



The literature on the Parliamentarians' Digital Communication

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The literature on the Parliamentarians' Digital Communication:

A Scoping Review

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The document research strategy was developed in collaboration with a library consultant in document search strategy development from the Université Laval library. The authors wish to particularly thank Richard Dufour for his invaluable help and guidance during the entire research process. The coding of the documents was done by two students at Université Laval. The authors wish to thank Olfa Riahi and Charlotte Barry for their research assistance.

Abstract: With the development of social media on the one hand, and political communication on the other, the online communication of parliamentarians has become a central issue widely addressed by the literature. This article uses and presents a scoping review method to give an overview of this field of study. All are listed (510 studies). After providing a general review of the published scientific works (location, institutions, digital media studied, methods used) on the digital communication of parliamentarians and candidates in general elections, we review the different themes addressed in this field of research and conclude by proposing paths for future research that could enrich the existing literature. We found that the results of research on this issue are influenced by conceptual and methodological choices. More precisely, the prevalence of the content analysis method in the field implies that the work done *before* the communication itself, and the way the digital communication of parliamentarians and candidates in general elections is *shaped* are left behind in most studies. Future studies should consider the strengths and weakness of different approaches and the significant potential of using other methods to highlight the rationale of the politicians in their online presence.

Keywords: Political communication, parliamentarians, Internet, social media, general elections, scoping review.

Highlights

- Our systematic literature review process identified 510 studies.
- This article attempts to provide a comprehensive account of the literature on the MPs digital communication.
- The three most studied digital communication platforms are Websites (223 studies), Twitter (176 studies), and Facebook (95 studies).
- Content analysis is, by far, the most commonly used method in the field. Most times, it is coupled with a quantitative approach.
- Four Main Subfields of the Digital Communication of Parliamentarians and Candidates for the General Elections are identified: Marketing and Strategies, Relationships with Citizens, Standardization and Digital Revolution, and Impact on Voting.
- The prevalence of the content analysis method in the field implies that the work done *before* the communication itself, and the way the digital communication of parliamentarians and candidates in general elections is *shaped* are left behind in most studies.
- Future studies should consider the strengths and weakness of different approaches and the significant potential of using other methods to highlight the rationale of the politicians in their online presence.

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Introduction

Parliamentarians use of online communication has grown strongly for the past twenty years. It started with their presence online on their websites (Adler, Gent, & Overmeyer, 1998; Conners, 2005), forums (Coleman, 1999) and e-mails (Arce, 2016; Carter, 1999). Parliamentarians then invested in blogs (Albrecht, Lübcke, & Hartig-Perschke, 2009; Pătruț, 2015) and social media. We now find them on Facebook (Crosby, 2015; Zoto, 2013; Williams & Gulati, 2013) and Twitter (Kruikemeier, 2014; Lassen & Brown, 2011; Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010), as much as on Youtube (Gibson & McAllister, 2011; Carlson & Strandberg, 2008; Chen & Smith, 2010; Lorenzo Rodriguez & Garmendia Madariaga, 2016), Instagram (Selva-Ruiz & Caro-Castano, 2017a) and even Snapchat (Grønning, 2018; Yaghi & Antwi-Boateng, 2017). This has, of course, not gone unnoticed in the scientific literature. The first article published on the subject dates back to 1997 (Klotz, 1997). However, there is yet to be an article presenting a general overview of this particular topic. This is precisely what we suggest to do in this article. After presenting a general review of all the published works on the digital communication of parliamentarians and candidates in general elections (location, institutions, digital media studied, methods used), we review the different themes addressed in this field of research and conclude by proposing paths for future research which could contribute to the existing literature.

Scoping Review Methodology

To create an evidence-based mapping literature of the digital communication of Parliamentarians up to December 2018, our literature review follows the guidelines established by the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI). This article's goal is to produce a scoping review of all academic studies on the topic of Parliamentarians online communication or that of their teams, whether politicians are already in office or are campaigning to get elected. Scoping reviews are defined by JBI as a type of review

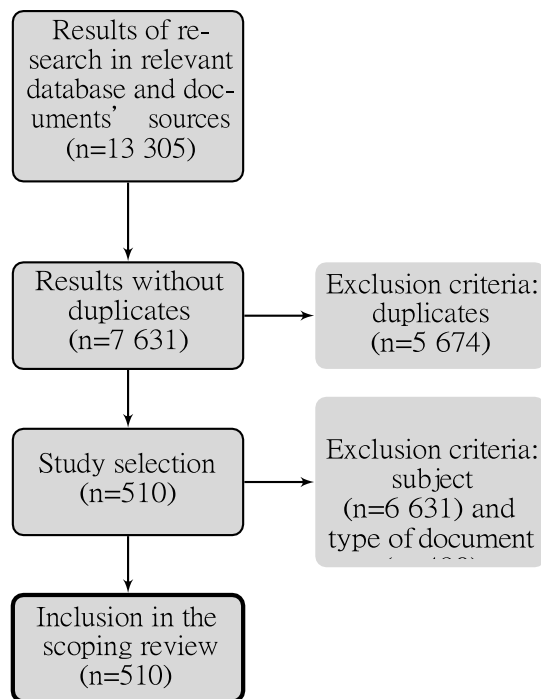
estimating the size and scope of a body of literature on a given topic. The conventional goal of a scoping review is to identify the various research designs and gaps existing in the literature (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2014, p.173). This method is particularly interesting as it attempts to question the literature inductively. The researcher is therefore not tempted or less tempted to subjectively orient the result of his review of the literature. Of course, total objectivity is unattainable. However, it is worth noting that this method allows for a decrease in subjectivity. The objective is to let the corpus reveal the trends most followed by the literature instead of arbitrarily choosing themes which one would then seek to deepen as in a more theoretical work. This paper builds on the existing literature analyzing the way parliamentarians are using online communication channels with a scoping methodology, as it is considered a rigorous, effective and transparent synthesis of the research field (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2015).

With this scoping process, the intent is to provide an exhaustive overview of academic findings regarding the digital communication of parliamentarians and to objectively describe the work of the entire community of scholars working in the field (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2015).

Document Research Strategy and Selection Criteriae

Figure 1: Flowchart of the Parliamentarians' Digital Communication Literature

Handling



This analysis follows the *Reviewers Manual Methodology for JBI Scoping Reviews*¹. As such, a three-step search strategy to collect relevant sources was used. First, a manual literature review of over 100 sources was carried out after having selected the keywords which seemed most relevant to this search in Google scholar. The works included in this analysis allow us to identify the main keywords used in the titles and abstracts of papers from this sample of the literature on Parliamentarians digital communication.

