

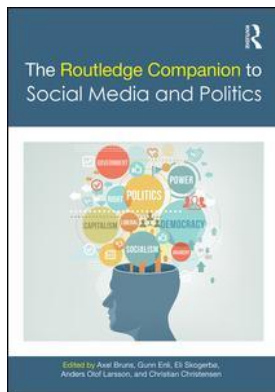
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SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN THE GERMAN ELECTION CAMPAIGN 2013

*Christian Nuernbergk, Jennifer Wladarsch,
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Introduction

Concerning election campaigning research, Germany can be considered as a special case for several reasons: first, Germans are rather reluctant to use social media and generally less interested in news-related participation as well as political campaigning online (Hasebrink and Hölig 2013; Bernhard, Dohle, and Vowe 2014). Second, Germans are generally cautious to embrace new and individualised news services broadly. Germany's media system reflects the country's federal structure: a comparably strong regional press market, several regional public broadcasters, regional and national commercial operators, and national press titles shape the media landscape. Traditional mass media have also taken the lead online: Germans seem to be rather loyal to established news sources. Third, Germany's political system is described as a 'party-driven democracy' (Esser and Hemmer 2008) with a fairly stable set of influential parties.

Such structural constraints as well as specific patterns of media use and civic engagement are likely to have an effect on the particular shape of German election campaigning and the significance of social media use in these campaigns. Therefore, this chapter draws a more detailed picture of the role social media played during the German federal election campaign 2013. It provides an overview on the German media and political system and will briefly describe the 2013 campaign cycle developments. From an analytical point of view, different perspectives on social media use in campaigns will be considered: on the one hand, the focus lies on how candidates and parties make use of social media in their campaigns. On the other hand, the dynamics of the networked publics which emerge around these campaigns in social media and which are shaped by citizens as well as campaigners are emphasised.

The German Political System: A Party-Driven Democracy

The electoral context that German voters operate in is quite complex. German electoral law combines principles of proportional representation with elements of a first-past-the-post system (Klingemann and Wessels 2001). The country's mixed-member

election system allows voters to cast a nominal and a party vote in national elections. The nominal ballot selects a candidate by plurality vote in single-seat districts. The second ballot is based on a closed party list in each of the 16 federal states. The proportion of this party vote determines the number of seats a party receives in parliament. List-tier allocation only takes place when parties overcome a nation-wide 5 per cent threshold or win three single-seat districts. Each party will get its plurality-won seats plus the seats gained by the proportional rule less the number of plurality-won seats (Klingemann and Wessels 2001). Thus, half of the seats are allocated to district winners. The German system exhibits a high degree of stability regarding turnover in governments and the number of parties in the Bundestag. Germany's voter turnout is also relatively high compared to some other European countries (2013: 71.5 per cent). But younger people and those with lower education are less likely to participate in elections (Partheymüller and Schmitt-Beck 2013: 504). Federal elections take place every four years.

Electoral systems may have an effect on campaign behaviour. In mixed-member systems, Plasser and Plasser (2002) expect mainly party-driven campaigns. Parties alone organise the nomination of candidates for public office in Germany. Thus, candidates will need to serve as team members and are required to cooperate to some extent (Zittel and Gschwend 2008). Parties receiving 0.5 per cent of all votes will receive public funding based on their electoral success. This regulation lessens the dependency on collecting donations during campaigns. Overall, party organisations play an important role in the administration of campaigns and influence policy making and government formation. They also shape political programmes and campaign messages. This is also true for social media: all established parties employ professional staff to manage the party's and leading candidates' different social media channels (Jungherr 2014a).

The right-of-centre Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and the left-of-centre Social Democratic Party (SPD) are both known as catch-all parties (*Volksparteien*) in Germany. However, the combined share for both parties has declined from 77.3 per cent of the vote in 1990 to 56.8 per cent in 2009. The liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), the ecological Green Party (Die Grünen), and the more orthodox Left Party (Die Linke) are smaller parties which were also represented in the 17th Bundestag (2009–2013). Since German unification, an increased level of fragmentation has been observed in the party system (Lees 2012). The newly emerged Alternative for Germany (AfD), a far more Eurosceptic group, gained popularity during the 2013 election campaign and nearly entered parliament.

