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Campaigns and conflict on social media: a literature snapshot

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to discuss the themes identified in the submissions to this volume. The findings are contextualized in recent scholarship on these themes.
Design/methodology/approach – The discussion is organized around predicting social media use among candidates, organizations, and citizens, then exploring differences in the content of social media postings among candidates, organizations, and citizens, and finally exploring the impact of social media use on mobilization and participatory inequality defined by gender, age, and socio-economic status.
Findings – This volume addresses whether social media use is more common among liberal or conservative citizens, candidates, and organizations; the level of negativity in social media discourse and the impact on attitudes; the existence of echo chambers of like-minded individuals and groups; the extent and nature of interactivity in social media; and whether social media will reinforce participation inequalities. In sum, the studies suggest that negativity and interactivity on social media are limited and mixed support for echo chambers. While social media mobilizes citizens, these citizens are those who already pre-disposed to engage in civic and political life.
Originality/value – This paper explores key topics in social media research drawing upon 60 recently published studies. Most of the studies are published in 2015 and 2016, providing a contemporary analysis of these topics.
Keywords Social media, Facebook, Protest, Twitter, Politics, Elections
Paper type Literature review

The studies in this volume address some of the most contentious issues in social media research. How are social media tools used differently by females and males, candidates and citizens, and will social media ameliorate or exacerbate participation inequalities (Bode *et al.*, 2016; Evans, 2016; Gainous *et al.*, 2016; Straus *et al.*, 2016; Vraga, 2016; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2016)? To what degree is social media discourse negative and does social media use produce critical attitudes (Bode *et al.*, 2016; David *et al.*, 2016; Gainous *et al.*, 2016; Merry, 2016; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2016)? Do social media build echo chambers of like-minded individuals and groups (Merry, 2016; Vraga, 2016), and to what degree is social media use interactive (Merry, 2016; Straus *et al.*, 2016; Kruikemeier *et al.*, 2016)? These issues are addressed at the political elite level (political candidates), the organizational level (political parties, interest groups), and at the citizen level. The discussion is organized around predicting social media use, then exploring differences in the content of social media postings, and finally examining the impact of social media use on mobilization and participatory inequality.

Social media use
Partisanship and ideology
Ideology and partisanship have been widely studied as predictors of social media adoption in campaigns and among citizens. At the aggregate level, the research offers stronger support for ideological differences, rather than partisanship differences. American studies tend to find that liberal or left-wing candidates, citizens, and interest

groups are more likely to post on social media than their conservative counterparts, but internationally, the results are less conclusive. The studies in this volume do not find differences between Republican and Democrat congressional candidates in terms of the volume of tweets during elections in 2010 and 2012 (Bode *et al.*, 2016, Table 1; Evans, 2016, Table 2). However, other studies of this time period have found differences (Enli and Naper, 2016; Gainous and Wagner, 2014). New research has evolved into exploring differences in ideology, rather than partisanship. Straus *et al.* (2016) argue that ideology, rather than political party, predicted social media adoption in 2014. They find that members of Congress who are more ideologically extreme have higher Twitter use and higher Klout scores, compared to those near the center (Straus *et al.* 2013, 2016, Table 4).

International studies also explore ideology as a factor predicting social media use. David *et al.* (2016) observe a slightly higher number of Facebook posts from the right-wing governing party, compared to left-wing and centrist parties. Reviewing the Danish EP election of 2014, 2014 Swedish election, as well as the UK 2014 EP and 2015 general elections, studies tend to find that left-leaning parties and candidates use Twitter more than other parties or candidates (Jensen *et al.*, 2016; Larsson, 2015; Lilleker *et al.*, 2016). In France, the results vary by election (Koc-Michalska *et al.*, 2014). In 2007, left-wing candidates performed better in offering interactive media, including blogs, videos, and social networking profiles; this pattern was reversed in 2012 with conservative candidates performing better (Koc-Michalska *et al.*, 2014). Koc-Michalska *et al.* (2014) point out the complexity of untangling ideological patterns from challenger-incumbency patterns of social media adoption.

In terms of citizens' ideology, partisanship, and social media use, early research established that party identification does not predict citizens' social media adoption (Gainous and Wagner, 2014; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2012b). While some studies find partisan differences in posting political content on social networking sites (Bode *et al.*, 2014; Gainous and Wagner, 2014), other studies find that ideology better explains these differences (Vraga, 2016, Table 2). Liberals are more likely to post-political content on social networking sites, than conservatives (Vraga, 2016, Table 2).

