2 State of Research

In this chapter, I look at the two main research areas that this book draws on and contributes to: political participation, and the Internet and politics. As there are comparatively few cultural anthropologists working in either area, this chapter outlines the potential contribution that an anthropological gaze can make.[1] The cultural anthropological perspective differs here to political or media studies perspectives insofar as it sees the everyday of the users/actors as central, and is therefore only indirectly interested in media-technological artefacts themselves (cf. Schönberger 202).

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1 Of course, that is not to say that politics or digitalisation are not objects of their own anthropological research tradition. There have, for example, been three recent anthologies on anthropological research in political fields (Fenske; Adam and Vonderau; Rolshoven and Schneider). The study of questions relating to gender (for example in the DFG-research group Recht – Geschlecht – Kollektivität: Prozesse der Normierung, Kategorisierung und Solidarisierung led by Beate Binder at Humboldt-University Berlin), protests (e.g. Schönberger and Sutter, Kommt herunter, reiht euch ein), and policies (e.g. the DFG-research group Participative development of rural regions. Everyday cultural negotiations of the European Union's LEADER program led by Ove Sutter at Bonn University) are research areas with long and on-going traditions in the discipline. In regards to digitalisation, the German Association of Cultural Anthropology and Folklore Studies' (dgv) "Digitization in Everyday Life" section in particular has been an incubator for diverse anthropological approaches to digitalisation. Its publications have included Koch's anthology Digitisation. Theories and Concepts for Empirical Cultural Research (2017).

2.1 *Update Loading?* – (Re)defining Political Participation

Political participation is the central issue of democracy.[2] As such, this chapter summarises research on political participation in three parts. Firstly, it provides an historical overview of the foci of traditional political participation research, that is the recording and classification of various modes of participation as well as the examination of favourable conditions for political participation. Secondly, it shows how new modes of participation coming out of the political and societal changes of the last century have forced scholars to update hegemonic, conservative definitions of political participation. Thirdly, it examines how definitions of political participation are central to democratic theory discourse, and in doing so, shows how online participation tools such as *Betri Reykjavík* and *LiquidFriesland* challenge the status quo, representative democracy.

2.1.1 Foci of Traditional Research on Political Participation

Since its beginnings in the 1940s, political participation research has tended to focus on two key areas: the recording and classification of the various modes of political participation, and the examination of participation and the conditions which facilitate it (cf. Soßdorf 77). In the following paragraphs, I look at both areas in detail.

The recording and classifying modes of political participation dates back to the beginnings of research in this area. At the outset, research centered on voting behaviour and elections. The focus on election-centred modes of political participation such as contacting politicians or political parties, as well as engaging in election campaigns, continued into the early 1960s. However, as various societal and political changes unfolded, the spectrum of modes of political participation began to expand enormously. From the late 1960s onwards, other modes of political participation had moved to the forefront. Protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, and boycotts were only a few of the modes that developed during the heyday of

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2   Since both research fields, *Betri Reykjavík* and *LiquidFriesland*, are identified as venues of political participation directed at influencing concrete local political decision-making processes (see chapter 4, Research Fields), the research focus here is on political participation. While there are relatively few cultural anthropologists working in the field of political participation, it is part of a substantially larger body of literature on the concept of participation in general, and in which there are a number of (social) anthropologists working (e.g. Cornwall). However, the research area of political participation, including the literature predominantly authored by political scientists, is best suited to the research questions at hand.

the civil rights and student movements, as well as the New Social Movements of the 1970s. With a postmaterialist change of values in the 1990s, modes of civic engagement and voluntary work have also increasingly become understood as political participation (cf. Norris; Putnam; cf. Verba, Schlozman, et al.). More recently, van Deth has argued that the newest developments predict the continued dissolution of boundaries both between societal spheres; and of differentiation between the different roles which these spheres designate for citizens (cf. 'Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft' 172).

