21-Dec-2022

Dear Professor Jochem Tolsma,

Your manuscript entitled "How Twitter divides the Dutch parliament:

Social and Political Segregation in the following, @-mentions and retweets networks" which you submitted to Information, Communication and Society, has been reviewed. The reviewer comments are included at the bottom of this letter.

The reviewer(s) would like to see some revisions made to your manuscript before publication. Therefore, I invite you to respond to the reviewer(s)' comments and revise your manuscript.

When you revise your manuscript please highlight the changes you make in the manuscript by using the track changes mode in MS Word or by using bold or coloured text.

Information, Communication and Society has recently changed its referencing style from Harvard to APA. When revising your manuscript please modify your references accordingly. For guidance please refer to the Taylor & Francis APA style guidelines: [https://urldefense.com/v3/\_\_http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/authors/style/reference/tf\_APA.pdf\_\_;!!HJOPV4FYYWzcc1jazlU!7kfZPKQ5Am2MbmFmswet4OIO34k8zXVDddNHStWnDC5FoueXFtCvGY5LwcnqAiTGsG1OwnnIlufYqDO3v5SDuFj\_\_d0dpA$](https://urldefense.com/v3/__http:/www.tandf.co.uk/journals/authors/style/reference/tf_APA.pdf__;!!HJOPV4FYYWzcc1jazlU!7kfZPKQ5Am2MbmFmswet4OIO34k8zXVDddNHStWnDC5FoueXFtCvGY5LwcnqAiTGsG1OwnnIlufYqDO3v5SDuFj__d0dpA$)

Before submitting your revisions, please ensure that your revised manuscript does not exceed the journal’s word limit of 8000 words.

To submit the revision, click here \*\*\* PLEASE NOTE: This is a two-step process. After clicking on the link, you will be directed to a webpage to confirm. \*\*\*

[https://urldefense.com/v3/\_\_https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/rics?URL\_MASK=43bd21ef68b64052b3c52d07239a49df\_\_;!!HJOPV4FYYWzcc1jazlU!7kfZPKQ5Am2MbmFmswet4OIO34k8zXVDddNHStWnDC5FoueXFtCvGY5LwcnqAiTGsG1OwnnIlufYqDO3v5SDuFj9P-06IQ$](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/mc.manuscriptcentral.com/rics?URL_MASK=43bd21ef68b64052b3c52d07239a49df__;!!HJOPV4FYYWzcc1jazlU!7kfZPKQ5Am2MbmFmswet4OIO34k8zXVDddNHStWnDC5FoueXFtCvGY5LwcnqAiTGsG1OwnnIlufYqDO3v5SDuFj9P-06IQ$) . Under "Actions," click on "Create a Revision." Your manuscript number has been appended to denote a revision. Please enter your responses to the comments made by the reviewer(s) in the space provided. You can use this space to document any changes you made to the original manuscript. Please be as specific as possible in your response to the reviewer(s).

Alternatively, once you have revised your paper, it can be resubmitted to Information, Communication and Society by way of the following link:

\*\*\* PLEASE NOTE: This is a two-step process. After clicking on the link, you will be directed to a webpage to confirm. \*\*\*

[https://urldefense.com/v3/\_\_https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/rics?URL\_MASK=f6ab6c744bd047bf9e2858fad203c1d8\_\_;!!HJOPV4FYYWzcc1jazlU!7kfZPKQ5Am2MbmFmswet4OIO34k8zXVDddNHStWnDC5FoueXFtCvGY5LwcnqAiTGsG1OwnnIlufYqDO3v5SDuFjBtA7w9A$](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/mc.manuscriptcentral.com/rics?URL_MASK=f6ab6c744bd047bf9e2858fad203c1d8__;!!HJOPV4FYYWzcc1jazlU!7kfZPKQ5Am2MbmFmswet4OIO34k8zXVDddNHStWnDC5FoueXFtCvGY5LwcnqAiTGsG1OwnnIlufYqDO3v5SDuFjBtA7w9A$)

IMPORTANT: Authors must upload two versions of their manuscript.

The anonymous version of the manuscript should have all information identifying the author(s) removed to allow it to be sent anonymously to referees. This file should be defined as ‘Main Document – without author information

Additionally authors must upload a version of their manuscript including the manuscript title, name(s) and institutional affiliation(s) of the author(s), the word count of the manuscript, an abstract, author(s) contact details, and the name of the corresponding author. When uploading this version of the manuscript, it should be defined as Main Document – with full author details.

If tables and/or figures form part of the manuscript, these should be uploaded as separate, additional files and defined as such.

Please note that editable files such as Word documents are required. Please do not upload PDFs as Production will need separate files to correctly prepare the work for publication.

