Chapter 3

A Research Design for the Examination of Political Empowerment Through Social Media

Marius Rohde Johannessen

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6343-3207

University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway

ABSTRACT

The chapter presents a research design for examining social media use in political contexts, framed as the methodology community case study. The main difference from a traditional case study is that the focus is on online communities rather than single organizations. The chapter presents the case study methodology along with the individual methods that have been applied in community case studies: interviews, stakeholder analysis, the Delphi method, social network analysis (and other digital methods), document, and genre analysis. The chapter concludes by discussing possible types of insights gained through applying these methods, and presenting a few example findings from previous research. The design has been successfully applied in the author's PhD thesis and later work, and is presented here in the hope that it might provide aid and inspiration for graduate students facing similar research problems.

1. INTRODUCTION

A thriving democracy should encourage citizens to participate in the democratic process through voting and active membership in political parties (Dewey, 1927; Oppenheim, 1971). Citizens should contribute to the public debate through participation in various discussion spaces and involvement in the political process within the confines of representative democracy (Brooks & Manza, 2007).

However, societal trends are moving away from these ideals, and new media technologies such as social media are changing political communication (Kruikemeier, Sezgin, & Boerman, 2016) Our democratic societies are facing a series of changes, and multidisciplinary research using a set of on- and offline research methods is needed to understand these changes. In the majority of European countries, party membership has strongly decreased since 1998 (Van Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2012). Governments rely increasingly on expert assessment, leaving less room for public opinion (Rayner, 2003), and market forces are pulling power away from parliamentary democracy (Østerud & Selle, 2006). Fewer citizens vote in elections (Gray & 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, Lorentzen, Selle, & Wollebæk, 2002). These factors have led to a general feeling that politicians have become removed from the citizens they are elected to represent (Narud & Valen, 2007).

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, Rose, & Nyvang, 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 & Kelly, 2008).

There are those, however, who believe that civic engagement is not disappearing, but rather changing form (Bimber, 2003). 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 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, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, & Verba, 2012) Activist groups and political parties alike gather support and spread information through social media (Segerberg & Bennett, 2011; Sen, Spyridakis, Amtmann, & Lee, 2010). A new sphere for civic engagement and empowerment, with a new form and tone of communication (Graham, 2008, 2011), is emerging in these online spaces (Chadwick, 2009; M. R. Johannessen, Sæbø, & Flak, 2016). There is a need to understand how these new arenas for participation works, and how they can contribute to democracy.

Social media is still a relatively new phenomenon, and rapidly changing. YouTube was launched late in 2005, Facebook and Twitter in 2006. There are some examples of earlier social media, but the concept of "web 2.0" was not coined until 2005 (O'Reilly, 2005). Research on the political implications of social media have undergone a transition from hype to hope to disgruntlement. The latter especially true after events such as the refugee crisis in Europe, Brexit and the Trump election and allegations of Russian influence in 2015-16, as well as increasingly disturbing reports about hate speech as a threat

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/a-research-design-for-the-examination-of-political-empowerment-through-social-media/238216

Related Content

Customer Attitudes towards Internet Banking and Social Media on Internet Banking in the UK
Yen-Yao Wang, Mohana Shanmugam, Nick Hajliand Hatem Bugshan (2015). *Handbook of Research on Integrating Social Media into Strategic Marketing (pp. 287-302).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/customer-attitudes-towards-internet-banking-and-social-media-on-internet-banking-in-the-uk/130574

The Role of Politics in Telecentres: Cases from South Africa
Einar Braathen, Heidi Attwoodand Julian May (2012). *International Journal of E-Politics (pp. 1-20).*
www.irma-international.org/article/role-politics-telecentres/67805

Corporate Strategies in Media Convergence: A Comparative Study of Sony vs. Samsung as Transnational Cultural Industries
Dal Yong Jin (2011). *Global Media Convergence and Cultural Transformation: Emerging Social Patterns and Characteristics (pp. 340-353).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/corporate-strategies-media-convergence/49613

Addicting Content, Blue Light, and Curtailed Sleep: The ABCs of Social Media Use and Sleep
Joanna C. Yau, Branda T. Sunand Jason D. Moreno (2020). *The Psychology and Dynamics Behind Social Media Interactions (pp. 211-240).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/addicting-content-blue-light-and-curtailed-sleep/232567

Citizen Engagement and Social Media: The Case of Mexican Presidential Candidacies
Rodrigo Sandoval-Almazanand Juan Carlos Montes de Oca Lopez (2019). *International Journal of E-Politics (pp. 24-43).*
www.irma-international.org/article/citizen-engagement-and-social-media/251891