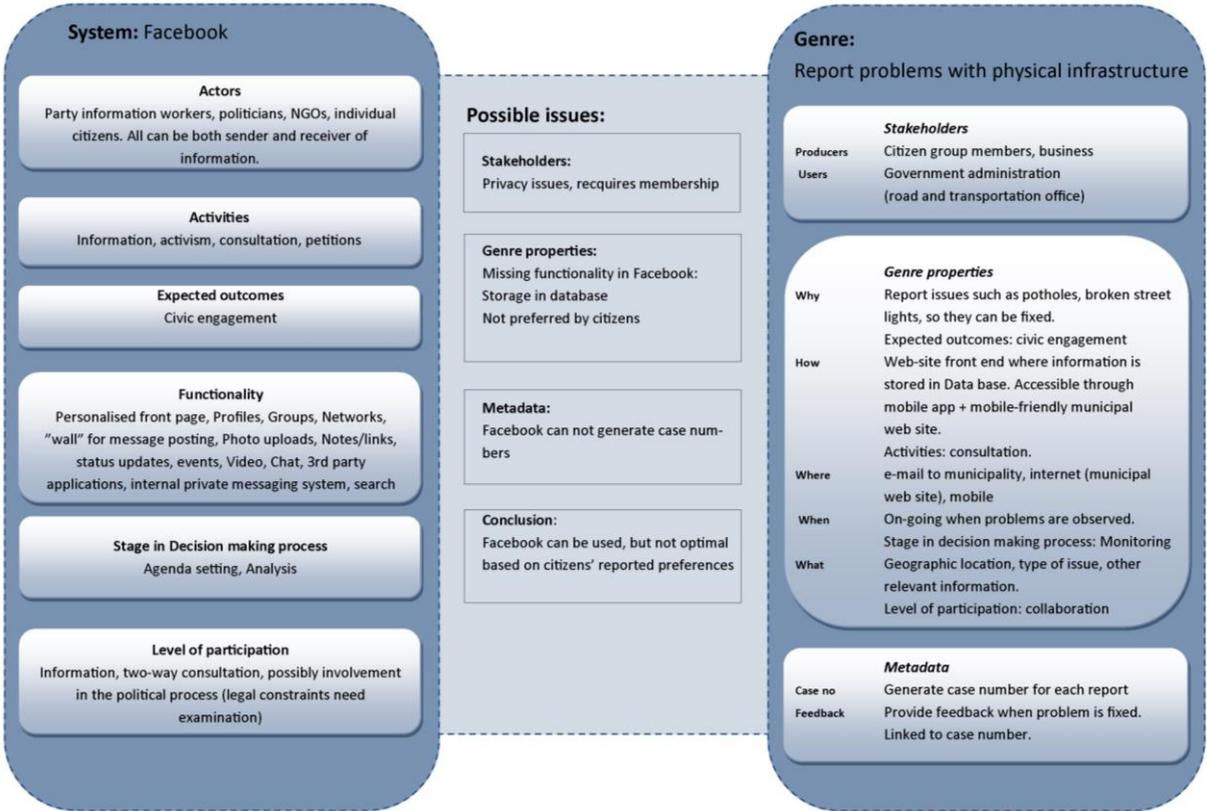


Figure 6: Matching medium with communication need

6.2 Research question 2b – Communication for deliberative outcomes

2b) How can communication in social media contribute to deliberation?

Similar to the first research question, this second question is also divided into a socio-technical and a communication-related sub-question. While RQ 2a presents a framework for matching technology with communication need, research question 2 b focuses on the deliberative outcome of participation, by identifying the genres more likely to lead to a deliberative debate along the lines of the public sphere as outlined by research question 1b. Answering this question contributes to increased understanding of how to communicate online, and provides practitioners such as moderators, project managers, web editors and content contributors with guidelines on how communication should be structured in order to facilitate a deliberative debate.

In the 2009 parliamentary election case, the interviews with representatives from the seven political parties represented in parliament revealed three broad objectives for using social media in dialogue with citizens. As the central organisation of the political parties represent the leading politicians in Norway, including Members of parliament and government ministers, these objectives can be applied to eParticipation in Norway in general. The political parties all agreed that these objectives were the reason for using social media. The objectives for using social media are:

- Dialogue – Dialogue between citizens and decision-makers
- Contribution – Citizen input on various policy areas, stories from individual citizens regarding for example how health policy affects individual citizens
- Involvement – Get citizens to volunteer for campaigning, fundraising and other activities organised by the political parties.

These three objectives were identified using the 5W1H method in the interview guide, and are presented in Table 19 as “genre objectives” – objectives that genres used in eParticipation should aim at supporting. These objectives supplement the public sphere framework presented in research question 1b, in that they present something the genres being used in social media can be evaluated against.

		Objectives		
		Dialogue	Contribution	Involvement
5W1H description	Why	Involve citizens in public debate	Knowledge about citizen concerns	Raise funds. Get people to volunteer
	When	Continuous	Election time	Election time
	What	Conversation between citizens and politicians/citizens and citizens	Q&A. Voter stories	Competitions, membership forms, information
	Who	Politicians, party members, citizens	Politicians, party members, voters	Voters, sympathizers
	Where	SNS, web site	SNS, web site	SNS, web site
	How	Encourage dialogue. Open and personal language. Citizen-generated content.	Encourage contributions and questions from voters	Competitions, theme sites, cross-publication

Table 19: Participation/genre objectives.

Digital communication in *the 2009 parliamentary election* showed an emerging repertoire of online genres, ranging from one-way information dissemination to heated discussions between politicians and citizens. The main problem was that there was little agreement between political parties and citizens on how these genres should be enacted. Communication was mostly one-way, leaving questions and appeals unanswered. And even though the respondents pointed out the importance of not using social media to post press releases, many politicians did so. This led to a series of frustrated posts on the Facebook walls of several parties, asking why the political parties used social media when they did not bother to answer. However, those genres enacted when the political parties asked for input on specific matters still received a lot of attention.

The political party social media site contains more genres than were found in the 2009 election case and some genres where content is overlapping. This can be seen as a sign that social media communication has been maturing somewhat between 2009 and 2011. It is also a possibility that the communication in a medium where the stated purpose is discussion becomes richer because this purpose is communicated. Another factor that could contribute to explain the larger variety in genres is that the section producing the most genres is also the most local section of the site. The posts generating the most discussion were all grounded in local and concrete issues, such as local infrastructure and development. A very interesting genre, which addresses the critique from the election campaign on misalignment on the way genres should be enacted, is the metacommunication genre. The most active participants are discussing how the communication in the site should be structured, and are attempting to create a set of informal rules for conversation.

The urban planning case was examined from the point of view of activists, as this group of actors were the most active in social media. For this case the objectives were both to identify genres being used in an activist context, and to compare the genres repertoires of traditional/print and social media. While many of the same genres are present in both traditional and social media, there are differences in the way they are enacted. In print, contributions provide a more well-thought out line of argumentation and in general provides better insights into the case. Similar genres in social media are shorter and often more improvised and less factual. On the other hand, social media presents some new genres, such as “greeting” and “links”, and social media genres also take advantage of multimedia and network effects. Short posts providing links to content posted elsewhere, images, music and video provides a new dimension to the debate, which is not possible to achieve in print media.

Which genres contribute to deliberation?

As the genre analysis shows, there is a rich variety in social media communication that includes everything from formal debates to harassment. Some of the observed genres do not contribute to the political objectives for social media, at least not in a constructive way. However, taken together, the genre repertoires found in the cases do contribute in different ways to deliberation and to the public sphere.

Dialogue is the objective most directly related to deliberative ideals, and is also the objective being addressed by the largest number of genres. *Appeal to party, Critique, Debate, Greeting, Humour, Information, Links, Metacommunication, Opinion, formal, Opinion, informal, Policy comment, Q&A, Recognition, and Thanks* contribute to the dialogue objective in different ways. The formal opinion, debate, information, critique, appeal to party, policy comment, metacommunication and Q&A genres can be seen as typical for deliberation. These all aim at fulfilling the deliberative ideals put forth by Dahlberg and Habermas. The *links* genre can be related to network effects and bridging social capital, as it brings information from one online space to another. The genres *greeting, humour, informal opinions, recognition* and *thanks* contribute to community formation and to bonding social capital. These function as the social glue that helps communities to form and thrive. By recognising others, saying thank you to someone who has done something good and using humour to dissolve difficult situations, participants go beyond formal deliberation, and these genres contribute to people returning to the discussion, or taking part in other discussions in the community. Dialogue is facilitated by a wide range of genres. Some are formal and

can be seen as the actual discussion of an issue, while others play a bigger role in facilitating a sense of community, bonding and maintained social capital, or contribute to network effects and bridging social capital.

The contribution objective is also related to deliberation, as it aims at raising decision makers' awareness of citizen concerns. *Call for action*, *Appeal to party*, *Personal accounts*, *Video response*, *Policy comment*, and *Opinion, formal* are genres contributing towards this objective. *Call for action* is an important genre, in that it is used to ask citizens to provide input. The call is closely related to the responding genres *Policy comment*, *Video response*, *Personal accounts* and *Opinion, formal*, which are often, but not always, used to respond to this call in various ways. The variety in responses is likely to provide more input, as not everyone is familiar or comfortable with formal language. Similarly, the *Appeal to party* genre allows for both formal and more informal requests to the decision makers. The genres applied to address the contribution objective are related in that they generate increased knowledge about the concerns of citizens, and that they are often used in response to a call for input on a specific issue.

Finally, the involvement objective does not directly relate to deliberation, but is rather an objective related to the promotion of the individual political party. The only genre directly addressing this objective is the *call for action*, which is initiated by the political party. Responses to this genre would typically not be presented in social media, but rather in the physical world when sympathisers volunteer to go knocking on doors, being on stands etc. These genres all aim at getting citizens more directly involved in concrete activities

Objectives for participation	Genres addressing objective
Dialogue -Involve citizens in public debate	Appeal to party, Critique, Debate, Greeting, Humour, Information, Links, Metacommunication, Opinion, formal, Opinion, informal, Policy comment, Q&A, Recognition, Thanks
Contribution -Knowledge about citizen concerns	Call for action, Appeal to party, Personal accounts, Video response, Policy comment, Opinion, formal
Involvement -Raise funds. Get people to volunteer	Call for action

Table 20: Objectives for participation and genres addressing these objectives

6.3 Summary: Improving social media use

2 How can the improved understanding of social media influence eParticipation projects?

The answer to research question 2 applies the theoretical insights from research question 1. Research question 2a is informed by the definition of the IT artefact, and research question 2b is informed by the definition of the public sphere. Combined, this knowledge contributes to aid eParticipation practitioners in project planning and in facilitating communication that addresses the objectives of online participation.

The three cases examining social media communication in various settings cover a wide variety of eParticipation activities, and contribute to understanding of the outcomes of social media use.

The “who” category of the genre analysis identifies the actors involved in producing and consuming information, and reveals an important insight, which can be interpreted as an obstacle for deliberation. In the three cases where the genre perspective was applied, there are many stakeholders who are not present.

In the campaigning genre repertoire, citizens are the ones who are most active in attempting to create a debate. With some exceptions, politicians do not take part in the actual debate in social media. As noted before, some of the political parties were criticised for this.

In the deliberative social media repertoire, there is debate, but the vast majority of participants are members of the Labour party or of an opposing political party. While other stakeholders are represented, they take part to a much lesser degree. What the site does provide however, is a discussion space for those members of the political party who may not be the most powerful in their local party groups.

Finally, in the activist genre repertoire activists are over-represented in the discussions, both in social media and in print media. While the distinction between activist and citizen sharing the views of the activists can be somewhat blurred, it is clear that many of the posts in social media and letters written to the editor are made by the same people, and that these people are members of one or more of the activist groups.

Politicians report that they do not take part in the social media discussion. At most they browse some of the Facebook groups occasionally. The developer is not present in social media at all, and only on a few occasions in print media.

One explanation for this is found in the urban planning case. Citizens and activists are represented in social media, while the other stakeholders prefer other means of communication. These actors have in common that they do not have any formal power to influence the case, but both groups have strong opinions and interests in the outcome of the case. This combination shows that actors who are strongly concerned and involved in an issue, but who lack the formal power to affect the outcome, are more likely to use social media and all other communication forms that can help to spread their opinion to more people. In the interviews, the activists report that their most important objective in their communication strategy is to convince the politicians who have the formal decision making power that public opinion is in favour of the activist view. In this context social media becomes an important forum. The activists gain access to the contact details of a large user base that can be informed about demonstrations and activities, and are also provided with a concrete measure of support in the form of Facebook group followers.

As deliberation requires that everyone is able to participate, one can argue that social media supports deliberation only in a limited way. However, as the cases show, social media is being used for political discussions and some of these discussions are being spread to others outside the immediate network of discussants. While not a perfect match in terms of strict deliberative ideals, the communication in social media does at least to some extent contribute to democracy simply by allowing more people to participate and to access the opinions of others.

Further, social media use does seem to include actors who would perhaps otherwise not be engaged in political deliberative discussions or activist activities. In the election case, hundreds of patients got to tell their stories to the minister of health. In the Labour party case, party members and citizens have a space for deliberative debate, and in the urban planning case social media allowed the activists to gather support and spread information to hundreds of citizens, and this can well have contributed to the many years of delay and debate in the local community. There is still much room for improvement. Many actors are absent from the discussion, most notably youths. Politicians and other high power actors could become better at listening and engaging

with the other actors and online campaigns could become better at taking advantage of the capabilities in social media. While social media has not revolutionised democracy, it plays a role as one of many channels of communication contributing to maintaining the public sphere.

Summing up, research question 2 can be answered as follows:

- **Media choice:**
- Actors only prefer social media for dialogue-related issues.
- The actors most likely to participate are those with limited power and a high interest in the case. These two observations contribute to limiting the potential usage areas of social media.
- The following steps can be applied to ensure good fit between communication preferences and the chosen communication technologies:
 1. Identify communication genres
 2. Analyse capabilities of available technologies
 3. Identify technologies that best fit genre requirements
- **Communication within the chosen media:**
- A total of 17 different eParticipation-related genres have been identified
- These genres address different eParticipation objectives
- Depending on the objectives of the individual project, site moderators/editors/owners should attempt to steer the conversation towards the genres addressing these objectives

This knowledge of how social media is being used (RQ 2b), how actors prefer to communicate and why some choose not to participate (RQ 2a) can act as valuable input for practitioners when planning an eParticipation related project. Further, it can act as a moderating force for citizen expectations about the outcome of participation. The observations from the cases show that social media allows people to be heard, but does not guarantee that people are being listened to. This is well in line with public sphere ideals, where the objective is not so much to make decisions as it is to create a space for mutually informing debates.

7 Conclusions and implications

This thesis presents an exploratory study of the use of social media in the Norwegian public sector, and contributes to the understanding of how social media can be applied to improve deliberation. The overall objective of the thesis is to contribute to the understanding of social media used for political participation and deliberation, as well as to show how social media is being used today, and how this use contributes towards the objective of increased deliberation. A case study approach using multiple methods for data collection has been adopted in order to examine participation in different settings. The four cases provides input from both the municipal and state level, and the opinions, objectives and actions of stakeholders such as political parties, activists, administrative officials and “ordinary” citizens are examined through interviews, observation, content analysis and social network analysis. The underlying assumption of the thesis is that understanding demands a socio-technical approach. This is reflected in the research questions, which are separated into sub-questions addressing social media as technology and the communication taking place within the technology.

The research questions for thesis are:

1. How can social media be understood in the context of fostering deliberation?
 - A. How can social media be defined as IT artefact in the context of eParticipation?
 - B. How can communication in social media contribute to deliberation?
2. How can the improved understanding of social media influence eParticipation projects?
 - A. How can social media and the needs of relevant eParticipation actors be matched?
 - B. Which forms of social media communication contribute to increased deliberation?

The first question is addressed through a conceptual approach, and validated through applying empirical data from the cases. Research question 1a presents an ensemble definition of the IT artefact. The IT artefact is defined as both the technological capabilities of the individual social medium and the information infrastructures that make up social media as phenomenon. This provides a hermeneutic lens for understanding social media both as the individual social media technologies and as a whole consisting of the wider infrastructure and culture of social media. The artefact definition is applied to an example case, and shows the insights gained from this definition of the social media IT artefact.

Research question 1b is answered by presenting a framework for understanding the online public sphere, situated in the context of the network society. The framework consists of criteria for deliberative communication in a public sphere, presents different types of public spheres, the network society and community formation, and applies concepts related to social capital in order to analyse network formation and community building within an online public sphere. The framework is applied on an example case, showing how it can be used to analyse how communication contributes to deliberation.

The answers to research questions 1a and 1b provide insights into social media and to the communication taking place in social media. Combined, these provide an answer to how social media can be understood in a deliberative context. This is visualised through a model showing how technological capabilities, information infrastructures and communication in a public sphere influences the outcome and level of participation of eParticipation activities.

The second question aims at providing a more practical exploration of how eParticipation projects using social media can be improved. It does so by combining the theoretical insights gained from answering research question 1 with empirical findings from the four cases.

In answering research question 2a, I present findings from a Delphi study on the communication needs and media preferences of eParticipation stakeholder groups, and combine this with the definition of the IT artefact to create a framework for media choice based on stakeholder expectations and genres of communication. This provides practitioners with a tool that can be used to make more informed choices about what technologies to use for different communication needs.

For Research question 2b, I present the political parties objectives for using social media, examine the genres used to communicate in the cases, and analyse how each genre contributes to the objectives. This analysis shows that a mix of formal and less formal communication contributes to deliberation, and also reveals that stakeholder salience plays an important role in determining which stakeholder groups that choose to communicate. As deliberation ideally requires participation from all relevant stakeholders, this salience analysis is an important part in explaining deliberation in social media.

Finally, the summarising answer to research question 2 presents the observed actors, activities, technologies and genres being used, and the outcomes and level of participation observed in all the cases combined, and for the individual case. The section then presents a discussion of how these findings should be interpreted, claiming that social media as is used today does contribute somewhat to deliberation within the confines of representative democracy, but that efforts should be made to include more stakeholders, and that politicians and civil society stakeholders should make efforts to negotiate the genres structuring communication in social media. The current status is that social media plays a role as one of many channels of communication contributing to maintain the public sphere. While not revolutionary, this is still an important democratic function.

Research question	Findings	Contributions
1a: How can social media be defined as IT artefact in the context of fostering deliberation?	Presents a model of the social media ensemble IT artefact, in the context of eParticipation.	Contributes to understanding the socio-technical nature of social media through identifying social media as IT artefact.
1b How can communication in social media contribute to deliberation?	Presents a framework for defining the online public sphere.	Contributes to understanding and analysing social media communication through a public sphere analytical framework.
1 How can social media be understood in the context of fostering deliberation?	Combines the above to achieve a socio-technical understanding of social media in eParticipation.	Improved understanding of the relation between eParticipation outcomes, social media technologies and communication.
2a How can social media and the needs of relevant eParticipation actors be matched?	Presents stakeholder groups, their communication preferences and preferred communication media. Presents framework for media choice based on these findings.	An analytical approach combining genre theory, stakeholder analysis and the public sphere for selecting social media suited to the objective of the actors.
2b Which forms of social media communication contribute to deliberation?	Presents a genre analysis and a stakeholder salience analysis of social media communication.	Contributes to understanding which forms of communication foster a deliberative environment.
2 How can the improved understanding of social media influence eParticipation projects?	Summarises the findings from the two sub-questions.	Contributes to increased understanding of how social media can support eParticipation through media choice framework, and analyses of genre use and actors participating in social media.

Table 21: Overview of research questions, findings and contributions

Implications

This thesis shows that social media is a complex socio-technical phenomenon, and that the usage areas of social media depends both on the technological capabilities and the social and cultural aspects surrounding the use of social media. The conceptual and empirical material collected for this thesis have presented a conceptual approach towards understanding how social media can contribute to eParticipation, as well as showing empirical examples of the insights gained from this approach.

There are two main implications of the research presented in this thesis. For research, the improved understanding of the relation between deliberation and social media clearly shows that applying a purely technological focus is insufficient when attempting to realise the potential of social media. While this is not new insight as such, history has shown that this exercise needs to be repeated for every major technological change (see page 3). Examining current technological media coverage shows that social media is no exception to this. Thus, researchers should be critical and approach the subject from a holistic perspective. The tools developed as answers to research questions 1a and 1b, enables future research to analyse the challenges facing deliberation in social media in greater detail and in their proper context, and thereby aids in resolving these challenges.

For practice, the main implication lies in making visible the complex nature of social media. This urges practitioners to consider the technological functionality, the user base of the individual social medium, the wider consequences related to the culture of social media, the citizens' expectations to social media as well as the complexity of facilitating and maintaining deliberative communication. Both the framework for media choice and the genre analyses of social media can be applied by practitioners when planning eParticipation related projects. Practical use of these frameworks should lead to more targeted use of social media as well as a more inclusive user base, which includes those actor groups who are not currently involved in deliberation.

Table 22 provides a more detailed overview of the implications drawn from the research questions. In summary, the IT artefact and public sphere shows the complexity of social media, and provides tools that can be applied by researchers to increase knowledge about deliberative use of social media, while the media choice framework and genre analyses provide practitioners with insights and tools for improved eParticipation projects.

Research question	Contributions	Implications
1a How can social media be defined as IT artefact in the context of fostering deliberation?	Contributes to understanding the socio-technical nature of social media through identifying social media as IT artefact.	Shows that social media is a complex phenomenon involving network effects, social/cultural issues, technological capabilities. Understanding this complexity allows for deeper understanding of how social media facilitates deliberation.
1b How can communication in social media contribute to deliberation?	Contributes to understanding and analysing social media communication through a public sphere analytical framework.	Shows that social media can function as a space for deliberation and increases knowledge about how to set up spaces that facilitate deliberation. Provides a tool for analysing deliberative qualities of social media spaces.
1 How can social media be understood in the context of fostering deliberation?	Improved understanding of the relation between eParticipation outcomes, social media technologies and communication.	IT artefact and public sphere frameworks should be applied in future research to develop deeper contextual and more fine-grained understanding of the interplay between social media use and deliberation.
2a How can social media and the needs of relevant eParticipation actors be matched?	An analytical approach combining genre theory, stakeholder analysis and the public sphere for selecting social media suited to the objective of the actors.	Shows that social media is preferred only when the purpose of communicating is related to dialogue. Provides practitioners with a tool to improve the selection of technologies for eParticipation projects, based on communicative needs and technological capabilities.
2b Which forms of social media communication contribute to deliberation?	Contributes to understanding which forms of communication foster a deliberative environment.	Shows which combinations of communication genres facilitate on-going debate with deliberative qualities. Enables practitioners to moderate discussions and set up rules for conversation in ways that will increase deliberation.
2 How can the improved understanding of social media influence eParticipation projects?	Contributes to increased understanding of how social media can support eParticipation through media choice framework, and analyses of genre use and actors participating in social media.	Given the complex nature of social media, the media choice framework and genre are recommended to increase the chances of realising social media's deliberative potential.

Table 22: Implications of thesis contributions

Limitations and further research

This thesis is submitted under the regulations of a three year doctoral program, which limits the time available for longitudinal data collection. The four cases have collected data from the years 2009 through 2011, and with an emerging phenomenon such as social media it would be preferable to have data from a longer time period, for example in order to compare the elections of 2009 and the upcoming 2013 election, or to be able to compare different activist cases. While the four cases cover a wide variety of eParticipation related activities, they do not provide a complete picture of

eParticipation in Norway. Media reports emerging the last six months show that many municipalities have had success with their Facebook pages, and there is a lot of communication going on in Norwegian online newspapers. Both of these cases would possibly have provided data which might have had implications for the conclusions of this thesis.

However, the objective of case study research is not to generalise to the population (Walsham, 1995), but rather to either develop concepts, generalise to theory, draw specific implications and contribute to rich insight. This thesis has aimed at rich insights, drawing implications from the cases, and a theoretical contribution (the public sphere and IT artefact definitions) rather than attempt to cover every aspect of social media.

As with all interpretive studies, the findings and conclusions of this thesis can be challenged by alternative interpretations. As an example, how do you decide what a sufficient amount of deliberation is, or how many people needs to participate before a medium is inclusive? Interview respondents had very different interpretations of this, especially in the urban planning case. Social media practitioners I discuss my research with would contest my conclusion that social media is not revolutionary, and I have had several hermeneutic iterations with the data before drawing my final conclusions. When beginning the study, I shared the attitudes of my practitioner peers that social media was revolutionary and a truly disruptive technology, which would make traditional channels of political communication obsolete. After the initial rounds of data collection, the interviews with politicians (and especially the prime ministers comment about even his own political party's general assembly was a hassle for the daily workings of the government), brought me towards the opposite conclusion that social media was completely useless for democracy, as politicians do not really listen. Finally, after several more iterations of interpreting the data, I ended up with the conclusion presented in this thesis, that social media does provide new spaces for public discussions, that there is some evidence of this happening, but that there still are challenges to be solved. Hopefully, this thesis provides a contribution towards solving some of these challenges.

Several future research challenges can be derived from this thesis. There is a need for longitudinal data to follow the evolution of social media election campaigns over time, and for more cases on the different eParticipation activities in country specific

contexts. The media choice framework is based on data from one municipality, and a natural extension would be to confirm the communication needs and media preferences in a larger scale study of municipalities varying in size. Validation of a common list of communication needs and the appropriate technology to support each communication need is considered to be an important contribution to further practical development. Regarding stakeholder salience, there is also a need to verify the findings through case studies and possibly also surveys in related contexts. The social capital measures included in the public sphere framework presents an apparent paradox: a high amount of social capital fosters participation and participation provides more social capital. Research into how this circle can be broken, and more citizens made interested in political participation, would be a valuable contribution towards including more citizens in political participation and democratic processes. Finally, the findings from the genre analyses could be applied in the development of data mining research, and implemented for example in order to identify those discussions that do not at first glance seem to part of the political domain.

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Appendix a: Research publications

#	Title	Published	theme
1	Johannessen, M.R & Munkvold, B.E. (2012) Defining the social media IT artefact for eParticipation: An ensemble view	European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS), Barcelona	Defines social media as an ensemble view IT artefact in the context of eParticipation. Presents framework for analysing social media capabilities for supporting eParticipation
2	Johannessen, M.R. (2012) Social Capital and the Networked Public Sphere: Implications for Political Social Media sites*	Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-45), Maui, Hawaii	Presents a public sphere theoretical lens and framework for eParticipation research. Argues that working social media public spheres can contribute to increased political debate.
3	Johannessen, M.R. Flak, L.S. and Sæbø, Ø.(2012) Stakeholder expectations for municipal eParticipation: Choosing the right medium for communication	Fourth International Conference on eParticipation (ePart), Kristiansand	Identifies local eParticipation stakeholder groups, and the groups' communication preferences. Based on this and paper #2, outlines a framework for media choice
4	Johannessen, M.R., Flak, L.S & Sæbø, Ø. (2013) Social media as Public Sphere: A stakeholder perspective	Government Information Quarterly (forthcoming, under review since 07/2012)	Examines how different stakeholder groups use ICT for communication. Examines how stakeholder salience influences the extent to which social media functions as a public sphere.
5	Johannessen, M.R (2012) Genres of communication in activist eParticipation: A comparison of new and old media*	The 6th International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance (ICEGOV), Albany, NY	Compares genres used in print media and social media to examine maturity of social media and type of public sphere found in print and social media.
6	Johannessen, M.R. & Følstad, A. (2013) Political social media sites as public sphere: A case study of the Norwegian Labour party	Communications of the Association for Information systems (forthcoming, review round 2)	A genre and social network analysis of a political social media site. Discusses how these types of site should communicate in order to facilitate a public sphere.

* = *nominated for best paper award*

Note: After submission of the thesis, paper 6 has been accepted for publication, and paper 4 has progressed to review round 2.

DEFINING THE SOCIAL MEDIA IT ARTEFACT FOR EPARTICIPATION: AN ENSEMBLE VIEW

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Abstract

Social media has become a popular outlet for various eParticipation activities, such as online campaigning by political parties. However, research so far has shown that political parties often have limited success with their efforts. Much is yet unclear as to the results and possible applications of social media use. This paper contributes to clarify the underlying concepts of social media, by analysing the social media IT artefact as a socio-technical object. We propose and define an ensemble view on social media use in eParticipation, and present a framework for analysing the capabilities of social media for supporting eParticipation and analysing the socio-technical nature of social media through an information infrastructure perspective. Together, this provides us with a comprehensive conceptualization of the social media IT artefact. The framework is applied to an example case, which demonstrates the insights gained from our proposed ensemble view of social media in eParticipation.

Keywords: Social media, eParticipation, IT artefact, information Infrastructures

Introduction

There is a strong concern about the future of representative democracy as practiced in the western world. Some claim that representative democracy is in a declining state, as power is moving from elected representatives towards transnational corporations, public administration and the legal system (Østerud et al., 2003). Policy development is increasingly influenced by interest groups and lobbying, and voter turnout has also declined (Gray and Caul, 2000). There is also talk about a “democratic divide”, where only parts of the population is involved in politics and democratic discourse (Taewoo, 2010). In addition, public services are felt to be inefficient, and government is criticised for being less concerned about citizen needs than their own internal bureaucratic process (Eggers, 2005).

eParticipation, the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for political participation (Sæbø et al., 2008), has been presented as a possible solution to some of these problems. eParticipation is an emerging research area focusing on how ICT can be used to facilitate more and better participation in the political process and to facilitate civic engagement (Sanford and Rose, 2007). eParticipation is usually associated with some form of deliberation or decision-making in the political process (Sæbø et al., 2008). However, many eParticipation projects have struggled to engage a sufficient number of citizens, or citizens have left the project after an initial burst of interest (Rose et al., 2007), due to a lack of purpose, etiquette and rules for conversation (Hurwitz, 2003), or projects being unrepresentative (Dahlberg, 2001).

In contrast, social media have a large user base as well as functionality such as collaboration, discussion and feedback, that could help foster participation (O’Reilly, 2005; Jackson and Lilleker, 2009). In the 2007 Norwegian local elections, when Facebook was still a new phenomenon, there were 326 Facebook groups supporting various political parties (Kalnes, 2009), and in Barack Obama’s presidential campaign in 2008 social media was an important part of the campaign strategy.

Several authors have defined social media as participatory technologies, based on the sharing of content, user profiles and user generated content (O’Reilly, 2005; Boyd and Ellison, 2007). In eParticipation, a methodology for social media exploitation by government has been defined (Charalabidis and Loukis, 2011). However, there is still a need to conceptualize social media as an IT artefact (Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001). The IT artefact is essential in studies of technology, and there is a need for more theorising about the technologies in focus in information systems (IS) research (ibid.). We argue that social media is a complex phenomenon which should be viewed as an “ensemble artefact” (Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001), i.e. an ensemble of the technological characteristics of the individual web application and the socio-cultural expectations of the user-base (Anderson, 2007; Boyd and Ellison, 2007).

While political parties have embraced social media as technology, they have not yet embraced the underlying social concepts of sharing and interaction (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009). An increased understanding of both the social and technological characteristics – the ensemble artefact – of social media could thus help improve political communication in social media. To understand social media as IT artefact, we

need to look beyond the purely technical. The technological artefacts of social media are at their basic level HTML code, databases and submit buttons. When the overall objective is to understand how social media can support eParticipation activities, examining the technical alone makes little sense. Separating the technical and the social can help us improve our understanding of social media, and point out issues that could be helpful to both researchers and practitioners. We apply the Information Infrastructures (IIs) perspective to represent the combined technological and social aspects of social media. The objective of this paper is thus to define social media as an ensemble IT artefact. We illustrate this by examining the technological characteristics and eParticipation capabilities of the most commonly used social media in the 2009 Norwegian parliamentary election, as well as by defining the social context of social media used for eParticipation. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section two describes previous research related to the topics addressed by this paper. Section three describes social media as an ensemble view IT artefact by examining both the technical and social characteristics of social media. In section four, an example case is presented to show the possible insights gained by viewing social media as an ensemble artefact, and the final section discusses the implications of this approach.

Related research

eParticipation

The use of IT in the public sector has been a research topic since the 1970s. The term eGovernment became common in the 1990s (Grönlund and Horan, 2004). While early eGovernment literature was mostly concerned with technical challenges related to internal use of IT, this today is a broader topic which includes civil society and how government can use IT to support citizen needs (ibid.).

There are three different areas of eGovernment, which can be defined as the use of IT to: 1) facilitate access to information and public services, 2) improve the quality of public services, and 3) provide civil society with opportunities for interaction (Grönlund, 2002, 27). These areas can be viewed as a triangle, where politicians, civil society and public administration are the main actors.

As a sub-area of eGovernment, eParticipation is located on the axis between civil society and politicians. The objective in eParticipation is to examine the potential of technology can enhance democracy by increasing political participation (Macintosh et al., 2009)

eParticipation can be defined as “technology-mediated interaction between the civil society sphere and the formal politics sphere and between the civil society sphere and the administration sphere” (Sæbø et al., 2008). Most eParticipation studies focus on consultation and deliberation (Sanford and Rose, 2007), which implies that the politician – civil society axis is most important for eParticipation as a research field. This view is supported by Sæbø et al. (2008), who claims that “the focal point of eParticipation is the citizen, i.e., the purpose of eParticipation is to increase citizens' abilities to participate in digital governance”.

