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:

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).

> Wer in der Europäischen Ethnologie, Empirischen Kulturwissenschaft, Kulturanthropologie und Volkskunde über Technik und Medien forscht, der bewegt sich in einer Forschungstradition, die wesentlich von Hermann Bausinger in seiner 1961 erschienenen Habilitationsschrift „Volkskultur in der technischen Welt" angestoßen wurde. Die Schrift war in ihrer Zeit Aufruf und Anstoß zugleich und begründete eine paradigmatische Neuorientierung der Volkskunde in ihrer Betrachtung von Technik, die bis dahin in einem antimodernistischen Reflex vielfach als Gegenpol zum Lebendigen und Kulturellen begriffen worden war. Bausinger hingegen zeigt, wie die Technik längst integraler Bestandteil der Alltagskultur […] ist […]. ('Empirische Kulturanalyse' 179)
>
> Those in anthropology who are researching technology and media follow a tradition that was substantially initiated by Hermann Bausinger's 1961 habilitation "Volkskultur in der technischen Welt" (English title *Folk culture in a world of technology*). Both appeal and impetus, the paper was at the core of a paradigmatic shift in the discipline's view on technology which in an anti-modernist reflex has often been understood as the opposite of the living and the cultural. By contrast, Bausinger shows the ways in which technology has long been an integral part of everyday culture.

Those scholars who warn against simply dismissing online modes of participation typically do so by pointing to statistical evidence of the modes' actual effects. However, I believe that it is also important to look at online participation modes – in fact at all acts and forms of political participation –, from a different perspective, one that is lacking in most political science and communication studies work: the micro-perspective. This means looking from the perspective of those who actually take part, those who chose to participate in one way or another, those who mix and match modes of participation right through the artificial boundaries of the offline and online worlds and who, in doing so, always remain true to their everyday lives and experiences. Too often the reasonings and motivations of citizens as competent and self-determined actors become lost within stiff formalised survey questionnaires and research designs and the constant, stringent attempts of quantitative researchers to develop large-scale, comparable, representative research results. Bimber points out that "[t]he problem is not only conceptual but empirical" as many surveys "are election-centric, emphasizing tradition [sic] institution-oriented participation" (122). In focusing on the actual participants, listening to their stories, their descriptions and their reasonings, the cultural anthropological approach opens a hitherto strongly under-researched dimension, not only of participants' diverse motives for and perspectives on political participation, but also on their use of (Social) Media.

2.2.1 *Simply Slacktivism?!*[15] – A Fresh Look at ICTs' Effects on Political Participation

This sub-chapter will concentrate on the impact of the Internet on political participation as one crucial element of democracies. It will trace the hopes and fears that were initially connected to the Internet's spread into the political sphere, concluding that while the impact of the Internet on political participation has turned out to be more elusive and nuanced than obvious and extensive, it also cannot be contested.

Elections have been regarded with increasing categorical significance since literature on political participation began in the 1940s. Elections are not only regarded as extraordinarily significant in political practice and research, but also in the public perception. As constituted modes of participation, elections fulfil essential functions in representative democracies, such as the establishment and stabilisation of polity and the recruitment of political and civil personnel. Nevertheless, de Nève and Olteanu point out that this emphasis on elections is problematic, arguing that the power of citizens should not be reduced to their power as the electorate, as this neglects their other claims to power and say. Moreover, they argue, elections alone do not create an intact and high-quality democracy (cf. 19).

Indeed, the strategic heightening of electoral participation as a category results in a devaluation of online modes of participation. These are often characterised as a sort of second tier mode of participation, with actors often dismissed as "detached from formal politics and therefore do not aim to influence political outcomes, that they choose easily accessible digital forms of engagement over more effective traditional activities, and that they lack central political competences necessary to comprehend the functioning of the political system" (Serup Christensen, 'Slacktivism' 1). Online political activities are often criticized for only serving to increase the feel-good factor for participants. These prejudices against online participation modes cumulate in the generalised stigmatisation of online forms of participation as *clicktivism* or *slacktivism* (see Baringhorst et al.). These scholars do not consider a single click on *facebook's like*-button or on *Sign Here!* under a petition at *Change.org* as significant personal contributions by citizens. Indeed, although "'Participating' in Facebook is not the same as participating in a Free Software project, to say nothing of participating in the democratic governance of a state" (Jenkins 36), such acts of online participation are not as insignificant as is often understood (cf. Baringhorst, 'Internet und Protest' 105).

