Chapter 9
Twitter Campaigning in the 2011 National Election in Slovenia

Strategy and Application of the Twitter Social Media Outlet in Party Election Campaigns

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Abstract The chapter examines the Twitter campaigning of parliamentary political parties and their influential members during the 2011 preterm national election campaign. We examine the rationales behind the adoption and appropriation of Twitter in the Slovenian political arena. Content analysis of 4,610 Tweets and conducted interviews with campaign managers of seven lists of candidates allowed us to revisit three perennial hypotheses about political communication on the web: the copycat, revolution and normalisation hypotheses. While the examined parties' move into the Twittersphere confirmed the copycat hypothesis, their utilisation of the tool revealed mixed evidence for the revolution vs. normalisation dilemma. Party campaigning did show signs of 'politics as usual', with political powerhouses taking the lead on Twitter as well. However, it also demonstrated a substantial degree of genuine direct political interaction between politicians and citizens.

Keywords Twitter • Slovenia • Election campaign • Copycat theory • Normalisation thesis

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B. Pătruţ and M. Pătruţ (eds.), *Social Media in Politics*, Public Administration and Information Technology 13, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-04666-2_9,

9.1 Introduction

The ongoing economic crisis in Slovenia that emerged in early 2009 rapidly extended into a governmental crisis due to the government's inability to reach a consensus with social partners on much-needed reforms. The online campaigning of various social factors, including the main political stakeholders, played an influential role in the eventual dissolution of the parliament and the call for a pre-term election[1] (Mekina 2011). Web-based tools became the main channel of communication with the public and political adversaries, as it became common practice for government ministers to reflect on the rumours surrounding them, for the opposition to attack certain governmental measures without serious challenge or with fraudulent claims and even for the political 'big guns' to engage in open confrontation with each other via Twitter[2] or Facebook (Košak and Žumer 2012). The fact that all parliamentary[3] political parties except the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia—something stereotypically expected from a party with such a base—actively utilised the official Twitter account of the party and/or the party leader is an additional indication of the relevance of this outlet.

With an unexpected election campaign on the horizon and the broad perception that big campaign spending is immoral during times of crisis, the political actors reshaped the 'permanent' political communication campaign into a formal short-term election campaign. The extensive focus on the use of web-based tools was primarily grounded on their less capital-intensive nature, accompanied by the wave of enthusiasm regarding the democratic and participatory effect the tools appeared to have during the early stages of the Arab Spring uprising (Bertoncelj 2011; Štefančič 2011). As a result, social networks stepped out of the shadows of the conventional modern campaign strategies Slovenia was used to (see Deželan et al. 2010), introducing certain new qualities that had otherwise not been present (e.g. negative campaigns). In fact, even the traditional media started to report and reflect on the impact of online campaigning as part of their regular campaign activities. An additional drive towards online campaigning in general also fostered the appearance of two influential new political newcomers that deprived the minor political parties of the usual media attention.

The above-mentioned collage of new contextual features demands a revisit of certain key hypotheses about party politicking on the web that relate in one way or another to the modernisation framework of political communication. The first is the copycat theory of party web campaigning (see Gibson and Ward 2000; Newell 2001; Selnow 1998; Gibson et al. 2003), which argues that political parties tend to lack a clear rationale for their activities on the web, particularly when taking initial

[1] E.g. '**@strankaSDS:** Government coalition is occupied with itself and stalls pre-term elections http://t.co/tXxJ17nV 6:50 p.m. Sep 17th, 2011'.

[2] E.g. '**@strankaSDS:** @PGantar During Pahor's government you increased the public debt from 8.2 to 16.4 billion euros (source SURS). You know SURS [Statistical office of Slovenia], right? 10:22 a.m. Sep 22nd, 2011'.

[3] With deputies in the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia or the European Parliament.

steps into new territory. Hence, their main rationale for a move into new territory is usually connected with keeping up to pace with political adversaries in order to maintain the appearance of being modern and up-to-date. Since Twitter is a relatively new and politically relevant web-based outlet, imbued with positive normative claims regarding its effects due to the aforementioned events involving Slovenes (e.g. Tomažič 2013), the analysis of the 2011 pre-term election promises to provide us with new insights into the rationales for changes in parties' election campaign strategies. While the 2011 pre-term election was the first Twitter election, notably under the influence of the tool's use in the Obama 2008 campaign (see Solop 2010) and across the globe (e.g. Grant et al. 2010), the observed national election race was also the only appropriate occasion to date for testing this hypothesis.

Secondly, exploration into the conditions leading to election day in early December 2011 compels us to revisit a major theoretical dilemma in the relevant literature—the revolution vs. normalisation hypothesis—which inspired a series of seminal studies on online politicking (e.g. Wright 2012; Strandberg 2008; Baxter et al. 2011; Gibson and Ward 2000; Margolis and Resnick 2000). Although the pre-eminence of this debate has been criticised for its technological determinism (Wright 2012, pp. 248–251), it has proved to be very influential, and the view that online activities reflect offline politics—contrary to expectations of major shifts in the political process and power-relations—progressively began gaining an edge. Nevertheless, the emerging patterns of party use of Web 2.0 outlets, particularly Twitter, in the Slovenian case may shed new light on the validity of these arguments. Our examination into the revolution-normalisation hypothesis is based on the professionalisation/modernisation framework of political campaigning (see Negrine and Lilleker 2002; Norris 2004; Farrell and Webb 2000; Plasser and Plasser 2002; Gibson and Römmele 2008, 2009) that traces changes in the tools and strategies political actors employ to appeal to voters due to major societal changes and increasing de-alignment of the electorate (see Holtz-Bacha 2002).

Our re-examination of these hypotheses in the political communication literature is divided into three parts. The first part explores the theoretical premises of party politicking from the aspect of election campaigns, while the second elaborates on the methods applied in our study. The third part is divided into three separate entities that put forward the intensity of and reasoning behind Twitter usage, the character of Twitter communication in the 2011 national election campaign and the implications of the direct communication modality. We conclude the chapter with a discussion of the impact of Twitter on the political process and thoughts regarding the relevance of new technologies and how they are appropriated.