In summary, eParticipation is part of the broader eGovernment area of research, is mainly concerned with how civil society can participate and interact with politicians and public officials, and a number of different research fields are involved in doing research on eParticipation topics.

Social media

Social media, or Web 2.0 as it is also termed, was first mentioned in an article by Tim O'Reilly in 2005 (O'Reilly, 2005). O'Reilly examined the IT companies surviving the burst of the “.com bubble”, and found a number of common characteristics: Audiences were active participants on the web sites, building profiles and social networks, and content was created and shared by the users of the sites (Tambouris and Tarabanis, 2007). Further, social media can be categorised based on the purpose of the system. Categories include social networking, aggregation services (RSS and other services collecting data from several sources and making them available in one place), collaboration services and data mash-ups (the combination of data from different sources to create new services) (Anderson, 2007). Social networking is perhaps the most popular and common social media type. Social networks can be defined as “*web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.*” (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, 211)

Several articles from 2007 onwards discuss the use of social media technologies for government (OECD, 2007; Rose et al., 2007; Ward, 2008). Social media applications attract millions of visitors who interact and share content and information. In eGovernment and especially within the eParticipation area, projects have failed to attract a sufficient number of participants over time. Some claim that as much as 70-80 % of all eGovernment projects fail (Misuraca, 2009). By moving participation from proprietary government platforms to social media applications, researchers see a potential for attracting more participants (Rose et al., 2007). Citizens have already begun using these channels to express themselves politically, through citizen journalism (blogs and independent media centres) and activism (Reed, 2005; OECD, 2007; Juris, 2004). Political parties and individual politicians have also become gradually more active in social media, especially during elections. Example cases include the Norwegian elections in 2007 (Kalnes, 2009) and 2009 (Johannessen, 2010), Twitter use among politicians in Norway, and of course Barack Obama's successful presidential campaign in 2008 (Effing et al., 2011).

The goal of governments' use of social media is to involve civil society as co-producers of knowledge and information. The point is not to simply introduce new technologies and tools, but to respond to “the underlying concepts of listening, interacting and networking” (Peña-López, 2008). A recent study has measured the degree to which political parties have made this change, and concludes that thus far, parties have begun using the technologies, but not the concepts of interaction and sharing (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009). Thus, a better understanding of both the social and technical characteristics of social media could help improve the online political discussion.

The IT artefact

A lot of research where technology plays an important part has tended to treat technology as a black box. Instead of explicitly defining and explaining the individual system or group of systems relevant to the research, many studies allow the technology to “disappear” from view, take it for granted or assume that once the system is in place, the technology itself does not matter anymore (Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001). Studies of technology need to pay closer attention to the technology itself, and define four different conceptualisations of the IT artefact; *the tool view*, where technology is simply the designed artefact and research focus is on the technology itself; *the proxy view*, defining technology either based on our perceptions of it, or from its diffusion or economic measures; *the computational*, concerned with the capabilities of the technology in terms of computing power; and finally *the ensemble view*, which focuses on the interplay between the social and technological spheres, and is concerned with either how technology is developed, or how technology is used (Orlikowski and Iacono, 2001). The IT artefact, in one form or another, is seen as central in IS theory building (Gregor, 2006).

While there seems to be agreement on the notion of the centrality of the IT artefact, there is less agreement on how it should be applied in IS. Benbasat & Zmud (2003) introduce a nomological net of the IT artefact, consisting of the IT artefact, its usage, impacts, as well as practices and capabilities that influence the artefact. They claim that these issues are crucial if we are to understand the technology. Iivari (2003, 578) agrees, and argues that we “*should emphasize more the nature of Information Systems as an applied, engineering-like discipline that develops various “meta-artefacts” to support the development of IS artefacts*”.

Others instead call for more plurality in IS research. Galliers (2003) calls for a broad scope, and claims we should be less strict when defining the boundary of the IT . Lyytinen (2004) argues that technology is changing so quickly that we should be open to a number of interpretations of it: “The IS field will make progress on all fronts, and turn and turn in the gyre, if it comes to see its centre as a market in the service of the ‘vast commerce of ideas’”. In cases where the IT artefact is social media, we argue that the open approach of Lyytinen and Galliers is more productive. Social media as IT artefact should include a number of social and technological issues, as we will describe in more detail in the following sections.

Social media as IT artefact

The conceptualisation of the IT artefact depends on the research question and the context of the study. For social media used for eParticipation purposes, an ensemble view seems most appropriate. The consequences of technology should be viewed as a product of both “material and social dimensions” (Misuraca, 2009). Social media is a complex phenomenon, and can be viewed as the interplay between the socio-cultural expectations of the user base, supported by the technological capabilities of the specific media being used. Addressing the technology or the social spheres individually is less fruitful. The technologies of social media are simple web-based tools; it is the way they are assembled and used that defines their social capabilities.

But the way these technologies are assembled also has an impact on how we use them. Facebook and Twitter are built around many of the same technologies, such as web form fields, user profiles and hyperlinks. Yet, the two media are used in very different ways.

The ensemble view on the IT artefact helps us make the socio-technical nature of technology visible. But if the ensemble view is to provide us with meaningful insights, we need to clarify the technological and social characteristics of each area of study. We first present a framework for analysing how social media support eParticipation. Second, we discuss the socio-technical nature of social media through the lens of information infrastructures.

Supporting eParticipation through social media

As eParticipation initiatives become more numerous, there is a need for evaluative frameworks allowing us to understand what kind of participation the technology can support (Tambouris et al., 2007). With the introduction of social media, this need becomes even greater. We apply the evaluative framework of Tambouris et al. (2007), adapted to social media use in eParticipation by adding fields for activities and expected outcomes from the seminal eParticipation article by Sæbø et al. (2008). These were chosen for their eParticipation focus. Together, these fields provide us with a comprehensive analytical tool, covering both the technological characteristics and eParticipation capabilities of social media for eParticipation.

The framework is depicted in table 1, and consists of the functionality of the individual social medium, the level of participation it is expected to support, where in the decision making process the medium would be most appropriate, the purpose for which the medium would typically be used, and expected outcomes of using the medium.

Name of medium	<insert name of social medium>
Functionality	Technical functionality, such as forms, video, feedback options, calendar tools, search, sharing, commenting
Level of participation	Information/two-way consultation/involvement in the political process/collaboration/power transfer to civil society
Stage in decision making process	Agenda setting, analysis, policy creation, implementation, monitoring
Actors	Divided into facilitators and users of the technology
Activities	Voting, discourse form, decision making, activism, consultation, petitions
Expected outcomes	Civic engagement, deliberative effects, democratic effects

Table 23: Defining the technological characteristics and eParticipation capabilities of social media for eParticipation (adapted from Tambouris et al., 2007 and Sæbø et al., 2008)

The level of participation is based on categories made by the OECD, IBM and the IAP2 participation spectrum (Tambouris et al., 2007), and is divided into information, two-way consultation, involvement in the political process, collaboration and power transfer to civil society. The actors are separated into facilitators and moderators, and everyone who is a stakeholder in eParticipation can be an actor in a specific medium.

Usually this would include elected officials, government employees, and various actors from business and civil society. The possible activities defined by Sæbø et al. (2008) consist of voting, discourse formation or general political debate, decision making, activism, consultation and petitioning. Finally, the expected outcomes can be increased civic engagement – more participants, more contributions to debate, new forms of participation, deliberative effects – participants are acting in concordance with rules for proper debate, or democratic – in some way contributing to democracy.

Social media as Information Infrastructures

Based on the ideas of structure and agency, and derived from socio-technical theory, the Information Infrastructures (IIs) perspective allows us to see technology not as single artefacts, but as a socio-technical network of technologies and people (Hanseth et al., 1996; Bygstad, 2008).

The term was coined by former US vice-president Al Gore, as a reference to the growing network of data cables, telecommunications and information technologies that emerged in the mid-nineties (Gore, 1994; Griffith and Smith, 1994). Today, IIs has moved from a description of physical objects into a more general theory for thinking about technology. The concept of Information Infrastructure is characterised by six key aspects: enabling, shared, open, socio-technical, heterogeneous and the installed base (Table 2) (Hanseth and Monteiro, 1998)

Enabling	Infrastructures have a supporting or enabling function, as opposed to systems that are specifically designed for one single purpose.
Shared	An infrastructure is one irreducible unit shared by a larger community, it cannot be split into separate parts, except for analytical and design purposes. Sharing demands standards for proper communication.
Socio-technical	IIs are socio-technical networks. Not just technology, but also users and producers
Open	There are no limits on the number of users, stakeholders, network nodes and technical components. One cannot draw a border for one single infrastructure.
Heterogeneous	IIs are connected in infrastructure ecologies, layered upon each other, and similar functions may be implemented in different ways.
Installed base	You cannot change an entire infrastructure, or build it from scratch. New things must be attached to the old, and the old (the installed base) influences how the new can be designed.

Table 24: Aspects of Information Infrastructures (Hanseth & Monteiro, 1998)

The technological artefacts of social media are at their basic level HTML code, databases, scripting languages, text boxes and submit buttons. If our aim is to say something about the social world, examining these artefacts makes little sense, as they can be combined in a multitude of ways, for a multitude of different purposes. In essence there is little difference between a login page and the commenting function in Facebook or the home page on Twitter. They all contain text boxes and a submit button, but their functions are not at all similar. The heterogeneous aspect of IIs on the other hand acknowledges this difference.

Even if we move up a level and examine an entire application (Facebook or Twitter), we would be limited by the fact that the main feature of social media is the network effects of multiple postings and discussions over multiple channels. A blog post is advertised on Facebook and Twitter, discussed in the blog and on Facebook, and may

generate additional discussion among other actors on Twitter. In the realm of social media, the only certainty is the complexity of the network, and IIs provide us with a tool to examine this complexity.

All the six aspects of IIs can help us improve our understanding of social media, and point out issues that could be helpful to both researchers and practitioners (Table 25).

Enabling	<p>Infrastructures have a supporting or enabling function, as opposed to systems that are specifically designed for one single purpose.</p> <p>Relevance for EP research: The enabling function of IIs is very important in this research context. Social media are not designed to support political deliberation. Users rather choose to use the enabling functions of social media for this purpose. This has at least two consequences: The system might not be ideal for the purpose, and users will have to make do with what is there, and adapt to the limits of the medium. Second, social media are used for a number of purposes, which leads to political issues having to compete with other topics, and users need to find ways of getting attention in this stream of information.</p>
Shared	<p>An infrastructure is one irreducible unit shared by a larger community, it cannot be split into separate parts, except for analytical and design purposes. Sharing demands standards for proper communication.</p> <p>Relevance for EP research: This is connected to the previous aspect. As most social media are not designed for political deliberation, users need to adapt to their environment. One user group cannot change the way an entire infrastructure functions. Studies of political parties' activity on Facebook show that the political parties have attempted to use social media as a one-way channel, which is not in line with the culture of social media (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009)</p>
Socio-technical	<p>IIs are socio-technical networks. Not just technology, but also users and producers.</p> <p>Relevance for EP research: Introducing the socio-technical, or structural, perspective further strengthens the argument that the culture of social media needs to be taken into consideration when using these media for political purposes. Researchers and practitioners need to map and understand the culture of social media in order to become effective social media users. For example, it is not considered proper behaviour when a politician uses his/her blog to republish press releases, or as a one way communication tool (Johannessen, 2010), and acting in this way could lessen the impact of social media.</p>
Open	<p>There are no limits on the number of users, stakeholders, network nodes and technical components. One cannot draw a border for one single infrastructure.</p> <p>Relevance for EP research: The open nature of infrastructures means it becomes difficult, but also necessary, to find ways of delimiting our object of study. Researchers need to be specific about which parties, groups, web sites or connections they are researching. There is also a need to discuss how, when and why we should stop adding new research sites.</p>
Heterogeneous	<p>IIs are connected in infrastructure ecologies, layered upon each other, and similar functions may be implemented in different ways.</p> <p>Relevance for EP research: Heterogeneity in the political context not only refers to the technical, but also to the social world. Viewed through the II lens, and taking the culture of social media into consideration, means that the form of the political debate is changing online (Graham, 2008). The heterogeneous nature of infrastructures influence the form of debate, and this should be taken into consideration when we make decisions on where to look for public spheres.</p>
Installed base	<p>You cannot change an entire infrastructure, or build it from scratch. New things must be attached to the old, and the old (the installed base) heavily influence how the new can be designed.</p> <p>Relevance for EP research: The installed base aspect reflects the technical side of needing to adapt to the artefact, and makes visible the social characteristics that are embedded in the technology. As with the enabling aspect, the installed base to some extent controls, or guides, what we can and cannot do with social media. For example, Facebook discussions are influenced by the way information is presented on Facebook, and might not be a good fit with the needs of political parties due to issues such as compliance with archiving regulations.</p>

Table 25: Aspects of Information Infrastructures and how they can support eParticipation research on social media

The enabling and shared aspects show that to use social media for a specific purpose, one must adapt to both the technical possibilities and the social norms of the infrastructure, as well as compete for attention with other forms of content. On Facebook and Twitter, the political party can be one of several hundreds of pages and friends an individual is following, and one needs to find ways to make content attractive and easy to find. The technical constraints are also reflected in the aspect of installed base. The socio-technical aspect shows us that both researchers and those wanting to use social media need to map and understand the culture of these media in order to fully understand how to use or conduct research on them effectively. The open aspect addresses delimitation issues. As IIs are borderless, researchers need to find ways of delimiting their object of study. Discussion on how to do this should be an

important part of social media researchers' agenda in the coming years. Finally, the heterogeneous aspect is related to the above mentioned technological constraints, but also has a social meaning. Political communication online takes on many different shapes, and we might need to look in new places when we are examining the online public sphere.

Example case: The Norwegian parliamentary election

In this section, we apply the IT artefact ensemble view for analysing the case of the Norwegian 2009 parliamentary election. Data for the case was collected through five one hour face to face interviews and two e-mail interviews with information workers in the seven political parties represented in parliament, analysis of the social media channels being used, as well as a genre analysis using the 5W1H-method of Yates and Orlikowski (1992) of the communication taking place in these channels.

The 2009 parliamentary election was the first time all Norwegian political parties made a serious attempt at using social media for campaigning and creating a dialogue with civil society. The political parties' online presence was scattered across a number of web sites and social media services. Including the party web site, a total of nine different media were in use. The most popular of these were the party web site, blogs, Facebook, Flickr and Youtube, which were being used by all of the seven parties represented in Parliament. Twitter and a self-developed video solution were used by all but one party. Finally some parties used Norwegian-only social media such as Origo.no, a social network similar to Facebook, and snutter.no, a Norwegian video-sharing service. The seven parties reported the same goals for their social media use, which was to facilitate debate, inform potential voters and to enable dialogue with potential voters. They reported that in order to reach these goals, they would post the political views of the party, invite party sympathisers to debate these views, attempt to channel online engagement to the offline world by getting people to go knocking on doors and helping out at rallies around the cities, and finally some efforts were made to have party sympathisers create online content such as videos, through competitions announced on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. The parties all reported that they had the intention of continued use after the election was over, but pointed out the challenges of managing this on a day-to-day basis in a hectic life as elected members of Parliament.

The genre analysis of the communication that took place across these web- and social media sites revealed that a number of communication types were emerging. Examples include questions and answers, appeals to the party, comments on policy, calls for action and support declarations from sympathisers. These genres all met at least one of the goals the parties had set for their social media use. Unfortunately, the activity was far less than the parties had hoped, which at least partially was due to the fact that there were few explicit invitations to engage in dialogue on any of the social media services being used. There was also little agreement between political parties and citizens on how these genres should be enacted, and this led to some frustration among citizens who did not receive answers to their questions or input. In the few cases where dialogue and contributions were asked for, response was a lot better. For example, the Labour party asked people to create short video clips that could be used in the

campaign, and got a lot of response on these posts. Similarly, the Socialist left party asked people for input on concrete policy formation via Twitter, and had good response on these postings.

The case serves as a good example of the theoretical implications we can draw from our ensemble view conceptualisation of the social media IT artefact. These implications are summarised in tables 4 and 5. Due to space limitations, only one of the examined media, Facebook, is included in the analysis.

Table 4 shows the technological characteristics and eParticipation capabilities of Facebook. Facebook has a number of different functions, and awareness of how these work and are used by the broader community is essential for effective use of the medium. Facebook would most likely support information and (informal) consultation, and be included in the agenda setting and analysis stages of decision making. Legal and privacy issues would most likely stop Facebook from being used for policy creation, implementation and monitoring.

In the case, we found that Facebook was used by a number of different actors and that these actors had varying motivations for participating and thus used Facebook for different purposes. If the political parties had done a similar analysis beforehand, coupled with the understanding of the broader context of the information infrastructure as outlined in table 5, they would perhaps have experienced less of the problems reported in the case.

Name of medium	Facebook
Functionality	Personalised front page, Profiles, Groups, Networks, "wall" for message posting, Photo uploads, Notes/links, status updates, events, Video, Chat, 3rd party applications, internal private messaging system, search, Sharing of content, mobile app for smartphones
Level of participation	Information, two-way consultation, possibly involvement in the political process (legal constraints need examination)
Stage in decision making process	Agenda setting, Analysis
Actors	Party information workers, politicians, NGOs, individual citizens. All can be both sender and receiver of information.
Activities	Information, activism, consultation, petitions
Expected outcomes	Civic engagement

Table 26: Technological characteristics and eParticipation capabilities of Facebook

Table 5 shows how the six aspects of IIs can contribute to our understanding of the ensemble artefact in the example case. The *enabling* aspect of IIs shows how the political parties had limited resources and therefore needed to plan which social media systems to use in order to get the best fit between available resources and effects, as well as learn how to repackage content for publishing across different systems. The *shared* aspect also shows how parties had to learn how to adapt the message to the medium, or more specifically to the culture surrounding the medium, and the negative consequences of not doing so.

Enabling	<i>Infrastructures have a supporting or enabling function, as opposed to systems that are specifically designed for one single purpose.</i>
	Relevance for case: The political parties had to learn how to use the different social media systems, something which took up quite a lot of resources. As a consequence, not all of the social media systems were utilised to their full potential. For

	example, creating videos is demanding, even though it is easy to post videos to YouTube. Using the Facebook wall to discuss politics was not always ideal, as discussions disappear from the front page before people have a chance to contribute. Blogs were not always used as a two-way medium. In many cases politicians would simply post their press releases to the blog, without even allowing for comments.
Shared	<i>An infrastructure is one irreducible unit shared by a larger community, it cannot be split into separate parts, except for analytical and design purposes. Sharing demands standards for proper communication.</i> Relevance for case: The social media as infrastructure perspective forces political parties to think in new ways. Related to the previous aspect's resource issues, we have seen that parties re-use information and adapt it to different social media in order to reach further. This type of standardisation works well, but in many cases, as with posting press releases to blogs, standardisation needs to be tempered by adaption to the particular medium.
Socio-technical	<i>Its are socio-technical networks. Not just technology, but also users and producers.</i> Relevance for case: The disagreement on genres, such as when and how they should be used, exemplifies the structural issues we are faced with when moving to new types of media. Especially when politicians who have not used for example Twitter for private purposes suddenly are told to use it as politicians. Some of them have met rough treatment from social media experts and frequent users due to their lack of commitment and response.
Open	<i>There are no limits on the number of users, stakeholders, network nodes and technical components. One cannot draw a border for one single infrastructure.</i> Relevance for case: Several of the interviewed party employees reported some problems with scoping their social media efforts. The fact that something is there does not necessarily mean it should be used, and all of the respondents talked about this as a big issue in the campaign planning. Even so, respondents were vague as to who they wanted to reach through the different social media systems.
Heterogeneous	<i>Its are connected in infrastructure ecologies, layered upon each other, and similar functions may be implemented in different ways.</i> Relevance for case: The form of the political debate genre is changing online (Graham, 2008). There are a lot of unanswered comments and questions across the social media systems being used, and this led to quite a few critical comments to the individual party or politician. Some politicians simply chose to tell beforehand what they would and would not answer, and thus did not receive any negative feedback on this.
Installed base	<i>You cannot change an entire infrastructure, or build it from scratch. New things much be attached to the old, and the old (the installed base) heavily influence how the new can be designed.</i> Relevance for case: The installed base posed a challenge for many of the parties. When moving to a new medium, we often replicate the communicative genres we are used to from "old" media (Sheperd and Watters, 1998), and except for a few individual politicians, this was the case in the 2009 election. Politicians and parties failed to take into consideration the social media culture of sharing and participation, and a lot of the reported problems can be traced back to this issue. There is a transition from one-way informational web sites towards a two-way or many to many form of communication that is yet to take place, as politicians and parties have not yet adopted the culture of social media (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009)

Table 27: Aspects of Information Infrastructures and relevance to 2009 Norwegian election case

The *socio-technical* aspect reveals that communication genres are still not fully in place and agreed upon, as well as the structural challenges politicians who are not digital natives are faced with when moving from one-way to two-way communication channels. The *Open* aspect shows the challenges of scoping the party's online presence when there are so many channels to choose from. Further, it highlights the difficulty of fitting target audience with medium, as few parties had explicit strategies for who they wanted to connect with in different social media systems. The *heterogeneous* aspect makes visible the challenges connected to moving from one-way to two-way media, and that by simply stating what will and will not be answered, this challenge can in a large part be overcome.

Finally, the *installed base* aspect outlines how political parties need to adapt their communication acts to the social culture of the system being used. Some politicians chose to resolve this by posting only short messages, links or informational tweets, and by using the Facebook wall instead of the hidden discussion group option with limited functionality. Others attempted to create the same functionality on their own web sites, with a lack of readers and feedback as a result. From this we can argue that it is better to use the limited functionality that is in the media where people spend time, rather than to make your own version with better functionality, but with less impact. Another possibility would be to use social media to attract people to your own site.

Conclusion and implications

This paper examined how we can conceptualise social media used for eParticipation as an ensemble view IT artefact, using a framework for analysing eParticipation capabilities in combination with the Information Infrastructures perspective for analysing the broader socio-technical context of social media. The six aspects of Information Infrastructures make visible the networked nature of social media, and provide us with some insights for both practitioners and researchers. Practitioners could use the combined framework to analyse and understand the eParticipation capabilities of the social media available to them, while the Information Infrastructures perspective provides additional insight into the socio-technical structure of these media. Researchers can gain theoretical insights by comparing the technological functionality and the infrastructure aspects of social media.

The example case shows how infrastructural issues affected the communication in social media during the 2009 Norwegian parliamentary election. A failure to adhere to the expectations of the broader social media community led to less efficient social media campaigning, although the political parties in the study did report some success, mostly in those cases where they asked citizens for input and feedback, and engaged in discussions.

Certainly the ensemble view of social media could be outlined in other ways, using traditional socio-technical theory or structuration theory coupled with an evaluation of the technological aspect. However, the information infrastructures perspective helps in operationalizing the sometimes abstract concepts of these other theories, providing us with a useful framework for analysis of the ensemble IT artefact. Future work should focus on a broader examination of the theories underlying the contents in this paper. The relationship between the social and technological aspects could be explored further, and the practical implications of the “ensemble view IT artefact” should also be explored.

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Social Capital and the Networked Public Sphere: Implications for Political Social Media sites

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Abstract

This paper presents a theoretical lens for research on social media use in eParticipation, along with an example case study. The idea of the public sphere and how it can be applied to eParticipation research is presented. The public sphere is discussed in relation to Castell's notion of the network society as the "networked public sphere", and social capital is introduced as a possible explanation for why some people choose to participate while others refrain from doing so. An example case is presented and analysed in terms of the public sphere and social capital. Finally, the argument is made that working public spheres, enacted through various online social media platforms, can contribute to increased social capital and increased political debate among citizens

1 Introduction

Jürgen Habermas' concept of the Public Sphere has been used as the philosophical background for a number of eParticipation studies [1, 2]. eParticipation can be defined as the use of technology for inclusion of citizens in the public discourse [1]. The idea of the Public Sphere as a "place" for reasoned debate provides researchers with a concept that helps explain the importance of eParticipation studies, and several researchers have discussed the importance of creating online public spheres to renew democracy [3-6]. However, few eParticipation studies provide an in-depth description and analysis of the public sphere. The public sphere is treated as a black box, even though there is a vibrant debate going on in other fields of research, such as media studies, on what a public sphere is, how it is created and maintained, and the consequences of different forms of public spheres. As such, there is a need for theoretical clarification of the usefulness of the public sphere concept in eParticipation research.

Jürgen Habermas was first to present the idea of the public sphere, as "that domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed" [7]. Habermas saw the public sphere as a forum for elite thinkers, not as a space open to everyone, and claimed that in the 20th century the public sphere is said to have declined because of mass communication, the capitalist state and the growth of the middle classes [8]. Other philosophers have argued against this, claiming that the public sphere should include everyone [9] and that the Internet and networks have created a global, networked public sphere [10]. Social media, with its focus on sharing and participation, as well as a steadily increasing user base, could attract even more citizens to participate [11]. Social media also has functionality such as collaboration, discussion and feedback, that could help foster participation [12], and the successful campaign of US president Barack Obama showed us that social media can in fact be an effective tool for political use [13]. Some claim that as much as 70-80

% of all eGovernment projects fail [14]. By moving participation from proprietary government platforms to social media applications, researchers see a potential for attracting more participants [11]. Citizens have already begun using these channels to express themselves politically, through citizen journalism and activism [12, 15, 16].

A related issue is how we can explain participation in public spheres. eParticipation projects often struggle with few users, or users that leave after an initial burst of interest [11], due to a lack of purpose, etiquette and rules for conversation [17], as well as little collaboration and missing tools for providing feedback [18]. Trust is a central element when explaining social media use [19, 20]. Trust is also a central element in social capital [21], leading us towards the idea that social capital and functioning public spheres are interlinked. Societies with high amounts of trust has a higher degree of civic engagement and community formations, as citizens trust that their own engagement will be reciprocated by other citizens [20].

Social capital refers to "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them"[21], and can also be understood as simply valued relations with the people around us [22]. A lack of trust and reciprocity in relations with others can provide some explanation as to why there is a lack of etiquette, collaboration and rules for conversation. At the same time, successful participation in public spheres could well lead to increased levels of social capital [20]. The challenge is to discover how to go about this.

This paper aims to contribute to clarify the value of using the public sphere concept in eParticipation studies by reviewing literature on the public sphere, introduce the concepts of the network society and the networked public sphere, and present social capital as possible explanatory factors for why people participate. The role of social media in creating networked public spheres for eParticipation is discussed, and the argument that increased social capital could be seen as an important outcome of successful networked public spheres is made visible through applying these issues to an example case.

2 The networked public sphere

In this section, a brief summary of the public sphere concept, its many interpretations and disagreements is presented, and it is argued that in our current network society, we are moving towards multiple and fragmented public spheres online.

2.1 The public sphere

The public sphere concept has different meanings to different scholars. Habermas' original public sphere was restricted to the ruling classes [7], while

his colleagues Kluge and Negt, concerned with the class struggles of postwar Europe [23], extended the public sphere to include the working classes [9]. In later years, researchers have begun talking about an online, or networked public sphere [5, 10].

The Public Sphere is said to have arisen simultaneously as the nation state, as private citizens began to meet, exchange ideas and form “public opinion” [7]. The semantic meaning of what an “opinion” is and what constitutes a “public” is central to the Public Sphere. It is only when the bourgeoisie (property owners and the upper class) begin to challenge the power of the church and state that it makes sense to talk about a “public” forming an “opinion”. Public opinion is the shared understanding of an issue, reached through debate by rational citizens [24]. The public sphere is “an essential component of sociopolitical organization because it is the space where people come together as citizens and articulate their autonomous views to influence the political institutions of society” [10], and having access to an online public sphere includes more people in the public debate, as many are reluctant to discuss politics in offline settings [25]. It is in light of this that the notion of the Public Sphere is valid as a philosophical backdrop for eParticipation.

Dahlberg has identified six requirements that need to be present in a Public Sphere:

Autonomy from state and economic power. Rational-critical discourse involves engaging in reciprocal *critique* of normative positions that are provided with reasons and thus are criticisable rather than dogmatically asserted. Participants must be *reflective*, and critically examine their cultural values, assumptions, and interests, as well as the larger social context. Participants must attempt to understand the argument from the other's *perspective*. Each participant must make a *sincere* effort to make known all information, including their true intentions, interests, needs, and desires, as relevant to the particular problem under consideration. Every participant is *equally entitled* to introduce and question any assertion whatsoever [26]. All of these do not have to be present in every forum, but in order to create a Public Sphere we need to see at least some evidence of deliberative debate [27].

There is disagreement as to what we should consider a public sphere. Splichal discusses the public sphere of contemporary European politics, and draws a line between weak and strong public spheres [28]. The former talks about enlightened individuals that meet and construct shared meanings, and who are “members of a complete commonwealth or even cosmopolitan society”, while the weak public sphere is concerned with freedom of the press, and the public's right to access information and act as an “effective check on the legislature based on people's distrust” (of the government) [28]. The strong public sphere, which is the one that most resembles Habermas' own visions, is an idealised “space” for a

small proportion of the public, based on ideals held by the ruling classes, and have been criticised for excluding certain social groups, and especially for not including the working classes [9]. Others reject the idea of enlightened thought altogether, claiming that modern day media consumers are active readerships who constantly form themselves, change and evolve into something new, and because of this constant evolution we cannot adhere to a set of principles from the past [29]. In the information society it no longer makes sense to talk about bourgeois or working class. We have all become “citizens of the media” (ibid.).

A number of researchers have pointed to the Internet as the location of the modern day public sphere [4-6, 30]. However great the potential, there is some concern about the challenges facing this online public sphere. A case study of womenslink, a forum for women's organisations in Ireland, showed that the free exchange of ideas was hindered by the institutional affiliation of participants [31]. Others call for patience, claiming that the Internet has not revitalised the public sphere yet, but that there is hope for incremental changes that could revitalise the public sphere [32], and studies have shown that online public spheres are indeed emerging [33-35], especially in social media such as Facebook, blogs and YouTube [10].

Bourgeoisie or working class, elitist or open, weak or strong, on- or offline. There are many variations and many different opinions as to what constitutes a public sphere. It seems clear that Habermas' public sphere is not present in today's society. His idealised public sphere excludes everyone that is not within the cultural sphere of the idealised “Bourgeoisie”, and as Hartley (1996) shows, is far from how we view citizens today.

This does not mean that we should think of every conversation as a public sphere. Rather, we should look towards the requirements developed by Dahlberg [26] to ensure that we have an open and inclusive dialogue, where citizens can come together and form public opinion. The next section will examine the concept of the network society, and show how this impacts on the public sphere.

2.2 The network society

The functions and processes of society are increasingly organized through networks. Networks influence culture, business and politics alike [36], as institutions in society now operate more as networks and less as closed groups of families or organisations [37]. A network consists of several nodes, and the overlapping and multiple connections between nodes. Nodes can be individuals, organisations, societal institutions, business and government [38]. If we expand the idea to include systems of overlapping networks, one can conceptualise government as a network in itself, and simultaneously as a node in a

larger societal network. Conceptualised as a single network, government is closed to people from the outside and operates on its own, as a group.

Conceptualised as a node in a larger interconnected network of individuals, institutions and organisations, we have a tool to examine how government policy is shaped not only by government, but also by the several external nodes that provides government with information and input. This government-as-node view is what makes network theory a powerful theory for examining Public Spheres in eParticipation, as it makes visible the different nodes of a networked Public Sphere [39, 40]. The latter view is supported when we look at how decisions are made globally. Regional and global institutions such as the European Union and the United Nations influence national policy, and are in turn influenced by a multitude of different actors, operating both globally and on the national and local level [40, 41]. From the local and spatially anchored public sphere of the past, new communication technologies and the global media system have created a “multimodal communication space...[that] constitutes the new global public sphere” [10].

The network society theory belongs to the “macro-social...the extended social field of forces” that influence all aspects of society [42]. Ideas and innovations only reach as far as the current macro-social environment allows, and no one knows when, where or how these changes come about, only that they often coincide with technological innovation (ibid.). In the past we have moved from hunter-gatherers, via the agricultural society towards the industrial society and now the network society [36].

Macro-social conditions are seldom linear and clear-cut. Instead we have different paradigms living side by side for prolonged periods of time [42]. The industrial revolution did not happen overnight, and today one could argue that there is a tension between the technocratic bureaucracy of the late post-war era and the culture of collaboration which existed in the early post-war days [42] and which is now emerging again with social media [43]. The network society is one of many competing descriptions of the times we live in [38], and arguably the one which is best suited to explain the success of social media, due to the common focus on the power of the network.

