

# Politicians & the Public: The Analysis of Political Communication in Social Media

**Juan Pablo Alperin**

*Simon Fraser University, Canada.  
juan@alperin.ca*

**Catherine Dumas**

*University at Albany, USA.  
cdumas@albany.edu*

**Amir Karami**

*University of South Carolina, USA.  
karami@mailbox.sc.edu*

**David Moscrop**

*Simon Fraser University, Canada.  
david.moscrop@gmail.com*

**Vivek Singh**

*Rutgers University, USA.  
vs451@comminfo.rutgers.edu*

**Hassan Zamir**

*Dominican University, USA.  
mzamir@dom.edu*

**Aylin Ilhan**

*Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, Germany.  
aylin.ilhan@hhu.de*

**Isabelle Dorsch**

*Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, Germany.  
isabelle.dorsch@hhu.de*

**ABSTRACT**

Nowadays, social media has a pivotal role in political communication. Politicians, parties, and the public engage in social networks like Twitter or Facebook. This panel focuses on election campaigns and policy-making process in social media. How do politicians use social media during elections? How can we identify the public opinion of voters through the application of text-mining in social media? The US presidential election in 2016, possess big discussions and critics about the general social media usage in the context of election campaigns. Considering the case of Cambridge Analytica, information leakage, privacy issues, and trust also play an essential role as well. In respect of truthfulness, how can we encourage more robust and wide-reaching sharing of trustworthy material, such as scholarly research? Besides politicians, the public comes more and more into the focus as a political stakeholder in social media. How does the public engage in policy-making? Electronic-petitioning serves as a medium to mobilize support and interest of the public. The panel provides the possibility for speaker and participants to exchange both, information as well as methodological approaches of political communication in social media.

**KEYWORDS**

E-petitioning, Opinion Mining, Privacy challenges, Political Elections, Social Media.

**INTRODUCTION**

For politics, social media became a pervasive communication tool connecting politicians, parties, and the public. It has gained more and more importance within the last years, especially in respect to election campaigns. For example, the use of Twitter during election campaigns and mediated campaign events as well as social media impact on scientific research in various fields (Jungher, 2016). With the American election in 2016 leading the way, significant discussions and critics about social media usage in context of the election campaigns arose in the media until today, including aspects like politician's social media use, public and company engagement in social media and also the collection of political social media data. Likewise, during the 2016 US presidential elections, issues on big data analyses emerged. Already Alistair Croll stated for the elections in 2012:

“After Eisenhower, you couldn't win an election without radio. After JFK, you couldn't win an election without television. After Obama, you couldn't win an election without social networking. I predict that in 2012, you won't be able to win an election without big data. (Alistair Croll, founder of Bitcurrent),” (González, 2017, p. 10).

Nowadays, it seems his prediction has come true. Cambridge Analytica, a big data analysis company specialized in political data-driven campaigns and commercial data-driven marketing works with big data from social media like Facebook. The case

of Cambridge Analytica got a huge medial resonance within the last months and in the context of information leakage, privacy issues, trust of big data in social media, it is critically discussed (e.g. Tufekci, 2018). Thereby, information leakage is defined as “phenomena where explicit information provided to a third party can be used to derive implicit and previously hidden information about an entity,” (Nouh et al., 2014, p. 353).

In the past, policy-making research has focused mostly on the influence of political leaders, interest groups, and the mass media; “the public” was absent from this research (Muhlberger, Stromer-Galley & Webb, 2011). However, nowadays this has changed. Public and its policy-making engagement; e.g. electronic-petitioning (Yasseri, Hale, & Margetts, 2018); and political opinion (Anstead & O’Loughlin, 2015) are also objects of investigation.

This panel comprises social media research addressing political elections and policy-making engagement as well as the analysis of such social media data. In doing so, it provides an ideal opportunity for speakers and participants to exchange not only information but rather methodological approaches. Thereby, it addresses the topic from different viewpoints, namely:

- Social media usage of politicians during elections
- Public opinion data tracking and application of text-mining in social media
- Privacy challenges of big data (according to the case of Cambridge Analytica)
- Sharing behavior of trustworthy material in order to inform about political decisions
- Electronic-petitioning for political decisions

Such diverse views enable a discussion taking into account politicians and parties as well as the public involved in political social media communication.

## **PANEL STRUCTURE**

The panel is structured as follows. First, the chair will introduce the panel speakers and give a short overview of the discussed topics, including the main concerns and definitions as well as the outcomes of an informetric analysis on the topic. Following this, each panelist will answer the main question regarding her or his research. The addressed questions concern social media in the context of politicians and the public. The panel will be concluded with a discussion forum. The panel should last 1.5 hours.

## **SPEAKER OVERVIEW**

**Aylin Ilhan and Isabelle Dorsch will introduce the speakers, present a short informetric analysis, and moderate the panel.**

Isabelle Dorsch is research associate and Ph.D candidate at the Department of Information Science, Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf (Germany). She is a lecturer in social media and knowledge representation as well as a mentor for student research projects. Besides social media (with a special focus on user behavior on Instagram), her research interests include, but are not limited to informetrics (especially scientometrics).

