3-2014

Political Social Media Sites as Public Sphere: A Case Study of the Norwegian Labour Party

Marius Rohde Johannessen

Department of Information Systems, University of Agder, Norway, marius.johannessen@hbv.no

Asbjørn Følstad

Sintef Research Institute, Norway

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aisel.aisnet.org/cais>

Recommended Citation

Rohde Johannessen, Marius and Følstad, Asbjørn (2014) "Political Social Media Sites as Public Sphere: A Case Study of the Norwegian Labour Party," *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*: Vol. 34 , Article 56.

DOI: 10.17705/1CAIS.03456

Available at: <https://aisel.aisnet.org/cais/vol34/iss1/56>

This material is brought to you by the AIS Journals at AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). It has been accepted for inclusion in Communications of the Association for Information Systems by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). For more information, please contact elibrary@aisnet.org.

Communications of the Association for Information Systems

Political Social Media Sites as Public Sphere: A Case Study of the Norwegian Labour Party

Marius Rohde Johannessen

Department of Information Systems, University of Agder

marius.johannessen@hbv.no

Asbjørn Følstad

Sintef Research Institute

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 the networked public sphere, as long as they invite opposing voices to the discussion, communicate using the genres which facilitate discussion and have users or moderators who help spread ideas between discussion spaces.

Keywords: e-participation; social media; public sphere; network society; genre theory

Volume 34, Article 56, pp. 1067-1096, March 2014

I. INTRODUCTION

The research presented in this article concerns the movement of democratic dialogue into the online environment, a phenomenon which is bound to increase in the digital age. 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 [Johannessen, 2012].

This transformation poses a challenge to political parties and organisations. The individual media consumer now to a greater degree can choose and customize his or her media consumption [Stroud, 2008; Tewksbury, 2005]. To reach out to the public, political parties and organisations need to be present in more than one medium, or risk substantial proportions of the public not being aware of current political and societal events [Gurevitch, Coleman and 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 and Caul, 2000]. The broad social movements no longer seem to have the same focus of attention in the population. Instead we seem to favour issues-based politics, engaging in single issues, possibly working with the political party supporting the issue, but not taking an interest in the broader political agenda [Østerud, Engelstad and Selle, 2003].

It has been claimed that the Internet and social media can contribute to renew the public's interest for politics [Macintosh, McKay-Hubbard and Shell, 2005; Tambouris and Tarabanis, 2007; Brandtzæg and Lüders, 2008]. 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]. Though online social interaction has been supported since the very beginning of the Internet, the term *social media* may be seen as reflecting the opportunities arising from the advancement and penetration of solutions for such online social interaction, in particular the network effects made possible by online social networks such as MySpace and Facebook [Boyd, 2009]. Though initially controversial, social media is gradually established within the scientific literature [Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre, 2011]. Social media may increase the growth and impact of grassroots movements [Shirky, 2011] and may also be used in support of those in political power [Abroms and Lefebvre, 2009]. Social media initiatives, however, may be difficult to control [Shirky, 2011], and the success of such initiatives may be uncertain [Brandtzæg and Heim, 2008].

As an ever increasing part of the population moves online, political parties are likely to benefit from establishing an online presence and take part in this transition. It is, however, challenging to establish a productive presence in this new media landscape [Effing, van Hillegersberg and Huibers, 2011]. Social media has a different culture from traditional media, with its focus on user participation and user-generated content [Jackson and 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 and Lilleker, 2009], that there is disagreement between citizens and politicians on how to communicate in social media [Johannessen, 2010], and that this lack of understanding has limited the outcome of social media initiatives [Kalnes, 2009]. Thus, political parties need to learn how to use new media and to understand how to engage citizens so as to renew the public sphere online. As the public sphere becomes a number of fragmented discussion spaces, learning how to participate in these different spaces becomes ever more important.

The 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 and Orlikowski, 1992] and are useful when studying social media use in a political context [Sæbø and Päivärinta, 2005]. Applying genre theory in the study of new media forms provide a more comprehensive analysis of new media, beyond that of looking only at the functionality of the technology behind the new medium [Orlikowski and Yates, 1994]. Mapping the genres being used in political discussions and examining how they contribute to the objectives for political communication thus may allow for a better understanding of how political parties and may set up their social media initiatives for renewed political engagement and debate.

It has been suggested that the networked nature of the Internet, and the culture of sharing and participation found in social media, provides opportunities for the creation of a networked public sphere where participants share their ideas and views across a multitude of smaller spaces [Benkler, 2006; Castells, 2008; Chadwick and Howard, 2009]. In response to these suggestions, we need to examine whether and how online political discussion spaces may be understood as a networked public sphere.

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 concerning the large variation in the 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 do the network effects of a social media community help foster a networked public sphere?”

By examining the genres used and how topics and ideas spread in networks, we may contribute to better political media strategies, for example, by uncovering which genres contribute to the public sphere and to the objectives of the political party. Such knowledge could lead to insights for site owners and frequent contributors to political discussion spaces about how a thriving political debate may be started and maintained in an online context.

