The Social Media Paradox Explained: Comparing Political Parties Facebook Strategy Versus Practice

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Abstract

Political parties' interaction strategy and practice on Facebook is the topic of this article. Political parties and individual politicians can use social media to bypass media and communicate directly with voters through websites and particularly social media platforms such as Facebook. But previous research has demonstrated that interaction on social media is challenging for political parties. This study examines the disparity between interaction strategy and online responsiveness and finds that political parties identify three clear disadvantages when communicating with voters online: online reputation risk, negative media attention, and limited resources. In addition, the authenticity requirement many parties adhere to is creating a "social media interaction deadlock," which is increasing the disparity between the parties' expressed strategy and online performance. This study compares major and minor political parties' interaction strategy during the 2013 national election in Norway and combines interviews of political communication directors with an innovative method to collect Facebook interaction data.

Keywords

social media, Facebook, political parties, political communication, online politics, Norway

It has been called a paradox—the contradiction between how political actors talk about interacting with citizens through communication technology compared to their actual campaign behavior (Karlsen, 2009, p. 186). Several studies have documented how direct dialogue with voters is mentioned as one of the main motivations for political parties and politicians to use social media (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Karlsen, 2009, 2011). Internet has become a popular intermediation channel for political communication during election campaigns, and particularly, social media platforms have been hailed for their participatory and interactive potentials. Political parties and individual politicians can use social media to bypass media and communicate directly with voters through websites and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. But despite the potential for closer connections with voters, political parties and politicians are only reluctantly taking advantage of the interactive and social aspects of social media. Loss of control, limited time, and resources are supposedly some of the reasons why parties are hesitantly using new digital communication tools (Klinger, 2013; Lüders, Følstad, & Waldal, 2014).

Thus, the perceived contrast between political parties' interaction strategy and practice in social media is the topic of this article. This article examines empirically the

difference between Facebook strategy and practice among major and minor parties in Norway during the national election in 2013. Explicitly, I ask whether there are any differences in how political parties articulate their Facebook strategy compared to how they perform it in practice during the election. The article presents empirical data based on semi-structured interviews with communication directors and strategists in five political parties, in addition to interaction data from Facebook pages of the political parties and party leaders. By using an innovative method to capture interactions data on Facebook, this study is able to compare social media strategy with actual responsiveness in social media. Accordingly, the study contributes with valuable insights into a less examined field of online political communication.

The study proceeds as follows: In the next section, I will discuss relevant research on political parties and social media campaigning during elections with a specific focus

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on interaction. Next, I will turn to my case study of political parties' online communication strategy on Facebook ahead of the Norwegian election in September 9, 2013, as well as the parties' expressed challenges with the interaction strategy on Facebook. Furthermore, I analyze the parties' online interaction on their Facebook pages. Finally, I conclude with a discussion and suggestions for future research.

Political Parties, Social Media, and Interactivity in Election Campaigns

Political parties have always adapted to new communication technology and changing electoral environments to improve their chances in national and local elections. Increasingly, the Internet and social networking tools, in particular, have become standard communication practices for political actors, also outside of election campaigns (McNair, 2012, p. xviii). Social media or social network services are commonly described by means of their interactive and networking features that let users interact, create, communicate, and share content (see, for example, boyd & Ellison, 2007; O'Reilly, 2005). It has been claimed that online political communication may increase citizens' political engagement by bringing politics closer to citizens, that is, through interactivity and personalization (Kruikemeier, van Noort, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2013). The potential for political parties to connect, communicate, mobilize, fundraise, and affect the news agenda through social media are some of the strategic reasons why political parties are increasingly performing online politics (Johnson, 2011). Thus, strategic use of social media during election campaigns can be valuable for parties. Political communication has commonly a strategic or purposeful function, whether it is mediated through social or editorial media or taking place face-to-face. Thus, we can define political communication as "communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objects" (McNair, 2012, p. 4). During election campaigns, the political parties' communicative purpose is both to mobilize supporters and convince undecided voters (Karlsen, 2011, p. 41). Accordingly, political parties develop communication strategies ahead of election campaigns, not only for so-called mass media (TV, radio, newspapers, news sites), paid media (advertising) but increasingly also for online spaces such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The combination of old and new campaign tools and communication platforms has been called "hypermedia campaigning" (Lilleker, Tenscher, & Štětka, 2015). In 2009, 43% of all Norwegian candidates who ran for office used Facebook in their campaign communication (Karlsen, 2011), and all parties had Facebook pages in the 2013 election, as my study later will show. Numerous digital services can be defined as social media, but above all, Facebook and Twitter have been adopted by politicians and political parties in Western societies as part of their communication repertoire during the past decade (Lilleker et al., 2011; Small, 2008; Vergeer, 2013). Particularly, Barack Obama's presidential