Aylin Ilhan is research associate and Ph.D candidate at the Department of Information Science, Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf (Germany). She is a lecturer in social media, scientific writing as well as a mentor for student research projects. Her research interests include, but are not limited to social media (user behavior), activity trackers (e.g., acceptance, impact, motivation, information and user behavior) and smart cities.

**Hassan Zamir on how political elites use, interact and share information on Twitter during recent presidential elections around the world?**

Social media plays a vital role in political information dissemination during national election. With its success in the 2008 Obama Presidential election campaign strategy, political elites across the globe strongly use social media like Twitter in recent national election. Rapid exposure to voters, digression of traditional broadcasting and print media etc. contribute profoundly why politicians use Twitter and other social media. Due to the emergence of new media it is interesting to identify how politicians use Twitter during election years as an online platform for conveying political information. Twitter use for political communication has become global practice. However, further investigations are required to understand politicians’ Twitter use behavior. This study aims to map politicians’ Twitter use patterns, understand their level of interactions, and

types of contents shared. With a comparative lens, it discusses how politicians particularly from the US, Mexico, Russia, France, and Iran use, interact, share information on Twitter during recent presidential elections.

Dr. Hassan Zamir is a lecturer at the School of Information Studies at the Dominican University (USA). He teaches in the areas of information technology, data science, informatics, and big data. His research interests revolve around social media analytics, big data, and text mining. He plays active leadership roles at the Dominican University and in various professional organizations including the Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T) and the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE).

### **Amir Karami on social media and opinion mining in elections – How to track public opinion in social media?**

Opinion polls and surveys have played an important role in elections. Different methods, including face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, and surveys sent by mail or email or available online have been used to gather and learn about people's thoughts about main issues. Among different technologies, social media plays the role of a big focus group in an election cycle. Unlike traditional surveys, collecting and analyzing social media data is a cost-effective way to survey a large number of participants in a short period of time. However, analyzing a large amount of social media data is a complicated task that needs computational methods. The proposed topic discusses the application of text mining methods for mining social media in elections.

Amir Karami is an Assistant Professor in the iSchool of the College of Information and Communications at the University of South Carolina. His research interests are computational social science and medical/health informatics. He is currently working on developing text-mining techniques and utilizing them for medical, health, and social science. Previously, he was a Data Science Consultant at Washington DC area.

### **Vivek Singh on the newer privacy research challenges in surveillance with social “Big Data”.**

Recent uproar regarding Cambridge Analytica's use of social media data to influence US elections underscore two privacy related issues.

- (1) Privacy of your friends' data: While the app in question was installed by 270K users, it had access to the data from 50M users. This is because each user installing the app inadvertently gave access to their friends' data. I will present results from an experiment making people aware of this “social information leakage” and their response.
- (2) De-anonymization of individuals in large streams of social data: Our behaviors are inherently unique and even after the removal of Personally Identifiable Information (e.g. name, address, social security number) one's data can be connected back to them. In a Science article, my colleagues and I have reported that an individual whose data is part of a large corpus (e.g. millions of users), may be de-anonymized quite simply with access to just four external data points.

Vivek Singh is an Assistant Professor at Rutgers University and a Visiting Professor at the MIT Media Lab. His work on privacy has been published in leading scientific venues (Science, Proceedings of the IEEE) and has received significant media coverage (BBC, New York Times, Wall Street Journal).

### **David Moscrop and Juan Pablo Alperin on why do pundits share scholarly research on social media—and why should we care?**

The arrival of the internet was expected to initiate an era of information democratization; as communication technology proliferated, cyber optimists argued it would lower barriers to political participation. Decades later, the internet and social media are pervasive but the egalitarian and democratizing potentials of these technologies haven't been fully realized—in some ways, they've been co-opted for purposes that run counter to these goals, with some digital media practices making it more difficult for citizens to find trustworthy information. This raises questions about how we can encourage more robust and wide-reaching sharing of trustworthy material, such as scholarly research. We investigate how media personalities use research to inform the public sphere so that we can better understand how reliable knowledge can inform our political decisions.

Dr. David Moscrop is a postdoctoral fellow with the Scholarly Communications Lab at Simon Fraser University, specializing in democracy and decision making. He's also a writer and political commentator.

Dr. Juan Pablo Alperin is a Director of the Scholarly Communications Lab and an Assistant Professor in Publishing at Simon Fraser University. He uses a combination of computational techniques and innovative methods to investigate how knowledge is produced, disseminated, and used.

## Catherine Dumas on electronic petitioning and social media: Online Collective Action or “Slacktivism”?

Events happen in the public sphere that trigger attention to policy issues. New Information Technologies offer a great deal of opportunity for the public to participate. E-petitioning systems have the potential to position the public as active participants in the policy-making process by allowing them to initiate policy proposals on issues of interest to them. Further, using links to Twitter and Facebook, these systems provide users with the technical capabilities to mobilize support from their social networks, or from the public at large, for or against particular policy proposals. Do these new forms of online or virtual participation constitute a new form of collective action or are they simply acts of “slacktivism” which debates the value of online participation?

Catherine Dumas is a PhD Candidate in Information Science at the University at Albany, State University of New York. Her research is motivated by data generated by platforms potentially used for online collective action or digital activism. Using data mining techniques and online collective action theories her work is exploring the impact of new information communication technologies (ICTs) on the phenomenon of online collective action.

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