Since the beginnings of research in this area, it has been customary to further characterise and categorise the different modes of political participation along binary lines: constituted/non-constituted, legal/illegal, legitimate/illegitimate, and conventional/unconventional. Naturally, authors dealing with the categorisation of modes of political participation did not consult all of them simultaneously and equally. These binary classifications have long been the standard tool-kit for scholars researching political participation and remain so today, with most reproducing these classifications in an unquestioned and uncontested manner in their work (cf. Haunss 34).

In the following, I will outline how these classifications developed conceptually, before suggesting that they should, in fact, be treated with caution. While accepting that classifications and taxonomies always work with simplified and unrealistic ideal types (cf. Schmidt-Hertha and Tippelt 25), one must nevertheless be wary of the normative potential of classifying modes of political participation along those lines. In this case, questions of agency and authority in particular have to be considered. Or, in other words: who has the agency and the authority to decide what is a legitimate form of participation, and what is not?

It is nevertheless rewarding to take a brief look at these binary categorisations, especially as they have the longest tradition in this area of research. The question of legality and illegality appears to be relatively undisputed, at least within democratic societies. In most cases, acts and modes are participation can be classified according to a country's laws. The same can said of constituted/non-constituted modes, especially as few modes of political participation are actually established in law, one being the right to vote. Kaase argues that the costs and consequences for participating in constituted ways are especially low, since a binding rule establishes the context of participation for all participants (cf. 147).

Defining the legitimacy/illegitimacy of political participation is more problematic. In my opinion, due to its' extreme subjectivity, legitimacy is the most diffuse and problematic of these binary criteria. As (il)legitimacy appears to be the aggregated expression of attitudes of individual citizens toward a specific mode of participation (cf. Kaase 148), logically one should never be able to speak of (il)legitimacy as an established criteria; rather, there should be as many versions of

(il)legitimacy as people making up their minds about each, single specific act of political participation. Nevertheless, it is unusual to read of multiple legitimacies from people with different point of views. Rather, one is usually presented with a few dominant voices that exert power and interpretational sovereignty by either deeming an act of political participation legitimate or illegitimate. This can have far-reaching consequences for the groups of actors involved. For example, insecure and timid participants at a demonstration may withdraw from participating in similar events after a politician publicly deems it illegitimate. It becomes clear then that framing or classifying modes of political participation as (il)legitimate raises a number of problems and questions around agency, authority, and interpretational sovereignty.

By introducing the binary of conventional and unconventional political participation, Barnes and Kaase aim to combine the legal constitutional and legitimacy dimensions. For the authors, conventional modes of political participation are centred around established institutionalised elements of the political system that appear established, without being institutionalised themselves (cf. Kaase 148). In contrast, they define unconventional participation as "behavior that does not correspond to norms of laws and custom that regulate political participation under a particular regime" (as cited in de Nève and Olteanu 15). Soon after the release of the work, Barnes and Kaase were criticised for failing to adequately operationalise the unconventional dimension. Not only did the unconventional dimension mix political activities with differing degrees of 'legitimacy', but also with differing legal statuses (cf. Kaase 148).

Indeed, the question of convention is context-dependent and changeable, since cultural, political, societal and social processes are decisive in the public perception of a participatory mode (cf. de Nève and Olteanu 15). In that way, many acts of participation that may have once been viewed as unconventional become conventional over time (cf. Hoecker 10; cf. Fuchs as cited in de Nève and Olteanu 15). Thus, the relevance and analytical gain of categorising acts of political participation according to their (un)conventionality has been increasingly questioned (cf. Hoecker 10; cf. Haunss 35). Although de Nève and Olteanu's updated definition of unconventional participation is interesting, it does not appear to offer enough to justify categorising participation into conventional and unconventional modes.

Overall, the analytical gain offered by all four prominent categorises of political participation is questionable. Classifying acts as (il)legitimate and (un)conventional raises complicated entanglements regarding questions of agency, authority, and interpretational sovereignty. Indeed, the characterisation of political acts along all these dichotomies appears especially hopeless in the light of today's rapid expansion of the repertoire of political participation modes (see upcoming subchapter). Nevertheless, it is important to understand and contextualise typol-

ogies and categories as the central approach to (political) participation research across a number of disciplines, including social anthropology (e.g. Cornwall). My findings and analysis will show that these categorisations of political participation remain deeply entrenched in the views of politicians and administration, programmers, and citizens (prospective users).