The rest of the article is structured as follows: Section II presents existing research on the public sphere and network society. Section III presents our chosen research method. In Section IV we present our case and case findings. Finally, in Section V we present conclusions, limitations and ideas for future research.

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 [Sæbø, Rose and Flak, 2008; Sanford and Rose, 2007]. The public sphere 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 may be summarized as “that domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed” [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. He argued that in the twentieth 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 against this, claiming that the public sphere should include everyone and criticizing Habermas for an elitist bias [Kluge and Negt, 1972]. More recently, we have seen claims that the Internet has enabled 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 and Sanford, 2007].

“Public opinion” is an important concept in the public sphere. Public opinion can be defined as a shared understanding of an issue, reached through debate by rational citizens [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 organisation 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].

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, identified six ideal requirements for a public sphere:

1. *Autonomy*. The discourse should be driven by citizens rather than government or commercial actors.

2. *Rational-critical discourse*. The deliberation should involve reciprocal critique of normative positions supported by rational arguments, and thus be criticisable rather than dogmatically asserted.
3. *Reflexivity*. The participants should be critical also towards their own cultural values and social context.
4. *Perspective*. The participants should attempt to take the perspective of other participants, to better understand their position.
5. *Sincerity*. The participants need to make known all information relevant to the topic of debate, including their own intentions and interest.
6. *Discursive inclusion and equality*. Any citizen should have the same opportunity to participate in the deliberation.

Dahlberg himself made note that the above requirements are ideal, but that they may serve as criteria against which to assess whether online debates adhere to the principles of the rational-critical discourse of the public sphere. The ideal character of such requirements for a networked public sphere has also been discussed by others, noting a lack in correspondence between actual online debates and such ideal requirements [Neuman, Bimber and Hindman, 2011]. For example, a case study of *womenslink*, a forum for women's organisations 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 organisation 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 indicate that public spheres are emerging online [Gibson, Lusoli and Ward, 2005; Kaschesky and Riedl, 2009; Robertson, Vatrappu and 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 of online political debate concludes that such debate hardly is characterized by the ideals of the public sphere as they have been spelled out by Dahlberg [2001]. The same authors also criticised Dahlberg for not being sensitive to the effect the specific characteristic of the online medium will have on the debate [Stromer-Galley and Wichowski, 2011]. Nevertheless, they argue that we should look for other benefits of online political debate, such as its potential usefulness in public policymaking.

The notion of online support for public spheres may also be criticised on the basis of the work of Hindman [2008], who argues that the challenge for people in democracies wanting to make their opinions on political issues heard through the Internet is not to be able to speak but to be heard. Likewise, for the hosts of online spaces for political debate, fostering an active community of participants may be just as challenging as making sure that the participants adhere to the requirements of the public sphere.

Recent studies indicate that we may need to redefine our perceptions of the public sphere to address the somewhat different culture of the Internet [Graham, 2008]. Furthermore, we may need to see the requirements of a public sphere as graded characteristics rather than absolute categories. Even so, it may be argued that to justify characterizing an online space for public debate as an online public sphere there needs to be evidence concerning at least some of the Dahlberg's criteria [Graham, 2008].

While the original concept of the public sphere concerned the public sphere as one "thing", Trenz and Eder [2004a] presented 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, 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 strategies for protest, for example; (3) based on political campaigning, as in campaign websites for political parties or individual politicians; (4) based on consensus, where there is little disagreement, and people support each other. These four ideal-types of public spheres allow us to extend the original concept to better fit with the complex and many-layered society in which we live [2008].

The Network Society—Towards a Networked Public Sphere

Western society is increasingly organized through networks [Castells, 2000; van Dijk, 2000; Splichal, 2006] A network is made up of nodes (the individual parts of the network) and the connections between these nodes. Nodes can be individuals, organisations, societal institutions, businesses 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 organisations, 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 motivates us to see this public sphere as a multitude of smaller discussion spaces, linked to each other through a network of connections, rather than one unified sphere. The more connections, the more powerful the discussion spaces of a networked public sphere become.

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; Trenz and Eder, 2004b]. 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 may be beneficial to the empowerment of citizens. Individuals have little influence on the EU or UN, but can participate in various discussion forums and through their 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 being in support of positive relationships between people, something that may be a prerequisite to the ideal public sphere of Dahlberg [2001]. 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.

We may distinguish between *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.

Analysing the Public Sphere Through Network and Genre Analysis

With the networked public sphere conceptualized above, using the requirements of Dahlberg [2001] and divided into different types of public spheres [Trenz and Eder, 2004], we still need tools 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 beneficial 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 a network. Strong ties indicate community, and a large number of connections between different nodes indicate that information is disseminated in a networked rather than a one-to-one fashion, thereby reaching more nodes. What we choose to see as nodes may depend on our research question. Nodes can be both people and objects, such as a post or a comment [Smith, Shneiderman, Milic-Frayling, Rodrigues, Barash, Dunne, Capone, Perer and Gleave, 2009].