The German Media System and Patterns of Media Use

Following Hallin and Mancini's framework of comparing media systems, Germany can be considered as 'Democratic Corporatist' by showing a strong involvement of organised social groups in policy (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Generally, the German media landscape is rather diverse with a large number of press titles and a dual system of public and private broadcasting. According to the Federation of German Newspaper Publishers (BDZV), newspaper readers can choose between 351 daily newspapers, 21 weekly titles, and seven Sunday titles with a combined circulation of 21.5 million copies (BDZV 2014). Press and public broadcasting both reflect the regional structure of the federal republic, which still influences the cultural life of Germany. Despite the regionalised newspaper landscape, a small number of publishing houses dominate the press market and a process of concentration has been underway in recent decades (see

Hasebrink and Hölig 2013; Röper 2014). However, compared to other countries, the German press market is still healthy in terms of political diversity (Esser and Hemmer 2008).

Under the German Constitution, broadcasting is controlled by the German states rather than the federal government. As a consequence of this federal model, public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting are both regulated by an Interstate Broadcasting Treaty. The Treaty describes public broadcasters' duties to fulfil informational and educational purposes. It does not allow sponsored political newscasts. Following these rules, public broadcasters' election news coverage must uphold standards of professional distance and impartiality (Esser and Hemmer 2008). Commercial broadcasting was introduced in 1984. Regulation in this sector is limited in comparison: according to the treaty, commercial channels have no comparable duties to inform and educate the public. Election airtime is granted to parties in commercial as well as in public channels (Esser and Hemmer 2008). While this airtime is generally free (but limited) on public channels, the Interstate Broadcasting Treaty authorises parties to pay a reduced spot rate on commercial channels.

Germany is among the countries with the highest traditional news media consumption. Therefore, a majority of the population is still reached by traditional channels (Hasebrink and Hölig 2013). The representative Reuters Institute news survey lists Germany highest with Japan concerning the use of news from newspapers (63 per cent). It is also one of the top-ranked countries in terms of TV news (82 per cent) and radio news consumption (51 per cent) (Hasebrink and Hölig 2013: 81). The same report also states that Germans are least likely to use online news (66 per cent). Additionally, only one fifth of Germans receive news from blogs and social media (21 per cent). Except for France (20 per cent), all other countries examined in the comparative Reuters Institute survey exhibited higher numbers, ranging from 23 per cent to 51 per cent (Newman 2013: 10). It is likely that this country-specific communicative behaviour and media culture will also shape the application of different election campaign strategies. According to Hasebrink and Hölig (2013), a possible reason for this reluctance to use social media may lie in a German need for "systematic and reliable structures" (Hasebrink and Hölig 2013: 83), which may keep Germans from embracing new technologies at an early stage.

Research on Social Media in German Election Campaigns

The empirical research related to German election campaigns on social media can be classified into two main fields: (1) usage studies, and (2) campaign features. Research on the usage side explores who consumes information on social media, and who participates. Additionally, studies also examine the possible effects of social media use. Further, the empirical work on campaign features researches what social media opportunities are provided, and for what campaign purposes they are designed.

The reluctant social media use in Germany leads to the assumption that social media activities are rather unlikely to play important roles in the country's election campaign strategies. So far, a representative survey on news consumption on the 2013 election showed that the most common media channel for using news on the election campaign was television (66 per cent), followed by newspapers (38 per cent) and the Internet (23 per cent) (Gscheidle and Gerhard 2013: 559). Bernhard, Dohle, and Vowe (2014) reported a similar order concerning media use for political information. The younger

generation is more likely to use a wide range of platforms and combines online sources and traditional media (Hasebrink and Hölig 2013). But even among young adults (18–29) the Internet was not more important than television for consuming news on the election campaign (Gscheidle and Gerhard 2013). Overall, social network sites (SNS), like Facebook and Twitter, have not played an exceptional role: only a minority of those who informed themselves about the election campaign on the Internet also relied on these channels (8 per cent; see Gscheidle and Gerhard 2013: 558).

German election campaigners first experimented with social media in 2005. Barack Obama's successful presidential campaign in 2008 was especially influential in terms of promoting the potential uses of (and myths about) social media in political campaigns. Even a crossover of personnel expertise took place when U.S. strategists advised German politicians preceding the 2008 campaign (Lilleker and Jackson 2011). Within the German party-centred system, political parties control official campaign strategies and play the central role. But this structural pattern could be challenged by the personalised and dialogical characteristics of social media (Enli and Skogerbø 2013) which allow candidates to communicate politics more individually. Beyond their official party accounts on social media, German parties do not try to systematically encourage party discipline in social media channels. According to a Tagesschau.de news report, no party had issued guidelines for its members' use of social media in the 2013 election campaign. Thus, there was no official 'overall strategy' on how to use and communicate via social media even in 2013 (Matzen 2013).