15 The question "Simply Slacktivism?" is taken from Serup Christensen's 2012 article on the Internet and political participation in Finland.

The Internet has the potential to change the terms of political participation to a degree beyond that of any other societal or technological development since the beginning of participation research. As Mossberger et al note: "[t]he Internet's interactivity, diversity, flexibility, speed, convenience, low cost, and information capacity potentially allow the public to become more knowledgeable about politics and government [...]" (52). The opportunities opened up by the Internet result in high hopes for the political mobilisation and participation of citizens (e.g. cf. Escher, 'Beteiligung via Internet' 136). As such, the connection between the Internet and politics has become a key area of research (cf. Escher, 'Mobilisierung' 454; cf. Theocharis 235), especially among political scientists and communication studies scholars.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the growth and development of the Internet, scholarly understandings of its role in and impact on democracy and political participation has changed over the last two decades. As Linaa Jensen remarks, "[i]n early theoretical works the Internet was often regarded as something 'out there', good or dangerous for the democratic process, but radically different and isolated from mainstream political processes" (349). Similarly, Schaal argues that many theoretical contributions fail to systematically link reflexion on democratic theory with technological expertise. He argues that in research, the Internet is generally understood as an empty signifier for technological progress (cf. 300). For Henry Jenkins and Mizuko Itō, this approach seems especially careless at a time when

> more and more organizations, institutions, and businesses have embraced a rhetoric of participation, yet it is abundantly clear that not all forms of participation are equally meaningful or empowering. Many of the core debates of our time center around the terms of our participation: whether meaningful participation can occur under corporately controlled circumstances, when our ability to create and share content is divorced from our capacity to participate in the governance of the platforms through which that content circulates. (1)

Early research on the Internet and politics, as well as on the Internet generally – and other media too –, is characterised by radically normative views. In this period, the most prominent views on the effects of ICTs on politics were the replacement and the mobilisation hypotheses. Scholars like Benjamin Barber, who represented what later became known as the replacement hypothesis (cf. Althaus and Tewksbury), saw the Internet as a new public sphere that would replace many "traditional channels for political involvement" targeted both at information and participation, for example media or town hall meetings (Linaa Jensen 349). Amongst German-speaking scholars, it was especially popular to categorise people into one of three categories: *net-optimists*, *net-normalists*, and *net-pessimists* (cf. Escher,

'Mobilisierung' 449). Today, many scholars would agree that "although the Internet extends the media matrix available for political campaigning, agenda-setting and political participation", it supplements rather than substitutes other forms of political participation and other media as a source of information (ibid.).

In those early years, other scholars focused on the so-called mobilisation hypothesis. These scholars were optimistic that the Internet could help mobilise and politicise previously disengaged parts of society. However, in the last years this hypothesis could only be supported within concretely limited research fields and/or among low numbers of participants (e.g. Feezell et al.; Saglie and Vabo; Xenos and Moy). Indeed, most research has shown that only those already politically active in other ways use the Internet for further political information and participation. Hence, the Internet was simply reproducing and thereby reinforcing existing social biases, an idea commonly summarised as the "digital divide" (cf. Gibson et al. 561).