The second key area of political participation, the examination of favourable conditions for political participation, is far more contested than that of recording and classifications of political participation. Over the years, scholars have developed various models with differing degrees of empirical cogency and theoretical strengths. For the sake of concision, only the in my eyes most promising model to date, Verba et al.'s *Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM)* is explained here.

CVM draws together and refines two other approaches, *the Socio-Economic Standard Modell (SES)* and *Rational-Choice-Theory (RC)* (cf. Verba, Schlozman, et al. 525). Verba et al. point out that resources like education, income, and social status (the core assumption of the SES-model) cannot alone explain levels of political participation. Not only do the authors expand the definition of socio-economic resources to include time and civic skills (communicative and organisational competences), but they also add two other variables, motivation and network (cf. 267ff.).

The motivation variable is made up of four concepts, each of which has been widely investigated within political participation research: political interest, political information (in the sense of knowledge), political efficacy, and political identification. First, political interest is the central factor within the motivation variable. Countless empirical studies have found that "[c]itizens who are interested in politics – who follow politics, who care about what happens, who are concerned with who wins and who loses – are more politically active" (Verba, Schlozman, et al. 345). Second, political information describes the knowledge of everyday political events, structural or institutional contexts, as well as political actors (cf. Soßdorf 82). Third, "the sense of political efficacy", which was first investigated by Campbell et al. in the 1950s, is defined as "the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process" (Campbell 187). Campbell et al. found that citizens who judge themselves to be politically competent and see the political system as open to the individual exertion of influence are more likely participate politically (cf. 189). Other researchers further developed Campbell et al.'s unidimensional concept of political efficacy to differentiate between internal and external efficacy (cf. Chamberlain 2f.). Here, "external efficacy" refers to the belief that the political elites and the political system are responsible and responsive (cf. Stark 77), and "internal efficacy" describes the belief in one's own ability to influence political matters. While the various influences of the Internet on political participation will be dealt with elsewhere,

it is interesting to note here that both Serup Christensen (cf. 'Slacktivism' 15) and Colombo et al. (in an investigation of 15 countries) (cf. as cited in Escher, 'Mobilisierung' 461), found that Internet use increases both political interest and internal political efficacy. Fourth, understanding political identification as a kind of path dependency, Verba et al. investigated the strength of ties with a particular policy (cf. Soßdorf 82). Combining both the resource and the motivation variable, they state that "interest, information, efficacy, and partisan intensity provide the desire, knowledge, and self-assurance that impel people to be engaged in politics. But time, money, and skills provide the wherewithal without which engagement is meaningless" (354).

Verba et al. attribute slightly less importance to the facilitating effects of the network variable on political participation. In this context, a "network" refers to work surroundings, various forms of clubs and associations, and religious groups as both "training grounds for civil skills" and as "a site for political recruitment" (369). Drawing together all three variables – resources, mobilisation, and networks –, allows the researcher to reach detailed conclusions about the favourability of conditions for political participation in various settings. This will be shown at various occasions throughout this book. Nevertheless, causal links between these factors can never be unambiguously determined, as Brady et al point out: "[p]olitical interest and political efficacy, for example, certainly facilitate political activity, but activity presumably enhances interest and efficacy as well" (271).