However, all parliamentary parties had implemented a range of Web 2.0 features by 2009 (Lilleker and Jackson 2011). Campaign weblogs and supporter networks emerged even earlier, in the 2005 election. But this previous experiment with weblogs was not really substantial. Only a small percentage of German Internet users used weblogs in 2005, and the political blogosphere was still in an early stage of development (see Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Rischke 2007). Not surprisingly, blogging was then mostly discontinued by politicians after the 2005 election (Bieber 2011).

As a consequence of the impressive Obama campaign, SNSs like Facebook or its German counterpart StudiVZ, YouTube videos, and Twitter received more attention than the traditional campaigning websites in 2009 (Bieber 2011). However, on a national level, these 'interactive activities' did not have a statistical effect on electoral performance (Marcinkowski and Metag 2013). Lilleker and Jackson (2011: 107) described the German parties' Web 2.0 features as "more or less aesthetic tools," and missed "genuine political discussions". Notably, only 21 candidates and 11 Members of the Bundestag (MdBs) were found to be blogging in 2009 (Albrecht 2011). Nevertheless, Albrecht also identified a strong increase in election-related blogs based in civil society. He concluded that this format is relevant for the political periphery rather than for the system's centre.

Since the 2009 election, extensive research was conducted, especially on Twitter (see Jungherr 2014b for an overview). Plotkowiak and Stanoevska-Slabeva (2013) investigated how German candidates used Twitter in 2009. They found that less than one fifth of the 3,500 candidates held an active Twitter account in 2009. Conversations on Twitter were mainly in-group focused and took place between members of the same party. During the same election, Elter (2013) studied seven regional state election campaigns. He found that Twitter was used less than Facebook in these campaigns. Almost all parties received the most 'likes' and comments immediately prior to the election date. Despite this tendency for mobilisation, no patterns of sustainable dialogue were

visible. Thimm, Einspänner, and Dang-Anh (2012) described two rather distinct styles of Twitter use during two regional state elections in 2011: a 'personal-interactive' style and a 'topic-informative' one. Politicians tweeting in the first style were characterised as 'networkers' who frequently used Twitter's conversational markers. On the other side of the spectrum were politicians who often used hyperlinks to share information with their own followers but did not engage in conversations. Beside these considerable differences regarding politicians' activities, they observed a preference for non-dialogical styles.

More generally, Jungherr (2014b) stated that Twitter messages with hashtag mentions of political parties followed different temporal patterns than their mentions in traditional media during the 2009 election. Research showed that those actors who were retweeted the most in mentioning political parties during two state election campaigns were leftists, activists, and bloggers (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan 2012). Similarly, Jungherr's (2013) findings indicated that especially the Pirate Party was comparably more visible on Twitter in the 2009 election than traditional parties. With regard to the 2009 case, these results point to a rather specific user environment in the Twitter publics which emerged during the campaign as it unfolded.

Particularly in the case of German Twitter studies, two typical selection strategies are present: in one approach, studies analyse and track specific accounts or specific outlets. In another approach, topic-related tweets are selected by keywords or hashtags. The case studies on the German election campaign presented below each stand for one of these two perspectives.

Although online election campaigns are well researched, some limitations can be identified. First, most studies concerning campaigns still focus on single *platforms*. Second, much previous research focuses on the online activities of established political *actors*. In doing so, the substantially new aspect of the networked public sphere remains hidden: the participation of non-established actors outside of the control of campaign headquarters, MPs' offices, or the editorial offices of mass media. Third, so far most studies have concentrated on a single *topic*. For this reason, a comparison of topics could hardly be drawn. More generally, a focus on the strategic use of social media in election campaigns dominates, whereas research in this field interrogates the extended participatory structures only much more rarely.

The 2013 Campaign Cycle

The 2013 federal election took place on 22 September 2013. The conservative CDU/CSU nearly won an absolute majority of seats but still needed a coalition partner to govern in the new term. The liberal FDP failed to re-enter parliament for the first time since 1949. The newly emerged Alternative for Germany (AfD) came very close to entering parliament but finally fell below the 5 per cent hurdle. SPD, Greens and Leftists each re-entered parliament, but with mixed results.