The second step is to create specific search requests with the identified keywords. These search requests were launched in seven databases for academic writings. They

¹The document research strategy was developed in collaboration with a library consultant in document search strategy development from the Université Laval library. The authors wish to particularly thank Richard Dufour for his invaluable help and guidance during the entire research process.

were selected based on their relevance to the topic of research: International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Worldwide Political Science Abstracts, PAIS International, Proquest Dissertations and Theses, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and World-Cat. These are multidisciplinary or specialized document databases that allow for a large scoping of academic texts originating from various disciplines such as political science, technology, communication, and economy. Requests obviously need to be adjusted to the specificities of each document database. One of the seven search requests is presented in *Appendix A*. All requests of document databases were executed in December 2018. In order to ensure that our search protocol was exhaustive, no language constraints were used, and all years of publication were included. A summary of the results of these searches is presented in *Appendix B*. Finally, a list of all relevant sources cited in the list of documents found during the second step was created. This final aggregation step allowed us to create a list of 13,305 references. Two research assistants² independently analyzed the full list of sources to determine whether each source should be excluded or not. To ensure a common evaluation scheme, the assessments of both research assistants were compared twice: once after the evaluation of the first 100 sources and once at the end of the process. Discrepancies were settled by the authors after a discussion with both assistants. *Figure 1* shows the process of sources inclusion in the scoping review. The final database included 510 sources for analysis.

Inclusion Criteria are as follows: 1) Subject: any source which mentions, in its title

² The coding of the documents was done by two students at Université Laval. The authors wish to thank Olfa Riahi and Charlotte Barry for their research assistance and the Groupe de recherche en communication politique for its funding.

or abstract, online communication practices of Parliamentarians, candidates, or their teams during parliamentary elections; 2) Type of documents: scientific articles, books, thesis papers, M.A. theses and scientific conference papers; and 3) All languages.

Exclusion Criteria are as follows: 1) Duplicated sources; 2) Subject: sources who aren't directly related to the online communication of parliamentarians or that are related to presidential, local, or municipal elections; and 3) Type of documents: unpublished articles, articles waiting for correction or verification, news articles, websites, blogs, and book reviews.

An exploratory study on included references was then conducted to examine the main features of this body of literature.

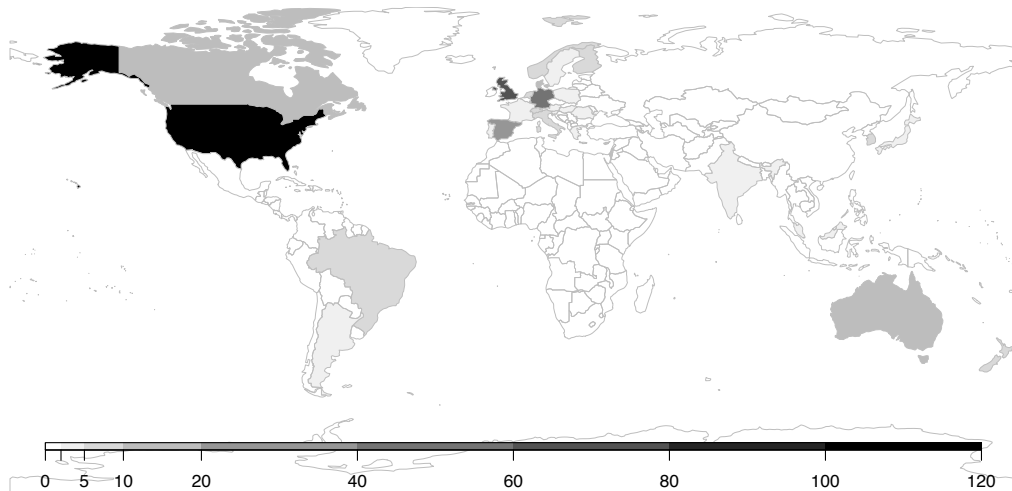
A Literature Overview on Parliamentarians Digital Communication Practices

Our systematic literature review process identified 510 studies. The first study was published by Robert Klotz (1997) and focused on analyzing the campaign websites of candidates running in the 1996 Spanish Senate elections. From that point on, the field developed relatively quickly: three studies are published the next year, followed by 14 in 1999 and more in the following years. A more in-depth analysis of each of these studies was carried out in order to provide a more in-depth perspective of this field of research. The following section categorizes the different countries that were targeted by such studies. It also provides an overview of the parliamentary institutions for which researchers study digital communication and the institutions for which candidates compete in the general elections that were studied. This section also addresses the types of digital media used by Parliamentarians and candidates. Finally, we offer an overview of the different types of methodology used to research this particular subject.

Location of Studied Cases

The most studied countries in the digital communication literature of parliamentarians and candidates in general elections are identified in *Figure 2*.

Figure 2: Where are the parliaments studied? (December 2018. n=510)

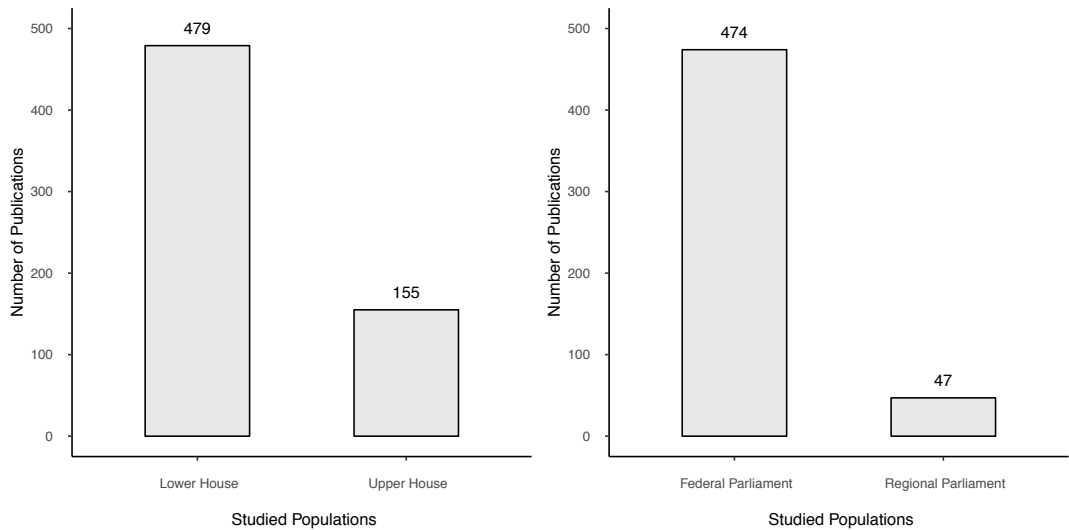


Given the state of the current scientific field, the distribution of the studied countries is relatively not surprising. Indeed, most studies on the American continent are conducted on the United States which was the subject of 116 studies up until December 2018. Other most studied countries include Canada (23 studies), Brazil (11 studies) and Argentina (5 studies). In Europe, those countries were the United Kingdom (92 studies), Germany (46 studies), and Spain (44 studies). Other noteworthy countries include Denmark (13 studies), Italy (11 studies), the Netherlands (9 studies), Norway (7 studies), Switzerland (7 studies), and Finland (7 studies). Unlike some other research topics, the study of digital communication is not limited only to the North of Europe; in this case, the South is also significantly studied (particularly in Spain and Italy). It is also important to mention that *Figure 2* does not account for studies that focused on the European Parliament. Indeed, academic works focusing on this institution were counted separately and accounted for 54 studies in our initial list.