By connecting nodes that would otherwise not be able to find each other, networks can facilitate the formation of communities. Community can be described as the back-bone of civil society, as civic engagement is often channeled through civic organisations, where community formation is a central aspect for the organisation to function as one of society’s pillars [20]. Defining community is not easy, as the concept is used for many things in many different contexts. One approach is to separate “community-as-value” and community as descriptive values [44]. Community-as-value brings together a number of values, such as solidarity, trust and

fraternity [45]. The common denominator for community-as-value can be interpreted as a description of positive relationships between people, and these values are interlinked with Dahlberg’s requirements for the public sphere [26]. It is more likely that communication will be autonomous, critical, reflexive, sincere and inclusive if one is able to form a community based on trust, solidarity and a sense of belonging to a fraternity of civic-minded peers.

Community as descriptive value can be separated into *gemeinschaft* (volunteer communities) and *gesellschaft* (constructed or top-down initiated communities) [46]. For eParticipation studies using the Public Sphere as philosophical backdrop, it is most useful to think about community as *gemeinschaft*. EParticipation is concerned with voluntary acts of participation [1], where citizens form communities of interest in order to discuss political issues.

The formation and importance of communities for civic engagement were not as big an issue in the past. In the times before communication technologies were introduced, there were no restraints on people’s abilities to communicate. The only available technology was the voice of the individual, which was situated within a limited geographical entity. When man began using technology to communicate this changed, introducing power struggles where those who had access to communication technologies held the upper hand. The right to communicate became a political issue, and was often appropriated by the people already in power, and network and community access became important. [28]. A networked public sphere, where every citizen has the right to participate, could well contribute to reduce this imbalance in power.

With the advent of the network society and globalisation of government, we move towards a public sphere that is no longer spatially constrained, and therefore by necessity reliant on communications technologies. The network can facilitate the formation of communities, by tying together nodes of people that would not meet without access to the network, and value-based communities, *gemeinschaft*, are based on values that correlate with the requirements for a public sphere. As such, we should strive towards facilitating community in our attempts to create a multimodal networked public sphere for eParticipation.

3 Social capital

The theory of social capital is useful when discussing the importance of communities in eParticipation. Social capital refers to

“connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them ... ‘social capital’ calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is

most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital." [21]

3.1 Theoretical constructs

High amounts of social capital have been seen as an explanation for why the Scandinavian welfare societies function as they do. In spite of high taxes, big government and few incentives to work hard, the Scandinavian countries are among the most well off societies in the world [20]. This is explained by the high amount of social capital in Scandinavia, which acts as "grease" for transactions, lowering the cost of doing business as there is less need for formalised contracts and expensive legal agreements (ibid.).

One of the major criticisms of Social Capital is that it is difficult to define and measure. Social capital is often measured as levels of individual and institutional trust. A high level of individual trust lowers barriers to participation and simplifies transactions, as there is less need for written contracts, control and measurement. A high level of institutional trust indicates that government institutions such as police, judicial system and administration are functioning well. Reciprocity, the degree in which people are willing to give something back when they receive something, is another measure of social capital [47, 48]. The level of trust and reciprocity has direct consequences for political participation and people's sense of belonging to a community (ibid.). Without trusting that other actors will carry out a rational debate, and that you will get something back by participating in the discussion, one can assume that there will be little activity and difficult to create and maintain a public sphere [49]. With high levels of trust and reciprocity, individuals benefit from their personal social capital by gaining access to the resources of the people in their network, and groups benefit from the aggregate resources of the group members [50]. For eParticipation this could typically be opinions, ideas, experiences or the skills needed to drive a political initiative forward.

Social capital can further be divided into bonding and bridging, where bonding social capital is the connections between tightly knit individuals in a group (such as the traditional village) and bridging social capital is the connection between different groups, where individuals have ties to two or more groups [21]. Both types are important in the networked public sphere. Bonding social capital allows for tight communities where opinions can be formed and tested, while bridging social capital helps ideas and arguments spread from one community to the next. Recently a third type of social capital was introduced and labelled "maintained social capital", the ability to keep one's connections even when physical proximity is removed [51]. This latter type is related to social media, and the way we maintain

relationships through sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

3.2 Applications in previous studies

Yang, Lee & Kurnia [48] have done a review of Social Capital usage in Information Systems studies, and found a number of studies using the theory. The studies fell into two categories: Measurement of impacts of IT on accumulation and creation of social capital, and the role of Social Capital in the development and use of IT. Typical research topics include knowledge sharing, e-learning, and IT as a connecting factor for rural and geographically dispersed communities (ibid.).

Several eParticipation studies have used social capital as their philosophical basis. A study of social capital in social networking sites (SNS) shows that the characteristics and user population of SNS' is important for the level of social capital and political debate [52]. A study of community media as a channel for eParticipation uses social capital as its interpretive lens [53], and a study of youth engagement in participation argues against Putnam's idea of declining social capital due to time spent in front of screens [54]. As stated by Putnam (2000), social capital appears as trust and reciprocal norms in social networks. Community is essential to social capital [55]. This leads us towards the conclusion that there is a connection between social capital and the public sphere, as per Dahlberg's requirements [26]. As discussed in section 3.2, the values that tie communities together [45] are similar to the requirements for the public sphere. It is a lot more likely that communication will be Autonomous, critical, reflexive, sincere and inclusive if one is able to form a community based on trust, solidarity and a sense of belonging to a fraternity of civic-minded peers, and the community values are central elements of social capital [55]. As such, social capital should function as a good measurement of public spheres.

Another point is that social capital concerns the immediate and personal connections between people and events more than distant and formal relationships with government and policy [55]. If we agree that public spheres are important for democratic societies, this implies that politicians and policy-makers should become active participants in the public sphere, engaging in a direct dialogue with citizens. This would in turn likely lead to increased amounts of social capital, with all the societal benefits this brings (see [20]).

4 Example case – social media politics

In this section, the above raised issues are applied to an example case study of a Norwegian political party's online community web site. The analysis shows how combining the networked public sphere with social capital helps us understand how political

parties use social media to engage voters and party members

4.1 Case description

The Norwegian labor party runs its own online community for party members and sympathizers, called *MyLabor*. The objective is to inform, facilitate debate and information sharing, and to act as a resource for party members in their work in local party groups. The site is divided into a number of different zones, most of which are geographically based. A zone is a subsection, or site within the site, of the *MyLabor* web site. Most local and regional branches of the party have their own zone, and there are also zones for the individual party leaders as well as topical zones for campaigning and some high profile political issues.

The site is structured similarly to a blog. The main content is postings and comments, as well as some set pages with information about party activities, election campaigns and other party-related issues. The postings and comments are considered to be the most important part of the site.

The objective of the case study was to examine three of these local zones to uncover who communicates, what they communicate about, and how they do it, as well as to uncover to what degree the three zones can be seen as public spheres. The case serves as a good example of the theoretical implications we can draw from combining the networked public sphere and social capital.

4.2 Case analysis

Social network analysis [56] was conducted on multiple levels for the three zones, examining the topics being discussed, the personal networks of people addressing each other in debates, and the people acting as bridges between zones. Further, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to examine how many people participate in discussions, the number of comments on each post and which postings get the most comments. Finally, a content analysis examined the communication types people used in comments. A total of 539 postings and 731 comments made between February 2009 and February 2011 have been downloaded and analyzed.

The analysis shows some evidence of community formation in two of the three examined zones. Few people comment regularly, and a majority of the examined postings have only one comment or no comments at all. However, there is a core community of six people in each zone, who contributes regularly and helps maintain some sort of network. In the third zone, there is a core community of 12 people who comment regularly, address each other by name, and

who seem to know each other well enough to hold lively discussions on a number of issues.

This type of bonding social capital is very important to the debate. In all three zones, the core community members are addressing each other by name, referencing other discussions they have had in the past, and are using a type of language (greetings, references to common experiences and previous debates) that suggests these are people who have online friendships.

Further, the social network analyses show that even though there are few people participating, there is some evidence of weak ties between the three zones. Two people have commented in all three zones and seven people have left comments in two of the zones. These weak ties help spread ideas between the zones, and we can say that these people have a high degree of bridging social capital, as the content analysis shows that they play an important role in the spreading of ideas between different local party groups by sharing what is being done on specific issues in other local groups. Without these bridges, the zones would be silos, and ideas would not leave the immediate, bonding network that constitutes the individual zone. Bridging social capital helps spread ideas and information, and allows the zones to act as nodes in the larger party network, rather than simply remote villages where no outside influence reaches the core community.

The topical and person to person network analyses strengthen the impression from the descriptive analysis. There are few people except the core participants discussing more than one topic, or addressing more than one other person. The exception is the third zone, where three central nodes make a lot of comments, which again generates answers from others. These three inner core members of the community strengthen the ties between both topics and people, and as such could be seen to be the ones with most personal social capital. Their personal social capital also adds to the community, in that their discussions attract others, who then contribute to create some very lively and educational discussions. We also see that participants trust that they will be met with some degree of civility and reciprocity in the form of responses to their arguments, which makes them contribute more to the discussions. Comments and arguments generate more comments and arguments.

We also see that participants who are met with sarcasm or silence, what we could call a lack of reciprocal respect, experience a lack of trust in the community and leave after making one or two comments.

There is also some evidence of maintained social capital between some of the participants in the most active zone, as the most active participants are members of different political parties and therefore not likely to have personal relationships offline. There are also participants from the central party

organisation, praising the local party for their efforts in creating an online discussion space. Many of these ties between people who only meet online could be said to be personal. People seem to know each other even though they only meet online.

The content analysis further helps us identify the presence of a networked public sphere. In terms of Dahlberg’s criteria [26], the findings vary. As the zones are part of the ruling Labor party’s own network, we cannot say that the MyLabor site is autonomous from the state. However, the debates on the site are not moderated and open to everyone, and in that sense the site is autonomous.

In terms of a rational-critical discourse and reflexive arguments where participants attempt to understand the perspective of his/her opponents, findings vary. There is evidence of a rational-critical discourse in some discussions, while others have a lot of irrational or ungrounded comments. In some cases the discussion is far from reflective, while other cases show the opposite. Discussions will sometimes wander off-topic, and lead to other unrelated debates.

The only point where Dahlberg’s criterion is truly met is inclusion. Everyone can create an account and participate, and there is, according to the moderators, no censorship of the possible topics or issues being raised.

Although not all of the criteria are met, we should still consider the zones to be part of the networked public sphere. There is evidence of some deliberation, important political issues are discussed, and there are weak ties between the different zones that help spread ideas.

The community in the zones can be seen as *Gesellschaft* (forced) because the community is created by the central party, and most postings are made by party officials. However, in the cases where participants comment and conduct a lively and strong debate, those postings are transformed into *gemeinschaft* (volunteer) communities based on trust and reciprocal actions, where social capital plays a role in the community’s formation and maintenance. One of the most interesting findings from the content analysis is that there is a “metacommunication” debate going on between some of the regular contributors, where they discuss how to conduct debates, the language which is and is not suitable to use, and other issues related to what they want the community to be like. Such actions are more likely to occur when the participants have a true sense of community [57].

The MyLabor site is arguably a strong public sphere. While the examined zones do not strictly adhere to Splichal’s [28] idealized description, the participants in the zones do meet and they do construct shared meanings through the discussions. And as Hartley [29] shows, the other criteria for a strong public sphere should be considered obsolete in our times, due to their elitist bias.

Finally, there are instances where discussions in one zone have been lifted up and used in other sources, such as mainstream local media, which again adds to the networked public sphere, or network of multiple public spheres, if you will.

The findings from this analysis are summarized in **Table 28**.

Table 28: Summary of case observations

Theory	Concept	Case observations
Public sphere	Dahlberg’s criteria	Partially present: autonomous discussions, inclusive debates, some reflection and some rational-critical discourse
	Network society	Ties between internal core actors and between different zones contribute to maintain a networked community
	Gemeinschaft community	Metacommunication and tone between participants contribute to <i>Gemeinschaft</i>
	Weak/strong	Has aspects of strong public sphere, but not all of them
Social Capital	Bridging	A total of ten people contribute in more than one zone, acting as bridges.
	Bonding	Each zone has a core community that contributes regularly, and who seem to know each other
	Trust & reciprocity	Plays a big role. Trusting relations and reciprocal actions contribute to participants’ staying. Lack of reciprocity makes participants leave.
	Maintained social capital	A fair proportion of the participants only meet online, but still address each other as if they have a “real” relationship

5 Discussion

The definition of the public sphere as “that domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed” [7] is what makes the public sphere such a useful concept for eParticipation, as the purpose of eParticipation is to engage citizens in political debate [1]. The public sphere provides us with an established concept of participation that is easily understood across disciplines, as well as by the general public. However, for something to be called a public sphere there needs to be some evidence that the communication we are observing is autonomous, critical, reflexive, sincere and inclusive [26]. Aside from Habermas’ definition [7], there is much disagreement on what the public sphere is, if it exists at all, how to measure it, and if the Internet can be seen as a public sphere. The author’s opinion on this matter is that those who call for a public sphere that is in line with the bourgeois ideals of the past are in the wrong. As Hartley [29] and Poster [6] show, the

public of today is different from the public of the past, and this means that we should not judge the present with the ideals of the past. The modern day public sphere is not freed from rules, but in a globalised, fragmented and multi-faceted world, we need to allow for a variety of voices and forms of communication. In the MyLabor case, the moderators have taken explicit steps towards this, by acknowledging that by opening up for debate, they are also inviting those who are not well trained in the current political communication paradigms. This is also being discussed in “meta-communication” debates among participants in the discussion.

As to the argument of whether or not the Internet constitutes a public sphere, the answer depends on how you stand in the question of what a public sphere is. Supporters of the bourgeois public sphere would most likely say that the Internet is not a public sphere, because of its fragmented nature, and the tone and style of much of the discussion going on online. However, by the standards set by Hartley [29], Poster [6], Castells [10] and others, the Internet (along with the traditional media and face to face meeting places) constitutes the modern day public sphere, albeit a fragmented one, where different communities meet to discuss a huge number of different issues. Some more politically oriented than others, but all contribute in their own way towards creating not one, but several “public opinions”. As Hartley [29] shows, there is no single public in the information age, but a fluid and constantly evolving readership that forms and reforms itself as different communities form in response to current affairs. This is reflected in the three examined zones of the MyLabor web site where, apart from a few core members, different groupings of people will “meet” in discussions of different topics.

One reason why we need to look online for the modern day public sphere is that more and more of society is organised through networks [36, 37]. Networked community values bear many similarities to the requirements of the public sphere [26], and the global nature of present day politics means that we need to embrace the network in our conceptualisation of the public sphere [10], and talk about the networked public sphere. The networked public sphere exists, as already pointed out, as many fragmented “mini spheres”. In a networked and interlinked world, it is no longer the case that all of us meet in the same forum and discuss the same issues. Rather, there are many communities discussing many different issues, that link up to form the public sphere of the network society.

Social media is a child of the macro-social changes brought about by the network society. In social media, we can connect otherwise fragmented pieces of information, and with the enormous user base (according to alexa.com, social media sites are among the most visited sites in the world), reach out to a global audience. Citizens are already using social

media for civic, political and activist purposes [12, 15, 16], and the successful campaign of US president Barack Obama [13] shows that the public sphere is alive and well in social media. The networked nature of social media could also facilitate gemeinschaft-like communities online, in a time where the fragmentation of family structures and an increasingly mobile population threatens to tear apart gemeinschafts such as families and neighbourhoods. However, there are still obstacles, as the current macro-social conditions society is not clear-cut. There is still a tension between the technocratic bureaucracy of the late post-war era and the culture of collaboration in the network society.

As the example case shows, Social Capital is well suited for research on public spheres in eParticipation, as it measures the power of connections between people. Social Capital can be used to explain the ties between social media users, and can also function as a tool for explaining why social media applications have become so popular in such a short amount of time.

Social capital and social media are both concerned with networks, communities and with helping the people around you and Social Capital as theoretical lens provide us with a good explanation of the reasons why so many people take part in online communities, seemingly without getting any rewards for their contributions. Because of the interconnected values of social capital, communities, networks and the public sphere, social capital could act in two ways, both as a determinant of participation, and as an outcome of participation. High levels of social capital strengthen participation, and participation in turn leads to even higher amounts of social capital.

6 Conclusion

The paper has shown the theoretical insights of applying social capital and the networked public sphere on social media use in eParticipation. The concept of the public sphere is presented, and it is argued that there is a great deal of disagreement on how it is defined. Further, it is argued that eParticipation studies using the public sphere as their philosophical backdrop should acknowledge these disagreements. Habermas’ ideal public sphere is not present today, we should instead strive for an open and inclusive public sphere, where citizens can come together and form public opinion based on ideals of an open, critical and inclusive debate.

Macro-social changes are moving us from the industrial and towards the globalised network society, which introduces the need for communication technologies in order for a public sphere to function. Networks facilitate community formation, and communities thrive on values that are similar to those of the public sphere. Thus, facilitating community formation should also facilitate the creation of a multimodal networked

public sphere, which exists simultaneously on- and offline and in a number of different media, where social media is one of the most important.

As the example case shows, Community values and the public sphere are linked with social capital, which acts as “grease” for interpersonal transactions and communication. As such, social capital should function as a good measurement of public spheres. We should also expect to see increasing levels of social capital in those who participate in public spheres, making social capital both a requirement and an outcome of a working public sphere

6.1 Limitations and possibilities for further research

The public sphere is conceptualised in many ways and in different fields of research. While I have attempted to cover some of the current debate on the public sphere, there is a need for more research on how we conceptualize it. The same can be said for social capital, where there is little agreement on how we should measure it. However, as a theoretical concept used to explain why some people participate and others do not, social capital is still useful.

In addition, there are other forms of intangible capital (cultural, political) that could further explain participation in public spheres, and research should be conducted on these.

Finally, the presented lens could be improved by an increased focus on technology, by conceptualising the IT-artefact as a networked Information Infrastructure.

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Choosing the right medium for municipal eParticipation based on stakeholder expectations

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Abstract. This paper examines the expectations and communication needs of relevant stakeholder groups for municipal eParticipation in a small Norwegian municipality. We identified relevant stakeholder groups with the municipality, and asked them about their communication preferences through a combined Delphi study and survey approach. The findings show that information about local issues, information about issues relevant for the individual stakeholder, and dialogue on business' needs and employment are the three most important communication needs. E-mail and the municipal web site are the two preferred modes of communication, with social media ranking third. For dialogue and participation, a face to face meeting is the preferred mode of communication. Our findings show that effective municipal communication requires a number of different media, depending on what is being communicated. We conclude by outlining a framework for media choice in eParticipation.

Keywords: eParticipation, stakeholder theory, social media, media choice

1 Introduction

Digital media are increasingly used by governments and political parties in their communication with citizens, business and organisations. It has been claimed that digital media “are set to transform political structures and organisations, political campaigning, lobbying strategies and voting patterns” [1]. In Norway, the vision for digital communication is to be among the best in the world on digital citizen dialogue, digital services and efficient eGovernment [2]. Politics as a field is becoming more and more dependent on good media and communication skills [3], but information overload and filtering problems presents government with massive challenges related to media choice [4], and there is often a gap between government choice and citizen expectations [5].

Deliberation in various digital media can increase the political sophistication of citizens [6], and online participation extends the political centre by including more citizens, but may also increase the distance between the ones in the centre and those in the periphery [7], widening the gap between those who are “inside” and “outside” of the public debate. Participants in political deliberation initiatives are rarely representative of the general population, but organising deliberation programs in different settings such as online surveys and discussions, face to face meetings or informal dinners could include citizens with more diverse backgrounds [8]. The fact that today's government is technocratic and relies ever more on expert reports and opinion further alienates the average citizen, who feels s/he has nothing to contribute to a debate where the focus is on consultancy reports and numbers [9].

To include more citizens in the decision making process, governments have attempted to implement various participatory techniques, but these are often biased towards the socio-cultural background of government officials, and leaves little space for the actual needs of citizens [9]. Thus, our first aim is to discover what various citizen groups actually want to talk to government about, and through which medium they prefer to communicate. We have focused on the municipal level, as this is where the diversity of citizen interaction is largest in Norwegian government.

While political parties have embraced technology, they are yet to embrace the social concepts underlying the technology [10]. A recent study defines both the social and technical concepts of technology for research, and calls for practical applications of the theoretical framework [11]. This leads us to our second objective, which is to aid practitioners in government who are uncertain about which medium they should use for various eParticipation efforts. Thus, our research questions for this study are:

- 1: Who are the stakeholders in eParticipation at the municipal level?
- 2: What are their communication needs and media preferences?
- 3: How can practitioners choose media for various types of communication?

To answer these questions, we conducted a Delphi study of the various citizen stakeholder groups, and distributed a survey to capture the opinions of stakeholders who did not want to take part in the Delphi study. Finally, based on the findings from the Delphi study and survey we applied the theoretical framework of

Johannessen and Munkvold [11], and synthesised several existing frameworks for technology choice and communication to create a tool that could help practitioners in government in choosing the right technologies for different communication needs.

2 Theoretical Premises: Technology Evaluation through genres

While our study identifies citizen preferences for eParticipation, there is still the need to transfer this knowledge to governments' technological choice so that government can decide which tools to use for which purpose. Existing literature has several examples of this, but mostly focuses on either communication or technology. A synthesis between these studies could lead us towards a more holistic solution.

The eParticipation tool assessment [12] combines the analysis of technical functionality with several other factors such as the level of participation it can address and the stages in the decision making process that are supported. Existing frameworks address the technological requirements of eParticipation well, but it is made from the perspective of government, and does not take into account the varying needs of different citizen groups, or the socio-technical nature of technology. However, to succeed, it is important to take citizens' needs into account [13], and to address technology from a socio-technical perspective [11].

To extend the framework to include the socio-technical perspective so it can more easily be used to identify the communication needs of citizens, we used elements from genre theory. A genre is defined as "a typified communicative action which is invoked in response to a recurring situation" [14]. Genres that are routinely enacted, such as questions to politicians, reports on potholes or specific types of input to the decision making process can be seen as a genre repertoire [15] of eParticipation. Genres are identified through similar form and function [14], as well as technical functionality [16], and can be analysed through the 5W1H framework, where you ask *Why* are we communicating, *What* is the content, *Who* are the participants, *Where* should the communication take place, *When* and *How* should we communicate. The framework helps uncover how and when the genre is enacted, in what situations it is used, who the participants are and why the genre is used [17]. Genre theory has been used in several previous studies of eParticipation [18-21].

There are some examples of genre based methods for systems planning and development in government. Päivärinta et.al. [22] present a method for Information Systems Planning based on genre theory, where the communication genres are the deciding factor for the technological choice. The framework includes a stakeholder analysis of who the producer and the user of the information is, as well as genre and metadata analyses. Others have built upon this framework to create a method for development of eGovernment portals, where the genre perspective is extended through the inclusion of life-events in the planning stage [23]. In another example, genre theory have been used to help structure and plan discussion forums for local eParticipation through the 5W1H method [18].

While both the assessment tools and the genre approaches are good, none of them address both the technological and communicative aspects of eParticipation. Combining the two into a genre *and* technological choice framework could aid practitioners in choosing the appropriate media for different eParticipation activities. In section five, we begin to sketch the outlines of such a framework, which combines the genre and technology analyses referenced in this section.

3 Research method

The findings reported in this paper are part of an on-going collaboration between the university and a municipality in southern Norway. The municipality has 8000 inhabitants, and relies heavily on agriculture. Three large fjords have led to a scattered population, with about half of the inhabitants living in the centre, and the rest spread out across the municipality.

As our objective was both to identify stakeholder groups and their preferences, we chose multiple research methods. By a multiple approach different aspects of reality may be explored to gain richer understanding of the research topics investigated [24]. Our first objective was to identify relevant stakeholder groups through a stakeholder analysis. Stakeholder theory was originally a set of tools and methods to identify relevant stakeholders [25], and stakeholder theory has been adapted to the eGovernment field [26, 27]. Our stakeholder analysis was conducted in collaboration with politicians and government officials in the municipality, and we came up with a total of 23 local stakeholder groups. Stakeholders with similar characteristics were then grouped into 10 panels for the Delphi study, which provided us with a list of stakeholders from politics, government administration and civil society.

Data collection took place between April and November 2011. We collected our data using the Delphi method [28, 29]. The Delphi method is well suited for studies where "judgmental information is indispensable", and has

been used for concept and framework development in Information Systems studies [28] and public policy development [30]. The method consists of three phases: Brainstorming of issues, consolidation, where the list is narrowed down, and finally the ranking phase, where the participants attempt to reach consensus on which of the identified issues are most important [28, 29]. The respondents were asked to provide a qualitative answer to the question *what do you want to communicate with government about, and which media would you prefer to use?* In addition, there was a short text explaining the purpose of the study.

The municipality recruited participants based on our stakeholder analysis, and these were invited to take part in the Delphi survey. The survey was distributed to 80 participants, of which 22 chose to participate. In addition to this, we distributed a regular survey to the municipality’s inhabitants, which resulted in 36 additional respondents.

We were not able to reach consensus, as the participants lost interest in the study after the first round of ranking. This is a common problem with the Delphi method, but fortunately the amount of data from initial rounds is often rich enough that we can draw some conclusions, as shown by Päivärinta & Dertz [31]. In our case, both the brainstorming and first ranking phases provided insights into the communication preferences for the different stakeholder groups, as well as their preferred communication technologies for each form of communication.

The brainstorming phase identified 31 different communication categories, which were narrowed down to ten in the consolidation phase. Eight of these were ranked by more than 50 per cent of the participants, and thus considered to be at least moderately important for a majority of the respondents. The survey data confirmed these as the most important issues. Finally, we asked the respondents to report which communication technology they preferred for each of the communication categories, and found that more than 70 per cent prefer some form of digital communication.

Treating the communication categories as genres of communication [14], we combined the technological framework of Tambouris et. al. [12] and the genre based frameworks [18, 22, 23] to create an overview of which technologies are suited to which communication genre.

4 Results

4.1 Who are the stakeholders?

Stakeholder groups were identified in collaboration with representatives from the municipality. The objective was to include every government and civil society group that has a need to communicate with the municipality.

In eGovernment we usually discuss three main stakeholder groups: Politicians, administration and the civil society [32]. For the municipality, it was important to solicit opinions from these as separate stakeholders. The relation between politicians and the administration was mentioned as very important, due to the different responsibilities of these groups.

Defining civil society stakeholder groups is more difficult, as they can be divided in several ways, such as age, education, ethnicity, business owners and associations. We attempted to include as many groups as possible, and came up with eight civil society stakeholders: Business, Service users, associations, expats, immigrants, youth, senior citizens and finally a group for the “silent majority” of citizens with no organizational membership. The identified stakeholder groups are listed in **Table 29**.

Sphere		Stakeholder groups
Political		Municipal executive board
Government		Administration officials from city hall
Administration		Municipal employees from health and education
Civil Society	Business	Business association, Tourism, Primary industry
	Organizations/ citizen groups	Service users: PTA, Health care patients
		Associations: Residents, religious groups, sports
		Expats
		Immigrants and new residents
		Youth (15-25 years old)

Table 29: Municipal stakeholder groups**4.2 What are the communication needs?**

The reported communication needs from the initial brainstorming session are listed in table 2. It is worth noticing that some of the reported needs are available today if you know what you are looking for, but these are reported to be either hard to find, of poor quality, or in a language which is not easily understood by ordinary citizens.

Table 30: Communication needs

Communication needs	Description
Report problems	Report problems with physical infrastructure
Information: Nature	Information about local areas for hiking and fishing
Tourist information	Information about what happens, where to sleep and what to do
Municipal news	News about what happens in the municipality
Website links	Links to local web sites
Planning information	Information on construction, road works
Inform on political decisions	Information about decisions made by the municipal council
Debate urban planning	Create a forum for debate
Citizen surveys	Conduct surveys on big and important issues
Feedback	Receive feedback from municipality after making contact
Referral to laws	case correspondence from the municipality should include references to relevant law
After hours contact	The municipality should be available after 4PM
Accessible information	Policy documents are difficult to understand, and should be made more accessible to ordinary citizens.
Geographic information	Citizens should be informed on issues in their neighbourhood.
Rapid feedback	When contacting the municipality, receive feedback and case status.
Comment services	Comment and provide feedback on municipal services
Urban planning dialogue	Dialogue between business and municipality
Information on business services	Information on services for business
Dialogue on land use	Dialogue between business and municipality
Dialogue on the harbour	Dialogue between business and municipality
Dialogue on apprentice recruitment	Dialogue between business and municipality
Dialogue with immigrants	Establish a forum for politicians, locals and immigrants to meet
Information: geriatric	Information about plans to cope with an aging population
Information: the church	Information about religious activities
Information: political objectives	Information about the long term ideas and thoughts of politicians
Information flow politicians/administration	Introduce routines for information flow between administration and politicians
Discussion forum	Create a forum for discussion on long-term political issues.
Electronic case handling	Case documents digitized for easier access
Information: services	Inform citizens about the municipality's services.
Information: Courses	Inform citizens about available short educational courses.
Patient evaluation	Patients in health care should be able to evaluate their treatment

The 31 communication needs of the initial brainstorming were reduced to ten in the consolidation phase, and the consolidated list was presented to and approved by the participants. The ten remaining factors were grouped in the categories *information dissemination*, *public services* and *public dialogue*, as the qualitative data from the first phase revealed that these were the three main concerns for the participants.

Table 31: Consolidated list of communication needs, grouped by category

Information dissemination	Public services	Dialogue
Generic information	Service dialogue	Forum for debate
Information tailored to individual needs	Evaluation of existing services	Business dialogue
Local information	Report problems with services	Municipal surveys

Table 4 shows the communication needs that were important to the different stakeholder groups. We were not able to solicit answers from all of the civil society groups identified by our stakeholder analysis. Hence, some of the groups from table 1 are excluded from table 4. None of the stakeholder groups ranked *report problems with services* as important. *Tailored* and *local information* are important to almost all of the stakeholder groups, and the qualitative data shows that these are even more important than the table suggests:

“Calling them does not work at all. It would be a lot more efficient if there was one person responsible for one area. We are located on an island where it can take one year for a light bulb to be changed, just because the right people aren’t told about the problem” (Associations respondent 1).

Except for the administration, all the stakeholder groups wanted to report problems with the physical infrastructure, such as potholes, missing streetlights, poor road maintenance in winter etc. Again, this is a very important issue also in the qualitative data set from the brainstorming phase: *“My main communication need is to comment on municipal services such as [problems with] garbage disposal and snow clearing”* (Associations respondent 5).

Table 32: Stakeholder groups' communication needs

	Adm.	Politicians	Seniors	Business	Youth	Associations
Generic information		X		X	X	X
Local information	X	X	X		X	X
Tailored information	X	X	X	X	X	X
Service dialogue	X	X			X	X
Evaluation of services	X					
Report problems w/infrastructure		X	X	X	X	X
Forum for debate	X	X	X			X
Business dialogue	X	X	X	X		X
Municipal surveys				X		X

Respondents were asked to pick the most important issues, and to rank them from least to most important. Table 5 shows how many of the participants who included each item in their list of most important issues. While democratic dialogue is an important issue for eParticipation, a majority of our respondents call for information tailored to individual needs, dialogue on the needs of business, a way to report problems with the physical infrastructure or information about things happening in their local area, such as planned construction and power outages. The ranking confirms these as the most important issues.

Table 33: Ranking of communication needs, all stakeholders

Communication need	Percentage
Tailored information	100.0%
Business dialogue	77%
Report problems with physical infrastructure	69%
Local information	62%
Generic information	46%
Service dialogue	46%
Forum for debate	31%
Evaluation of services	15%
Municipal surveys	15%

4.3 How can practitioners choose media for various types of communication?

In addition to asking about the communication needs of the stakeholder groups, we also asked them which communication media they preferred to use for each category. The findings are summarized in table 6. There were no notable differences between the stakeholder groups’ preferences, so we do not report the results of the individual groups. The participants were able to choose more than one media preference for each communication need. Based on the input from the brainstorming phase, we grouped the media preferences into six categories. Four based on technology, and two physical contact points.

Internet, as in the municipality’s web site or other web sites is by far the most popular medium overall, along with e-mail whereas social media and mobile phones are less popular. Age does not seem to play an important role as the distribution between age groups is fairly similar. In terms of dialogue, social media scored higher, which is consistent with the idea of social media as a two-way medium, and an indication that governments’

social media presence should include some form of feedback option. Another interesting observation is that public meetings also received a high score. This indicates that, at least in small communities, physical contact is deemed important for dialogue. Even so, the trend is clear. In most cases, some form of digital communication is the preferred option, while physical contact is still in some cases seen as important.

Table 34: Media preference for each communication category

Preferred medium	Percentage for each communication need									
	Generic information	Local information	Tailored information	Service dialogue	Evaluation of services	Report problems w/infrastructure	Forum for debate	Business dialogue	Municipal surveys	
E-mail	66	60	75	47	47	74	39	38	63	
Internet	78	62	58	56	61	53	61	62	69	
Social media	22	24	14	22	17	15	42	44	20	
Mobile devices	16	19	25	14	9	35	6	18	14	
Service bureau	8	16	14	14	12	32	12	18	6	
Public meetings	8	5	6	19	12	6	46	41	9	

5 Discussion: Towards a framework for media choice

Knowing the communication needs and media preferences of the stakeholder groups in our case municipality, we are now able to move on towards the next phase, choosing the appropriate technologies for each communication need. The reported communication needs are translated into genres in our proposed framework, based on the phases from [22] and expanded with the technological framework [12].