In 2013, all established parties could build on previous experience with communities on social media. Hence, campaign planners were able to manage them more efficiently and knew how to utilise social media in a realistic manner in the pursuit of their main campaign goals. Therefore, differences regarding social media were also prevalent in this campaign cycle. But as in earlier election campaigns, some events mainly took place to generate media attention and coverage (see Jungherr 2014a). For example, the challenger Peer Steinbrück (SPD) organised a Twitter Townhall which was not

primarily meant to be an interactive forum. It was rather an attempt to illustrate the candidate's affinity for digital media. On different SNS, especially two symbolic gestures quickly gained visibility: Angela Merkel's signature hand gesture of a rhombus (<>), which was also used on a giant campaigning billboard in Berlin, and Steinbrück's middle finger (#stinkefinger). The challenger's gesture was printed before in a pictorial interview in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin* (Seifert 2013).

A first synopsis of the 2013 campaign by Jungherr (2014a) indicated that especially the supporter network platforms were more professionally integrated into the overall campaign framework. They were used to organise local campaigns in the constituencies. Additionally, donations were more successfully collected than in previous elections. This may have helped to boost the AfD which also quickly obtained visibility in social media and the comment sections of news websites. Furthermore, both leading parties CDU/CSU and SPD produced professional media content, which they distributed across different social media channels.

Two empirical case studies will be presented in the following to further examine the role of social media in the 2013 campaign. The first study analyses different social media and examines how they mirror election content. The aim of this research was to overcome the limitations mentioned above. A second case study explores how politicians used Twitter in their individual campaigns and to what extent they interacted with citizens.

Study 1: Dynamics of Topics, Parties and Candidates in Social Media

This study presents results from a broad-based social media monitoring that encompasses the period between 16 May and the election date, 22 September 2013. It does not focus on a specific platform but rather on content relevant to the federal election—topics, candidates and political parties. The study compares Twitter as a microblogging service, selected weblogs, and the forum *meta.tagesschau.de*, which is used to comment on the online articles of Germany's highest-reach television news broadcast, *Tagesschau* (see full report: Wladarsch et al. 2014). In this context, the following research questions will be addressed: Which agenda did social media have during the election campaign 2013? How did the agenda concerning topics, political parties, and candidates change over time? What are the differences between the three platforms? Who are the influential players in social media, in terms of generating the highest resonance?

The digital database of online articles allows an automatic data collection and analysis. Thereby, quite a large number of cases can be handled. However, the methods used have hardly been tested yet and lack established standards (Jungherr 2014b; Kaczmirek et al. 2014). Thus, the following study also has to be interpreted on the basis of these constraints.

Data collection was realised by the internally developed software tool SMART Prototype. The software is able to handle a large volume of unstructured data (e.g. text body, status updates) and related metadata (e.g. author, amount of comments/retweets) from a broad variety of social media platforms. On *meta.tagesschau*, all articles and comments were tracked. For blogs, a preselection had to be made due to the vast population. Those blogs highly relevant for political and economic communication in Germany had to be identified. Therefore, several blog rankings and blog awards were used as indicators (e.g. Ebuzzing, Virato, Google Page Rank). Using these criteria, a selection of 76 blogs was made. In order to determine relevant topics on Twitter, a broad tracking

of the political campaign was necessary. For this, a keyword-based way of data tracking was used to in principle include any account. In the run-up to the tracking, a keyword list was defined which finally contained 350 words as indicators for political communication (e.g. names of all parties and politicians, political topics, general words in the context of elections).

In a second step, articles on different topics relevant to the analysis were extracted from these data. Sixteen topics of relevance to the voters' decision (as indicated in surveys) or much discussed on social media were selected. Every topic was operationalised by several keywords.¹

Which agenda did social media have during the election campaign 2013? The number of cases differs very substantially between the three platforms (see Table 30.1), which can be explained by the platforms' different functions: tweets are quickly written