9.2 Party Politicking Through the Lens of Election Campaigning

It is obvious that technological and communication developments play a central role in the way political actors communicate messages to their voters (Ward et al. 2003, p. 14). Be it a matter of utility or image-selling, the political parties

were evidently 'obliged' to step online due to processes of social differentiation and changes in media systems and technology (Holtz-Bacha 2008, p. 657). As is argued by Holtz-Bacha (ibid.), these changes have been influenced by the modernisation of society, and the professionalisation of political communication is an inevitable consequence of that. Whether it is described as professionalisation or modernisation—it also shares some theoretical premises with the Americanization thesis (Kavanagh 1995; Swanson and Mancini 1996) and with globalisation (Scammell 1998)—is a matter of lively debate outside the scope of this chapter (see Holtz-Bacha 2008; Negrine and Lilleker 2002; Gibson and Römmele 2007). However, this perspective encompasses (1) the adoption of new tools and tactics; (2) a shift in the overall style of campaigning to a more capital-intensive, aggressive or attack-oriented and continuous mode; (3) a reorientation in the relationship with the electorate towards a more interactive and individualised engagement; and (4) the restructuring of power relations within the party with an increasing centralisation of power, as well as some resurgence of the local level (Gibson and Römmele 2009).

Political parties differ in their motivation for adoption and utilisation of technological innovations. When looking at the rationales behind the parties' move online, three main reasons prevail. Agranoff (1972, p. 129) claimed that parties may introduce technological innovations when they perceive the job will be done 'cheaper and faster'. Still, the reasons for introduction of technological innovation—particularly the move online—tend to be much more prosaic. Ward et al. (2003, p. 13) identified the symbolic value of adopting new technology as very significant, since parties want to display themselves to their electorate as modern, relevant and up-to-date. Maintaining an image of professionalism is therefore an important drive itself (Gibson and Ward 2000, p. 302); however, this is frequently coupled with peer pressure from other political parties. This reasoning—also known as the copycat approach (see Gibson and Ward 2000; Newell 2001; Selnow 1998; Gibson et al. 2003), the 'me too effect' (Selnow 1998, p. 88) or the domino theory (Gibson and Ward 2000, p. 302; Tops et al. 2000)—has been the most widely defended rationale for parties moving online and highlights the bandwagon effect, in which all political actors fear 'not boarding' with everyone else (Selnow 1998, p. 88). Parties therefore decide instead against giving opponents the edge despite being uncertain of the tangible benefits of moving to the new territory (Gibson et al. 2003, p. 13). Although this hypothesis has been widely confirmed for parties gaining a foothold in cyberspace across different contexts (e.g. Stone 1996; Gibson and Ward 2000; Deželan 2005; Newell 2001; Tops et al. 2000), the jury is still out for parties moving to 2.0. As previous studies put forward the lack of a clear rationale for Slovenian parties gaining a foothold in cyberspace—having no clear idea about its potential (Franz 2003, p. 40), primarily utilising the web's informing function (Oblak and Željan 2007) and failing to present much more than party manifestos and candidate CVs (Deželan et al. 2010)—*we expect that the examination of motivations for the move to Twitter will reflect the same 'me too' reasoning*.

The bandwagon effect came under criticism in the case of the smaller and extremist parties that devised a clear rationale for their appropriation of new technologies. Due to their inferior resource capacity and very limited exposure in

traditional media outlets, this type of political actor began to perceive the Internet not just as a mere technological utility but as a 'game-changer' (see Gibson and Ward 2000, p. 302). The manner and intensity of utilising this new technology (in addition to a clearly devised adoption strategy) provide the basis for the equalisation theory (see Baxter et al. 2011; Strandberg 2008; Norris 2003), promoted by 'revolutionaries' (Wright 2012, p. 245) who were also called 'cyber-optimists' (see Margolis and Resnick 2000). This approach symbolises the initial utopian wave of deliberation on the impact of the Internet on the political process. The main aspiration of this wave may be observed under the ambitions for direct democracy (Budge 1996), new opportunities for empowerment (Dertouzos 1997), virtual communities that could help citizens revitalise democracy (Rheingold 2000), a more participatory style of politics with the activation of an increasingly disaffected electorate (see Baxter et al. 2011) and a new platform for political competition among political actors on a more equal basis (Strandberg 2008, p. 224). Hence, the general claim of the utopians was that the move online would challenge existing power structures (Margolis and Resnick 2000, p. 1) and introduce a distinct type of political engagement that sharply differed from traditional activities (Norris 2003, p. 23). Following this rationale *we expect that the smaller and extremist Slovenian political parties, with comparatively modest resources and little appeal for traditional media outlets, perceive Twitter as a potential 'game-changer' and therefore intensify their efforts related to it compared to mainstream political powerhouses*. In addition, *we expect more interactive and individualised engagement with the adoption of new tactics that are not common to the previous TV-dominated one-way-traffic political interaction*.

Contrary to utopian aspirations, a second wave of more sceptical voices of cyber-realists raised growing doubts about the impact the move online might have on the political process. By putting forward a 'politics as usual' assertion, Margolis and Resnick (2000, p. vii) have probably made the strongest case for the normalisation hypothesis by rejecting revolution in the conduct of politics and stressing that the Internet tends to reflect and reinforce the patterns of behaviour of the real world. This 'no-change' scenario simply reflects the politics online as an extension of offline politics (Strandberg 2008, p. 224). According to normalisation theorists, the utopian hopes of a new politics that would spill out of the computer and revitalise citizenship and democracy have been shattered by ordinary politics and commercial activity, which have invaded and captured cyberspace (Margolis and Resnick 2000, p. 2). Building on the libertarian tradition and the Lockean state of nature, the authors argue that the brief revolutionary golden age ceased with rapid state and market regulation (see Wright 2012, p. 247). Hence, a sophisticated political economy increasingly designed and guided by web professionals crowded out the amateurs and hobbyists and began to dominate political, economic, social, and recreational life on the Internet (Margolis and Resnick 2000, p. 4). Despite the accumulated evidence of the validity of this line of thought (see Norris 2003, p. 42), the emergence of Web 2.0 tools—in this case, Twitter—calls for its re-examination. This is primarily the case for the shift in the overall campaign style to continuous and more capital-intensive campaigning led by professionals and centralisation of power—a hallmark of professionalisation (see Norris 2004; Farrell and Webb 2000;

Plasser and Plasser 2002; Gibson and Römmele 2009). Accordingly, *we therefore expect to find Twitter communication to be more or less equally intensive during and outside of the election campaign, of a similar nature*[4] *to conventional (offline) political communication and led by professionals hired or employed by parties and under high scrutiny by the party leadership*. The main purpose of our scrutiny of parties' appropriation of Twitter is therefore (1) to resolve whether and to what extent the existing power positions are mirrored on Twitter and (2) how and to what effect the process of political (campaign) communication changed.