2.1.2 New Modes – New Definition?
Defining Political Participation Through the Ages

A rapid growth in the modes of political participation has been detectable since research began in the 1940s.[3] The number of prevalent modes has naturally influenced work on defining participation throughout the decades. Nevertheless, Verba et al.'s definition of political participation, which remains the standard definition today, lists only seven different modes (cf. 51ff.). By the 1990s, however, scholars like Parry et al. had begun to list more than 20 different modes (cf. 39ff.). In 2014, van Deth points out that "the list of modes of political participation is long and

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3   Charles Tilly coined the term repertoire to describe the "variable ensemble of performances" with different targeted outcomes from which social movements pick and mix (3). It also appears to be a suitable term to describe the possibilities for the actions of individuals, which is the focus in this book. Repertoires evolve historically, both over the period that a social movement exists and within the biography of an individual, and they contain a variety of different modes of participation (cf. Schönberger and Sutter, 'Protesthandeln' 24).

gets longer almost daily", ('Map' 349) . According to van Deth, recognising a participation mode has become increasingly difficult these days because of the rapid expansion of diverse political activities all around the world (cf. ibid.). Because of this, an update to the definition of political participation appears imperative.

There is a number of reasons for the development of modes of political participation. In this section, I will provide a brief overview and possible reasons for the "waves" of expansion in the repertoire of political participation in the US and Europe, as well as a brief historic overview of research in this area. Political participation research initially developed out of the study of voting behaviour, especially in the light of suffrage, which meant the inclusion of ever-growing segments of society – including women, minorities, and younger people. In the 1950s, research began to focus on engagement within unions, political parties, and other associations, but these groups were still predominantly investigated for their effects on voting behaviour (cf. Stark 43).[4] Campbell et al. were the first to take other activities, albeit still revolving around the election as the prime mode of political participation (such as taking part in campaign rallies, donating money to candidates, or campaigning), into consideration (cf. 28ff.). At the end of the 1950s, Lane started to break away from the concentration on elections and investigated political participation modes such as approaching politicians, membership in political organisations, and taking part in political discussions (cf. as cited in Stark 46).

Although the modes of participation that scholars investigated continued to grow and resisted any long-term categorisation, the definition of political participation has remained surprisingly static and uncontested since Verba et al.'s original work was published. In different articles from the 1960s, scholars did make some minor alterations and did slightly expand their definition, but by and large, political participation was and is still seen today as "those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" (Verba, Nie, et al. 46).[5] However, there are a number of problems with this insistence on a traditional defi-

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4   Markus Steinbrecher points out that many early modes of political participation already existed but were not taken seriously by most researchers because, at least in the public eye, they had not been properly institutionalised (cf. as cited in Stark 44). This suggests another fascinating research question, albeit one outside the scope of this thesis. Namely, an investigation of the reasons, structures, and contexts that bring scholars to include a certain mode of participation in their work, while excluding others, and by that significantly contributing to the framing of non-institutionalised modes of political participation as minor and of less importance, or as *illegitimate*.

5   In his article "Is it Time to Update the Definition of Political Participation", British political scientist Stuart Fox meticulously illustrates the short conceptual distance from

nition of political participation and attempts by scholars like Jan van Deth, who have dared to conceptualise an updated definition of political participation, have been especially fruitful.

When using a definition that has become cast in stone for over 50 years, researchers may face an imminent danger – that they (subconsciously) analyse the results of empirical investigations in a biased and restricted way in order to fit them into the predominant theoretical concept. Moreover, it can mean that researchers are blind to or have a blinkered view of developments that challenge these established concepts (cf. Theocharis and Deth 160).[6] No doubt the researcher will fit in with the scientific mainstream by sticking to established theory, but this will also limit the ability to generate new insights – surely the main aim of scientific and scholarly investigations.

An analytical blindness is evident in the minimal impact that the major societal and technological developments of the last 50 years have had on the definition of political participation. Those developments have fundamentally shaped the ways in which people see the world, see democracy, see policy(-making) and decision-making, and most importantly, take part (politically) within it. It is hard to believe that these changes have rarely even merited a footnote to Almond and Verba's 1960s "gospel" of participation. Van Deth points out that "(t)he continuous expansion of the modes of participation has confronted many researchers with the dilemma of using either a dated conceptualization excluding many new modes of political participation or stretching their concepts to cover almost everything" ('Map' 351). This becomes especially problematic once one recognises that "[i]f the definition and meaning of democratic engagement is constantly redefined, researchers cannot stick to measures and taxonomies of political participation that proved their usefulness decades ago: the conclusion we draw about the quality of democracy depend on our definition of democratic engagement" (Theocharis and Deth 159).