Table 30.1 Amount and Shares of Articles on Different Topics

	<i>Twitter</i>		<i>Blogs</i>		<i>meta.tagesschau</i>	
	<i>amount</i>	<i>share in %</i>	<i>amount</i>	<i>share in %</i>	<i>amount</i>	<i>share in %</i>
NSA affair	217,600	39.0	3,465	40.5	16,588	38.0
Energy transition	65,818	11.8	611	7.1	1,449	3.3
Candidates' TV debate	60,529	10.8	157	1.8	375	0.9
Taxes	53,709	9.6	792	9.3	2,112	4.8
Mollath ²	30,730	5.5	294	3.4	280	0.6
Syria crisis	24,445	4.4	1,453	17.0	17,321	39.7
Minimum wage	23,036	4.1	246	2.9	520	1.2
Floods in Central Europe	18,852	3.4	246	2.9	963	2.2
European crisis	16,309	2.9	442	5.2	548	1.3
Euro Hawk ³	12,923	2.3	72	0.8	1,550	3.6
Road tolls	11,764	2.1	63	0.7	626	1.4
Pensions	11,455	2.1	515	6.0	830	1.9
Tax evasion	8,597	1.5	172	2.0	368	0.8
Loaning of party votes	1,976	0.4	10	0.1	100	0.2
'Amigo' affair ⁴	470	0.1	14	0.2	6	0
Criticism of Europe	65	0	4	0	6	0
Total	558,278	100	8,556	100	43,642	100

Note: multiple topics can be assigned to one article.

and forwarded, whereas postings on blogs are much more detailed and discussed over a longer period of time. Comparing the agenda across the topics, some differences can be noticed. Media-driven events and topics with reference to the Internet generate a higher resonance on Twitter than on other platforms. Topics of great social or political significance (e.g. Syria crisis, taxes) are much discussed on blogs and especially *meta.tagesschau* and are less tied to specific events. In this context it must be taken into account that *meta.tagesschau*'s agenda is pre-determined by the *Tagesschau*'s online articles and thus follows an editorial selection of topics. Analysing the topic dynamics on a daily basis, two special peculiarities can be noticed. First, Twitter and the comments on *Tagesschau* articles respond quickly and intensively to events, whereas blog postings are less linked to topicality and tend to be commented on over a longer period of time. Second, the analysed dynamics of topics can be grouped into (at least) two types: the first group includes dynamics with one or more strong peaks (e.g. TV debate, flood, NSA affair, Syria crisis). Those topics are especially driven by important events (mostly reported by media). Their dynamics are very similar across the platforms. The second group can be characterised by topics that are discussed continuously on a more or less constant level; these topics are all economically, socially or politically relevant over the long term, and less tied to major events (e.g. energy revolution, taxes, pension). Thus, the platforms' dynamics are quite heterogeneous.

How visible are political parties on the three platforms? Table 30.2 shows large differences between the three platforms. On Twitter mostly small parties (Alternative for Germany, Pirate Party) are mentioned, whereas on blogs left parties (Greens, Left Party, Social Democrats) predominate. Only on *meta.tagesschau* do the proportions correspond roughly to the weighting of the popular vote.

How visible are the top candidates on the three platforms (see Table 30.3)? In general, the Chancellor Angela Merkel was mentioned much more often than her challenger Peer Steinbrück across all platforms. Furthermore, concerning the proportions on a daily basis it can be noticed that media performances generated the highest

Table 30.2 Amount and Shares of Party Mentions

	Twitter		Blogs		<i>meta.tagesschau</i>	
	amount	share in %	amount	share in %	amount	share in %
CDU	309,897	13.6	1,174	12.2	2,712	16.7
CSU	165,744	7.3	465	4.8	1,223	7.5
SPD	358,419	15.7	1,643	17.1	3,593	22.2
FDP	315,117	13.8	945	9.8	2,245	13.8
Greens	294,084	12.9	2,207	23.0	2,693	16.6
Left Party	166,726	7.3	1,699	17.7	1,753	10.8
AfD	223,040	9.8	915	9.5	1,371	8.5
Pirate Party	450,789	19.7	562	5.8	628	3.9
Total	2,283,816	100	9,610	100	16,218	100

Note: Multiple parties can be assigned to one article.

Table 30.3 Amount and Shares of Candidate Mentions

	Twitter		Blogs		meta.tagesschau	
	amount	share in %	amount	share in %	amount	share in %
Only Angela Merkel (CDU)	339,200	73.7	1,585	72.8	6,122	80.4
Only Peer Steinbrück (SPD)	88,780	19.3	296	13.6	767	10.1
Both	32,359	7.0	295	13.6	723	9.5
Total	460,339	100	2,176	100	7,612	100

resonance. Thus, a large dependency on journalism and the three examined platforms can be confirmed.

