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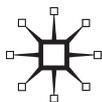
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SOCIAL MEDIA, PARTIES, AND POLITICAL INEQUALITIES

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PART I

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*Background*

## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction

### **Social Media: A Political Revolution?**

Recently, scholars and pundits alike have argued that social media—online platforms that allow a user to send, share, and consume information<sup>1</sup>—were crucial to the success of the Arab uprisings (e.g., Howard & Parks, 2012; Shirky, 2011), that they played an important role in mobilizing people in Latin America (e.g., Harlow & Harp, 2012), and that President Obama to a large extent owed his wins in the 2008 and 2012 Presidential elections to his team’s innovative use of social media (e.g., Agranoff & Tabin, 2011; Bartlett, 2013; Crawford, 2009; Katz, Barris, & Jain, 2013; Pollard, 2013; Swigger, 2013). While these examples are highly diverse, all focus on the supposedly high impact of social media in politics, on the instances where social media made a positive difference.

Yet this revolutionary characteristic of social media is far from uncontested. The “utopian view” is opposed by a strong collective of scholars and pundits sometimes labeled as “social-media skeptics” (see Larsson & Svensson, 2014). These skeptics point out the failed social-media protests in Belarus (2006) and Iran (2009) (e.g., Schectman, 2009; Shirky, 2011); show that social media were far from sufficient to topple authoritarian rulers in the Middle East (e.g., Wolfsfeld, Segev, & Sheafer, 2013), claim that social media are no solution for disengagement (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009), assert that politicians are far more active users of social media than citizens (e.g., Parmelee & Bichard, 2011; Katz, Barris, & Jain, 2013), and address the fact that politicians in several countries saw their reputations and careers severely damaged when they posted messages “in the heat of the moment” that transgressed social and/or political norms (Jacobs & Spierings, 2015; Lee, 2012).

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These examples raise a number of important questions. Can both the utopists and the skeptics be right? Do utopists focus on the exceptional positive cases too much? On the one hand, maybe the actual impact of social media in normal politics is far more modest? On the other hand, one could wonder whether skeptics are perhaps too skeptical. Might social media actually change political dynamics or the balance of power? These are the questions that triggered the writing of this book. We will therefore not focus on the exceptions to daily life—the groundbreaking, extreme, and rare events broadcast on CNN, BBC, ARD, or NOS. We will focus on “normal politics” and the way social media can and cannot—or do and do not—reshape the dynamics and balance of the political system in established Western democracies.

Whereas the political struggles in many non-Western regimes are about the power balance between citizens and the authoritarian or pseudo-democratic regimes per se, in Western democracies’ everyday politics, the relationships between different political parties, between politicians within parties, between parties and the media, and between parties and social groups are more prominent. A large part of Western democratic politics revolves around the behavior and ideas of political parties, party officials, and politicians. Their use of, and views about, social media’s political importance thus are crucial. Yet so far, the few existing detailed case studies or books on social media tend to emphasize the linkage between voter and politics (Parmelee & Bichard, 2011; Katz, Barris, & Jain, 2013). This book should be seen as complementing those studies, providing additional depth with respect to the supply side of politics: the parties themselves. Obviously, we will not lose sight of the voter-politics linkage, as it is an important aspect of normal politics. However, this linkage is just one element of a broader picture: If social media have a transformative potential to change political power relations and inequalities, whether or not that potential actually materializes, depends on these political actors.

***The Benchmark: Social Media in US Politics***

Most of the studies on social media address the situation in US politics (Conway, Kenski, & Wang, 2013; Evans, Cordova, & Sipole, 2014; Katz, Barris, & Jain, 2013; Lassen & Brown, 2011; Parmelee & Bichard, 2011; Peterson, 2012) or are limited to Anglo-Saxon, majoritarian political systems in which only one politician is elected per district (Gibson & McAllister, 2011; Gibson & McAllister, 2014; Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Lilleker & Jackson, 2010). In such majoritarian systems, the gap

between large and small parties is extremely wide and (candidates from) smaller parties face an uphill struggle more than anywhere else. A result of this is that these smaller parties have far fewer resources but arguably also more motivation/incentive to use (cheap) social media.<sup>2</sup>