At the organizational level, Valenzuela *et al.* (2012a, 2016) note that social media is particularly attractive tool for left-leaning protest groups in Latin America following the election of center-right parties. Merry (2016) notes that in a five year period, the Brady campaign posted 5,443 tweets, whereas the National Rifle Association (NRA) posted 4,475. Based on this data, it appears as though liberal organizations may tweet more often than conservative organizations. However, it is unclear whether the difference is due to ideology or due to the challenger-status quo divide. Does the Brady campaign tweet more often because they are challenging the status quo on gun control or because they are a liberal organization? Further research should explore these dynamics using other interest groups with differing statuses in terms of challenger versus status quo supporters.

Incumbents vs challengers
The studies in this volume explore the role of incumbency and challenger status at the candidate level, offering mixed findings (Bode *et al.*, 2016; Evans, 2016). These differences may be explained by variation in the role of social media between chambers of Congress and election years. Several differences have been observed for House of Representative (2012) and Senate elections (2010). Early research found that challengers were more likely than incumbents to adopt social media in a campaign

(Gainous and Wagner, 2014, Chapter 5). Following this research, Evans (2016, Table 2) finds that successful challengers tweeted more often than incumbents in the 2012 House of Representatives election and in the summer after the election. Bode *et al.* (2016, Table 1) do not find a difference between challengers and incumbents in the 2010 Senate election.

Existing research offers different findings about the role of electoral competitiveness in social media use. Evans (2016, Table 2) finds that in House of Representatives elections, the competitiveness of the election has an effect on Twitter use and the volume of tweets. Bode *et al.* (2016, Table 1) do not find that competitiveness affected Twitter usage in the 2010 Senate elections. Looking at both Senate and House elections in 2010, Wagner *et al.* (Forthcoming) do not find an effect of competitiveness on the volume of tweets.

These studies align with a stream of research demonstrating differences between Senate and House of Representatives elections (Bode and Epstein, 2015; Gainous and Wagner, 2014; Glassman *et al.*, 2015). For example, Glassman *et al.* (2015) report that Republicans were more likely than Democrats to use Twitter and Facebook in 2011; these gaps were larger in the House of Representatives than in the Senate. Other studies find house members tweet less often than Senate candidates (Gainous and Wagner, 2014; Glassman *et al.*, 2015); the same pattern holds for Facebook posts (Glassman *et al.*, 2015). Bode and Epstein (2015) find differences in social media Klout scores for Senate and House of Representative elections and for newcomers vs established candidates.

Jungherr (2016) cites nine studies demonstrating that opposition party and candidates use Twitter more than governing parties. However, findings differ by national context: studies of Swiss politicians in 2013 suggest that incumbency-challenger differences in the volume of tweets do not exist (Rauchfleisch and Metag, 2015). However, this research does not explore nuances. How do challenger-incumbent candidate status, partisanship, competitiveness, and opposition versus governing party dynamics interact in predicting patterns of social media use? For example, is social media use greater for a Republican challenger, than a Republican incumbent? Is social media use greater for a Democrat challenger, than a Democrat incumbent? How do these patterns differ if the chamber is dominated by Republicans vs Democrats? How does the competitiveness of the election affect these patterns?

Jungherr (2016) notes several studies showing that citizen supporters of opposition parties tend to use Twitter more intensively than supporters of governing parties. The studies in this volume do not explore this dynamic in terms of social media use. However, similar questions could be asked. Do citizens make greater use of social media when their preferred candidate is a challenger, rather than an incumbent? Does this pattern of use differ if the chamber is dominated by Republicans vs Democrats? Does the competitiveness of the election affect citizens' use of social media to talk about their preferred candidate?

Gender
This volume paints a rather complicated picture of gender and social media use. Evans *et al.* find that female candidates were more likely to tweet than males during the 2012 House of Representatives election, but these differences disappear in non-election periods (Evans, 2016, Tables 2 and 3; Evans *et al.*, 2016). Among Senators, Bode *et al.* (2016, Table 1) find females were more likely to tweet during the 2010 election cycle, whereas Straus *et al.* (2016, Table 4) do not find gender differences in 2014. Looking at both chambers of Congress, some studies find gender differences

(Wagner *et al.*, Forthcoming, Tables 1 and 2) and some studies do not find differences (Straus *et al.*, 2013). Gender differences have also been observed in the adoption of Twitter internationally. In Switzerland, Rauchfleisch and Metag (2015) find that female politicians were more likely to have a Twitter account than males, but did not find differences in the volume of tweets.