In the literature, network analysis have been used to show how top universities in China collaborate [Bo Yang, Zhihui Liu, and Meloche, 2010], how the blogosphere is made up by several subsets of dense, interest-based networks [Xiaoguang Wang, Tingting Jiang, and Feicheng Ma, 2010], to analyse student participation in e-learning [Mazur, Doran and Doran, 2010; Mazzoni and Gaffuri, 2009] and to examine topics and author networks in eGovernment research [Erman and 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 to the network. Measured as closeness (the number of nodes between two participants), between-ness (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*: The proportion of actual vs. potential connections within the network [Otte and Rousseau, 2002]

Genre theory has been shown useful in several studies of communication patterns in digital democracy [Päivärinta and Sæbø, 2008; Sæbø, 2011; Sæbø and Päivärinta, 2005; Johannessen, 2010]. Genre theory is a high-level analytical theory derived from structuration theory [Yates and Orlikowski, 1992]. A genre can be defined as “a typified communicative action invoked in response to a recurrent situation” [Yates and 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 and 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) [Yates and Orlikowski, 1992].

Genres were originally identified by their common content (themes and topics of the conversation) and form (physical and linguistic features) [Yates and Orlikowski, 1992], and studies of digital media have later added technological functionality to the analysis [Shepherd and Watters, 1998]. While functionality is an important property of a genre, one should not confuse genre and medium. Email is a medium, while a personal letter sent via email is a genre [Yates and 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 [Yoshioka, Herman, Yates and Orlikowski, 2001; Yates and Orlikowski, 2002]:

- *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.
- *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 website, can be seen as a genre repertoire, that is, a collection of genres that belong together [Yates and 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 and 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 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 because the Labour Party represents political perspectives representative of a large proportion of the population, and because their community is an early example of a political party inviting their members and others with an interest in politics to online political debate.

The data in this article was collected from two local and one regional zones on the MyLabourParty website, 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, fourteen semi-structured interviews were made with three owners and eleven 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 genre and network analyses. A genre analysis maps how people communicate within a given structure, such as the MyLabourParty website [Orlikowski and 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 and Orlikowski, 2002] depicted in the previous section and was used to confirm the initial analysis. An analysis was 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 examination of the relationship between two nodes at a time as 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 conducted: (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 provided insight into the extent to which there was 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 are important as they bring ideas from one small discussion space 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 make claims general to a population, but rather to develop concepts, generalise to theory and contribute to rich insight [Walsham, 1995]. The primary objective of the study is 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 structure of MyLabourParty is quite complex. The site is divided into a number of different subdomains termed *zones*. Most local and regional branches of the party have their own zone, with the address "[local party].mylabourparty.no". In addition, there are zones hosted by individual politicians as well as topical zones for campaigning and high profile political issues. Zones also have 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 little or no activity, have been active over only a short period of time, or have been created as one-way information channels.

The structure of a zone is similar to that of 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 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 posts and comments may be seen as 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, organisations 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 1. 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 other two 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 are where most discussions are initiated. Some of these discussions trickle upwards in the system and reach 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 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 other zones of the same categories.

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 regarding one or more of the issues being debated. The Labour party is one of the largest political parties in Norway and has been so for decades, and this could be seen as one reason 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 ongoing debate among participants about how to run 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 deleting comments is not common; site administrators rather seem to prefer to provide counter-arguments.

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 adhered to the ideal requirements of a public sphere, as a thriving dialogue and citizen involvement are important objectives for the site and the party.

The analysis shows 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 are 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 from fulfilling the ideal requirements of a public sphere to indecent flaming.

Network Analysis

The density of a network may be positively associated with the level of community formation and participation within the network [Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe 2007]. 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]. Connections between different networks may indicate a spread of ideas and discussions from one community to another [Abrahamson and Rosenkopf, 1997; 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 seventy-five 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 ongoing debate. Only comments which in some way respond to a previous comment are included, as these contribute to an ongoing 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 will resemble 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 has more of the characteristics of a vibrant network. Several people participate, and a core of about ten people addresses each other frequently. The maximum out-degree is 19, and the average is 2,7. Thus, in this zone more people 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 ten people (out of forty contributors in total) are really forming a network. The active members of opposing political parties have high scores on between-ness 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 website 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 website may be 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 between-ness 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 dissenting voices to foster 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 has strong effects on the diffusion of ideas [Abrahamson and 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.

