

# Understanding Twitter™ Use among Parliament Representatives: A Genre Analysis

Øystein Sæbø

► **To cite this version:**

Øystein Sæbø. Understanding Twitter™ Use among Parliament Representatives: A Genre Analysis. Efthimios Tambouris; Ann Macintosh; Hans Bruijn. 3rd Electronic Participation (ePart), Aug 2011, Delft, Netherlands. Springer, Lecture Notes in Computer Science, LNCS-6847, pp.1-12, 2011, Electronic Participation. <10.1007/978-3-642-23333-3\_1>. <hal-01589367>

**HAL Id: hal-01589367**

**<https://hal.inria.fr/hal-01589367>**

Submitted on 18 Sep 2017

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



# Understanding Twitter™ use among parliament representatives: A genre analysis

Øystein Sæbø  
University of Agder, Norway  
Oystein.Sabo@uia.no

**Abstract.** This article examines parliament representatives' Twitter-contributions (tweets). First, the genre of communication approach is introduced to identify common characteristics and communication patterns. Second, the findings are analysed using various eDemocracy models and deliberative standards to identify to what extent these tweets could be characterized as part of a deliberative discussion. The tweets are mainly dominated by five communication purposes; providing links to information sources for other Twitter users, to inform about the representative's ongoing activities, to express views on topical issues, introducing non-political (private) content and participating in online discussions with other parliament representatives. Other less frequent communication patterns include tweets attracting attention to the representative's own blogs, requests for input from readers and finally discussions with citizens. The analysed tweets generally did not meet deliberative standards and are dominated by politicians disseminating information and discussing with other parliament representatives. We conclude by arguing that the parliament representatives' Twitter use is linked to the Liberal Democracy model, where the main purpose is to disseminate information to electors, and provide information on ongoing activities to the audience.

**Keywords:** Twitter, eParticipation, Parliament representatives, genre of communication, Democracy models

## 1 Introduction

Throughout the last years, social networking services, such as Facebook and Twitter, have proliferated in political debate and communication, significantly influencing how various stakeholders communicate. Such services offer the potential to deliver conventional forms of discourse to a wider audience and offer new opportunities for political participation [1]. A growing body of research has begun to examine the influence of social networking services on political communication [1], since interpersonal discussion plays a distinct role in creating the dialogue necessary for sound political deliberation [2].

This study contributes to this research by exploring how a social networking service, Twitter™, was adopted and used by parliament representatives. Conceptually, we use this empirical study to weave together two strands of research. The first strand argues that electronic communication, like the use of Twitter, can be classified into

recognizable genres [3]. Research on online political communication often exposes “the Internet” as one-dimensional [4], discussing “the Internet” as a single entity [1]. Genre refers to “a recognizable communicative event” [5] with socially identifiable motives and tasks, which give a rational reason for communicative utterances to exist [6]. Genres have been used to study the communication structure within organizations [3], determining requirements for systems in general [7], and specifically in e-Participation projects [6, 8]. A genre-based analysis may help to explore characteristics of politicians’ Twitter postings to better understand the role of using such services for political purposes, and addresses the call for a more in-depth understanding of online political communication [9].

The second strand of research argues that the use of electronic media for political purposes is influenced by the ideals regarding how democracy should take place [10-12]. Current research on Internet and political engagement often focus on citizen’s engagement [9] and deliberation [13-15]. The conclusions are often somewhat disappointing, illustrated by the conclusions drawn by Strandberg [16]:

*“on-line discussions are not, at least for the time being, truly deliberative. The debates analysed generally did not meet deliberative standards in terms of quality and only politically very active and interested citizens seemed to take part in them. The question thus still remains if, and how, on-line citizens’ discussions can ever become truly deliberative”*(p. 71)

Rose and Sæbø [17], by analysing a political discussion forum, found conflicts of interest between citizens and politicians:

*“Politicians set out to demonstrate their specialist/elite abilities through rational argumentation and to broadcast their policies to a broad range of voters in order to be (re)elected. Citizens engaged politicians in discourse in order to set agendas and influence political decision making”*(p.160)

To fully understand the influence of social networking services on political communication, we need to broaden the perspective by including other democratic context than only the deliberative approach, and to include various stakeholders’ perspectives. The eDemocracy models represent means for seeing technologies and development of the society as a mutually dependent and dynamically emergent phenomenon [18]. Discussing the identified genres in relation to various eDemocracy models explore how politicians’ use of Twitter contributes to various democracy ideals.