As far as countries in Asia are concerned, South Korea is the most studied one with seven studies focusing on digital communication. This country benefits from Parks extensive research on the subject (Hsu & Park, 2011; Lim & Park, 2011; Park & Thelwall, 2008; Randolph Kluver, 2009; Yoon & Park, 2014; Hsu & Park, 2012; Park, Kim, & Barnett, 2004). It is followed by Japan (3 studies), India (3 studies), and Malaysia (4 studies). Finally, in Oceania, Australia (19 studies) is the primary subject of such studies by Gibson (Gibson & McAllister, 2006, 2009, 2011; Gibson, Lusoli, & Ward, 2008; Ward, Lusoli, & Gibson, 2007), followed by New Zealand (7 studies).

Identification of the Most Studied Institutions and Digital Media

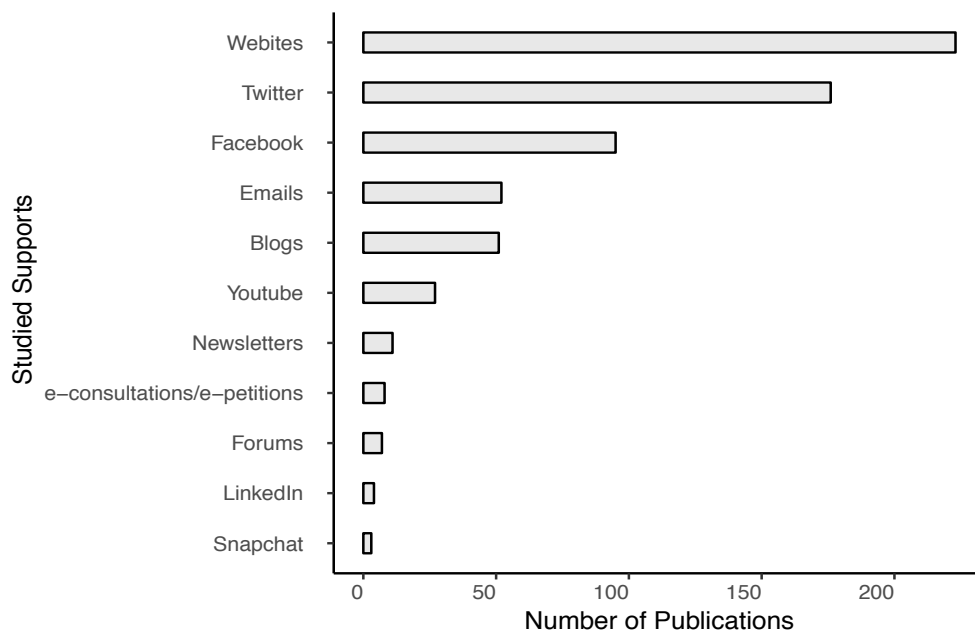
Figure 3: Which institutions are studied? (December 2018. n=510)



The literature focuses on the digital communication of elected representatives and candidates to national and regional parliaments. The elected representatives and candidates to the national parliaments were examined in 474 works, whilst 47 analyzed those of the regional parliaments. Among the most studied regional parliaments are the Scottish Parliament (10 studies) (Baxter, Marcella, & O'Shea, 2016; Marcella, Baxter, & Cheah, 2008; Seaton, 2005a), the Catalan Parliament (8 studies) (Coromina, Prado, & Padilla, 2018; Del Valle & Bravo, 2018; Borge Bravo

& Esteve del Valle, 2017), and the Quebec Parliament (4 studies) (Lalancette, 2018; Sullivan & Bélanger, 2016). In most cases, one or two authors produce the major part of the literature on these regional parliaments: Rita Marcella and Graeme Baxter have published a third of the papers on digital communication of politicians in the Scottish Parliament. Similarly, Rosa Borge Bravo and Marc Esteve Del Valle wrote five of the eight publications on the Catalan Parliament.

Figure 4: Platforms used for political communication (December 2018. n=510)



The three most studied digital communication platforms are Websites (223 studies), Twitter (176 studies), and Facebook (95 studies). Scholars are especially interested in Twitter. This is partly due to the easier access to and gathering of Twitter data compared to Facebook. Nevertheless, studies on Twitter and Facebook tend to have different research questions. It is in part due to the difference in the types of users of these social media platforms and their particularities. For example, while Twitter enables the measurement of online influence of parliamentarians and candidates - including their social and political capital (Del Valle & Borge Bravo, 2018; Borge Bravo & Esteve del Valle, 2015)- , Facebook is a better indicator of the relationships likely to be created (or not) online between the parliamentarian and the citizens

(Crosby, 2015; Geber & Scherer, 2015; Bene, 2017). Maintaining the production of research on these two platforms is therefore essential. E-mails (52 studies) and blogs (51 studies) are the fourth and fifth most studied platforms. The study of these platforms, unlike the first three, appears to be in relative decline. E-mails and blogs belong to the first phase of the Internet, in other words to Web 1.0 and the beginning of Web2.0. No articles on communication via e-mails has been published since 2017 (Hoffmann & Suphan, 2017; Akirav, 2017). Blogs are in the same position, with no published article in 2018. However, these media remain very important communication tools today especially e-mails. The study of these specific media tests assumptions that are difficult to apply to social media (Campos Dominguez, 2010; Merkovity, 2014); that is why it seems essential to us that academics continue to examine communication of parliamentarians and candidates on these specific platforms.

Finally, there are other specific media that, when put together, represent less than 10% of the published academic works: Youtube (27 studies), newsletters (11 studies), e-petitions and e-consultations (8 studies), forums (7 studies), LinkedIn (4 studies), as well as Snapchat and Instagram (3 studies). Among these media, it is worth highlighting that the study of Snapchat and Instagram is still in its early stages. The first studies on Instagram (Yaghi & Antwi-Boateng, 2017; Yarchi, Wolfsfeld, Samuel-Azran, & Segev, 2017; Selva-Ruiz & Caro-Castano, 2017b) date back to 2017 and the one on Snapchat, to 2015 (Sampietro & Ordaz, 2015). In short, we encourage scholars to maintain the diversity of studies on digital media, for studies on various media cannot all test the same hypotheses.

