Journal of Public Deliberation

Volume 13 | Issue 1 Article 4

4-20-2017

From Code to Discourse: Social Media and Linkage Mechanisms in Deliberative Systems

Benjamin A. Lyons
Annenberg Public Policy Center, University of Pennsylvania, lyonsb@siu.edu

From Code to Discourse: Social Media and Linkage Mechanisms in Deliberative Systems

Abstract

Scholars have increasingly examined less formal conceptions of public deliberation, coinciding with a shift to the deliberative systems approach. However, few have grappled with how, or how well, discussions in distributed spaces connect to one another. Those who have theorized about such "linkage" have done so in an unsatisfactorily broad manner (Parkisnon, 2016). This article addresses this gap in the context of social media by reviewing the literature on platforms' technical features and emergent discursive forms, and considering the capacity for these to link flows of deliberation as they evolve online and approach empowered spaces. Avenues for future research are discussed.

Author Biography

Benjamin Lyons is the Martin Fishbein Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center. He is also an associate of the Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance at the University of Canberra.

Keywords

deliberative system, social media, linkage, publics, narrative, memes

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Roudy Hildreth, Aaron Veentra, the seminar participants at the Centre for Delibertive Democracy and Global Governance, and especially the anonymous reviewers and editor for their helpful comments on the manuscript.

Introduction

Online deliberation has largely been evaluated by face-to-face standards, drawing on Habermas (1984, 1990, 1996). Some researchers (e.g., Coleman & Moss, 2012; Dahlberg, 2001; Dahlgren, 2005; Freelon, 2010; Graham, 2015; Zimmermann, 2015) have critiqued and looked beyond this approach. Instead, expanded views of deliberation have been employed (Conover & Searing, 2005; Mansbridge, 1999; Young, 2006). Implicitly, this approach is informed by a systemic view of deliberation (Mansbridge et al., 2012): Not every discussion space needs to meet every criterion, but the spaces must be linked. Unfortunately, these studies do not explicitly examine how forums might connect. Digital media studies meanwhile look at actual objects of connection as it occurs online, such as through hyperlinks, follower networks, semantic tags, and memes. By integrating these bodies of research, scholars can better evaluate deliberative functions in digital communication environments. At the same time, scholars of digital media can better frame the contribution the objects of their study make to the broader political system.

This article lays the necessary groundwork for studying social media-enabled linkage mechanisms in deliberative systems. In the first section, I overview the central tenets of deliberation, how it has been evaluated in online contexts, and recent expansions of definitions that coincide with the system or network view of deliberative democracy. The next section discusses the core concept of linkage within that view, with emphasis on mediated links. The potential for social media to serve as a "macro" link between spheres is explored before focusing on actual connections within and among deliberative exchanges on these platforms. Following an overview of digital media objects' technical and discursive means of connection, potential for future research is outlined.

Deliberation and the Systemic Turn

Deliberation's most enduring definition comes from Habermas (1996): Participants must make use of rational argumentation in reciprocal fashion, with equality. Rational argumentation is central to the justification of claims (Dryzek, 2000; Habermas, 1984; Mansbridge et al., 2010) requiring at a minimum the presence of causal structure (Zimmermann, 2015). Reciprocity refers to the level of interactivity in a discussion. Equality has been used to refer to equal opportunity to participate, but also respect among participants – internal equality (Habermas, 1996) – which implies listening. Satisfying these conditions should allow deliberation to produce reflected public opinions that constitute the public sphere and subsequently pressure the formal political system to integrate them into decision-making.

A large body of research has applied these standards to online discussion, with mixed results (for overviews: Graham, 2015; Zimmermann, 2015). These ambivalent findings have led to a number of related complaints about this body of research. Aside from noting inconsistent operationalization (Graham, 2015; Zimmerman, 2015), the thrust of the critiques is conceptual. Evaluating online deliberation by Habermas' criteria "tell[s] us no more than that researchers prefer certain modes of civic talk," according to Coleman and Moss (2012, p. 7). This "rationalist bias" (Dahlgren, 2005; Mouffe, 1999; Sanders, 1997) seems to overlook the *demos* in democracy, systematically favoring some groups over others.

While noting that the overwhelming majority of online interactions are geared toward entertainment, consumerism, and nonpolitical socializing (Dahlgren, 2005), some researchers have consequently expanded the scope of their inquiry into discursive participation online, to examine less formal "everyday political talk" (Conover & Searing, 2005; Graham, 2012), enclave deliberation (Simone, 2010), liberal-individualist expression, and potential hybrids such as rationalist monologue and individualist dialogue (Freelon, 2010; Freelon, 2015; Zimmerman, 2015). These supplemental forms of discourse differ from formal deliberation procedurally, but may share common goals (Zimmerman, 2015) in building toward the legitimization of political outcomes (Habermas, 1996; Wessler, Rinke & Lob, 2016). The expanded attention of these studies has coincided with a shift toward the system view of deliberation (Mansbridge et al., 2012).

Studies of deliberative quality have tended to focus on only one episode or forum of deliberation, or perhaps compare one forum's quality against another's (Dryzek, 2010; Mansbridge et al., 2012; Thompson, 2008; for examples, see Pedrini, 2014; Wessler & Rinke, 2014). But the policy decisions that democracies make outstrip the capacity of single institutions. The contestation of public interests is undertaken by legislative bodies and other institutions of the state, advocacy organizations, media, and citizens. These various sites constitute a deliberative system (e.g., Dryzek, 2009, 2010; Goodin, 2005; Hendricks, 2006; Mansbridge, 1999; Mansbridge et al. 2012; Parkinson 2008, 2012; Young 1996, 2006). This system entails distributed functions and a division of labor among its differentiated but interdependent parts (Mansbridge et al. 2012). This means (1) that not all parts must fully fulfill every expectation of deliberative quality, and (2) that these parts must be connected in a way that allows changes in one to effect change in some other (Mansbridge et al. 2012). According to Dryzek (2009), it is the strength of these linkages that helps determine the quality of the system at large.

Evaluating deliberation in the system view implies quality tradeoffs (Mansbridge et al., 2010; Sanders, 1997; Young, 2000), necessitating contextual expectations (Beste, 2013; Goodin, 2005, 2008). Goodin argues the variety of social contexts

necessitates differing criteria of discursive quality, which may then be realistically achieved within a given context's demands and affordances. Some sites may be more deliberative, some more contestatory. Partisan campaigns, for example, may be seen as fitting an ecological niche in a deliberative system (Dryzek, 2010; Mansbridge et al., 2012), encouraging the flo of ideas and perspectives despite their failure to meet traditional standards (Cohen, 1989; Habermas, 1984). Their influence on other deliberative components is of interest in the system view. However, Beste (2013) still sees a downside to the contextual evaluation approach. It views the political process as made up of separate units, while "networking environments regularly do not follow this logic," (p. 26), and instead should be "understood as a complex, fluid and evolving 'infrastructure'" (Healey et al., 2004, p. 86). This places a great importance on the means of connection among and within discourses as they evolve. To this end, this article focuses on how a hierarchy of digital media objects, from the technical to the discursive, serve to connect flows of deliberation.

'Linkage'

Young (2006) introduced "linkage" as a necessary criterion for a functional, decentered deliberative system. It seems obvious that in a deliberative democracy, deliberation occurring in far-ranging spaces must be connected for those conversations to be meaningful. It is understood that ideas must pass from site to site, challenged, filtered, and shaped by multiple groups – a process that can illuminate what reasons may be appropriate to present to empowered sites such as decision-making bodies and mass media (Dryzek, 2009). Regardless, linkage's theoretical importance is only beginning to be emphasized (Boswell, 2013; Dryzek, 2016; Hayward, 2008; Mansbridge et al., 2012; Parkinson, 2008, 2016). To date, the linkage concept has been used in reference to connections among institutions or even at the scale of "spheres." Later in this article, I discuss how it also might be observed among micro-level sites of online deliberation.

It is worth noting that unlike Habermas' two-track conception of a deliberative system (1996), where the will formation of the state is the core surrounded by a periphery of public opinion, most current system scholars' proposed models do not necessarily center on the state. Binding decisions can be made outside of state power (Mansbridge et al., 2012). Therefore, functional linkages need not link all sites of deliberation to the decision-making bodies of the state, although that is often ideal (Hendriks, 2016). One further conceptual caveat is that the emerging push to study connections in deliberative systems makes use of a few related concepts that can be subsumed under the broader idea of "linkage." Hendriks (2016) for example develops the idea of loose or tight "coupling" of institutions or groups, while Dryzek (2009) and Boswell et al. (2016) talk about the "transmission" of ideas from the public to elites. These two metaphors both describe connections, but Hendriks

clarifies that while transmission focuses on flows of communication, coupling focuses attention on the relationships and interactions among institutions and spaces, and "encourages us to look at multidirectional linkages between sites, rather than focusing on flows predominately from public to empowered sites," (p. 46).