In this paper, we integrate these two research strands by investigating the use of Twitter among Norwegian parliament representatives. We conduct content analysis to analyse 473 tweets based on the genre of communication perspective to identify common patterns of communication. These patterns were then analysed in regards to the eDemocracy models.

## **2 Theoretical premises**

### **2.2 Genres of communication**

The term genre originally describes a distinctive type or category of literary composition [19]. The genre perspective was introduced to Information System (IS)

research by Yates and Orlikowski [3, 20] who used it to investigate organizational communication by applying it to “recognized type of communications, e.g. letters, memoranda or meetings. In the eParticipation area, the theory of genres has been used to analyse the purpose and nature of communication in government-initiated discussion forums [6, 8, 17], and provided the basis for guidelines to develop eParticipation systems that combined eDemocracy models and genres [6]. Genres are complex, as they integrate many different facets into an identifiable but intricate whole, and the boundaries are difficult to specify [21]. Yates and Orlikowski [3] defined a genre of organizational communication as a typified and recurrent communicative action such as memos, meetings and training seminars, enacted to realize a particular social purpose. The recurrent situation includes the history and nature of established practices, social relations, and communication media within organizations, and involve expectations relating to communities and roles [3].

Even though no common consensus exists on the exact definition of genre, most classifications include considerations of the form, expected content, and intended communicative purpose [21]. The purpose of a genre refers to the socially identifiable and enacted motives and tasks, which give a rational reason for communicative utterances to exist. Purpose is constructed and recognized by the organizational community [22]. Form refers to observable aspects of the communication [22], such as the preferred media for the typified utterances (e.g., pen and paper, telephone or Skype), linguistic characteristics of how information and communication content is organized and stylistic expectations for the language and other semantically meaningful expressions used [6]. An established genre within a community serves as a template for social interaction, shaping the communicative actions of members within the community [20].

By employing various computing devices and the Internet, the genre research agenda has broadened not only to organizational, but also digital genres [19]. As documents migrate to the web, their identity also evolves [21]. Many technologies are converging – voice, image, text, databases, computing – creating opportunities for combining and recombining many various forms of genres in inventive ways and for unexpected purposes. Digital genres are thus not only characterized by traditional indicators, such as specific content and form, but also new and different cues for both identifying and then analysing and conceptualizing them.

In order to analyse genres, we adhere to the six dimensions of communicative interactions, introduced by Yates and Orlikowski [20]: purposes (why), contents (what), participants (who/m), forms (how), time (when) and place (where), also known as the “5W1H” framework (See Table 1).

Why	Expectations about socially recognized purpose.
What	The content of the genre, including expectations about which genres typically appear and potential sequences.
Who/m	The participants involved in the communicative interaction and their roles, e.g. who initiates and who is addressed by the genres involved.
How	Expectations regarding the form, including expectations on media, structuring devices and linguistic elements.
When	Temporal expectations, such as deadlines or expectations (explicitly or implicitly stated) on timelines for performing the communicative actions.
Where	Location and time expectations, physical or virtual.

Table 1 : 5W1H framework (adapted from [20])

## **2.2 Models of eDemocracy**

Ideas and ideals of democracy may vary significantly between societies, communities, and even the stakeholders of one community. Literature on democracy models [10-12] uses varying characteristics in order to clarify differences among democracy ideas, making a detailed comparison of the competing models difficult. A review of this literature [18] suggests an overarching but simplified comparison of various eDemocracy models based on two fundamental dimensions: inclusion in decisions and control of the agenda [23]. Inclusion refers to the idea of whether all members of a society are able to participate in current debates and decision-making processes. Control of the agenda is related to the issue of who decides what issues should be addressed in the first place. The resulting stereotypical models allow for analytical comparison on different theories, empirical situations and stakeholder perceptions between the models [18]. Since this paper focuses on twitter use among parliament representatives, only the models where politicians are the initiators are relevant; that is, the Liberal and the Deliberative democracy models.