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/her contributions. This can potentially allow for ideas and input to spread to a wider audience. Without such contributions across zones, the flow of potentially valuable ideas between individual zones would be more limited. These bridges are important, as they contribute to creating a network out of the zones which make up the MyLabourParty website. Without them, the individual zones would possibly have been less valuable as a public sphere, as ideas and debates might not as easily find its way out of the originating zone. The interviews also indicate 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 websites in order to keep themselves up-to-date on current political issues:

Well, let's take the purchase of new fighter jet; 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 websites 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 websites (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 not to 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 did 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 ask for input on specific policy areas	Posts ask 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 call 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 among 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 website	Posts introduce and present the MyLabourParty website, 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

Table 1: Topics and Comment Types Identified Through Network Analysis – Continued			
Budgeting	Discussion on issues related to local and regional government budgeting	Posts in this category mostly congratulate the party on their budgets. Comments 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 healthcare 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 — Continued

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 make this community of this zone seem stronger than those of the other zones.

In all three zones we found local issues to be most important to the participants. The topics people comment on vary relative to which topics are 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 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 metadata 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 on 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 and Orlikowski, 1992], and are identified by their common content (themes and topics of the conversation) and form (physical and linguistic features) [Yates and Orlikowski, 1992], as well as technological functionality [Shepherd and 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 and 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 [Yoshioka et al., 2001; Yates and Orlikowski, 2002]. 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 twelve 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]; a minimum requirement for a comment being included in the debate genre is that it supports 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 ongoing 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. Though not necessarily commendable, these may serve 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 day-care 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 in a sarcastic tone, the result is actually that the debate continues:

If what you say is true, What do you mean is the solution, [name]? We have a lot of areas that need 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 generate 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 willing to contribute, as long as their contributions are being used for something valuable, 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).

Fourteen 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, Zone 1).

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 [Zone 1] 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 may 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 and Päiväranta, 2009]. Several of the most active debates in Zone 3 can be classified as metacommunication. In these debates, participants discuss how to address each other, how to conduct a decent and fruitful debate, online etiquette 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? (member 1 of the Labour party, Zone 3).

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 (member 2 of the Labour party, Zone 3).

In response to this, another member of the party writes:

It is great that [member 2] 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 (member 3 of the Labour party, Zone 3).

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 [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, that is, dialogue and community formation and facilitation of political debate, dialogue may be argued to be the most important objective to address in our case. Table 2 shows which, if any, of these objectives the identified genres are addressing. Nine of the genres concern the objective of dialogue, as these in different ways contributes to an ongoing 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

Table 2: Genre Repertoire – Continued

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 ask 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	Ongoing	When producer is happy with something and/or wishes to acknowledge someone
Who	Producer: citizen, politician User: politician	Producer: citizen, politician User: citizen, politician

Table 2: Genre Repertoire – Continued

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 which forms of communication may contribute 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 associated comments often are better. A mix of the debate genre and the positive tone genres contribute to a thriving public sphere. The more informal humour, thanks and acknowledgement genres are especially important, as they may act as drivers for continued debate. Posts where only the debate genre is visible seem more likely to lead to harassment or sarcasm; as if the debaters tend to want to have the last word but run out of arguments. The use of genres with a negative tone (sarcasm, harassment) led 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 website.

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 these techniques contribute to clarifying whether the examined community may be characterized as a public sphere, and what type of public sphere it may be, 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, large numbers of strong ties and interconnected nodes indicate that ideas and opinion find their way to as many people as possible. Few ties imply that we are not looking at a strong *gemeinschaft*, and is a sign that the site may not be 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 organisation. Through this, we can improve our understanding of how to communicate. The findings indicate that if your objective for participating on the MyLabourParty website is to contribute to policy formulation, you may benefit from applying 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 may be effective, albeit not ethically sound, tools. By viewing the individual genres as genre repertoires, we see which genres may be used together to further our objectives. For site administrators, this knowledge could contribute to the creation of guidelines for debate and online etiquette, as well as for how the administrators themselves should act in the discussions.

Fourth, the combination of the two techniques was found to be helpful to assess the site relative to the ideal public sphere. As we argue in Section 1.2, the online spaces for debate enabled by social media 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—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. Both individual and relational data is necessary to fully understand social phenomena [Otte and Rousseau, 2002]. In our 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 the Host of a Networked Public Sphere

How does the MyLabourParty site serve as a public sphere in terms of Dahlberg's [2001] ideal requirements and the theory of the network society? The site's compliance to Dahlberg's requirements to some degree may be assessed through the presented findings:

- *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 this ideal.
- *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 the identified 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 requirement, 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 whom 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 genre analysis to some extent indicates that the three examined zones comply with Dahlberg's requirements. However, this compliance is far from perfect as indicated by the prevalence of genres such as harassment. 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 so 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 website, especially since the bridge network analysis indicates movement of ideas between the zones. Our findings seem to be in line with the view of Graham [2008], implying that that we may benefit from reorienting our perceptions of the online public sphere.

As seen in the theory section, online spaces for public debate may be seen more as a 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 has 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 ongoing 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 our findings from the network analysis seem to resonate with 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 to a wider public, 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 websites 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 are aligned with the theoretical assumptions on network effects.