Whether one finds taxonomies like *net-optimists*, *net-normalists*, and *net-pessimists* (cf. Escher, 'Mobilisierung' 449) relevant or not, it becomes evident that their respective understanding of democracy, and with it, that of agency, play a key role in assessing what opportunities the Internet offers for political participation. As Escher illustrates, these understandings are heavily dependent on fundamental assumptions on the part of the researcher: are citizens responsible and competent to decide freely and independently, as in participative democratic theories, or do they need guidance and governance, as in liberal elitist democratic theory (cf. 'Mobilisierung' 451).[16] Depending on the perspective of the scholar, the diversity of information and enlargement of the political public sphere provided through the Internet was either welcomed for offering variety and for decentralising media and opinions, or condemned as overloading, spreading false information and anonymity, catalysing lobbyism, commercialisation, and centralisation (cf. 450).

As British political scientist Colin Hay notes that "[…] those with the most restrictive and conventional conceptions of political participation identify a strong and consistent pattern of declining political participation and engagement over time, whilst those with a more inclusive conception discern instead a change in the *mode* of political participation" (23). If one correlates this with the broad spectrum of perspectives towards the diversity of information and enlargement of

16 The latter view on citizens of liberal democratic theory is also referred to in Michel Foucault's analysis of governmentality. Drawing especially on Christian pastoral power, Foucault compares governing a population to herding a flock of sheep (cf. Sarasin 181). Here, citizens need to be taken care of, guided, and looked after for a population to thrive. Unfortunately, a more thorough consideration of Foucault's theories goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

the public sphere just outlined, the diversity of research findings on politics and the Internet becomes understandable. As Anduiza et al. point out, "although the effect might be small at times, more evolutionary than revolutionary, and require certain conditions, it is rarely contested that digital media have an impact on civic and political involvement [...]. However, the mechanisms by which Internet use makes political engagement more probable remain somewhat elusive" (1). A key step in identifying these mechanisms is to broaden the scope for research, as Jorba and Bimber point out: "[i]f anything has been shown in a decade of research on digital media in the Unites [sic] States, it is that the effects on political participation and civic engagement are connected to people's attitudes, interest, and motivation rather than simply to reduced transaction costs or easier access to information" (22).

In any case, the enormous expansion of the repertoire of political participation through the Internet is clear, and many of these acts of online participation appear to be the direct equivalent to an offline act. For instance, sending an email to a political representative appears equivalent to sending a letter, and signing an e-petition to signing a petition on paper. Even political consumption that has recently gained public attention because of concomitant Internet campaigns, consisting of blog posts, vlogs, pictures, and all accompanied by hashtags, constitute a mode of political participation established long before the spread of the Internet (see for example Baringhorst, *Politik mit dem Einkaufswagen*; Baringhorst, 'Politischer Konsum').

However, it is only in the past few years that scholars have begun to increasingly argue that "digitally networked forms of participation do not establish an expansion of one of the available modes of participation. They create a new and distinct mode of participation […]" (Theocharis and Deth 158; cf. Gibson and Cantijoch; cf. Valenzuela). Here, it is crucial to note that terms like online participation, e-participation or Internet participation are very inclusive and therefore tend to lack definitory clarity. That is, by "digitally networked forms of participation", Theocharis and van Deth indeed mean the usage of social networking sites for political participation. In their large quantitative survey across Germany, the authors measured three items that they defined as part of a new and distinct dimension of digitally networked participation: commenting on social media on political/social issues, posting or sharing political links on social media, and encouraging other people to take action using social media (cf. Theocharis and Deth 151). Indeed, it is hard to think of offline equivalents to participation modes based on inherently novel technological phenomena such as social networking sites. Nevertheless, detailed differentiation of the researched modes of participation and the general field of research are necessary to avoid conceptual and analytical misunderstandings.