9.3 Methodology

In order to analyse ways of using and applying the Twitter social media outlet in the political parties' overall strategies for the 2011 Slovenian national election, we employed the framework of Golbeck et al. (2010) to analyse the content of microblogs in the political realm. Additionally, we conducted qualitative interviews with campaign team leaders of seven lists of candidates to obtain data indicating their perspectives on social media, find out various ways to give meaning to Twitter usage during the campaign and relate this to larger dynamics of political communication (e.g. Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Employing both methods is congruent with the method mix of seminal studies in the field (Gibson and Ward 2000; Newell 2001; Baxter et al. 2011). In this regard, we used the concurrent triangulation approach, where we collected both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently and compared the two databases to determine if there was convergence, differences or some combination of the two (e.g. Creswell 2009, pp. 384–85).

9.3.1 Quantitative Content Analysis

In addition to news coverage (e.g. de Vreese et al. 2006) and online media releases (e.g. Gibson and Ward 2000), content analysis is also a favourable method for analysing Twitter microblogs, which are extensively used by politicians and public officials (Golbeck et al. 2010; Waters and Williams 2011; Bruns and Stieglitz 2012). Aimed at detecting the latent campaign communication strategy in Slovenia, we prepared a codebook that identified different features of collected tweets as analysed units. Taking into consideration the essentials of campaign communication strategies, the codebook was prepared based on the coding scheme of Golbeck et al. (2010) for providing the internal content of analysed tweets. The codebook was based on additional elaboration of some classified categories in order to distinguish to whom politicians communicated, how they did that (spontaneously,

[4] The nature of communication is analysed on the basis of a framework for the analysis of the content of microblogs. See the following section.

with @ or by a RT (retweet)) and/or what they talked about (#). In this regard, the codebook intertwines indicators of both election campaign communication and Twitter communication:

DC *(Direct Communication)*: A message directed at a specific person or institution identified with the @name convention. DC was divided into five subclasses: DC1, internal communication with members of the party; DC2, external communication with media (DC2a) or journalists (DC2b); DC3, external communication with citizens (DC3a) or opinion makers (DC3b); DC4 internal communication within the institution (ministry); and DC5, communication with oppositional politicians from other parties.

DCC *(Direct Conflict Communication):* A message directed at a specific person or institution identified with the @name convention and explicit competitive or opposing communicative action.

DAC *(Direct Affection Communication):* A message directed at a specific person or institution identified with the @name convention and explicitly expressed tender attachment.

PM (*Personal Message*): A message or note with personal expressions. PM was divided into two subclasses: PMI, personal messages with a non-political character; and PMP, messages with a political campaign character.

ACT *(Activities):* A message reporting on persons' or institutions' 'offline' campaign activities. This was divided into two subclasses: OB, official and predictable campaign activities; and LA, non-official or unpredicted activities.

INF *(Information)*: A message providing a fact, opinion, or attitude expressed on Twitter.

RA *(Requesting Action)*: A message providing a request to take action—for instance, voting on elections, signing a petition, attending rallies.

FU (Fundraising): A message asking for donations and contributions.

XX *(Unknown)*: A message that cannot be classified—for instance, a single-character post.

LINK: A message that provides a link to other websites that have also been coded—for instance, a link to a personal blog, personal Facebook account, political party website, state or European institution website, news website, YouTube or another social network.

RT *(Retweet)*: A message that provides a repost of tweets posted by others, usually accompanied by the abbreviation 'RT'.

HT *(Hashtag):* A message containing a word or a phrase prefixed with the symbol #, a form of metadata tag for grouping similar messages.

EMO *(Emotional Icon):* A message containing a verbal emotional expression or a non-verbal one—for instance, an emotional icon such as ☺ or ☹.

Based on positive tests for intra- and inter-coder reliability[5] (Krippendorff 2003; Benoit 2011), tweets were coded by two independent coders in May 2013.

[5] A sample of 100 randomly-selected tweets was coded by two independent coders before the coding process (inter-coder reliability) as well as after the coding process (intra-coder reliability).

With this apparatus, we analysed tweets from official accounts of all former and current parliamentary political parties using Twitter, party leaders involved in social media communication and the most prolific party twitterians[6] during the official 30-day election campaign—4 November to 2 December 2011. Altogether, 4,610 tweets were collected and analysed, from 16 accounts:

six political party accounts (@Zares—811 tweets; @LDSstranka—531; @strankaSD—436; @StrankaSLS—447; @strankaSDS—333; @NovaSlovenija—29);

five party leaders' accounts (@ZaresGregor—375 tweets; @ZoranDELA—198; @KatarinaKresal—171; @JJansaSDS—59; @gregor_virant—15); and

four prolific party twitterians (@zzTurk—671 tweets; @PGantar—259; @matevzfrangez—169; @AlesZalar—76; @Libertarec—30).

9.3.2 Qualitative Interviews

The interviews conducted were characterised by three criteria (Flick 2006, p. 161): 'problem centering', that is, the researcher's orientation to a relevant problem (i.e. Twitter usage in political parties' overall strategies for the 2011 Slovenian national elections); 'object orientation', that is, developing or modifying interviews with respect to an object of research (i.e. party specifics in their Twitter adaptations); and 'process orientation', that is, understanding of the object of the research (i.e. normative grounding of political communication and dynamics of its social media negotiations during election campaigning). In interview conversations, we adopted a 'heuristic interviewing' (Legard et al. 2003, p. 140) approach, which emphasises the personal approach of the interviewer and sees the process of interviewing as a collaboration between the researcher and the participant, where both partners share reflections and information.

Thus, the study methodology departed from 'focused' or 'structured' interviews, in which the interviewer strictly follows the interview guide, and adopted what is known as a 'semi-structured' or 'semi-standardised' type of interview. Indeed, the interview guide was organised, but not fixed—we adopted it as a tool for theoretically informed and contextually grounded conversation. The interview conversations appeared as what Hermanns (2004) calls 'an evolving drama' (ibid., 212), in which the interviewer's task is to facilitate this drama to develop. Thus, the conversations were steered by the rather flexible application of the guide and the active involvement of the interviewer.

The inter-coder reliability analysis was performed using Krippendorf's Alpha to determine consistency among and within coders. The inter-coder reliability for two coders for all utilized variables was found to be at least Krippendorf"s Alpha (nominal) = 0.83, while the intra-coder reliability for all utilized variables did not drop below Krippendorf"s Alpha (nominal) = 0.93.