Identify stakeholders and producers and users of information. A stakeholder analysis, such as the one presented in table 1, tells us who should participate in the communication. The next step is to identify producers and users of information (PUI entities), so that we know who should initiate and who should respond. See [22] for more on PUI entities.

Identify communication genres. For eParticipation, the first step has too often been based on the needs of government. Our identification of the communication needs of various external and internal stakeholder groups (tables 2-5), allows us to create genres that are grounded in citizen and other stakeholder needs. Identifying genres based on these communication needs can be done through the 5W1H method, as shown by [18]. *Who/m* is excluded from 5W1H, as it is addressed in the stakeholder analysis.

Define and gather metadata about the various genres. This should be done in collaboration with the stakeholders. Typical metadata varies depending on the type of communication, but could include preferred medium (see table 6), response time, reference number, and for government, issues such as archiving and access might also be necessary for compliance. This step overlaps with the technological analysis. These steps are shown in Table 35, with an example of a finished analysis in **Table 36**.

Table 35: Genre analysis

Genre :	[name]	
<i>Stakeholders</i>	Producers	Who is the one producing information/ the sender
	Users	Who is the receiver of information?
<i>Genre properties</i>	Why	What is the purpose and expected outcome of the genre?
	What	What is the information content and level of participation addressed?
	When	In what time-period, and where in the decision making process should the genre be enacted?
	Where	What is the reported preferred technology for the genre?
	How	What are the technological needs, how should the genre be produced? What activities are involved?
<i>Genre metadata</i>	Meta 1	Metadata is collected through user input
	Meta 2	Metadata can also be related to compliance issues such as archiving laws

Table 36: Example of a genre analysis

Genre : Report problems with infrastructure		
<i>Stakeholder</i> s	Producers	Citizen group members, business
	Users	Government administration (road and transportation office)
<i>Genre properties</i>	Why	Report issues such as potholes, broken streetlights, so they can be fixed. Expected outcomes: civic engagement
	What	Geographic location, type of issue, other relevant information. Level of participation: collaboration
	When	On-going when problems are observed. Stage in decision making process: Monitoring
	Where	e-mail to municipality, internet (municipal web site), mobile
	How	Web-site front end where information is stored in Database. Accessible through mobile app + mobile-friendly municipal web site. Activities: consultation.
<i>metadata</i>	Case number	Generate case number for each report
	Feedback	Provide feedback when problem is fixed. Linked to case number.

Analyse available technologies. The last step is shown in Table 37, with an example analysis in **Table 38**. Based on Tambouris et.al. [12], we analysed the communication media the stakeholders prefer to use for the specific genre. The technology evaluation includes the technical functionality, the level of participation and stage in decision making process (based on OECD recommendations) the medium can accommodate, and actors. Activities and outcomes are other important factors in eParticipation [33], and these have been added to the original technological analysis to provide a more holistic picture. While our example includes only one technology, in most cases there would probably be many suitable systems, consistent with a multichannel strategy [5].

Table 37: Technology evaluation

<i>Name of medium</i>	<insert name of medium>
Functionality	Technical functionality, such as forms, video, feedback options
Level of participation	Information/two-way consultation/involvement in the political process/collaboration/power transfer to citizens
Stage in decision making process	Agenda setting, Analysis, policy creation, Implementation, Monitoring
Actors	Who has access to the technology?
Activities	Voting, discourse form, decision making, activism, consultation, petitions
Expected outcomes	Civic engagement, deliberative effects, democratic effects

Table 38: Example of a finished technology evaluation table

<i>Name of medium</i>	<i>Facebook</i>
Functionality	Personalised front page, Profiles, Groups, Networks, "Wall" for message posting, Photo uploads, Notes/links, status updates, events, Video, Chat, 3rd party applications, internal private messaging system, Search, Sharing of content, Mobile app for smartphones.
Level of participation	Information, two-way consultation collaboration
Stage in decision making process	Agenda setting, Analysis
Actors	Everyone with a Facebook account. Requires participants to register, may exclude privacy conscious people
Activities	Information, activism, consultation, petitions
Expected outcomes	Civic engagement

Based on tables 8 and 10, our example genre and example technology are not well-matched if the reported metadata item "case number" is seen as very important. Using a Facebook page or group would not generate case numbers, does not allow reported cases to be stored in a database, and privacy issues related to ownership of

data could also be an obstacle for this particular genre. This short example shows the importance of addressing both the technology and the users' preferences for communication before starting on an eParticipation project, and we believe our framework could serve as a guide in this sense.

6 Limitations and future research

While this study provides insights into the communication needs and media preferences of various stakeholder groups, there are some limitations that need to be addressed. As we were not able to reach consensus in the Delphi study, we were unable to create a definite list of communication needs to be addressed. However, we were still able to identify some needs, and through the survey that was distributed later, we also got data to verify the findings from the Delphi study. Our findings should however be read mainly as qualitative and interpretive, and within the contextual limitations of a small Norwegian municipality, rather than quantitative.

Our combination of the eParticipation technology framework and genre frameworks is mainly based on theory and inspired by the findings on communication preferences. A logical next step in this research would be to verify the framework through testing it in government. Specifically, validation of a common list of communication needs and the appropriate technology to support each communication need is considered to be an important contribution to further practical development.

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SOCIAL MEDIA AS PUBLIC SPHERE: A STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE

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In this article we examine how ICT is used by different stakeholder groups to affect the dynamics of the public sphere. The study was conducted as a qualitative case study. Data sources include interviews, social media content, document analysis and field notes from meeting observations. Our findings show that media strategies of different stakeholder groups vary according to their salience level. Stakeholders with higher salience are less likely to participate in social media debates, since they are in no need for communicating through such media, while those who are less salient will use every available medium to get their message across. This difference in commitment to public debate, based on level of salience, challenges the opportunity to create public sphere through the use of social media. The case shows that power and urgency are the most important salience attributes influencing stakeholder's use of social media. Stakeholders with low power and high urgency are most likely to use social media. High power stakeholders are less likely to use social media, as these are seldom an integral part of government processes and therefore not a venue to exercise power. Stakeholder and salience analysis shows that in this case, social media cannot be seen as a public sphere based on Dahlberg's criteria. This extends current knowledge of public spheres by adding the stakeholder perspective as a second layer of analysis in addition to existing models of the public sphere.

Keywords: eParticipation, social media, stakeholder theory, public sphere

1 INTRODUCTION

The representative democracy of industrialised nations is in decline, with decrease in voter turnout by around 10 per cent from 1955 to 1997 (Gray and Caul, 2000). Citizens tend to identify less with trade unions, the church, and traditional class distinctions (Gray and Caul, 2000). This breakdown of group identity has altered participation from voting in elections and political party support towards a more activism-based form of participation, where single issues are more important than political ideology (Lokaldemokratikommisjonen, 2006).

As society becomes ever more digitised, governments are attempting to boost democratic interest through various eParticipation programmes (Macintosh et al., 2005, Tambouris et al., 2007). eParticipation can be defined as "a set of technology-facilitated participatory processes, both deliberative and decision oriented" (Sæbø et al., 2008), where participation is understood as joining in some form of discussion, activity or decision-making (ibid.).

Many eParticipation projects fail, either due to low interest (Rose et al., 2007), lack of purpose and rules for conversation (Hurwitz, 2003), or a lack of citizen participation (Sotirios et al., 2011, Kolsaker, 2005). Recent studies of eParticipation projects in the EU shows that only 15 % of the invited people actually participated (Sotirios et al., 2011), and in the US only one fifth of Internet users participate (Christopher, 2011). Hence, triggering the interests of stakeholders is seen as vital in eParticipation efforts. In response to these issues, social media are increasingly being considered to engage stakeholders in future eParticipation projects (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009, Kalnes, 2009, Effing et al., 2011).

The concept of the Public sphere has been used as philosophical grounding for many eParticipation studies (Sanford and Rose, 2007). The public sphere is defined as "that domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed" (Habermas, 1989),

and provides researchers with a useful concept for explaining the importance of participation. A number of researchers make the case that a functioning public sphere is essential for democracy (Papacharissi, 2002, Dahlberg, 2001, Gimpler, 2001, Poster, 1997). Functioning public spheres require reasoned and open deliberation, where every point of view should be heard and participants are open to opposing views (Dahlberg, 2001). We address these issues in our article by introducing the public sphere as a conceptual framework to explore the relationship between various stakeholders' media strategies. Our specific research questions are: How do major stakeholders follow different media strategies in their efforts to influence the decisions being made and how does this fit into ideal forms of public sphere? Through an urban planning case in a Norwegian municipality we explore the relationship between stakeholder salience and online communication in an. Stakeholders involved are analysed according to their preferred modes of communication. Our analysis suggests that varying degrees of salience impact the types of communication different stakeholders prefer, and that this has implications for the public sphere and democratic dialogue in social media. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section presents the related research on which we build our arguments. Then we describe our research methodology and introduce the case. In the findings section we analyse stakeholder groups, their relationships and media strategies, before discussing the use of social media as public sphere in light of our findings, and finally conclude by offering suggested implications.

2 RELATED RESEARCH

2.1 PUBLIC SPHERE

The Public Sphere is defined as "that domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed". An autonomous "place" where citizens can debate government policy and act as an informal correction when governments step out of bounds (Habermas, 1989), separated from the state and economic interests (Habermas, 1989, Frazer, 1999). The Public Sphere can be understood as a mediating layer between government and citizen, where citizens discuss and agree on issues of public interest, as it is "the interaction between citizens, civil society, and the state, communicating through the public sphere, that ensures that the balance between stability and social change is maintained." (Castells, 2008)

The definition of public opinion is essential for the Public Sphere. When the bourgeoisie class began to challenge the power of the church and state during the formation of the European nation states in the 19th century, it began to make sense to talk about a public forming an opinion. Before, in the feudal age, the church and kings of Europe had no use for a public in the modern sense of the word, as the kings and nobility had no electorate to hold them accountable for their decisions (Merriman, 1996). In modern representative democracy this has changed. Government is elected by politicians, who are accountable to the public, and the public can be defined as

"all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for ... Since those who are affected are not direct participants ... it is necessary that certain people be set apart to represent them, and to see to it that their interests are conserved and protected." (Dewey, 1927 p. 15)

In order to identify these consequences, we need an informed and talking public: "There is no state without government, but also there is none without the public" (Dewey, 1927 p. 67). Thus, public opinion is the shared understanding of an issue, reached through debate by rational citizens (Habermas, 1991), and is considered a necessary function in a modern democracy: "The public sphere is "an essential component of sociopolitical organization because it is the space where people come together as citizens and articulate their autonomous views to influence the political institutions of society" (Castells, 2008). If there was no public

sphere or organized public to act as a check on individual power, it would be a lot easier for strong individuals to control the state and overrule the interests of others (Dewey, 1927). Mass media and the commoditization of information, along with the disappearance of physical spaces for assembly and debate is said to have brought an end to the civic values and sense of public-ness that are so important to the public sphere (Putnam, 2000). This view is contested, and other scholars have pointed to the Internet as a medium where the public sphere is very much alive and functioning (Dahlgren, 2005, Gimmler, 2001, Papacharissi, 2002, Poster, 1997). Studies of political participation indicate that Internet use has led to an increase in the public's political interest (Gibson et al., 2005), and it is claimed that the Public Sphere of today is no longer a physical place. Rather, it is found in the media and in networks and acts as the "cultural/informational repository of the ideas and projects that feed public debate." (Castells, 2008).

There is, however, a challenge with the online Public Sphere. Online activities tend to be focused around people's interests. Interest-based communities and segregation can easily become a democratic problem. When people socialise only with others who have the same interests, we lose that space in society where people of diverse backgrounds can assemble, debate, and shape public opinion (Calhoun, 1998). And while the Internet is promising, not everyone agrees that we currently have a functioning Public Sphere. A lack of attention to issues of public interest has been flagged as one of the major challenges to the online Public Sphere (Muhlberger, 2005).

Dahlberg (2001) has identified six requirements for a functioning Public Sphere: It must be *Autonomous* from state and economic power. It should be based on a *rational-critical discourse*, where participants are engaged in reciprocal critique of normative positions that are criticisable rather than dogmatic claims. Participants must be *reflective*, and critically examine their cultural values, assumptions, and interests, as well as the larger social context. Participants must attempt to *understand* the argument from the other's perspective. Each participant must make an effort to *make known all information* relevant to the particular problem under consideration, and everyone is *equally entitled* to introduce and question ideas and issues. Dahlberg's perspectives allow us to explore how our findings relate to a functioning public sphere.

2.2 STAKEHOLDER THEORY

Stakeholder theory (ST) emerged in the management literature during the 1980ies. Originally proposed as collection of management tools and techniques to identify and manage stakeholders (Freeman, 1984, Mitchell et al., 1997), ST expanded in three directions in the 90ies (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). The *descriptive aspects* of ST were further advanced. ST also developed *normative aspects*, focusing on the moral sides of management in relation to multiple stakeholders. Finally, the instrumental aspects of ST were investigated as a study of the effectiveness of stakeholder oriented management.

The descriptive parts of ST has been argued to be well suited as a theoretical basis for analysing complex eGovernment efforts (Flak and Rose, 2005) to understanding how stakeholders affect developments and also how they themselves are affected (Scholl, 2005, Klischewski and Scholl, 2006, Flak et al., 2008). More recently, ST has also been applied to study the dynamics of eParticipation by analysing various attributes that makes up different stakeholders 'degree of salience (Sæbø et al., 2011). Studying salience attributes allows for a deep understanding of why some stakeholders act to protect their interests while others might not. Further, determining salience is a way of analysing power between stakeholders. Salience refers to the question of why some stakeholder claims are attended to while others are not. According to Mitchell et al. (1997), salience is composed of the attributes power,

legitimacy and urgency. Figure 1 presents a stakeholder typology comprising eight different combinations of these attributes (Mitchell et al., 1997).

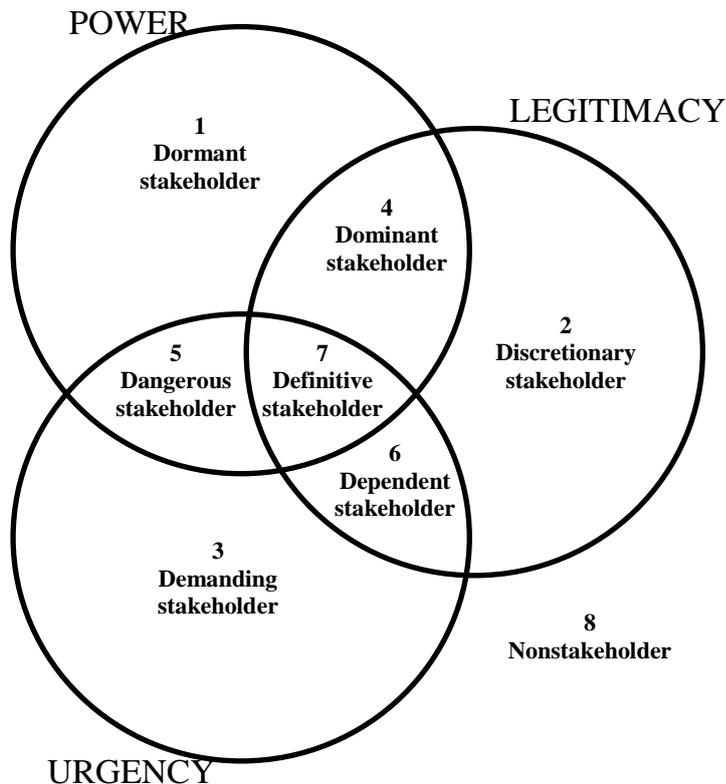


Figure 1. Stakeholder typology. One, two or three attributes present (Mitchell et al., 1997)

Stakeholders possessing all three attributes are more salient towards decision makers than stakeholders that only possess one or two of the attributes, and are thus termed definitive stakeholders in the typology. A definitive stakeholder would very likely be given attention not only because this person or group would represent a legitimate claim, the person or group would also be likely to exercise power because of a sense of urgency. For example, it is possible to imagine that a politician could be more interested in exercising his or her legitimate powers to influence political decisions shortly before an election because of an increased sense of urgency to be re-elected. Both stakeholders and salience represent dynamic phenomena, which should be analysed regularly.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was framed as a qualitative case study. The objective of qualitative research is “understanding...by investigating the perspectives and behaviour of the people in these situations and the context within which they act” (Kaplan and Maxwell, 2005), and qualitative studies are well suited for exploratory studies and for answering why and how something happens (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, Kaplan and Maxwell, 2005). Case studies are particularly suited for research on new phenomena where the experiences and interpretations of the actors and the wider context are important factors (Cresswell, 2009).

Interpretive studies should approach the data in an open manner, and be willing to modify assumptions and the theories used in analysing the data in an iterative, hermeneutic process (Walsham, 1995). Our initial objective was to explore how local government stakeholder

groups use social media. An urban planning case from a municipality in Southern Norway was chosen for three reasons:

1. The municipality has a history of citizen engagement, and the number of actors involved makes it an ideal case for a stakeholder analysis.
2. The process has a long history, dating back almost 30 years to the first plans for developing the area.
3. The first author has followed the case as a citizen over several years before engaging in it from a research perspective, which leads to a thorough understanding of the case context. As interpretive researchers, we are aware of the possible bias this closeness can lead to (Walsham, 1995).

The data used in this case was collected between February and November 2011. Twelve semi-structured interviews were made with representatives from different stakeholder groups: Politicians elected to the city council (4), officials from the city administration who were responsible for developing the plans (2), the private investor's representative (1), local media (1 + informal meetings and e-mail exchanges with 2 others), representatives from the three main activist groups (3), and one representative from the regional governments' heritage department. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Interviews should be supplemented by other forms of data (Walsham, 2006). In our case, other forms of data were as important as the interviews. The first author attended one workshop meeting and two city council meetings as an outside observer (Walsham, 1995). In addition, all the case documents for the decision-making process between 2007 and 2011 were collected and analysed. This includes minutes from council meetings, consultancy reports, architectural plans, formal hearing documents and the results of two surveys made in relation to the development project. Finally, we collected data from several web-sites and Facebook groups made by the activist groups, local media news coverage and editorials. Interpretive studies should approach the data in an open manner, and be willing to modify assumptions and the theories used in analysing the data in an iterative, hermeneutic process (Walsham, 1995). While we entered the analysis with a stakeholder theory perspective, our analytical lens was constantly changing as new aspects of the case led us in new directions. Understanding the political and administrative issues related to the case took a long time, and together with the stakeholder salience (Mitchell et al, 1999) analysis led us towards a public sphere perspective on the case. Stakeholder theory and the public sphere are used as theories for explaining (Gregor, 2006) how ICT use affects democracy.

4 CASE DESCRIPTION

The urban planning process concerns a cove of 5 acres, located about 1 km from the city centre of a Norwegian mid-sized city (40.000 inhabitants). There are two land owners: a private investor and the local municipality own about 50% each.

Over the past 30 years, there have been a number of plans for development of the cove. In the 1980's, the city council decided to build a new harbour in the area, but the development was halted and the only structure built was the local hub of a national freight company, resulting in the cove becoming a no-man's land of car parks and freight trucks. The area is very attractive for development, as it is by the sea and also the last open area close to the city centre in a city where the topography makes development difficult.

There is strong agreement in the population that something should be done about the cove. No one is pleased with the current situation. The disagreement is mainly between those who want housing and commercial properties, and those who want to use the area for a recreational park. Between 2001 and 2006 a number of plans were presented to, and rejected by, the city council.

In 2007 and 2008, plans for a residential building were accepted by the city council, but the project awoke local opposition. Several activist groups began to form, and through a concentrated campaign, which included actions such as talking to politicians, writing to the local newspaper and setting up stands and organising protest concerts, they were able to stop the plans. A renewed plan presented in 2009 was also stopped by the activists' campaign. This time, the activists' campaign had expanded to include Facebook groups as well as their own web site. Especially the Facebook groups were effective in gathering support and attention, with one group having more than 2.000 members (out of a population of 40.000). The Facebook group membership was covered extensively by local media.

In 2010, the municipality restarted the process, and decided to come up with a new area development plan. After being criticised for not listening to the citizens when the past plans were laid out, the municipality decided to run this as an inclusive process. In 2011, they arranged three workshops prior to the plans being developed by the city administrators. In total, 30 different groups and organisations were invited to these workshops. Workshop participants got four different alternatives to work with: The entire area as a recreational park, 25%, 50% and 75% coefficient of utilization. A plan for each of these alternatives were presented and discussed in the final workshop.

In addition to the workshops, an online survey was distributed to the general public and presented at the final workshop. The survey was based on the same alternatives as the workshops, and respondents were also asked a number of questions about which activities they wanted in the area, where buildings should be erected etc. 56 % of the respondents (N=688) reported they wanted at least half the area for a recreational park. The local newspaper distributed another survey two months after, with similar results. Both surveys were open to interpretation, which lead developers and activists to argue a great deal about what was the "true" public opinion in the matter.

Both activists and government officials have called this a sham process claiming that politicians had no intention other than to soothe the opposition. When faced with these charges, politicians have denied them in the interviews, claiming they created workshops and surveys in an honest attempt to be more inclusive. Nine different alternatives for development were presented to the city council, partially based on input from the democratic process. In March 2011, the city council voted in favour of residential and business development on 75 % of the cove, and in August the council signed the contract with the developer.

In September there was a new municipal election. Following the same strategy that led to a halt in development in previous years, the activists created a pamphlet showing how people could vote if they wanted politicians in the new city council who would re-open the case. The pamphlet was distributed both in print and digital form through the activists' web site, and promoted in local media and on Facebook. Although not a complete success, the activists were once again able to influence who got elected to the city council. About 400 people followed the activists' advice, changing their ballots in order to elect those politicians most sympathetic to the activists' cause.

At the time data collection ended (November 2011), the previous city council's decision had not been up for discussion in the new city council, and the new mayor has told the media that it is not likely the case will be reopened.

5 FINDINGS

This section summarizes our analysis of stakeholder salience, the influence of salience on use of social media and to what extent social media actually constitute a social sphere in its own right.

5.1 STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Stakeholder groups were identified through a document listing formal stakeholders and input from the interviews. The following stakeholder groups were identified: The real estate developer, politicians, activists, municipal chief officer, ordinary citizens, historical societies and regional government heritage office, regional government, environment office, and various government offices with interests in the area, such as transportation and railroad authorities. Of these, the most active stakeholder groups have been politicians, the developer, and the activist groups. The identification of the stakeholder groups’ interests was done mainly through analysis of interviews, and verified through analysis of Facebook groups and other online statements, newspaper editorials and media coverage of the case. Stakeholder interests are summarised in Table 1, and the most central stakeholders are discussed below.

INTERESTS	Developer	Politicians	Activists	Citizens	Municipal administration	Regional gov heritage	Other regional government	Local media
Financial	X				X			
Job creation	X							X
More attractive city	X	X	X		X			X
Development: buildings	X	X		X				X
Development: park		X	X	X				
Maintain lines of sight			X			X		
Ground pollution			X				X	
Traffic			X				X	
Cultural heritage			X			X		
Maintain value of surrounding area			X					
Party program		X						

TABLE 1: STAKEHOLDER INTERESTS

Developers’ interests: The developers’ main interest is financial gain. They stand to gain substantial income from developing the area. However, the developer is interested in developing the city by creating jobs and building a new district that is to become an extension of the existing city centre, thereby making the city a more attractive place to live and work. By developing the cove they believe they are giving something back to the city they were born and raised in:

“The land owner is an old fisherman, and did business in the cove in the past. He has a genuine interest of really doing something with the area, something which is good for the city, and something he can be remembered for by later generations.” (Interview, developer1)

Politicians’ interests: The politicians believe in creating a more attractive city through development, although they disagree about what should be developed. Fulfilling the goals in their respective party programs is another important interest, but most importantly, they talk about their long-standing ambitions for positive development in the cove:

“Our main objective must be to create a stimulating and inspiring environment for our children, to ensure that every child born should have the possibility of an upward class journey. And we know the importance of the area you live in for these things...what is best for our children is our guiding light the cove development.” (Interview, politician3)

Activists’ interests: While there are several activist groups, their interests are more or less the same. Like the developer, they also want to create a more attractive city, but they believe that

a recreational park is better suited for this purpose, and thus their main interest is in conflict with the developer's interests. They are also concerned about the value of the surrounding buildings and preserving the cultural heritage of the old wooden houses in the hills above the cove:

“We made plans for a park filled with activities: a small boat harbour, an outdoor stage, golf... We have some nice areas in the city, but there is no green zone in the centre. It is important to have that in a city, but we don't seem to realize that here in our city.” (Interview, activist1)

The activists have also used arguments made by various government offices, such as ground pollution and traffic, and have worked (unsuccessfully) with the regional government Heritage Office to get the regional government's politicians to stop the plans. They have also worked hard to convince citizens to fill out the surveys in line with the activists' interests. Even so, the survey results were inconclusive, showing that citizens were split between buildings and park.

Citizens: The interests of ordinary citizens were collected through two surveys conducted by the municipality and the local newspaper. In both surveys, citizens were asked how they wanted the cove to be developed, and results were inconclusive. Few citizens want massive development. Around half the respondents wanted a mix of buildings, park and cafés, while the rest wanted less than 25 % buildings and the rest as a park.

Local media: Local media has played an important role in the case, acting as the main outlet for debate. In editorials, the biggest local newspaper has been outspoken in favour of a massive development with little room for green areas, while the newspaper's coverage has been more balanced. When asked, none of the interview respondents were very happy about how the media treated them.

“In our newspaper editorial columns have been in favour of development, while the general coverage in total perhaps has been more from the point of view of the activists” (Interview, journalist1)

Regional government heritage office: Regional government is an important stakeholder in the formal hearing process, as they have the power to stop any development until their conditions are met. The regional government's heritage office, along with local historical societies, attempted to stop the development plans in order to preserve the heritage value of the area. They are concerned about the lines of sight between the old buildings in the surrounding valleys and the sea, and have raised objections that a modern set of buildings are not compatible with the heritage value of the surrounding area.

“Our opinion is that the buildings in the cove need to adhere to the visual and historical contact between the old houses in the background and the sea. And we have made some statements about that. The regional politicians did not agree with us that the plans should be stopped, so we have only been able to make a statement about our concerns.” (Interview, regional government heritage office)

Municipal administration: The municipal chief officer is an important stakeholder in any development. He is the one responsible for preparing the case documents and plans for the city council, and although he is supposed to be politically neutral has a lot of influence. We were not able to get an interview with him, but through reading the case documentation, observation and media coverage we found his main interest to be the improvement of the city's financial stability, and thus being in favour of heavy development, as this provides more funds for the city. The activists see him as a pawn of the developer. The city's urban planners and architects also play a big role in the case, as they run the formal process based on input from politicians.

5.2 SALIENCE ANALYSIS

Using the model developed by Mitchell (et al., 1997), we analysed the salience level of each of the stakeholder groups, giving each a score of low, medium or high, based on their power, legitimacy and urgency. We further compared the salience with the extent to which each group has been active in social media. This allowed us to see if salience level had any influence on a specific stakeholder groups' participation in social media, and to analyse how social media can be considered a public sphere in cases where debate is initiated by activist groups. The analysis is presented in Table 2. There are small, but important differences in the salience level of the various stakeholders.

We scored the various stakeholder groups in terms of their **power** to influence the formal decision-making process. The city council and regional government offices receive a high score as they have judicial power to make decisions, or to stop them. Regional government scores medium to high, because they are the ones who prepare the documents for the city council and also provides input on what they consider the best option, meaning that their interpretation of the city council's will has an influence on the final decision. The activists receive a low score, as they have little formal power unless they are able to rouse a sufficient number of citizens to their cause.

Legitimacy analyses the extent to which each stakeholder has a legitimate reason to be included in the process. All of the stakeholder groups have a high score on this aspect, as they have the possibility of taking part in the hearing stage of the decision making process. However, we find the activists' legitimacy to be questioned as the case progresses. Interviews with the politicians shows the activists have been too active and too stubborn in their positions over to long a period of time, which in fact has lowered their chances of being heard:

“None of [the activists] see that if they want to win in this case, they should support the parties who are fighting for their interests, instead of spending time criticising the ones who are not. I have not received any official support from them, despite the fact that I alone have been supporting their views in the planning committee.” (Interview, politician3)

The **urgency** attribute uncovers more variation in the stakeholder groups' score than legitimacy. Urgency refers to how important the issue is for the individual stakeholder group. In the development case, politicians receive a high score as many politicians in interviews and observed meetings report that the case has been dragged out for too long, taking time from other important matters. The developer and activists also receive a high score, as a final decision from the city council is important for both. The developer uses substantial resources on planning and wants to start building as soon as possible to cover the losses from the planning process, while the activists know a final decision in favour of building will ruin their hopes of a park.

Stakeholder	Power	Legitimacy	Urgency	Salience
Politicians	High	High	High	High
Developer	Medium	High	High	Medium high
Activists	Low	High (medium)	High	Medium high
Citizens	High	High	Low	Medium high
Regional government	High	High	Low	Medium high
Municipal administration	Medium-high	High	Medium	Medium high
Local media	Medium	High	Low	Medium

TABLE 2: SALIENCE ANALYSIS

In summary, the main conflict in the case is between the activists and the developer, who promote different outcomes for the same area. At the time of writing, the city council has voted for development, which includes both buildings and a recreational park in the centre and alongside the sea. While this seems like a win-win situation, the activists feel this is a big loss and that the developer has won. The developer is satisfied that a decision has been reached and is ready to start development.

5.3 SALIENCE AND MEDIA USE

In this section we examine the communication media used by the different stakeholder groups, and compare that to our salience analysis in order to discover if there is a connection between salience levels and media use. The analysis is based on observation of the various media, as well as the interviews.

There are noteworthy differences in the media use of the different stakeholder groups.

Politicians are the legal representatives of the population, and thus have high salience on all levels. They are frequent users of social media in general, but while they are observing the Facebook groups discussing the case they are not active participants in them. Politicians instead write to the local newspaper, make their meeting minutes and other documents available online, discuss face to face with people they meet, and of course take part in the formal decision-making process. Social media is used by some individual politicians as a means of promoting themselves:

Some politicians will...share and comment on stories from local media, post Facebook status updates and such things. Especially in high profile cases, some politicians will spend more time commenting and sharing than they do with cases that do not receive the same kind of attention. (Interview, politician2)

The **developer** has a medium to high salience score, and is not visible in social media at all. They score high on legitimacy and urgency, and medium on power. As owner of the land, they have the right to utilize it, and want to do so as quickly as possible in order to realize the values of the land. The final decision, however, still lies with the politicians.

They report that they have mainly relied on face-to-face meetings with politicians and the municipal administration, the formal process as well as some attempts to communicate through the traditional media. The latter was more or less abandoned after some time, as they felt traditional media was not on their side.

We have tried to get our side of the story presented through the media, same as the activists do...But the media tend to turn everything into scandal and negative headlines...Especially when you want to develop something new, there is this common perception that us builders and architects are just crooks out to make a quick buck.(Interview, developer1)

The **activists** have a medium to high salience score, but scores low on power. They attempt to raise their power through convincing the general public that the area should not be built up, and they have a very clear strategy for how to accomplish this:

It has been a very clear strategy on our side, to use the media in order to sway public opinion in our favour...For example, the architect with the winning plans in 2008 was called 'Dark architects', and of course we used that in our campaign, working to associate their drawings with darkness and other bad things (Interview, activist3).

They have also made attempts at direct influence of politicians, through face to face meetings and phone calls, sent written complaints in the hearing stage of the decision making process, and mobilised to have as many as possible answer the surveys to their liking. They have also

been on stands in the city centre, and have held several musical concerts in order to gather support for their case. Their main argument for stopping development is that “we have public opinion on our side. Stopping the development plans is the most democratic thing to do”. As such, their strategy has been to communicate in as many channels as possible.