campaign in 2008 demonstrated how the potential in online communication technology could be realized. The Obama campaign's extensive use of social media to mobilize voters and fundraise proved inspirational for politicians from all over the world (Vergeer, 2013). Practically, it became the international flagship campaign for how to integrate communication technology in election campaigns. Nevertheless, the interactive aspects of social media are challenging for political parties in election campaigns.

Political Challenges With Digital Interactivity

Despite the potential advantages interactivity offer politics, studies have demonstrated political actors' reluctance to interact with citizens on digital and social media. Interaction in online spaces can be described as "decentralized communication of many-to-many" (Janssen & Kies, 2005). Some of the reasons for limited political interactivity are lack of resources, expertise, or need for control (Mascheroni & Mattoni, 2013; Small, 2008; Stromer-Galley, 2000). In a study of Norwegian political candidates' motivation for using social media during the 2009 and 2011 election, politicians reported more idealistic motivations for democratic dialogue in their social media use than they managed to maneuver in reality (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). Their actual use of social media was geared more toward marketing purposes. Similarly, a Danish study found that interactivity was among the main arguments why Danish politicians included social media in the campaign mix (Skovsgaard & van Dalen, 2013). Nevertheless, a majority of the Danish members of Parliament performed one-way communication on Facebook, and Skovsgaard and van Dalen (2013) argued that candidates magnify the importance of interactivity in social media since "responsiveness to the electorate is a normative cornerstone of democracy" (p. 750). Thus, candidates express more idealistic, deliberative intentions while the actual social media behavior is rather characterized by broadcasting.

In the same way, a study of how Swiss political parties use social media finds that while political parties claim to appreciate the dialogue and mobilization potential of social media, they mainly use social media as an additional channel to spread information and electoral propaganda (Klinger, 2013). Klinger (2013) noted that "although the parties have adopted well to mass media logic, they still face the challenge of having to adapt to the new logic of social media as well," particularly when it comes to the potential of political interactivity and participation (p. 733). Social media logic (also called networked media logic) refers to the mechanism and affordances of these platforms that drives attention and visibility, process information, and communication (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013; see also Klinger & Svensson, 2014). Political parties' half-hearted use of interactive or discursive opportunities in social media during election campaigns is also found in studies varying from France (Vaccari, 2008), Canada (Small, 2008), Norway (Kalnes, 2009), Italy (Mascheroni & Mattoni, 2013), and United Kingdom (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009). Norway is

an interesting case country to study online political interaction for many reasons. All political parties in Norway use websites and social media as part of their online presence; thus, the question is no longer adoption, but rather strategic use of digital communication channels. Next, I will describe in more details the Norwegian context.

Norway's Political and Social Media Context

Internet access and use in Norway is among the highest in the world, 96% of the population has access (MediaNorway, 2015), and Facebook is heavily used in all age groups; 66% of all Norwegians with Internet access use Facebook on a daily basis and almost 80% of the population use it weekly (Bjørnstad & Tornes, 2014). Twitter is used by 15% of Norwegians weekly and is regarded more as an "elite platform," heavily used by journalists, politicians, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), public relations (PR) professionals, and academics in Norway (Larsson & Moe, 2014).

Norway's political system is characterized as a multiparty parliamentary system with proportional representation. Political campaigns in Norway are typically party-centered, centralized, and nationwide, and candidates campaign as part of the greater party campaign organization (Skogerbø & Karlsen, 2014). Stronger personalization in Norwegian politics has become more prevalent in the past decades. Party leaders and top politicians tend to receive most attention from news media and citizens (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2004; Aardal, Krogstad, & Narud, 2004). Increased mediatization of politics—political actors and institutions are adapting to conditions and changes in news media—is one of the explanations for stronger personalization (Jenssen & Aalberg, 2007, p. 10). In addition, social media services such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs have made it convenient to manage and run personalized campaigns and marketing efforts online (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Skogerbø & Krumsvik, 2014). The inspiration from Barack Obama's 2008 campaign was also evident in Norway: "Much can be ascribed to before and after Obama," as the Head of Information for the Norwegian Labour Party said in 2009 when interviewed about inspiration from Obama's online campaign (Karlsen, 2012a, p. 164). When former Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg established his Facebook profile in August 2008, it created media attention as he was the first Norwegian Prime Minister on Facebook. Explaining why he joined Facebook, he said, "it is an important way to communicate with many people" (Andersen, 2008).