[6] We selected up to one visible party member with at least one thousand followers per political party.

More specifically, we combined three types of questions, each of which was a distinct stimulus used for a particular purpose in a certain stage of the conversation. First, 'open' (Flick 2006, p. 156), 'content-mapping' (Legard et al. 2003, p. 148) or 'non-directive' questions (Lindlof and Taylor 2002, p. 195) were used in order to get the conversation on the topic started; they were answered on the basis of the knowledge the interviewee had at hand (e.g. *'Why does the party use Twitter'?*). Then, the interviewer asked 'theory-driven' (Flick 2006, p. 156) questions based on the literature review and the theoretical framework of the study (e.g. *'What are the basic characteristics of Twitter communication with the citizens'?*). Finally, the third type of questions—'confrontational' questions (Flick 2006, p. 157) or 'content-mining' questions (Legard et al. 2003, p. 150)—responded to the notions the interviewee had presented up to that point in order to critically re-examine them in light of competing alternatives or even contradictions identified through content analysis (e.g. *'How do you explain differences in communication patterns on the party's account and party leader's account'?*).

Between 29 April and 21 May 2013, we conducted interviews with campaign team leaders of seven lists of candidates. We interviewed general secretaries or heads of parties' public relations offices from *Positive Slovenia* (PS), the *Social Democrats* (SD), the *Civic List* (DL), the *Slovenian People's Party* (SLS), *New Slovenia—Christian People's Party* (NSi), *Zares,* and *Liberal Democracy of Slovenia* (LDS). Interviews in this study had an average length of 1 h and were held in quiet public spaces, party offices in the parliament, or party headquarters. Interviews were voice-recorded and later transcribed in full. We were not able to conduct an interview with the campaign team leader of the *Slovenian Democratic Party* (SDS), but only had a short telephone conversation with the head of their public relations office, in which he stated that they had addressed Twitter usage 'several times publicly, in the media' (Jernej Pavlin, personal communication, 7 May 2013). Therefore, in the empirical part of the study, we use party members' statements about Twitter published in media outlets in 2012 and 2013 to explain the data gathered through content analysis. Additionally, we conducted a short interview with an SDS member who asked for anonymity.

9.4 Contextualization and Results

9.4.1 Internet and Social Networks in Slovenia

National statistical office reports that more than 67 % of the general population of Slovenia use the internet at least once a week (SORS 2012). According to the national survey on the use of internet (Vehovar et al. 2011, 4), 60 % of internet users in Slovenia have at least one social network profile. Moreover, the UK Office for National Statistics (2013) ranks Slovenia among countries with the highest proportion of social network users in the EU, which is also indicated by the fact that 92 %

of young Slovenes use social networks. In addition, the majority of Slovenes believe social networks are a modern way of keeping up to date with political affairs and are a reliable source of political information (Eurostat 2012, 48). Accordingly, the use of social networks by politicians is extensive and continually rising. To be precise, during the 2008–2011 parliamentary term, 64 % of MPs had a Facebook account; that percentage rose to 69 % in the present term. Likewise, although less extensive than Facebook, the use of Twitter has increased significantly in the past few years, from 18 % in the 2008–2011 parliamentary term to 46 % in the current one. Twitter is also widespread across the executive branch since 66 % of current governmental ministers and a significant share of ministries and state secretaries have an official Twitter account. Political parties make no exception, as only one out of six current parliamentary political parties do not use Twitter as an official channel for communicating with the public.

9.4.2 Twitter Usage: Intensity and Reasoning

Analysis of interviews with campaign team leaders indicates that 'me too' reasoning was prevalent in political parties' narrative about the adoption of Twitter as a campaign tool. Interviewees stressed that Twitter is 'used by everybody' (Bogdan Biščak, Zares, 10 May 2013), appeared to be an 'indispensable communication tool' (Uroš Jauševec, SD, 21 May 2013) and emerged as 'an important tool for targeted communication' (Jernej Vrtovec, NSi, 10 May 2013). Furthermore, by triangulating interview data with results of the content analysis of tweets, it became evident that Twitter was not only regarded as a significant factor by a large majority of campaign teams, but also an extensively used communication tool in the month before the national election of 2011.

On the one hand, as Table 9.1 shows, not only small parties, but also established ones intensified their Twitter activities during the campaign in comparison to other time periods. Small liberal parties (@LDSstranka and @Zares) and their leaders (@KatarinaKresal and @ZaresGregor) were the most salient examples of intensification. For instance, when interviewed, the general secretary of LDS acknowledged that before the election, their Twitter strategy was clear and fixed: 'We had a precise timeline with topics for each part of the day. In the morning we launched a certain topic, later a YouTube video on the same topic, for example, and then we followed the dynamics on Twitter and tried to respond to them' (Uroš Petohleb, LDS, 15 May 2013). As the content analysis showed, among the established parties, Social Democrats were the most active (@StrankaSD): 'Before the election campaign Twitter usage intensified and became professionalised. We used outsourced staffers as a result of strategic decision-making to use specific slogans, for instance' (Uroš Jauševec, SD, 21 May 2013). There were a few exceptions, though. For instance, the largest conservative party (@strankaSDS) did not substantially change its tweeting practices during the campaign but still remained active in comparison to others (see Table 9.1). This was also the case for the conservative NSi

Table 9.1 Twitter activity in and outside of the official election campaign by individual accounts

Twitter account	Tweets per day (campaign 2011)	Tweets per day (in general)	RT in 2011 campaign (in %)	RT in general (in %)	# in 2011 campaign (in %)	# in general (in %)
@strankaSD	15.10	3.01	29.0	14.0	30.6	0.1
@matevzfrangez	5.83	1.06	7.7	14.0	21.3	0.1
@strankaSDS	11.48	11.08	9.9	30.0	18.9	0.0
@JJansaSDS	2.03	0.94	78.0	52.0	33.9	0.0
@zzTurk	23.14	6.56	6.7	7.0	11.9	0.1
@strankaSLS	15.40	4.02	9.4	14.0	40.7	0.3
@ZoranDELA	6.83	0.61	8.6	7.0	2.0	0.1
@NovaSlovenija	1.00	1.03	0.0	29.0	6.9	0.0
@gregor_virant	0.52	0.53	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0
@Libertarec	1.03	2.04	0.0	1.0	0.3	0.0
@LDSstranka	18.31	1.05	23.0	19.0	34.7	0.2
@KatarinaKresal	5.90	0.65	21.1	5.0	19.9	0.0
@AlesZalar	2.62	1.08	21.1	5.0	25.0	0.0
@Zares	27.97	1.27	66.0	29.0	19.5	0.0
@ZaresGregor	12.93	4.75	21.6	31.0	9.6	0.1
@Pgantar	8.93	6.26	2.7	4.0	6.2	2.9

(@NovaSlovenija) and liberal DL (@gregor_virant and @Libertarec), which were the least active parties on Twitter (see Table 9.1)—mostly due to a lack of resources, as they stressed: 'During the campaign we were not actively communicating via Twitter. We published a few posts, but this was negligible at that moment. We only had the desire, but the realisation was poor. ... We did not have enough resources' (Igor Bordon, DL, 15 May 2013).