Please be aware that authors who do not comply with this request will have their manuscript returned to them without review.

Because we are trying to facilitate timely publication of manuscripts submitted to Information, Communication and Society, your revised manuscript should be uploaded as soon as possible. If it is not possible for you to submit your revision in a reasonable amount of time, we may have to consider your paper as a new submission.

Once again, thank you for submitting your manuscript to Information, Communication and Society and I look forward to receiving your revision.

Yours Sincerely,

Brian D. Loader

Editor-in-Chief, Information, Communication and Society

[editor.in.chief.ics@gmail.com](mailto:editor.in.chief.ics@gmail.com)

Referee(s)' Comments to Author:

Referee: 1

Comments to the Author

This paper presents an important understanding of inter-elite communication within the Dutch Parliament. Overall, there is a lot to like about this paper, and I certainly agree with the author(s) that this type of research represents interesting insight into the connections between elected representatives. Within there is a clear attempt to ground the results within theory (although more work could be done here, see below); and the results which highlight the importance of physical distance within Parliament could have implications on other chambers with fixed seating arrangements.

I have responded to this review with the recommendation of major revisions on the basis that there are both quite a few minor changes, but also some substantial ones such as additional analysis that should be required when presenting this case study. This review will go by these topically below:

-----

(major) SNA: Representation of Social Network Analysis through the Sociogram [figure 1]:

The figure here is one of the key outputs of your dataset. However, there should be a justification of why this layout was presented as is. By presenting the network through the seating positions, you risk imposing a certain analysis to readers that might not be exist within the reality of the social network. Instead, you should consider structuring the network though another layout (such as ForceAtlas2) and use modularity classifications to see if both party and seating positions are are visible clusters. If not, this should be explained.

-----

(major) Social Media Data:

While this research makes use of retweets and @mentions, there are a couple of questions within.

-Firstly, it seems the Reply and Mentions are combined into (@mentions). This is a questionable choice considering both these actions are very different types of activity on the platform and convey different meanings. For example, mentions might just be a replacement for a politician’s full name when tweeting about them, while replies are a certain signal of dialogue or responsiveness. If replies are not part of the dataset, they should be! The networks between representatives are vastly different between retweets, mentions, and replies as seen by the reviewer’s own work.

Secondly, likewise, Quote Retweets are not a variable in your analysis. As a feature introduced in 2015, and subsequently well used thereafter, it is a questionable subtraction.

In both instances, if the author(s) do not wish to include these, there needs to be satisfactory justification for not including these variables as part of your analysis.

----

(minor) Theory:

While I agree with the theoretical framework presented, this needs to be sign-posted to within the analysis and results. You could more explicitly state how your work amends/contextualises/contests prior theories, and more strongly present a “so what” to the work.

-----

(minor) Explanation of values:

Some explanation of the variables (example being terms such as ego, alter, & dyad) used in the Analytical Strategy to non-technical audiences might be useful. Especially as the more simplistic features of Twitter’s operation was explained to users. It leaves the reader wondering why where them features of Twitter explained but not these ones involved with analysis.

-----

(minor) Table1:

-Table1. Statistics, It would be useful to highlight the significance of these metrics, if available.

------

(minor) Limitations:

Limitations of the study should be included within the methodology. As readers should not have to wait until the conclusion to frame their interpretation of results.

----

(minor) line by line.

Many of these relate to academic verse and writing styles, the author(s) may wish to give this paper a re-edit as some issues below are recurring ones.

Page – Line | Comment

P3 -21 The ‘might’ in this sentence suggests the author(s) are unaware or are not making an informed argument. What is the basis for your understanding of how networks might form on the basis of party or gender/age/ethnicity?

P3 -26 Two issues:

Firstly: Personally, I would avoid framing political communication & social media research as prospering. This suggests that this is not an already well established field with over a decade of active research!

Second: There are quite a few papers which look at inter-MPs networks. This includes the three research papers highlighted within, but also:

-Del Valle, M.E., Sijtsma, R., Stegeman, H., & Borge, R. (2020). Online Deliberation and the Public Sphere: Developing a Coding Manual to Assess Deliberation in Twitter Political Networks. Javnost. Doi: [https://urldefense.com/v3/\_\_https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2020.1794408\_\_;!!HJOPV4FYYWzcc1jazlU!7kfZPKQ5Am2MbmFmswet4OIO34k8zXVDddNHStWnDC5FoueXFtCvGY5LwcnqAiTGsG1OwnnIlufYqDO3v5SDuFiKICubuw$](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2020.1794408__;!!HJOPV4FYYWzcc1jazlU!7kfZPKQ5Am2MbmFmswet4OIO34k8zXVDddNHStWnDC5FoueXFtCvGY5LwcnqAiTGsG1OwnnIlufYqDO3v5SDuFiKICubuw$)