These observations inevitably hint at the need for a new, more flexible definition of political participation that includes the newer modes of participation that

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    Almond and Verba (1963) to later texts by other authors on political participation in the United Kingdom.

6   This conservative approach towards a research area is exemplified by Hooghe's review of Jan van Deth's suggestion for updating the definition of political participation. Hooghe identifies some elements that van Deth discusses regarding defining any action as political participation as "indeed quite *unproblematic*" simply because they were already included in Verba et al.'s *classical* definition (339, my italics). To Hooghe, these elements would not need further thinking, because Almond and Verba had considered them decades ago. In contrast, he is highly critical of every element that van Deth adds in order to update Almond and Verba's definition to today's circumstances.

have evolved over the last few decades, but which still draws distinct boundaries. I agree with van Deth that the meaningfulness of stretching the original definition to accommodate new modes of participation has been long exhausted. Instead, it is time to leave behind "the conventional approach of presenting nominal definitions to solve conceptual problems" ('Map' 349). While Almond and Verba's ground-breaking 1960's definition will remain a corner-stone of political participation research, it is time for a fresh perspective on the diverse ways in which people participate today. Van Deth's operational map of political participation is one of the few attempts at updating this definition, and while it is not beyond question, it does provide an intriguing start to the conversation.[7]

Van Deth has developed a minimal *operational* definition of political participation which is comprised of four rules. Researchers can then "run" any given phenomena through the rules in order to determine if the activity should be defined as a mode of political participation (cf. 'Map' 354ff.):

- "Rule 1: Do we deal with behaviour?" (354)
- "Rule 2: Is the activity voluntary?" (354)
- "Rule 3: Is the activity done by citizens?" (354f.)
- "Rule 4: Is the activity located in the sphere of government/state/politics?" (356)

As van Deth points out "[t]hese four decision rules already suffice to reach *a minimalist definition of political participation*. […] [A]ll amateurish, voluntary activities located in the sphere of government/state/politics are specimen of political participation as defined by this minimalist definition" ('Map' 356). If the activity does not take place in the sphere of government/state/politics (rule 4), but fulfils one of the three following additional rules, it should as well be defined as participation:

- "Rule 5: Is the activity targeted at the sphere of government/state/politics?" (357)
- "Rule 6: Is the activity aimed at solving collective or community problems?" (358)
- "Rule 7: Is the activity used to express political aims and intentions of participants?" (359)

Consequently, "[a]ny activity that fulfils the first three rules – activity, voluntary, citizen – but is neither located in the political arena nor aimed at political actors or

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7   The conversational nature is enhanced through the rather innovative publishing format in which van Deth's thoughts were first published. Hooghe and Hosch-Dayican subsequently criticise the article, and in a rejoinder, van Deth replies to their criticisms.

collective problems can be depicted as a form of political participation if it is used to express political aims and intentions by the participants" (359). Indeed, van Deth's definitory questions allow the researcher a much clearer understanding of the activity one set out to study. It may be challenging or unusual in the political sciences to work without a concise, nominal definition. However, in light off the ever expanding and ever-changing repertoire of modes of political participation, the traditional ways of categorising and characterising political participation have ceased to be meaningful, and van Deth's operational approach may be exactly what is needed.

2.1.3 Political Participation –
the Centre of Democratic Theory Discourse

"Participation is at the heart of democracy" said Verba et al. in 1995 (129). Originally, this remark aimed at conveying the authors' convictions about the importance of the extensive integration of citizens and a vibrant repertoire of political participation modes within democracy. Slightly out of its original context, here the statement serves to frame the discussion on the role of political participation within democratic theories in order to illustrate the ways in which online participation tools such as *Betri Reykjavík* and *LiquidFriesland* challenge the status quo of representative democracy. In the following, I will show how participation is the central point of difference between democratic theories. Democratic theories accounting for the relevance of political participation appear to differ in a variety of ways; not only in the weight they place on political participation in general for example, but also their inclusivity of more novel modes of participation, especially more recent, creative, and Internet-based forms of participation, as well as the different roles democratic theories envision for citizens.