Early campaigning research found that the Internet (Web 1.0) mostly benefited major or large parties, as they had the resources to create good-looking websites with lots of bells and whistles and to buy large databases of email addresses (cf. Margolis & Resnick, 2000). Yet the few studies that focused on how social media were used in everyday politics came to more mixed conclusions. Most did at first find some indications of the power balance shifting in favor of the minor parties and their candidates when Web 2.0 started to supplement websites, even though later on, when social media started playing a more independent role, a return seemed to take place to business as usual. Lassen and Brown (2011), for instance, showed that minor party candidates used Twitter the most, and two years later Conway, Kenski, and Wang (2013) still stressed that nominees from major parties were not the ones tweeting the most. In 2014, however, Evans, Cordova, and Sipole observed that third-party candidates were far less active on Twitter but used the platform differently in that they are (or remain) more interactive and share more personal information. In short, adding up the American studies suggests that technological innovations go through a diffusion process whereby the initial advantage of smaller parties is washed out in later phases. In these later phases there are still differences between parties even though these are best described as “change within a continuity.”

### *Moving beyond US Politics*

But do these findings hold true in other contexts? While US politics is highly relevant—it influences many other countries through the Americanization/professionalization of politics (Gibson & Römmele, 2001; Plasser & Plasser, 2002)—the political and media constellation of the United States is rather unique. For instance, US politics is extremely personalized; the political system is almost purely first-past-the-post, leading to a two-party system, and as a result of liberal campaign-financing rules, the big parties’ financial resources are unrivaled (Bowler, Donovan, & Van Heerde, 2005). In other words, the results of studies on the United States may well not apply to Western democracies that have a completely different political system and culture.

The central question of the book therefore is: *How have social media transformed normal politics in Western democracies?* We specifically focus

on how social media may transform existing power balances in party politics and on whether they mitigate existing inequalities or rather reinforce them—hence the title of the book. By doing so we embed ourselves in the broader theoretical debate that pits those who believe that technological innovations can level the playing field (“equalization”) against those who believe these innovations only empower the powerful (“normalization”). Empirically, we will zoom in on the Netherlands and compare it to the radically different case of the United States. Since a lot of the available material deals with the United States, we still do not know whether these insights travel to other Western democracies. By making the Netherlands our main empirical focal point, we can answer that question.

Our contribution is therefore threefold. First, we update and reiterate the theoretical debate about the transformative power of social media and offer a new theoretical framework, namely a motivation-resource-based diffusion model. Second, we expand the scope of the classic theories and apply this model not only from a perspective merely focusing on the competition between parties, but also from a perspective that considers competition within these parties and between different political arenas such as the local versus the national. Third, we test insights from the US literature in a completely different setting, the Netherlands, and offer rich and detailed information about the use and effects of social media on normal politics, placing these findings in a broader comparative perspective.

### **Theoretical Challenges: Equalization versus Normalization**

Time and again the advent of a significant new technology raises the question whether such innovations constitute a so-called game changer (Chadwick, 2013). Social media has recently attracted a lot of scholarly attention addressing that very question (Gibson & McAllister, 2011; Gibson & McAllister, 2014; Gibson, Römmele, & Williamson, 2014; Koc-Michalska, Gibson, & Vedel, 2014; Koc-Michalska et al., 2014; Kruikemeier, 2014; Small, 2008; Spierings & Jacobs, 2014; Utz, 2009; Vergeer & Hermans, 2013). Given the importance of elections in democracies and given that new media and political campaigns are at the heart of both political communication (Graber & Smith, 2005) and comparative politics (Boix & Stokes, 2007), one question that has become particularly salient in both these fields is whether social media replicate existing power differences and mainly benefit the already dominant political actors (the so-called normalization thesis) or

whether technological innovations and new media in fact level the playing field, making it easier for minor and marginalized political actors to gain power (the so-called equalization thesis). This “[e]qualization versus normalization is a key debate in the cyber-campaigning literature” (Small, 2008:52), and the question of whether and how new web technologies influence the power balance between parties has now been puzzling scholars for almost 20 years (Castells, 1996; Cornfield, 2005; Gibson & McAllister, 2014; Gibson & Römmele, 2001; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Margolis, Resnick, & Wolfe, 1999; Negroponte, 1995; Schweitzer, 2011; Sudulich & Wall, 2010; Vaccari, 2008).