Expectations

Thus, based on previous research, I expect to find that the political parties have implemented social media in the campaign mix, but not taking full advantage of the interactive and participatory potential of social media such as Facebook. I also expect to find a disparity between the social media strategy and the online performance of political parties and party leaders during the election campaign. Finally, I expect to find difference between minor and major parties' interactive capacity, mainly due to resources. I will now turn to the data material and the methods used.

Data Material and Methods

This study will identify emerging social media strategies and practices in Norwegian politics through interviews and social media data analyses. The research design combines both qualitative and quantitative methods, and the study is carried out in two steps: (1) analyses of interviews with Head of Communication or Campaigning in five major and minor parties about social media strategy with a specific focus on Facebook and (2) analyses of interactions on the parties' and party leaders' Facebook pages.

First, I conducted semi-structured in-person interviews 4-6 months before the election to address and explore the parties' online strategies ahead of the election. The election took place on September 9, 2013. Norwegian election campaigns consist of two distinct phases: the "long campaign" starts about a year before election and the "short campaign" includes the intensive four last weeks (Aardal et al., 2004). Thus, the interviews took place in the long campaign phase. The interviews lasted between 40 and 60 min. Interviews with Head of Communication or Campaigning in five parties were conducted with three major parties: the Labour Party (Ap), the Conservative Party (H), the Progress Party (FrP), and two minor parties—the Socialist Left Party (SV) and the Liberal Party (V). Two of the parties were in government (Ap, SV), while three of the parties (H, FrP, V) were in opposition during the election campaign. Seven parties were represented in the parliament *Stortinget* when the election campaign started in 2013. Based on the number of votes and resources, we can divide them into major and minor parties (Table 1).

Due to limited time and resources, not all Norwegian parties were included in the study. The minor parties—the Christian Democratic Party (Krf) and the Centre Party (Sp)—were represented in parliament and not included in the study, similar to other minor parties such as the Red Party (R) and the Greens (MDG). The purpose of the selection was to study a collection of minor and major parties, both in position and opposition on both sides of the so-called left–right scale of the political spectrum, which I will argue is secured with the selected parties.

Second, I measured the number of interactions on the political parties' and party leaders' Facebook pages. In this context, I was mainly looking at possibilities for interaction on political parties' and party leaders' open Facebook pages. The "Like" and "Share" features are popular interactive opportunities, but in this study, the responsiveness in the comment section is my main focus. By using a web application called *fb_loader* (UiO, 2013) developed by programmers at the University of Oslo in cooperation with the author and Anders Olof Larsson, I could extract the number

Table 1. Characteristics of Norwegian Political Parties.

Norwegian parties (abbreviation)	% of votes in 2009 national election	In government after election	Campaign budget 2013 (million NOK)
Major parties (10%+)			
Labour Party (Ap)	35.4	Yes	25
Progress Party (Frp)	22.9	No	18
Conservative Party (H)	17.2	No	23
Minor parties (3.9%-9.9%)			
Socialist Left Party (Sv)	6.2	Yes	5.9
Centre Party (SP)	6.2	Yes	2
Christian Democrats (Krf)	5.5	No	1.2
Liberal Party (V)	3.9	No	6.5

Source: Campaign expenses source: Grande (2013).
NOK: Norwegian Krone.

of interactions on the selected Facebook pages. The web application, which was developed for this purpose, allows researchers to extract posts and comments from public Facebook pages and study them according to different interaction measure (i.e., likes, shares, comments, and comments by page owner). By measuring comments by page owners—here, political parties or party leaders—it is possible to gauge the interactive responsiveness of political actors on Facebook. The open Facebook pages of five political parties and their party leaders were uploaded. To assess the frequency of interaction on Facebook, the number of comments by page owners between August 1 and September 15 were measured, basically covering the short and most intensive election campaign period. Now, I will present the findings based on the interviews.