New media is great, as you reach all these people with little effort. We have used the Facebook groups to collect people’s phone numbers, and sent SMS’ to everyone about demonstrations and activities...It’s all about reaching out, and showing that we have the people of the city behind us...So we use every available media, and have lots of stuff on our web site as well, such as the results of the surveys. (Interview, activist2)

Citizens have a medium to high salience score, with high power (through elections) and legitimacy (as voting citizens), and low urgency. They have mainly communicated passively, through answering the survey. A minority has also been writing letters to the traditional media, written supporting comments on the activists’ Facebook wall, or commented on the online edition of the local newspaper. In 2010, 54 different people wrote to the newspaper, but only 12 people wrote three times or more. These 12 were all connected to the activists. There are varied interpretations of how much the ordinary citizen cares about the case. The politicians and government officials tone down the citizen engagement, while the activists claim that citizens care deeply and are in favour of the activists’ interests:

It wasn’t really a lot of interest in the survey we distributed...I guess you need to care quite deeply to respond. I’ve been asking myself this, how many people really care for the cove? We have the activists, they are relatively few, and some outsiders...I talked to the trade association earlier today, they say that a lot of people are very much in favor of building, but that is not something we hear about, we mostly hear about the resistance. (Interview, politician2)

They keep saying it is only a small minority of activists who care about the cove, that we are not representative of the population. But that is completely wrong. Look at our last list of signatures, the amount of people who signed up in just four days...the survey, where results were quite conclusive... We don’t know for sure, but we are fairly certain that at least 70% of the population agrees with us. (Interview, activist3)

Local media communicates mainly through their own channels in the newspaper or online. They have a medium salience score. They can influence citizens through their writing, and scores medium on power. Legitimacy is high, as local media remain the main source of news for citizens. Urgency is low, as the media has no direct interest in the case apart from as an interesting and on-going story. While social media is being used to some extent, it is mainly to promote the stories written in the newspaper, and not to take part in the general debate surrounding the case. They have clear ideas about how the developer and activists use the media:

The activists have been very good at arguing and marketing their views through us in the media. The developers have not been as good at talking to us, and not very present in other forums either... We have been supporting the development in our editorials, while the news coverage mostly favours the activists...Social media I don’t think have had much of an influence, but it has been a place where the activists could meet, mobilize and reach out. Coordinate protests and such things (Interview, journalist1)

Other stakeholder groups have a more passive role in the case, and have not been very active in any medium. The stakeholder’s media use is summarised in table 3.

Stakeholder group	Salience	Modes of communication				
		<i>Traditional media</i>	<i>Face2Face</i>	<i>Formal process</i>	<i>Social media</i>	<i>Survey</i>
Politicians	High	x	x	x		
Developer	Medium-high	x	x	x		
Activists	Medium-high	x	x	x	x	x
Citizens	Medium-high	x			x	x
Regional government	Medium-high			x		
Municipal administration	Medium-high	x	x	x		
Local media	Medium	x				

TABLE 3: STAKEHOLDERS' MEDIA USE

While social media have not been used by all the stakeholder groups, some respondents claim they have played a big role in gaining support for the activists, and as a channel for mobilising. When asked about the influence of social media, most respondents are negative, claiming that social media has not had a big influence on neither city council, nor public opinion. Respondents from all the stakeholder groups instead claim that face-to-face meetings and other physical modes of communication have been more important, alongside with the traditional media.

Urgency and most notably power, are the factors most contributing to social media use. The combination of low power and high urgency has led the activists to reach out through all available channels, and to seek power through influencing citizens to become activists and fight for the recreational park. With support from a sufficient number of citizens, they could have swung the vote in their favour through sheer force of numbers. However, this support failed to materialise, even though the activists have claimed they have most of the citizens in their side.

High salience stakeholders such as the developer, have relied more on traditional channels of communication, seek out public officials in power, and has been supported by editorial opinion in the local media. The analysis of the letters columns in the local newspaper show they were active participants here in the beginning, but chose to refrain from taking further part in this debate as they felt they were not being heard in these channels.

Our analyses of stakeholder salience and media usage suggest that stakeholders with high degree of urgency and low degree of power are likely to embrace social media to promote their interests. Similarly, stakeholders with high degree of urgency and high degree of power are less likely to use social media and more likely to rely on traditional communication channels. These relationships are visualized in Figure 2.

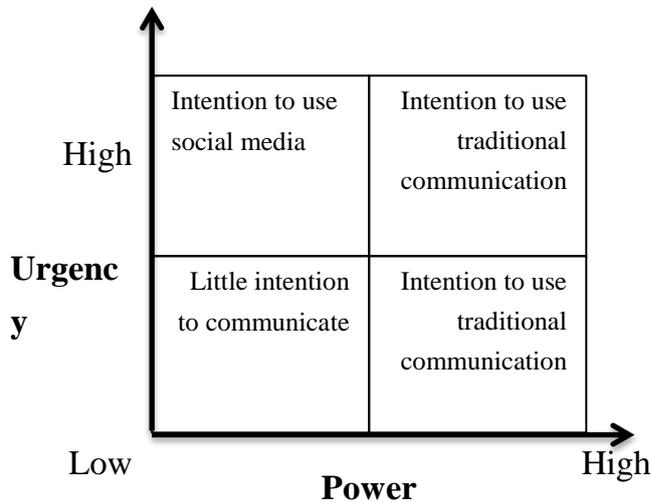


FIGURE 2. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SALIENCE AND COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES.

Social media may have played a role in the activists’ campaign to change the outcome of the election. About 400 voters changed their ballot to vote “park-friendly” politicians in to the city council. Instructions for this were posted online on their web site, on Facebook, and also got media coverage. While we cannot measure how many voters were influenced to change their ballot from social media or from other sources, activists report some success with their online campaign. However, this effort was not enough to get the new city council to overrule the previous decision.

6 DISCUSSION: SOCIAL MEDIA AS PUBLIC SPHERE?

While the Internet and social media have a potential for extending the public sphere (Johannessen, 2012, Papacharissi, 2002, Dahlgren, 2005), social media does not act as an ideal type public sphere in this particular case, when analysed against the Dahlberg’s (2001) criteria.

The discussion spaces in social media are only partially autonomous. There is little discussion between the different stakeholders, and the activists owned all of the groups we identified. This was also the case in other discussion spaces. The local newspapers’ debate sections were skewed to the activists, as was participation in the workshops.

There was little evidence of a rational-critical discourse or reflective behaviour. Instead, most arguments were one-sided statements supporting the activists’ established points of view. Neither was there much evidence of a critical debate, or of discussants altering their views based on the input of others.

The arguments put forward by the participants was only partially based on all of the available information, as the developer interests were not present at all in social media. One could argue that the developer’s interests were known through other channels, but even so they were not taken into consideration by those who chose to participate in social media discussions.

Finally, we found only partial support for the criterion that everyone should have an equal right to participate. While everyone can form their own Facebook groups or other social media spaces, our case shows that those with high urgency and little power to make their interests come true, are more likely to use social media. Supporters of development are not at all present or active discussants on any of the Facebook groups we have examined. Neither are politicians or other important stakeholder groups with less urgency and/or more power.

Thus, we argue that that it is difficult to achieve an ideal type of public sphere in a case involving low power/high urgency and low urgency/high power stakeholder groups, since only the groups with low power will invest time in social media. The discussion spaces in this case should instead be seen as what Trenz and Eder (2004) call a mass public sphere, a public sphere based on political protest. This type of public sphere is recognised by “an active public relates to arcane practices of domination which exclude citizens from participation in decision-making processes” (Trenz and Eder, 2004), a description well suited to the findings in the development case. This should have some implications for how social media is treated in the political decision-making

7 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

In this article, we have examined social media use in an urban planning case in a Norwegian municipality. A stakeholder salience analysis illustrates that stakeholder groups with low power and high urgency are more likely to use social media to promote their interests than other stakeholder groups. This has implications for the public sphere, as we found that high power stakeholders were less likely to participate. Consequently, social media did not provide a well-functioning public sphere in this case. Rather, it becomes one of many channels where the low power stakeholder attempts to reach out. These findings have some important implications.

For practitioners, our research shows that to attract high power stakeholders such as politicians to social media, we need to examine ways of motivating these groups to participate, which most likely would include some way of allowing high power stakeholders to use their power. As it is, social media is a new channel for reaching out, competing with other existing channels such as face to face communication, traditional media and surveys. Until social media are made part of formal decision-making processes, already powerful stakeholders are unlikely to participate in social media.

There are two possible approaches to this, both of which opens up new questions and issues for research. The first is that municipalities and city councils should not become active participants in social media, but rather see social media as one of many places to receive informal input. This approach means paying attention to relevant social media channels, but not to act as suppliers of social media or social media spaces. If the public sector is not willing to change their decision making processes to increase citizens’ power and decrease other stakeholders’ power on the decision being made, the unbalanced position continues where major stakeholders are not actively using social media and thus not contributing to the public sphere in these media. If that is the case, it does not make sense for the municipalities to initiate the use of social media as public sphere, since major stakeholders are anyhow not motivated for participating in the online discussions.

The second approach is to make social media an integrated part of government processes and thus force high power stakeholders to exercise their power using the social media instead of traditional communication channels. Only then will (e)participation increase and a true public sphere will be created. As activists seem to use social media regardless of government supply, one could argue that it only makes sense for governments to facilitate the use of social media when their use is integrated in formal processes.

Our paper addresses Mitchell et al.'s (1997) call for investigation of the usefulness of their work on stakeholder salience and appropriateness of the salience attributes. Our work illustrates the usefulness of investigating stakeholder salience as this contributed to detailed understanding of social media use in our case. While Mitchell et al. (1997) appear to consider power, legitimacy, and urgency to be of equal importance in assessing salience, our findings suggest that at the context of social media use, power and urgency are relatively more

important than legitimacy. This can be seen as a theoretical proposition that can be further investigated in other settings.

For research, we contribute to a better understanding of who participates in social media and why. Through the stakeholder salience analysis we identified power is the main determining factor, especially when low power is combined with high urgency. More studies are needed to investigate the contextual sensitivity of our findings, to shed further light onto the relative importance of the three attributes on the use of social media as public sphere.

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Genres of communication in activist eParticipation: A comparison of new and old media

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we examine the genres of communication in an activist case in a Norwegian municipality. As genres evolve over time, and the emergence of new genre properties is a sign of a mature technology, we compare the genres used in traditional paper-based media with the genres used in social media, to examine the maturity of social media as a medium for activist eParticipation. We also discuss the usage patterns of traditional vs. social media, and their relation to the public sphere. Our findings indicate that so far, the genres used for activism in social media are very similar to their offline counterparts, with some new genres and genre characteristics emerging. Social media is moving towards maturity, but still has a way to go.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.4. [Computers and Society]

General Terms

Measurement, Documentation, Human Factors, Theory

Keywords

eParticipation, Social Media, Genre Theory, Public Sphere.

INTRODUCTION

Our media and communication habits are increasingly moving towards the digital domain and to social media. While political communication has been lagging behind, this area is also increasingly becoming digitized [1, 2], and as such is forced to change in order to adapt to the logic of two-way communication media [3]. This move towards new media has been hastened by what is perceived as a lessening of civic engagement in traditional channels. Voter turnout is in decline [4], there are fewer members of political parties, and less interest for political participation and debate [5]. These perceived threats to democracy have led government towards a number of projects where digital media is used in an attempt to boost participation and civic engagement [2, 6, 7].

The public sphere, said to have disappeared in the age of mass media, has re-emerged online [8, 9]. But how new is the online public sphere? How much has political communication online been adapted to the two-way, inclusive logic of “new” media?

To answer this question, we look towards genre theory. Genre theory tells us that communicative acts recurring over time, with similar form and function, can be analyzed and categorized into a set of communication genres [10]. Genres used within an organization or a given context can further be categorized into a repertoire of suitable genres for a given context [11].

When moving from “old” to “new” media, genres from the old medium will typically be copied as-is and used for some time in the new. After some time, new genres emerge, and old ones are adapted to fit the new medium. The maturity of a medium can to some degree be measured by examining the genres of the new and old medium [12]. Maturity is in this case understood as the degree to which the actors involved in using the medium agree on the conventions and rules for the medium, as well as the emergence of new genres, or old genres which are adapted to the functionality of the new medium.

In this paper, we identify the genre systems used for political activist communication in new and old media, through a case study of an urban development project in a mid-sized Norwegian city. The actors involved in the case have used both traditional print media, social media and the Internet in their communication, and this allows us to categorize the same message as different genres in different media.

In addition, we discuss these findings against the ideals of the public sphere [13]. Are the new media mature enough to cater for a public sphere, or are we still in transition between the “old” and “new”? And if there is an online public sphere in this case, what kind of public sphere is it? Finally, we discuss how social capital impacts participation and the public sphere.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section two presents our theoretical foundation, consisting of the public sphere, genre theory and social capital. Sections three and four outline the research method we have applied, and presents a thick case description. In section five we present our findings, which are separated into the genre analysis of the new and old media, and an analysis of the extent to which these genre systems support a public sphere. Finally, we present our conclusions, limitations and some possibilities for future research.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The Public Sphere

The Public Sphere is defined as “that domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed”. An autonomous “place” where citizens can debate government policy and act as an informal correction when governments step out of bounds [14], separated from the state and economic interests [14, 15]. The public sphere can be understood as a mediating layer between government and citizen, where citizens discuss and agree on issues of public interest, as it is “the interaction between citizens, civil society, and the state, communicating through the public sphere, that ensures that the balance between stability and social change is maintained.” [16]

The existence of a public, which is aware of itself and able to form an opinion, is essential for the Public Sphere. When the bourgeoisie class began to challenge the power of the church and state during the formation of the European nation states in the 19th century, we saw the first modern example of the public forming an opinion. Before, in the feudal age, the church and kings of Europe had no use for a public in the modern sense of the word, as the kings and nobility had no electorate to hold them accountable for their decisions [17]. In modern representative democracy this has changed. After the initial formation of the European nations followed two devastating world wars, several nations falling back from democracy to dictatorship, and back to democracy, and all of this has contributed to a strengthening of the western world’s belief in democracy and governments’ accountability to the public [17].

Public opinion can be understood as the shared understanding of an issue, reached through debate by rational citizens [18], and is considered a necessary function in a modern democracy: “The public sphere is an essential component of sociopolitical organization because it is the space where people come together as citizens and articulate their autonomous views to influence the political institutions of society” [16].

Some claim the Public Sphere no longer exists, due to the spread of mass media and commoditization of information, along with the disappearance of the old “salons” and other physical spaces where the bourgeoisie assembled and debated. When everyone are allowed to participate, the public sphere holds no value [19]. This view is controversial, and has been criticised for being overly elitist and for not taking into consideration the

changing times we live in (Hartley, 1996). Rather than longing for the salons of old, a number of researchers have pointed to the Internet as the medium for modern day Public Sphere [8, 9, 20, 21]. Studies of political participation indicate that Internet use has led to an increase in the public’s political interest [22], and it is claimed that the Public Sphere of today is no longer a physical place. Rather, it is found in the media and in networks and acts as the “cultural/informational repository of the ideas and projects that feed public debate.” [16].

There is, however, a problem with the online Public Sphere. Online activities, even more so than their offline counterparts, tend to be focused around people’s interests, at least in the Norwegian context. It is a lot easier to pick and choose only that which we are interested in when we move around on the Internet [23]. Interest-based communities and segregation can easily become a democratic problem. When people socialize only with others who have the same interests, points of view and likes and dislikes, we lose that space in society where people of diverse backgrounds can assemble, debate, and shape public opinion [24]. And while the Internet is promising, not everyone agrees that we currently have a functioning Public Sphere. A lack of attention to issues of public interest, our habits as online consumers as well as general political disinterest can explain why the internet has not revitalized the public sphere to the extent some scholars have expected [25].

Habermas, who has been criticized for being elitist, redefines the public sphere to better suit the current media environment. He concludes that two things are needed for a networked and media-based Public Sphere: “*mediated political communication in the public sphere can facilitate deliberative legitimization processes in complex societies only if a self-regulating media system gains independence from its social environments and if anonymous audiences grant a feedback between an informed elite discourse and a responsive civil society.*” [26].

Several scholars have operationalized the requirements for a Public Sphere. Dahlberg [13] has identified six requirements: A public sphere must be *Autonomous* from state and economic power. It should be based on a *rational-critical discourse*, where participants are engaged in reciprocal critique of normative positions that are criticisable rather than dogmatic claims. Participants must be *reflective*, and critically examine their cultural values, assumptions, and interests, as well as the larger social context. Participants must attempt to *understand* the argument from the other’s perspective. Each participant must make an effort to *make known all information* relevant to the particular problem under consideration, and everyone is *equally entitled* to introduce and question ideas and issues.

Trenz & Eder [27] presents four ideal-types of the Public Sphere, thereby extending the requirements made by Dahlberg. A Public Sphere can be discourse-based, based on political protest, on political campaigning, or simply on consensus. Another issue that can be measured, especially in cases of online activism, is the extent to which the online activity is linked with the mainstream media, and through that to the wider public sphere.

Social capital

While the public sphere is the ideal public debate should be striving for, the concept of social capital can be used to explain who participates [28]. Social capital refers to

“connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them ... ‘social capital’ calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.” [29]

Some claim that a high level of social capital is an important factor in explaining the Scandinavian welfare societies. despite high taxes, big government and a relatively flat income structure, the Scandinavian countries are among the richest countries in the world [30]. The high amount of social capital in Scandinavia acts as “grease” for transactions, lowering the cost of doing business, as there is less need for formalized contracts and expensive legal agreements (ibid.).

Social capital is often measured in terms of individual and institutional trust and reciprocity, and divided into bonding and bridging social capital. Trusting individuals lowers barriers to participation and simplifies transactions, as there is less need for written contracts and other control measures. Institutional trust indicates that government institutions such as police, judicial system and administration are functioning well. Reciprocity, the degree in which people are willing to give something back when they receive something, is another measure of social capital [31, 32].

There are several types of social capital. Bonding social capital is the connections between individuals in a group, such as the traditional village or a local community. Bridging social capital is the connection between different groups, where individuals in a group have ties to individuals in other groups [29]. A third type of social capital is “maintained social capital”, the ability to keep one’s connections also when one is physically separated from them [33].

In Information Systems, social capital have been used to measure both how technology affects social capital, and how social capital affects development of technology [32]. Other studies have shown that the characteristics and user population of social networking services is important for the level of social capital and for the outcome of political debate on such sites [34]. And that spending time in front of screens can increase social capital, depending on the activities we are conducting [35].

Genres of communication

Genre theory has been applied to study communication patterns in a number of eParticipation studies [36-39]. Genres can act as a tool for studying the role of communication in social processes [10]. Genres develop over time, in the interaction between predefined rules for communication and the people that are communicating. Genres are useful when studying social media use in eParticipation, as the introduction of new media over time often leads to new communication practices which genre theory allows us to map and analyze [38]. By

studying communication genres instead of the technology used to communicate, we can discover how communication changes and evolves over time [11].

Genres can be defined using the 5w1h-method By asking *where, why, when, who, what* and *how*, we can uncover the purpose, contents, placement in time, location, participants, structure and medium for communication [40, 41]:

- *Where* tells us where the communication takes place, the medium being used, or the physical location.
- *Why* explains the purpose of the genre, as understood by those using it.
- *When* refers to the time where communication takes place. For example, the “job application” genre is enacted when applying for a job, and needs to be in by a set date.
- *Who* defines the actors involved in communication, the sender and receiver of the genre.
- *What* is the content of the genre, and defines what is being communicated, and any relations to other genres.
- Finally, *How* describes the technical needs for delivery of the genre, for example which medium is being used, or any other technical necessities.

Genres are further identified by having a common content (themes and topics of the conversation) and form (physical and linguistic features), as well as technological functionality in genres enacted through electronic media [12]. A common mistake is to confuse genre and medium, especially when including functionality in the analysis. E-mail is a medium, while the job application sent via e-mail is the genre [10].

It is possible to go beyond single genres, and look at the genre system. Genre systems are collections of genres that belong together [41]. For example, the previously mentioned job application is part of a system where the job listing comes first, followed by the job application and some kind of feedback on the application. When examining an entire genre system, we can analyse communicative practices over time, and how new genres emerge and influence the ways we communicate [11].

By analysing the genre system of different media, we can see if there are differences between how the genres are enacted, and identify the genres that are most used by participants in an eParticipation project (ibid.). By applying genre theory in the study of new media forms, we get a more comprehensive analysis than what we would get from only looking at the functionality of the technology behind the new medium [11].

RESEARCH METHOD

The research was framed as a qualitative case study, of which this paper is one in a series of planned publications. The objective of qualitative research is “understanding...by investigating the perspectives and behavior of the people in these situations and the context

within which they act” [42], and qualitative methods are appropriate for exploratory studies and for examining how something happens [42, 43]. The case study examines the phenomenon in its “natural setting”, collects data from multiple sources, and the researcher may have limited knowledge about the outcome of the research [44]. Case studies are particularly suited for research on new phenomena where the actors’ experiences and interpretations and the wider context are important factors [45].

Our initial objective for the project as a whole was to explore and understand how social media was being used by activist groups in a Norwegian municipality. As part of that objective, the research question for this paper is *how are the genre systems of old and new media used for activist communication, and how do these genre systems fit with the public sphere ideal?*

The urban planning case was chosen for the following reasons: The process has a long history, dating back almost 30 years. This provides rich insights into the process, and especially into how the introduction of social media has changed the way the actors communicate. The number of people involved also made access to interview subjects easy. Further, the first author has followed the case as a citizen over several years before engaging in it from a research perspective, which leads to a thorough understanding of the case context. There is a risk of bias, but we have attempted to minimize this risk through a constant analysis and questioning of our findings.

The data used in this case was collected between February and November 2011. We made 12 semi-structured interviews with representatives related to the case: Members of the city council (4), officials from the city administration responsible for developing the plans (2), the private investor’s representative (1), local media (1 + informal meetings and e-mail with 2 others), representatives from the three main activist groups (3), and one representative from the regional governments heritage department. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviewer gave a brief introduction to the research project, and asked the respondents to talk freely within the context of the case.

Interviews should be supplemented by other forms of data [46]. For the findings reported in this paper, this mainly consists of postings from Facebook groups and letters to the editor. These are the basis for the genre analysis.

In addition, we attended one workshop meeting and two city council meetings, where field notes were made and written out. All documents relevant to the case between 2007 and 2011 that were made available by the city council were collected and analyzed. This includes minutes from council meetings, consultancy reports, architectural plans, formal hearing documents and the results of two surveys made in relation to the development project. These data sources are not used explicitly in this paper, but nonetheless influence our conclusions and as such should be mentioned.

The data was analyzed using genre theory and the 5W1H framework [41] to identify the genre systems of old and new media. Old media is represented by the print edition of the local newspaper, while new media is represented by several Facebook groups related to the case. The

analysis was inspired by a genre analysis of a municipal online discussion board [36].

Finally, we wanted to examine how the genre systems of old and new media were related to the public sphere. This examination was used following the framework of [28], where several constructs of a public sphere are measured, including the amount of social capital among the participants.

CASE DESCRIPTION

The case is about a cove of 5 acres, located about 1 km from the city center of a Norwegian mid-sized city (40.000 inhabitants). There are two land owners: a private investor and the local municipality own about 50% each.

Over the past 30 years, there have been a number of plans for development of the cove. In the 1980’s, the city council decided to build a new harbor in the area, but the development was halted and the only structure built was the local hub of a national freight company, resulting in the cove becoming a no-man’s land of car parks and freight trucks. The area is very attractive for development, as it is by the sea and also the last open area close to the city center in a city where the topography makes development difficult.

There is strong agreement in the population that something should be done about the cove. No one is pleased with the current situation. Between 2001 and 2006 a number of plans were presented. In 2007, the city council agreed on an area development plan, and in 2008, the municipality invited several architect firms to draw new plans for the area based on this development plan. Plans were presented for a mainly residential project consisting of six five-story apartment buildings, with the ground floor reserved for business purposes. The idea behind the plans was to create a new urban district, with shops, restaurants and apartments. This was to be an extension of the current city center.

When these plans were presented, local opposition began to arise. The local residents’ association started campaigning against the development by talking directly to politicians, writing to the local newspaper, and setting up stands and organizing protest concerts. Their main argument was that this was the last area close to the city center which could be developed into a green recreational park. They also organized a campaign to have politicians sympathetic to their cause voted in to the city council in the 2007 municipal election, and succeeded so well that the plans were downcast by the new city council in 2008.

One year later, new plans were presented. This time the plans were only for the parts of the area owned by the private investor, and consisted of three high-rise residential buildings. The idea behind these plans was that with these high-rise buildings, the city would have room for a recreational park on the remaining 2.5 acres owned by the municipality.

Once again the residents’ association protested, and this time new activist groups were formed and joined the opposition. The new groups consisted of creative professionals, local historians and heritage people. They still argued for a recreational park in the entire 5 acre area, but also introduced arguments for retaining the area’s historical heritage by preserving the view from the sea to the old wooden houses in the surrounding hills.

Once again the activist groups were able to stop the proposed plans.

In 2010, the municipality restarted the process, and decided to come up with a new area development plan. After being criticized for not listening to the citizens when the past plans were laid out, the municipality decided to run this as an inclusive process.

In 2011, they arranged three workshops prior to the plans being developed by the city administrators. One of them was open to the public. The other two were for invited groups only, but included all three new activist groups, as well as public and private organizations with a stake in the area. In total, 30 different groups and organizations were invited to these workshops. Workshop participants got four different alternatives to work with: The entire area as a recreational park, 25%, 50% and 75% development. One plan for each of these alternatives were presented and discussed in the final workshop.

The workshop participants were somewhat skewed towards activists and others who opposed housing and industrial development. The private investor did not attend the workshops, nor did other stakeholders who had an interest in development. This would later be used as an argument for development.

In addition to the workshops, an online survey was distributed to the general public and presented at the final workshop. The survey was based on the same alternatives as the workshops, and respondents were also asked a number of questions about which activities they wanted in the area, where buildings should be erected etc. 55,7% of the respondents (N=688) reported they wanted at least half the area for a recreational park.

The local newspaper distributed another survey two months after, with similar results. Around half the respondents wanted a mix of recreational park and urban development in the area. Respondents were also asked how important they considered this case to be, and 40% reported it to be important or very important.

Both surveys were open to interpretation, which lead developers and activists to argue a great deal about what was the true public opinion in the matter.

Several respondents, both activists and government officials, have called this a sham process, and claimed that politicians had no intention other than to soothe the opposition. When faced with these charges, politicians have denied them in the interviews, claiming they created the workshops and surveys in an honest attempt to be more inclusive.

The municipal administration used the input from the workshops and survey, and came up with 9 alternatives for the new area development plan. At this stage only the building footprint, how much of the cove to set aside for buildings, was discussed. The argument for this was that previous debates had tried to cover too much, which lead to no decision on the overall plan. The administration supported an alternative which meant 75% of the area was to be developed, and the city council voted in support of this in a council meeting held late March 2011, with 21 votes against 18.

In august 2011 the city council assembled again, to vote on building heights and the contract for development with the private investor and his partners. After long

debate, which included a vote on a change to the area plan passed in the last meeting, the council again voted in the support of development, with 24 votes against 14.

Both meetings had a large audience consisting mainly of activists aged between 40 and 70. There were few, if any, people under the age of 35 present, in spite of activist claims that youth were very engaged in the case and were big supporters of a recreational park. In both meetings, activists created a lot of disturbance, causing the mayor to threaten to close off the meeting to the public. After the August meeting, activists were furious, claiming the politicians had failed to listen to the public.

In the autumn of 2011 there was a new municipal election. Once again the activists created a pamphlet showing how people could vote if they wanted “park-friendly” politicians in the new city council, who could re-open the case. The lists were distributed online, through a web site, were promoted on Facebook and also spread through physical means and word of mouth.

Although not a complete success, the activists were once again able to influence who got elected to the city council. About 400 people seemed to follow the activists’ advice.

At the time data collection ended (November 2011), the previous city council’s decision had not been up for discussion in the new city council, and the new mayor has told the media that it is not likely the case will be reopened.

However, the activists have vowed to keep on fighting, and at the time of writing have complained to regional authorities about procedural errors in the existing resolution. The complaints will most likely not be heard, at least not lead to changes in the development plans.

Even though it seems as if the activists have lost their fight, there is no doubt that citizen initiated participation has had considerable influence in this case. The activists have, through their targeted efforts, managed to influence the composition of two city councils, have made the city council swing against development several times, and through this they have delayed development for almost 5 years, and forced the city to concessions such as the workshops and survey, as well as the creation of several reports on noise, pollution and other issues.

FINDINGS

In this section the findings from the genre systems of print media (letters to the editor) and social media (Facebook groups) are presented, followed by an analysis of how the two systems rate in terms of contributing to the public sphere.

Genre systems

The individual genres were identified through applying the 5WIH-method to letters to the editor in the printed edition of the local newspaper, and postings on Facebook groups created to discuss the case. In order to examine the genre system, additional columns for the system were added, as well as a column showing the relation between genres. These additional columns were inspired by [36].

Earlier research conducted by the author has shown that there are three objectives for why politicians choose to communicate in digital media. These are dialogue with citizens, contributions from citizens, and involvement in

party activities [39]. Effective political communication should thus address these.

These objectives can be interpreted and as genres in their own right. Table 1 shows the three objectives as genres.

The genres identified in the discussion spaces we are observing can be analyzed as to which of these “genre objectives” they support (table 2), and this knowledge can be applied by site administrators and politicians in such a way as to facilitate the use of genres which are most likely to lead to the desired objective.

Table 39: Political objectives as genres

	Dialogue	Contribution	Involvement
Why	Involve citizens in public debate	Knowledge about citizen concerns	Raise funds. Get people to volunteer
When	Continuous	Election time	Election time
What	Conversation between citizens and politicians/citizens and citizens	Q&A. Voter stories	Competitions, membership forms, information
Who	Politicians, party members, citizens	Politicians, party members, voters	Voters, sympathizers
Where	SNS, web site	SNS, web site	SNS, web site
How	Encourage dialogue. Open and personal language. Citizen-generated content.	Encourage contributions and questions from voters	Competitions, theme sites, cross-publication

While letters to the editor could be said to be a genre in itself, there are some significant differences in style and form. As could be expected from a mature medium, there are a limited number of genres to be found. Except for the “poem” genre, the main difference between the genres in the letters to the editor section lies in the level of formality and how the arguments are presented.

Some letters are kept in a formal tone and based on facts, while others are more personal, some bordering on libelous. In the beginning there were several voices represented, but as the case progresses the activists, who were against development, produced the vast majority of letters. Letters tend to become more aggressive over time, with a somewhat increased focus on individuals and less on formal, fact-based debate. As it is mainly those opposing development who write to the paper, there is little direct debate.

However, a number of the writers address politicians by name, citing things the politician(s) said in council meetings or other places.

All in all, the genre system of the editorial column functions well for disseminating ones ideas, somewhat well for debate (although the slow speed of print means you have to pay close attention if you want to catch who is addressing whom), and the majority of letters are at least somewhat fact-based and formal. The genres in this system are presented in table 2. The first two rows describe the purpose and actors of the genre system (letters to the editor), while the rest of the table is a 5W1H analysis of the individual genres identified within the genre system.

Table 40: Genre system in newspaper editorial section

System: why	Promote and conduct debate about local issues	
System: whose	Owned and edited by the local newspaper. Open to everyone, but editors decide who gets printed	
Genre	Opinion, formal	Opinion, informal
Where	Newspaper	Newspaper
Why	Convince others through presenting facts	Convince others through appeals to emotions
When	Continuously, more when case is processed in city council or during election time	Continuously, more when case is processed in city council or during election time
Who	Activist to citizen/politicians Developer to citizen/politicians	Activist to citizen/politicians
What	Presents a view, followed by supporting facts and arguments	Presents a view, supported by emotional statements or unsupported views
How	Letters are sent to the editor and published.	Letters are sent to the editor and published.
Relation to table 1	Dialogue, contribution	Dialogue
Genre	Poem	Personal attacks
Where	Newspaper	Newspaper
Why	Gain attention through an unusual genre	Vent own feelings, discredit the one being attacked
When	Infrequently, no set pattern	Continuously, more when case is processed in city council or during election time, or when newspaper editorial have written positively about

		development
Who	Activist/citizen to citizens	Activist to politicians/developer/new s editor
What	Short rhymes, aimed at touching people's emotions	Points to previous letter or quote and argues against it. Some simply claim the person being attacked is less gifted because s/he means what s/he means
How	Letters are sent to the editor and published	Letters are sent to the editor and published.
Relation to table 1	None	None

All the Facebook groups we found were run by activists, and most of the participants in the groups were either activists or citizens supporting the activists' opposition to development. There were also a lot of passive members who did not contribute in the discussions on the wall, whereof some were representatives of the city council or the media that joined in order to follow what the activists were saying and planning.

There are some noteworthy differences between the two genre systems. In social media we see many of the same genres, but also some new ones where functionality of the medium plays an important role. The links genre makes use of the networked nature of the Internet to provide fast access to information stored elsewhere, and link targets often contain multimedia content.

Multimedia also helps to enrich some of the other genres. The formal and informal opinion genres are present in both the "old" and "new" media, but are enacted somewhat differently in new media. In the Facebook groups we see a lot of images and also some videos made by the activists to show how the planned development will impact the surroundings. These provide valuable extra information that can be difficult to present in a printed medium with limited space.

On the other hand, the postings on Facebook tend to be shorter, and there is less fact-based discussion and postings seem to be more improvised, which provides less information than the longer and more thought-out letters to the editor.

Another difference is the spontaneous "greetings/cheers" genre, where people will congratulate each other, or citizens will write a short post to show their support for the activists' case. This kind of informal communication is not likely to be printed, as it does not contribute to the debate, but nonetheless acts as important feedback and perhaps a moral boost to the activists.