Who are the influential players in social media, in terms of generating high resonance? Resonance was measured by the count of retweets (Twitter), or the amount of comments generated (blogs). For each topic, the top 10 accounts were identified to examine whether the resonance depended on topics. Amongst the most influential Twitter accounts, there are particularly many accounts of political parties, famous politicians, mass media, and interest groups. Hence, tweets sent by individual (ordinary) citizens did not generate high resonance. Comparing the 16 topical rankings, only a few consistencies can be determined. Thus, Twitter accounts that are influential across topics cannot be identified on the basis of the topics examined, quite contrary to the top blogs. Here, several blog names (e.g. *wiesaussieht.de*, *spiegelfechter.com*, *starke-meinungen.de*) are to be found across many topical rankings. This finding suggests that an elite has emerged within the German blogosphere—much as it has in the U.S. (Hindman 2009). However, it has to be considered that only 76 blogs were analysed, due to the pre-selection.

Study 2: Twitter as a Campaigning Device? German MdBs' Adoption of Twitter

The second study analyses the activities of Members of the German Bundestag (MdBs) on Twitter before and during the 2013 election campaign. The aim of this study lies in investigating whether politicians simply integrate Twitter into their established set of campaigning strategies, or whether they adapt their strategies somehow to the interactive and participatory environment provided by Twitter. To what extent the empowering potential of social media is challenged by the social-political reality of political campaigning is still a relevant empirical question (Larsson and Svensson 2014). By focusing on German MdBs, this study examines whether the political elite is engaged in a basic dialogue with citizens. It addresses the following research questions: Does the dominance of certain parties on Twitter reflect their electoral strength in the German Bundestag? Who are the primary addressees of the MdBs' Twitter communication?

A comparative synopsis of earlier research mainly ascertained that resourceful opposition parties are also predominant on Twitter (Jungheer 2014b). According to Jungheer's research summary, there is also "little evidence of Twitter being an enabling

device for dialogue between politicians and other Twitter users, not part of the political elite” (2014b: 48).

For the purposes of this study, data from all official Twitter profiles of German MdBs were retrieved using the Twitter API.⁵ Beside the MdBs’ tweets, all users who were mentioned in these messages using the @name as a marker of addressivity have been recorded. For comparative reasons, two weekly timespans were selected to study MdBs’ activities and their conversations with other actors: the data were retrieved for a first timeframe six months before the election day (20 to 26 March 2013), and for a second timeframe close to the election (15 to 21 September 2013). The first timeframe could still be described as a period of ‘routine’ politics outside the election. We identified Twitter accounts held by MdBs through systematic manual searches and cross-checking of different sources: All official MdB websites and the additional profile information for each MdB provided at the website of the Bundestag were reviewed. Thus, 338 tweeting MdBs out of 620 were identified by September 2013. Among these is Angela Merkel’s opposition challenger Peer Steinbrück, whereas the Chancellor herself does not have an account. 193 MdBs also had a verified profile, according to Twitter. The tracking resulted in 4,244 tweets for the March period. In the September timeframe, MdBs posted 7,736 tweets altogether. All tweets were included in a quantitative content analysis. This analysis was conducted to classify political content and forms of political campaigning. Furthermore, all users marked by using the @reply or RT @ operator in a message were classified by their actor type as citizens, politicians, or media actors. The coding was conducted by undergraduate student coders and two researchers. A reliability assessment achieved acceptable results on the coding of different forms of campaigning (Holsti’s coefficient: .71–.85) and good results on the classification of actor types (.81–.96).

The tracking of Twitter profiles allowed us to determine the number of active members during both periods: even though a majority of German MdBs was found to have an account on Twitter, just one third of all MdBs also composed tweets during the timeframes analysed. In the March period, 208 MdBs contributed tweets (34 per cent). Only a small increase was found for the September period, with 221 MdBs composing messages (36 per cent). However, the tweeting activity of those using the service almost doubled closer to the election (March: 20.4 tweets on average; September: 35.0 tweets). The Greens exhibited the highest share of actively tweeting Members in their parliamentary group (68 per cent in September, $n = 68$), followed by the Left Party (44 per cent, $n = 75$), and the FDP (42 per cent, $n = 93$). The ‘catch-all’ parties SPD (31 per cent, $n = 146$) and CDU/CSU (24 per cent, $n = 237$) followed last.