While we find that the MyLabourParty website to some extent complies with the ideal requirements of a public sphere, it remains to be shown what type of public sphere it could be characterized as. The four ideal types of public sphere [Trenz and Eder, 2004b] can aid us in this. While Trenz and Eder see the four public sphere types as distinct and separate from each other, the zones in the MyLabourParty website are not as easy to place. Rather than belong to one ideal type, they bear elements from several of them. 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 is 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 between the consensus and political campaigning ideal types.

Zone 3 is the most 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. Many 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

Our findings 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. To create a thriving public sphere, it seems beneficial to have at least some members present with an opposing political opinion, as we see in Zone 3. Otherwise, comments may be reduced to short supportive statements, and little debate may follow as most of the participants may agree with the original post. A thriving public sphere further requires 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 article 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: (1) How do the network effects of a social media community help foster a networked public sphere? and (2) How does genre influence dialogue and debate within and beyond an online political community?

Answering Research Question 1

One of the three examined zones shows more signs associated with a full-fledged 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 realised only to a limited degree.

The three zones have posts which cover fifteen different topics. The most popular topics receiving comments are related to internal Labour party issues and topics in which 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 are in support of an argument 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.

Answering Research Question 2

A total of twelve 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 seems to be beneficial for generating long discussions, while sarcasm and especially harassment seems to have 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 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 are 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 websites may consider encouraging interaction characterized for example by humour, thanks and solicitation. Also sarcasm, 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 is hardly beneficial.

The generalizability of the findings made in the present article 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 combined use of network and genre theory in the study of political social media as public spheres.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The work of the second author was supported by the research project NETworked Power, supported by the Norwegian research council VERDIKT program (<http://networkedpower.origo.no>). We are grateful for the practical help and cooperation of the Norwegian Labour Party throughout this work.

REFERENCES

Editor's Note: The following reference list contains hyperlinks to World Wide Web pages. Readers who have the ability to access the Web directly from their word processor or are reading the article on the Web, can gain direct access to these linked references. Readers are warned, however, that:

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.

Abrahamson, E., and L. Rosenkopf (1997) "Social Network Effects on the Extent of Innovation Diffusion: A Computer Simulation", *Organization Science*, (8), pp. 289–309.

Abroms, L.C., and R.C. Lefebvre (2009) "Obama's Wired Campaign: Lessons for Public Health Communication", *Journal of Health Communication*, (14)5, pp. 415–423.

Barney, D. (2004) *The Network Society*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Benkler, Y. (2006) *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Bo Yang, Zhihui Liu, and J.A. Meloche (2010) "Visualization of the Chinese Academic Web Based on Social Network Analysis", *Journal of Information Science*, (36), pp. 131–143.

Boyd, D. (2009) "Social Media Is Here to Stay... Now What?", *Microsoft Research TechFest*, Redmond, Washington, February 26.

Boyd, D., and N.B. Ellison (2007) "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, (13), pp. 210–230.

- Brandtzæg, P.B., and J. Heim (January 2008) "User Loyalty and Online Communities: Why Members of Online Communities Are Not Faithful", *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on INtelligent TEchnologies for interactive enterTAINment*, ICST (Institute for Computer Sciences, Social-Informatics and Telecommunications Engineering), p. 11.
- Brandtzæg, P.B., and M. Lüders (2008) *eCitizen 2.0: The Ordinary Citizen as a Supplier of Public Sector Information*, Oslo: Ministry for Government and Administration Reform.
- Castells, M. (2000) "Materials for an Exploratory Theory of the Network Society", *The British Journal of Sociology*, (51), pp. 5–24.
- Castells, M. (2008) "The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, (616), pp. 78–93.
- Chadwick, A., and P.N. Howard (2009) "Introduction: New Directions in Internet Politics Research", in Chadwick, A., and P.N. Howard (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics*, London: Routledge.
- Dahlberg, L. (2001) "The Internet and Democratic Discourse: Exploring The Prospects of Online Deliberative Forums Extending the Public Sphere", *Information, Communication & Society*, (4), pp. 615–633.
- Dahlgren, P. (2005) "The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication: Dispersion and Deliberation", *Political Communication*, (22), pp. 147–162.
- Effing, R., J. van Hillegersberg, and T. Huibers (2011) "Social Media and Political Participation: Are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube Democratizing Our Political Systems?", in *Electronic Participation*, Berlin Heidelberg: Springer, pp. 25–35.
- Ellison, N.B., C. Steinfield, and C. Lampe (2007) "The Benefits of Facebook 'Friends': Social Capital and College Students' Use of Online Social Network Sites", *Journal of Computer-mediated Communication*, (12), pp. 1143–1168.
- Erman, N., and L. Todorovski (2009) "Mapping the e-Government Research with Social Network Analysis", *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference on Electronic Government*, Linz, Austria: Springer-Verlag.
- Frazer, E. (1999) "The Problem of Communitarian Politics", in *Unity and Conflict*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Gibson, R.K., W. Lusoli, and S. Ward, (2005) "Online Participation in the UK: Testing a 'Contextualised' Model of Internet Effects", *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, (7), pp. 561–583.
- Gimmler, A. (2001) "Deliberative Democracy, the Public Sphere and the Internet", *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, (27), pp. 21–39.
- Graham, T. (2008) "Needles in a Haystack: A New Approach for Identifying and Assessing Political Talk in Nonpolitical Discussion Forums", *Javnost–The Public*, p. 15.
- Gray, M., and M. Caul (2000) "Declining Voter Turnout in Advanced Industrial Democracies, 1950 to 1997", *Comparative Political Studies*, (33), pp. 1091–1122.
- Gurevitch, M., S. Coleman, and J.G. Blumler (2009) "Political Communication—Old and New Media Relationships", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, (625), pp. 164–181.
- Habermas, J. (1989) "The Public Sphere", in: Seidman, S. (ed.), *Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (1991) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.
- Hindman, M. (2008) "What Is the Online Public Sphere Good For?", in Turow, J., and L. Tsui (eds.), *The Hyperlinked Society: Questioning Connections in the Digital Age*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Jackson, N.A., and D.G. Lilleker (2009) "Building an Architecture of Participation? Political Parties and Web 2.0 in Britain", *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*, (6), pp. 232–250.
- Johannessen, M. (2010) "Genres of Participation in Social Networking Systems: A Study of the 2009 Norwegian Parliamentary Election", in Tambouris, E., A. Macintosh, and O. Glassey (eds.), *Electronic Participation*, Berlin Heidelberg: Springer.
- Johannessen, M.R. (2012) "Social Capital and the Networked Public Sphere: Implications for Political Social Media Sites", The Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-45), Maui, Hawaii, U.S.