Table 41: Genre system in social media

System: why	Activist groups fighting against the planned development	
System: whose	Owned by activist groups or individuals, open to everyone but mostly participants are opposed to development	
Genre	Opinion, formal	Opinion, informal

Where	Facebook group wall	Facebook group wall
Why	Convince others through presenting facts	Present short opinion on something
When	Ongoing	Ongoing
Who	Activist to activist/citizen	Activist to activist/citizen
What	Presents a view, followed by supporting facts and arguments. Often with links, pictures, video	Presents a view, supported by emotional statements or unsupported views. Sometimes with links, pictures, video
How	Group members post messages on wall	Group members post messages on wall
Relation to table 1	Dialogue, contribution	Dialogue
Genre	Call to action	Personal attacks
Where	Facebook group wall	Facebook group wall
Why	Get people to act on something	Discredit opponents
When	Before city council meetings or other events where there is a need to do something	Ongoing
Who	Activist to activist	Activist to developer, politicians
What	Invites people to participate in demonstrations, contact politicians or cast their vote in a certain way	Often unprovoked short comments claiming a named person or group are in the wrong
How	Group members post messages on wall	Group members post messages on wall
Relation to table 1	Involvement	None
Genre	Links	Greetings/cheers
Where	Facebook group wall	Facebook group wall
Why	Inform others about content posted elsewhere	Congratulate each other after victories, raise morale
When	Ongoing	When the city council vote in favor of activists
Who	Activist to activist/citizen	Activist/citizen to activists
What	Links to other online spaces, often multimedia content	Positive comments about a recent event, or about the activists' work
How	Group members post messages on wall, often with a short comment	Group members post messages on wall
Relation to table 1	Dialogue	None

Public sphere and social capital

The second part of the research question was how these genre systems contribute to the public sphere. To measure this the framework of [28] is applied. The framework analyses the public sphere using Dahlberg's criteria for a public sphere (see section 2.1), as well as looking for network effects to help spread the content of the discussion to more people, the type of community being supported, and the type of public sphere being supported.

As social capital is said to influence who participates in a public sphere, social capital is also measured using the constructs mentioned in section 2.2. Together, these constructs helps us to understand how the communication spaces we are examining supports a public sphere, and thus how valuable they are in maintaining democratic ideals.

Table 42: Public sphere characteristics of "old" media

Theory	Concept	Case observations
Public sphere	Dahlberg's criteria	Partially present, but participants are not attempting to understand the others' perspective. Debate is fairly rational and reflective
	Network effects	Letters are read and distributed to others, and often answered or followed up in new letters.
	community	Readers and writers all belong to the same local community, some have regular contact outside of editorial columns
	Type of PS	Discourse-based (after some time more towards political protest)
Social Capital	Bridging	Letters are read by both those who agree with and those who oppose the author's position
	Bonding	Shows others of the same opinion that they are not alone, helps bring the community closer together (for activists. The developer is more on his own).
	Trust & reciprocity	Is less of an issue in old media, as there is an editorial middleman who decides what is printed and not.
	Maintained social capital	Writers address each other by name, even though they may not meet in person.

Table 43: Public sphere characteristics of social media

Theory	Concept	Case observations
Public sphere	Dahlberg's criteria	Discourse is more one-way and less argument-based than in the old media, as there are mainly activists taking part in these groups.
	Network effects	Postings can be re-posted on the walls of group members, helping to spread the ideas presented to a larger audience.
	Community	There is a sense of shared objectives and common interest in the groups, which help create a sense of community.
	Type of PS	Political protest. There are very few posts disagreeing with the activists.
Social Capital	Bridging	There is little evidence of bridging social capital. Content seems to stay within the group. However, it was not possible to measure the extent to which content was reposted on individual's walls.
	Bonding	Greetings/cheers genre as well as the general sense of agreement contributes to bonding social capital.
	Trust & reciprocity	Participants in the groups trust each other, which is natural as long as there is a common goal
	Maintained social capital	Not easy to measure, but there is certainly contact and discussion between the members in the group.

While there are differences between the two genre systems, they each contribute to the public sphere in their own way. The genre system of traditional media is perhaps better suited to support a traditional Habermasian public sphere, where people of different opinions come together to discuss and debate. Letters printed in the newspaper are more reflective and argumentative than posts in social media, and reach a bigger audience than just those who already agree with the author of the letter or post. However, the editorial column is only as good as the people writing to it, and over time the activists view is almost the only one present, making it less a space for debate and more of a one-way communication channel.

The genres in social media are less in line with Habermas' traditional public sphere ideals, but works great to support a political protest public sphere. Activists and their supporters have a place to meet, where they can discuss, support each other, share information and maybe recruit new members. And there is also the added value that some journalists do use social media in their work, to

discover new issues and find new sources. Sometimes social media gives them ideas for stories they would otherwise not have written. An informal e-mail survey sent to the journalists in the local newspaper confirms that this happens.

Also, the network and bridging effects of social media are potentially a lot stronger. We do not see these effects very strongly in this particular case, perhaps because the case is localized to a small geographical area, and mainly concerns the inhabitants of that area. The users of social media already belong to the same physical community, which means there is less need for virtual networking.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This paper has examined the genre systems of the letters to the editor column in traditional print media and in social media, with the purpose of uncovering differences and similarities between the two systems, and to measure if social media is beginning to produce media-specific genres for eParticipation, and what this means for the public sphere.

The findings indicate that we are beginning to see new genres in social media, as well as old genres being reinvented to better suit the functionality of new media. The addition of multimedia content to existing genres is one example of this. While we cannot say that social media has matured, we can conclude by saying that social media is moving ever more towards maturity.

New media has room for a bigger variety of genres than traditional print media, and their instant feedback allows for a faster dialogue and more participants. This does however come at a price. Contributions in social media are often less well thought through, and not backed up by facts and rational arguments in the same way as we see in the traditional media. In that sense, the strength of the new is also its weakness.

In terms of contributing to the public sphere, both genre systems do that, each in their own way. Traditional media better supports the Habermasian ideal of rational discourse, while social media is a good supporter of the political protest public sphere. As the examined social media groups are so homogenous, there is little debate going on. Social media does have a place in the wider “general public sphere”, as a source of information for news journalists. As tables one through three show, some genres are better suited than others for those who want to contribute to the political debate and to gain the attention of politicians. Genres that accommodate one of the three political objectives could perhaps be seen to contribute more to the public sphere than genres that do not address these objectives.

There are some limitations to the findings in this paper. As they are based on one single case, it is not possible to generalize the findings outside of the case context. Other cases in different contexts would perhaps provide very different results. Future research efforts could include examining how the different genres should be enacted to support the objectives in table 1, and through them the public sphere. Also, more research is needed on how the added functionality of new media can contribute to eParticipation, if certain media are better suited than others for a given genre, and what combination of genres and media would be likely to provide good results for the concrete objectives of various activist campaigns.

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Communications of the Association for Information Systems

CAIS 

Political Social Media sites as Public Sphere: A Case Study of the Norwegian Labour Party

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Abstract:

Political interest and voter turnout is in steady decline. In an attempt to renew interest for political matters, political parties and governments have attempted to create new digital meeting places, with the hope that social media can contribute to renew the public sphere and thereby increase political awareness in the population. Communicating in new media demands adaption to the culture of the new medium, and the networked nature of the Internet poses challenges to old ways of thinking, as we can no longer talk about one public sphere, but rather a networked public sphere consisting of a multitude of discussion spaces. In this article, we contribute to the understanding of the networked public sphere and online political communication through a case study of MyLaborParty.no, a social network run by a Norwegian political party. Our findings indicate that political parties can create a thriving part of

Volume xx, Article x, pp. xx-xx, Month

The manuscript was received mm/dd/yyyy and was with the authors x months for y

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, democratic dialogue is increasingly moving online, especially among the younger generation. We are living in a network society (Castells, 2000), and the public sphere, which in the past was seen as one common discussion space, is slowly being transformed into a networked public sphere consisting of a number of interconnected spaces for dialogue and discussion (M. R. Johannessen, 2012).

This transition also leads to a more fragmented media landscape. This poses a challenge to political parties and organizations. The individual media consumer now to a greater degree can choose and customize our their media consumption (Stroud, 2008; Tewksbury, 2005). In order to reach out to the public, political parties and organizations needs to be present in more than one medium, or risk large proportions of the public not being aware of current political and societal events (Gurevitch, Coleman, & Blumler, 2009).

Over the past few decades, political participation has been in a steady decline. Fewer people participate in elections or become members of political parties (Gray & Caul, 2000). The broad social movements of the past no longer interest us. Instead we favour issues-based politics, engaging in single issues, working with the political party supporting the issue, but not taking an interest in the broader picture (Østerud, Engelstad, & Selle, 2003).

It has been claimed that the Internet and social media can contribute to renew the public's interest for politics (Brandtzæg & Lüders, 2008; Macintosh, McKay-Hubbard, & Shell, 2005; Tambouris & Tarabanis, 2007). Social media can be defined as web based services where users can create a public or semi-public profile, create a list of users they are connected to, and access their own and other users' list of contacts (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). As an ever increasing part of the population moves online, it at least seems clear that political parties should establish an online presence, and take part in this transition. The challenge is to discover how to use these new media. Social media has a different culture from traditional media, with its focus on user participation and user-generated content (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; O'Reilly, 2005). Existing studies of political parties' use of social media show that they have not fully embraced or understood the social media culture of sharing and two-way communication (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009), that there is disagreement between citizens and politicians on how to communicate in social media (M. Johannessen, 2010), and that this lack of understanding has limited the outcome of social media use (Kalnes, 2009). Thus, political parties need to learn how to use new media, and to discover how to engage citizens so that the public sphere is renewed online. As the public sphere becomes a number of fragmented small spheres for discussion, learning how to participate in these different spheres becomes more and more important.

Media are important in the political process, as transmitters of messages between citizens and politicians (McNair, 2011). To understand and classify these messages, genre theory can be applied. Genres can act as a tool for studying the role of communication in social processes (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). Genres are useful when studying social media use in a political context (Sæbø & Päivärinta, 2005). Applying genre theory in the study of new media forms provide a more comprehensive analysis of new media, beyond that of only looking at the functionality of the technology behind the new medium (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994). Mapping the genres being used in political discussions and examining how they contribute to the objectives for political communication thus allows for better understanding of how one should communicate in social media.

While fragmented media consumption is a challenge, the networked nature of the Internet, and the culture of sharing and participation found in social media also provides opportunities for the creation of a networked public sphere where participants share their ideas and views across several of these smaller and fragmented spaces (Benkler, 2006; Castells, 2008; Chadwick & Howard, 2009). There has been little empirical focus on this issue in a political discussion context, thus there is a need to examine if and how these network effects are present in political discussion spaces.

In this article, we contribute to the above problem area by a case study of a political community hosted by the Norwegian Labour party, called MyLabourParty.no. In particular, we contribute insight about the large variation in dialogue and discussion to be found within such a community. Our research questions are “how does genre influence dialogue and debate within and beyond an online political community?”, and “how does the network effects of a social media community help foster a networked public sphere?”

By examining the genres being used, and how the network effects of social media helps spread the ideas in one sphere to other spheres, we can contribute to better political media strategies by uncovering which genres contribute to the public sphere and to the objectives of the political party. This knowledge could lead to insights for site owners and frequent contributors about how content should be communicated to reach their objectives.

The rest of the article is structured as follows: Section 2 presents existing research on the public sphere and network society. Section 3 presents our chosen research method. In section 4 we present our case and case findings. Finally, in section 5 we present conclusions, limitations and future research ideas based on our findings.

II. EXISTING RESEARCH

The Public Sphere

The concept of the Public Sphere, as presented by Jürgen Habermas in the 1960's book *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (translated into English in 1991), has been used as philosophical grounding for a number of studies on digital democracy (Sanford & Rose, 2007; Sæbø, Rose, & Flak, 2008). The Public Sphere's idea of having a space for debate of public issues provides researchers with a concept that helps explain the importance of research on digital democracy, and a number of researchers have pointed out the importance of creating online public spheres to renew democracy (Dahlgren, 2005; Gimmler, 2001; Papacharissi, 2002; Poster, 1997).

Jürgen Habermas' original idea of the public sphere was simply “that domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed” (J. Habermas, 1989). To Habermas, the public sphere was a forum for elite thinkers from the upper classes of society rather than a space open to everyone. Thus, he claimed that in the 20th century the public sphere declined because of mass communication, the capitalist state and the growth of the middle classes (Webster, 1995). There were simply too many people involved for a public sphere to be viable. Other thinkers have argued otherwise, claiming that the public sphere should include everyone and criticizing Habermas for his elitist bias (Kluge & Negt, 1972). More recently we have seen claims that the Internet and networks have created a global, networked public sphere (Castells, 2008), and that social media, with its focus on sharing and participation, as well as a steadily increasing user base, could attract even more citizens to participate (Rose, Sæbø, Nyvang, & Sanford, 2007).

“Public opinion” is an important concept in the public sphere. Public opinion can be defined as shared understanding of an issue, reached through debate by rational citizens (J Habermas, 1991). Before the emergence of democratic societies, there was no public as we understand the concept of public today. The church, aristocracy and kings were the only ones entitled to have an opinion, and the remainder of the population had no rights to voice their opinion (Merriman, 1996). Today, the public sphere is “an essential component of socio-political organization because it is the space where people come together as citizens and articulate their autonomous views to influence the political institutions of society” (Castells, 2008).

While some claim the Public Sphere no longer exists, due to the spread of mass media and commoditization of information (Webster, 1995), several researchers points to the Internet, and specifically the many discussion spaces online, as the location of the modern day public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002; Poster, 1997; Dahlgren, 2005; Gimmler, 2001).

In order to identify a public sphere, we need some way of measuring and examining the online space. Dahlberg (2001), building on the original work by Habermas, has identified six requirements that need to be present in a public sphere:

- *Autonomy* from state and economic power.
- *Rational-critical discourse* involves engaging in reciprocal critique of normative positions that are provided with reasons and thus are criticisable rather than dogmatically asserted.
- *Reflexivity*. Participants must critically examine their cultural values, assumptions, and interests, as well as the larger social context.

- *Perspective*. Participants must attempt to understand the argument from the perspective of other participants.
- *Sincerity*. Each participant must make a sincere effort to make known all information, including their true intentions, interests, needs, and desires, as relevant to the particular problem under consideration.
- Discursive *inclusion* and *equality*. Every participant is equally entitled to introduce and question any assertion whatsoever (Dahlberg, 2001).

There are, however, some obstacles to the online public sphere. A case study of *womenslink*, a forum for women's organizations in Ireland, showed that free exchange of ideas was hindered by the institutional affiliation of participants in the forum. Participants were afraid that their personal views would be confused with the views of the organization they represented (O'Donnell, 2001). Others point to the potential of the Internet, claiming that the Internet has not revitalized the public sphere yet, but that there is hope for incremental changes that *could* revitalize the public sphere (Muhlberger, 2005). Several studies in the recent years have shown that online public spheres are indeed emerging (Gibson, Lusoli, & Ward, 2005; Kaschesky & Riedl, 2009; Robertson, Vatrapu, & Medina, 2009), especially in social media such as Facebook, blogs and YouTube (Castells, 2008). At the same time, Stromer-Galley and Wichowski (2011) in their review studies on online political discussions concludes that such discussions hardly are characterized by the ideals of the public sphere as they have been spelled out by Dahlberg (2001). However, Stromer-Galley and Wichowski argue that we should look for other benefits of online political discussions, such as potential usefulness in public policymaking.

The intention is not necessarily to tick off every single point, but rather to address that in order to create a Public Sphere we need to see more than a few blog comments or Facebook wall postings. There needs to be evidence that the communication we observe at the least contains some evidence of the above-mentioned criteria. Recent studies have pointed out that online, we need to redefine our perceptions of traditional public sphere criteria to address the somewhat different culture of the digital realm (Graham, 2008).

While the original concept of the public sphere talked about the public sphere as one "thing", Trenz & Eder (2004) presents four ideal-types of the Public Sphere, thereby adding an additional layer to the requirements made by Dahlberg (2001). A Public Sphere can be 1) discourse-based. This is the ideal-type closest to Habermas' original ideas of a space for free thought and discussion 2) based on political protest, where we would typically find a group of like-minded people discussing for example strategies for protest. 3) Based political campaigning, as in campaign web sites for political parties or individual politicians. 4) Based on consensus, where there is little disagreement, and people support each other. By adding these ideal-types of public spheres, we can extend the original concept to better fit with the complex and many-layered society we live in today.

A final obstacle to the online public sphere was noted by Hindman (2008), who argue that the challenge for people in democracies wanting to make their opinion on political issues heard through the internet is not to be able to speak but to be heard. Likewise, for many hosts of online arenas for political discussion, the challenge of fostering an active community of participants may be just as challenging as to make sure that the participants adhere to the principles of the public sphere once the active community has been established.

The Network Society – Towards a Networked Public Sphere

One further aspect of the modern age needs to be examined in order to understand how the public sphere functions today. While the original concept talks about *the* public sphere, it can be argued that today it makes more sense to talk about multiple public spheres, connected in loose networks.

Western society is increasingly organized through networks (Castells, 2000). Compared to the past, where geographic location and long travel times made communication across vast distances difficult at best, information technology has transformed institutions so that they operate more as networks and less as closed groups of families or organizations (van Dijk, 2006). In the past, there were no restraints on people's ability to communicate, as the only available technology was the voice of the individual. When we began using technology to communicate this changed, introducing power struggles where those who had access to communication technologies held the upper hand. The right to communicate became a political issue, and was often appropriated by those already in power (Splichal, 2006). A networked public sphere, where every citizen has the right to participate, could well contribute to reduce this imbalance in power, by providing an outlet for those who previously had none.



A network is made up of nodes (the individual parts of the network) and the connections between these nodes. Nodes can be individuals, organizations, societal institutions, business and government (Barney, 2004). Thus, government can be seen both as a network in itself, and as a node in a larger societal network.

If we see government as a node in a larger interconnected network of individuals, institutions and organizations, we can examine how government policy is shaped not only by government, but also by the several external nodes that provides government with information and input. This makes visible the different nodes of a networked Public Sphere (Benkler, 2006; Keane, 1995), and shows how we should think not of a single public sphere, but rather of a multitude of smaller discussion spaces, linked to each other through a network of connections. The more connections, the more powerful the public sphere becomes.

Regional and global institutions such as the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) influence national policy, and are in turn influenced by a multitude of different actors, operating both globally and on the national and local level (Keane, 1995; H Trenz & K Eder, 2004). From the local and spatially anchored public sphere of the past, new communication technologies and the global media system have created a “multimodal communication space...[that] constitutes the new global public sphere” (Castells, 2008). In this setting, facilitating spaces for discussion becomes important if we want to empower citizens. Individuals have little influence on the EU or UN, but can participate in various discussion forums and through the network ultimately contribute to policy formation.

By connecting nodes, networks such as an online discussion forum can facilitate the formation of communities. Communities bring together a number of values, such as solidarity, trust and fraternity (Frazer, 1999), values which can be interpreted as a description of positive relationships between people, and these values are interlinked with Dahlberg’s (2001) requirements for the public sphere. It is a lot more likely that communication will be Autonomous, critical, reflexive, sincere and inclusive if one is able to form a community based on trust, solidarity and a sense of belonging to a fraternity of civic-minded peers.

A Community can be either *gemeinschaft* (community) or *gesellschaft* (society). *Gemeinschaft* refers to communities which naturally evolve out of shared values and interests, such as political, religious or sports communities. *Gesellschaft* refers to constructed community, such as “western society” or the “nation-state”. *Gesellschaft* is considered as a non-voluntary community (Tönnies, 1974). In the context of this article, it is most useful to think about *gemeinschaft*-type communities, as participation in the site we are examining is voluntary and based on shared interests.

With the advent of the network society and globalization of government, we move towards a public sphere that is no longer spatially constrained, and therefore by necessity reliant on communications technologies. The network can facilitate the formation of communities, by tying together nodes of people that would not meet without access to the network, based on values that correlate with the requirements for a public sphere.

Analysing the Public Sphere through Genre and Network analysis

With the networked public sphere conceptualized above, using the requirements of Dahlberg (2001) and divided into different types of public spheres, we still need a tool for visualizing the network and analysing the actual communication taking place online. This is where social network analysis and genre theory comes in.

Network analysis is used to visualize and analyse various types of networks, through examining how individual nodes are connected to each other. The strength of individual ties, as well as the number of interconnected ties, determines the strength of the network. Strong ties indicate community, and a large number of connections between different nodes indicates that information is disseminated in a networked rather than one-to-one fashion, thereby reaching more nodes. What we choose to see as nodes varies depending on our research question. Nodes can be both people and objects, such as a post or a comment (Smith et al., 2009).

In existing literature, network analysis have been used to show how top universities in China collaborate (Bo Yang, Zhihui Liu, & Meloche, 2010), how the blogosphere is made up by several sub-sets of dense, interest-based networks (Xiaoguang Wang, Tingting Jiang, & Feicheng Ma, 2010), to analyse student participation in e-learning (Mazur, Doran, & Doran, 2010; Mazzoni & Gaffuri, 2009) and to examine topics and author networks in eGovernment research (Erman & Todorovski, 2009).

The basic use of network analysis is to identify patterns of interaction among the participants in a network. Typical variables measured are:

- *Degree*: The number of participants a given participant interacts with, can be split into receiving (in-degree) and sending (out-degree) messages.
- *Centrality*: How important a participant is in the network. Measured as closeness (the number of nodes between two participants), betweenness (how each participant helps connect other participants), and eigenvector (how well a participant is connected to other active participants)
- *Clustering*: The degree to which a set of participants form a group within the network (Mazur, et al., 2010)
- *Density*: Indicates the level of connections within the network (Otte & Rousseau, 2002)

Genre theory has been shown useful in several studies of communication patterns in digital democracy (M. Johannessen, 2010; Päivärinta & Sæbø, 2008; Sæbø, 2011; Sæbø & Päivärinta, 2005). Genre theory is a high level analytical theory derived from structuration theory (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). A genre can be defined as “a typified communicative action invoked in response to a recurrent situation” (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992), a set way of responding to a given piece of input. Genres function as a tool for examining the role of communication in social processes (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). In line with structuration theory, genres develop over time, in the interaction between predefined rules for communication (structure) and the people who take part in the communication (agency).

Genres were originally identified by their common content (themes and topics of the conversation) and form (physical and linguistic features) (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992), and studies of digital media have later added technological functionality to the analysis (Shepherd & Watters, 1998). While functionality is an important property of a genre, one should not confuse genre and medium. E-mail is a medium, while a personal letter sent via e-mail is a genre (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). This was later elaborated on, and today genres can be defined using the 5w1h-method (*where, why, when, who, what* and *how*). This method allows us to analyse the purpose, contents, placement in time, location, participants, structure and medium for communication (Yates & Orlikowski, 2002; Yoshioka, Herman, Yates, & Orlikowski, 2001):

Where tells us the location of the communication, whether virtual or physical.

Why explains the purpose of the genre, from the perspective of those using it.

When refers to the time where communication takes place.

Who defines the actors involved in communication, the sender and receiver of the genre.

What is the content of the genre, and defines what is being communicated, and any relations to other genres.

Finally, *How* describes the technical needs for delivery of the genre, for example which medium is being used, or any other technical necessities.

Genres enacted within a certain medium, such as the MyLabourParty web site, can be seen as a genre repertoire. Genre repertoires are collections of genres that belong together (Yates & Orlikowski, 2002). For example, a blog post is part of a genre repertoire where we have different types of posting genres and commenting genres. When examining the genre repertoire, we can analyse communicative practices over time, and how new genres emerge and influence the ways we communicate within a given system (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994).

As genre analysis does not capitalize on the knowledge of the network of the participants, it may be useful to combine this approach with network analysis.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

To provide a convincing study of the variation of discussion and debate within political online communities, we found it useful to restrict our research to a single case as variation within one case was judged to be a stronger indicator of the relevance of such variation than variation between cases. As a case, we chose a political online community, Mitt Arbeiderparti (MyLabourParty), hosted by the Norwegian Labour Party. The case was found to be relevant both because the Labour Party represents political perspectives representative of a large proportion of the population, and their community is an early example of a political party inviting their members and other politically interested people to online political discussion.

The data in this article was collected from two local and one regional zone on the MyLabourParty web site, and consists of a textual analysis of posts and comments in these zones. A total of 539 posts and 731 comments

were analysed. In addition, 14 semi-structured interviews were made with 3 owners and 11 users of the zones. The findings reported in this article are mainly based on the textual analysis, while the interviews are used for the case and contextual descriptions. Interview quotes and quotes from the analysed comments are translated from Norwegian.

The data was analysed using network and genre analyses. A genre analysis maps how people communicate within a given structure, such as the MyLabourParty web site. By examining the characteristics of the individual genres, such as the sender and receiver, form, content and functionality, we can discover how the participants communicate, and whether or not the same genres are used for similar purposes (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994). The genres were identified through two steps. The first step was done simultaneously with the network analysis, through examining the characteristics of communication. The second step followed the 5w1H-framework (Yates & Orlikowski, 2002) depicted in the previous section, and was used to confirm the initial analysis. An analysis is also made of how the individual genre addresses the objectives of political communication in social media identified by Johannessen (2010).

The network analysis was made using the Node XL software (Smith, et al., 2009), a free plug-in for Microsoft Excel. This software allows the researcher to examine the relationship between two nodes at a time, and be either directional (*a* addresses *b*) or non-directional (*a* and *b* are connected). In our analysis, only directional relationships were examined. The following network analyses were made: 1) *Identifying those who explicitly addressed each other*. Here, we examined our list of comments, and created a relation for every instance where one person would explicitly address someone else. This let us examine the extent to which there was a lively debate going on within each of the zones. 2) *The bridges between zones*. Bridges are the people who comment in more than one zone, and these people are important as it is the bridges between different communities who bring ideas from one small community to the next (Putnam, 2000). In this analysis, we examined the connection "person [comments in] zone". 3) *The most commented topics*. In this analysis, posts were coded into their policy area, and the relation "Person [comment on] topic" was registered. This allowed us to examine which topics generated the most debate, and also acted as a precursor to the genre analysis, as the metadata provided valuable input in identifying genres and examining which genres contributed to generating more comments.

Combining genre and network analysis allows us to examine how the communication in the three MyLabourParty zones functions in terms of the characteristics for a public sphere, and what type of public sphere we are looking at. This can provide valuable input for practitioners and site administrators on how they should set up the sites and lead the discussion in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the site. For researchers, the combination of network and genre analysis provides valuable insights into how different types of public spheres are maintained.

The objective of case study research is not to identify findings which can be generalised to the population, but rather to develop concepts, generalise to theory, draw specific implications or contribute to rich insight (Walsham, 1995). The purpose of this study is first of all to draw specific implications related to the case context (a social media site run by a political party), and second to contribute to rich insights about the communicative actions taking place in this specific case, as well as to examine if and how these actions can be seen as part of the public sphere.

Case description

The Norwegian labour party is one of Norway's largest political parties, and has digital communication high on their communication agenda. They run their own online community for party members and sympathizers, called *MyLabourParty*. The objective of the site is to spread information about the party's policies and events, facilitate debate and information sharing, and to act as a resource for party members in their work in local party groups. Their target audience is mainly existing party members and voters. The authors were engaged by the party to examine how the site performs in terms of reaching the objectives.

The site structure is quite complex. The site is divided into a number of different zones. A zone is a subsection of the MyLabourParty web site. Most local and regional branches of the party have their own zone, with the address "[local party].mylabourparty.no". In addition, there are also zones for the individual party leaders as well as topical zones for campaigning and high profile political issues. In several cases, a zone has been created to gather input for policy-creation on issues such as jobs creation and healthcare. At the time of the case study, there are 1291 zones in total, many of which have no activity at all, have only been active over a short period of time, or have been created as one-way information channels.

The structure of zones is similar to blogs. Contributors write a post, and each post can be commented on. The comments section is where most of the discussion takes place, as only some people are allowed to publish posts. There are also pages with information about party activities, election campaigns and other party-related issues, and a calendar with events in the region or city. The postings and comments are considered to be the most important part of the site.

The site is run on the *Origo* platform, a Norwegian social networking platform used by two political parties, several newspapers, organizations and individuals. While MyLabourParty.no is a site by itself, with its own graphic profile and URL, it is also part of the Origo network.

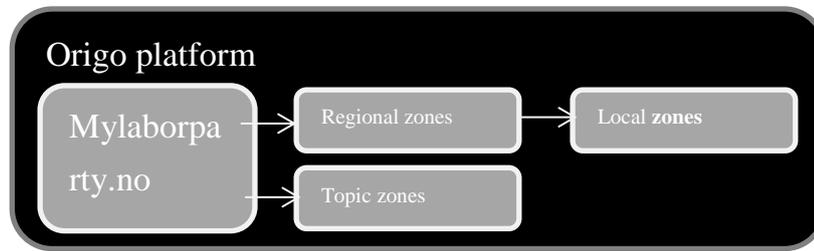


Figure 7. Site structure of MyLabourparty.no

Three zones were selected for the case study; one zone for a large city (zone 1), one for a region (zone 2), and one for a mid-sized city (zone 3). One of the zones (zone 3) was among the most active zones in MyLabourParty, whereas the two others had some activity. This selection of zones was made to include zones that were representative of the body of zones with a fair amount of activity. Regional and local zones were chosen as the object of study because the regional and local branches of the party is where most discussions are initiated. Some of these discussions trickle upwards in the system and reaches the central party organisation. Our objective was to include zones that were representative for the party organisation, had varying degrees of activity for the purpose of comparing high and low activity zones, and that covered a wide geographical spectrum. The information flow in the party typically goes from local branches to regional branches and finally to the central party organisation, hence we wanted to examine a local and a regional zone. In addition, we wanted to compare a large local zone with a smaller one, so that we could examine if the potential user-base had any influence on actual use of the zone. The three chosen zones are representative for the other zones in the same category.

The user base of the three zones is varied. We find party members, party sympathisers and voters, members of opposing parties, and ordinary citizens who are concerned about one or more of the issues being debated. The Labour party is the largest political party in Norway at the time of writing, and has been so for decades, and this could be seen as one reason for why members of the opposition and ordinary citizens choose to participate in the Labour party zones.

There are no set rules for participation, but there is an on-going debate among participants about how to conduct a fruitful debate. Only site administrators are allowed to publish posts, but everyone who is a registered user of the Origo platform can comment. Comments can be moderated, but except for a few exceptional cases, they are rarely deleted. The site administrators see it as more valuable to provide counter-arguments rather than delete comments.

IV. FINDINGS

In this section we present the findings from our network and genre analyses of the content in the three MyLabourParty zones we examined. Our objective with these analyses was to examine how well they performed as public spheres, as a thriving dialogue and citizen involvement are important objectives for the site and the party.

The analysis reveals that in two of the zones there are few participants who make frequent comments, or comment on more than one topic. In the third zone, activity and debate is high, with a number of different genres being enacted, as well as some discussion on the rules of debate. The quality of the debate varies between fulfilling the requirements of a public sphere and indecent flaming.

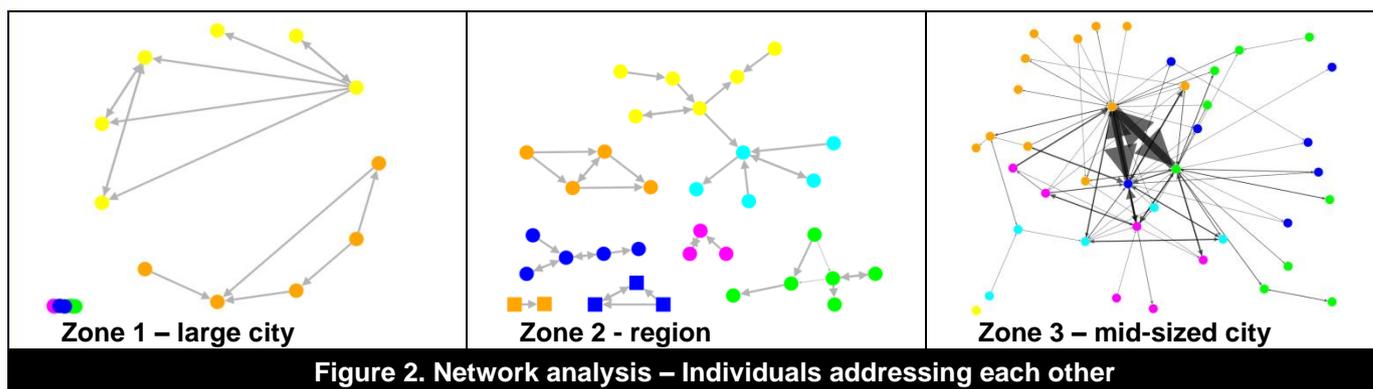
Network Analysis

Information spreads rapidly through networks. In a network, more connections are better, both within the network in order to facilitate community-formation and increased participation by the members of the community (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), and between different networks in order to help spread ideas and discussions from one community to another (Abrahamson & Rosenkopf, 1997). A lot of connections indicate frequent participation and a functioning public sphere, and dense social networks foster the kind of civic values which facilitate participation: “*civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations.*” (Putnam, 2000, p. 19).