Proponents of the *equalization thesis* suggest that new technologies such as social media level the playing field and redistribute the power balance in favor of previously disadvantaged parties (e.g., Gibson & McAllister, 2011). Regarding social media, the core argument is that social media are (1) cheaper, (2) require less expertise, and (3) allow disadvantaged parties and candidates to bypass traditional media (e.g., Gibson & McAllister, 2014; Vergeer & Hermans, 2013). Furthermore, it has been claimed that its *interactive* nature and its possibility of *anonymity* also benefit marginalized groups (Vergeer & Hermans, 2013). Others espouse the *normalization thesis* and contend that new technologies merely reinforce existing inequalities (e.g., Jackson and Lilleker, 2011). Normalizationists, generally refer to three explanations: (1) online technologies simply replicated old power inequalities because larger parties have *strategic departments*; (2) already powerful politicians are generally better campaigners and more *professional*, and thus better at taking advantage of new technologies; and (3) leading political actors tend to have the resources and *motivation* (see Small, 2008:52).

As will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2, the current normalization-equalization debate, which originated in the early days of the Internet, is in dire need of an update: first, because it is still unclear *why* social media specifically would have an impact on politics; second, because we have little insight in where and when which social media have an impact; and third, because we know very little about which political power relations and inequalities social media have an impact on.

### ***Why Would Social Media Reshape Political Relations?***

The theoretical explanation regarding why social media may have an impact needs to be refined. Currently, the impact of *social media* (as something different from traditional websites) is unclear, and there seem to be inconsistencies in the theories. For instance, if social media

are cheaper, why then are resources still so important (cf. Gibson & McAllister, 2014; Small, 2008)? And, if social media can be used to surpass existing media, why then do many politicians seem to target their tweets to journalists in particular (Peterson, 2012)? These examples illustrate that it neither has been thought through how the attributes that make social media unique influence politics nor whether politicians' actual social-media usage fits this theoretical uniqueness. In this book we address both these crucial questions.

First, social media (also called Web 2.0) are said to be different from Web 1.0 in several respects. Social media create large networks that diffuse political messages across societal strata through “likes,” “shares,” and “retweets” at an unprecedented speed and volume—going viral (Steinfeld, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). They also facilitate unmediated and interactive forms of communication that can be used by anyone, given that the platforms are free to access (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Spierings & Jacobs, 2014; Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013). The general logic in the equalization and normalization theories is based on the rise of the Web 1.0, but social media have unique characteristics. It specifically needs to be thought through how exactly social media's “causal characteristics” (Goertz, 2006) potentially benefit one group over another. Yet even that is not sufficient: We need to take the debate one step further and incorporate politicians and parties as important *agents* in the framework. It is the actors that enable this causal potential, not just the technical characteristics of social media. Keeping the politicians and parties out of the picture keeps the normalization-equalization debate an academic one, which hardly helps to understand, explain, and inform everyday politics. A few scarce studies focusing on the motivation of politicians is just a first step in this respect (see Small, 2008:52).

Second, the existing literature mainly focuses on how Web 2.0 differs from 1.0. This approach obscures the differences between different social-media platforms. Juxtaposing the two politically most prominent platforms, Facebook and Twitter, shows just how flawed this is. Indeed, Facebook uses far more complex algorithms to punish “bad messages” and is less publically accessible, yet it allows for more visual and personal material. In short, it is a fairly complex personal peg board. Twitter, however, is openly available and a treasure trove for journalists; it is simple but overwhelming, due to it featuring lots of short shout-outs. Twitter is, in sum, a personal press agency.<sup>3</sup> In other words, these different platforms have different strengths and weaknesses, and are perceived and used differently. Understanding *the* impact of social

media on everyday politics implies that we need to think through and study how different social media differ, not focus only on Twitter (e.g., Jacobs & Spierings, 2014; Kruikemeier, 2014; Peterson, 2012; Vergeer & Hermans, 2013; Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013) or lump the different platforms together (e.g., Hansen & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2014; Koc-Michalska et al., 2014).

### ***Where and When Would Social Media Reshape Political Relations?***

The second challenge in understanding the impact of social media is knowing where to look. It is quite unlikely that the results obtained from studies on the United States and other majoritarian political systems translate to other nonmajoritarian countries one-to-one. For instance, some claim that politicians can be expected to benefit more from social media in majoritarian systems because the nature of both social media and the system is more geared toward the person, not the party (Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013), but this has not been studied. At the same time, in countries with relatively strict campaign-financing legislation, social media might have more impact as they are a very cheap campaign tool. To some extent these are empirical issues, but evidently they also raise theoretical questions about context dependency and the generalizability of country-study findings. We will now discuss three such questions.