- Kalnes, Ø. (2009) "Norwegian Parties and Web 2.0", *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*, (6), pp. 251–266.
- Kaplan, A.M., and M. Haenlein (2010) "Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media", *Business Horizons*, (53)1, pp. 59–68.
- Kaschesky, M., and R. Riedl (2009) "Top-level Decisions Through Public Deliberation on the Internet: Evidence from the Evolution of Java Governance", *Proceedings of the 10th Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research: Social Networks: Making Connections Between Citizens, Data and Government*. Digital Government Society of North America.
- Keane, J. (1995) "Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere", *The Communication Review*, (1), pp. 1–22.
- Kietzmann, J.H., K. Hermkens, I.P. McCarthy, and B.S. Silvestre (2011) "Social Media? Get Serious! Understanding the Functional Building Blocks of Social Media", *Business Horizons*, (54)3, pp. 241–251.
- Kluge, A., and O. Negt (1972) *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lanamäki, A., and T. Päiväranta (2009) "Metacommunication Patterns in Online Communities Online Communities and Social Computing", in Ozok, A., and P. Zaphiris (eds.), Berlin Heidelberg: Springer.
- Macintosh, A., A. McKay-Hubbard, and D. Shell (2005) *Using Weblogs to Support Local Democracy. E-Government: Towards Electronic Democracy*, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK: International Teledemocracy Centre, Napier University.
- Mazur, A., C. Doran, and P.R. Doran (2010) "The Use of Social Network Analysis Software to Analyze Communication Patterns and Interaction in Online Collaborative Environments", *International Conference on Education, Training and Informatics, ICETI*, Orlando, FL.
- Mazzoni, E., and P. Gaffuri (2009) "Monitoring Activity in e-Learning: A Quantitative Model Based on Web Tracking and Social Network Analysis", in Juan, A., T. Daradoumis, F. Xhafa, S. Caballe, and J. Faulin (eds.), *Monitoring and Assessment in Online Collaborative Environments: Emergent Computational Technologies for e-Learning Support*, Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- McNair, B. (2011) *An Introduction to Political Communication*, Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Merriman, J. (1996) *A History of Modern Europe: From the French Revolution to the Present*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Muhlberger, P. (2005) "Human Agency and the Revitalization of the Public Sphere", *Political Communication*, (22), pp. 163–178.
- Neuman, W.R., B. Bimber, and M. Hindman (2011) "The Internet and Four Dimensions of Citizenship", *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media*, pp. 22–42.
- O'Donnell, S. (2001) "Analysing the Internet and the Public Sphere: The Case of Womenslink", *JAVNOST*, (8), University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, pp. 39–58.
- O'Reilly, T. (2005) "What Is Web 2.0? Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software", O'Reilly Publications, <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html> (current February 9, 2010).
- Orlikowski, W.J., and J. Yates (1994) "Genre Repertoire: The Structuring of Communicative Practices in Organizations", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, (39), 541–574.
- Østerud, Ø., F. Engelstad, and P. Selle (2003) "Makten og demokratiet", *En sluttbok fra makt- og demokratiutredningen*, Oslo, Gyldendal akademisk.
- Otte, E., and R. Rousseau (2002) "Social Network Analysis: A Powerful Strategy, Also for the Information Sciences", *Journal of Information Science*, (28), pp. 441–453.
- Päiväranta, T., and Ø. Sæbø (2008) "The Genre System Lens on e-Democracy", *Scandinavian Journal of Information Systems*, (20).
- Papacharissi, Z. (2002) "The Virtual Sphere: The Internet as a Public Sphere", *New Media & Society*, (4), p. 9.
- Poster, M. (1997) "Cyberdemocracy: The Internet and the Public Sphere", in Porter, D. (ed.), *Internet Culture*, New York/London: Routledge.
- Putnam, R.D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York, Simon & Schuster.