In Liberal eDemocracy, governmental agencies and the political elite set agendas for decision-making processes. Citizens participate only implicitly, if at all, in most of the decision-making processes, except for voting in elections. Meanwhile, the citizens are mostly regarded as consumers of services and subjects to the public governance. Liberal eDemocracy is based on a representative government, where citizens form the electorate, participate in public debate and provide mandates to representatives at the local level [10]. The purpose of politics is to reconcile conflicting individual interests using politicians to mediate these conflicts through negotiations [24].

The concept of Deliberative eDemocracy connects citizens more explicitly and directly to the decision-making processes [10, 25] emphasizes the role of open discussions in a properly functioning public sphere [26]. Politicians and citizens share ideas via dialogue and discourse, which then leads to the formation of public political opinion. This is a form of representative democracy where the input and cooperation between citizens, politicians, and administration constitute the legalisation of power. Graham [14] introduces four components for deliberative democracy. First, the discussion should take the form of rational-critical discussion, with reasoned claims. Second, to achieve such rationality, reciprocity is needed, where the participants listen and respond to others. Third, reflexivity is required where the arguments of others are reflected against one's own. Finally, empathy might be necessary, where you are able to put yourself in another's position in order to achieve mutual understanding [14].

## **3 Research method**

Twitter is a micro-blogging service where users may post 'tweets' (brief text updates that are a maximum of 140 characters) to describe their current status. Twitter allows a user to register as "followers" to receive updates (tweets) added by others [27].

Tweets are exclusively textual and in principle form a document that can be analysed by any recognized form of textual analysis. In addition, the postings demonstrate many of the characteristics of conversation, such as question and answer

periods, thematic groupings, ordering, and obvious conversational devices, such as references to previous postings and the opportunity to change the subject. The text is therefore suited to qualitative analysis, within a philosophical framework of hermeneutics, and genre analysis. Content analysis [28, 29] is chosen as the analysis method. Content analysis provides a relatively systematic and comprehensive summary or overview of the dataset as a whole [30]. It operates by observing repeated themes and categorizes them using a coding system.

The thematic analysis took a grounded approach. Tweets were examined in detail, first for more specific textual evidence of adherence to the political models and second for repeated types of postings and interactions. Communication patterns were derived in a grounded manner from the text (rather than from a theoretical source), giving the opportunity for a more qualitative style of detailed analysis designed to display the important features of the interaction. The resulting communication patterns were then iteratively used as thematic categories and the text recoded so that their frequency could be counted. Since the genres themselves can also be related to the democracy models, this analysis both triangulates the earlier theoretical analysis and exposes some increasingly detailed ways in which the interactions operate. The principle purpose of the theoretical analysis was to discover which models of democracy underpin the tweets posted.

A total of 102 (out of 165) parliament representatives posted approximately 4000 messages in the time period studied (January to June 2010). We randomly selected 473 of these tweets to be included in the conducted analysis. In the genre analysis, the tweets are studied in detail. Questions of structure, tone, style, intended audience, and relation to context were investigated, based on a genre approach to identify purpose and forms. These common patterns are then sorted according to the democracy models that they best relate to (each of the squares in the theoretical table is allotted a code). Some tweets are classified into more than one category. Thus, the number of tweets allocated into the various categories (527) exceeds the number of tweets analysed (473).

The content analyses are conducted to identify communication patterns and to explore the characteristics of the tweets posted, and do not allow for generalization towards the samples identified. The communication patterns should be seen as examples and potential archetypes, which may or may not be supported by quantitative studies. The number of occurrences should, therefore, not be seen as an attempt to generalize, but are instead conducted to support the textual descriptions of the identified communication patterns.

## 4 Results

The genre analysis identified eight typical communication patterns, which are introduced as follows.