There are various potential mechanisms of linkage, both organic and designed (Hendriks, 2016). Institutional forms, such as parliamentary inquiries, send decisions from appointed deliberative sites directly to lawmakers. Gutmann and Thompson (1996) describe this as "middle democracy" – citizens making use of existing institutions that link the public with decision-making. Political parties offer another somewhat formalized means to transmit political will from aggregated citizens to representative bodies. But linkage is almost always mediated, with mass media theorized as serving as "the major links" (Mansbridge et al., 2012). Habermas (2006) conceives the mass media as serving to focus, in both content and form, the public's agenda. Addressing the communication landscape more inclusively, Parkinson (2012) and Rasmussen (2009) suggest the communication between citizens and elites will occur through mass media, personal networks, and social media. While Habermas (2006) argued that (at least at that time) the Internet's role was secondary, the dynamic nature of deliberative systems means it is difficult to generalize about the linkage role of each medium, or even any one channel within these, as they may vary across time and issues (Mansbridge et al., 2012). Taken together, though, media allow for discourse to link deliberative spaces by "enable[ing] actors across the system to draw on as shared argumentative resources," (Boswell et al., 2016, p. 3; Dryzek, 2009).

Social Media as a Macro Link

A starting point for thinking about social media's role in deliberative systems is as a macro link, a generic intermediary between citizens and mass media, or citizens and elites. Although ill-defined in the literature (Veenstra et al., 2017), social media are generally understood as applications that "facilitate content creation, sharing, and social networking," (Gretzel, 2015, p. 184). The prevalence of entertainment on social media platforms may have a similar result as the spectacle-driven televised deliberation Coleman (2013) describes, wherein public deliberation and popular culture are inherently mixed. Articulating a view that echoes Goodin's contextual expectations, Coleman (2013) argues that rather than mimicking a university seminar, "a more modest, but hugely important, role for television is to make the debates that are already going on in the real world accessible, engaging and inclusive to as many people as possible, and particularly those whose experiences, viewpoints, and voices are most commonly overlooked by conventional traditions of rarefied and hierarchical deliberation," (p. 29). Social media may serve a parallel function in amplifying the myriad conversations of the public. Their hybrid media

environment empowers "different publics and construct[s] different media narratives," with an expanded "tonal range" that especially privileges playfulness and humor (Freelon & Karpf, 2015, p. 391; Chadwick, 2013).

As a macro link, social media might overcome some of the structural weaknesses inherent in mass media, such as the news values that dictate presentation and act as filters (Barnett, 1997; Parkinson, 2006, 2012; Xenos, 2008). Valid, compelling reasoning may fail to be linked to broader audiences because of those filter values. Ostensibly, though, less gatekeeping and a limitless "news hole" (Parkinson, 2006, p. 177) mean social media may be better positioned to transmit otherwise neglected perspectives (Parkinson, 2012; for examples, see Drueke & Zobl, 2015; Freelon & Karpf, 2015; Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2016; Maireder & Schlogl, 2014), and offer new forms of access to elites. Similarly, social media cultures have helped shift the role of journalists to "gatewatchers," increasingly influenced or informed by readers (Bruns, 2008; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Social media and mass media, then, may operate as symbiotic spheres, providing, in turn, a variety of views and lucidity and standardization (Rasmussen, 2009).

Social media may not be driven by the same filtering incentives as the mass media (Xenos, 2008) but are ruled by their own, less established values that channel social traffic (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Social media exist under proprietary control that can filter messages using black-box algorithms to help users deal with the overwhelming number of messages generated in their network (Bozdag, 2013). These algorithms convert notions of a "networked public" (boyd, 2010; Ito, 2008) to more complicated notions of "personalised, calculated publics," (Gillespie, 2014, p. 188). This social filtering has introduced a subtle layer of human-machine gatekeeping over the democratic breadth implied by social media (Bozdag, 2013). More explicitly, "algorithms are made to capture, analyze, and re-adjust individual behavior in ways that serve particular ends," and for social media platforms these ends are increased time spent and engagement on the platform (Jurgenson, 2015, para. 14). This relationship shapes what users see, and ultimately share (para. 15). More directly disconcerting is growing concern that political bots may distort these opinion climates by way of computational propaganda (Bessi & Ferrara, 2016; Woolley & Howard, 2016). The final outcome of algorithmically curated social media experience is unsettled, though. Using tracking data, Guess (2016), for example, finds a broad overlap in the media most people consume through these platforms, and goes as far as to suggest that "from the perspective of democratic theory, these websites provide two vital functions: shared mediated experiences and access to diverse perspectives," (p. 30; see also Barbera, 2014; Vaccari et al., 2016).

Evaluating the potential of messages distributed through social media platforms to link disparate discussion sites across the electorate also may raise questions about

the effect of a digital divide (e.g., van Deursen & van Dijk, 2014). The demographics of their user bases can be partially informative; Facebook use is beginning to mirror the general population, with 72 percent of adult Internet-using Americans members as of 2015, without much variation across race, income, age, or education (Pew Research Center, 2015). Only 23 percent of online adults used Twitter, however, with more variation in terms of age and rural/urban populations. While growing use may offset some remaining divides, inevitably other pockets of the population will remain unconnected. In the broad view, however, "as the Internet becomes the chief backbone for any kind of media distribution, distinctions between networked and non-networked public spheres are increasingly meaningless," (Bruns & Highfield, 2016, p. 106).

Likewise, disconnects may be overcome in part through inter-media agenda-setting processes (e.g., Conway, Kenski & Wang, 2015; Groshek & Grosheck, 2013). User-generated social media posts not only serve as content fodder for large-audience digital aggregators like Buzzfeed, but content created on Tumblr, Instagram, Reddit and other platforms is then picked up and broadcast by mass media (Dahr, 2015; del Aguila-Obra, Padilla-Melendez & Serarols-Tarres, 2007; see also Chadwick, 2013). Social media messages possessing high retransmission potential (e.g., Liu-Thompkins, 2012; Spitzberg, 2014; Stefanone, et al., 2015; Sutton et al., 2015) may filter up to more empowered sites in traditional mass media (Dryzek, 2009), and outward to peripheral face-to-face conversations, connections which reduce the importance of demographics (Bruns & Highfield, 2016; Rasmussen, 2009, p. 23). No single channel or medium is perfectly inclusive, but interconnected spaces are better able to serve the public (Dryzek, 2016). This highlights the nature of social media as comprising a "nested" deliberative system in themselves — not separate, but parallel and interconnected (e.g., Colleoni et al., 2014; Jurgenson, 2012; Bruns & Highfield, 2016) to a broader system.

Linkages within Social Media

Parkinson (2016) has recently noted deliberative democrats' surprising inattention to links between sites – what is transmitted and how this is achieved. When the topic has been covered at all, scholars have taken an overly broad view. He attributes this oversight to the orienting metaphors scholars have used to conceptualize deliberative democracy, in particular the use of bounded, centered spheres, which "directs the scholarly gaze within rather than between," them (p. 13). Work that treats small-scale forums as linkages (i.e., middle democracy, Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Mansbridge, 1999) simply inserts "another set of bounded spaces in between the 'big two' of the informal and formal public spheres, and says little directly about transmission per se," (Parkinson, 2016, p. 13). In contrast to viewing social media as a macro link, then, scholars can focus their attention on the linkage

of strands of deliberation as it occurs within and across these platforms. What technical or cultural means allow the circulation and propagation of ideas? Focusing on digital media objects and examining their roles in connecting and serving deliberative functions can help ground the abstract concept.

Doing so can also help address a related problem in research that looks at the intersection of political communication and information technology more generally: "The majority of this research is narrowly construed, typically focusing on a single medium or platform at a time" (Bode & Vraga, forthcoming). This work ignores network logic and the actual nature of digital media as a communicative system. One way to address the shortcomings described in both cases is to focus on the way messages are spread within and across platforms. The following section outlines a hierarchy of prominent digital media objects, discussing how each functionally links messages or conversations within and across platforms.

Importantly, a networked sphere includes not only a social dimension but an objective or structural one, which includes texts, digital media objects, and social and hyperlink networks. The connective objects within these flows then can be understood on a continuum that ranges from the socio-technical to the discursive (Maireder & Schlogl, 2014; Rasmussen, 2009). Deliberation occurring through digital media is made possible through the de facto technical connections of hypertext, which is the underlying concept supporting the structure of the Web. The contemporary social Web, characterized by user-driven phenomena like networking platforms and comments sections (Carlson & Strandberg, 2012; Flew, 2007; Gretzel, 2015), builds on this foundation, with discrete speech acts connecting in a number of effortless ways built into the platform architecture (Bruns & Moe, 2014; Gillen, 2007). Use of aggregative semantic tags (e.g., Twitter hashtags) can then connect posts to form, for example, ad hoc publics or issue publics (Bruns & Burgess, 2011), simultaneously linking discussions in both a technical and discursive way (Wikstrom, 2014; Zappavigna, 2015). Network architecture then allows users' personal connections to serve as conduits for incidental exposure and exponential audiences (Bruns & Highfield, 2016). Finally, memes can be seen to spread and connect by way of these subordinate means while serving a discursive linking role that incorporates the bridging elements of narrative (Boswell, 2013) and intertextuality (Milner, 2012).

Linkage through Technical Features

On social platforms, the most obvious way to link conversations, forums, or strata in a system is to use built-in functions — tools embedded in sites' architectures. These tools help sort and target information in a vast and otherwise chaotic sphere. Their use may be "socio-technical" linkage (see Rasmussen, 2009, p. 21). Another

way of thinking about the role of platforms' technical features in supporting deliberative linkage is through the discourse architecture literature (e.g., Freelon, 2015). This work argues that "distinct discourse architectures can be thought of as packages of technical characteristics that work together to enable and constrain different norms of democracy," (Freelon, 2015, p. 776). Likewise, the presence of some technical features may encourage the formation and strength of linkages.