First, the political system can be expected to shape the extent to which social media affect the political power balance. Considering the characteristics of social media, the degree of personalization, the campaign-financing regulations, the media system, and the role of journalists are our main focus here. The mechanisms behind social media's impact on the power balance in politics between the different actors should be assessed against that background. However, as said, a lot of the established Western democracies are parliamentary systems with a proportional electoral system in which the dominant position of the biggest parties is more precarious to begin with. Such a context may increase the zeal and opportunities of the smaller parties in applying technological innovations, while bigger parties at the same time have to be on the lookout, as their position is more vulnerable.

Second, social-media theories are usually tested at the national level. As such “first-order” elections attract a great deal of attention from citizens and media alike, one can expect that the added value of social media is relatively limited. It is likely that in second-order elections, such as

local or European elections, the unique potential of social media to create large networks has a stronger transformative power, given that these arenas often attract far less attention from the traditional media and thereby often largely remain invisible. Unfortunately, these two arenas are often neglected (Gibson & McAllister, 2014:2; though see: Larsson, 2013; Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013). In other words, to understand the impact of social media in nonnational elections, we argue for more theoretical attention to the way the transformative power of social media is conditioned by the visibility of a political arena.

Third, in many countries, including the Netherlands and the United States, social media are no longer a complete novelty, and their impact might have changed over time. If pioneers have shown that social media improved their situation vis-à-vis the frontrunners (equalization), the latter, having seen what works and what does not, might have decided to pick up the glove and start using social media too (see Gibson & McAllister, 2014). Moreover, in the early-adoption phase, politicians who used social media might have benefited from being modern and progressive.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as soon as social media became part of everyday politics this advantage is likely to have evaporated. In fact, the effect may be such that those who shy away from using social media are at a disadvantage: the early-bird benefit has then changed into an absentee penalty. In sum, the timing and political popularity of social media needs to be assessed to understand its actual equalizing potential.

### ***On Which Political Power Relations and Inequalities Do Social Media Have an Impact?***

The final theoretical (and empirical) challenge can be found in the lack of an overarching framework. The equalization-normalization framework might be argued to be the most comprehensive one, but it mainly focuses on interparty relationships; most research on the transformative power of social media primarily examines how social media change the dynamics between (candidates of different) parties, studying whether major, minor, or fringe parties benefit more from technological innovations in communication (though see: Karlsen, 2011; Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013). As many would argue that the power balance between parties with different ideologies is most indicative of the direction a country takes, this focus might appear logical, but there is actually no theoretical reason not to expect social media to shape intraparty relationships—the power balance between different politicians in a party—or those between the individual politician and the party.

Given the logic just mentioned, intraparty relations might seem trivial, but nothing could be further from the truth. These power balances are crucial in shaping the degrees and practices of personalization and representation, and thus fundamental to the functioning of our democratic systems. If social media allow individuals to build large personalized and unmediated networks, this might actually be most useful to politically marginalized and underrepresented groups such as women and ethnic minorities. We do know that the first woman on a list and the first ethnic-minority candidate often receive a bonus in list-proportional electoral systems (André, Wauters, & Pilet, 2012; Thijssen & Jacobs, 2004), and in the United States the “social-media president” (Katz, Barris, & Jain, 2013) was also the first African American President. Our knowledge about how ethnic or gender profiling changes the intraparty power balance, however, is fairly limited.<sup>5</sup> Politicians representing specific groups such as ethnic minorities or women can make use of the nonmainstream profiling and tailor to these specific groups without being bound by geographic distances (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Enyedi, 2008).

Similarly, there might be diffuse personalization—strengthening the power of individual politicians *vis-à-vis* parties (Van Aelst, Schaefer, & Stanyer, 2011)—because politicians now have cheap access to their own campaign tools as well as to direct communication channels with journalists on social media (Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012; Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013). As such, social media can also undermine the centralization of the party and make individual candidates more independent from the party leadership.

In other words, the transformative potential of social media can well be expected to extend beyond the interparty relationships that are so central to the equalization-normalization debate. Not adding that important new dimension could easily lead to underestimating the impact of social media. Moreover, given that social media are typically personalized communication tools (Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013), we are actually more likely to see their impact on intraparty politics than on interparty politics.

## Research Design

In the previous section, we formulated three theoretical challenges in developing further understanding of the way social media can reshape and are reshaping everyday Western politics, particularly power relations or political inequalities. The second chapter of this book will

address these challenges and formulate our motivation-resource-based diffusion model. In the chapters after that, we will test the expectations derived from this model.