Research Designs and Methodologies Used in the Field

Above all, it is important to remember that this article aims to give a general overview

of the literature on this topic. The methodological elements presented in this passage therefore remain relatively general and should be explored more in-depth in a distinct study.

Content analysis is, by far, the most commonly used method in the field. This research design was used in 268 academic works to study the online communication of parliamentarians. Most times, it is coupled with a quantitative approach. This reflects the interest of researchers for new trends in semi-automatic or automatic quantitative approaches which are different from the traditional manual approach. This should be seen as a key development in modern political science in general and, more specifically, online policy research. Content analysis approaches are followed by questionnaires and surveys (66 studies), interviews and focus groups (57 studies), and comparative analyses (50 studies). We opted for relatively open search design categories. Some works can therefore be categorized differently, especially those using multiple methodologies. While content analysis was expected to be the most frequent approach used, their total weight in the corpus is surprising. The generally short time necessary and the democratization of content analysis methods with the multiplication of web scraping applications - especially prior to the Cambridge Analytica scandal - could also explain the interest of researchers for this approach. As we have already seen with digital media, not all methodologies can address the same issues: maintaining the diversity of methods is crucial. Network analysis (31 studies), as well as comparative analyses (50 studies) remain valid choices in this arena.

Figure 5: Which research designs are used to study parliamentarians' communication? (December 2018. n=510)

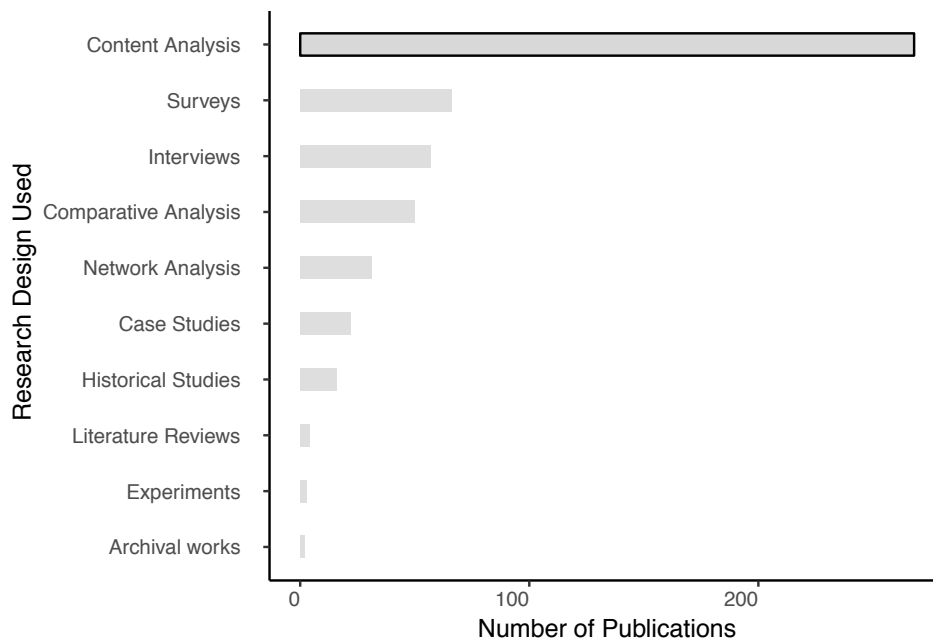
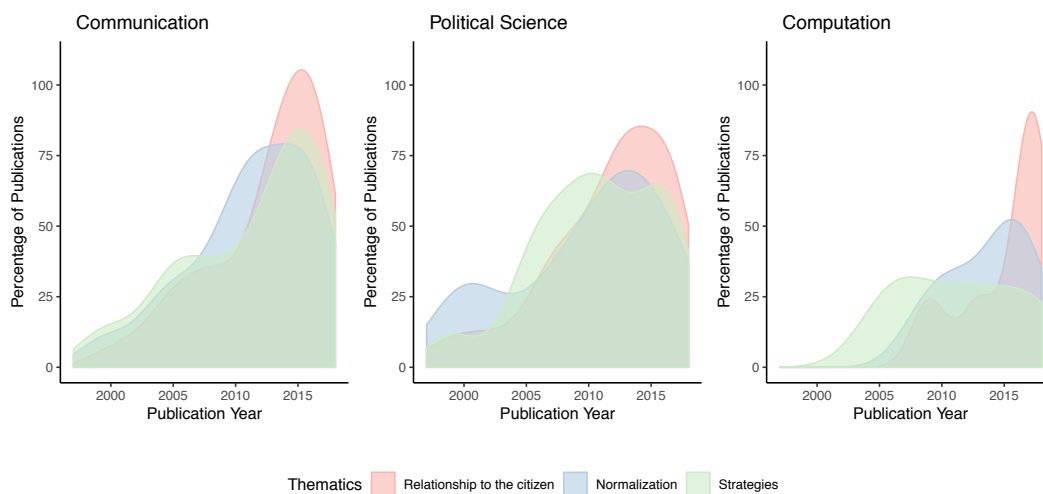


Figure 6: Evolution of Themes analyzed in three research disciplines (December 2018. n=510)

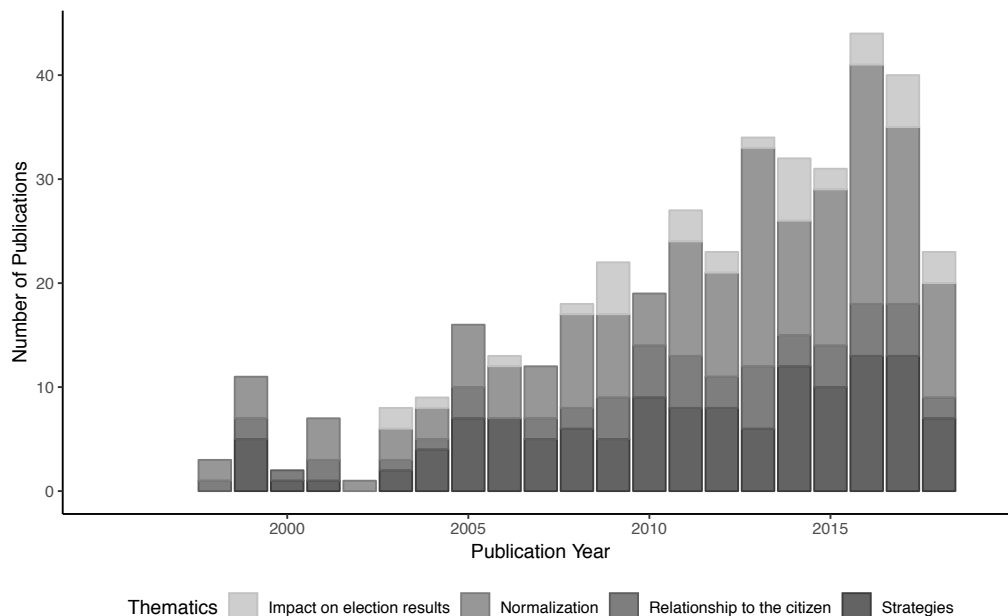


Four Main Subfields of the Digital Communication of Parliamentarians and Candidates for the General Elections