A universal feature of digital media, hyperlinks' primary functions are sorting and targeting information, but may be employed for social uses. Havalais (2008, p. 48) has argued that they are "the currency and connective tissue of the networked society." Hyperlinks are sometimes used to support deliberative arguments with supplementary facts. These facts are then literally linked to the ongoing thread of deliberation, as Bor (2013) finds in an analysis of political campaigns' Facebook pages. Hyperlinks can link internally within a channel (e.g., linking to a Facebook page on Facebook), or externally across sites (e.g., linking to news sites or other forums). Because link structures determine search engine results, this can also serve to amplify messages (Ackland et al., 2007; Park et al., 2005) and distribute attention on a given issue. Hyperlinks are also used to explore the deliberative connectivity among blogs (e.g., the left and right blogospheres, as shown by Adamic & Glance, 2005; Herring et al., 2005; Hargittai, Gallo & Kane, 2008). A lack of cross-pollination via hyperlinks is associated with enclaves and single-discourse dominance which is self-reinforcing (Stevenson & Dryzek, 2012). It is worth noting that analysis can reveal not only sites' network centrality, but their role as intermediary brokerages — sites "which provide crucial connections among clusters of websites, even if they do not necessarily have a large number of hyperlinks leading to them directly," (Koopmans & Zimmermann, 2007, p. 224). In general, hyperlinks provide a technical means of connecting "issues, publics, arguments, and facts," though this may not be realized in practice (Rasmussen, 2009, p. 20). As with other technical linkage mechanisms, hyperlinks allow us to see connections among sites of deliberation being made at a granular level. Compared to other technical means, hyperlinking may be seen as lacking aggregative potential; whereas a hashtag can link an unlimited number of posts, a hyperlink discretely connects to one object.

Other built-in functions are used for targeting and filtering messages on social platforms. Twitter's @-mention, retweet, and hashtag are examples of tools that allow users to target their message to different "layers" of a platform audience (Bruns & Moe, 2014). Although social media platforms differ in the functions available to users, platform convergence produces similar overlapping functionalities (e.g., Facebook added Twitter's hashtag function in 2013). @-mentions, interpersonal exchanges mostly visible to the direct participants, may not seem to hold great potential for deliberative linkage, but represent a powerful mechanism for scaffolding

deliberation "upward" to elites and broader forums. Media elites and elected officials may transfer deliberation hashed out in less conspicuous forums to their more-public platform when contacted in this way (Maireder & Ausserhofer, 2014; cf. Graham et al., 2013). Retweets and default posts allow users to share with their personal publics, while hashtags allow them to join wider conversations (e.g., Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Veenstra et al., 2015).

Maireder and Ausserhofer (2014, pp. 305-6) describe how these various fundamental operators link otherwise-distributed discourse as it evolves and coalesces online: "[Twitter users] linked to news stories, documents, critical blog posts, and satirical videos. They also heavily referred to each other, retweeted one another's messages, responded to arguments, and approached each other for a reaction. On Twitter, [an Austrian deputy governor's conviction] was not just a news story, but a public conversation." These tools allow, they argue, for a more inclusive mix of views (via emergent communicative norms), media objects (via hyperlinking), and actors (via @-mentioning) to be integrated into debate.

Because the norms of Twitter have led to responses that typically meld news and interpretation, current events are connected to personal experience and world views; "this way, a much wider range of aspects may be included in Twitter discourses than in news reports," (Maireder & Ausserhofer, 2014, p. 310). Likewise, more events become interconnected. Similarly, tweets "as media objects" tend to become connected to other media objects via hyperlinks. Maireder and Ausserhofer (2014) write that "this network object is part of the 'material' base of the networked public sphere" (p. 310). Joining an evolving Twitter discourse to other documents and forums on the Web, hyperlinks bring together commentary emanating from mass media, government, advocacy organizations, and the public. In doing so, they also connect across time, surfacing five-year-old press releases or buried YouTube videos and casting old content in a new light. These tools allow users to reframe old arguments and generate new meaning. The structural design of Twitter also links otherwise isolated individuals, for instance, increasing crosstalk between political elites and more peripheral users enabled by the @-mention function. Twitter's affordances allow unaffiliated but interested actors to become prominent in conversations, and "reorganize the users' experiences of the political" (Maireder & Ausserhofer, 2014, p. 316; Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013; Larsson & Moe, 2012). Through technical and discursive means, social media provide for linkages in issues, objects, and people. The configuration of the different linkages varies over time, and especially across issues. As explained in the next section, these basic technical features facilitate connections among the many *social fragments* that together make up the protean public component of deliberative systems.

Personal Publics and 'Wild Flows'

The public sphere may now be fragmented into "public sphericules" (Cunningham, 2001; Gitlin, 1998; Bruns, 2008) in which smaller subsets of more interested participants address debates in particular thematic areas. However, these sphericules *are* connected. These issue communities are now most likely to congregate online, particularly on social network platforms (Bruns & Highfield, 2016), where the egocentric networks that surround individual users act as "personal publics" (Schmidt, 2014). As Bruns and Highfield (2016, p. 110) describe, these personal publics serve as a connective tissue, linking widely distributed discussions:

> The multitude of personal publics, overlapping with each other as friendship connections are shared between individual users and thus enable flows of information that are determined by common sociodemographic identities, topical interests, and communication practices amongst users, in combination constitutes a global patchwork of interconnected micro-publics, tying together social media, face-to-face, and other communication forms and channels, that may be seen as the lowermost foundation of the overall public sphere.

Habermas (2006) has also noted that "the public sphere is rooted in networks for the wild flows of messages" (p. 415). Focusing on mass media as the major links in the deliberative system, then, misses the opportunity to investigate the foundational linkage role of networks.

Because individuals' personal publics are centered on social connections rather than specific themes, everyday talk serves as a conduit, an unintentional but important passageway for ideas across issue publics. In this sense the private sphere supports the public sphere in a way that blurs the boundary between the two (Papcharissi, 2010, 2015). This fact broadens the range of participants contributing to public debate, while also allowing for higher-quality, intensive deliberation within more narrowly thematic sphericules (Bruns & Highfield, 2016). The technological base of social media allows for observation of the dynamics of these information flows – built on these platforms' network architectures and facilitated by targeting and filtering tools like retweets and hashtags.

Through this, Bruns and Highfield (2016) empirically illustrate how the elements of this de-centered public sphere interconnect – horizontally through personal publics and vertically through issue sphericules. Maireder and Schwarzenegger (2012), Maireder and Schloegl (2014), and Segerberg and Bennett (2011) make similar cases. Because publics have no borders, and users can belong to more than one, information can spread among clusters. These studies provide evidence not only

that filter bubbles and fragmentation may be, in the grand systemic view, unwarranted fears, but also show that digital media technology allows for linkage within and across components of the public sphere. As discourse spreads among clusters, it can acquire new meaning, suggesting that the platforms' technical structure plays a role in the process of meaning creation (Maireder & Schloegl, 2014, p. 14).

So far I have reviewed how basic technical features of social media allow for intra- and inter-channel connections in deliberation to be made. I have then shown how these features make possible the personal connections that stitch together disparate information flows. Lastly, I will discuss how these conditions allow for discursive connections that bind online and embodied communication spaces together – rhetorically, narratively, and intertextually – and how this can connect those interlocking personal publics, issue publics, and public sphericules to empowered spaces. To do so, I will highlight and describe the linkage role of memes, which connect conversations from the level of code to the level of discourse.

Widely distributed social media messages such as memes are transmitted through basic protocols such as hyperlinks and retweets, and exposed to more general audiences through the technical affordance of platforms' Trending topic features (Leavitt, 2014). Crucially, they pass through platforms' personal networks that are to some degree isomorphic to users' offline social circles after often originating in the interest or issue-centric communities common online. Users also transmit these messages from their original platform to others, typically remediating them in the process (Rodley, 2016). Memes so selected through collaborative filtering hold great capacity to connect to mass media and non-mediated discussion space and thus bear some influence on decision making. Importantly, "As memes move between individuals, the cultural salience of the meme increases: it becomes more meaningful for more people" (Leavitt, 2014, p. 139; Jenkins et al., 2013).

Discursive Linkage in Social Media

Linkage can occur through different discursive forms. *Rhetoric*, particularly when intended to bridge to groups across divides rather than bond to those within, can help link deliberators and ideas across a system (Dryzek, 2010). Boswell (2013) makes an extensive argument that *narrative* serves a linkage function across spaces and strata of the public. I will make the case here that *intertextuality* can operate in a similar fashion, and that social media cultures have produced a new communicative form, the Internet meme, that can link flows of deliberation through these various discursive properties.