There are as many as six major democratic theories competing within my research fields: representative-liberal democracy, participative democracy, deliberative democracy, direct democracy, liquid democracy, and digital democracy. All of them have influenced the creation, implementation, establishment and (ongoing) maintenance of the two participation tools studied. In this section, I focus on how these theories understand the importance of participation role within democracy. In doing so, it becomes again clear that political participation is a highly contested research area. In the analysis of my research findings (Results and Discussion), this awareness may serve to understand various processes, events, and decisions taken in both research fields.

In broad terms, the understanding of the role of participation within democracy differs in two perspectives. First, the instrumental understanding of participation sees democracy as a formal method for the formation of government. Second, the normative understanding of participation sees democracy as a lifestyle and way

of governing (cf. Hoecker). The instrumental understanding of participation is embedded in so-called empirical or realistic democratic theory. These euphemistic terms hint at this view's core criticism of normative and liberal democratic theories – as idealistic and as over-emphasizing the role of citizen participation in democracy. Instead, representatives of the instrumental understanding of participation see democracy as a mere method to achieve the formation of a government and safeguard efficient governability.

One of the, if not the, most prominent instrumentalist theorists was Joseph A. Schumpeter. To him, democracy was not the rule of the people, but the rule of politicians with the consent of the people (cf. Hoecker 4). That is, Schumpeter reduced the role of the citizen to voter. Moreover, the function of voting is not for the citizens to declare their interests, but to create and legitimate a strong and assertive government able to make decisions. Moreover, Schumpeter stressed that democracy as such does not imply any ideal values: neither citizen-responsibility nor extensive participation are part of democracy per se. In fact, Schumpeter took the idea of responsible citizens for fiction. Instead, he characterised citizens as having low senses of reality and responsibility, and as only capable of incoherent volition (cf. Lösch 18). Similarly, father of the widely-cited Rational Choice Theory, Downs argues that citizens are first and foremost self-interested and not interested in the common good. Downs thinks that issues related to society are only addressed as the by-products of people's actions, namely at that point that they coincide with private ambitions (cf. 193ff.).

Although Schumpeter and Down's works were first published (over) 50 years ago, the instrumental approach to participation persists both in theory and practice almost unaltered to the present day. Indeed, it is at the core of representative democracy as the predominant form of democracy across the globe, and as such the official form of government in both research fields in this thesis. The understanding of democracy as analogue to the market, as merely a competition between rival (party political) elites with citizens voting every four years, and otherwise pursuing their individual goals as more or less rational consumers appears to be reality today.

In contrast, the normative understanding sees participation as more than a method for establishing legitimacy, more than a means to an end. It stresses the intrinsic value of political participation and sees democracy as a process concerning society as a whole: democracy as a way of life (cf. Lösch 22f.). In this understanding, democracy extends beyond the political sphere and aims to facilitate socio-political participation in as many fields of society as possible. As a logical consequence, this approach sees democracy as transitive and flexible, as a work in constant progress (cf. Hoecker 6). Amongst the democratic theories that build on a normative understanding of participation are participative, deliberative, and direct democratic

theories. These approaches all try to work against the economisation of the political sphere; and by stressing that there would be no political community without participation and no political participation without community, they seek to counter supposed tendencies towards individualism and self-interestedness. On a national level, forms of democracy other than direct democracy will presumably remain supplements to representative democracy (cf. Lösch 23). However, this does not mean that they cannot be extensively developed and be given special importance at a state level. Indeed, at local and municipal levels, direct and participatory democratic elements are becoming increasingly popular in many countries.[8]

The most prominent proponent of the theory of participative democracy, Benjamin Barber, suggests a "strong democracy" which centres on the freedom of citizens to participate politically and on direct democratic self-government (cf. 209ff.). Barber suggests concrete reforms are needed to implement this project: as the base for community-building discussion processes he stresses the expansion of communication technologies, diverse offers of political information and political education, and the establishment of a general citizens' service: on the municipal level, local neighbourhood assemblies should gradually take over legislative competences, with municipal positions to be filled by lot combined with financial incentives (cf. Barber 291).