- Robertson, S.P., R.K. Vatrupu, and R. Medina (2009) "The Social Life of Social Networks: Facebook Linkage Patterns in the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election", *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research: Social Networks: Making Connections between Citizens, Data and Government*. Digital Government Society of North America.
- Rose, J., Ø. Sæbø, T. Nyvang, and C. Sanford (2007) "The Role of Social Networking Software in eParticipation", in Svendsen, S.B. (ed.), *DEMO-net: D14.3. DEMO-net: The Democracy Network*.
- Sæbø, Ø. (2011) "Understanding Twitter Use Among Parliament Representatives: A Genre Analysis", in Tambouris, E., A. Macintosh, and H. De Bruijn (eds.), *Electronic Participation*, Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer.
- Sæbø, Ø., and T. Päivrinta (2005) "Autopoietic Cybergenres for e-Democracy? Genre Analysis of a Web-based Discussion Board", *Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*.
- Sæbø, Ø., J. Rose, and L. Flak (2008) "The Shape of eParticipation: Characterizing an Emerging Research Area", *Government Information Quarterly*, (25), pp. 400–428.
- Sanford, C., and J. Rose (2007) "Characterizing eParticipation", *International Journal of Information Management*, (27), pp. 406–421.
- Shepherd, M., and C. Watters (1998) "The Evolution of Cybergenres", *Proceedings of the Thirty-first Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, volume 2, pp. 97–109.
- Shirky, C. (2011) "Political Power of Social Media-Technology, The Public Sphere Sphere, and Political Change", *The Foreign Affairs Magazine*, (90), p. 28.
- Smith, M.A., B. Shneiderman N., Milic-Frayling, E.M. Rodrigues, V. Barash, C. Dunne, T. Capone, A. Perer, and E. Gleave (2009) "Analyzing (Social Media) Networks with NodeXL", *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Communities and Technologies*, University Park, PA: ACM.
- Splichal, S. (2006) "In search of a strong European public sphere: some critical observations on conceptualizations of publicness and the (European) public sphere", *Media Culture Society*, 28, 695–714.
- Stromer-Galley, J., and A. Wichowski (2011) "Political Discussion Online", in Consalvo, M., and C. Ess (eds.), *The Handbook of Internet Studies*, London: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Stroud, N. (2008) "Media Use and Political Predispositions: Revisiting the Concept of Selective Exposure", *Political Behavior*, (30), pp. 341–366.
- Tambouris, E., and K. Tarabanis (2007) "The Role of Web 2.0 Technologies in eParticipation", *DEMO-net Booklet*, DEMO-net: The Democracy Network.
- Tewksbury, D. (2005) "The Seeds of Audience Fragmentation: Specialization in the Use of Online News Sites", *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, (49), pp. 332–348.
- Trenz, H., and K. Eder (2004a) "The Democratizing Dynamics of a European Public Sphere", *European Journal of Social Theory*, (7), pp. 5–25.
- Trenz, H., and K. Eder (2004b) "The Democratizing Dynamics of a European Public Sphere: Towards a Theory of Democratic Functionalism", *European Journal of Social Theory*, (7), pp. 5–25.
- Tönnies, F. (1974) *Community and Association*, Great Britain: Lowe & Brydone Ltd.
- Van Dijk, J. (2000) "Models of democracy and concepts of communication," In K. L. Hacker & J. V. Dijk (Eds.), *Digital Democracy, Issues of theory and practice*. London: Sage.
- Walsham, G. (1995) "Interpretive Case Studies in IS Research: Nature and Method", *European Journal of Information Systems*, (4), pp. 74–81.
- Webster, F. (1995) "Information Management and Manipulation: Jürgen Habermas and the Decline of the Public Sphere", in *Theories of the Information Society*, London: Routledge.
- Xiaoguang Wang, Tingting Jiang, and Feicheng Ma (2010) "Blog-supported Scientific Communication: An Exploratory Analysis Based on Social Hyperlinks in a Chinese Blog Community", *Journal of Information Science*, (36), pp. 690–704.
- Yates, J., and W. Orlikowski (2002) "Genre Systems: Structuring Interaction Through Communicative Norms", *Journal of Business Communication*, (39), pp. 13–35.
- Yates, J., and W.J. Orlikowski (1992) "Genres of Organizational Communication: A Structural Approach to Studying Communication and Media", *The Academy of Management Review*, (17), pp. 299–326.