Findings: Political Parties' Strategy for Online Communication on Facebook

Based on the interviews, three main strategic reasons for why parties prioritize online communication and interaction with voters on Facebook can be identified as follows: (1) dialogue with voters, (2) feedback, and (3) to bypass media.

First, interaction and dialogue with potential voters are repeatedly mentioned in the interviews as the most promising aspect when using social media during election as it has potential to bring a new dynamic into politics, connecting citizens and politicians in new ways, says the informants. Dialogue on Facebook is compared to speaking with people on a political street stall. It is impolite to turn your back to citizens in the street, and similarly, it is regarded impolite not to reply online:

> We have hired a person who will answer everything on social media. We have defined social media as the Conservative Party's "digital street stall." Primarily to create an image, both internally and among people, that when you visit the Conservative Party's

stand on Oslo's main street, Karl Johan, you will meet real people of flesh and blood, and we don't turn our backs on voters. But I have the impression that many are sloppy in social media. Voters are asking, but don't get answers. That is why we define social media as the Conservative Party's digital street stall. We will emphasize that everyone who asks, will get answers from Høyre. (Conservative Party)

The idea that it is impolite or wrong to turn your back to voters by not answering them on Facebook seems to resonate particularly strong among the Conservative Party, Progress Party, and Liberal Party, who all used the term "digital street stall." Nevertheless, Facebook can be a bit complicated for parties, since personalized communication is believed by the respondents to have a more positive effect on the number of comments and interactions with users. Thus, some of the parties prioritize most of the activities on the party leader's Facebook page and less on the party's page. The party leaders prefer to write their own social media updates most of the time, but they have very limited time to give feedback to people. One solution some parties have employed is to let the communication advisors answer on the party leader's behalf, signed with the advisor's initials. The Liberal Party differentiates the type of content they publish on the party leader's Facebook page and the party's page: While the party page is devoted to political issues and party activities, the party leader's page (Trine Skei Grande) is devoted to her day-to-day business and what she feels like to share from her personal life. The Socialist Left had one person more or less dedicated to social media activities during the election campaign. With limited resources compared to their largest governmental partner, the Labour Party, the Socialist Left has to create engagement with less resources:

> We are working on how to initiate more two-way-dialogue. We are fairly good at it now, answer quite a few on Facebook, and discuss with people. But we need to do more to engage people and get debates started. (Socialist Left)

During the election campaign, parties drive a great deal of traffic to their social media profiles and websites, particularly during the last few weeks of the election campaign, according to the Liberal Party. The parties are aware of how different types of content can create interaction and engagement on Facebook. Particularly, infographics (images or animations combined with text or slogans), images, and videos are mentioned as particular well-suited material to publish on Facebook to engage and encourage sharing, according to the Labour Party. As images get more space than text in Facebook's news-feed—thus attention—parties have experienced that people respond better to visual content on Facebook:

> What we see engage people, is when we are able to give "behind the scene" access: images, videos and infographics—things that are easy to understand and share. It creates engagement and we try to do it as often as possible. (Labour Party)

Additional examples of activities that can lead to increased interaction on Facebook are party leaders asking for suggestions (mentioned by the Conservative Party and the Progress Party), posting personal pictures (Labour Party), or challenging political opponents (Socialist Left Party). Facebook has lowered the threshold for parties to interact and engage in dialogue not only with members and sympathizers but also with friends of friends who are not necessarily interested in the party's politics. If a friend shares a political message on Facebook, it is received differently than a political advertisement on Facebook or another website, argues several of the respondents. Thus, "shares" on Facebook are viewed very favorably by the parties.

Second, online dialogue can give parties' valuable feedback, even policy impact. The Progress Party describes social media as "very useful tools" and explains how comments or questions on Facebook and personal messages to the party leader Siv Jensen have been addressed to ministers during Question Time in the Parliament. "Interactions are generating practical politics for us," says the Progress Party. Social media are also used by parties to track feedback and reactions on politicians' public performances. Thus, the parties are using the feedback as quick real-time polls. Whether it is a radio debate, a talk show performance, or a newly launched campaign, the parties are monitoring and analyzing the feedback, particularly through Twitter and also on Facebook. The immediate response on social media is valuable, although the parties are aware that users in social media are not representative of the whole population,