The aspects of online communication that have yielded remix culture also present a new mechanism to connect distributed deliberations (Börzsei, 2013; Esteves,

2012; Gauntlett, 2011; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Leadbeater, 2009; Shifman, 2013; Shirky, 2010). People are able to produce, post, respond to, and spread messages at faster rates — to sometimes incalculable audiences — while employing or manipulating images has become easier. These affordances seem to encourage memetic communication. In part because they "rely on collaborative circulation to propagate," (Esteves, 2012, p. 2; Leadbeater, 2009, p. 6; Meikle & Young, 2012, p. 125), Internet memes have important implications for the ability of discourse objects to serve a linkage role.

Internet memes are "multimodal symbolic artifacts created, circulated, and transferred by countless mediated cultural participants" (Milner, 2013, p. 2359). Most emblematic are *image macros:* template-based, single images with superimposed text, which are easily shared (Börzsei, 2013; Plevriti, 2014; Rintel, 2013). Scholars see Internet memes as a technological transformation of much older cultural forms, such as fables, caricatures, and political cartoons (Börzsei, 2013; da Silva & Garcia, 2012; Rushkoff, 1997); Shifman (2014) says memes are a kind of "(post)modern folklore." Perhaps more important than the historical roots this implies is the distinction that Internet memes are somehow different, transfigured by the digital environment. The convergence of media platforms (Jenkins, 2006) contributes to an environment in which memes can flow, and therefore link spaces, in previously unseen ways (Börzsei, 2013, p. 162). Because replicability (i.e., ease, speed, and longevity) is afforded or constrained by the structural conditions in which a meme is created, the Internet is naturally "the ultimate meme hothouse," (Rintel, 2013, p. 255). Citizens communicate with their own interrelated graphic objects at a new scale: The simplicity and visuality of their formats, the accessibility of meme-generator websites, and the visibility and speed of digital media have maximized their ability to reach others (Börzsei, 2013; Rintel, 2013) while a do-it-yourself aesthetic invites audiences to participate themselves (Shirky, 2010; da Silva & Garcia, 2012). So, while their role in deliberation can be grounded in historical forms, Internet memes, and their potential to serve as connective tissue, transcend these.

Following Mansbridge (1999), we must observe the talk that occurs among citizens wherever it happens, and Internet memes are now a favorite medium of the public (Shifman, 2014). Originating in subcultural Internet areas (e.g., 4chan), political Internet memes now can be found in mainstream discourse (Börzsei, 2013; Esteves, 2012; Huntington, 2013). For example, Mitt Romney made a series of faux pas in the 2012 U.S. presidential campaign concerning, among other things, "binders of women." His statements were instantly derided in memes, which populated social network feeds, prompting mainstream news organizations to cover the social phenomenon and reproduce meme-makers' frames for the debate (Freelon & Karpf, 2015; Huntington, 2013). According to the analysis of Freelon and Karpf (2015, p.

401), "citizen participation via social media created objects for engagement by journalists and other media personalities, extending the life of certain issue frames and feeding into the news agenda. Memes […] became news stories unto themselves, in large part due to the diversity of the viewertariat that propped them up." Moreover, the binders of women meme increased scrutiny on Romney's gender-equality efforts, leading to the revelation that the percentage of senior-level appointments of women actually declined during his tenure (Boehler, 2012), and that it was MassGAP, a women's lobbying group, who compiled the list of qualified female applicants (Peralta, 2012). In terms of presenting valid reasons to the public, this meme conveyed that Romney was unsuitable for office due to his telegraphed artifice regarding gender parity; The memetic public surrounding his statement drew attention to its underlying connotation and argued that it is worthy of scorn. Perhaps more importantly, the binders of women meme lives on, long past the election, as a shorthand narrative for gender equality failures and lip service (Wetherbee, 2015, para. 8) that can "adapt to new cultural-ideological contexts" and "help reshape those same contexts."

It is important to note Internet memes usually fall short of serving deliberative ends, sharing the predominantly phatic nature of most online communication (Dahlgren, 2005). Even when they address substantive political issues, da Silva and Garcia (2012) suggest there are a number of drawbacks inherent in the emerging medium, including a grounding in negativity. Intuitively, this negativity may deepen divides and diminish their capacity to connect, although studies of virality find content evoking high-arousal emotions is most likely to be shared (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Guadagno et al., 2013). Strong negative affect may actually encourage their spread, especially when their source is an out-group member (Guadagno, et al., 2013); through emotional contagion, the oppositional stance common in memes can help infuse social spaces with encounters of difference. But the deliberativeness of such encounters, particularly the frequency of good-faith *listening* occurring, is also suspect (Ercan, Hendriks & Dryzek, 2015; but see Milner, 2013, pp. 2374-81, for examples of extensive multi-turn arguments, aimed at both implied and specific interlocutors, occurring through meme formats).

Yet the use of memes also allows speakers to enhance deliberation at a system level. Political talk in many online areas tends toward echo chambers, as DeLuca, Lawson and Sun (2012), for instance, found in sealed-off left/right networks of blogs' Occupy Wall Street (OWS) discussion. An analysis of memes used during the OWS protests, however, showed they assisted discussion between dissimilar points of view (Milner, 2013). Milner argues their creators succeeded where bloggers failed, in part, by employing memes that shared personal anecdotes while coalescing into a broader (and open-ended) narrative (e.g., the 99%), and memes that appropriated popular culture (e.g., *Sesame Street*), resulting in what he calls "polyvocal" public

discourse. Using these open, demotic forms, meme creators helped facilitate the debate across networks and sites. Interestingly, their ability to do so may partly stem from memes' uncontrollability. This communication opened up the conversation with new means and to new discussants, including detractors. As a result, the content most shared on OWS Facebook pages was not that bearing direct OWS frames, but rather that which resonated most with audiences (Gaby & Caren, 2012). The openness of messages to the interpretation of disparate audiences and the invitation to recontextualization were more decisive in messages' memetic "fitness," (Spitzberg, 2014; Weng et al., 2012).

Memes as Narrative Linkage

The ability of those who create and share memes to link forums discursively may be aided by these artifacts' narrative qualities. In online communication spaces, memes have come to collect and serve as carriers of broader cultural narratives (Milner, 2012), linking online sites together, while connecting them with empowered offline spaces and the general public's conversations. Boswell (2013) writes an extensive argument for narrative's role in deliberative systems. Although narrative certainly exists in the absence of memes, much of his conceptualization can help explain how memes serve to link deliberative sites. He writes that narratives form through the accumulation of anecdotes, linking them to the society-wide discourse. Narratives, like memes, dramatize politics by way of binary representation of issues (Chilton, 2004), and are often vivid renderings that elicit emotional responses. These qualities offer grounding for abstract policy points, making debate more inclusive. They often assume archetypical scripts, normative messages, and cast actors involved as stock characters (Boswell, 2013). Memes, particularly image macros, likewise "build on a set of stock characters that represent stereotypical behaviors" and emotions (Shifman, 2013, p. 112; Börzsei, 2013). Memes tend to rely on existing cultural schema and attendant attitudes to make sense of new political events due to their spatial limitations. This creates a kind of recursive loop of existing and remixed culture, now tied with the political. Like narratives, they provide accessible scripts with which to enter and shift debate, creating "a shared cultural experience," (Shifman, 2013, p. 367).

But, importantly, both narratives and memes are ambiguous and negotiable (Bruner, 1991; Hajer, 1995; Stone, 2002). This is critical in deliberative systems, where diverse coalitions who must come together to form narratives can then emphasize them differently in different contexts. Because these familiar structures help make sense of complicated issues, those with differing backgrounds and baseline knowledge can similarly describe the same phenomenon. In depending on legitimating from various deliberative strata, a narrative serves to link across the system.

These narrative traits can be observed in influential Internet memes. The "99%" meme, for example, is likely OWS's most enduring contribution to public discourse; It is now a broadly adopted narrative, the result of a collaborative series of memetic anecdotal storytelling that is both the product and origin of deliberation. 99% memes followed a formula featuring a handwritten statement concerning an individual's economic hardships, held up for the camera (Gaby & Caren, 2012; see Figure 1). As individual memes, they provided anecdotal storytelling, while they gradually collected into a larger narrative of disadvantaged masses versus Wall Street's oppression. These memes intentionally relied on pathos, and, like narrative more generally, presented a simple binary. This worked toward gaining sympathy for Occupiers' position, allowing others to enter the political discussion through emotional engagement (Van Zoonen, 2005). But it also opened the message up to appropriation. The broad utility of the format allowed another group to put forth a "53%" meme (the percent of the American population supposed to pay income tax) in appropriative critique (Figure 1). This counter-meme counter-narrative was also resonant. The inclusive mimetic-narrative "Percenter" structure allowed both those who identified as marginalized at the hands of bankers and those who felt put-upon by the entitled protesters to enter into the discussion and respond to one another through meme. The interplay of their messages filtered through more empowered spaces and the broader cultural landscape.