2.2.2 The Special Case of Social Media

An anthropological approach can contribute to conceptual and analytical clarity to research on Social Media by stressing both sociality and a comparative perspective. In other words, that is in understanding "the way in which people associate with each other to form social relations and societies" as "(t)he core to the study of social science" (Miller et al. 4). After focussing on the more general research context of the Internet and politics, this sub-chapter looks at Social Media as today's prime avenue for online political participation. Here, the benefits of a distinct anthropological perspective in research on Social Media will be discussed, as will the "vagaries of public semantics" revolving around the term Social Media (Miller et al. 9). Subsequently, I will provide a brief history of the Internet before it began to become dominated by Social Media in the public view. I will then outline one way of defining Social Media, that is, by highlighting key features in which the organisation of Social Media differs from other media. The concepts of *scalable sociality* and *polymedia* developed by the anthropological think-tank around Daniel Miller at University College London will feature throughout this section.

Generally speaking, social anthropological research usually incorporates a comparative approach to the study of socio-technological phenomena (cf. Miller et al. 24). Rather than placing the research focus on individual platforms, anthropological investigations tend to trace a certain phenomenon through multiple media. Miller et al. describe this as employing "[…] a theory of polymedia that recognises our inability to understand any one platform or media in isolation. They must be seen as relative to each other, since today people use the range of available possibilities to select specific platforms or media for particular genres of interaction" (211). Further, they remind us that "(i)t is the content rather than the platform that is most significant when it comes to why social media matters" (1).[17]

But what is Social Media? The term Social Media appears to be the colloquial expression for certain offers and forms of digitally networked media which facil-

17 Miller et al.'s collaborative project Why We Post (at University College London) and the extensive book series of the same name that has resulted from it are illustrative examples of the anthropological approach to Social Media, which they understand as a "[…] study of what people post and communicate through platforms, of why we post and the consequences of those postings" (ibid.). Within the context of the Why We Post project, nine cultural anthropologists spent 15 months living in nine different communities around the world, researching the role of social media in people's everyday lives. Results were published in a number of different languages and were at least partly published as open access. For more information, see the website at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/why-we-post (last accessed on 10 August 2019).

itate both the editing and publishing of content online, as well as the connection and exchange between people (cf. J.-H. Schmidt, *Social Media* 16).[18] Ebersbach et al. name six prototype-appliances dominating the Social Media-sphere according to their technical characteristics: wikis, blogs, microblogs, social-networking-sites (SNS), social sharing, and elements that many platforms deploy, such as crosslinking with RSS.[19] The final element cannot be allocated to a single one of the prototypes, but is rather a form of extension. Often, one can find combinations of several prototypes, such as blogs with a microblog extension (cf. Ebersbach et al. 37).[20] Social Media appears as a new form of communication that deviates from the traditional dichotomy of broadcasting and dyadic media. As Miller et al. point out "with the development of the Internet, this polarisation between public and private media started to change" (2). According to Baym, SNSs in particular "offer numerous benefits, including the abilities to carefully craft a public or semi-public self-image, broaden and maintain our social connections, enhance our relationships, increase access to social capital, and have fun" ('Social Networks' 400).

However, in academic circles, the term Social Media has become disputed and increasingly seen as misleading and ambiguous. The prime focus in the critique of "Social Media" is the central claim within the term: that the *social-ness* of digitally networked media marks it as unique and distinct from other media. This terms therefore suggests that other media exist which are not social, when media as means of communication are inherently linked to an exchange between people and in that way, media are social in their very essence (cf. J.-H. Schmidt, *Social Media* 16). As Baym argues, "(t)here is nothing more 'social' about 'social media' than there is about postcards, landline telephones, television shows, newspapers, books, or cuneiform. There are distinctive qualities to what we call 'social media' [...], but being social is not among them" ('Struggle for Society' 1). Further, Baym

18 The term Web 2.0 is another oft-used expression. To a larger extend, the term Web 2.0 is used to describe technical, economic, and legal aspects rather than aspects concerning the sociality of its users (cf. Ebersbach et al. 27).

19 RSS (short for Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication] enables users to stay up-to-date with one's favourite websites without manually checking them regularly for new posts. RSS gathers headlines from those sites and feeds them to an app or website, a so-called RSS reader. That way, the user only needs to scroll through the RSS reader (for example Feedly or Bloglovin) to see all the new posts from their favourite websites. Subsequently, the user is either able to read the full article directly or is redirected to the corresponding website after clicking a headline in the RSS reader (cf. Gil).