Third, social media allow political parties to bypass media and frame issues as they prefer. Social media challenge media's role as gatekeepers who choose and decide which information and stories should get attention (Chadwick, 2013; Strömbäck, 2009). Through social media, parties try to "define" the story, and if the angle is interesting enough, mass media will give the blog post, the Facebook update, or the tweet attention. When the Labour Party publishes something on Stoltenberg's Facebook page, the Norwegian politician with most followers on Facebook (315,592 at the time of the election), the party could reach more people than a news article in major online newspapers. The Progress Party has, for example, responded to and "corrected" local news article on Facebook. However, the parties mention the combination of both mainstream media and social media as the most effective way to create attention and affect the news agenda. Provocative or conflict-oriented content in social media is what creates attention from journalists, and consequently, invitation to TV or radio debates:

> Social media is used to rub in our view of reality both before and after the story has run in media. (Socialist Left)

"Rub in" here implies how the Socialist Left use social media to establish or affect the framing of a particular issue. Nevertheless, social media also represent some clear and present challenges for the political parties during the election campaign, which I now will address

Political Challenges With Online Interaction on Facebook

Interactions on social media have also clear disadvantages for political parties. Particularly, three challenges were identified among the respondents: (1) offensive online behavior, (2) negative media attention, and (3) limited resources.

First, offensive online behavior on Facebook pages poses potential threats to parties' and politicians' reputation. As social media are becoming more common in online politics, politicians and political parties have to deal with responsibilities similar to news editors—moderation of user comments. All the interviewed parties moderated comments on their Facebook pages, consequently deleting comments and excluding people from the page. Most of the parties stress that they do not remove comments that disagree with the party and the policy, rather, users who demonstrate uncivilized online behavior (i.e., sexist, racist, inflammatory, etc.):

> It happens that we delete comments and block people. We have written on SV's Facebook page that harassments and discriminatory comments will be removed. We don't delete arguments that disagree with us, but views that are sexist, racist or harassing. It ruins the debate for other people, it is not because we can't withstand it. (Socialist Left)

Misunderstandings in comment threads are frequently occurring. In addition, the tone in the comments affects how the thread develops. The Labour Party has observed some tendencies:

> When we post something on Facebook, we immediately get a lot of feedback. A tendency we have seen is that those who are positive, like something, while those who are negative, comment.

[. . .] It is important for us to encourage a positive tone in the beginning. If the 2-3 first comments are negative, the thread has a tendency to become negative. We try to be present in the start (of the discussion), we keep an eye on the comments, take part in the discussion, and clarify misunderstandings. It works fairly good, but it is time-consuming. (Labour Party)

Second, negative media attention related to comments is another disadvantage mentioned by the parties. Nasty Facebook comments from users can potentially create news stories. However, it is more common that individual politicians write something embarrassing in social media that get picked up by a journalist. A typical news story is "someone says something stupid on Facebook or Twitter," according to the Progress Party. Thus, loss of control in social media is not only related to citizens' increased access to politicians' digital platforms, but it also applies to politicians' increased publishing possibilities, uncontrolled by the party.

Third, limited human and financial resources constrain the parties' ability to engage with citizens on social media. Although it is free to create a Facebook page or profile, social media are not without costs. The Liberal Party did not have a dedicated employee on social media; updating and responding to people had to be integrated into the ordinary working routines of the three communication people. The person who was in contact with media on a specific issue was also responsible for publishing the story on the webpage and in social media, in addition to follow-up in the comment section:

If we had not shared this (the response job) on everyone, one person would be stuck answering. It has to be part of the work description. Otherwise, you will not be able to answer people. (Liberal Party)

In addition, the "authenticity requirement" mentioned by many of the parties—that party leaders personally should update and answer citizens in social media—limits the interaction based on the party leader's online capacity:

Erna (Solberg, party leader) answers herself on Twitter and Facebook. We are never posting anything on Twitter for her, we do that sometimes on Facebook, but she approves everything. She writes much herself. She can spend one afternoon answering people on Facebook. It's nice, then you know you get an answer from Erna Solberg, not an advisor. It means we are not able to answer everyone, which is impossible. (Conservative Party)

All the parties have created Facebook pages for the party and the party leader. However, Facebook's algorithms encourage page owners to pay for ads or sponsored stories in order to become visible in users' newsfeed (Bechmann & Lomborg, 2013; Bucher, 2012). Facebook algorithms bury much of the content from a political page in users' newsfeed; thus, in order to become visible, parties have to encourage fans to be very active, in addition to buy visibility in the newsfeed. Sponsored material also means changes in how parties invest in advertising. Most of the parties avoid ads in printed newspapers; rather, Facebook is preferred. Promoted content on Facebook is also used by the Socialist Left Party:

Sometimes we pay to promote content, which means visibility, and we have seen that it works, the graphs are going up. But we have not measured it in more details than that. (Socialist Left)

While the interviews outlined the strategic thinking and motivation within the parties regarding online interactivity, I will now take a closer look at the interactive practices on the parties' Facebook pages.