In this next section, we will discuss how our case study from a comparative perspective is set up and which data sources we will use to answer the core questions formulated above.

### *A Case Study From a Comparative Perspective*

As mentioned earlier, more research is needed to establish whether the results found for the United States translate to other Western democracies, and, more generally, to find out how the political context influences the impact of social media. This book faces that empirical challenge by studying the Netherlands from a comparative perspective. As will be clear by now, we define a “case study in comparative perspective” in line with Gerring (2007:19), as “an intensive study of a single case [a spatially delimited phenomenon observed over a period of time] to shed light on a larger class of cases.” Specifically, we will study the Netherlands from about 2009–2010 to 2014–2015, explicitly providing empirical information on the larger class of cases. This case study is thus an in-depth examination of the how and why: How and why do social media reshape the power balance between parties and politicians? The focus therefore is on within-case variation. This within-case variation in our study can encompass variation in the extent to which politicians use social media and the variation in the parties’ campaign strategies, the popularity of social media over time, the types of messages posted, the reasons for using social media, the risks and opportunities associated with social media, the journalists’ treatment of social media, between political arenas, the resources politicians and parties have, the ideologies, and so forth and so on.

One of the major advantages of this approach is that we can combine a theory-testing and a theory-generating approach (Gerring, 2007:39–41; see also Beach & Pedersen, 2013). On the one hand, we can test the mechanisms proposed by equalization and normalization theory not only in terms of whether the expected effects (changes in the power balance) are found but also whether these changes occurred for the reasons those theories suggest. On the other hand, given that we apply the theories to intraparty relations, in different contexts, and at new levels, it would be very limiting to only test those two theories. In other words, we should also be open to new ideas and political mechanisms arising from the study, as some elements have hardly been theorized before.

The case-study approach allows us to combine theory testing with theory generating, and this is highly suitable for a field such as this, where the existing theory could benefit strongly from further development. As such, our focus is on internal validity. Our choice not to focus on one point in time but to instead cover a somewhat longer time period also helps us in this respect. The time period covered in this book includes two national elections (2010, 2012), as well as local and European elections (2014). Moreover, though social media were a political novelty in 2010, they quickly became widespread in the years that followed. This focus increases our within-case variance and helps us to track developments that might influence the impact of social media on political power relations.

Last but not least, since we place our case study in a larger literature and explicitly relate it to existing studies on other countries, such as more similar European political systems or the United States, we can reach a larger external validity than a classic, independent case study.

### *The Netherlands*

Among the established Western democracies, the Netherlands is in many ways a counterpoint to the United States, and not just because there are roughly 20 Americans for every Dutch citizen and 220 square miles of US territory for every square mile of the Netherlands. The Dutch political system is anything but majoritarian: highly proportional, it has roughly a dozen parties in parliament, and the most proportional translation of the percentage of votes to the number of a party's seats in parliament (Farrell, 2011). In addition, campaign budgets have been fairly limited and, when compared to the United States, the central parties are far more powerful than individual politicians (Andeweg & Irwin, 2005). Hence, if results found for the United States also hold in the context of the Netherlands, this would strongly suggest they are likely to be found elsewhere as well (echoing the case-study logic of a most different system design). Or to put it in fewer than 140 characters: If we can find the same results there, we can find them anywhere.

This is not the only reason why the Netherlands is an interesting case. The country has also been a digital frontrunner in Europe; it is roughly two to three years ahead of most other European countries. The Dutch have a top-ten Internet-penetration rate worldwide—94 percent since December 31, 2013 and rising<sup>6</sup>—as well as a top-ten broadband Internet subscriptions—39.4 percent in the early 2010s.<sup>7</sup> The social-media penetration is high too, with 3.3 million Twitter users in 2012,

in a population of approximately 17 million (Oosterveer, 2013). According to some sources, the Dutch are also the most active social-media users worldwide (Dugan, 2012; Woollaston, 2013). Politicians are also very present on social media: 76 percent of the 531 candidates of the 11 biggest parties in the 2012 national elections had a Twitter account, and 72 percent were present on Facebook.

This frontrunner position makes the Netherlands a particularly interesting case for at least two reasons. The first reason is societal and political, studying this case in detail can help make predictions and formulate policy advice for countries that will probably go through similar developments. The second is that a country with a longer history of social media use can help show developments over time. As suggested by the literature, the initial advantage smaller parties have may later wane, and to study this, we need to be able to look at developments over time.