Our corpus reveals the recurrence of particular themes in the literature on digital communication of parliamentarians and candidates in general elections. These themes are as follows: Marketing and Strategies, Relationships with Citizens,

Standardization and Digital Revolution, and Impact on Voting. To a lesser extent, we can also mention the Impact of National Cultures, Transparency, Mobilization, Polarization, and Agenda Setting Theory. The boundaries between some of these themes are relatively porous. Moreover, some academic works embrace several of these themes at once. The objective here is not so much to systematize the highlighting of themes which would be totally exclusive of each other, but rather to suggest a classification that highlights the subjects most addressed by the literature. This distribution over time is illustrated in *Figure 7*.

Figure 7: Diverse Themes studied (December 2018. n=395)



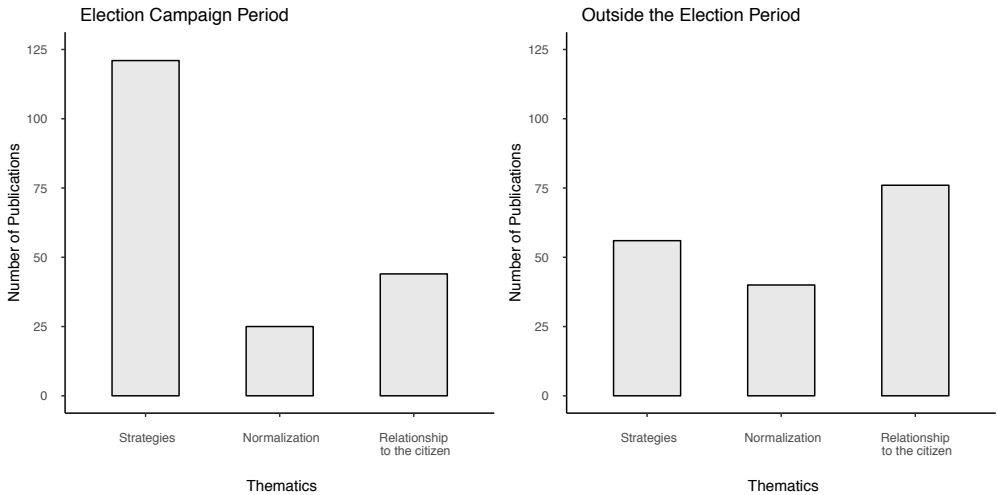
The most noteworthy observation is the constant multiplication of academic work on digital communication of parliamentarians and candidates in general elections. Since the late 1990s, the number of publications has increased significantly, reaching about 40 publications per year in recent years.

Among the four most commonly studied themes, two stand out the most: the study of strategies and digital standardization which goes hand in hand with its opposite: the thesis of the digital revolution. Interest in this second topic is also increasing over

time, as demonstrated by the number of studies published in recent year. This last theme appeared in the first studies on the Internet and it is strongly framing research on the Web even beyond the topic of digital communication.

In addition, the digital communication of parliamentarians and candidates in general elections is giving rise to studies in different scientific subfields. Political science, communication, and computer science are currently the main providers of academic work on the topic. Our review of the literature has also highlighted the interest of other disciplines to this subfield, such as economics (J. Druckman, Kifer, & Parkin, 2010; J. N. Druckman, Kifer, & Parkin, 2007; Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2011; Chi & Yang, 2011), anthropology (Chibois, 2014), sociology (Iannelli & Giglietto, 2015; Jacobs & Spierings, 2014; Benvegna, 2002), linguistics (Mancera Rueda & Pano Alaman, 2015; Sampietro & Ordaz, 2015), and psychology (Nursyahida bt Mohd Jaafar, International Islamic University Malaysia, & Department of Psychology., 2011; Jones et al., 2018). *Figure 8* illustrates the evolution of themes over time within the fields of political science, communication, and computer science.

Figure 8: Themes analyzed by periods (December 2018. n=510)



We can observe that, in all three disciplines, the study of the relationships with citizens emerged much later. Most works in this subfield were published around 2010

in studies on communication and political science and in 2014 in computer science. In the case of studies on strategies, works on this topic were especially flourishing in the early 2000s as far as the field of political science was concerned, with a significant increase starting in 2005. Works on strategies started being published more significantly by the communication field around 2010. This specific topic, however, remains a theme considerably less studied by computational scientists. Finally, the analysis of normalization has been gradually increasing in communication studies prior to the 2000s. The study of this topic was also an emerging research topic in political science since the mid-1990s, although it has mostly taken off around 2000, before re-developing post-2005. Coincidentally, it is also around 2005 that computer scientists started publishing work on this topic. We took this reflection further by highlighting the main debates related to these different topics based on an analysis of the most cited studies in each of these subfields.

Marketing and Strategies

The Marketing and strategy theme is the most common one found in our references corpus, with 177 academic works published on this topic. These studies are mostly written by researchers in political science with a quantitative approach (including content analysis). In works on Marketing and strategy, the goal is generally to study the strategies, marketing tools and techniques used online by parliamentarians and parliamentary candidates. Researchers aim to answer two main research questions: 1) *What are the factors that enable the adoption of digital practices by parliamentarians and candidates in general elections?* (G. J. Gulati, 2004; J. N. Druckman et al., 2007; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014), and 2) *For what purpose(s) and how do they adopt these tools?* (G. J. J. Gulati & Williams, 2010; J. Druckman et al., 2010; Evans, Cordova, & Sipole, 2014)

As far as the adoption of digital communication by parliamentarians and candidates in general elections is concerned, the literature agrees on the impact that gender has on this process (Evans et al., 2014; G. J. Gulati, 2004; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011). However, gender is not the only determining variable. Research shows that several other variables are significant in the adoption and subsequent use of digital communication. More specifically, researchers observed an impact of the level of competitiveness of the campaign (J. N. Druckman et al., 2007; Evans et al., 2014), the political affiliation (Evans et al., 2014; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011) or the seniority of politicians on the political scene (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; G. J. Gulati, 2004). Ethnicity is sometimes mentioned, as is whether opponents are active online or not (Williams & Gulati, 2013). Gibson and McAllister established that the main consensus from these works - at least until 2010 was that enthusiasm for web campaigning is strongest among established party members (Gibson et McAllister, 2006).. On the other hand, G. J. Gulati and Williams (2007) also found that financial resources underwrite the highest levels of content and constitute a moving hurdle for disadvantaged candidates.