Representatives posted **links to information** sources, which is the most common communication pattern identified (114 occurrences). This is a one-way communication pattern, where the representatives are providing some information for everyone to read, without any expectations to receive input or initiate a discussion

with others. In general, the representative provide links to information supporting their own views, from sources sharing their political point of views, e.g. their own party's web-pages or mass-media from their own political "sphere". Furthermore, it is interesting to observe that links to online content from sources other than the dominating and established information providers (mass-media, political parties, organizations from the two sides of industry) are indeed rare. It seems as though the representatives, even when using social media like Twitter, are continuing to rely upon established sources for information.

**Informing everyone about the representative's ongoing activities** is the second most common communication pattern (98 occurrences). These tweets also represent a one-way communication pattern, with few (if any) attempts to get into dialogue with the reader (receiver) of the tweet posted. Such tweets are often posted when the representative is on external visits, or when the representative is participating in a debate in the parliament. Oftentimes, he/she is expressing his/her viewpoints while informing about what he/she is doing, e.g. by telling how impressed he/she is by what he/she explores when visiting an external project. There are no negative comments from visits outside the parliament; everyone seems to be pleased and impressed by the external visits.

Many tweets posted (87) express the representative's **political statements**. These tweets share some similarities with those providing links to information; they are topical (part of the ongoing parliament discussions or referring to issues discussed by the mass media) and represent one-way information dissemination, without encouraging the readers to respond. These tweets focus on the representative's own views of the issue being discussed. A very limited amount of these tweets (seven out of 87) include questions as a part of their statements, but some of these questions appear rhetoric.

It is quite common to tweet about **non-political content** (83 occurrences). On one hand, such tweets are not an important part of the political discussion. On the other hand, however, these tweets might be partly considered an attempt to allow citizens to get to know their representatives. It is interesting to look at what kind of private message that are posted. These tweets are heavily dominated by discussions about sports-related topics. Football and cross-country skiing are often introduced, which are both very popular sports in Norway. Talking about football, the representatives supports their local teams from the region they are elected representatives. Other popular tweets are about daily life, e.g. discussing family life in general or private plans for what to do in their spare time. There are very few tweets in this category that could be considered controversial.

**Discussions with other parliament representatives** are quite common (77 occurrences). Unlike the communication patterns introduced above, the dialog is important here. References to other Twitter users and ongoing discussions are common, and the statements often include arguments posted by other parliament representatives. There are few, if any, non-politicians participating in these discussions. As such, the discussions appear internally oriented, without any clear invitations for others to participate. These tweets are generally posted during discussions taking part in the parliament, where several parliament representatives are present in the same room listening to the same debate.

More seldom (28 occurrences), the representatives are **linking to their own blog postings**, or their own postings at e.g. their party's web page. These tweets are generally the only communication pattern referring to information not being posted by the established information providers (e.g. mass-media or the parliament). These tweets might be seen as "teasers" to attract more readers to the blogs. They share characteristics with the "linking to information" category introduced above, and represent in general one-way information dissemination, even though it should be mentioned that the blogs might encourage readers to add comments and take part in a dialogue.

**Requests for input from other Twitter users** represent the first of the final two communication patterns where non-politicians are included as active participants, posting their own tweets (in the discussions) or being requested to respond (requests for input). These communication patterns are quite rare, with eight occurrences for requests and only two occurrences where the representatives have posted tweets being a part of an on-going discussion dominated by non-politicians. The requests for input from citizens are often connected to an early phase of a decision-making process, where the representative or his/her party is in a clarifying phase. Readers are then asked to reply on some specific issues, expressing their argument to further guide the representative. No information is given on how this information will be a part of the further process, or how the representative plans to comment on the (potential) input made by citizens.

Finally, there are two tweets representing **discussions with citizens (non-politicians)**. Here, non-politicians are dominating, both context-wise by initiating what topics to discuss, and content-wise by dominating the debate concerning number of occurrences. It makes no sense to introduce general communication patterns based on only two tweets. Thus, they are not summarized as the communication patterns above. These tweets follow a similar pattern to the discussion within parliament representatives, except from the fact that citizens are dominating the discussions.

The communication patterns are summarized towards the 5W1H framework in table 2 below.