At the citizen level, early research demonstrated that females were more likely than males to use Facebook (Gainous and Wagner, 2014; Perrin, 2015; Wells and Link, 2014). Murthy *et al.* (2016) find that males are more likely to be on Twitter, but females tweet more than males. Perrin (2015) claims that gender differences in social media use have now diminished. International studies do not observe gender differences in social media use (Koc-Michalska *et al.*, 2014; Valenzuela, 2013).

Social media content
Political tweets
Compared to other tweet topics, politics comes up rarely (Jungherr, 2016). Barbera (2016) finds that 0.2 percent of tweets mention the US president and fewer than 22.5 percent of users ever mention the president. Looking at social networking sites generally, Vraga (2016, Table 1) reports that about 40 percent of Americans post- political content, but more than 80 percent of Americans have seen political content on social networking sites. Despite infrequent postings, social media users do recall seeing political content.

David *et al.* (2016) find that citizens and political parties' discourses on social media are closely aligned. For example, right-wing political parties use Facebook to post about religion and this same pattern occurs in the analysis of right-leaning citizens (David *et al.*, 2016). Barbera (2016) also notes the popularity of religion among Republicans.

Research in this area is largely based on the analysis of social media text. Gerodimos and Justinussen (2015) find few text-only messages on Obama's 2012 campaign Facebook page. The effects of social media on attitudes and behaviors may be different if video and picture content are considered. Furthermore, studies of dual-screening show that Twitter users react to visual cues, more so than verbal cues, in terms of the volume of tweets during a candidate debate (Shah *et al.*, 2015). Text-based analysis would miss these nuances. Further research should examine pictures and videos posted on social media to determine how these items differ from text-only messaging and whether these visual items are influential in campaigns.

Bode *et al.* (2016, p. 12) find that only half of tweets from 2010 Senate candidates contain any information about policy issues. Other studies of the 2010-2014 period estimate that between 11 and 25 percent of candidate tweets are related to policy (Evans *et al.*, 2016; Gainous and Wagner, 2014; Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015; Glassman *et al.*, 2015; McGregor *et al.*, 2016). Gerodimos and Justinussen (2015) find that Obama's Facebook page was largely focussed on his family and personality, rather than policy. This is in sharp contrast to television ads, which almost all specify policy issues (Bode *et al.*, 2016). These findings suggest that different media serve different functions in a campaign. The personalization of social media postings has clear implications on voter's intentions (Kruikemeier *et al.*, 2016).

The economy is among the most popular policy-related tweet (Bode *et al.*, 2016, Table 2; Evans, 2016, Table 1). Bode *et al.* (2016, Table 3) find partisanship differences in tweets in three of six policy areas: Republicans are less likely to tweet about social welfare issues, legal issues, and general social issues than Democrats. Evans *et al.* do

not find partisan differences in tweeting about women's issues (Evans, 2016, Tables 2 and 3; Evans and Clark, 2016).

Gainous and Wagner (2014) find that Republicans sent more policy tweets, in general in 2010, than Democrats. This pattern is also observed for the Obama and Romney campaigns in 2012 (Borah, 2016). Gainous and Wagner (2014) also find that incumbents were more likely to tweet about policy, in general, than challengers and that Senators tweeted more about policy than House of Representative members. The competitiveness of the election also affects the topic of the tweets, with Evans and Clark (2016) finding that more competitive elections produce more policy issue tweets.

Discontent and attacks tweets

David *et al.* (2016) find that left-leaning political parties and citizens were more likely to mention "protest" in their Facebook postings than right-leaning political parties and citizens. They explain this pattern in terms of right-wing parties leading government, leaving left-wing parties and citizens "protesting and criticizing its decisions" on social media (p. 12). Other research affirms that social media is most appealing to those who wishing to express discontent. Gainous *et al.* (2016) find correlations of social media use with criticisms of the state of democracy and political conditions for respondents in Latin American countries (Table 3). The findings are replicated in cross-national studies in eastern and Western Europe (Ceron and Memoli, 2016; Stoycheff *et al.*, 2016). Valenzuela (2013) also finds a correlation between social media use and economic dissatisfaction. Social media seems to be a particularly attractive media for expressing discontent, but is social media particularly negative in its content? The set of articles do not address negativity in citizens' tweets; however, Murthy *et al.* (2015) find that positive tweets are more frequent than negative tweets.