A second section of the literature on this topic seeks more information regarding the objectives of the online communication of MPs and candidates in general elections, as well as the modalities of implementation. Larsson and Kalsnes (2014) criticize the literature for not studying enough the routine use of two of the currently most popular social media services - Facebook and Twitter. They maintain that the literature mostly focuses on the use of these platforms during election campaigns. However, our review of the literature demonstrates that it is not really the case. Indeed, among our sample of most cited works on this particular topic, more than 36% focus on analyzing the day-to-day social media practices rather than the same practices during electoral campaigns. Jackson and Lilleker (2011), for example, single out the daily use of

specific platforms in their study on the use of Twitter by British parliamentarians (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011).

Moreover, and as will be discussed further in the next section, the academic community already notes that interactivity is not a main objective of online politicians. G. J. Gulati and Williams (2007) explain this as follows: Features and functionality that allow citizens to coproduce content and interact in two-way communication are not being adopted widely. They also state that baseline informational web content and features have become standardized. Larsson and Kalsnes (2014) who are interested in Scandinavian politicians ways of communicating on Facebook and Twitter - point out that use levels are, in their case, rather low for both services - the median amount of tweets sent and messages posted on Facebook being close to one per day for Scandinavian politicians.

In one of the first studies of the field to have reached a significant scientific audience, Jackson (2003) suggests that the Internet is a potential battleground between MPs who want greater control of their own local campaigning and the party elite who wants to ensure a consistent, coherent and controlled message. Like Zittel (2009), Jackson contributes to the debate over whether the Internet promotes the partisan centralization of communication or, on the contrary, allows politicians to develop more autonomous strategies in relation to their party of belonging. However, Jackson (2003) notes in his results that apart from a few pioneers, MPs have not progressed beyond using the Internet as shovelware, meaning that the vast majority of them view their website as an electronic brochure and not as a two-way communication tool.

Our analysis of this first theme demonstrates that academic works tend to communicate a relative disenchantment regarding the strategies behind the use of digital communication platform. However, to better understand these results, we suggest that the literature investigates these questions more qualitatively. Such an

approach could be complemented with the analysis of the strategies and objectives pursued online by parliamentarians and candidates in general elections. It would then be possible to compare the results obtained from the quantitative observation of online content produced outside of any election situation by politicians, to their statements - especially through interviews.

Relationships with Citizens

The impact of digital communication on the relationships of politicians with citizens is also a highly studied topic in digital communication (146 works). The main studies on this particular topic are the result of research carried out in the field communication. This academic community is mostly interested in the difference between actual and potential impacts of online communication (Stromer-Galley, 2000; Lusoli, Ward, & Gibson, 2006; Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff, & Haar, 2013; Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013) as well as in the skills needed to implement digital communication that can successfully engage with citizens (Coleman, 2004). Much-cited works from political scientists, although less numerous, agree that digital communication can be an asset for outsider candidates or parties (Carlson & Strandberg, 2008; Gibson & McAllister, 2011). These works also examine partisan usage (Zittel, 2009).

In the most quoted article to this day on this topic, Stromer-Galley (2000) addresses the question of the opportunities the Internet offers in terms of interaction with citizens. Her interviews with members of the campaign teams and the study of websites of US candidates in 1996 and 1998 allowed her to observe that most political campaigns are resistant to using human-interactive features. Lusoli et al. (2006) confirm these results in their 2006 study that examined the extent to which new media can open up new channels of communication between MPs and the public and whether it could widen or deepen participation in parliamentary politics.

Whilst new media technologies have potential, without wider changes to parliamentary politics, they are just as likely to reinforce existing participation patterns. Similar results were found by Graham et al. (2013) when they studied the tweets of candidates in the 2010 UK general elections. Their work showed that British politicians mainly used Twitter as a unidirectional form of communication. However, there were candidates who used it to interact with voters by, for example, mobilizing, helping and consulting them, thus tapping into the potential Twitter offers for facilitating a closer relationship with potential supporters. Coleman (2004) analyzed two case studies of online consultations ran on behalf of the UK Parliament. He observed that the success of online parliamentary consultations is dependent upon two groups of actors: parliamentarians and citizens. Each of these groups must acquire new types of communication skills and develop new practices of operating. Thus, the most cited works in the communication literature agree that digital communication is not really used by political actors as a way to interact with citizens. The academic work on relationships with citizens make it possible to relativize the hopes raised by the interactive potential of the digital.

Normalization and Revolution

The opposition between normalization and revolution on the Internet is also the focus of many studies (74 studies). The normalization hypothesis of cyberspace infers a transfer of real-world features of politics to the Internet. On the other hand, the thesis of revolution implies that cyberspace enables us to do politics differently, as this space is less impacted by the social hierarchies. The most cited works seem to validate the thesis of standardization (Schweitzer, 2005, 2011; Strandberg, 2013). This is not especially surprising considering the results of searches done on the first two themes presented. However, this standardization is expressed in different ways depending on the study: locking of the communication, reluctance to use digital media, supremacy

of the most important political actors online, etc. Here again, content analysis remains the method most used in the subfield (Klinger, 2013).

Schweitzer (2011) summarizes well this part of the literature by examining the functional, relational and discursive dimensions of the normalization thesis in one study, for both Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 features, in a longitudinal design. A quantitative content and structural analysis of German party websites in the national elections between 2002 and 2009 was conducted. In this study, several of the issues raised in studies on normalization are addressed: communication that remains top-down, a digital gap between small and large parties, and finally, symptoms which are found even more strongly on web 2.0 than on web 1.0 (Schweitzer, 2011).

Ward and Lusoli (2005) insist, in their study on the websites of British parliamentarians, on the static and cautious state of politicians web communication. For the researchers, this implies a modernizing rather than democratizing strategy. Finally, the question of the perpetuation of existing online political hierarchies is well illustrated by Klinger (2013). He addresses the way political actors use social media in the context of the 2011 elections in Switzerland (Klinger, 2013).

Impact on the Vote

The study of the electoral impact of the digital communication of parliamentarians and candidates in general elections is also found in 49 studies of the corpus. Among the most cited references, we find mixed results. While some argue for a positive effect (Gibson & McAllister, 2011; Herrnson, 2012; Kruikemeier, 2014), others observe that politicians online communication have little impact on voting behavior (Ward & Gibson, 2003; Strandberg, 2013).

This is one of the main questions political scientists explored. Ward and Gibson (2003) noted that the overall impact of the internet on electoral outcomes was minimal and that use of the technology by itself is unlikely to herald the coming of e-

democracy. Strandberg (2013) has come to similar conclusions. Analyzing the use of social media by both candidates and citizens in the 2011 Finnish parliamentary election campaign, Strandberg showed that the significance of social media was generally modest in the election campaign. Moreover, its impact on citizens voting decision is even smaller.