On the other hand, content analysis of tweets indicates that usage of specific elements of Twitter communication, such as retweets (RT) and hashtags (#), increased during the national election campaign in comparison to the usual activities of the analysed Twitter accounts (see Table 9.1). This was particularly evident in the case of hashtag usage in Twitter posts, as 21 % of all published tweets had this metadata tag. This fact signals that political parties and politicians were keen on participating in unmoderated discussions during the campaign, first and foremost in those general ones grouping messages about the national election (#volitve2011) and television debates (#soocenje). Paradoxically, when discussing Twitter trends, interviewees hardly addressed hashtags explicitly and did not understand them as meaningful elements of deliberation or agenda-building.

The only exception was the general secretary of the liberal DL: 'We started using our own keywords in tags. These tags are being used, they are noticed. However, we are not on the level we would like to be' (Igor Bordon, DL, 15 May 2013). Additionally, Table 9.1 shows that retweeting emerged as a significant campaign practice, especially in regard to two accounts: the leader of the SDS (@JJansaSDS, 78 % of all tweets were RTs) and the party account of the liberal Zares (@Zares, 66 % of all tweets were RTs). Otherwise, 24.2 % of all tweets

posted the month before the election were retweets. Content analysis also shows that analysed accounts mostly retweeted posts published by party colleagues or by their own party (13.1 % of all tweets), followed by those by citizens (5.6 %), and media and journalists (3.8 %).

Despite acknowledging Twitter as an important campaign tool and the intensified use of this social network, in the month before the national election, interviewees stressed that traditional campaign tools were more important, with the foremost being mass media, in particular television. 'Television is the first' (Igor Bordon, DL, 15 May 2013) and 'television is dominant' (Lejla Kogej, SLS, 29 April 2013) are only two examples emphasising a clear hierarchy; in particular, television debates were regarded as 'crucial' by interviewees (Tanja Sodnik Dodig, PS, 10 May 2013). In this context, interviewees understood Twitter, together with other social networks—for instance, Facebook—as a complementary communication tool central for gaining cross-media momentum. 'The combination of Twitter, Facebook, and television is the winning combination. . . . This was not so clear in 2011, but it has emerged as such now' (Uroš Jauševec, SD, 21 May 2013).

9.4.3 The Character of Twitter Communication in the 2011 National Election Campaign

During the 2011 pre-term election campaign, the observed political actors' tweets could mainly be placed into two categories: information and direct communication. The former encompassed more than 54 % of all captured tweets and presented the dominant mode of political actors' communication on Twitter (see Fig. 9.1). However, we have to note that in general, official party Twitter accounts reflected much higher shares of tweets classified under information modality than official accounts of party presidents or the most influential twitterians, even when the president's account performed the function of the official party account and when professionals were handling it (e.g. @ZoranDELA). The Twitter communication of smaller and new party presidents therefore reflected a far less traditional informative position (less than one-third) than those of established parties and some of their presidents, which amounted to up to 90 % of all tweets (see Table 9.2).

The informative tweets generally consisted of information about a party's or president's position on various topics that emerged during the election campaign. These positions frequently replicated statements from the party manifesto or provided a more personalised interpretation. The following are examples of these statements:

@Zares: Let's enhance the competitiveness of the economy and let's encourage entrepreneurship. http://t.co/UgPUE1Kl 7:34 a.m. Dec 1st, 2011.[7]

[7] All tweets written in Slovenian language are directly translated.

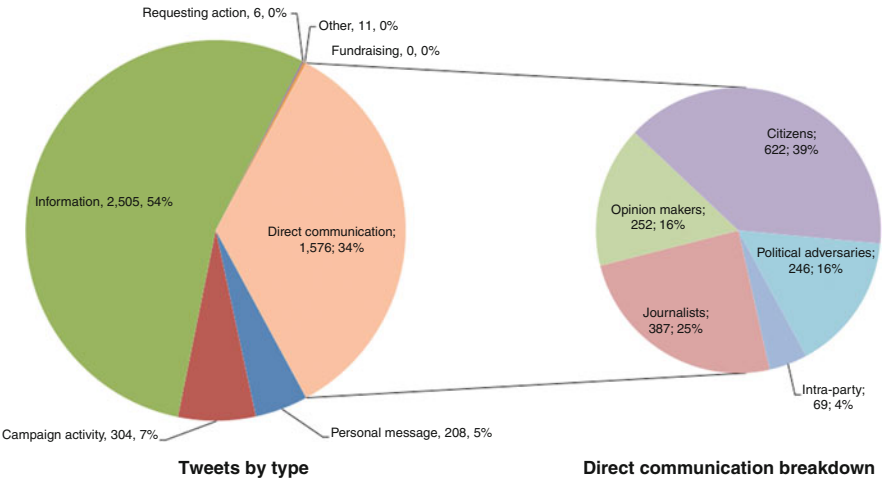

Fig. 9.1 Tweets by type and types of direct communication in the 2011 election campaign

@strankaSDS: SDS Manifesto: 10 + 100 Solution for justice, jobs and development. http://t.co/dDoLnB0X 6:46 p.m. Nov 4th, 2011.

Very infrequently, tweets involved opinions that did not have grounds in certain party programmatic documents or practices:

@AlesZalar: The presumption of innocence should not be an alibi for political irresponsibility in a parliamentary democracy. 6:03 p.m. Nov 20th, 2011.

In 21 % of the cases, these positions, facts, or opinions were substantiated by links to external information sources—most frequently, party, personal, or mass media websites. The latter frequently performed the function of external legitimation (either by including a link or without one) of the party's or individual's position, hence making the claim much more valid and tangible.

@strankaSD: The last public opinion poll from Ninamedia estimates already 14.3 % support. Forward. 9:31 p.m. Dec 2nd, 2011.