Negative tweets are also rare among political candidates and interest groups. Bode *et al.* (2016) find that only 15 percent of tweets are negative. Evans *et al.* (2016) find that only 11 percent of tweets are negative and 42 percent of candidates ever posted a negative tweet. Many other studies affirm the rarity of negative tweets and negative Facebook posts at the candidate level (Enli and Naper, 2016; Gainous and Wagner, 2014; Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015; Wagner *et al.*, Forthcoming).

Despite the rarity of negative tweets, there is an abundance of research about who is more likely to be negative. Republicans, challengers, and Senators are more likely than their counterparts to post negative tweets (Gainous and Wagner, 2014; Wagner *et al.*, Forthcoming). In the 2012 presidential election, half of Mitt Romney's tweets were attack, largely directed at Obama (Borah, 2016; Enli and Naper, 2016). The competitiveness of the election does not affect the number of negative tweets (Evans and Clark, 2016; Wagner *et al.*, Forthcoming).

Bode *et al.* (2016, Table 4) do not find gender differences in posting negative tweets. However, other studies find small gender differences with female candidates more likely to be negative (see Evans and Clark, 2016; Evans *et al.*, 2016; Wagner *et al.*, Forthcoming). However, contextual issues matter. In a non-election period, the gender differences in posting negative tweets disappear (Evans *et al.*, 2016). Wagner *et al.* (Forthcoming) find that the gender effects disappear when partisanship is considered alongside gender in a multivariate model. Gender interacts with party status – Republican females post the most negative tweets compared to Republican males, Democrat males, or Democrat females (Wagner *et al.*, Forthcoming). The pay-offs of being negative, in terms of vote share, was better for Republican females than other groups (Wagner *et al.*, Forthcoming).

As observed among political candidates, Merry (Figure 2) finds that most tweets are neutral for the Brady campaign and the NRA. When tweets are negative, Merry (Table 4) finds that the target's Twitter handle is much less likely to be included in the tweet, than if they are being praised or identified as an ally. The findings are consistent for both the Brady campaign and the NRA (Table 4). However, this finding may be specific to these organizations. Freelon *et al.* (2016) examine conservative discourse around the killing of Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri and find that President Obama was the most common mention (as a direct reply using the @ symbol). These mentions were explicit disagreement with the president (Freelon *et al.*, 2016). Further research should explore the negativity in tweets among interest groups and social movements to determine the extent to which tweets are confrontational and the impact of this confrontation approach on citizens' support for the cause.

Gender
The content of tweets differs by gender for citizens and political elites. At the citizen level, females are less likely than males to post- political content on social networking sites (Vaccari *et al.*, 2015; Vraga, 2016, Table 2). Barbera (2016) finds that 26 percent of men and approximately 19.5 percent of women have ever mentioned the president. A cross-national analysis replicates the finding that men are more likely to engage with political content on Facebook than women (Brandtzæg, 2015).

Among political elites, Evans (2016) finds that successfully elected female candidates are more likely than males to tweet about women's issues (also see Evans and Clark, 2016). This pattern appears during the election campaign as well as after (Evans, 2016, Tables 2 and 3). While females from both parties are more likely to tweet about women's issues than their male counterparts, Democrat female candidates tweet more, on average, about this topic than female Republicans (Evans, 2016). Incumbents are more likely to tweet about women's issues, than challengers during an election (Evans, 2016, Table 2; Evans and Clark, 2016).

Evans *et al.* (Evans and Clark, 2016; Evans *et al.*, 2016) find that female candidates are more likely than males to tweet about policy issues and that the percentage of female candidates in an election increased the number of tweets about policy issues (Evans and Clark, 2016). The gender differences in tweeting about policy issues disappear after the election (Evans *et al.*, 2016). Using a six-category scheme for coding policy areas, Bode *et al.* (2016, Table 3) find only one of six policy domains where males and female politicians differed: female candidates were less likely to tweet about legal issues, compared to males.