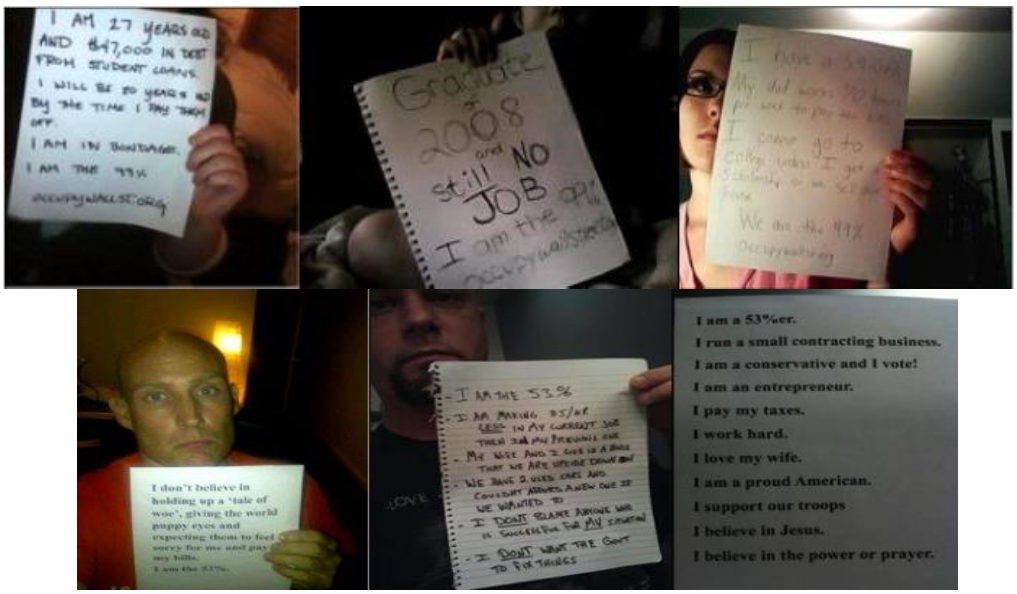

***Figure 1*. "I am the 99%" memes (top) and "I am the 53%" memes (bottom)**

Memes as Intertextual Linkage

Shifman (2014) notes that memes are heavily intertextual as a medium, relating to one another but also popular culture at large. Milner (2013) argues Occupy memes opened up discussion through appropriating popular culture. Intertextual creations like "Occupy Sesame Street" played on existing associations within audiences. The presence of pop culture increases accessibility and helps to link across strata of society, while also increasing messages' chances of being shared. Similarly, the "Pepper Spray Cop" meme(s), which used an image of a University of California-Davis police officer nonchalantly pepper-spraying various photo-shopped figures, made use of "interdiscursive" connections to historic events: One set of iterations had him spraying famous activists, such as Tiananmen Square's Tank Man and Rosa Parks, while another series inserted hallowed American iconography as targets, such as the Constitution, George Washington crossing the Delaware, and soldiers raising the American flag on Iwo Jima (Figure 2). These memes "interdiscursively linked historical events, contemporary news stories, and age-old discussion," (Milner, 2013, p. 2363). While such connections increased ambiguity about the messages, they made for a powerful, potentially bridging rhetorical style (Dryzek, 2010), and were indispensable in imbuing them with the versatility and recognizability that popularized them.

***Figure 2*. "Pepper Spray Cop" memes**

Through the use of memes, specifically those that appropriated prominent cultural references, the OWS movement was able to shift the debate at a higher order — in the media and public opinion. Mainstream media covered the 99% and Pepper Spray Cop "stories," despite earlier dismissive reporting of OWS (DeLuca, Lawson & Sun, 2012), so they can be seen to act as links across levels of deliberation. This pattern recurred in the public commentary surrounding the 2012 presidential debates in the U.S. Suddenly politicized, Big Bird (interestingly, *Sesame Street* again provided source material) served as a fertile jumping off point for creative expression (Freelon & Karpf, 2015). These authors find that the conversation surrounding another debate soundbite, which lacked a pop culture hook ("horses and bayonets"), was less encouraging of mimetic innovation. And again, the memes became their own news story and extended the life of certain frames.

Because popular culture can serve as points of engagement with politics (Street, Inthorn & Scott, 2013), political Internet memes are important connective tissues in the deliberative system. Just as testimony and storytelling supplement argument with perspective and pathos, memes can do so with visuals, humor, and intertextuality, while coalescing into narratives that penetrate mass media and public dialogue. Memes can convey arguments more accessibly to others. In turn, they can connect discussions occurring across networks, sites, and spaces in the greater deliberative system.

An Agenda for Social Media Linkage Research

Although the system view of deliberation has become popular among scholars, many neglect what may be its core concern: the linkage among its distributed components. This is a particularly glaring oversight for research that examines online deliberation from an expanded "everyday talk" perspective, which is premised on the notion that interconnected spaces can contribute different "goods" in the constitution of the system. However, many digital media studies provide accounts of the ways their objects of study connect strands of discourse over time and space. I have reviewed these here and noted their relevance to the deliberative system project. Specifically, individuals are able to link discussions through technical means, such as hyperlinks and hashtags, while social media platforms' architectures allow for a patchwork of information flows through interconnected personal networks. New communication forms native to online spaces, such as Internet memes, can be transmitted through these pathways, and in their narrative and intertextual properties connect across social strata while reaching the mass media, embodied space, and elites. This argument bears a series of research questions. In this section I propose three sets of jumping-off points, followed by a discussion of potential analytic approaches.

Research Questions

First, we can pose a number of research questions that are essentially descriptive, lend themselves to quantitative investigation, and naturally flow from the arguments made in this article. We should ask simply to what degree, and in what configuration, a system's discussions are linked. We can then ask how the presence or strength of these links changes over time. Next we may consider whether some spaces are more likely to be linked than others, and by which means (e.g., technical features, networks, narrative). The latter questions, in particular, may enrich the discourse architecture literature. A second group of research questions build upon the first group, and may be less apparent. Answering them may be best achieved using interpretive methods. Does the presence of a given link lead to actual transmission, and, if so, what is the degree of fidelity? What degree of accountability from elites is evident? And, finally, are these links actually deliberative in nature? Third, scholars can address research questions about what moderates the above outcomes. Does the existence, strength, mechanism, or deliberativeness of a link vary based upon context? For instance, although the idea has not received sufficient scholarly attention, "certain issues may be inherently more prone to certain types of democratic discourse," (Freelon, 2015, p. 787; see also Bennet et al., 2007; Carmines & Stimson, 1980). The same may be true for different issues encouraging or discouraging linkages – in type, strength, duration and so on. Likewise, comparative research may detect cultural variability in these processes.

Analytic Approaches

It is clear that the uniquely media-rich, and interconnected, environment of online discourse should be assessed in some greater detail than allowed for in current empirical evaluations of deliberative quality. One modest hope for future research is the inclusion of linkage — in some operationalization — as a consideration in studies of deliberative "quality" or "sequencing." The most immediate way to realize this goal would be to graft a linkage criterion onto existing quantified quality rubrics (e.g., those of Bachtiger & Steenbergen, 2004; Zimmermann, 2015). Beyond rubrics, though, further quantitative methods can be used to address the initial research questions posed above.

Network analyses can readily account for the ways that hyperlinks, retweets, and other "material" objects connect deliberation across spaces (and time) (e.g., Bruns & Highfield, 2016; Maireder & Ausserhofer, 2014) if shifted to address research questions concerning systemic linkage for specific issues. Likewise, agenda-setting or agenda-building analyses, particularly intermedia agenda-setting approaches (e.g., Groshek & Groshek, 2013), can be repurposed to shed light on the links among a democracy's various mediated spaces. The intermedia approach can better

account for the complex system of spaces through which claims pass. Linkage may be examined further via second- or third-level agenda-setting analyses. Second-level (attribute) agenda-setting can account for the transmission of issue attributes' relative prominence (e.g., McCombs et al., 1998), while third-level (network) agenda-setting can determine the extent to which a medium "bundles" attributes and makes them co-salient downstream, in influenced channels (e.g., Vu et al., 2014). When coupled with an intermedia approach, these offer especially nuanced ways to detect the presence and strength of links in a deliberative system. Researchers also may take a more prospective, psycho-social approach to evaluating messages, borrowing frameworks for gauging mimetic diffusion potential (Lerman & Ghosh, 2010; Spitzberg, 2014), virality (Guadagno et al., 2013; Liu-Thompkins, 2012), frame resonance (Lakoff, 2004), emotional resonance (Gross, 2008; Ng & Kiddler, 2010), or intertextual resonance (Panagiotidou, 2010). Importantly, however, none of these approaches can say "whether, and to what extent, such transmission is deliberative in nature," (Boswell et al., 2016, p. 3).

Conversely, linkage can be approached from an interpretive standpoint. Ercan et al. (2015) argue that particularly in the study of message transmission processes, quantitative approaches "must be allied to interpretive techniques, which are more attentive to the substance of these connections and the context in which they occur; interpretive research can go beyond an analysis of the presence, apparent strength or relative frequency of such connections and offer a deeper understanding of their *nature*," (p. 13). Discourse analyses that reflect on actors' sense-making across sites of deliberation (Hajer & Laws, 2006; Stevenson & Dryzek, 2012) could be particularly well-suited to understanding the emergence or effectiveness of narrative and intertextual linkage in social media. While it is possible to measure the presence of a narrative, and thus its surface-level transmission, interpretive analysis may discover that it is co-opted and watered down as it approaches empowered sites. On a related note, to address the problem of cooption and distortion, Neblo (2005) proposes a model in which decision-makers must make efforts to show that their expressed claims track with those circulating in the public space, making linkage a two-way street (Boswell et al., 2016). Research at the intersection of social media and deliberative systems might probe how this "accountability" can manifest online, whether it be politicians retweeting the concerns of voters, engaging with popular memes, or more substantial, long-term engagement.