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 perhaps we could 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 you can think of as 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 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: 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, in which 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 created simply 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			Color	Size	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

Figure 6. 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

Figure 7. Example of Coding Output

The final illustration shows the metrics for the entire network. In our case this means the individual zone.

Figure 8. Example of Coding Output, Network Metrics

APPENDIX B: GENRE ANALYSIS CODING EXAMPLES

The genre analysis process is covered by the methods section of the article in the description of the 5W1H framework. The actual coding process simply was 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.

Figure 9. Example of Genre Coding

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marius Rohde Johannessen is Research Fellow in Information Systems at the University of Agder. He has recently submitted his Ph.D. on social media use in eParticipation and has a background in the media industry. His research interests are on eParticipation and eGovernment, with emphasis on understanding how government can apply new media technologies to improve communication with citizens. His previous work has been published at conferences such as IFIP 8.5 eParticipation, ECIS and HICSS.

Asbjørn Følstad is senior researcher at the Norwegian research institute SINTEF ICT, where he works in the networked systems and services department. His research interests are in the area of usability, human–computer interaction and user experiences of ICTs. His previous work has been published at several HCI conferences and journals.

Copyright © 2014 by the Association for Information Systems. Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and full citation on the first page. Copyright for components of this work owned by others than the Association for Information Systems must be honored. Abstracting with credit is permitted. To copy otherwise, to republish, to post on servers, or to redistribute to lists requires prior specific permission and/or fee. Request permission to publish from: AIS Administrative Office, P.O. Box 2712 Atlanta, GA, 30301-2712, Attn: Reprints; or via e-mail from ais@aisnet.org.

Communications of the Association for Information Systems

ISSN: 1529-3181

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Matti Rossi
Aalto University

AIS PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

Virpi Tuunainen Vice President Publications Aalto University	Matti Rossi Editor, CAIS Aalto University	Suprateek Sarker Editor, JAIS University of Virginia
Robert Zmud AIS Region 1 Representative University of Oklahoma	Phillip Ein-Dor AIS Region 2 Representative Tel-Aviv University	Bernard Tan AIS Region 3 Representative National University of Singapore

CAIS ADVISORY BOARD

Gordon Davis University of Minnesota	Ken Kraemer University of California at Irvine	M. Lynne Markus Bentley University	Richard Mason Southern Methodist University
Jay Nunamaker University of Arizona	Henk Sol University of Groningen	Ralph Sprague University of Hawaii	Hugh J. Watson University of Georgia

CAIS SENIOR EDITORS

Steve Alter University of San Francisco	Michel Avital Copenhagen Business School
--	---

CAIS EDITORIAL BOARD

Monica Adya Marquette University	Dinesh Batra Florida International University	Tina Blegind Jensen Copenhagen Business School	Indranil Bose Indian Institute of Management Calcutta
Tilo Böhmann University of Hamburg	Thomas Case Georgia Southern University	Tom Eikebrokk University of Agder	Harvey Enns University of Dayton
Andrew Gemino Simon Fraser University	Matt Germonprez University of Nebraska at Omaha	Mary Granger George Washington University	Douglas Havelka Miami University
Shuk Ying (Susanna) Ho Australian National University	Jonny Holmström Umeå University	Tom Horan Claremont Graduate University	Damien Joseph Nanyang Technological University
K.D. Joshi Washington State University	Michel Kalika University of Paris Dauphine	Karlheinz Kautz Copenhagen Business School	Julie Kendall Rutgers University
Nelson King American University of Beirut	Hope Koch Baylor University	Nancy Lankton Marshall University	Claudia Loebbecke University of Cologne
Paul Benjamin Lowry City University of Hong Kong	Don McCubrey University of Denver	Fred Niederman St. Louis University	Shan Ling Pan National University of Singapore
Katia Passerini New Jersey Institute of Technology	Jan Recker Queensland University of Technology	Jackie Rees Purdue University	Jeremy Rose Aarhus University
Saonee Sarker Washington State University	Raj Sharman State University of New York at Buffalo	Thompson Teo National University of Singapore	Heikki Topi Bentley University
Arvind Tripathi University of Auckland Business School	Frank Ulbrich Newcastle Business School	Chelley Vician University of St. Thomas	Padmal Vitharana Syracuse University
Fons Wijnhoven University of Twente	Vance Wilson Worcester Polytechnic Institute	Yajiong Xue East Carolina University	Ping Zhang Syracuse University

DEPARTMENTS

Debate Karlheinz Kautz	History of Information Systems Editor: Ping Zhang	Papers in French Editor: Michel Kalika
Information Systems and Healthcare Editor: Vance Wilson	Information Technology and Systems Editors: Dinesh Batra and Andrew Gemino	

ADMINISTRATIVE

James P. Tinsley AIS Executive Director	Meri Kuikka CAIS Managing Editor Aalto University	Copyediting by S4Carlisle Publishing Services
--	---	--