Echo chambers
Sunstein (2001) raises serious concerns about the potential of digital media to create echo chambers of like-minded individuals who isolate themselves from differing viewpoints, which can lead to polarized attitudes about issues. These concerns have carried into social media research (Gainous and Wagner, 2014; Jungherr, 2016). Merry (2016) finds that two gun policy interest groups overlap in some of the hashtags used (e.g. #nra, #guns, see Table 3), but they also use hashtags that appeal specifically to supporters (Boulianne, 2016). The same pattern is observed for anti- and pro-Keystone pipeline tweets with #keystonexl being popular for both groups, but each side employing hashtags appealing to their unique supporters (Hodges and Stocking, 2016). These findings fuel concerns about echo chambers.

On the other hand, Merry (2016) also find that the Brady Campaign is more likely to use hashtags than the NRA (Table 3). Indeed, using hashtags is a sign of trying to engage a diverse public, whereas the lack of hashtag use is a sign of trying to engage a narrow public, e.g., followers (see Merry, 2016). A similar pattern has been observed in electoral contexts. Straus *et al.* (2014) find that liberal Senators are more likely to use hashtags than conservative Senators. The Obama campaign was more likely than the Romney campaign to use hashtags in the 2012 presidential election campaign, but only 16 percent of tweets included a hashtag (Enli and Naper, 2016). Collectively, the findings suggest that liberal organizations and candidates make greater use of hashtags than conservatives. These hashtags can encourage cross-cutting discourse.

At the candidate level, Jungherr (2016) discusses several prior studies showing that politicians and citizens tend to interact with those who share their ideological views. Vraga (2016) reports that the frequencies of having ever seen politically incongruent content is similar to seeing congruent content (see Table 1, 95 percent). Scholars suggest that people self-select the content that they view and prefer content that is consistent with their own views (Gainous and Wagner, 2014; Bode and Vraga, 2015). In particular, Twitter use correlates with this preference for congruent content and with extreme attitudes (Gainous and Wagner, 2014). However, a Facebook-based experiment reveals that when some people are exposed to headlines with contrary views, they may change their minds about some issues (Bode and Vraga, 2015).

Other studies show that while people communicate more frequently on social media with those who share their party affiliation, they also frequently talk across party lines (Heatherly *et al.*, 2016). More frequent use of social media use increases the frequency of engaging in online political discussion across party lines (Heatherly *et al.*, 2016). However, the discussion is among moderates on both sides, rather a discussion involving extremists (Heatherly *et al.*, 2016).

Interactivity of social media
The level of interactivity in social media has been a well-studied topic in the context of campaigns (Jungherr, 2016), but less research has been done at the citizen or interest group level. Merry (2016) analyzes over 10,000 tweets from two gun policy organizations. She finds that 23.2 percent of tweets contained an @ symbol representing a direct reply. The Brady campaign, challenging the status quo on this policy issue, was slightly more likely to directly reply (25.5 percent) than the NRA (20.4 percent) (Merry, 2016). Theocharis *et al.* (2015) report cross-national differences in interactivity for social movements with the USA's Occupy Wall Street Movement and Spain's *indignados* movements being more interactive than Greece's *aganaktismenoi*. Likewise, the anti-Keystone pipeline groups are more likely to be interactive (mentions, replies), compared to pro-Keystone pipeline groups (Hodges and Stocking, 2016).

Straus *et al.* (2016) analyze tweets from 97 Senate candidates and find replies and retweets are, on average, rare compared to original tweets (Table 1). These statistics suggest that interactivity continues to be low on Twitter (Jungherr, 2016) and Facebook (Gerodimos and Justinussen, 2015). During the 2010 elections in the USA, the UK, and Denmark, approximately 30 percent of political candidates' tweets contained the @ symbol, but there are some cross-national differences in interactivity (Gainous and Wagner, 2014; Graham *et al.*, 2016; Kruikemeier, 2014).

Female candidates were more likely than males to use the @ symbol in their tweets, but these differences disappear after the election (Evans *et al.*, 2016; Meeks, 2016). On the other hand, Straus and colleagues do not find gender differences in interactivity (Straus *et al.*, 2014, 2016, Table 4). Comparing two candidates in the 2014 Danish election, Jensen *et al.* (2016) find the female candidate to be much more interactive than the male candidate, but the comparison is confounded by challenger-incumbent status. Compared to incumbents, challengers tend to use Twitter more interactively (Gainous and Wagner, 2014; Jungherr, 2016). In the 2010 election campaign, Republicans, challengers, and Senate candidates were more likely to include the @ symbol in their tweets (Gainous and Wagner, 2014). Looking at ideology instead of partisanship, Straus *et al.* (2016, Table 4) do not find differences in interactive tweets for liberal and conservative candidates.