20 For example, there may be a small frame at the right-hand side of the blog's starting page, displaying the blogger's latest tweets on Twitter or her latest posts to the image-based Social Media site Instagram.

criticises the often neglected neo-liberal connotation of the term "Social Media", arguing that it only "emerged at the time that companies began harnessing what people were already doing online" (ibid.).

In consciously using the emic term "Social Media" in their publications, scholars like Miller et al. thereby accept the "vagaries of public semantics" (Miller et al. 9). Used both by research participants and the general public alike, the term Social Media has become part of general language use and consequently brings a certain concision with it that other expressions, though potentially more correct or precise, lack. In this book, "Social Media" is used to refer to the distinct platforms – like *facebook* and *Twitter* – which epitomise the term in the public view; whereas the term "information and communications technologies" (ICTs) is used to describe the entirety of digital technologies and media through which people communicate.

Before going into greater detail in the comparison between Social Media and other media, I will here outline key differences between the early Internet, Web 1.0 so to speak, and the Internet after the arrival of Social Media, as this is helpful in evaluating changes and understanding the overall context.[21] As Baym points out: "[w]hen the first Internet connection was made in 1969 through what was then called ARPANET, funded by the US Department of Defence, no one envisioned that an interpersonal communication medium had been launched". Instead, the Internet "was developed to safeguard military knowledge", and "(f)or its first quarter-century, the Internet was text-only. With its limited social cues, it seemed a poor match for personal interaction. Yet it took mere months for its developers (who were also its primary users) to realise the medium's utility for personal communication. Within three years of the first login, email was in use […]" and the first mailing lists followed soon after (*Personal Connections* 13). The development of *Usenet* newsgroups in the early 1980s was another means of asynchronous group discussion with wide reach (cf. 14), and in 1985, one of the earliest still existing online communities, *Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link (Well)* was founded in San Francisco (cf. Ebersbach et al. 22). Four years later, physicists around Sir Tim Berners-Lee at the Swiss physics laboratory *CERN* developed the World Wide Web. Baym stresses that "(t)his heralded a shift from communication that was purely text-based to multimedia communication, and gave rise to more new forms of mediated interaction" (*Personal Connections* 15f.). With the disconnection of ARPANET in 1990, the US government withdrew from further developing the Internet, an event which marked a watershed in the process of the Internet's commercialisation (cf. Ebersbach et al. 23).

21 For a detailed, balanced, analytically sophisticated account of the Internet's history, see Janet Abbate's Inventing the Internet (2000).

After the "dotcom-bubble" burst in 2000, the first economic crisis of the IT-industry, Internet use did not decrease, rather new business concepts and offers emerged. The Internet has increasingly become seen as a platform to store content. For example, the most successful community-project platform ever, Wikipedia, was started in 2001. The restructuring of the Internet in this period became referred to as "Web 2.0", which is often seen as defined by interaction and communication in which the roles of recipient and producer can no longer be distinguished. In this understanding, users became 'produsers', both consuming and producing content within one and the same application and session (cf. Bruns; cf. Koch, 'Empirische Kulturanalyse' 185; cf. J.-H. Schmidt, Neue Netz 177). However, this simplistic view has become increasingly questioned:

> [o]ne might begin by questioning how much of Web 2.0 and online social networking is really new. As someone who has been studying online interactions since the early 1990s, I shake my head at the idea that the contemporary Internet is 'user generated' while that which preceded it is not. The very phrase 'user-generated' only makes sense when there is an alternative, in this case something like 'professionally generated for profit.' Until 1994, this alternative did not exist. On an Internet with no World Wide Web, sponsored by the United States government, all of the content was generated by the people, for the people. We only call Web 2.0 'user generated' because a well-established class of professional content providers now dominate the Internet. ('Social Networks' 384)