There are some notable differences between the three zones in our analysis. At the time of data collection, zone 1 has a total of 166 posts and 75 comments. Few posts have more than one comment, and few people comment more than once. Zone 2 has 242 posts and 114 comments. There are some discussions, although the majority of posts have only one comment or no comments at all. Discussion is mostly created by those who are not members of the party, as they will attack party policy and receive responses from party members. Zone 3 has more activity than the other two, with 131 posts and 542 comments. This zone has a core membership who participates in several debates on a number of different topics. Here too, those who are not members of the party are often the ones who start or run the debate.

Dialogue or Stand-alone Comments?

The first part of the network analysis attempted to identify who and how many people in each zone who explicitly addressed each other when commenting, as this is a sign of an on-going debate. Only comments which in some way responds to a previous comment are included, as these contribute to an on-going dialogue. The nodes in figure 2 represent people, and do not say anything about how many posts the comments are addressing. The sizes of the arrows indicate how often a node addresses another. The different colours and shapes indicate different networks of people addressing each other. The more dense the network, the closer it resembles a community.



Zone 1 has very little debate. Two small groups address each other, spread across several posts. The maximum out-degree is 5, while the average out-degree is 1,1. One person in the zone has addressed five others, while the other participants on average address one other. Density for the zone is 0,068, which further strengthens the indications that this zone does not make up a strong or close-knit community with many participants engaging each other in conversation.

Zone 2 is somewhat more active, with six smaller groups attempting to create a debate on different issues. The maximum out-degree is 3, and the average is 1,1. Centrality measures indicate that one person is central in the discussion. The ties are weak, and most connections make only one comment to others, which is not enough to create a strong debate or community. Density for the zone is 0,034, which is reflected in the figure’s visualisation of several smaller groups addressing each other in individual posts, with no overlap between them.

Zone 3 looks a lot more like a network. Several people participate, and a core of about 10 people addresses each other frequently. The maximum out-degree is 19, and the average is 2,7. Thus, in this zone we see more people who address each other on a more regular basis. However, density for the zone is still only 0,068, which shows that only the core community of 10 people (out of 40 contributors in total) are really forming a network.

The active members of opposing political parties have high scores on betweenness centrality, and should be seen as important contributors to many of the discussions in the zone.

The reason for this limited amount of dialogue is found in interviews. A majority of the people interviewed say that despite the site's stated objective of being a place for dialogue, they use the web site to receive information and prefer to conduct debates in a face to face setting:

«Good debate begins in local branches of the Labour party and trickles upwards in the system. It is all face to face, not online. I don't believe that big and complex discussions work online» (respondent 2).

Some respondents also point out that the MyLabourParty web site is too homogenous for good debates:

«[my zone] more resembles a tribe meeting, where everyone more or less agree on the issues we discuss. Therefore the discussions online do not present any new perspectives» (respondent 4).

The latter of these two quotes is supported when looking at the user profiles and betweenness centrality measures of the most frequent commenters. In zones 1 and 2 where there is little dialogue, the users are mostly registered as members of the Labour party. In zone 3 where there is more dialogue, members of other political parties post critical comments, which in return are responded to by members of the Labour party. Thus, it seems that the site administrators should strive for heterogeneity and attempt to attract more dissenting voices in order to address the objective of facilitating dialogue.

Bridges Between Zones, and beyond

Bridges are the people who participate in more than one community, thereby potentially bringing ideas and input from one community to other communities. In a networked society bridges are very important in widening the network, as the number of links between networks potentially have strong effects on the diffusion of ideas (Abrahamson & Rosenkopf, 1997). There are some bridges (black dots) between the three zones (red squares), most notably between zones 2 and 3 (figure 3). These zones are also connected geographically, making it more realistic that several participants have ties to both zones. Centrality measures are very high for the two people commenting in all three zones, and moderately high for the six people who contribute to two zones. This shows both the vulnerability of having only a few bridges, as well as the importance of having bridges.

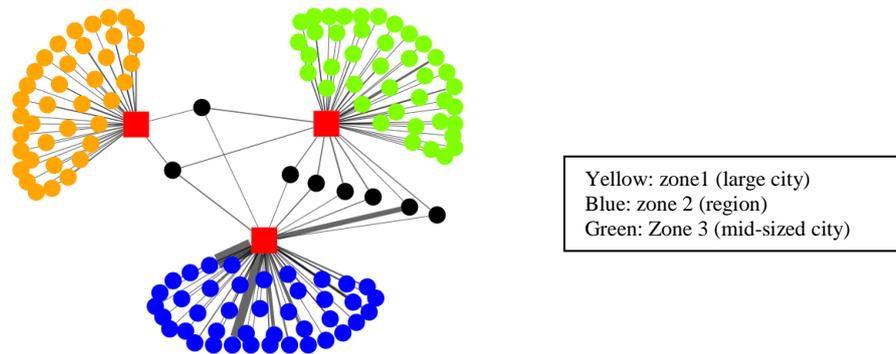


Figure 3. Bridges between zones

As all the zones within the MyLabourParty site runs on the same platform, we can access the profile of a user who contributes across several zones and see all of his/hers contributions. This can potentially allow for ideas and input to be spread to a much wider audience. Without these contributions from members of other zones, the flow of potentially valuable ideas between individual zones would be more limited. These bridges are very important, as they contribute to creating a network out of the zones which make up the MyLabourParty web site. Without them, the individual zones may be less valuable as a public sphere, as ideas and debates may not as easily find its way out of the originating zone. The interviews also show that MyLabourParty.no is seen by its users as an important part of the network. Users move back and forth between the Labour party site and other relevant web sites in order to keep themselves up-to-date on current political issues:

«Well, let's take the purchase of new fighter jets, we discussed that a while ago and when I read about the rationale for our choice of jet, then I had to check the options, go to other web sites and get information about the different types of planes, the discussions in other countries, stuff like that...then I move away from the Labour site to check, and back again to recheck our own arguments» (respondent 1)

When it comes to sharing and disseminating content from MyLabourParty.no to other web sites (typically to Facebook, as the site has a 'share on Facebook'-button attached to all posts), the respondents vary in their habits. The respondents reporting they are regular users of social media are more comfortable with sharing content than those who are not regular users:

"I've never shared anything. But then I am not a regular user of Facebook or any other social media. Just the Labour site. I guess I should become more active in other places." (respondent 7)

"Yes, I use the 'share on Facebook' button sometimes. I'm often on Facebook, so that's why I share stuff to Facebook" (respondent 10)

However, most of the respondents report they do not share at all, or only at a few occasions. They rather use the site to stay updated on party policy and to search for information. This should be seen in connection with the many respondents who say they prefer face to face communication, are not used to online discussions, or who see themselves as inexperienced Internet users. The same respondents report that they find a lot of useful information on the site, and that they use this information when talking to friends or colleagues who raise questions about the Labour party's policies:

"I prefer to have the background information and the party's arguments online, and then use this information when talking to others and when I am on an election stand and things like that" (respondent 7)

Thus, there is potential for more relevant external and internal sharing if the users who have these attitudes are educated about the potential network effects of sharing and acting as bridges.

In addition to the network analysis using NodeXL, an in-link analysis was performed using a tool from the Digital Methods Initiative (<https://wiki.digitalmethods.net/Dmi/ToolLinkRipper>). This analysis examined which sites linked to content in the domains *[name_of_zone].mylabourparty.no*. The results show that most links to the zones included in this case came from other zones in the MyLabourParty site, or from other sources related to the Labour party.

Which topics are commented on?

So far, the network analyses have focused on relations between people. A different usage is to apply network analysis to discover which topics people are most interested in commenting on.

The identified topics are summarized in table 1. The topics were classified using common policy areas in Norwegian politics, and individual posts were assigned to topics based on the content of the post. In addition, we found some topics to not belong in a policy category, as they either were discussing issues internal to the Labour party, or discussing the differences between Labour and the opposition. Topics with less than two posts or less than five comments have been excluded, as these did not provide any additional data. The table is sorted by ratio (number of comments per post).

Table 1 – Topics and comment types identified through network analysis

Topic	Topic description	Comments description	# Posts/ comments/ ratio
Campaigning	Issues related to upcoming election	Posts discuss the importance of the coming election and who should become mayor after the election. Comments are equally divided between those who support Labour and the opposition, who attack Labour for a lack of results in previous years.	P: 2 C: 26 R: 13
Feedback	Party officials asks for input on specific policy areas	Posts asks people for input on various policy areas, and the comments are replies to this call, as well as discussions on other commentators' suggestions	P:3 C: 30 R: 10
Welfare	Welfare-related policies, fight against poverty	Posts discuss welfare vs. well-being and the fight against poverty.	P: 3 C: 27 R: 9
Transportation	Infrastructure, railroads, public transport and roads	Posts calls for increased spending on railroads, specific road sections or bridges. Comments support or oppose the proposal in the posts.	P: 4 C: 35 R: 8,75
Party to party	Discusses policies of other political parties	Posts attack other parties' policies or actions. Comments vary widely between support, aggressive replies from opposition, debate and harassment.	P: 10 C: 77 R: 7,7
Education	School rankings, teacher evaluation, financial issues	Posts present increased spending on schools, improved results and teacher education in Labour-run municipalities. Comments cheer the news, discuss the results or attack Labour for not doing enough	P: 6 C: 35 R: 5,8
E-government	Presentations of e-government and participation, mostly related to the MyLabourParty web site	Posts introduce and present the MyLabourParty web site, or provide data on recent site activity. Comments acknowledge and congratulate the poster, some negative comments on missing functionality or perceived censorship	P: 4 C: 23 R: 5,75
Healthcare	healthcare quality and spending	Posts discuss quality of, and budgeting in, healthcare. Comments argue for and against Labour's healthcare policy and the concrete examples in the posts.	P: 5 C: 24 R: 4,8
Business and labour	Policies related to business and labour issues	Shows the right/left divide in politics. Commentators from conservative and liberal parties typically argue for less taxes and a reduction of employee rights	P: 4 C: 19 R: 4,75
Budgeting	Discussion on issues related to local and regional gov's budgeting	Posts in this category mostly congratulate the party on their budgets. Comments either support the post, argue for a different budget, or are more aggressive ideological attacks on the budgeting of the Labour party	P: 3 C: 14 R: 4,66
Labour party	Topics that are only or mostly interesting to party members	Posts are on historical Labour events, policy formulation and recruitment. Comments are short supportive statements by other party members.	P: 5 C: 23 R: 4,6
Immigration	Immigration and asylum seekers policies	Posts are on placement of refugee centres and multiculturalism. Comments are supporting liberal/harsh immigration policy, or harassing asylum seekers	P: 3 C:12 R: 4
Senior citizens	Discussions on retirement and health care for seniors	Posts present the current status and future plans related to senior citizens, pensions and care. Comments are mixed between debating these issues, attacking or supporting Labour's policies.	P: 6 C: 23 R: 3,83
Urban planning	Discussion on the future of the local community	Posts present and argue for various types of development, and the comments are supportive statements.	P: 2 C: 7 R: 3,5
Culture	Discussion on local cultural activities	Posts describe local cultural activities, and requests for more culture. Comments discuss the local cultural scene.	P: 3 C: 9 R: 3

Figure 4 shows the topics receiving comments, and the number of people who comment on more than one topic. The circles represent people, and the squares represent topics. The figures do not show the number of posts related to a topic, nor do they reflect when the same person has made more than one comment to the same topic.

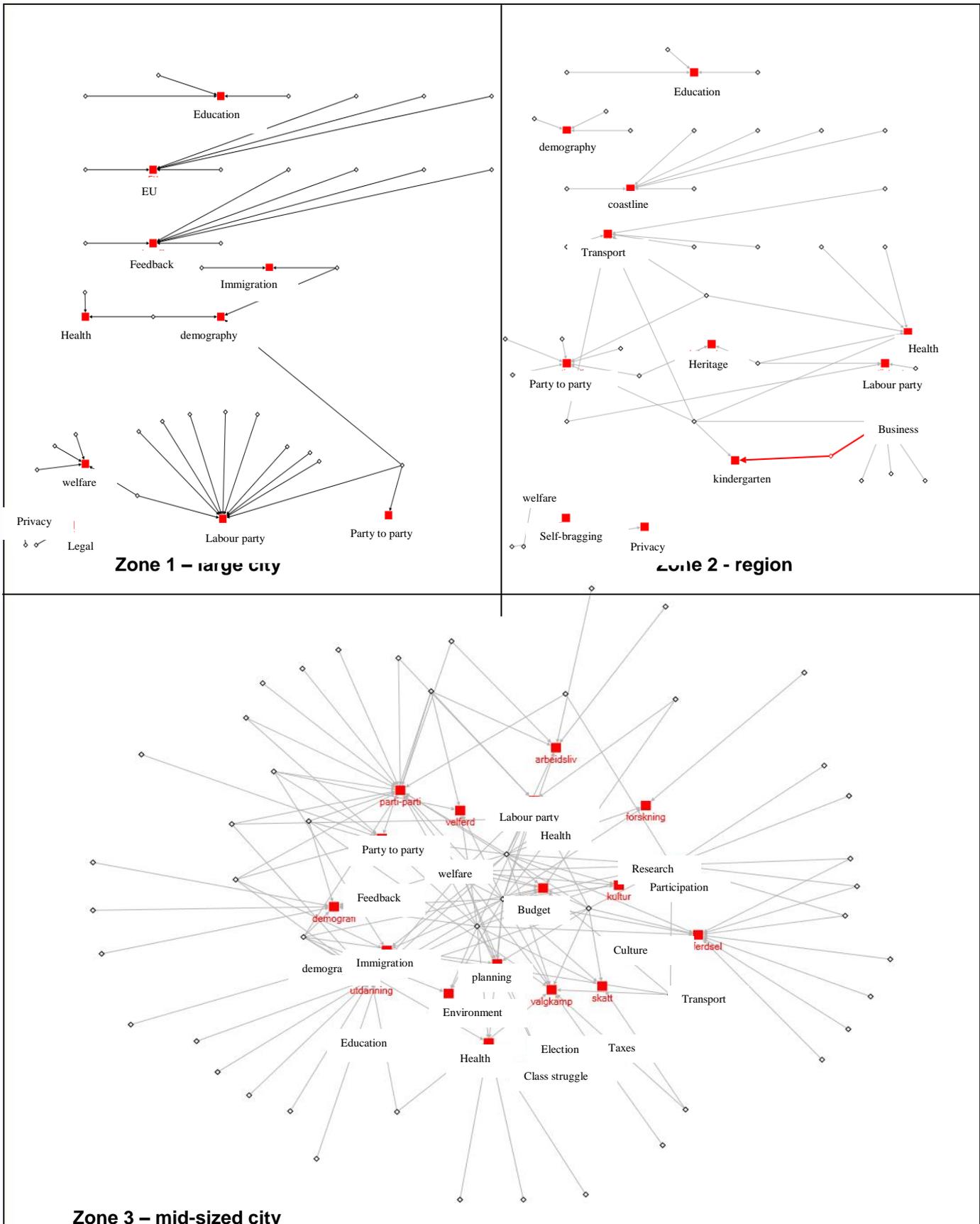


Figure 4. Network analysis – Topics receiving comments

In zone 1 the topics *Labour party*, *feedback and welfare* receive the majority of comments. There is little overlap between different topics, meaning that few people comment on more than one topic. In zone 2 the most commented-on topics are *transport*, *party to party* (comments where the policies of different parties are discussed), *business and healthcare*. There are more connections between different topics in this zone, indicating a somewhat stronger community. In zone 3 the topics *party to party*, *education* and *transportation* are most popular, with a number of other topics following close by. In this zone there are more people commenting and more people commenting on different topics, which makes this zone the one with the strongest community.

In all three zones we found that local issues are most important for the participants. The topics people comment on vary based on which topic is important in the local community. Local grounding is also mentioned as important by several of the interview respondents. Zone 1 is the zone with the least amount of posts on local issues, which might contribute to explain why this zone has the lowest participation.

The topic analysis was also applied as a precursor to the genre analysis in the next section. The meta-data from the topic analysis pointed towards several genres in use, and these data were used in the genre analysis to identify individual genres. Further, the most popular topics were used to narrow down the data, so that we could apply the genre analysis to the content of the most popular topics, and thus discover the genres that contributed to the creation of a public sphere.

Genre Analysis

The network analysis shows how many people engage each other in conversation, the posts and topics that are commented the most, as well as the bridges that spread ideas between different zones. The topic analysis provides some additional insights to the nature of the comments. It does not, however, show clearly how people communicate. This is where the genre analysis comes in.

Genres allows us to examine the role of communication in social processes (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992), and are identified by their common content (themes and topics of the conversation) and form (physical and linguistic features) (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992), as well as technological functionality (Shepherd & Watters, 1998). A given genre is used in response to a given situation. When asked a question, we are expected to provide an answer, which contains information that addresses the question. In established settings, the genres are usually well-known, but in new media it takes time before a genre repertoire that everyone agrees on can emerge. Until the genre repertoire is in place, there is often some confusion about the rules of conversation (Shepherd & Watters, 1998). This is often seen in online political forums, as this kind of communication is fairly new to many of the participants.

The genre analysis was done using the 5W1H framework (Yates & Orlikowski, 2002; Yoshioka, et al., 2001), and the results are presented in table 2. Table 2 also provides an analysis of the genre repertoire used in the MyLabourparty site as a whole. The why (purpose) construct holds an element of interpretation. As it is not possible to get each of the hundreds of comment producers to provide a reason for why they have posted their comments, the purpose is derived from a holistic analysis of the discussion content, context of the discussion in relation to the original post, and the intention as stated by the comment producer where that is included in the comment. The remaining five constructs are derived from the contents of the comments by the first author. The second author and a third person involved with the case examined the finished list of genres and provided comments for revision. Appendix B provides coding examples for each of the identified genres.

The genre repertoire in the three examined zones consists of 12 different genres, most of which are found also in other settings. The debate genre contains about a third of the total number of comments, which is good for a site where debate and discussion is an objective. Comments placed in this genre follow at least some of the requirements of Dahlberg (2001), and a minimum requirement for a comment being included in the debate genre is that it supports its statements with a logical argument or with verifiable facts. The following example is from a debate on infrastructure development (a popular topic in the Norwegian public debate) in the region covered by zone 2:

“According to the agency for railway services, the regional railroad is 138 km long. 17 km of this stretch is double track, and even when the two on-going projects are completed, 99,9 km will remain as single track railroad. You brag about how the current government has invested heavily in infrastructure, but when measured as percentage of GDP, we spend less now than we did in the past” (citizen, zone 2)

This comment generates three more comments, discussing the merits of the current government in building railroads and roads through the region:

“You are of course free to claim that rail and road building is not progressing rapidly enough, but you can’t overlook the fact that our region receives more funds than any other region right now, thanks to the Labour politicians in our region. ... Billions of kroner have been invested already, and there will be even

more money coming in the next couple of years when we start the third railroad project. And all of these railroad projects are being planned for high speed trains” (member of the Labour party, zone 2)

Some debates contain harassing or sarcastic comments, but these often function to add new interest to the debate, leading the more serious participants on. In one example from zone 3, a member of an opposing political party comments on a topic where the Labour party congratulates itself on the results they have achieved during the past year:

“Well... You’re shutting down the daycare facility for the senile elderly. Increasing parking fees. Raising the price of after school activities for kids. Raising real estate taxes. Etc. etc.... oh well, the fear of privatisation is starting to become expensive for you socialists now, eh?” (Member of opposition, zone 3)

In this and other instances where comments are made out in a sarcastic tone, the result is actually that the debate continues. Labour party members seem to have a need to argue against such comments:

“If what you say is true, What do you mean is the solution, [name]? We have a lot of areas that needs funding, should we at least give something to everyone, or just shut down half of them and give the rest what they need?...and will privatisation make things less expensive, and what is the price of that? Personally I don’t want to see tax payers’ money end up as profit in the pockets of rich business owners” (member of the Labour party, zone 3)

Recognition and thank you-messages are other interesting genres. Often short messages giving thanks to the post author or another comment author, these can seem unimportant at first glance. However, for the author receiving this comment, it provides positive reinforcement, leading the author towards providing more contributions:

“Thanks for those thorough and interesting comments! We will bear those in mind when we discuss the next policy document” (Member of the Labour party, zone 1. Thanking a comment poster for input on a post asking for comments before the creation of a new policy document)

This form of recognition generates additional input from the same person:

“Thank you for replying. And while we’re on the topic... about the tests for school children. I disagree that every school should have them. For example schools with a high number of immigrant children, where the kids just tick random boxes, since they can’t even understand the questions” (Citizen, zone 1)

Harassing comments, on the other hand, in some cases leads to the harassed person removing him/herself from the site, especially in cases where a new contributor not used to being met by aggressiveness receives harassing comments. In the following example, the receiver of the comment was a new member of the Labour party, asking questions about local activities and about what she could do to become a more active member of the party. After receiving this response, she left the site and did not return:

“What is wrong with you? Everything you ask about is available in the zone for new members, why not look there before you bother us with your stupid questions? And why are you posting this here, it is SO off topic!” (comment, zone 3)

This comment did not remain on the site for long, and there were many comments supporting the new member and attacking the person making the comment. But the new member did most likely not catch this, as she had already left the site.

The solicitation genres (call for action, and the replies following the call) often generates a lot of response, especially when asking for input to policy-formation or other concrete issues the party asks people to contribute to. People seem to want to contribute, as long as their contributions are being used for something “real”, such as input to the party program or for a concrete local case. The following call for input on the process of creating new policy generated the most replies of all the posts in zone 1:

“Now you can have your say on the new policy of the [local party branch]. In the coming weeks we are discussing the new policy document for 2011-2015, and we would like to hear from you here in [zone 1]. What is good and what needs to be improved in the attached outline for new policy?” (Member of the Labour Party, zone 1)

14 comments were made, which provided the party with several ideas related to policy formation, as well as comments which pointed out errors or logical weaknesses in the existing document:

“Great outline. I have two small amendment propositions: 1 ‘plan and build more homes for senior citizens which include e-health technologies’. 2 ‘work for a house savings scheme where seniors can save up money for refurbishing their homes so they can stay at home longer’. This should provide the same taxation benefits as the current home savings for youth-program” (Member of the Labour party, zone1)

"I have some comments on the parts related to education:... I don't think anyone disagrees with what is there now, but I miss a section saying that the schools in [zone1] should have a common set of objectives. Maybe that is the intention of your policy document, but it is not clearly presented as it is."
(citizen/teacher, zone 1)

A very interesting phenomenon and genre in zone 3 is what we can call «metacommunication», communication about how to communicate. Metacommunication is a self-regulating way of addressing challenges we are faced with in new media and a sign that participants are committed to the site (Lanamäki & Päivärinta, 2009). Several of the most active debates in zone 3 can be classified as metacommunication. In these discussions, participants discuss how to address each other, how to conduct a decent and fruitful debate, netiquette and other issues related to communication. Topics such as moderation and censorship, promoting debates through sharing in social media, which posts to share, how to decide what is off-topic, and the connection with other zones in the MyLabourParty site are actively discussed in several of the early posts in zone 3. This could provide a partial explanation for why this zone has a lot more activity than the other two. One member of the party asks:

"New media can open for a more direct form of democracy. How can we as a party adapt and make this into something positive for the citizenry?" (Member1 of the Labour party, zone3)

This question led to a debate on urban development, via several comments which are too long to quote here. This in turn generated a comment from another user of the site:

"I am happy to see you are debating urban planning, but I suggest you create a post on the topic, and continue the discussion there. That way we can maintain a clean and neat site with discussions sticking to the topic being discussed" (Member2 of the Labour party, zone3).

In response to this, another member of the party writes:

"It is great that [member2] has started educating us in online communication. I hope we can discuss ethics and smartness in online communication as well. We should all, as public persons, revise our own ethical standard when discussing online. Strategic use of the Internet as a communication forum is modern, necessary and important so...let's take the discussion on how to discuss now, instead of waiting until it is too late" (Member3 of the Labour party, zone3)

Examining communication genres arguably provides more insights when you have a set of objectives to compare the genres to. In a study of political communication in Norway (M. Johannessen, 2010), the political parties represented in parliament presented the following objectives for political communication in social media:

- Dialogue – Dialogue between citizens and decision-makers
- Contribution – Citizen input on various policy areas, stories from individual citizens regarding for example how health policy affects individual citizens
- Involvement – Get citizens to volunteer for campaigning, fundraising and other activities organised by the political parties.

Compared to the stated objectives for the MyLabourParty site (available on the site. Dialogue and community formation and facilitation of political debate), dialogue is the most important objective to address in this particular case. Table 2 shows which, if any, of these objectives the identified genres are addressing. Nine of the genres address the objective of dialogue facilitation, in that they in different ways contribute to an on-going exchange of information.

Table 2 – Genre repertoire

repertoire: why	Contribute to dialogue and community formation with party members and sympathizers. Facilitate political debate	
repertoire: whose	According to administrators: Mainly for party members and sympathizers, but open to everyone and comments from opposition welcome	
Repertoire: where	Posts and comments on the Labour party's social media site	
Repertoire: how	Structure similar to that of a blog. The site is made up of several posts, where users can comment. Everyone with a user account can comment, but in order to create posts you need to go through the site administrators.	
Genre	Recognition	Debate
Why	Support community formation and maintenance	Present factual arguments in order to convince others about a given position
When	When someone has made a comment the producer believes should be recognised	When discussing an issue, and the objective is to reach consensus or convince others
Who	Producer: Politician Labour User: Politician Labour	Producer: Politician, citizen, (business) User: politician, citizen (business)
What	Positive, supporting statements on other people's posts and comments	Justified argument for or against other arguments in a case being discussed. Some can be in an aggressive tone.
Relation to objectives	Dialogue	Dialogue

Genre	Harassment	Humour
Why	Show disagreement. Ridicule others.	Used in debates in an attempt to loosen up an aggressive tone or otherwise heated debate.
When	When producer has no productive arguments, but still wishes to say something	When debate becomes heated or aggressive.
Who	Producer: Politician opposition User: Politician Labour, Citizen	Producer: politician User: politician
What	Aggressive tone, unjustified negative statements about a person's or party's characteristics	Humorous comments and observations with a positive tone.
Relation to objectives	none	Dialogue (sometimes contributes to get a discussion back on track)
Genre	Information	Call for action (solicitation call)
Why	Present factual information related to the topic being discussed	Receive input on a specific matter, or get citizens to volunteer to do something
When	When producer thinks the debate is being conducted without the participants being aware of the relevant facts	Invoked when party officials asks for input, and often receives many replies.
Who	Producer: politician (business) User: politician, citizen (business)	Producer: politician User: citizen, service user
What	Facts on the issue being discussed	Calls for action or input on a specified area of concern, or policy proposal. The more specific the sender is about how responses will be used, the more replies are generated.
Relation to objectives	Dialogue	Contribution, involvement
Genre	Critique	Policy comment
Why	Reprove input of other discussants	Influence policy formation. Reply to a call for action
When	When poster strongly disagrees with a statement	When a call for action or specific input is made.
Who	Producer: citizen, politician opposition User: politician Labour	Producer: Citizen, politician, service user User: politician
What	Negative, but often well-argued for, statements	Comments on specific party policies. Sometimes in response to call for action, sometimes as a comment to a post which is related to the commenters' concerns.
Relation to objectives	Dialogue	Dialogue, contribution
Genre	Metacommunication	Sarcasm
Why	Discuss rules of conversation	Used to underscore a point or an issue being obvious in the eyes of the producer
When	Mostly used in early stages after the site's creation.	When producer means opposing view is obviously wrong
Who	Involves both members of party, site administrators and party sympathisers	Producer: politician opposition Received: politician Labour, Citizen, (service user)
What	Discussions on rules of communication and code of conduct	Bitter, sharp accusations, irony, and negative statements about the receiver's intellect.
Relation to objectives	Dialogue	None
Genre	Q&A	Thanks
Why	Ask questions about consequences of party policy, or issues related to party membership	Signal agreement and gratitude.
When	On-going	When producer is happy with something and/or wishes to acknowledge someone
Who	Producer: citizen, politician User: politician	Producer: Citizen, politician User: citizen, politician
What	Concrete questions about the outcome of a policy, answers from site administrators or party officials	Confirming, positive and supporting statements. Providing thanks to someone for something they have said or done. Related to recognition, but more specific in thanking someone.
Relation to objectives	dialogue	Dialogue

The genre analysis shows what forms of communication contributes to creating a public sphere. In the posts where comments included the debate genre, combined with some of the genres with a positive and supportive tone (humour, thanks, and acknowledgement), the number and quality of the comments were often better. A mix of the debate genre and the positive tone genres contribute to a thriving public sphere, where the more informal humour, thanks and acknowledgement genres are especially important, as they act as drivers for continued debate. A post where only the debate genre is visible is more likely to lead to harassment or sarcasm, as people

tend to want to have the last word, but run out of arguments. The use of genres with a negative tone (sarcasm, harassment) leads to poor quality and shorter debates.

An attempt was also made to explore the correlation between the observed genres and the list of topics presented in table 1. There were no clear correlations between genre use and topics receiving a lot of comments. The mix of genres being used within a discussion, and the inclusion of dissenting voices are the only factors we found that influenced the amount of dialogue in the MyLabourParty web site.

V. DISCUSSION

Understanding political social media through network and genre analysis

What types of insights do we gain from applying a combination of network and genre analyses? First of all, both analytical techniques contribute to clarifying whether or not the examined community is a public sphere, and what type of public sphere it is, as shown in the next section.

Second, applying network analysis allows us to examine the connections between different nodes, such as people, posts and comments. The visualizations from this type of analysis gives us an illustration of how people communicate, where the strength and number of ties between different nodes shows if we are looking at sporadic connections or a networked community. In online discussions such as on MyLaborParty.no, we want to see many strong ties and a lot of interconnected ties, so that ideas and opinion find their way to as many people as possible. Few ties indicate that we are not looking at a strong "gemeinschaft" community, and is a sign that the site is not working according to its objectives.

Third, genre analysis functions as a tool for creating a typology consisting of the different types of communication (genres) we find within a given community or organization. Through this, we can improve our understanding of how best to communicate in order to reach our objectives. The findings show that if your objective for participating on the MyLabourParty web site is to contribute to policy formulation, you should apply genres such as debate, thanks and acknowledgement. On the other hand, if you are a member of an opposing party and want to stop the discussion, harassment and sarcasm are helpful, but not very ethically sound, tools. By viewing the individual genres as genre repertoires, we see which genres should be used together in order to further our objectives. For site administrators, this knowledge could contribute to the creation of discussion guidelines and netiquette, as well as indicate how the administrators themselves should act in the discussions.

Fourth, the combination of the two techniques is helpful in decided if the site we are examining is indeed a networked public sphere. As we show in section 1.2, the online public sphere should not be seen as one public sphere, but rather as a network of small discussion spaces, where bridges act to spread ideas across different spaces. This creates a networked public sphere. The network analysis makes the ties between people visible and through the metadata from the analysis of topics also acts as a precursor, or bridge, to the identification of genres. Once the genres were identified, we were able to examine which genres had been used in which topics and thus discover which genres worked best together in order to reach the objectives of facilitating debate and spreading information.

Finally, combining network and genre analysis allows us to study our phenomenon of interest from both an individual and a connecting viewpoint. Traditional social theory and analysis have more focus on the properties of the individual actor, while network analysis focus on the properties of relations between actors. Both individual and relational data is necessary to fully understand social phenomena (Otte & Rousseau, 2002). In the Labour party case we show this in practice. The genre analysis examines communication as an individual property, while the network analysis reveals more about contextual factors such as how the relations between the people in the group affect communication. In a public sphere perspective, examining genres can reveal qualities of the communication which are related to the deliberative criteria of a public sphere, while network analysis addresses some of the challenges facing the public sphere in relation to fragmented media consumption and the lack of one common space for political debate.

A political party as host of a networked public sphere

How does the MyLabourParty site function as a networked public sphere, in terms of Dahlberg's (2001) criteria and the theory of the network society? Dahlberg's criteria can to a varying degree be identified through the genre analysis:

Autonomy: The site is owned by the governing Labour party, and as such is not autonomous. However, everyone can participate by commenting on posts, so this point is not as valid as it would have been in print media. However, one could easily raise the question of whether or not the Labour party should be more explicit in inviting opposing voices, especially as the lack of opposition is mentioned by interview respondents as one reason for not using the site to conduct debates.

Rational-critical discourse: The genre analysis shows that there is some evidence of a rational-critical discourse in the debate and information genres, but also that several of the comments are far removed from any kind of rationality.

Reflexivity is to some degree visible in the metacommunication genre in zone 3, where participants reflect on how they should proceed to create a good debating climate. In other genres, this aspect is missing. *Perspective* is to some degree visible in the debate and solicitation input genres, but overall participants do not consider the perspective of the other when making a comment.

Sincerity is mostly lacking in all genres, as participants are more concerned with their own positions and opinions, and less of making all relevant information visible.

Finally, discursive *inclusion* and *equality* is partly present. Genres such as thanks and recognition prove valuable in supporting this, as they provide positive feedback and help participants to become involved. The site structure is both inclusive and exclusive. Exclusive as there is some confusion among the interview respondents as to who the site is for, who is allowed to create posts and comment, and inclusive as everyone with a user account can participate.