@ZaresGregor: Krugman: From Euromess to Eurogeddon http://t.co/CcEe5DeB #evrozona is all over me 2:09 p.m. Nov 7th, 2011.

Barring one obvious exception (@ZaresGregor), informative tweets from party accounts—inherently adopting a more official stance—included higher shares of links in tweets (approximately 4 %), thus reaffirming the legitimation strategy observed earlier.

It could be argued that information tweets performed like press release postings, where key facts and positions were posted as part of the overall strategy to invite followers to visit websites, Facebook accounts, or other information sources, or to react to an issue that arose during the campaign.

@strankaSDS: Janez Janša: One of the key instruments is cutting-down the legal entities' income tax. #odprtiforumtujeinvesticije 9:15 a.m. Nov 26th, 2011.

Informative tweets with hashtags represented one-tenth of all tweets of this modality. In the case of hashtag utilisation in informative tweets, we observe one

Table 9.2 Tweets by type and contained elements by analysed Twitter accounts

		Tweet type										
		Direct communication	Personal message	Activity	Information	Raising awareness	Other	Total	Link	Retweet	Hashtag	Emoticon
@AlesZalar	Count	17	17	6	36	0	0		24	16	19	2
	% within	22.4 %	22.4 %	7.9 %	47.4 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	100.0 %	31.6 %	21.1 %	25.0 %	2.6 %
@gregor_virant	Count	10	1	0	4	0	0		0	0	0	0
	% within	66.7 %	6.7 %	0.0 %	26.7 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	100.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %
@JJansaSDS	Count	4	6	0	47	1	1		25	46	20	4
	% within	6.8 %	10.2 %	0.0 %	79.7 %	1.7 %	1.7 %	100.0 %	42.4 %	78.0 %	33.9 %	6.8 %
@KatarinaKresal	Count	54	20	28	68	1	0		81	36	34	37
	% within	31.6 %	11.7 %	16.4 %	39.8 %	0.6 %	0.0 %	100.0 %	47.4 %	21.1 %	19.9 %	21.6 %
@LDSstranka	Count	192	21	53	263	1	1		185	122	184	117
	% within	36.2 %	4.0 %	10.0 %	49.5 %	0.2 %	0.2 %	100.0 %	34.8 %	23.0 %	34.7 %	22.0 %
@Libertarec	Count	1	4	0	25	0	0		2	0	1	1
	% within	3.3 %	13.3 %	0.0 %	83.3 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	100.0 %	6.7 %	0.0 %	3.3 %	3.3 %
@matevzfrangez	Count	51	28	11	79	0	0		32	13	36	6
	% within	30.2 %	16.6 %	6.5 %	46.7 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	100.0 %	18.9 %	7.7 %	21.3 %	3.6 %
@NovaSlovenija	Count	0	1	3	25	0	0		5	0	2	1
	% within	0.0 %	3.4 %	10.3 %	86.2 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	100.0 %	17.2 %	0.0 %	6.9 %	3.4 %
@PGantar	Count	212	10	10	25	1	1		21	7	16	67
	% within	81.9 %	3.9 %	3.9 %	9.7 %	0.4 %	0.4 %	100.0 %	8.1 %	2.7 %	6.2 %	25.9 %
@strankaSD	Count	100	1	24	310	0	1		132	127	134	21
	% within	22.9 %	0.2 %	5.5 %	71.1 %	0.0 %	0.2 %	100.0 %	30.1 %	29.0 %	30.6 %	4.8 %
@strankaSDS	Count	6	13	1	311	2	0		125	31	63	3
	% within	1.8 %	3.9 %	0.3 %	93.4 %	0.6 %	0.0 %	100.0 %	37.5 %	9.3 %	18.9 %	0.9 %
@StrankaSLS	Count	90	11	100	245	0	1		212	42	182	136
	% within	20.1 %	2.5 %	22.4 %	54.8 %	0.0 %	0.2 %	100.0 %	47.4 %	9.4 %	40.7 %	30.4 %
@Zares	Count	93	10	27	680	0	1		327	535	158	44
	% within	11.5 %	1.2 %	3.3 %	83.8 %	0.0 %	0.1 %	100.0 %	40.3 %	66.0 %	19.5 %	5.4 %
@ZaresGregor	Count	237	18	2	117	0	1		101	81	36	19
	% within	63.2 %	4.8 %	0.5 %	31.2 %	0.0 %	0.3 %	100.0 %	26.9 %	21.6 %	9.6 %	5.1 %
@ZoranDELA	Count	129	2	27	39	0	1		28	17	4	22
	% within	65.2 %	1.0 %	13.6 %	19.7 %	0.0 %	0.5 %	100.0 %	14.1 %	8.6 %	2.0 %	11.1 %
@zzTurk	Count	380	45	12	231	0	3		131	45	80	36
	% within	56.6 %	6.7 %	1.8 %	34.4 %	0.0 %	0.4 %	100.0 %	19.5 %	6.7 %	11.9 %	5.4 %
Count		1,576	208	304	2,505	6	11		1,431	1,118	969	516
% within all accounts		34.2 %	4.5 %	6.6 %	54.3 %	0.1 %	0.2 %	100.0 %	31.0 %	24.2 %	21.0 %	11.2 %

important detail: established parties that reported clear interest in Twitter as part of their overall strategy and devoted resources to it (@LDSstranka; @strankaSD; @StrankaSLS) clearly used informative tweets with hashtags more frequently (in more than 40 % of informative tweets) and hence tried to influence and shape the debates evolving on Twitter.

@StrankaSLS: Zerjav: Slovenian farmers' problem today is that they cannot sell without middlemen #povecalibomosamooskrbo #soocenje #volitve11 8:22 p.m. Dec 2nd, 2011.

Contrary to expectations and some previous findings on the tweeting of politicians, the second most frequent category of tweets may be subsumed under the direct communication umbrella. More than 34 % of all tweets posted by examined accounts pursue two-way interaction, which is somewhat of a novelty in Slovenian electioneering as well as political communication in general. As this novelty deserves more detailed investigation, we devote a separate section of the paper to the characteristics of direct (campaign) communication on Twitter and its significance. For now, we will just briefly mention that direct communication entailed a much higher degree of personalised communication, since more than half of the tweets with emotional expressions by way of utilising emoticons were classified under this modality.

@StrankaSLS: @jgyorkos Every stand deserves its pic :) especially because we buy good and healthy domestic food. Maybe we've given you an idea for today's lunch :) 10:52 a.m. Nov 26th, 2011.