Inspired by Baym's critical stance, I look at the ways in which Web 2.0 media can be compared to and differentiated from both other media and face-to-face communication. Baym argues that these differences can be analysed in terms of interactivity, temporal structure, social cues, storage, replicability, reach, and mobility (cf. *Personal Connections* 7ff.). In her book *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, she makes it clear that "if we want to build a rich understanding of how media influence personal connections, we need to stop talking about media in overly simplistic terms. We can't talk about consequences if we can't articulate capabilities" (6). She then continues by asking: "What is it about these [*Social*, JTK] media that changes interaction, and, potentially, relationships?" (ibid.). Here, "personal connections" and "relationships" can simply be substituted according to research interest, such as in my case "information and participation practices".

In comparison to other forms of media, Social Media allow their users to talk back with unprecedented ease and speed. You do not agree with a newspaper article or TV report? Social Media makes it easy to address this immediately and facilitates discussion between you, other media users, and the authors/producers. A citizen of Reykjavík can easily start an initiative concerning the run-down

state of the playground in her neighbourhood. This will not take much longer than writing a customer review. Yet it could very well result in the replacement of a broken swing within a couple of months, provided that the initiative gains momentum and is endorsed by enough other *Betri Reykjavík* users that it makes it onto the city council's agenda and is approved by city councillors.[22]

Social cues are another important concept in differentiating media and in explaining the special role attributed to Social Media. As Baym points out, "(s)ome media convey very little information about the identities of those with whom we are communicating. […] In [those] lean media, people have more ability to expand, manipulate, multiply, and distort the identities they present to others. The paucity of personal and social identity cues can also make people feel safer, and thus create an environment in which they are more honest" (*Personal Connections* 8). But this feeling of security does not only effect honesty, as one email conversation I had with a *Betri Reykjavík* user revealed. Suffering from social anxiety, he told me he preferred to take part in political deliberation and discussion processes online because the Internet was a kind of safe zone where he could form friendships (that eventually lead to offline meetings), unlike in face-to-face situations.

Of course, online anonymity also opens up opportunities for online "terror" (Baym, *Personal Connections* 8), for example in the form of cyber-bulling, shitstorms, identity-theft, or trolling. Many online participation tool developers and political implementers therefore criticise anonymity as an untenable condition for participating in political deliberation or decision-making processes online. As such, and to ensure that they were seeking to act in their community's best interest and to avoid any destructive and potentially criminal uses of the platform, would be users of *LiquidFriesland* could only register under their real names and had to prove that they lived in the district of Friesland.

In another regard, with Social Media "(t)he gatekeeping function of mass media is challenged as individuals use digital media to spread messages much farther and more widely than was ever historically possible" (Baym, *Personal Connections* 10). In tweeting, writing a blog-post, or posting an initiative to *Betri Reykjavík* or *LiquidFriesland*, individuals can reach a much greater number of people over a much greater distance than ever before. Baym sees this as "a powerful subversion of the elitism of mass media, within which a very small number of broadcasters could engage in one-to-many communication" (ibid.). Transferred to the realm of politics and political communication, this means that Social Media offers a bridge between individual citizen and politics, a bridge which was once

22 The chapter on Research Fields provides in-depth information on the workings of *Betri Reykjavík* and *LiquidFriesland*.

reserved for the traditional authorities of political formation of opinion and interest intermediation, such as political parties and unions (cf. Tenscher et al. 191).

By looking at different media through Baym's key concepts, a more nuanced picture of what Social Media is begins to emerge. In order to describe this picture, or "to define what is popularly called social media but also includes prior media", Miller et al. suggest the term "scalable sociality" (3). They define sociality as "the way in which people associate with each other to form social relations and societies" (ibid.). Situations are scaled from the most private to the most public, and from the smallest group to the largest group: "At one end of both of these scales we still see private dyadic conversation and at the other end we still see fully public broadcasting" (3).