All in all, the genres present in the three examined zones can support a public sphere, as long we adhere to the view of Graham (2008) that we need to redefine our perceptions of the online public sphere. In zone 3, the most active zone, there is quite a lot of debate going on. The activity in the other two zones is simply too low that we can call them public spheres by themselves, but there are still some contributions providing input to the networked public sphere of the entire MyLabourParty web site, especially since the bridge network analysis shows movement of ideas between the zones.

As the theory section shows, the public sphere today could be seen more as loose network of interconnected smaller public spheres, where government itself is a node (albeit a strong one) in a larger network where policy formation to some degree is shaped by input from other nodes. Manuel Castells have shown how digital media have created a "multimodal communication space...[that] constitutes the new global public sphere", where citizens have indirect influence on policy formation through various political discussion spaces. These discussion spaces facilitate community formation, and community values are interlinked with the requirements of a public sphere and aid in facilitating debate. Network effects in social media facilitate the formation of communities by bringing together people who would not otherwise meet, and also aid in bringing information and debates from one public sphere to another one. The network analysis of the MyLabourParty.no site shows the importance of this combination of local community formation and network utilisation.

First, the analysis of people addressing each other shows a clear difference in the number of comments made, where zone 3 stands out as an active one compared to the other two zones. In zone 3, there is a core community which is responsible for maintaining the on-going discussions. The analysis of topics being commented on verifies this, and also shows how zone 3 has several participants commenting on a number of issues, while in zones 1 and 2 the participants mainly leave one or a few comments on a single topic, and then leave the site. Thus, the network analysis verifies the theoretical assumptions about the link between community and participation.

The second step in the networked public sphere is to bring the ideas created in one discussion space out to a wider public, in order to address the issue of media fragmentation. Here, the findings indicate that there is room for improvement in the Labour party. While there are some people acting as bridges (see figure 3) between the zones, the high centrality values of the few people contributing to more than one zone clearly shows how fragile this bridging is. When it comes to disseminating ideas outside of the MyLabourParty site, the interview respondents say they prefer to bring ideas from the site to face to face discussions, rather than sharing content via other social media. The in-link analysis also confirms that most links to the domain MyLabourParty.no are from other web sites related to the Labour Party. This could be seen as a major issue when political parties attempt to host a public sphere, but as respondents report uncertainty about sharing and about social media in general, this is likely more related to user training and marketing of the site outside of the Labour party than it is an issue of consciously setting up an internal, Labour party-exclusive, network. However, closer examination of

the people acting as bridges between the zones show that they do in fact contribute ideas from their native zone to the external zone in several cases, and thereby verify the theoretical assumption related to network effects.

While we can see the MyLabourParty web site as a public sphere, it remains to be shown what type of public sphere it is. The four ideal types of public sphere (H Trenz & K Eder, 2004) can aid us in this. While Trenz and Eder sees the four public sphere types as distinct and separate from each other, the zones in the MyLabourParty web site are not as easy to place. Rather than belong to one ideal type, they bear with them elements from several of them. Thus, we have placed the three zones on a grid, attempting to show which ideal type is closest for each of the zones. Zones 1 and 2 have little content, and do not show signs of much debate or political protest. Most of the content in these zones are written by party officials, which leads us towards the political campaigning type of public sphere, and the comments are mostly supporting the party. This means that zones 1 and 2 are placed in between the consensus and political campaigning ideal types.

Zone 3 is more difficult to place, as it contains elements of all the ideal types. The posts are written by party officials, but many of the comments are from members of other political parties. This contributes both towards a discourse-based and a political campaigning public sphere. A lot of the comments could be seen as political protest, while others are aimed more at creating consensus among the party members who make up the majority of the zone's members. Thus, we place zone 3 almost in the middle of all the ideal types, but leaning slightly towards being a discourse-based public sphere.

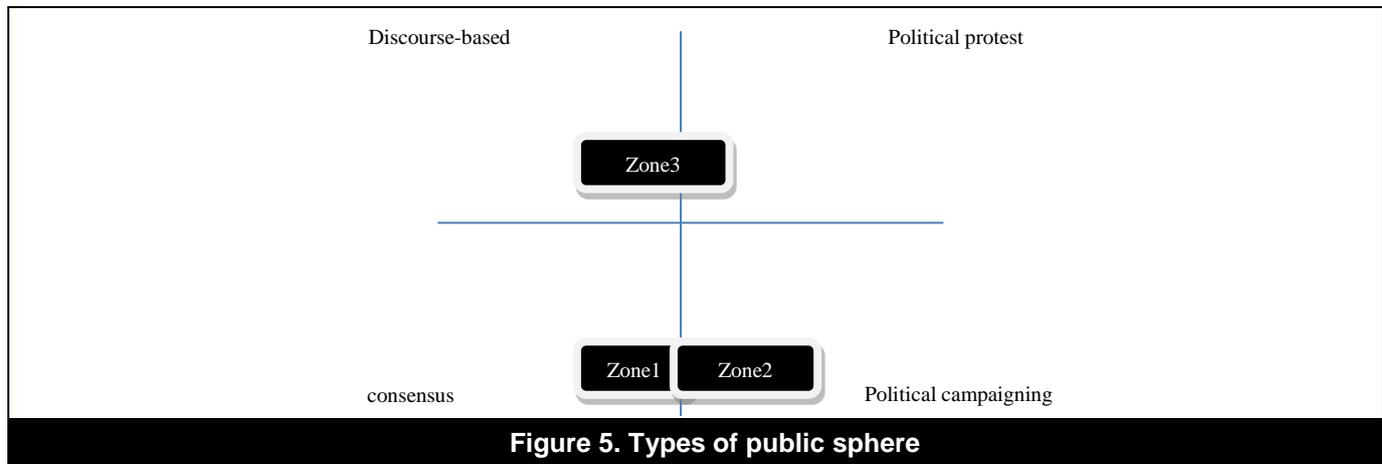


Figure 5. Types of public sphere

The findings in the MyLabourParty case should be transferable to other social media sites run by political parties. The host party presents their policies and opinions, and receive comments supporting or opposing their views from party members, supporters and members of opposing political parties. In order to create a thriving public sphere, it is vital to have at least some members of opposing parties present, as we see in zone 3. Otherwise, comments are reduced to short supportive statements, and there is little debate since most of the participants agree with the original post. A thriving public sphere further needs participants who contribute over time, address each other and thereby creating a community, and finally we need to see a mix of communication genres such as debate, humour, thanks and acknowledgement. This mix of genres and participants addressing each other could be seen as the driver of discourse formation in sites such as MyLaborParty.no.

VI. CONCLUSIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this paper we present a case study of the Norwegian Labour party's social media site, where a mixed-method approach consisting of interviews, social network analysis and genre analysis have been applied in order to answer the research questions "how do the network effects of a social media community help foster a networked public sphere?" and "how does genre influence dialogue and debate within and beyond an online political community?"

Our main case findings related to the first research question are:

One of the three examined zones shows signs of being a network, with several participants addressing each other's comments, across several different posts and topics. The main difference between zone 3 and the other two zones is the presence of several members of opposing parties. These people post comments that are critical to Labour party policies, leading members of Labour to argue against them. The interviews support this observation that the presence of opposing voices is essential for good debates.

A few of the participants contribute to more than one zone, which helps disseminate ideas across the MyLabourParty site. There are also some who share content to external sites, but most respondents report they are not comfortable with, or active participants in, social media in general. The network effects from bridging is only realised to a limited degree.

The three zones have posts which cover 15 different topics. The most popular topics receiving comments are related to internal Labour party issues and topics where the policies of different political parties are discussed. Campaigning and feedback attract the highest number of comments per post. The topic network analysis confirms that zone 3 is the only zone with a clear internal community.

In summary, the theory and findings sections combined show that a networked public sphere requires both an internal community of participants, as well as participants who bring the content from one discussion space out to other spaces. The internal community needs to include opposing voices in order to facilitate dialogue, otherwise the discussion becomes homogenous and less valuable. In the Labour party case, one of three examined zones have managed to create an internal community, and there are some few examples of participants sharing content across and outside of the zones.

For the second research question, we found that:

A total of 12 different genres were being used to communicate in the three zones. Of these, six genres contribute to the objective of fostering dialogue: Recognition, debate, Humour, Information, Critique, Policy comment, Metacommunication, Q&A and Thanks.

Genres contribute to dialogue and thereby to maintaining a public sphere in different ways:

Formal genres: Debate, Q&A and information by presenting factual information and arguments supported by external sources or following a logical argument. Critique by providing opposing views to the debate. Policy comment by responding to calls for action or input. *Informal, social genres:* Recognition, humour and thanks by increasing trust and thereby driving dialogue forwards. Finally, metacommunication contributes by being a genre where participants in the discussion can discuss the rules and etiquette of the forum.

A mix of formal and informal genres contributes best towards generating long discussions, while sarcasm and especially harassment has the opposite effect.

Several lessons may be learnt from this study; In particular, we would like to offer the following:

It may be challenging for a political party to host an active online political community. As seen in the variety in the three studied zones, online political communities (or sub-communities) may differ greatly in their ability to generate a vibrant public sphere. It is necessary to allow sufficient resources to establish such a public sphere.

Diversity may be key to an active community. As is seen in the analysis of zone 3, diverging voices may be important to generate discussion and opinion formation. When a political community is hosted by a political party, it may be even more important to be open to the outside perspective – or at least to encourage discussion within the community.

A networked public sphere requires both an active internal community and participants who bring content to a wider network. There needs to be an internal community of people who produce discussions and content in order for there to be anything to disseminate, and for the internal discussions to be made known to a wider audience participants need to share content and discussions to external spaces such as (but not limited to) Facebook or various face to face settings. For a community hosted by a political party, this may be even more important in a public sphere context, as the majority of community members are internal to the party.

Different communication genres contribute to maintaining dialogue in a number of different ways. Formal genres by addressing the requirements of the public sphere, and informal social genres by increasing trust among participants, and acting as drivers of community formation.

Genres associated with the public sphere may depend on other genres for a thriving community. The ideals for interchange within the public sphere, such as presented by Dahlgren (2001), may indeed be critical for meaningful political discussion. However, it may be that to kick-start interchange actually adhering to such lofty ideals, other kinds of interaction is needed. Interaction characterized by humour, thanks, or solicitation may not be at the core of the ideal public sphere, but may at the same time serve as a social glue that enables rational debate and critique.



Hosts of political communities may be wise to allow and encourage a broad spectrum of genres. Given that interaction that may be characterized by genres associated with the public sphere may depend on interaction of other kinds, hosts of political web sites may consider encouraging interaction characterized by for example humour, thanks and solicitation. Also sarcasm may, as we know from high level political debate, may be both fruitful and stimulating – even though it may be challenging to demarcate sarcasm, which may be beneficial, from harassment, which hardly is beneficial.

The generalizability of the findings made in the present paper is limited by the study being conducted only in a single case. Future research is needed to elaborate on the findings, and to examine if the findings from this case are also valid for other cases related to political communication. We hope that this study may serve to advance the use of genre theory in the study of political social media as public spheres.

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1. These links existed as of the date of publication but are not guaranteed to be working thereafter.
2. The contents of Web pages may change over time. Where version information is provided in the References, different versions may not contain the information or the conclusions referenced.
3. The author(s) of the Web pages, not AIS, is (are) responsible for the accuracy of their content.
4. The author(s) of this article, not AIS, is (are) responsible for the accuracy of the URL and version information.

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APPENDIX A – THE SNA PROCESS AND CODING EXAMPLES

The process of conducting the social network analysis involved the following steps (after the initial round of reading and testing several different applications):

Identify and scope network

Identifying the network was easy in our case, as we were approached by the Labour party and asked to work with them. Scoping was a bit more difficult. Network analyses can in theory be extended indefinitely, so it is important to know when and where to stop. Finding a good balance between manageable data and enough data is tricky, and in retrospect we could perhaps have extended our analysis to include one or two more zones.

Identify network aspects you are interested in

The basic building blocks in a network analysis are nodes and the relations between them. This means that anything where you can think of a possible relation can be the object of analysis. Our mandate in the Labour case was to examine their social media site, and our academic interest was related to democracy and the public sphere. Hence, the aspects we chose to focus on were related to examining dialogue, information dissemination and examining topics which were being discussed.

Plot relations in NodeXL spreadsheet

Having identified the network relations we were interested in examining, the next step was coding the data. This was done manually by examining each post's comments and looking for the relations we were analysing. In the first analysis we examined people addressing each other explicitly by name, or implicitly where the contents of the comment showed that this was a response to the previous comment. The actual spreadsheet is simple, where you input the name of the two nodes who are connected to each other, and if the relation is directional or not. One spreadsheet was made for each zone. The analysis identifying bridges was based on a modified version of this first analysis, where we took the list of participants from each zone and coded the relation "participant [comments in] [zone name]". Finally, the topic analysis involved a new round of examining all the comments, after we had identified a list of topics for the posts in the three zones. The list of topics was simply created by examining policy areas in the Labour party's policy documents, and placing each post in one of these areas.

Run the NodeXL engine to generate results and graphs

After having coded the data, the NodeXL engine generated results as numbered values and as visualisation. The software generates values for degree, centrality and clustering (groups based on the plotted relations are suggested) on an individual level, and for the network as a whole. The network metrics also includes density. For the visualisation, the software allowed us to specify colour coding, labelling, and other visual elements, as well as providing several ways of generating the graphs. You still need to manually adjust the final visualisation in order to make the information easy to understand, and this process took several attempts before we had visualisations which worked.

In the following screenshot, we see vertex 1 and 2, which is the only information you are required to input. This screen is from the analysis of which participants address each other. Then follows input for visual properties, labelling, and finally for your own columns. We used these "other" columns to note metadata which would be useful for later analyses.



1					Label			Other Columns				
2	Vertex 1	Vertex 2	Style	Opacity	Visibility	Label	Label Text	Label Font	Add Your Own	type of relation	topic of original po	name of original post
3	Person A	Person B		100					Columns Here	praise&support	Internal issues	name of post
4	Person A	Person B		100						praise&support	Internal issues	name of post
5	Person A	Person B		100						praise&support	Internal issues	name of post
6	Person A	Person B		100						debate	welfare	name of post
7	Person A	Person B		100						debate	Transport	name of post
8	Person A	Person B		100						debate	Transport	name of post
9	Person A	Person B		100						debate	Transport	name of post
10	Person A	Person B		100						debate	Transport	name of post
11	Person A	Person B		100						debate	welfare	name of post
12	Person A	Person B		100						debate	welfare	name of post

appendix 1: Example of coding.

The second illustration shows the output results of the NodeXL engine for the individual nodes in the network. We see the metrics for degree, centrality, and clustering, as well as the visual properties for the individual node. Each node also has its own subgraph (not in the illustration), showing which nodes it is connected to. This was useful in identifying the most influential nodes.

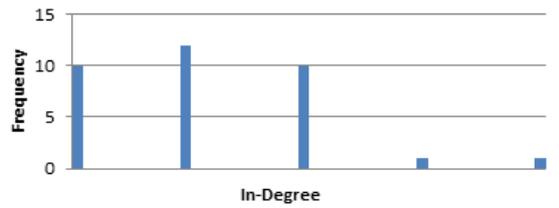
Vertex	Graph Metrics								Visual Properties			
	Degree	In-Degree	Out-Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Closeness Centrality	Eigenvector Centrality	PageRank	Clustering Coefficient	Color	Shape	Size	Opacity
Name of node		2	3	14,000	0,167	0,003	1,917	0,083	Blue	Disk	3,0	100
Name of node		2	1	8,000	0,143	0,003	1,443	0,167	Blue	Disk	3,0	100
Name of node		0	2	0,000	0,125	0,002	0,966	0,500	Blue	Disk	3,0	100
Name of node		0	1	0,000	1,000	0,000	1,000	0,000	Blue	Disk	3,0	100
Name of node		1	0	0,000	1,000	0,000	1,000	0,000	Blue	Disk	3,0	100
Name of node		2	1	0,000	0,500	0,000	1,000	0,500	Blue	Disk	3,0	100
Name of node		2	1	0,000	0,500	0,000	1,000	0,500	Blue	Disk	3,0	100
Name of node		0	2	0,000	0,500	0,000	1,000	1,000	Blue	Disk	3,0	100
Name of node		1	1	0,000	0,038	0,010	0,589	0,000	Blue	Disk	3,0	100
Name of node		4	2	60,000	0,059	0,020	2,583	0,000	Blue	Disk	3,0	100

appendix 2: Example of coding output

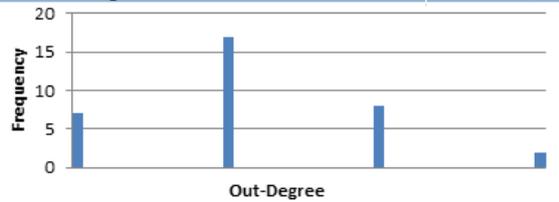
The final illustration shows the metrics for the entire network. In our case this means the individual zone.



Graph Type	Directed
Vertices	34
Unique Edges	39
Edges With Duplicates	0
Total Edges	39
Self-Loops	0
Connected Components	7
Single-Vertex Connected Components	0
Maximum Vertices in a Connected Component	11
Maximum Edges in a Connected Component	12
Maximum Geodesic Distance (Diameter)	4
Average Geodesic Distance	1,772727
Graph Density	0,034759358
NodeXL Version	1.0.1.161



Minimum In-Degree	0
Maximum In-Degree	4
Average In-Degree	1,147
Median In-Degree	1,000

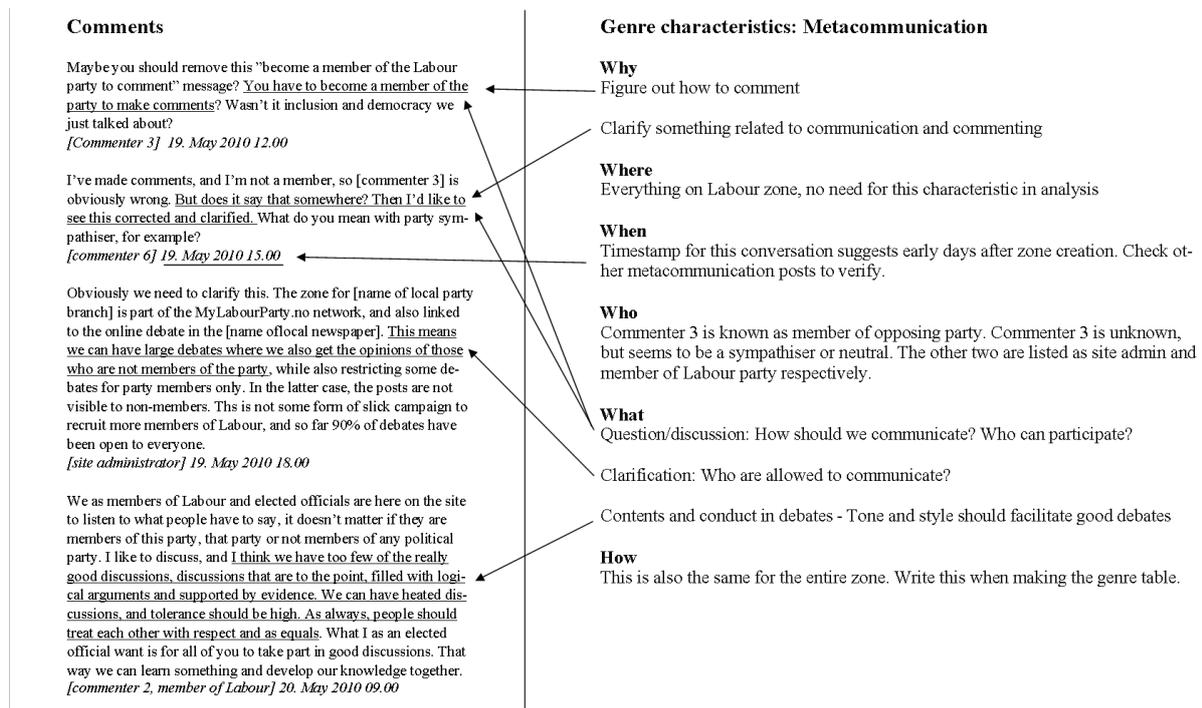


Minimum Out-Degree	0
Maximum Out-Degree	3
Average Out-Degree	1,147
Median Out-Degree	1,000

appendix 3 Example of coding output, network metrics

APPENDIX B – GENRE ANALYSIS CODING EXAMPLES

The genre analysis process is covered by the methods section of the paper in the description of the 5W1H framework. The actual coding process was simply to examine the comments one by one, perform the 5W1H analysis, and move on to the next comment. The process was made easier by coding “type of relation” in the network analysis, as this provided a starting point for examining the individual comments. In many cases, as with the example below, several comments needed to be analysed together in order to include the context of the actual discussion. After the first genres were identified, we first looked to see if the comment fit with existing genres before performing the full analysis. The illustration below shows an example of how the coding was done. For clarity, the illustration has been translated to English and created using Word. In the actual coding process we mostly used pen and paper.



appendix 4 Example of genre coding

Appendix b: Consolidated genre tables

The individual papers identifying genres have presented the genres in varying degrees of detail, depending on the context of the paper. The identification process has been the 5W1H framework throughout, so the data supports presenting all the details for the genres identified in the cases. In order to provide a more holistic and detailed view, I present the genres in consolidated tables. The different tables represent the genre repertoire, the set of individual genres used within an organisation or community, (Orlikowski and Yates, 1994b) used in the different settings examined in the cases. These settings are: campaigning, political party-run social media, activism in social media and activism in print media.

Online campaigning in social media		
repertoire: why	Contribute to citizen dialogue during the election campaign	
repertoire: whose	Varies depending on individual genres, most are initiated by citizens, but often in response to a call from political parties.	
Genre	Policy comment	Call for action
Where	Facebook, blogs, Origo, Twitter, YouTube	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube
Why	Influence policy formation. Attacks on policies of opposing parties	Generate responses from citizens, get citizens to act on something or volunteer
When	Early stages of election campaign. Can be response to call for action.	During election campaign for actions, early stages of election campaign for citizen input.
Who	Producers: citizens Users: citizens, party	Producers: Party Users: Citizens
What	Comments on specific party policies	Call upon citizens to comment on a specific policy area, or to volunteer for campaign activities
How	Comments on blogs, Facebook wall posts, Twitter replies, video responses on YouTube	Videos asking citizens to contribute, posts on Facebook or Twitter
Relation to objectives	Dialogue, contribution	Contribution, involvement
Genre	Q&A	Appeal to party
Where	Facebook, Twitter, blogs	Facebook, Twitter, blogs
Why	Ask questions about consequences of party policy	Get the political party to listen, and/or to act on an issue.
When	On-going	On-going (more during election time)
Who	Producer: Citizen User: Party	Producer: Citizen User: Party
What	Concrete questions about the outcome of a policy, answers from politicians. Often no answer from politicians	Appeal to individual political party, asking them to do something. Often based on citizen's individual experience after being in contact with a government agency. Often no answer from politicians
How	Citizens post questions on Facebook walls, via blog comments or via the Twitter "@"symbol directly to individual politicians	Citizens post questions on Facebook walls, via blog comments or via the Twitter "@"symbol directly to individual politicians
Relation to	Dialogue	Dialogue, contribution

objectives		
Genre	Greeting	Personal accounts
Where	Facebook, Blogs	blogs
Why	Creating a bond between citizen and politician	Collect personal histories related to specific issues
When	During special occasions, such as birthdays (informal) or when something has been achieved (formal)	Initiated when new policies or major policy changes are being planned.
Who	Producer: Citizen User: Party	Producer: Citizen, service user User: Party
What	Greetings to individual politicians or party, congratulating them on personal matters or successful policies	Stories about personal incidents and experiences related to a policy area. Best known example: When minister for health asked people to tell their health related stories
How	Short posts or comments on Facebook/blogs	Comments on blog
Relation to objectives	Dialogue	Contribution
Genre	Video response	
Where	Youtube	
Why	Provide a response to a previously made comment	
When	Mostly around election campaign. Rarely used genre	
Who	Producer: Citizen, party User: , citizen, party	
What	Video-“interviews” where citizens respond to a statement from a politician, response to competitions where parties ask sympathizers to create videos for the party, or politicians responding to other politicians.	
How	Posting video to YouTube and linking it to the content it provides a response to	
Relation to objectives	Contribution	

Deliberative social media site run by political party		
repertoire: why	Contribute to dialogue and community formation with party members and sympathizers. Facilitate political debate	
repertoire: whose	According to administrators: Mainly for party members and sympathizers, but open to everyone and comments from opposition welcome	
Repertoire: where	Posts and comments on the Labour party's social media site	
Repertoire: how	Structure similar to that of a blog. The site is made up of several posts, where users can comment. Everyone with a user account can comment, but in order to create posts you need to go through the site administrators.	
Genre	Recognition	Debate
Why	Support community formation and maintenance	Present factual arguments in order to convince others about a given position
When	When someone has made a comment the producer believes should be recognised	When discussing an issue, and the objective is to reach consensus or convince others
Who	Producer: Politician Labour User: Politician Labour	Producer: Politician, citizen, (business) User: politician, citizen (business)
What	Positive, supporting statements on other people's posts and comments	Justified argument for or against other arguments in a case being discussed. Some can be in an aggressive tone.
Relation to objectives	Dialogue	Dialogue
Genre	Harassment	Humour
Why	Show disagreement. Ridicule others.	Used in debates in an attempt to loosen up an aggressive tone or otherwise heated debate.
When	When producer has no productive arguments, but still wishes to say something	When debate becomes heated or aggressive.
Who	Producer: Politician opposition User: Politician Labour, Citizen	Producer: politician User: politician
What	Aggressive tone, unjustified negative statements about a person's or party's characteristics	Humorous comments and observations with a positive tone.
Relation to objectives	none	Dialogue (sometimes contributes to get a discussion back on track)
Genre	Information	Call for action (solicitation call)
Why	Present factual information related to the topic being discussed	Receive input on a specific matter, or get citizens to volunteer to do something
When	When producer thinks the debate is being conducted without the participants being aware of the relevant facts	Invoked when party officials asks for input, and often receives many replies.
Who	Producer: politician (business) User: politician, citizen (business)	Producer: politician User: citizen, service user
What	Facts on the issue being discussed	Calls for action or input on a specified area of concern, or policy proposal. The more specific the sender is about how responses will be used, the more replies are generated.
Relation to objectives	Dialogue	Contribution, involvement

Genre	Critique	Policy comment
Why	Reprove input of other discussants	Influence policy formation. Reply to a call for action
When	When poster strongly disagrees with a statement	When a call for action or specific input is made.
Who	Producer: citizen, politician User: politician Labour	Producer: Citizen, politician, service user User: politician
What	Negative, but often well-argued for, statements	Comments on specific party policies. Sometimes in response to call for action, sometimes as a comment to a post which is related to the commenters' concerns.
Relation to objectives	Dialogue	Dialogue, contribution
Genre	Metacommunication	Sarcasm
Why	Discuss rules of conversation	Used to underscore a point or an issue being obvious in the eyes of the producer
When	Mostly used in early stages after the site's creation.	When producer means opposing view is obviously wrong
Who	Involves both members of party, site administrators and party sympathisers	Producer: politician opposition Received: politician Labour, Citizen, (service user)
What	Discussions on rules of communication and code of conduct	Bitter, sharp accusations, irony, and negative statements about the receiver's intellect.
Relation to objectives	Dialogue	None
Genre	Q&A	Thanks
Why	Ask questions about consequences of party policy, or issues related to party membership	Signal agreement and gratitude.
When	On-going	When producer is happy with something and/or wishes to acknowledge someone
Who	Producer: citizen, politician User: politician	Producer: Citizen, politician User: citizen, politician
What	Concrete questions about the outcome of a policy, answers from site administrators or party officials	Confirming, positive and supporting statements. Providing thanks to someone for something they have said or done. Related to recognition, but more specific in thanking someone.
Relation to objectives	dialogue	Dialogue

Activism in social media		
Repertoire: why	Activist groups fighting against the planned development	
Repertoire: whose	Owned by activist groups or individuals, open to everyone but mostly participants are opposed to development	
Genre	Opinion, formal	Opinion, informal
Where	Facebook group wall	Facebook group wall
Why	Convince others through presenting facts	Present short opinion on something
When	Ongoing	Ongoing
Who	Activist to activist/citizen	Activist to activist/citizen
What	Presents a view, followed by supporting facts and arguments. Often with links, pictures, video	Presents a view, supported by emotional statements or unsupported views. Sometimes with links, pictures, video
How	Group members post messages on wall	Group members post messages on wall
Relation to table1	Dialogue, contribution	Dialogue
Genre	Call to action	Personal attacks
Where	Facebook group wall	Facebook group wall
Why	Get people to act on something	Discredit opponents
When	Before city council meetings or other events where there is a need to do something	Ongoing
Who	Activist to activist and citizens	Activist to developer, politicians
What	Invites people to participate in demonstrations, contact politicians or cast their vote in a certain way	Often unprovoked short comments claiming a named person or group are in the wrong
How	Group members post messages on wall	Group members post messages on wall
Relation to objectives	Involvement	None
Genre	Links	Greetings/cheers
Where	Facebook group wall	Facebook group wall
Why	Inform others about content posted elsewhere	Congratulate each other after victories, raise morale
When	Ongoing	When the city council vote in favor of activists
Who	Activist to activist/citizen	Activist/citizen to activists
What	Links to other online spaces, often multimedia content	Positive comments about a recent event, or about the activists' work
How	Group members post messages on wall, often with a short comment	Group members post messages on wall
Relation to objectives	Dialogue	None

Activism in print media		
Repertoire: why	Promote and conduct debate about local issues	
Repertoire: whose	Owned and edited by the local newspaper. Open to everyone, but editors decide who gets printed	
Genre	Opinion, formal	Opinion, informal
Where	Newspaper	Newspaper
Why	Convince others through presenting facts	Convince others through appeals to emotions
When	Continuously, more when case is processed in city council or during election time	Continuously, more when case is processed in city council or during election time
Who	Activist to citizen/politicians Developer to citizen/politicians	Activist to citizen/politicians
What	Presents a view, followed by supporting facts and arguments	Presents a view, supported by emotional statements or unsupported views
How	Letters are sent to the editor and published.	Letters are sent to the editor and published.
Relation to table1	Dialogue, contribution	Dialogue
Genre	Poem	Personal attacks
Where	Newspaper	Newspaper
Why	Gain attention through an unusual genre	Vent own feelings, discredit the one being attacked
When	Infrequently, no set pattern	Continuously, more when case is processed in city council or during election time, or when newspaper editorial have written positively about development
Who	Activist/citizen to citizens	Activist to politicians/developer/news editor
What	Short rhymes, aimed at touching people's emotions	Points to previous letter or quote and argues against it. Some simply claim the person being attacked is less gifted because s/he means what s/he means
How	Letters are sent to the editor and published	Letters are sent to the editor and published.
Relation to objectives	None	None

Appendix c: Interview guides

Interview guide, urban planning

Before start: Discuss use of data, anonymisation, ask for consent and recording permission.

1. Regarding the project (I'm looking for the individual respondent's views on the cove and the plans having been presented. Could turn out some interesting differences among different actors)
 - a. History/timeline
 - b. Conflicts
 - c. Why is this area so controversial, compared to other similar places in the city?

2. On different actors in the case, and their interests
 - a. Ask about who the actors in the case are
 - b. What are their interests?
 - c. Do you cooperate with other actors? Who and how?

3. Actor role re: legitimacy (the one being interviewed, not other groups)
 - a. power
 - i. Describe role/activities in process?
 - ii. Have you had major influence on the process outcomes?
 - iii. Have you reached any of your objectives? Which ones?
 - b. Legitimacy
 - i. Describe why you are so engaged in the case
 - ii. Why have you been invited to the workshops/hearings?
 - iii. Consequences of not being listened to?
 - iv. Describe arguments and actions used to further your case
 - c. Urgency
 - i. How important is it for you to «win»?
 - ii. What are the consequences if you do not?

4. On ICT and social media
 - a. Describe how you feel digital communication and esp. Social media, have been used in the case (role of...)
 - b. Have new media affected the city council in any way? How? (speculate if not politician)
 - c. How have you been using social media?
 - d. How do you feel local traditional media have acted?
5. "Snowballing"
 - a. Ask for any others I should talk to

Interview guide 2009 election

Introduce topic and theme of interview session. Ask for consent and discuss privacy

Where – *Which social media platforms are you using for the campaign, and why these?*

Why – *What is the purpose behind your party's use of social media?*

What – *What kinds of content are you planning to present/have presented?*

Who – *Who participates from the party? Which politicians? Can everyone contribute, or does the party choose? Which target audiences are you aiming at?*

When – *Is the use of social media only for the campaign, or is it an on-going activity?*

How – *What is the format of communication? Keywords: structure, language use, one or two-way communication, allow citizens to create their own content (ie. Obama campaign)*

Experiences and learning from previous election (2007).

Online campaigning compared to «regular» campaign. Is it something on the side, or part of the overall campaign strategy? How much resources are you spending (time, money, people)?