If the number of composed tweets is counted per political party, differences tend to diminish in September between the Greens and the conservative CDU/CSU of Chancellor Merkel. As Table 30.4 shows, the mean use of Twitter was significantly different in September, whereas MdBs’ use of Twitter did not differ by party during the routine period in March. Especially Members of the CDU/CSU and Greens exhibit a clearly increased posting rate close to the September election. Overall, Twitter activity by party only partially reflects their electoral strength in parliament. The strongest deviation was visible for the Greens party.

Graham et al. (2013) have demonstrated that averages on a party group level could be somewhat misleading given the divergence in posting rates among politicians in the UK. In the case of German parliamentarians, our study confirms that the distribution of composed tweets is also not egalitarian. But as Table 30.5 shows, election

Table 30.4 Distribution of MdBs' Tweets Compared to Party Strength in the Bundestag

	Distribution of seats (in %, n=620)	Tweets		Distribution of tweets (in %)		Mean per MdB		Median per MdB	
		2009–2013	MAR	SEP	MAR	SEP	MAR	SEP	MAR
CDU/CSU	38.2	1,096	2,174	26	28	20.3	38.1	8.0	26.0
SPD	23.5	1,027	1,402	24	18	23.9	31.2	14.0	19.0
FDP	15.0	538	998	13	13	15.4	25.6	8.0	13.0
Greens	11.0	1,058	2,330	25	30	25.2	50.7	10.5	33.0
Left Party	12.1	525	777	12	10	15.4	23.5	10.5	16.0
Total	–	4,244	7,736^a	–	–	20.4	35.0	10.0	24.0

^a Also includes independent MdB Wolfgang Neskovic.
September: $F = 2.477$, $df = 5$, $p < .05$; March: n.s.

Table 30.5 Weekly Rate and Distribution of Tweets

Number of published tweets per week	Number of MdBs publishing tweets		Share of MdBs publishing (in %)		Number of tweets		Share of all tweets (in%)	
	MAR	SEP	MAR	SEP	MAR	SEP	MAR	SEP
1	18	5	8.7	2.3	18	5	0.4	0.1
2–9	84	58	40.4	26.2	399	295	9.4	3.8
10–49	89	114	42.8	51.6	2,001	3,096	47.1	40.0
50–99	12	31	5.8	14.0	809	2,174	19.1	28.1
100 or more	5	13	2.4	5.9	1,017	2,166	24.0	28.0
Total	208	221	100	100	4,244	7,736	100	100

campaigning has mostly led to an overall increased posting rate. Thus, the comparison of different periods exhibits a slightly more moderate distribution close to the election in September.

In September, the parties also differed regarding their distribution rate (Cramer's $V = .291$, $p < .01$, Chi-square = 18.7, $df = 5$): The Greens exhibited the most visible presence on Twitter. Up to 94 per cent of their MdBs with posting activity published ten or more tweets per week. Other parties only reached values between 56 per cent and 74 per cent.

Not surprisingly, the results of the content analysis clearly demonstrate a turn towards campaigning-related Twitter activities closer to the election: Political campaigning was subject of 39 per cent of the self-composed tweets in September ($n = 4,441$), whereas earlier in March only one fifth (20 per cent, $n = 2,371$) of tweets

Table 30.6 @replies and Retweets in MdBs' Tweets by Parties (in %)

	@replies MAR (n = 2,295)	@replies SEP (n = 2,875)	Retweets MAR (n = 774)	Retweets SEP (n = 1,912)
Political actors	49.2	44.5	61.6	60.5
Journalistic actors	9.3	14.1	15.6	15.8
Ordinary citizens	35.0	36.8	12.9	18.4
Other	6.4	4.7	9.8	5.3

contained campaigning for party-related events, activities or information. Here, the periods differ significantly ($\Phi = .202, p < .001, \text{Chi-square} = 276.7, df = 1$). Likewise, efforts to mobilise (e.g. calls for votes) clearly increased (March: 3 per cent, $n = 2,380$; September: 10 per cent, $n = 4,476$; $\Phi = .112, p < .001, \text{Chi-square} = 86.2, df = 1$). Calls for donations were almost entirely absent from MdBs' messages. More generally, a decreasing amount of communication focusing on private life was observed in September (March: 18 per cent, $n = 2,902$; September: 4 per cent, $n = 4,649$; Cramer's $V = .241, p < .001, \text{Chi-square} = 439.5, df = 2$). With the ballot box in sight, messages which focused on specific policies were also posted significantly less (March: 72 per cent, $n = 1,880$; September: 23 per cent, $n = 3,779$; $\Phi = -.474, p < .001, \text{Chi-square} = 1,275.3, df = 1$).