Overall, 18.2 % of direct communication tweets included these symbols. In addition, barring one exception (@zzTurk), a pattern of users with declining or minor support engaging into more direct communication with their followers is clearly visible (see Table 9.2).

As far as other modalities of tweets are concerned, the general conclusion is that they constitute only a minor slice of the entire pie of tweets (see Fig. 9.1). Tweets about official campaign activities or less formal occasions that formed the overall campaign folklore covered only 7 % of the total and were mostly posted by either very well-versed twitterians (e.g. @KatarinaKresal) or parties with a clear strategy for promoting the event (@StrankaSLS). One example is the following tweet capturing 'unintended' hand-shaking with voters on the street:

@StrankaSLS: Very pleasant and inventive postman stopped me right on the street. RZ [Radovan Žerjav] http://t.co/UhGohDRw 11:56 a.m. Dec 2nd, 2011.

Personal messages additionally emerged as a less frequent modality with only 5 % of all tweets. As expected, the majority of these tweets was posted by accounts personally tweeted by politicians, not their staff (e.g. @AlesZalar). Other modalities such as fundraising and requesting action, thus mobilising the electorate, proved completely insignificant in the Slovenian context (see Fig. 9.1).

9.4.4 *Direct Communication: Between Conflict and Affection*

As Fig. 9.1 shows, in the month before the national election, parties, their leaders and prolific party twitterians directly communicated with citizens (39 % of all direct communication tweets), media and journalists (25 %), opinion makers (16 %), political adversaries (16 %), and colleagues within the party (4 %). However, analysis of interview data paints a rather different picture of the perceived significance of Twitter. Campaign team leaders hardly mentioned the importance of direct communication with citizens or potential voters. A synthesis of their answers reveals that their priorities lay in their relations with media and journalists, whereas other Twitter users were mostly not differentiated according to their role in the political processes. In this context, two extremes can be identified: there are parties that did 'not pay much attention' to whom they directly communicated with (Bogdan Biščak, Zares, 10 May 2013), while some set a clear hierarchy in direct communication practices, reflecting their campaign strategies: 'For political parties primary communication should foremost be with journalists, followed by opinion makers and also their internal community (Uroš Petohleb, LDS, 15 May, 2013).

Furthermore, interviewees emphasised that direct communication was straightforward and expressive, portraying the Twitter communication environment as highly interactive. For instance, the general secretary of the Social Democrats acknowledged the unpredictability and liveliness of Twitter: 'The complexities of communication and user demands are growing. It is no good if you ignore the users. If they are really rude and indecent, then it is of course a matter of decency and criteria whether you react or not' (Uroš Jauševec, SD, 21 May, 2013). Content analysis indicates that direct communication of politicians with other actors in political processes was articulated between affection and conflict, modestly tipping in favour of the latter (see Table 9.3). Analytics show that a significant portion of all direct communication effectively conveyed thoughts or feelings: 41.9 % of direct communication was conflicting and 25 % expressed affection.

Explicit competitive or opposing communicative action on the accounts of political parties, their leaders and prolific party twitterians mostly involved journalists—more than one-third of the cases (34.2 %). This mode of direct communication is even more intriguing, since 30 % of all direct communication involving journalists—the group for whom Twitter was mostly introduced—emerged as conflictive. Regardless of the political parties' ideological leaning, examples of direct conflict communication are traceable with a variety of different discursive elements:

@strankaSDS: @TjasaSlokar Ms. editor, when are you going to publish those facts we sent you 4 h ago and you intentionally left them out in #24ur? 7:58 p.m. Nov 25th, 2011.

@PGantar: @KatjaSeruga24ur are you also going to confront kitties, hamsters, puppies and parrots #soocenje 11:42 p.m. Nov 24th, 2011.

Table 9.3 Conflict and affection between politicians and various groups in direct communication

		Intra-party	Journalists	Political adversaries	Citizens	Opinion makers	Total DC
Conflict	Count	7	116	86	82	48	339
	% within DC	2.1 %	34.2 %	25.4 %	24.2 %	14.2 %	100 %
	% within group	10.3 %	30.0 %	35.0 %	13.2 %	19.0 %	41.9 %
Affection	Count	11	33	21	78	33	176
	% within DC	6.3 %	18.8 %	11.9 %	44.3 %	18.8 %	100 %
	% within group	16.2 %	8.5 %	8.5 %	12.5 %	13.1 %	25.0 %

However, affection was also traceable in 8.5 % of cases in direct communication with journalists and represented one-fifth of all tweets containing direct communication affection. The following examples address public gatherings where politicians and journalists met:

@JJansaSDS: @RadioOgnjisce Congratulations for an excellent concert for the 20th anniversary of Slovenian independence. Homeland received a marvellous present. 10:14 p.m. Nov 20th, 2011.

@KatarinaKresal: @SamoTrtnik @a_kocjan It was very nice, lots of youth, some journalists, even the mayor came by. 3:43 p.m. Nov 16th, 2011.

In this context, interviewees speak of a 'give and take relationship' with journalists (Bogdan Biščak, Zares, 10 May, 2013): for instance, 'We are all—some more and some less—professional. Everybody makes mistakes, everybody has their own interests. In all that you need to know how to act and try to do the best' (Lejla Kogej, SLS, 29 April, 2013).

Direct communication with opinion makers—that is, public figures outside of politics or society in general and Twitter users with more than 1,000 followers—is articulated somewhere between conflict and affection: 19 % of all direct communication with opinion makers was conflictive and 13.1 % expressed affection. Additionally, a significant portion of all tweets identified as direct communication effectively conveying thought or feeling happened between political accounts and opinion makers: 14.2 % conflictive and 18.8 % affectionate. In this sense, interviewees stressed that Twitter was an important tool for 'influencing opinion makers with weak predispositions' (Uroš Petohleb, LDS, 15 May 2013) and 'indirect effects on opinion makers' (Lejla Kogej, SLS, 29 April, 2013). Also in this context, direct communication with other citizens—the most numerous category of tweets involving direct communication—explicitly expressed tender affection in 12.5 % of cases (although this represented 44.3 % of all affectionate direct communication tweets!) and conflict (13.2 %), the latter being mostly reduced to brief communication instances such as the following two:

@ZoranDELA: @stanejersic @had Distinguished Mr. Jeršič. You are slowly losing your contact with reality. 9:45 a.m. Nov 11th, 2011.

@LDSstranka: @time_child Aha, you see us in the next government. Great!:) We think we performed well in the government and therefore remained part of it till the end. 10:40 a.m. Dec 1st, 2011.