Of the theories I look at here, participative democracy theory appears to have the most optimistic image of citizens. Indeed, Barber is convinced that citizens are naturally capable of more and better participation, whereas other participative democracy theorists suggest that citizens will quickly acquire those competences once integrated into information and learning processes. As Schmidt points out, this theory of transformation into a responsible citizen resembles a modern variation of Rousseau's education programme, transforming the "Bourgeois" into "Citoyens" through a process of participation, deliberation, and public decision-making (cf. 'Beteiligungszentrierte Demokratietheorien' 241).

The new architecture of the public space as proposed by Barber would require a redistribution of agency and power, meaning an extensive change in conventional understandings of the roles of those governing and those governed in representative democracies (cf. Rosenzweig and Eith 12). Through his concept of participatory culture, media scholar Henry Jenkins has introduced ideas around participative democracy into cultural analysis. For Jenkins and Mizuko Itō, a participatory culture is "one which embraces the values of diversity and democracy through every aspect of our interactions with each other – one which assumes that we are capable of making decisions, collectively and individually, and that we

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8   See Kersting for an extensive report on the state of direct democracy in Germany across all levels of polity (cf. 'Direkte Demokratie').

should have the capacity to express ourselves through a broad range of different forms and practices" (2).[9]

A variety of participative democracy is deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy theorists see the formation process of political opinion and will as the most important aspect of democracy. In contrast to majoritarian democracy which legitimates decisions through votes, deliberative democracy stresses consensus: "an ideal deliberation aims to reach a rationally motivated consensus thanks to reasons that are persuasive to all" (della Porta, 'Deliberative Democracy' 62).[10] However, deliberative democracy's focus on public opinion formation is criticised by theorists of participative democracy because it is limited to the informal area of politics, and therefore does not include any direct and practical democratic decision-making competences on behalf of the citizens (cf. Rosenzweig and Eith 12).

Direct democracy is a variant of participatory democracy which has been implemented as a form of government. Of course, the frequency, weight and relevance of direct democratic elements within political decision-making processes varies greatly from electorate to electorate. The most prominent example of direct democracy is Switzerland, which offers citizens more occasions for direct participation than any other country in the world (cf. M. G. Schmidt, 'Direktdemokratie' 339).[11] In direct democracy, citizen participation plays *the* central role through

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9   However, Jenkins is also convinced that "while participatory politics does raise hope for fostering a more democratic culture, it cannot in and of itself overcome structural inequalities that have historically blocked many from participating in civic and political life" (161). Danah boyd points out that especially in times of digital culture, the rhetoric surrounding social media often highlights that technology is an equal opportunity platform; 'everyone' supposedly has the ability to have their voice heard. I think that this is seriously deceptive. I would argue that true participation requires many qualities: agency, the ability to understand a social situation well enough to engage constructively, the skills to contribute effectively, connections with others to help build an audience, emotional resilience to handle negative feedback, and enough social status to speak without consequences. The barrier to participation is not the technology but the kinds of privilege that are often ignored in meritocratic discourse. I do think that technology has opened up new doors to some people – and especially those who are marginalized but self-empowered […] – but it's important to recognize the ways in which it also reinforces other forms of inequalities that make it harder for some people to engage. (in Jenkins and Itō 21)

10   See James Fishkin's work for more in-depth research on the implementation of deliberation within political decision-making processes (When the people speak).

11   See Schmidt ('Direktdemokratie' 339ff.) for a detailed account and ranking of direct democratic elements in democratic states across the globe.

referenda, initiatives and petitions. Whereas representative democracy appears centred on people and parties, direct democracy focuses on decisions regarding subject matter (cf. Kersting, 'Direkte Demokratie' 308).