More generally, zooming in on one country from a comparative perspective allows for more in-depth analyses without losing sight of the larger picture. This particular comparative perspective not only includes a contrast of two extreme cases (the United States vs. the Netherlands), but the Netherlands is also a good archetypical case within the European family of consensus democracies (Jacobs, 2011), and its multiparty system and ballot structure are fairly typical for most Western democracies (Farrell, 2011; Colomer, 2011).

### *Data Sources*

This book primarily draws on expert interviews, aggregate election data, and social-media data from the VIRAL project.<sup>8</sup> Over the course of the project, we conducted 18 interviews with high-profile politicians and with the social-media and web managers of nine parties represented in parliament. These expert interviews provide unique and valuable “behind-closed-doors” information about how political actors perceive the uses, dangers, and opportunities of social media, as well as factual information on the available resources and party policies and control. This qualitative information is accompanied by hand- and computer-coded quantitative data on all 1,024 candidates of parties that were represented in parliament with at least one seat. Of these candidates, we know whether they were present on Twitter (2010/2012), the Dutch social-media platform Hyves (2010), and Facebook (2012). For some years and platforms we also have information on how many friends or followers they had, and how many messages they posted in the period leading

up to the elections. For the 150 Members of Parliament (MPs) in 2010, 2012, and 2015, we have the same or even richer data available. In addition, demographic (gender, ethnicity, age) and political (media coverage, incumbency, preference votes, party, list position) data are available. The core focus of these data is on the supply side of politics: which politicians and parties have decided to use social media and to what extent they did. For several nonnational elections similar data is available.

The analyses of these data are accompanied by additional information derived from social-media content, media coverage, election surveys, party documents, and secondary sources (existing studies on the Netherlands). These data help to unpack the link between politics, social media, and “old” media; to disclose politicians’ views (as expressed in the media); to sketch the electoral background to our core questions; and to illustrate politicians’ presentation and behavior on social media. Evidently, we cannot definitely answer all our questions, certainly not as our study is partly about generating theory, plus there are limitations to the data available. In this respect, our decision to focus on the relationship between parties, politicians, and the media more than on the linkage between politics and voters also requires more focus on the sources used in this book than on voter surveys, for instance (cf. Katz, Barris, & Jain, 2013; Parmelee & Bichard, 2011; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2013).

Roughly speaking, we can compare a case study to a murder case or jigsaw puzzle—as has been done in the literature (e.g., Van Evera, 1997)—in the sense that we have to piece together the evidence and weigh bits and pieces of information, which can be anything from in-between a doubly decisive and a straw in the wind piece of evidence (see Beach & Pedersen, 2013; Gerring, 2007; Van Evera, 1997). These pieces together enable us to piece together the larger picture but will also help to pinpoint the pieces that are still missing. To some extent we already know what these will be: broad interpretative or qualitative analyses of the social-media posts of many politicians and parties are rare, for instance, partly because this is a very laborious endeavor, and such systematic content analysis is beyond the scope of this book as well. Moreover, we first need to try and solve our puzzle or murder case before we can more definitely tell which pieces are missing. For instance, a broad systematic qualitative content analysis of social-media profiles and posts would benefit from a spotlight on the *type* of content that is crucial for finding the missing links.

Overall we draw from various data sources, which is natural for a case-study approach, and this book brings together a unique collection

of data on the Netherlands. Where relevant, more information on the exact data and their collection process is provided in the text.

### *Techniques*

The techniques used to analyze the data depend a great deal on the specific data, and we will therefore discuss these techniques in greater detail in the chapters where they are applied. They encompass everything from qualitative content analyses and the close reading of interview transcripts, to statistical group comparisons and multilevel or (negative) binomial regression analyses.

### **Outline of the Book**

The questions, theories, data, and analyses discussed above will be presented in the seven chapters that make up the three parts of this book. Part I consists of three chapters (including this introduction), providing the necessary background information. Part II presents three chapters that each provide empirical analyses of the Dutch case from a comparative perspective and concern themselves with a specific element of social-media equalization and normalization in normal politics. Part III finalizes the book and reflects on the overall results in two chapters, asking whether social media have a tangible transformative impact and what the road ahead looks like. Below we give a more detailed outline per chapter.