Interactive Data From Facebook Pages

In order to scrutinize in greater details the responsive behavior of the Norwegian political actors, the Facebook data will now be used to compare and contrast the findings from the interviews. In 2013, Facebook page owners could choose whether people could post on the timeline and upload photos and videos. By gauging the possibility to post on the timeline, we can evaluate how open the political parties' Facebook pages are. Can users post on the political page's timeline or are they restricted to comment on posts? Comments are not possible to turn off on Facebook pages (Facebook, 2013). By turning off postings on the timeline, parties can, to a certain degree, control how people interact with the page.

As Table 2 shows, almost all the examined pages are open for postings on the timeline. The only exceptions are the two minority leaders, Audun Lysbakken (Socialist Left Party) and Trine Skei Grande (Liberal Party), who had disabled postings on their timeline. They are smaller parties with limited resources for online interaction and moderation, which might be one of the explanations for this situation. I will return to this topic in the discussion.

Gauging the level of interaction between citizens and the political parties, the number of comments by users is fairly overwhelming for the parties, particularly the Labour Party and the Progress Party, as displayed in Table 3. These two major parties had most fans on Facebook among the Norwegian political parties.

While particularly the Progress Party, the Conservative Party, and the Liberal Party expressed Facebook as a "digital street stall" where the party meet and talk with voters, the Progress Party is most successful in turns of implementing the strategy in practice. The Progress Party is the most interactive party in terms of total number of comments by page owner, followed by the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party, while the Liberal Party and finally the Conservative Party are trailing behind. The Conservative Party is hardly interactive on the party's Facebook page at all, replying to only 22 comments, thus more or less abandoning its interactive Facebook strategy.

Table 2. Minor and Major Political Parties' and Party Leaders' Facebook Pages on August 1, 2013.

	Major parties						Minor parties			
	Labour Party	Party leader Stoltenberg	Conservative Party	Party leader Solberg	Progress Party	Party leader Jensen	Socialist Left Party	Party leader Lysbakken	Liberal Party	Party leader Grande
Number of Facebook fans	52,424	315,592	20,231	30,509	47,152	86,789	9,090	5,536	7,971	8,514
Can users post on the Facebook wall?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No

Table 3. Number of Comments by Page Owners and Users on Examined Political Facebook Pages.

Party/party leader	Comments by page owner	Comments by users	Page owners' comments in percentage of total
Labour party	475	10,503	4.5
Jens Stoltenberg	1	20,843	0.004
Progressive party	1,001	18,452	5.4
Siv Jensen	4	23,116	0.02
Conservative party	22	2,234	0.9
Erna Solberg	10	7,518	0.1
Socialist Left party	414	1,081	38.3
Audun Lysbakken	33	740	4.4
Liberal party	94	1,020	9.2
Trine Skei Grande	13	849	1.5

Assessing which party leader receives most comments, Jensen, Stoltenberg, and Solberg from the three major parties are way ahead of the minor parties. The difference between the party leaders who receive most comments (Jensen) and least (Lysbakken) is more than 22,000 comments. Nevertheless, Audun Lysbakken from the Socialist Left is most active in responding to user comments, followed by Trine Skei Grande (Liberal), Erna Solberg (Conservative), Siv Jensen (Progress), and finally, then Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg (Labour). When comparing these findings with the interview data, the contrast is apparent. Clearly, party leaders have very limited capacity to respond to comments on Facebook, and their communication advisors can choose to do two things on the party leaders' behalf: either respond to users logged in as the party leader or answer from their personal or the party's profile, signed with their (own) initials. Based on these data, the first alternative is hardly used since the response rate is so low. If the communication advisors had responded from their own account and signed with their initials, it will not be tracked in this data collection as the application only tracks responses from the page owner. The "authentication requirement"—that party leaders mostly write and respond on their own Facebook pages—can be one explanation for the lack of response. I will return to this point in the discussion.