<b>1</b>	<b>Why</b>	<b>Provide link to information sources for the readers</b>
	<b>What</b>	Often the representative introduces his/her own view on a topical issue and provides hyperlinks to relevant information sources. The information provided is in general supporting his/her own views, e.g. by linking to his/her party or to online newspapers sharing his/her own political point of views.
	<b>Who/m</b>	The only one involved is the one posting the tweet. There are no specific expectations expressed on who is the receiver.
	<b>How</b>	The candidate often expresses his/her own views in the first sentence. The second part is the hyperlink to the information source.
	<b>When</b>	Topicality seems important. The more common explanations why it is topical is that that something is discussed in mass-media, the representative is travelling, visiting e.g. a project, a municipality or a business, or the Parliament is currently discussing the topic being introduced.
	<b>Where</b>	Online 24/7
<b>2</b>	<b>Why</b>	<b>To inform about the representatives on-going activities</b>
	<b>What</b>	The representative informs about what he/she is (or has been) doing. Often, he/she is also expressing his/her own point of view. If it is an external visit, his/her views are always positive, being impressed or very supportive towards what he/she is experiencing.
	<b>Who/m</b>	The representative is the only one being directly involved and there are no expectations to get the reader involved in a dialogue.
	<b>How</b>	In general, these tweets consist of one sentence in first person singular introducing the on-going activities.
	<b>When</b>	These tweets are posted in connection to external activities or parliament' discussions.
	<b>Where</b>	24/7, more often than other tweets posted from mobile devices.
<b>3</b>	<b>Why</b>	<b>To express his/her own views on topical issues</b>



<b>What</b>	The representative introduces the topic by referring to a source (a debate, mass-media, opinions expressed by other representatives). Then he/she adds her statements on the issue introduced.
<b>Who/m</b>	The first part refers to a third-party. The second part refers to his/her own points of view. There is no invitations or expectations to the reader to comment, although other Twitter users often do.
<b>How</b>	The first part of the tweet often refer to other Twitter users or debates by introducing “@” (reference to other users) or # (hash tag, referring to on-going Twitter debates). It is quite common to post ironic comments.
<b>When</b>	In relation to topical issues. The number increases during parliament debates. If one or two of the representatives post such tweets, a spillover effect seems to appear, where more representatives add similar tweets.
<b>Where</b>	Online 24*7
<b>4 Why</b>	<b>Introducing non-political content</b>
<b>What</b>	All kind of (non-controversial) private issues, dominated by messages in relation to sports, always supporting Norwegian athletes or teams from their own region. One-way information dissemination about on-going activities.
<b>Who/m</b>	The representative comments on some third-party stakeholder (athletes, musician or others), or his/her own family (anonymously).
<b>How</b>	Generally only one short sentence about on-going activities, which may include exclamation or question marks, the latter representing mainly rhetoric questions.
<b>When</b>	In connection to sport- or cultural arrangements, more often before or after the weekend or in relation to holidays.
<b>Where</b>	Online 24/7
<b>5 Why</b>	<b>Participating in online discussions with other parliament representatives</b>
<b>What</b>	The first part often relates to arguments introduced by others, or a link to users or topics being discussed. The second part is either a statement or a question. The question is either for other representatives to comment on or it appears rhetoric. Irony is quite common, e.g. when characterising other party’s or representative’s views.
<b>Who/m</b>	There is a clear connection between the tweet and other tweets and users who are encouraged to respond. The audience (the readers) are not explicitly addressed, and are as such a “non-present” part of the debates.
<b>How</b>	These tweets consist of two parts. First, the reference to the on-going discussions and then the representative’s contribution to the discussions. Linguistic elements related to Twitter are commonly used, such as reference to users (identified by “@”) and references to ongoing Twitter debates (identified by “#”).
<b>When</b>	Related to offline activities, in general to parliament debates where several parliament representatives are participating and listening to the same offline content. Thus, the tweets are quite often posted during office hours.
<b>Where</b>	More often than other tweets posted from mobile devices.
<b>6 Why</b>	<b>Attract readers to her own blog postings</b>
<b>What</b>	The representative often introduces his/her own view on a topical issue, argues why this is topical and why more information is needed, before providing a hyperlink to his/her own blog.
<b>Who/m</b>	The only one being involved is the one posting the tweet: There are no expectations on who is the receiver.
<b>How</b>	First part is the view and the reason for discussing the topic. The second part is the link to the blog.
<b>When</b>	Topicality seems important. A common explanation for topicality is that something is discussed in mass media, the parliament is currently discussing the topic, or his/her own party is expressing an opinion about the topics discussed.
<b>Where</b>	Online 24/7
<b>7 Why</b>	<b>Requests for input from Twitter users</b>
<b>What</b>	The representative introduces a topic and asks for some input from readers. No further information is given on how the information is to be used or will be commented upon by the representative.
<b>Who/m</b>	The representative is initiating the dialogue and invites other (unnamed) Twitter users to participate by posting their view on the issue being discussed.
<b>How</b>	The first part introduces the topic and tries to motivate readers to respond by arguing why the topic as well as the response is important. The second part is the request for input, most often conducted by posting a question.
<b>When</b>	These tweets appear to be posted in an early part of a decision-making process, when the representative or the party is considering various alternative solutions to the issue being discussed.
<b>Where</b>	Online 24/7