Politicians often use Twitter to interact with other members of the political elite and journalists, but rarely to interact with citizens (see discussion in Jungherr, 2016). Does interactivity matter? In an experiment, Kruikemeier *et al.* (2013) find that interactive websites increased respondents' political interest compared to less interactive websites. Likewise, they find that reading comments online increased political interest and indirectly voter turnout, compared to not reading comments online (Kruikemeier *et al.*, 2014). In Kruikemeier *et al.* (2016) find that interactive uses of Twitter increase the perceived expertise of the candidate and the perception of a connection with the candidate, which indirectly affects intended political involvement (Table 2). Finally, Kruikemeier (2014) found that candidates who more frequently used the @ symbol for direct interaction received more votes than candidates who used direct interaction infrequently. However, this may not transcend electoral contexts. In the US context, interactivity was not associated with electoral success (Enli and Naper, 2016; Meeks, 2016).

Social media impacts
Mobilization
Existing research clearly establishes that social media use mobilizes citizens to participate in civic and political life (Boulianne, 2015; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2016, Table 2; Vraga, 2016, Table 2). Valenzuela *et al.* (2016, Table 2) find that reading or sharing political content on social media affects participating in protests and signing petitions. This finding is consistent with other studies that demonstrate a positive correlation with social media use and protest-type of activities (Scherman *et al.*, 2015; Wells and Thorson, 2015; Valenzuela, 2013). Among French citizens, Koc-Michalska *et al.* (2014) find that social media use correlates with political participation, including signing a petition. Cross-national studies also find that social media use correlates with online participation, including signing an online petition (Saldana *et al.*, 2015; Valeriani and Vaccari, 2015). However, social media use may not affect all forms of political activity. A meta-analysis of 36 studies of social media use and engagement found that social media use is less likely to have a significant effect on campaign participation (Boulianne, 2015).

The type of social media use is also important to understanding the effects on participation. Studies find that blog use has a stronger positive effect on engagement, than other types of social media (Bode *et al.*, 2014; Towner and Muñoz, 2016; Vraga, 2016, Table 2). Further, the nature of social media use matters, e.g., liking or following political candidates has a stronger effect on engagement than other social media uses (Boulianne, 2015). Vaccari *et al.* (2015) find that engaging with social

media discourse through hashtags has an effect on participation. Vraga (2016, Table 2) looks at the relationship between social media use and participation from a variety of angles. She finds that posting political content on social media correlates with participation (also see Bode and Dalrymple, 2014; Vaccari *et al.*, 2015).

Participation inequalities

Valenzuela *et al.* (2016) raise another issue about participation: how will social media impact participation inequalities that exist in larger society? Jungherr (2016) summarizes the literature documenting how Twitter users are not representative of the larger public on demographics as well as political attitudes, such as political interest, partisanship, and levels of engagement (also see Vaccari *et al.*, 2015).

At the citizen level, young people are more likely to use social media sites than older people (Bode *et al.*, 2014; Gainous *et al.*, 2016, Table 2; Koc-Michalska *et al.*, 2014; Murthy *et al.*, 2016; Scherman *et al.*, 2015; Wells and Link, 2014). In contrast, older people are more likely to participate in political activities (Vraga, 2016, Table 2; Saldana *et al.*, 2015), though the effects of age may depend on the type of political activity examined (Valenzuela, 2013). Given these relationships, social media could diminish age-based participation gaps, but Valenzuela *et al.* (2016) find that the effect is small (Figure 2).

At the elite level of participation, age does not affect Twitter use among Senators (Bode *et al.*, 2016, Table 1; Straus *et al.*, 2016, Table 4). However, when looking at both Chambers of Congress, Straus *et al.* (2013) find that younger members are more likely to use Twitter than older members of Congress. In Switzerland, younger politicians are more likely to be on Twitter and tweet more often than older politicians (Rauchfleisch and Metag, 2015).