One final interest to linkage research is better understanding the variety of linkage mechanisms and the implications of their co-existence. Because different forms of linkage are not mutually exclusive and can occur simultaneously, competing legitimacy claims may be passed on to empowered spaces (Boswell et al., 2016). Even given limited distortion and competition, effective linkage must not be thought of solely as the correspondence of claims between public and decision-making sites,

because this not only limits success to policy impact, but may confuse similar discourse for meaningful influence.

Addressing different mechanisms of linkage and accumulating an understanding of the ways deliberative systems' distributed parts connect can help clarify how the theoretically appealing concept plays out in messy practice. Doing so may require a range of methodological tools, and call for collaboration among scholars of political communication, digital media, deliberative democracy, and other neighboring literatures. In any case, considering the arguments made in this article can help scholars think both big and small picture — reflect on individual artifacts' connections to an overarching system, while grounding a system view in the necessary ground-level building blocks. As the study of deliberation simultaneously turns toward empirical analysis and the system view, an important opportunity to analyze linkage lies ahead.

References

Ackland, R., Gibson, R. K., Lusoli, W., & S. Ward. (2007, May). *Mapping small things on the Web: Assessing the online presence of the nanotechnology industry*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the International Communication Association, San Francisco.

Adamic, L. A., & Glance, N. (2005). The political blogosphere and the 2004 US election: divided they blog. In *Proceedings of the 3rd international workshop on Link discovery* (pp. 36-43). ACM.

Ausserhofer, J., & Maireder, A. (2013). National politics on Twitter: Structures and topics of a networked public sphere. *Information, Communication & Society, 16*(3), 291-314.

Bachtiger, A., & Steenbergen, M. R. (2004). The real world of deliberation. A comparative study of its favorable conditions in legislatures. European University Institute, Florence. Working Paper SPS No. 2004/17.

Barbera, P. (2014). How social media reduces mass political polarization: Evidence from Germany, Spain, and the United States. Working Paper. Retrieved from http://pablobarbera.com/static/barbera-polarization-social-media.pdf

Barnett, S. (1997). New media, old problems. New technology and the political process. *European Journal of Communication 12*(2), 193-218.

Berger, J., & Milkman, K. L. (2012). What makes online content viral? *Journal of Marketing Research, 49*(2), 192-205.

Bessi, A., & Ferrara, E. (2016). Social bots distort the 2016 US Presidential election online discussion. *First Monday*, *21*(11).

Beste, S. (2013). Contemporary trends of deliberative research: Synthesizing a new study agenda. *Journal of Public Deliberation, 9*(2): Article 1. http://www.publicdeliberation.net/jpd/vol9/iss2/art1

Bode L. & Vraga, E. (Forthcoming) Studying politics across media. *Political Communication.*

Boeher, P. (2012, October 17). Binders full of women: Ladies and gentlemen, your new political meme. *TIME*. Retrieved from http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/10/17/binders-full-of-women-ladies-and-gentlemen-your-new-political-meme/

Bor, S. E. (2013). *Democratic deliberation on social network sites: A study of digital deliberative discourse in the 2012 election* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Utah).

Börzsei, L. K. (2013). Makes a meme instead: A concise history of Internet memes. *New Media Studies Magazine* 7, 1-28.

Boswell, J. (2013). Why and how narrative matters in deliberative systems. *Political Studies, 61*, 620–636. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9248.2012.00987.x

Boswell, J., Hendriks, C., & Ercan, S. (2016). Message received? Examining transmission in deliberative systems. *Critical Policy Studies*, *10*(3), 263-283.

boyd, d. (2010). Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications. In Z. Papacharissi (Ed.), *Networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites* (pp. 39–58). New York: Routledge.

Bozdag, E. (2013). Bias in algorithmic filtering and personalization. *Ethics and information technology, 15*(3), 209-227.

Bruner, J. (1991) The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry, 18*(1), 1–21.

Bruns, A. & Moe, H. (2014). Structural layers of communication on Twitter. In K. Weller, A. Bruns, J. Burgess, M. Mahrt, & C. Puschmann (Eds.), *Twitter and society* (pp. 15-29). New York: Peter Lang.

Bruns, A. (2008). Gatewatching, gatecrashing: Futures for tactical news media. In *Gatewatching: Collaborative Online News Production*, Digital Formations. New York: Peter Lang.

Bruns, A., & Burgess, J. (2011, August). *The use of Twitter hashtags in the formation of ad hoc publics*. Paper presented at the European Consortium for Political Research conference, Reykjavik, Iceland.

Bruns, A., & Highfield, T. (2016). Is Habermas on Twitter? Social media and the public sphere. In *The Routledge Companion to Social Media and Politics* (pp. 56-73). Routledge.

Carlson, T., & Strandberg, K. (2012). The rise of web campaigning in Finland. In J. Ramos & R. Davies (Eds.), *iPolitics citizens, elections, and governing in*

the new media era (pp. 125-150). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Chadwick, A. (2013). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing political discourse: Theory and practice*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Cohen, J. (1989) Deliberation and democratic legitimacy. In A. Hamlin & P. Petit (Eds.), *The good polity: Normative analysis of the state* (pp. 17-34). New York: Blackwell.

Coleman, S. (2013). Debate on television: The spectacle of deliberation. *Television & New Media, 14*(1), 20-30.

Coleman, S., & Moss, G. (2012). Under construction: the field of online deliberation research. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 9*(1), 1-15.

Colleoni, E., Rozza, A., & Arvidsson, A. (2014). Echo chamber or public sphere? Predicting political orientation and measuring political homophily in Twitter using big data. *Journal of Communication,64*(2), 317-332.

Conover, P. J., & Searing, D. D. (2005). Studying 'everyday political talk' in the deliberative system. *Acta Politica, 40*(3), 269-283.

Conway, B. A., Kenski, K., & Wang, D. (2015). The rise of Twitter in the political campaign: Searching for intermedia agenda-setting effects in the presidential primary. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication. 20*(4), 363-380.

Cunningham, S. (2001). Popular media as public 'sphericules' for diasporic communities. *International Journal of Cultural Studies, 4*(2), 131-147.

Dahlberg, L. (2001). The Internet and democratic discourse: Exploring the prospects of online deliberative forums extending the public sphere. *Information, Communication & Society, 4*(4), 615-633.

Dahlgren, P. (2005). The Internet, public spheres, and political communication: Dispersion and deliberation. *Political Communication, 22*(2), 147-162.

Dahlgren, P. (2009). *Media and political engagement: Citizens, communication, and democracy*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

da Silva, P. D., & Garcia, J. L. (2012). YouTubers as satirists: Humor and remix in online video. *eJournal of eDemocracy & Open Government, 4*(1), 89-114. Retrieved from http://www.jedem.org/article/view/95.

DeLuca, K., Lawson, S., & Sun, Y. (2012). Occupy Wall Street on the public screens of social media: The many framings of the birth of a protest movement. *Communication, Culture & Critique, 5*, 483–509. doi:10.1111/j.1753-9137.2012.01141.x

del Águila-Obra, A. R., Padilla-Meléndez, A., & Serarols-Tarrés, C. (2007). Value creation and new intermediaries on Internet. An exploratory analysis of the online news industry and the web content aggregators. *International Journal of Information Management, 27*(3), 187-199.

Dhar, R. (2015, March 4). Where does BuzzFeed source its content from? *Priceonomics*. Retrieved from http://priceonomics.com/where-does-buzzfeed-source-its-content-from/

Drüeke, R., & Zobl, E. (2016). Online feminist protest against sexism: the German-language hashtag# aufschrei. *Feminist Media Studies*, *16*(1), 35-54.

Dryzek, J. S. (2000). *Deliberative democracy and beyond: Liberals, critics, contestations*. Oxford University Press on Demand.

Dryzek, J. S. (2009), Democratization as deliberative capacity building. *Comparative Political Studies, 42* (11), 1379-1402.. doi: http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0090591716659114 1379-1402.

Dryzek, J. S. (2010). Rhetoric in democracy: A systemic appreciation. *Political Theory*, *38*(3), 319-39.

Dryzek, J. S. (2016). The forum, the system, and the polity: Three varieties of democratic theory. *Political Theory*. OnlineFirst, 1-27. doi: http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0090591716659114

Ercan, S.A. (2014), Same problem, different solutions: The case of 'honour killing' in Germany and Britain. In A. Gill et al. (Eds.), *'Honour' killing and violence: Theory, policy and Practice* (pp. 199-218). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ercan, S. A., Hendriks, C. M., & Boswell, J. (2015). Studying public deliberation after the systemic turn: The crucial role for interpretive research. *Policy and Politics*, Advance online publication. doi: 10.1332/030557315X14502713105886.

Ercan, S.A., Hendriks, C.M., & Dryzek, J.S. (2015, September). *Beyond expression: Realising public deliberation in an era of communicative plenty*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association in San Francisco.

Esteves, V. (2012). Internet memes: Transnational products of (home-made). Working Paper, University of Stirling. Retrieved from http://www.interdisciplinary.net/critical-issues/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/estevescyberpaper.pdf

Flew, T. (2007). *New media: An introduction*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Freelon, D. G. (2010). Analyzing online political discussion using three models of democratic communication. *New Media & Society, 12*(7), 1172-1190.