Of course, people also associate with each other to form social relations within the context of politics, both online and offline. Online, sociality develops from people engaging (with each other), discussing, deliberating, voting, and researching information within various digital political formats. I find "scalable sociality" to be a particularly valuable definition because it also includes prior media (cf. Miller et al. 3). By including "prior media" in their study of Social Media, Miller et al. acknowledge its ongoing influence and role in information, communication, and participation practices and that, at least in most cases, connections with family, friends, and acquaintances first developed in offline situations. In the same spirit, boyd and Ellison "use the term 'social network site' rather than 'social networking site' to emphasize that these sites are more often used to replicate connections that exist offline than to build new ones.[23] Their choice of noun over verb positions Web 2.0 as an extension of pre-existing social phenomena rather than as a transformation" (as cited in Baym, 'Social Networks' 386).

This thought also proves to be true in the realm of Social Media and politics. Many studies have found that those citizens who engage, inform, and participate around politics online were active and engaged in offline ways prior to the Internet (e.g. see Emmer et al.; Kubicek et al.; Wimmer; Glaab). Once more, it becomes clear that online participation tools work more as an extension of pre-existing habits and routines – "social phenomena" as boyd and Ellison call them – rather than a transformation or new formation of practices.

Moreover, the concept of "scalable sociality" offers a rare and refreshing stance within the literature on Social Media and politics that, in my impression, drastically overstates or underplays the possibilities for and influence of Social Media on politics, and on political participation in particular (see chapter 2.2.1 *Simply Slacktivism?!*). Between the diametrically opposed publications of the

23 Please note that the lower case printing of danah m. boyd's name in this thesis is not a mistake, but respects the style of writing the author herself chose (cf. boyd).

net-optimists and the *net-pessimists* (cf. Buchstein), there has been a lack of investigations in which emphatic involvement with participants in the field has been perceptible. Miller et al.'s *How the World Changed Social Media* is one of the few exceptions. Together with Baym (see esp. 'Call for Grounding') and van Deth (see esp. 'Map'), Miller et al. seem to be among the few to contribute a balanced view to the otherwise largely dichotomous depiction of Social Media, both in public media and academia, as either the saviour (e.g. see Dahlgren) or the final nail in the coffin of political participation (e.g. see Eisel).

By including prior media in their look at Social Media, Miller et al. also acknowledge that people rely on "polymedia". That is, people mix and match media in their information, communication, and participation practices. Most often, people do so without differentiating between reputed online–offline divides. Nobody uses just one medium for everything; rather, "the precise selection of social media within an environment of polymedia is based less upon technological affordances and more on local genres of social interaction or cultural significance" (Miller et al. 211). Miller et al.'s scalable society approach thus stresses the mundane and routine status of digital media "as they are increasingly embedded in everyday lives and social norms coalesce around their use" (Baym, *Personal Connections* 5). Consequently, in this book, I adopt Baym's suggestion that the emphasis and prime research interest should lie "on the mundane and the everyday, on how people incorporate digital media into their routine practices of relating and with what consequences" (ibid.).

As such, Social Media do not only change information practices, practices of information exchange and communication within political space, but also influence political decision-making processes by affecting relational structures between representatives and those represented in a number of ways.[24] Kneuer points out that parliamentarians and members of the government have become communication partners with whom citizens can directly and easily exchange ideas with through Social Media (cf. 'Wirkung' 14). Kneuer continues that today, parliamentarians and members of government may feel the urge (or the obligation) to actively use *facebook*, *Twitter*, blogs and other media to communicate with citizens (ibid.).

24 As recent events have shown, Social Media sites have also been used to manipulate political elections. In 2018, whistleblower Christopher Wylie revealed that data about "50 million Americans and at least a million Britons had been harvested from Facebook and improperly shared with Cambridge Analytica", a data analytics firm working for Donald Trump's election team and the Brexit campaign. Information on friends, "likes, activities, check-ins, location, photos, religion, politics and relationship details […] was used to influence the outcome of the US presidential election and Brexit" by targeting voters through personalised political advertisements (Solon and Laughland).