Education also affects social media use (Gainous *et al.*, 2016, Table 2; Vaccari *et al.*, 2015; Valenzuela, 2013; Wells and Link, 2014). Vraga (2016) finds that more educated people are less likely to post-political content on social media (Table 2), whereas other studies suggest that educated people are more likely to tweet about politics, compared to less educated people (Bode and Dalrymple, 2014; Vaccari *et al.*, 2015). Educated people are more likely to be politically engaged (Vraga, 2016, Table 2; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2016, Table 2; as well as Valenzuela, 2013). As such, participation inequalities are not ameliorated by social media, particularly those differences defined by socio-economic status (Gainous *et al.*, 2016, Table 2). None of the studies explore candidates' level of education as a predictor of social media adoption. However, given the homogeneity of political elites in terms of socio-economic status, it is unlikely that social media use would affect participation inequalities at this level.

Gender differences in political participation are culturally specific and vary by the type of political activity. For example, Valenzuela *et al.*, 2012a, 2016, Table 2 find no gender differences in protest in Latin America, but Olcese *et al.* (2014), using cross-national European data, find that males are more likely to engage in protest. Using a composite scale of participation, studies rarely find gender differences in other forms of political participation (Saldana *et al.*, 2015; Valenzuela, 2013; Vraga, 2016, Table 2). Saldana *et al.* (2015) find gender differences in online participation in the USA (not in the UK). Valenzuela *et al.* (2016, Figure 1) find that social media may have a larger effect on females' protest participation than males, which could ameliorate participation inequalities defined by gender.

Gender differences are much larger at the elite levels of running for office. Only 16-18 percent of Congressional seats in 2010 are held by women (Straus *et al.*, 2013;

Wagner *et al.*, Forthcoming) and about half of all Congressional elections only have male candidates (Wagner *et al.*, Forthcoming). As outlined in previous sections, social media use could address these gender differences at the elite level, if this tool is used effectively (see Kruikemeier *et al.*, 2016; Kruikemeier, 2014).

Summary of suggestions for additional research

The set of studies in this paper explore the role of social media at the political elite, organizational, and citizen level. As a set of studies, they raise a number of issues for further research. For example, the studies find that the frequency of social media use does not differ for Republicans and Democrats (Bode *et al.*, 2016; Evans, 2016); however, other studies suggest that there are differences in use by ideology (David *et al.*, 2016; Straus *et al.*, 2016; Vraga, 2016) and/or by national context, e.g., what party is leading government (David *et al.*, 2016; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2016). There is ongoing debate about whether differences reflect ideology or whether the differences are attributable to challenger-incumbency status.

This debate is also relevant at the interest group or social movement level. Does social media use, or the nature of social media use, differ for interest groups challenging the status quo or sustaining the status quo? Merry's (2016) analysis of gun policy groups suggest some differences in the two groups, but questions remain about whether differences are defined by ideology or status within the political system. Furthermore, research should examine whether these differences emerge in other policy domains.

The studies illustrate the importance of political context (David *et al.*, 2016; Gainous *et al.*, 2016; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2016). The studies suggest that those citizens and organizations opposed to the governing party may use social media to express their discontent. David *et al.*'s (2016) study suggest that protest is discussed more often among left-wing parties and citizens, noting that the government is led by a right-wing party. Would we expect social media to be as popular of a tool for expressing discontent when the governing party is liberal?

Another recurring topic for further research relates to the nature and tone of information acquired through social media. The set of studies establish that political elites and interest groups rarely go negative (Bode *et al.*, 2016; Evans, 2016; Merry, 2016) and are rarely interactive (Merry, 2016; Straus *et al.*, 2016). The content of messages matters (Kruikemeier *et al.*, 2016). The studies in this volume demonstrate that social media use has offline behavioral implications (Kruikemeier *et al.*, 2016; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2016; Vraga, 2016). However, the research raises several questions for further research. What are the implications of going negative or being interactive on support for social causes? How does interactive or negative content affect attitudes about the functioning of democracy? For example, when politicians are interactive, do citizens feel more efficacious? The research in this volume focuses on textual analysis, raising questions about the role of images in affecting support and changing attitudes.

The studies do not find gender differences in social media use at the citizen level (Vraga, 2016; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2016), but find mixed support for gender differences in how social media is used by political candidates (Bode *et al.*, 2016; Evans, 2016; Straus *et al.*, 2016). While gender determines elite levels of political participation, gender does not affect less intense forms of political participation (Vraga, 2016; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2016). While social media may not change female citizens' engagement, it may be transformative for female candidates if this media is used effectively (Kruikemeier *et al.*, 2016). Further research should address the role of social media in addressing gender-based and other participation inequalities at the elite level.

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