Freelon, D. (2015). Discourse architecture, ideology, and democratic norms in online political discussion. *New Media & Society, 17*(5), 772-791.

Freelon, D., & Karpf, D. (2015). Of big birds and bayonets: Hybrid Twitter interactivity in the 2012 presidential debates. *Information, Communication & Society, 18*(4), 390-406.

Gaby, S., & Caren, N. (2012). Occupy online: How cute old men and Malcolm X recruited 400,000 US users to OWS on Facebook. *Social Movement Studies, 11*(3–4), 367–374. doi:10.1080/14742837.2012.708858

Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani A. (1989). Media discourse and public-opinion on nuclear-power - A constructionist approach. *American Journal of Sociology 95*(1), 1- 37.

Gauntlett, D. (2011). *Making is connecting. The social meaning of creativity, from DIY and knitting to Youtube and Web 2.0*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gillespie, T. (2014). The relevance of algorithms. In T. Gillespie, P. J. Boczkowski, & K. A. Foot (Eds.), *Media technologies: Essays on communication, materiality, and society* (pp. 167–193). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Gitlin, T. (1998) Public sphere or public sphericules? in T. Liebes & J. Curran (Eds.), *Media, ritual and identity* (pp. 168–174). London: Routledge.

Goodin, R. E. (2005). Sequencing deliberative moments. *Acta Politica, 40,* 182-196.

Goodin, R. E. (2008). *Innovating democracy: Democratic theory and practice after the deliberative turn.* Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Graham, T. (2012). Beyond "political" communicative spaces: Talking politics on the Wife Swap discussion forum. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 9*(1), 31-45.

Graham, T. (2015). Everyday political talk in the Internet-based public sphere. In S. Coleman & D. Freelon (Eds.), *Handbook of digital politics* (pp. 247-263). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.

Graham, T., Broersma, M., Hazelhoff, K., & van't Haar, G. (2013). Between broadcasting political messages and interacting with voters: The use of Twitter during the 2010 UK general election campaign. *Information, Communication & Society, 16*(5), 692-716.

Gretzel, U. (2015). Web 2.0 and 3.0. *Communication and Technology, 5*, 181.

Groshek, J., & Groshek, M. C. (2013). Agenda trending: Reciprocity and the predictive capacity of social networking sites in intermedia agenda setting across topics over time. *Media and Communication, 1*(1), 15-27.

Gross, K. (2008). Framing persuasive appeals: Episodic and thematic framing, emotional response, and policy opinion. *Political Psychology 29*(2), 169-92.

Guadagno, R. E., Rempala, D. M., Murphy, S., & Okdie, B. M. (2013). What makes a video go viral? An analysis of emotional contagion and Internet memes. *Computers in Human Behavior, 29*(6), 2312-2319.

Guess, A.M. (2016, September). *Media choice and moderation: Evidence from online tracking data.* Paper presented at the Political Communication Pre-conference at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in Philadelphia, PA.

Gutmann, A., & Thompson, D. (1996) *Democracy and disagreement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Habermas, J. (1984) *The theory of communicative action*. Boston: Beacon.

Habermas, J. (1990). *Moral consciousness and communicative action*. Cambridge, MA: MIT press.

Habermas, J. (1996). *Between facts and norms. Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press.

Habermas, J. (2006). Political communication in media society: Does democracy still enjoy an epistemic dimension? The impact of normative theory on empirical research. *Communication Theory, 16*(4), 411-426.

Hajer, M. (1995). *The politics of environmental discourse: Ecological modernization and the policy process*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.

Hajer, M., & Laws, D. (2006). Ordering through discourse. In: Rein, M., Goodin, R. (Eds.), *Public Policy* (pp. 249-266). Oxford University Press, Oxford

Hargittai, E., Gallo, J. & Kane, M. (2008), Cross-ideological discussion among conservative and liberal bloggers. *Public Choice 134*(1), 67–86.

Havalias, A. (2008) The hyperlink as organising principle. In J. Turow & L. Tsui (Eds.), *The Hyperlinked Society: Questioning Connections in the Digital Age* (pp. 39-54). Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

Hayward, B. (2008). Let's talk about the weather: Decentering democratic debate about climate change. *Hypatia, 23*(3), 79-98.

Healey, P., de Magalhaes, C., Madanipour, A., & Pendlebury, J. (2004). Place, identity and local politics: analyzing initiatives in deliberative governance. In M.A. Hajer, & W. Hendrik (Eds.), *Deliberative policy analysis: Understanding governance in the network society* (pp. 60-87). Reprinted. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Hendriks, C. (2006) Integrated deliberation: Reconciling civil society's dual role in deliberative democracy, *Political Studies, 54*(3), 486–508.

Hendriks, C. M. (2016). Coupling citizens and elites in deliberative systems: The role of institutional design. *European Journal of Political Research*, *55*(1), 43-60.

Herring, S.C., Kouper, I., Paolillo, J.C., Scheidt, L.A., Tyworth, M., Welsch, P., Wright, E., & Ning, Y. (2005). Conversations in the blogosphere: An analysis "from the bottom up," System Sciences, 2005. HICSS '05. *Proceedings of the 38th Annual Hawaii International Conference.*

Huntington, H.E. (2013, March). *Big Bird, binders full of women & bayonets and horses: The diffusion of Internet memes in mainstream media coverage of the 2012 U.S. presidential campaign*. Paper presented at the National Popular Culture/American Culture Conference in Washington, DC.

Ito, M. (2008). Introduction. In K. Varnelis (Ed.), *Networked publics* (pp. 1–14). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Jackson, S. J., & Foucault Welles, B. (2016). #Ferguson is everywhere: Initiators in emerging counterpublic networks. *Information, Communication & Society*, *19*(3), 397-418.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2013). *Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture*. New York: NYU press.

Jurgenson, N. (2012). When atoms meet bits: Social media, the mobile web and augmented revolution. *Future Internet, 4*(1), 83-91.

Jurgenson, N. (2015, May 7). Facebook: Fair and balanced. *The Society Pages: Cyborgology*. Retrieved from https://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2015/05/07/facebook-fair-and-balanced/

Knobel, M., & Lankshear, C. (2007). *A new literacies sampler* (Vol. 29). New York: Peter Lang.

Koopmans, R., & Zimmermann, A. (2007). Visibility and communication networks on the Internet: The role of search engines and hyperlinks. In C. de Vreese & H. Schmitt (Eds.), *A European Public Sphere: How much of it do we have*

and how much do we need? Connex Report Series 2: 213-264. Mannheim: University of Mannheim

Lakoff, G. (2004). *Don't think of an elephant*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green.

Larsson, A. O., & Moe, H. (2012). Studying political microblogging: Twitter users in the 2010 Swedish election campaign. *New Media & Society, 14*(5), 729-747.

Lawrence, W. Y. & Bates, B.R. (2014). Mommy group sites for deliberation in everyday speech. *Journal of Public Deliberation 10*(2), Article 7.

Leadbeater, C. (2009). *We think – Mass innovation, not mass production*. London: Profile Books Ltd.

Leavitt, A. (2014). From #FollowFriday to YOLO: Exploring the cultural salience of Twitter memes. In K. Weller, A. Bruns, J. Burgess, M. Mahrt & C. Puschmann (Eds.), *Twitter and society* (pp. 137-154). New York: Peter Lang.

Lerman, K., & Ghosh, R. (2010). Information contagion: An empirical study of the spread of news on Digg and Twitter social networks. *ICWSM, 10*, 90-97.

Liu-Thompkins, Y. (2012). Seeding viral content: The role of message and network factors. *Journal of Advertising Research, 52,* 465–478. doi: 10.2501/JAR-52-4-465-478

Maireder, A., & Ausserhofer, J. (2013). Political discourses on Twitter: networking topics, objects and people. In K. Weller, A. Bruns, J. Burgess, M. Mahrt & C. Puschmann (Eds.), *Twitter and Society* (pp. 291-341). New York, Peter Lang.

Maireder, A., & Schlögl, S. (2014). 24 hours of an #outcry: The networked publics of a socio-political debate. *European Journal of Communication, 29*(6), 687-702.

Maireder, A., & Schwarzenegger, C. (2012). A movement of connected individuals: Social media in the Austrian student protests 2009. *Information, Communication & Society, 15*(2), 171-195.

Mansbridge, J. (1999) Everyday talk in the deliberative system. In S. Macedo (Ed.), *Deliberative politics: Essays on democracy and disagreement* (pp. 211-42). NewYork: Oxford University Press.

Mansbridge, J., Bohman, J., Chambers, S., Estlund, D., Føllesdal, A., Fung, A., Lafont, C., & Manin, B. (2010). The place of self-interest and the role of power in deliberative democracy. *Journal of Political Philosophy, 18*(1), 64-100.