The electronically implemented liquid democracy relies heavily on deliberative democracy theory. The developers of *LiquidFriesland*, one of the research fields of this study, understand liquid democracy as "a democratic system in which most issues are decided (or strongly suggested to representatives) by direct referendum. Considering nobody has enough time and knowledge for every issue, votes can be delegated by topic. Delegations are transitive and can be revoked or changed at any time. Liquid Democracy is sometimes referred to as 'Delegated' or 'Proxy Voting'" (Interaktive Demokratie e. V. 5).

The spread of the Internet did not only enable liquid democracy, but also brought fresh impetus for the implementation of other participative democratic theories, such as "digital democracy" or "e-democracy". German political scientist Gary Schaal argues that, from a democratic theoretical perspective, the innovative potential of the Internet (in particular) is unexhausted and under-theorised (cf. 299). Whereas some scholars broadly understand digital democracy "as the increasing opportunities for political participation online" (Rose as cited in della Porta, 'E-Democracy' 87), others, like Schaal himself, define it as a democratic theory for which the inclusion of computers within the actual political decision-making process is constituent (cf. 281).[12]

The potential of digital democracy has been widely celebrated by scholars, activists, and programmers alilke. Linden has summarised these celebratory discourses as the five promises of digital democracy (cf. sec.3):

- *The promise of equality*: digital democracy seems to (at least partially) cancel out the (hierarchical) difference between those governing and those governed.
- *The promise of participation*: digital democracy makes the impression that everybody can participate anytime from everywhere.
- *The promise of information*: the Internet enables the availability of all relevant information for everyone.
- *The promise of responsibility*: technological advancements enable the communicative reconnection between representatives and those represented.
- *The promise of rationality*: digital democracy produces rational, best solutions that everybody supports through reasoned insight.

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12   With his blog entry "A Typology of Electronic Democracy", German political scientist Martin Hagen for an excellent round-up of the dynamics of the discourse on electronic democracy, including explanations of the various concepts behind it (n.pag.).

Throughout the book, the degree to which these promises of digital democracy are fulfilled will be illustrated with insights from the research fields.

Finally, I would argue that, first and foremost, the technology available today makes the modernisation of representative forms of democracy possible. While the expanded forms of online-deliberation or direct democracy still face massive technological and design challenges (cf. Zittel as cited in Escher, 'Mobilisierung' 451)[13], the spread of information and communication technologies does have palpable effects on political participation. Those effects will be the focus of the next chapter.

2.2 Internet and Politics

Over the last two decades, the Internet has not only transformed the ways in which people inform themselves and communicate with each other, but has also offered the potential to enrich existing political systems through new forms of democracy, as debates around digital and liquid democracy have illustrated (cf. Plaum 148). The hopes connected to electronic information and communication technologies were high.[14] In this chapter, the focus is on the depiction of ICTs' effects on political participation within the literature, which appears highly dependent on the authors' respective understandings of democracy, and with it, of agency. Subsequently, I focus on the special case of Social Media, looking at how the rapid increase in the use of Social Media for political purposes over the last decade has, both from a technological and a societal perspective, changed information and participation practices.

Instead of categorising these developments in information and participation practices as either good or bad which I see as an unproductive venture, this chapter provides a more nuanced analysis of the ways in which Social Media differs from other media. Social Media evidently has accommodated political participation modes. In studying this nexus, this book is explicitly positioned within the anthropological research tradition sketched out by Gertraud Koch:

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13 One should not forget that "the Internet has also reinforced the abilities of governments to control information and assert their power in more centralized manners", as Roy points out (84).

14 According to Escher, one can arrange these hopes into three categories: the improvement of governmental functions and services often discussed under the keyword e-government, the strengthening of representative democracy in the form of e-participation or online participation, and the enablement of direct democracy (cf. 'Beteiligung via Internet' 132).