However, these results are a minority compared to the thesis of the proven impact of digital voting. Indeed, Gibson et McAllister revived the debate about the impact of the use of the web during the 2004 elections in Australia (Gibson and McAllister, 2006). They demonstrated that despite being linked with traditional campaigning techniques, web campaigning exerts an independent and significant impact on the level of electoral support that a candidate receives and conclude that web campaigning, at least under present electoral conditions, constitutes an important component of a winning election strategy. In 2011, they replicated their study, focusing particularly on the consequences of Web 2.0 campaigning on candidate vote share (Gibson & McAllister, 2011). Their findings show differing levels of commitment to older and newer e-campaigning technology across parties and their supporters. Significant electoral advantages are associated with minor parties candidates using Web 2.0 campaign tools. Those results confirm prior studies findings about the impact of Web campaigns on contemporary elections, but that these effects are moderated by the type of Web tools used and the party using them. Three years later, Kruikemeier (2014) analyzed the use of Twitter during the Dutch general elections of 2010. The findings demonstrated that using Twitter has positive consequences for political candidates. Indeed, candidates who used Twitter during the course of the campaign received more votes than those who did not. Additionally, using Twitter in an interactive way had a positive impact as well. Thus, and unlike the other themes discussed so far, it seems that the literature is truly torn between two

opposing results regarding the impact of the use of internet by the candidates on the election results.

Secondary Themes

There are 27 references in the corpus that study the impact of national cultures especially policies - on online communication of parliamentarians and candidates in general elections. Among the most cited works, Gibson, Lusoli and Ward concluded that the standardization of communication erases the effects of national cultures (Gibson, Lusoli and Ward, 2008). Nevertheless, other studies have highlighted the impact of different historical appropriation of social networks between countries (Graham, Jackson, & Broersma, 2016), of a unique institutional context (Tkach-Kawasaki, 2003), or of differences in the use of personalization of candidates online (Hermans & Vergeer, 2013).

25 works deal with the question of transparency in communication: *how does the use of digital communication promote (or not) transparency?* Some studies underline the initiatives adopted by different parliaments to increase transparency (Seaton, 2005b). Others point out the variations in the quality of the tools used (Esterling, Lazer, & Neblo, 2005). In this subfield, it is difficult to distinguish some consensus within the most cited works. Several studies contend that, more than working towards transparency, the use of social networks mainly allows the actors to self-promote.

Online mobilization is an approach addressed by 22 studies in our corpus. Some studies point out that parties, while using digital tools for online engagement, remain unsure about their effects (Karlsen, 2009). Another part of the literature questions which digital tools are the most effective mobilization tools. For example, Nielsen (2011) observed that specific mundane internet tools (email) are much more deeply integrated into mobilizing practices today than emerging (social networks) and specialized tools (campaign websites). Beyond this observation, the study of the most

cited references in the field of mobilization does not allow the identification of structuring streams of research on this theme.

The subject of polarization, relatively secondary, is still addressed in some academic works (18 studies). Unsurprisingly, these studies mostly use a network analysis approach (8 out of 18 references). Of the five most cited references, it is worth highlighting that three are from Parks research, which reinforces his status as a key author in the field (Hsu & Park, 2011; Park & Thelwall, 2008; Randolph Kluver, 2009). Beyond the theme of polarization, some studies in this subfield also address the issue of incivility and negativity of online statements that may be the result (or the cause) of a strong polarization (J. Druckman et al., 2010). Some studies show that incivilities can also lead politicians to abandon interactive approaches online (Theocharis, Barbera, Fazekas, Popa, & Parnet, 2016).

Finally, the agenda setting issue is the last theme identified. 16 academic works refer to this theme and mainly use content analysis (14 out of 16 studies) to answer the following question: *Does the political web make it possible to put forward some issues on the political and public agenda?* Or, on the contrary, *does it only repeat the issues already present in the public debate?* Some studies tend to confirm the similarity of the issues dealt with on the candidates websites and in the wider media space (Sulkin, Moriarty, & Hefner, 2007), or in public opinion (J. N. Druckman, Hennessy, Kifer, & Parkin, 2010). However, studies point out that the individual messages and overall political information environment created by candidates and available to voters through the Web in 2002 did not conform to the usual patterns found in the offline world of print and broadcast communication (Xenos & Foot, 2005). Moreover, some studies noted that politicians are also trying to use their websites to get journalists attention (Lipinski & Neddenriep, 2004).

Potential Research Areas

The scoping review allows us to highlight gaps in the literature regarding the digital communication of parliamentarians and candidates in general elections. We are thus able to suggest different research opportunities that can be addressed in future work. First and foremost, a subject to be explored is the way the digital communication of parliamentarians and candidates in general elections is shaped. Indeed, current literature mostly uses content analysis in its study of communication. The use of this method allows for an interesting analysis of the communications content. However, the prevalence of this method in the field implies that the work done before the communication itself is left behind in most studies. This also implies that the importance of the teamwork may be minimized. The elaboration of the digital communication of a political actor may require a team and, yet, the communication team is invisible in most studies of the corpus. Thus, several questions remain unanswered: *who is in charge of the communication strategies? Who are they? What are their daily practices? Is this category of actors professionalized?* In order to answer those questions, we recommend a more qualitative research design, thereby possibly highlighting the diversity of situations in that area.

Politicians relations with the media via digital tools could also be investigated further. There is work currently being done on how politicians are trying to attract the attention of media online (Dasilva, Ayerdi, & Galdospn, 2018; Chibois, 2014; Lipinski, Neddenriep, & Kedrowski, 2007). This issue could however be addressed by answering other questions such as: *Are there exchanges between politicians and online media?* Moreover, we know that political actors advertise media content on their various social networks. Thus, it would be relevant to know: *What types of content do they favor and what is their reasoning?*

The way citizens see the digital communication of parliamentarians is also a subject missing from the concerns of the academic works included in the scoping

review. No study found examines this aspect. However, this question could be addressed relatively easily with, for example, a survey. This observation goes hand in hand with that of the low interest for the work of politicians or candidates in their district. According to our scoping review, only 13 studies are examining the work in districts. Similarly, the use of big data to better understand voters, especially during campaign periods, could also be investigated further.

Conclusion

This paper provides an overview of more than 20 years of academic writings on the digital communication of MPs and candidates in general elections around the world. We highlighted the different countries in which these issues have been most studied (America, Europe, some Asian countries, Australia and New Zealand). We also observed that researchers tend to largely favor a particular methodology: quantitative content analysis. In addition, we isolated four major themes that come up most frequently in studies on the topic: marketing and strategies, relationships with citizens, debate between normalization and revolution and impact on voting. For each, the main scientific debates that existed were highlighted. Some subjects could perhaps have been dealt with more in-depth. This is, for example, the case of topics such as the response of citizens to digital communication and the quality of information. This is also true of the comparison between the effects of online and offline campaigns. However, our objective was to describe the orientations of the literature on the subject. Subtopics of importance that were not addressed significantly by the literature were therefore not tackled in the present text. Finally, the scoping review approach allowed us to identify different paths for future research that could be interesting in the light of the gaps present in the literature.