Table 2: The genre analysis of the Twitter postings.

By analysing the tweets towards the various eDemocracy models, we found that an overwhelming amount of tweets represent one-way communication patterns, where the parliament representatives are focusing on information dissemination to an unnamed audience. In general, there are very few examples where the representatives participate in debates where non-politicians are dominating, or add requests to the readers to participate. Tweets of this nature are only present in the categories

“Request for input” and “discussions with non-politicians”, with ten occurrences altogether, representing less than 2% of the tweets analysed.

The majority of the tweets posted do not support the Deliberative democracy model. As introduced above, the Deliberative model emphasizes the role of open discussion between citizens and politicians, sharing ideas via dialogue and discourse. None of the requirements for the deliberative discourse (rationality, including reciprocity, reflexivity and empathy) are met by more than only a few of the postings.

It could be argued that the ideas and ideals of the Liberal democracy model are dominating, where the citizens are regarded as subjects to the public governance, not as active participants in an ongoing dialogue. Thus, it is important for the parliament representative to inform citizens about the daily work, to disseminate their political points of view, and to get closer to potential voters by inviting them to learn more about their daily (private) life. Interestingly, these private messages are extremely non-controversial and dominated by content “everyone” agrees with, e.g. by supporting national skiing athletes or regional football teams.

## **5 Discussion**

The main purpose in this paper has been to explore how parliament representatives use Twitter, by identifying and describing common communication patterns. Thus, the main contribution is the descriptive analyses of the various communication patterns introduced above. The tweets are dominated by one-way information dissemination from the representatives to an unnamed audience. These tweets do not represent the ideas and ideals in a deliberative democracy and do not encourage anyone to reply or participate in an ongoing discussion. Further research is needed to fully understand the rationale and motivation for why these communication patterns are dominating, e.g. by interviewing the representatives themselves.

The parliament representatives’ Twitter messages do not appear to be posted mainly to address the general public. The comments received from others often have personal references, e.g. by referring to earlier meetings. Furthermore, to truly understand the content and the context of the tweets posted, the reader needs to follow the chain of messages posted, not only to read one tweet. That might be one explanation why these tweets are not very deliberative; the candidates may not consider Twitter an important arena for conducting discussions with citizens, but instead as an arena to discuss with their friends, supporters and colleagues. More research is needed to further explore the representatives’ views on these issues.

The representatives appear conscious on the regions they are representing. Most of the messages in the “informing about ongoing activities” category are messages from the representatives’ home regions. An explanation might be that the representatives are more often visiting projects in their home region. But it might also be more important for the representatives to tell potential electors that they are very active in their own regions. If the latter argument is true, this might be considered as a part of a Liberal democracy way of thinking, where it is important to inform (and not discuss with) the potential electors of how active and enthusiastic the representative is about projects in his/her own region. The regional perspective is also present in the private

messages discussing sports. For instance, the candidates are, without any exceptions, in support of their local football team. Perhaps none of the representatives are supporting teams from other parts of the country, or maybe those who are do not find it sensible to communicate such support?