[This paper should certainly be included as a Dutch case – although from a different methodological perspective, but one which the authors might find a useful comparative point for analysis]

-McLoughlin, L., Ward, S., Gibon, R., & Southern, R., (2020). A tale of three tribes: UK MPs, Twitter and the EU Referendum campaign. Information Polity. Doi:[https://urldefense.com/v3/\_\_https://doi.org/10.3233/IP-190140\_\_;!!HJOPV4FYYWzcc1jazlU!7kfZPKQ5Am2MbmFmswet4OIO34k8zXVDddNHStWnDC5FoueXFtCvGY5LwcnqAiTGsG1OwnnIlufYqDO3v5SDuFihVYG\_yg$](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/doi.org/10.3233/IP-190140__;!!HJOPV4FYYWzcc1jazlU!7kfZPKQ5Am2MbmFmswet4OIO34k8zXVDddNHStWnDC5FoueXFtCvGY5LwcnqAiTGsG1OwnnIlufYqDO3v5SDuFihVYG_yg$)

-van Vilet, L., Törnberg, P., & Uitermark, J. (2021). Political Systems and Political Networks: The Structure of Parliamentarians’ Retweet Networks in 19 Countries. International Journal of Communication. Available at: [https://urldefense.com/v3/\_\_https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/15867\_\_;!!HJOPV4FYYWzcc1jazlU!7kfZPKQ5Am2MbmFmswet4OIO34k8zXVDddNHStWnDC5FoueXFtCvGY5LwcnqAiTGsG1OwnnIlufYqDO3v5SDuFjdBW9GIg$](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/15867__;!!HJOPV4FYYWzcc1jazlU!7kfZPKQ5Am2MbmFmswet4OIO34k8zXVDddNHStWnDC5FoueXFtCvGY5LwcnqAiTGsG1OwnnIlufYqDO3v5SDuFjdBW9GIg$)

-Weaver, I.S., Williams, H., Cioroianu, I., Williams, M., Coan, T., & Banducci, S. (2018). Dynamic social media affiliations among UK politicians. Social Networks. Doi: [https://urldefense.com/v3/\_\_https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2018.01.008\_\_;!!HJOPV4FYYWzcc1jazlU!7kfZPKQ5Am2MbmFmswet4OIO34k8zXVDddNHStWnDC5FoueXFtCvGY5LwcnqAiTGsG1OwnnIlufYqDO3v5SDuFgVOo04yg$](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2018.01.008__;!!HJOPV4FYYWzcc1jazlU!7kfZPKQ5Am2MbmFmswet4OIO34k8zXVDddNHStWnDC5FoueXFtCvGY5LwcnqAiTGsG1OwnnIlufYqDO3v5SDuFgVOo04yg$)

Discussing this area as rare might prove to be a somewhat loaded term for readers who have spotted work not included in the literature review here!

P3-46 The lack of focus on demographic segregation should be the focus of this section – this is the real takeaway from this point (rather than the rarity of this type of research). Put the research gap, and not the numerical number of papers in this area centre stage.

P3-50 Despite has been used a few times already – avoid the overuse of particular words.

P4 – 46 Check capitalisation of the second use of Parliament, and in subsequent use. My Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors suggests this should be capitalised. The journals editors should be able to advise.

P4 -55 ‘for instance’ unnecessary

P5 – 39 -41 Citation needed here.

P5 – 52/53 Again – use of rare. Unless you have conducted a full meta-analysis of papers in this area, how sure are you that this statement is true?

P5 – 50 to P6 14 This is an interesting observation. But other areas of digital culture research certainly speak to online networks being clustered on demographics, and other factors such as class stratification. More research on behalf of the author(s) could be done here to compare online divisions outside of politics with those within.

Page7 The explanation of the actions and meanings of followers and mentions could be more concisely and accurately written. For example, describing a retweet as allowing users to ‘copy’ another users post is somewhat inaccurate.

This section should also include references to those who have worked on understanding the meanings behind these actions.

P18 – 43 Some clunky language “…we did not assess yet whether, for instance, …”

P18 – 57 Use of first person language “your” might be avoided depending on writing preference.

P19 – 55 Again, this might be stylistic, but I would lean towards avoiding rhetorical questions.

Overall, I applaud the approach of the author(s) here, and with some amendments I think that would fit within the remit of the journal.