Mansbridge, J. J., Bohman, J., Christiano, T., Fung, A., Parkinson, J., Thompson, D. F., & Warren, M. E. (2012): A systemic approach to deliberative democracy. In J. Parkinson & J. Mansbridge (Eds.), *Deliberative systems: Deliberative democracy at the large scale* (pp. 1-26). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

McCombs, M. E., Llamas, J. P., Lopez-Excobar, E., & Rey, F. (1998). Candidate's images in Spanish elections: Second-level agenda-setting effect. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly 74*(4), 703–717. doi:10.1177/107769909707400404

Meikle, G., & Young, S. (2012). *Media convergence: Networked digital media in everyday life*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Milner, R. (2013). Pop polyvocality: Internet memes, public participation, and the Occupy Wall Street movement. *International Journal of Communication 7*, 2357-2390.

Milner, R. M. (2012). *The world made meme: Discourse and identity in participatory media.* Doctoral Dissertation. University of Kansas.

Mouffe, C. 1999. Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism? *Social Research, 66*, 745–758.

Neblo, M. (2005). Thinking through democracy: Between the theory and practice of deliberative politics. *Acta politica, 40*(2), 169-181.

Ng, K. H., & Kiddler, J. L. (2010). Toward a theory of emotive performance: With lessons from how politicians do anger. *Sociological Theory 28*(2), 193-214.

Panagiotidou, M. E. (2010, June). *Mapping intertextuality: Towards a cognitive model*. Paper presented at the Language of Landscapes Conference of the Poetics and Linguistics Association at University of Genoa.

Papacharissi, Z. (2010). *A private sphere: Democracy in a digital age*. Cambridge: Polity.

Papacharissi, Z. (2015). Toward new journalism(s): Affective news, hybridity, and liminal spaces. *Journalism Studies, 16*(1), 27-40.

Park, H. W., Thelwall, M., & Kluver, R. (2005). Political hyperlinking in South Korea: Technical indicators of ideology and content. *Sociological Research Online 10*(3). Retrieved from http://www.socresonline.org.uk/10/3/park.

Parkinson, J. (2006). *Deliberating in the real world: Problems of legitimacy in deliberative democracy*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Parkinson, J. (2006). Rickety bridges: Using the media in deliberative democracy. *British Journal of Political Science, 36*(1), 175-183.

Parkinson, J. (2012), Democratizing deliberative systems. In J. Parkinson & J. Mansbridge (Eds.), *Deliberative systems: Deliberative democracy at the large scale* (pp. 151-172). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Parkinson, J. (2016). *On scholarly metaphors, or, What is deliberative about deliberative democracy*? Paper presented at the annual conference of the European Consortium for Political Research, in Prague, Czech Republic.

Pedrini, S. (2014), Deliberative capacity in the political and civic sphere. *Swiss Political Science Review, 20*(2), 263-286.

Peralta, E. (2012, October 17). Presidential debate spins "binders full of women" meme, fact checks. *NPR*. Retrieved from http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2012/10/17/163071667/presidential-debate-spins-binders-full-of-women-meme.

Pew Research Center (2015). Social media preferences vary by race and ethnicity. Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/02/03/social-media-preferences-vary-by-race-and-ethnicity/.

Plevriti, V. (2014). *Satirical user-generated memes as an effective source of political criticism, extending debate and enhancing civic engagement.* Unpublished Dissertation. University of Warwick.

Rasmussen, T. (2009). The significance of Internet communication in public deliberation. *Javnost-The Public, 16*(1), 17-32.

Rintel, S. (2013). Crisis memes: The importance of templatability to Internet culture and freedom of expression. *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture, 2*(2), 253-271.

Rodley, C. (2016). When memes go to war: Viral propaganda in the 2014 Gaza-Israel conflict. *The Fibreculture Journal, 27*. Retrieved from http://twentyseven.fibreculturejournal.org/2016/03/18/fcj-200-when-memes-go-to-war-viral-propaganda-in-the-2014-gaza-israel-conflict/

Rushkoff, D. (1997). *Children of chaos: Surviving the end of the world as we know it.* London: Flamingo.

Schmidt, J. H. (2014). Twitter and the rise of personal publics. In K. Weller, A. Bruns, J. Burgess, M. Mahrt & C. Puschmann (Eds.), *Twitter and society* (pp. 3-14). New York: Peter Lang.

Segerberg, A., & Bennett, W. L. (2011). Social media and the organization of collective action: Using Twitter to explore the ecologies of two climate change protests. *The Communication Review, 14*(3), 197-215.

Shifman, L. (2013). Memes in a digital world: Reconciling with a conceptual troublemaker. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 18*(3), 362–377. doi:10.1111/jcc4.12013

Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in digital culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Shirky, C. (2010). *Cognitive surplus: How technology makes consumers into collaborators*. New York: Penguin Press.

Shoemaker, P. J., & Vos, T. (2009). *Gatekeeping theory*. New York: Routledge.

Simone, M. A. (2010). Deliberative democracy online: Bridging networks with digital technologies. *The Communication Review, 13*(2), 120-139.

Spitzberg, B. H. (2014). Toward a model of meme diffusion (M3D). *Communication Theory, 24*(3), 311-339. doi:10.1111/comt.12042

Stefanone, M. A., Saxton, G. D., Egnoto, M. J., Wei, W., & Fu, Y. (2015, January). *Image Attributes and Diffusion via Twitter: The Case of #guncontrol*. In System Sciences (HICSS), 48th Hawaii International Conference (pp. 1788-1797).

Stevenson, H., & Dryzek J. S. (2012). The discursive democratisation of global climate governance. *Environmental Politics 21*(2): 189-210.

Stone, D. (2002). *Policy paradox and political reason: The art of political decision making.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Street, J., Inthorn, S., & Scott, M. (2013). *From entertainment to citizenship: Politics and popular culture.* Manchester, England: Manchester University Press.

Sutton, J., Spiro, E. S., Johnson, B., Fitzhugh, S., Gibson, B., & Butts, C. T. (2014). Warning tweets: Serial transmission of messages during the warning phase of a disaster event. *Information, Communication & Society,17*(6), 765-787.

Thompson, D. (2008), Deliberative democratic theory and empirical political science. *Annual Review of Political Science, 11*, 497-520.

Vaccari, C., Valeriani, A., Barberá, P., Jost, J. T., Nagler, J., & Tucker, J. A. (2016). Of echo chambers and contrarian clubs: Exposure to political disagreement among German and Italian users of Twitter. *Social Media + Society, 2*(3), 1-24. doi: DOI: 10.1177/2056305116664221

van Deursen, A. J., & Van Dijk, J. A. (2014). The digital divide shifts to differences in usage. *New Media & Society, 16*(3), 507-526.

van Dijck, J., & Poell, T. (2013). Understanding social media logic. *Media and Communication, 1(*1), 2-14.

van Zoonen, L. (2005). *Entertaining the citizen: When politics and popular culture converge*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Veenstra, A. S., Sapienza, Z., Mbunyuza-Memani, L., Degim, A., & Lee, J. (2017, February). *What are we talking about when we talk about social media?* Paper presented at Revitalizing Concepts in Mass Communication, Brussels, Belgium.

Veenstra, A. S., Iyer, N., Xie, W., Lyons, B. A., Park, C. S., & Feng, Y. (2015). Come together, right now: Retweeting in the social model of protest mobilization. In N. Rambukkana (Ed.), *Hashtag publics: The power and politics of networked discourse communities.* New York: Peter Lang

Vu, H. T., Guo, L., & McCombs, M. E. (2014). Exploring "the world outside and the pictures in our heads": A network agenda-setting study. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 91*(4), 669-686.

Weng, L., Flammini, A., Vespignani, A., & Menczer, F. (2012). Competition among memes in a world with limited attention. *Scientific Reports, 2*(335), 1–8. doi:10.1038/srep00335

Wessler, H., & Rinke, E. M. (2014). Deliberative performance of television news in three types of democracy: Insights from the United States, Germany, and Russia. *Journal of Communication, 64*(5), 827-851. doi:10.1111/jcom.12115

Wessler, H., Rinke, E. M., & Löb, C. (2016). Should we be Charlie? A deliberative take on religion and secularism in mediated public spheres. *Journal of Communication, 66*(2), 314-327.

Wetherbee, B. (2015). Picking up the fragments of the 2012 election: Memes, topoi, and political rhetoric. *Present Tense: A Journal of Rhetoric in Society, 5*(1). Retrieved from http://www.presenttensejournal.org/volume-5/picking-up-the-fragments-of-the-2012-election-memes-topoi-and-political-rhetoric/

Wikström, P. (2014). #srynotfunny: Communicative functions of hashtags on Twitter. *SKY Journal of Linguistics, 27*, 127-152.

Woolley, S. C., & Howard, P. N. (2016). Automation, algorithms, and politics| Political communication, computational propaganda, and autonomous Agents—Introduction. *International Journal of Communication*, *10*, 9.

Xenos, M. (2008). New mediated deliberation: Blog and press coverage of the Alito nomination. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13*(2), 485-503.

Young, I. M. (1996) Communication and the Other: Beyond deliberative democracy. In S. Benhabib (Ed.), *Democracy and difference: Contesting boundaries of the political* (pp. 120-36). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Young, I. M. (2006). De-centering deliberative democracy, *Kettering Review 24*(2), 43-53.

Zappavigna, M. (2015). Searchable talk: the linguistic functions of hashtags. *Social Semiotics, 25*(3), 274-291.

Zimmermann, T. (2015). Between individualism and deliberation: Rethinking discursive participation via social media. *International Journal of Electronic Governance, 7*(4), 349-365.