The analyses conducted ultimately yield the conclusion that we have seen several times in the eParticipation area; new technology does not extensively alter traditional communication patterns. The parliament representatives continue to focus on information dissemination, where the readers (citizens) are mainly considered as being the receivers of information, not active participants. This is, as such, not meant to be critical towards the politicians; they are most likely just doing what they have always done: utilizing available communication opportunities to inform potential electors about their ongoing activities and political point of view in order to achieve support and be re-elected as parliament representatives. New communication channels, like Twitter, do not change these needs in the short run.

What, then, is the use and usefulness of parliament representatives' Twitter messages? Firstly, what we have not investigated here is the consequence of shortening the distance between the representatives and citizens. Although dialogue between representatives and non-politicians is very rare, the *opportunity* to communicate is being presented. That is, every Twitter user has the opportunity to comment upon tweets posted by the representatives. More research is needed to investigate the perceived value of the *potential* to communicate.

Secondly, it is interesting to investigate who the users are among the 165 parliament representatives. That is, are there any characteristics among the active Twitter users that may tell us anything about the use and usefulness of twittering? A striking perspective is the lack of representatives from central government. Moreover, the most prominent representatives are not being very active. For instance, none of the party-leaders have posted more than two tweets in our selection. The more active contributors are the younger representatives in the parliament. The explanation might be that these representatives know how to use the technology. But maybe they are also in a bigger need than the more established representatives to utilize new arenas to communicate? The young representatives have less experience and are perhaps more seldom appointed to important positions within their party or the parliament? This might explain why they are more actively using Twitter to communicate.

Finally, it appears as though representatives from the opposition parties are more active Twitter users than representatives from the government parties. Maybe the opposition party representatives have more needs to communicate and express their views since they are not equally influential on the decisions being made in comparison to their colleagues from the government parties?

## **6 Conclusion**

In this paper we have explored how the parliament representatives are using Twitter by identifying common communication patterns and discussed them in light of both the Liberal and the Deliberative democracy model. The tweets analysed generally did not meet deliberative standards and are dominated by politicians distributing

information about political issues and themselves and discussions between various politicians. We conclude by arguing that the parliament representatives' Twitter use is linked to the Liberal democracy model, where the main purpose is to communicate information to electors and market the representatives' activities to the audience.

Our contribution represents a means for seeing social networking services and development of democratic discourses as mutually dependent and as a dynamically emergent phenomenon. We subscribe to an established line of theorizing that, in general, warns against viewing any application of information technology as a deterministic tool, orientating instead towards analysis of structural processes in which technologies and organization contexts (and, in this case, societies) develop in an interwoven [31, 32]. Our analysis of Twitter use in light of the genre of communication perspective and eDemocracy models addresses this issues: the need to discuss societal values and ambitions in connection with the development and use of a particular technology in a particular democratic context instead of seeing technology – let alone democracy – as a generic “black box” [18].