When it comes to politicians directly communicating with other politicians, there seems to be a clear division among intra-party actors and political adversaries in terms of conflict or affection in direct communication. There were only few examples of expressive direct communication among accounts of the same party, while in the case of political adversaries, such communication was more common. It represented a substantial amount of all direct exchanges among accounts of different parties, with conflict being dominant at 35 % presence and affection at 8.5 %. The following examples show that prolific twitterians of the conservative SDS addressed political adversaries conflictingly as well as with affection:

@zzturk: @PGantar And how are you going to achieve that as an non-parliamentary party? Should I be afraid? 7:38 p.m. Dec 2nd, 2011.

@zzturk: @krejecl Here you go. We've got another thing in common. :) 7:44 p.m. Nov 29th, 2011.

9.5 Discussion

An examination of the political parties' move into the Twittersphere could be well summed up with an old Slovenian proverb: 'The bear changes fur, but not its coat'. To be precise, political parties rightfully sensed the need to introduce a new tool into their political communication arsenal, but with shallow motives and dubious intentions. The move was nothing close to revolutionising the political process in the ossified Slovenian 'ivory-tower' politics, but a consequence of peer pressure, societal advancement and electoral pragmatism—after all, parties are in their pure essence nothing more than organisations competing for votes. The 'me too' reasoning was therefore omnipresent among political parties, either in the fear of being left behind or as a consequence of keeping up appearances in front of the electorate. In that sense, the move to Twitter does not differ much from the move online in the early years of this millennium: when everyone else was proficient in the use of the Internet, only the parties were still shuffling along. This rationale was valid even for parties that struggled in the offline battle for voters and the attention of the main media outlets.

However, the scenario is not as grim as one would imagine. Despite the initial Potemkin-like strategies devised only to impress voters, this tool that political actors were compelled to use was slowly being moulded into an indispensable one for targeted communication. As such, political actors employed it substantially during the 2011 election campaign, particularly smaller actors with minor or declining electoral support. This converges with the utopian view that this tool could provide a Lockean state of nature, free of offline chains, which consequently drives minor actors to use the potential 'game-changer' in their struggle against political powerhouses.

Indeed, some minor parties did invest meaningful attention in this outlet in their overall strategy; however, offline capabilities began to haunt the Twittersphere as well. They mainly did so on two accounts. Firstly, the resources available (financial or human) enabled them to set a clear and intensive strategy and, under the high scrutiny of party leadership, implement it according to plan. Either hired or internally available personnel executed planned Twitter activities on a daily basis, something minor political actors in the Slovenian political arena are unable to cope with. This is also evidenced by more sophisticated use of metadata tags and retweet options to shape discussions or externally legitimise standpoints and actions. The most dominant political parties even do this as part of their 'permanent' campaign, with very little variation in intensity within and outside the official campaign. Secondly, however, the appropriation of the tool made even more 'politics as usual'. The dominant information modality shaped the message on Twitter according to political communicators' conventional practice, as part of a one-way process from the actor to the recipient. In addition, the tool was utilised as a proxy for television, the Shangri-La of Slovenian spin-doctors, therefore significantly stripping it of its potential in the case of many major parties.

Nevertheless, Twitter did emerge as an importer of certain novelties into Slovenian political process. This is primarily so in terms of the insertion of a considerable amount of direct communication into the campaign process. Despite information proving to be the dominant modality of posts, the direct communication between politicians and various groups appears to be the most far-reaching consequence of Twitter introduction. Despite our expectation that this would be in favour of communication with specialised publics, such as journalists and opinion makers, in order to shape the media agenda—as was accentuated also by the parties themselves—the dominant group politicians communicated with were citizens. To be precise, this portion of affectionate and conflictive tweets introduced a rare chance for citizens to engage in unmediated conversation with politicians and was, potentially, the basis for true political discussion.

9.6 Conclusion

The Slovenian experience with Twitter in the 2011 election campaign may be subsumed under the well-known thesis that it is never about the actual impact of technology upon politics (see Wright 2012: 246); it is always the case of how technology is designed, exploited and adopted by actors in specific social and political contexts. The Slovenian case shows that Twitter offered a platform, and the stakeholders in the political process tailored it according to their needs and capabilities. There are several patterns of Twitter use that we can observe. The first is the complementary vs. supplementary use of social networks. Certain political actors talk to different publics via Twitter and Facebook and assign different functions to the two while others straightforwardly multiply the core strategy originating from their utilization of the internet (website) in general. Secondly,

there is a clear bifurcation in terms of Twitter account personalization since several political parties opted for personalized official Twitter accounts, leaving the party leader to tweet on the party's behalf. Thirdly, this may be done by an individual or collective production of tweets. To be precise, certain party strategies entailed professionalized teams that posted tweets in a well-thought-out manner, while others tweeted without any clear strategy (sometimes this work was even carried out by their personal assistants). Fourthly, political actors contrasted in terms of the nature of their communication on Twitter. While a lot of them still retained the old information provision form known from the use of websites and dull press releases, some of them engaged in an entirely different nature of communication—they began to interact and engage in meaningful political conversations with citizens, opinion makers, and journalists.

It is primarily the composition of each actor's patterns that offers new and potentially far-reaching changes. However, in the case of Twitter, all far-reaching patterns touch upon direct communication; one of those is between the politicians' and the journalists' utilization of the tool. For them, be it a matter of cooperation or adversity, the tool provided a valuable instant contact point to immediately inform about or respond to issues that arise with the speed of light during the election campaign. The other overlap is between citizens and politicians. Although politicians rarely follow anyone other than journalists, opinion makers and fellow politicians on Twitter, the dominant mode of politicians' direct communication is with citizens. While this could be a case of 'preaching and listening to the converted', we should not disregard the potential for genuine democratisation of the political process. However, the social media environment, with its omnipresent and always-on stream of information and interpretation, additionally blurs boundaries between intimate and public discourses as well as personal and institutional relations between journalists and politicians. These dynamics indicate that at least to a certain extent, social processes and relations are getting minced into small, almost personalized communication spaces where traditional societal roles and power relations are minimized. If articulations between journalism and political communication do not respond to the trend of fragmentation of the public sphere accordingly and fail to contribute to the common communication bases for citizens, democracy's troubles might deepen.

Is this enough to be classified as a revolution? No, probably not. However, at the same time, we have to ask ourselves whether we are putting the bar too high. The value and relative worth of the democratization seen in the 2011 election should not be underestimated.

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