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical background, presenting a systematic overview of the unique characteristics of social media as a means of communication and as a campaigning tool, and relating these to the existing theoretical debates about equalization and normalization. It then explores how and why the transformative impact of these unique characteristics may differ by political system, arena, and political diffusion of social-media context. We end the chapter by extending the debate from the power relations *between* parties to the relationships *within* parties. In closing, this chapter introduces our new theoretical framework, the motivation-resource-based diffusion model.

Chapter 3 outlines the empirical background, discussing the political system of the Netherlands as a typical multiparty parliamentary system and comparing it to other European and North American democracies. It offers general information about the role of social media in politics and about the data on social-media usage by political candidates, as well as newspaper coverage of social-media usage from a comparative

perspective. Above all, this illustrates the increasing importance of social media as perceived by politicians and political journalists, but it also reveals some discrepancies between the opportunities social media offer and their actual usage in politics. At the end of the chapter, we complete the picture by making the connection to the voters. Looking at the latter suggests that the broader public does not share the enthusiasm of the politicians and journalists. Citizens are slower in adopting social media, indicating that social media is most likely to have an indirect political impact (i.e., via traditional media) in the current situation.

The first of the three chapters in Part II, chapter 4, focuses on inter-party relations: Who benefits most, the major or minor parties? Using our interviews and social-media data for all Dutch parties in parliament, we show that it is crucial to take the parties' ideological signature (e.g., postmaterialist, populist) into account. Doing so shows that grouping minor parties by ideological characteristics better explains their social media usage and that minor parties are not a homogenous group for which social media has one and the same effect. Moreover, there is a considerable difference between the situation early on, in 2010, and the time when social media had proven themselves in the eyes of the major parties. Overall, we specify how in the end the unique combinations of the different resources available and dedicated to social media and the (de)motivation behind its use make social media beneficial to the major parties and the more postmaterialist minor ones, while the populist and traditional nonmajor parties are mostly disadvantaged. Chapter 5 deals with the intraparty relationship, arguing that social media can be expected to weaken the position of a party's main politicians and its central leadership, and (thus) particularly benefit politically underrepresented groups. Departing from this point, we first look at the way parties deal with the personalized campaigning that social media induce and the quantitative and qualitative diffusion of social-media usage within parties among different ranks of politicians (list pullers, top 10, and lower ranked politicians). We also specifically study the behavior of women and ethnic-minority candidates, their presence on social media, and their usage and identity presentation. Empirically, social media do not live up to their personalization and profiling potential here: dominant politicians remain dominant, and there are only few differences in terms of gender and ethnicity. Only few high-profile candidates manage to use social media at a high-quality level, and these are mainly the more postmaterialist candidates who have a network and expertise already. Still, both the party management and politicians seem to realize that the larger potential is there. In chapter 6, we look at

the role of the issues dealt with in chapters 4 and 5 in sub- and supra-national politics, providing new material on both local and European elections. The results presented in this chapter roughly show the same results as the previous chapters, but they also refine them and help us understand the dynamics in these political arenas in great detail.

Part III starts with chapter 7, posing a final question that reflects on the results from Part II: Do social media help win elections? The Obama campaigns are examples of the tremendous potential of social media, but the generalizability of these two elections is not yet clear. We argue that social media may not make people shift their vote from a highly conservative party to a green party, but they can in several ways influence people's voting decision within a certain bandwidth. This argument is illustrated using the preference votes for candidates in a list-proportional system. Our analyses as well as other studies more and more show a clear but small effect, particularly after the early-bird benefit disappeared. Finally, in chapter 8, we bring together the results from the empirical chapters, assess the overall transformative power of social media, and explicitly link this discussion to the debates introduced in chapters 1 and 2. In short, we find a multistage process whereby particularly post-materialist parties and candidates in those—less centralized—parties benefit from social media from the start, because of their enthusiasm and the expertise that is almost intrinsic to their ideology. This is equalization. Later on major parties and politicians catch up and have enough support to do so. They normalize their position vis-à-vis the other than postmaterialist actors. Professional usage becomes more and more important in this stage. When finally the most traditional, centralized, and populist parties start adoption social media more and more, their backlog in experience and expertise is considerable, and they have difficulty catching up. They mainly lose against the other nonmajor parties. Finally, the most innovative actors keep ahead by moving to new platforms or higher-quality use, but the old media logic remains rather dominant and social media seem to be underutilized for community-building and benefitting underrepresented groups.

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