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Appendices

Examples of Database Requests

International Bibliography of the Social Sciences

Search in: Anywhere except full text – NOFT

(AB(Facebook OR Twitter OR Website OR Websites OR Blog OR Blogs OR Instagram OR Youtube OR Snapchat OR Linkedin OR "digital communication" OR "digital communications" OR "social media" OR "instant message" OR "instant messages" OR "dual screen*" OR "dual screens" OR "online mobilization*" OR "online mobilizations" OR "online communication" OR "online communications" OR "online participation" OR "online participations" OR "digital participation" OR "digital participations" OR "digital mobilization*" OR "digital mobilizations" OR "echo chamber" OR "social network" OR "social networks" OR "digital campaign" OR "digital campaigns" OR "online campaign" OR "online campaigns" OR "web 2.0" OR "Web 2.0 platform" OR "Web 2.0 platforms" OR "digital politics" OR "online popularity" OR "new media" OR "internet politics" OR "digital environment" OR "digital environments" OR "social networking sites" OR SNS OR tweet OR tweets OR "online message" OR "online messages" OR "digital message" OR "digital messages" OR "hashtag" OR "hashtags" OR "retweet" OR "retweets" OR "big data" OR "personal data" OR "digital media" OR email OR "online survey" OR "online surveys" OR "digital age" OR Internet OR "audience online" OR "politics 2.0" OR "political microblog" OR "political microblogs" OR "online interactivity" OR "online tool" OR "online tools" OR "digital tool" OR "digital tools" OR "site internet" OR "sites internet" OR "communication numérique" OR "communications numériques" OR "communication digitale" OR "communications digitales" OR "communication en ligne" OR "communications en ligne" OR "médias sociaux" OR "réseaux sociaux" OR "mobilisation en ligne" OR "mobilisation online" OR "mobilisation digitale" OR

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networks" OR "digital campaign" OR "digital campaigns" OR "online campaign" OR
"online campaigns" OR "web 2.0" OR "Web 2.0 platform" OR "Web 2.0 platforms"
OR "digital politics" OR "online popularity" OR "new media" OR "internet politics"
OR "digital environment" OR "digital environments" OR "social networking sites"
OR SNS OR tweet OR tweets OR "online message" OR "online messages" OR
"digital message" OR "digital messages" OR "hashtag" OR "hashtags" OR "retweet" OR
"retweets" OR "big data" OR "personal data" OR "digital media" OR email OR "on- line
survey" OR "online surveys" OR "digital age" OR Internet OR "audience online" OR

"politics 2.0" OR "political microblog" OR "political microblogs" OR "online
 interactivity" OR "online tool" OR "online tools" OR "digital tool" OR "digital tools" OR
 "site internet" OR "sites internet" OR "communication numérique" OR "communications
 numériques" OR "communication digitale" OR "communications digitales" OR
 "communication en ligne" OR "communications en ligne" OR "médias sociaux" OR
 "réseaux sociaux" OR "mobilisation en ligne" OR "mobilisation online" OR
 "mobilisation digitale" OR "mobilisation numérique" OR "participation en ligne" OR
 "participation online" OR "participation numérique" OR "participation digitale" OR
 "campagne numérique" OR "campagnes numériques" OR "campagne en ligne" OR
 "campagnes en ligne" OR "campagne online" OR "campagnes online" OR "campagne
 digitale" OR "campagnes digitales" OR "chambre d'écho" OR "chambres d'écho" OR
 "nouveaux médias" OR "popularité en ligne" OR "popularité online" OR "capital
 numérique" OR "message en ligne" OR "messages en ligne" OR "données personnelles"
 OR "média en ligne" OR "médias en ligne" OR "médias digitaux" OR courriel OR
 courriels OR "audience en ligne" OR "audience digitale" OR "interactivit éen ligne" OR
 "outil en ligne" OR "outils en ligne" OR "outil numérique" OR "outils numériques" OR
 "outil digital" OR "outils digitaux") OR (SU("social networks" OR "social media" OR
 websites)))

Coordinated with AND

Search in: Subject heading - MAINSUBJECT

(TI("MP*" OR parliamentarian* OR deput* OR "European parliament" OR "general
 election*" OR congress OR "congressional candidate*" OR "House of representatives"
 OR senator* OR "parliamentary polling" OR "parliamentary election*" OR
 "parliamentary poll*" OR "legislative election*" OR "legislative poll*" OR "general

polling" OR "general poll*" OR "federal member*" OR "federal deput*" OR "deputy
mandate*" OR "legislative campaign*" OR senate OR "national assembly" OR
"constituent assembly" OR parliament OR "general election campaign*" OR "general
election candidate*" OR parlementaire* OR député* OR sénateur* OR parlement* OR
"chambre des représentants" OR "chambre haute" OR "chambre basse" OR
"campagne* législative*" OR "campagne* parlementaire*" OR "assemblée* nationale*" OR
OR "assemblée* constituante*") OR AB("MP*" OR parliamentarian* OR deput* OR
"European parliament" OR "general election*" OR congress OR "congressional
candidate*" OR "House of representatives" OR senator* OR "parliamentary polling" OR
"parliamentary election*" OR "parliamentary poll*" OR "legislative election*" OR
"legislative poll*" OR "general polling" OR "general poll*" OR "federal member*" OR
"federal deput*" OR "deputy mandate*" OR "legislative campaign*" OR senate OR
"national assembly" OR "constituent assembly" OR parliament OR "general election
campaign*" OR "general election candidate*" OR parlementaire* OR député* OR
sénateur* OR parlement* OR "chambre des représentants" OR "chambre haute" OR
"chambre basse" OR "campagne* législative*" OR "campagne* parlementaire*" OR
"assemblée* nationale*" OR "assemblée* constituante*") OR (SU(candidates OR
politicians OR "parliamentary elections" OR "electoral campaigning" OR "political
campaigns" OR "members of the lower chamber" OR "european parliament" OR
parliamentarians)))

Research Results Obtained in Each Databases Used³

International Bibliography of the Social Sciences 2 711 results

Worldwide Political Science Abstracts 2 418 results

PAIS International 931 results

ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global 268 results

Web of science 1 374 results

WorldCat 2 109 results

Google Scholar 1 612 results⁴

³ Results of research requests made in December 2018.

⁴ Because of Google Scholar's peculiarities, only the search engine is making accessible the first 1000 references.