When comparing the percentage of comments by page owners in relation to the total number of comments by users, the image changes somewhat. The two minor parties, the Socialist Left and the Liberal Party, stand out as active compared to the major parties. Similarly, Lysbakken from the minor party Socialist Left is the most active replier on Facebook in proportion of the total number of comments by users. Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg had only one interaction with voters on Facebook in total during this election period. The expressed intention to interact with voters on Facebook is not followed up on the major party leaders' Facebook pages compared to the leaders of minor parties. I will now turn to the discussion to analyze the implications of these findings.

Discussion

Initially, I expected to find that the political parties had implemented social media in the campaign mix, but without taking full advantage of the interactive and participatory potential of social media such as Facebook. I also expected to find a disparity between the social media strategy and the online performance of political parties and party leaders during the election campaign, as well as differences between minor and major parties' interactive capacity, mainly due to resources.

This study finds that all examined parties or party leaders had profiles on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr and YouTube, and all the interviewed political parties expressed awareness of what content is creating engagement (comments, likes, shares) on Facebook. While Norwegian political

parties were testing and experimenting with social media in national elections ahead of 2009 (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Kalnes, 2009; Karlsen, 2012b), this study demonstrates that Facebook and Twitter were tightly integrated in the campaign "media mix" in 2013. Although they did not use the term, the interviewed parties recognized the social media logic (Klinger & Svensson, 2014; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). The close integration of traditional and social media, online, and offline events in Norwegian politics portrays a hybrid political communication environment (Chadwick, 2013).

Nevertheless, this study also demonstrates that there is a clear discrepancy between parties' interaction strategy and actual responsiveness in social media, supporting the initial expectation based on previous research. A growing international body of empirical literature (i.e., Bruns, Enli, Skogerbø, Christensen, & Larsson, 2016; Nielsen & Vaccari, 2013) confirms that social media's afforded potential for interaction between the electorate and political actors is only marginally utilized. In the following discussion, I will particularly highlight how the idealistic strategy and the "authentication requirement" affect the major and minor parties' Facebook activities.

All the parties, and particularly the liberal and conservative parties, expressed idealistic intentions to interact with potential voters on Facebook. Three of the Norwegian parties (Liberal, Conservative, Progress) used the term "digital street stall" to describe Facebook's function—a place to meet and talk with voters. The main strategic advantages that were identified for using social media and specifically Facebook for online communication among the parties were (1) dialog with sympathizers and potential voters, (2) feedback on policy and performance, and (3) bypassing mass media. But although all the parties expressed idealistic and optimistic intentions to interact with voters, only a small fraction of the voters got response from these major and minor parties on Facebook. As expected based on the literature, strategy and online practice are apparently two different things, which the interaction data from the political Facebook pages show. By examining how often page owners participated in the dialogue on Facebook, we are able to see how particularly the Conservative Party—among the parties—and Siv Jensen (Progress Party) and former Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg (Labour Party)—among the party leaders—did not prioritize to interact with voters on Facebook. This study demonstrates that online communication in social media is still challenging for political parties, as pointed out in previous research (Klinger, 2013; Mascheroni & Mattoni, 2013). The parties describe lack of control regarding online reputation and negative media attention as clear disadvantages of online interaction. In addition, social media require substantial human and financial resource. It requires organizational changes (i.e., new competences and changed work routines) and substantial amount of time and resources, thus particularly challenging for minor, less resourceful parties. Online interaction and engagement with voters were the expressed strategies for all the parties, and all the interviewed parties except one (the Liberal Party) had hired people to work dedicated with social media outreach. Still, the amount of comments on Facebook was often overwhelming for the parties, particularly two of the largest parties, the Labour Party and even more so for the populist right-wing Progress Party.

However, the two minor parties have a much more communicative approach when looking at the share of comments from the parties and party leaders versus the total share of comments. Compared to the three largest parties, the interaction numbers for the two smallest parties are minuscule. Somewhat surprisingly and in contrast to the expectations, the minor parties are managing to give more of their users (in percentage of the total number of comments) feedback on Facebook. Although smaller and marginalized parties have less resources to generate effective communication (Klinger, 2013), minor parties have stronger incentives compared to major parties to be interactive due to less access to traditional media and less marketing resources (Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014; Skovsgaard & van Dalen, 2013), which is also confirmed in the interviews in this study. Thus, using social media to bypass media and communicate directly with voters is attractive for minor parties, despite limited resources compared to the major parties. Thus, differing from this article's initial expectations, parties with least resources are more interactive in relative terms.