## 7 References

1. Baumgartner, J.C. and J.S. Morris, MyFaceTube Politics. *Social Science Computer Review*, 2010. 28(1): p. 24-44.
2. Tocqueville, A.d. and J.S. Mill, *Democracy in America: in two volumes with a critical appraisal of each volume by John Stuart Mill*1961, New York: Schocken Books. 2 b.
3. Yates, J. and W.J. Orlikowski, Genres of Organizational Communication: A Structural Approach to Studying Communication and Media. *Academy of Management Review*, 1992. 17(2): p. 299-326.
4. Shah, D.V., et al., Information and Expression in a Digital Age. *Communication Research*, 2005. 32(5): p. 531-565.
5. Bhatia, V.K., *Analysing genre: language use in professional settings*1993, London: Longman. XVI, 246 s.
6. Päivärinta, T. and Ø. Sæbø, The Genre System Lens on E-Democracy. *Scandinavian Journal of Information Systems*, 2008. 20(2).
7. Päivärinta, T., The Concept of Genre within the Critical Approach to Information Systems Development. *Information & Organization*, 2001. 11(3): p. 207-234.
8. Sæbø, Ø., L.S. Flak, and M.K. Sein, Understanding the dynamics in e-Participation Initiatives: Looking through the genre and stakeholder lenses. *Government Information Quarterly*, forthcoming.
9. Sæbø, Ø., J. Rose, and L. Skiftenes Flak, The shape of eParticipation: Characterizing an emerging research area. *Government Information Quarterly*, 2008. 25(3): p. 400-428.
10. Held, D., *Models of Democracy*1996, Oxford: Blackwell.
11. Lively, J., *Democracy*1975, Oxford: Blackwell.
12. Van Dijk, J., Models of democracy and concepts of communication, in *Digital Democracy, Issues of theory and practice*, K.L. Hacker and J. Van Dijk, Editors. 2000, Sage publications: London.
13. Zhang, W., et al., The Revolution Will be Networked. *Social Science Computer Review*, 2010. 28(1): p. 75-92.
14. Graham , T., Needles in a haystack : a new approach for identifying and assessing political talk in non - political discussion forums. *Javnost : the Public*, 2008. 15(2): p. 17-36.

15. Rose, J. and Ø. Sæbø, Designing Deliberation Systems. *The Information Society: An International Journal*, 2010. 26(3): p. 228 - 240.
16. Strandberg, K., Public deliberation goes on-line? An analysis of citizens' political discussions on the Internet prior to the Finnish parliamentary elections in 2007. *Javnost-The Public*, 2008. 15(1).
17. Rose, J. and Ø. Sæbø, Democracy Squared: designing on-line political communities to accommodate conflicting interests. *Scandinavian Journal of Information Systems*, 2005. 17(2).
18. Päivärinta, T. and Ø. Sæbø, Models of E-Democracy. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 2006. 17: p. 818-840.
19. Ihlström, C., The Evolution of a New(s) Genre, in *Gothenburg Studies in Informatics 2004*, Göteborg University: Gothenburg. p. 162.
20. Orlikowski, W.J. and J. Yates, Genre repertoire: The structuring of Communicative Practices in Organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1994. 39(4): p. 541-574.
21. Kwasnik, B.H. and K. Crowston, Introduction to the special issue: Genres of digital documents. *Information Technology & People.*, 2005. 18(2): p. 76-89.
22. Yates, J., W.J. Orlikowski, and K. Okamura, Explicit and Implicit Structuring of Genres in Electronic Communication: Reinforcement and Change of Social Interaction. *Organization Science*, 1999. 10(1): p. 83-103.
23. Dahl, R.A., *Democracy and its critics* 1989, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. VIII, 397 s.
24. Eriksen, E.O. and J. Weigård, *Kommunikativ handling og deliberativt demokrati : Jürgen Habermas' teori om politikk og samfunn* 1999, Bergen: Fagbokforl. 340 s.
25. Pateman, C., *Participation and democratic theory* 1970, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 122.
26. Gimmler, A., Deliberative democracy, the public sphere and the internet. *Philosophy Social Criticism*, 2001. 27(4): p. 21-39.
27. Java, A., et al., Why we twitter: understanding microblogging usage and communities, in *Proceedings of the 9th WebKDD and 1st SNA-KDD 2007 workshop on Web mining and social network analysis 2007*, ACM: San Jose, California. p. 56-65.
28. Silverman, D., *Interpreting Qualitative Data* 2001, London: Sage.
29. Berelson, B., *Content Analysis In Communicative Research* 1952, New York: Free Press.
30. Wilkinson, S., Focus group research, in *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*, D. Silverman, Editor 1997, Sage: London. p. 177-199.
31. Markus, M.L. and D. Robey, Information Technology and Organizational Change: Causal Structure in Theory and Research. *Management Science*, 1988. 34(5): p. 583-598.
32. Orlikowski, W.J. and S. Iacono, Research commentary: Desperately seeking IT in IT Research - A Call to Theorizing the IT Artifact. *Information Systems Research*, 2001. 12(2): p. 121.