Regarding the Members' primarily interaction partners, the content analysis reveals that the most apparent actor types were other political actors. This is especially true in the case of retweets (see Table 30.6). Overall, this pattern remains rather stable across the comparison of both periods. Interestingly, ordinary citizens received more attention via the @reply operator than by being retweeted through politicians' accounts. Mainly journalistic actors were more often involved in Twitter conversations closer to the election.

Additionally, findings indicate that the examined parties also differed regarding their Members' interaction partners on Twitter. Only the Green Party was mentioning other politicians in a majority of the cases in both periods. A network analysis perspective could provide further insights into the selected interaction partners according to partisan lines.

Conclusion

Germany's politicians and campaign planners have experimented with social media since the 2005 election. Although they have learned to manage communities and different platforms, their messages do not necessarily flow across social media offhandedly. Most of the politicians' engagement could be characterised as symbolic action. Therefore, the dialogic characteristics of social media remain largely unused. Not surprisingly, gestures and iconic images often go viral, whereas key policy messages commonly remain unshared by the masses. However, from a political actor's perspective, the

distribution of non-viral content can also be functional in an age of hybrid media (see Chapter 1 by Chadwick, Dennis, and Smith in this volume). Virality is not a necessary condition for agenda-building or political influence.

Both case studies have shown that especially smaller parties take the opportunity to engage in social media (Study 2) and thus gained visibility (Study 1) on Twitter. However, smaller as well as larger parties do not engage broadly in dialogue with citizens. The analysis of politicians' Twitter networks has shown that the most visible interaction partners were political actors. Although citizens were mentioned to some extent, the impression prevails that the political Twittersphere is mainly dominated by the political and media elite. One explanation lies in the generally reluctant use of social media in Germany. User surveys have demonstrated that only a small number of citizens are actively engaged with political content and participate in the political periphery. Concerning the topic dynamics, the results indicate that traditional media are amplified by social media, especially in the context of major events.

The limitations of existing studies have revealed that there is a need for comparative studies on several dimensions (topics, actors, platforms, countries, time). So far, little is known about differences and commonalities among countries in social media use in general and for political purposes. Therefore, longitudinal data as well as systematic international comparisons would be desirable.

Previous campaign developments do not indicate that social media will broadly reshape Germany's next election campaigns online. Certainly there is a trend towards pluralisation and personalisation in politics. But all parties—established or not—will have to deal in the long run with the country's specific media landscape, which is still substantially driven by traditional actors. It is no accident, then, that especially social media have become a preferred space for extra-parliamentary, extremist positions and media criticism in Germany. Aside from this trend, the ongoing adoption of social media is rather unlikely to change reluctant political participation behaviour. In addition, unless social media platforms like Facebook also do not afford dialogue and deliberation in a substantial way, it is unlikely that dialogic approaches will become a major element of professional campaign strategies. However, it is clear that social media will continue to play an important role in upcoming elections—but with various approaches and goals.

Notes

- 1 To define the keywords, every topic was analysed by content-based dimensions to cover all relevant aspects. Across topics, all keywords are more or less on the same level of abstraction. Additionally, different ways of writing were considered. When the focus is on a single person or organisation in a scandal (e.g. Mollath), the name is a reliable keyword. The number of keywords used ranges from one (Mollath) to 15 (Euro Hawk).
- 2 Gustl Mollath is the victim of a juridical error.
- 3 Euro Hawk is an unmanned reconnaissance plane.
- 4 Political affair of the Bavarian conservative party: Bavarian parliamentarians misused public finances to employ relatives.
- 5 The retrieval process was jointly organised within a DAAD/ATN-funded research cooperation aiming to compare Australian and German Twitter activities ('Mapping Networked Politics'). The public streaming API was used to gather the data published by a specific set of *accounts*. Due to this approach and the small amount of tweets posted by German MdBs during the two weeks selected, no API-related limitations are to be expected.

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