Some additional paradoxes are evident from these findings: The study finds a higher degree of broadcasting in online communication from the party leaders of the major parties (Labour, Conservative, Progress), meaning they are seldom responding to voters on their Facebook pages. However, they are creating more comments and interactions than party leaders of the minor parties. It is not surprising that major parties receive more attention and are more visible among voters compared to minor parties, also in social media (Lilleker et al., 2011). Minor parties have smaller voter bases and limited issue ownership (Karlsen & Aardal, 2011, p. 139), thus limited possibilities to reach out to larger voter groups, also via social media. While party leaders of the minor parties have a more interactive communication style compared to major party leaders on Facebook, they are creating less comments and interaction among the voters, also compared to their parties' Facebook pages.

Another explanation why the interaction is limited on the party leaders' pages is the so-called "authenticity requirement"—the expectation and practice that party leaders preferably should do the Facebook updates and replies themselves. The "authenticity requirement" is not, to the author's knowledge, previously mentioned in the research literature and was not expected based on existing literature. The tendency is particularly noticeable on Stoltenberg's (Labour Party) and Jensen's (Progress Party) Facebook pages, where only *one* and *four* replies, respectively, were identified in the examined time period. By treating communication on social media literally as personal communication, the

authenticity requirement is thus creating what I will call a "social media interaction deadlock," particularly for the party leaders of the major parties. Although it is apparently common for communication advisors to answer on behalf of the party leader (as page owners, but signed with their own signatures), it is practically impossible (or meaningful) to answer everyone. But how many and whom to answer are something the parties struggle to figure out, as the discrepancy between the strategy and practice demonstrates.

If citizens and politicians have different expectations for online communication, "communication asymmetry" may occur. To adjust citizens' expectations for online communication can therefore be crucial. Social media may invite to interaction, but the challenge is to strike a balance between citizens' expectations for dialogue and influence versus resource-limited politicians who find it too demanding to participate to the extent citizens expect (Lüders et al., 2014, p. 460). Some party leaders, such as Erna Solberg (Conservative Party), used Facebook to adjust voters' online communication expectations. Solberg posted an update on her Facebook page 1 month before the election where she explained why she disallowed private messages during the last month of the election campaign. She explained that she received many messages, both on the wall and as private messages, and asked voters for patience—she was only able to answer a few open comments on the wall during the hectic campaign (Solberg, 2013). This kind of "dialogue expectation adjustment" can be helpful for the relationship between voters and politicians in social media, also suggested by Lüders et al. (2014).

Nevertheless, this study has some limitations that should be addressed. The article examines the number of answers from parties and party leaders' Facebook pages, not the content of the answers. As the *fb_loader* software was not able to differentiate between text and icons (such as a "like"), thumbs up from the parties can be included in the data material as replies. Similarly, the length of the text written by political page owners was not specified. In addition, if someone from the party participated in the comment section, but was not logged in as "page owner," this study has not been able to detect that participation. Thus, in order to understand how *substantial* the conversation between political actors and citizens is, qualitative studies of the dialogues are needed. This study has not examined the content of the comments on the parties' Facebook pages, but we should also take into account the potential community aspects of these pages. When voters are commenting on a politician's Facebook page, the main intention is not necessarily to engage in a conversation with the politician or party, but with like-minded party sympathizers or to provoke debate among opponents. Are there differences in online conversation on candidates' pages versus high-profile ministers or the Prime Minister? What characterizes the debate among commentators on these pages? Future studies could look further into online communities on political Facebook pages—that is, what attempts are done by political parties to collect, systematize, and use suggestions from citizens in social media?

This study has demonstrated that if parties are serious about their interaction strategy and want Facebook to be more than a broadcasting platform, organizational changes need to take place in order to prepare the political parties for substantial online interaction with citizens. Moreover, these findings make a number of contributions to the existing literature by providing additional details and explanations to untangle the social media paradox. To sum up, we can rephrase "everyone can publish, but few get heard" (Moe & Larsson, 2012) to "everyone can comment, but few get answered" on parties' and particularly party leaders' Facebook pages.

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