Research seminar: Social media and political engagement

The Arab spring, the Obama campaigns, the Gezi Park protests in Turkey, the intensive use of Facebook and Twitter in Danish and international elections. Social media have come to play an important role in everyday politics in democratic countries as well as in uprisings and revolutions against authoritarian regimes.

This research seminar, organised by Center for Internet Studies, Aarhus University, highlights and discuss the political use of social media based on experiences from a variety of countries like Denmark, the US, Turkey and the Arab World.

The seminar takes place:
**Monday September 22nd 2014 from 12.30 to 16
in ADA building, room 333, Aarhus University Katrinebjerg**

The seminar features five presentations and lot of room for discussions. We start by discussing political involvement in a Danish context, moving on to the wider world and more international perspectives. The order of presentations will be:

Jakob Linaa Jensen, Aarhus University:
Social Media – a critical examination of the democratic perspectives and impacts

Mads P. Sørensen, Aarhus University:
Democratic conversation on Facebook between politicians and citizens

Arjen van Dalen, University of Southern Denmark:
Different campaign, different strategy? The place of social media in the campaign mix during local and national elections

Kamil Demirhan, Hacettepe University, Ankara:
Social Media Effects on the Gezi Park Movement in Turkey: Politics under Hashtags

Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Roskilde University:
Mundane Internet Tools, the Risk of Exclusion, and Reflexive Movements—Occupy Wall Street and Political Uses of Digital Networked Technologies

Everybody is welcome. For purposes of planning, please sign up for the seminar by sending an e-mail to linaa@dac.au.dk.

Abstracts of presentations can be found below.

On behalf of Center for Internet Studies, Aarhus University
Jakob Linaa Jensen, associate professor and member of board

Abstracts of presentations:

Social Media – a critical examination of the democratic perspectives and impacts

Jakob Linaa Jensen, Aarhus University

This presentation discusses the overall promises and perils of democratic involvement through social media. Based on examples from Denmark and abroad, critical democratic issues and concepts are discussed and it is asked, how social media might change the existing dynamics of political participation. It is concluded that social media facilitate democratic action on a micro level where as the wider societal impact still remains to be seen.

Democratic conversation on Facebook between politicians and citizens

Mads P. Sørensen, Aarhus University,

Mads P. Sørensen will present the framework of and ideas behind a study that he is currently working on regarding the conversation on Facebook between citizens and Danish MPs. Democratic conversation has always been key to a well-functioning public sphere. In the democratic conversation it is among other things important to listen to each other and to explore the best arguments for and against a given topic under discussion. But is this also what is going on between Danish politicians and citizens at the Danish MPs' Facebook walls?

Different campaign, different strategy? The place of social media in the campaign mix during local and national elections.

Arjen van Dalen and Morten Skovsgaard, University of Southern Denmark

Although politicians, scholars and campaigners claim that social media such as Facebook and Twitter profoundly change election campaigns, still little is known about the place of social media in the overall campaign mix and its use in combination with traditional campaigning channels like the mass media.
In this paper we compare the place of social media in the campaign mix during Danish local elections and national elections. Based on representative survey data from candidates of the 2011 parliamentary elections and 2009 local elections, we study how much social media are used, who uses social media most and what the motives are for campaigning on social media. In national parliamentary elections, social media are integrated into Danish campaign mix according to the incentive structure of the electoral system and the media logic which characterizes modern campaigns. This paper study whether these results can be generalized to local elections, where intra-party competition is more important and mass media play a less central role.

Mundane Internet Tools, the Risk of Exclusion, and Reflexive Movements—Occupy Wall Street and Political Uses of Digital Networked Technologies

Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Roskilde University

I will offer three observations on the role of digital tools in wider activist organizing practices on the basis of examples from the U.S. Occupy Wall St protests. First, digital and networked technologies are relatively mundane tools to most of the activists who use them (and thus from their perspective not "new media"). Second, in movements that like Occupy define themselves as a broad-based movement for social justice ("We are the 99 percent"), it is clear that there are many among those that digitally savvy activists had hoped to engage, mobilize, and represent who do not have regular Internet access, social networking profiles, or high Web use skills—facts that raise the risk of social exclusion. Third, key individuals in movements like the Occupy movement are acutely aware of the organizing challenges that their partial reliance on digital and networked technologies represents, and work strategically and reflexively to monitor their own forms of communication and organizing in part to handle this problem.

Social Media Effects on the Gezi Park Movement in Turkey: Politics under Hashtags[1]

Kamil Demirhan, Hacettepe University, Ankara

This study aims at understanding the role of social media in the Gezi Park movement in Turkey. The movement started as a protest of an environmentalist group then it turned into a social-political movement. The protestors were opposed to the project of re-building Gezi Park and Taksim Square that is the public area at the center of Istanbul. Politicians, demonstrators, the public and media have agreed on the fact that social media had a significant role in this movement. Social media, especially Twitter, was regarded as the main reason of this movement. The effect of social media on politics on the development of social movements and political participation is often evaluated as an important topic in current academic studies. This study contributes to this literature by focusing on the role of social media in the Gezi Park movement. The analysis consists of Twitter functions, Twitter actors as users, and the forms of communication on Twitter.

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[1] This study published in B. Pătruț & M. Pătruț (Eds.) *Social Media in Politics: Case Studies on the Political Power of Social Media*, Springer, 2014.