Referee: 2

Comments to the Author

I enjoyed reading the manuscript. The manuscript addresses a relatively novel subject - the role of new communications technologies in changing party and parliamentary relations - that deserves merit. Some points play in favor of its publication: First of all, it uses a new analytical strategy that allows the authors to take into account the relationship between the different layers of networks between the MP in Twitter, as well as their evolution on multiple time points. In addition, it is well written and has a clear structure, the goals and objectives are expressed unambiguously. Overall, the analysis of the evolution of the three layers of MPs networks in Twitter is a contribution to the field. All these aspects make me lean in favor of publication.

Nevertheless, I feel somehow uncomfortable with the limited theoretical apparatus that has been mobilized to explain the phenomena that focus the attention of the manuscript. It seems that to extract the best conclusions from their data, the authors should devote some effort to integrate in the analysis some theoretical developments specifically focused on explaining the behavior of both the political parties and the MP when using Twitter in the Parliament.

Focusing on parliamentarians, the research has clear methodological advantages that resolves some of the more important issues that plague social media research. First and more important, choosing a set of parliamentarians and their interactions in Twitter is a straightforward, transparent and verifiable way of delineating the population and the sample procedure. This lowers the risk of obtaining inadvertently or uncontrollably –as it is often not descartable in many studies examining politics on Twitter– biased samples and, therefore, arriving to invalid conclusions from the data. In addition, as parliamentarians are public figures, which significantly reduces ethical issues regarding privacy protection and increases possibilities to match data obtained from Twitter with data from other sources. Therefore, the relationships observed in the different layers can be potentially explained by refined theories. Using the party affiliation ideology or position of the MP in the party as explanations of their interactions with other MPs using social media, going beyond naked network theory or substantiating with empirical data the claims of network theory.

Nevertheless, focusing on parliamentarians also limits the scope of research. It is not only that, as it is acknowledged in the manuscript, a longer temporal span and more information about the institutional relations of the MP in the Parliament could certainly explain more detailed hypotheses, but I think that one major limitation of the research is the existence of two theoretical blind spots –so to speak.

The first one is related to the fact that the Parliament is one institution specially designed to favor the dialectic interaction among its members. The actors of the Parliaments, political parties and MP, have more or less formal rules and incentives when interacting to reach their objectives. As it is customarily stated: influencing the policies approved, assuring the vote, or obtaining the offices. This context has to be inevitably relevant in the adoption and use of social media by the parliamentary actors, and it means that it has to result in a special kind of hybridity of online and offline interactions that will be not comparable with other contexts. One obvious consequence is that one cannot assume that social media interactions exhausts the communication between parties or MP. Some of the communication among the MP –probably the most relevant– will not be done through Twitter. This situation may explain one of the intriguing findings of the research: the fact that the interactions among the different political parties tend to decrease in the post-election period, while the formation of the government.

While the first blind spot is related with the existence of an internal communication between MP that is hidden or conveyed with offline means, like the discourses or parliamentary interventions, the second blind spot is related with the importance of the MPs interactivity outside the parliamentarians social media networks. Any activity of the MPs in Twitter is potentially relevant to the members of one’s own party, the rival parties, the journalists attentive to the parliamentary activity and eventually to the voters. Therefore, to understand why some interactions have actually been produced in Twitter by the MPs, we should use the situation and incentives of these MPs when pursuing their ‘fundamental’ objectives. For instance, the more or less safe position of some MPs in the party electoral list together with the degree of centralization of their political parties, can explain their incentives to speak with their own voice and discuss with other MPs or to accept to plainly diffuse the party message re-tweeting the party leader’s tweets. One good reference to construct the kind of theoretical expectations that will help to better understand some of the results obtained in the research would be Jacobs and Spierings (2016), which also take the case of the Netherlands (specially, the 4th and 5th chapters).

Apart from the convenience of taking into account or acknowledging these theoretical points, it seems that the lecture of the results is too sanguine in stating that Twitter is in fact ‘dividing the Duch parliament.’ To be sure, the results show the existence of homophily among the Duch MPs, but these results are like the glass half empty or half full. As it is usual in other works on Twitter and other social media, the level of mentions’ interaction among MPs of different parties is quite large and, what is more surprising, the interaction in the following behavior is also quite large. This result seems to be in line with the Duch political culture and also responds to the incentives provided by a highly fragmented multiparty system that inevitably requires parliamentary negotiations to form coalition governments. Therefore, it seems not very suitable to stress in the conclusions that Twitter is not only dividing the Duch parliament but it is also not contributing to the formation of a deliberative space.

All in all, the problems of the manuscript are not substantial and I recommend a minor revision and resubmit.

Reference

Jacobs, Kristof, and Niels Spierings. 2016. Social Media, Parties, and Political Inequalities. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.