

**Mobile Platforms:
The Medium and Rhetoric of the 2015 Canadian Federal Election Manifestos**

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Abstract: In the 2015 Canadian federal election, the three national parties capable of forming government waited until early October to release their full platform documents, with just two weeks remaining in the longest campaign in modern Canadian history. The full Conservative and NDP platforms appeared as late as October 9th, the first day of advanced polling. This practice continued a permanent campaign tactic from the 2008 election, where the parties tried to create media moments by announcing modular components on discrete policies, waiting to release their full platforms later. The new adaptation in the 2015 election, however, was creating party Web sites that were readily interoperable with smart phones and mobile devices. The Liberals in particular offered two innovative tools with their platform that harnessed mobile devices: the “myPlatform” application where one could select policies out of over 100 options, and a downloadable event selection application. Such offerings were arguably targeted to attract the younger, tech savvy voters the Trudeau campaign was hoping to activate.

Using a content analysis of the party Web sites, this paper first answers the question: what digital innovations appeared during the 2015 election that changed the delivery of the platforms? Second, an automated textual analysis identifies the top rhetorical issue units of the party platforms, comparing changes to the top issues against the 2011 campaign. Overall, the mobile platforms allow for increased micro-targeting of donors and potential voters' interests. The innovative myPlatform application, however, went beyond common social media and Web analytics by directly linking issues to donor information.

Key words: Agenda setting, apps, discourse institutionalism, issue networks, platforms

Word Count: 8546 (including References)

“If you have 40 priorities, you don’t have any” – Paul Martin (Wells, 2007, p. 211)

Ten years ago in 2006, the Harper team used one of Paul Martin’s own leadership statements to attack him and the Liberal party during the election campaign, critiquing his lengthy list of platform promises. The Conservatives created an attack advertisement based on a proclamation that Martin had previously stated, “If you have 40 priorities, you don’t have any” (Wells, 2007, p. 211). The Conservatives then added a list of fifty-six subjects Martin had discussed as being included on the Liberal agenda underneath the quote to illustrate Martin’s point, contrasting it with the five repeated priorities of the Conservatives which included (i) improving government accountability, (ii) a Child Care \$1200 annual benefit for parents, (iii) a promise to cut the Goods and Service Tax by 2%, (iv) a Health Care patient wait times guarantee, and (v) a tough on crime agenda to increase prison terms for violent offenders. This tactic was one of many that helped Harper to win his first election against the embattled Liberals under Martin, who were weakened after years in power, predominantly due to the Sponsorship Scandal among other issues.

Flash forward to today when the new Trudeau Liberal government ran on an 88 page platform, harkening back to the successful Red Book under Chrétien, who was well known to state that the Liberal priorities had all been costed and were listed in the platform. The full Trudeau platform document was the first to be fully released on October 5, 2015 during the election, in contrast to the Harper Conservatives’ and Mulcair-led NDP’s platforms, which were both released on October 9, 2015. Each of the three top national contenders used their party Web sites to release components of the platform throughout the 11-week campaign, which is well noted to have been the longest campaign in modern Canadian history.

This paper provides a comparison of the 2011 and 2015 election political manifestos of the three top national Canadian parties to understand how the issues in those documents have been “structurally coupled,” using Systems Theory terminology, with mobile applications (or “apps”) and tools the parties have developed to gain insight into voter intentions. The dominant theme of this paper is that coupling issue tracking with the party donor database and the Liberalist voter management database, which the Liberals’ innovative myPlatform and Events apps allowed through data interoperability, created an on-going means for monitoring supporter interest on key issues. The Liberal data management efforts contrasted with the Conservatives’ “Constituent Information Management System” (CIMS, or C2G), and the NDP’s Populus (see Marland, 2015; Patten, 2015; Thomas, 2015), which at their most basic provided data on the traditional door-to-door, mail, and telephone campaigns, while missing further on-going involvement with tracking voter intentions over time through direct online interaction. Susan Delacourt’s updated *Shopping for Votes: How Politicians Choose Us and We Choose Them* (2016) describes “The Console” software that the Liberals used to amalgamate all the data for their campaign and the connected Liberalist constituency database. Liberalist was the main competitor to C2G, but only the latter software included GPS tracking capabilities. Indeed, Flanagan (2015) was confident that the Conservatives held the funding and technology advantages over the other parties heading into the 2015 election.

To date though, no research has yet to analyze how the medium and rhetoric were linked to the two new apps that the Liberals developed in their myPlatform and Events tracking apps.

What do we know about these new algorithmic media systems? Was the election a

“robot war” between the party databases, as McKelvey (2015) described presciently, or did the new apps help put the Liberals over the top? Or, were both the databases and apps just minor factors among many more in the Liberals’ coordinated majority win? For instance, was the win possibly governed more by the platform issues that the Liberals selected, which some have argued were more commonly aligned with the NDP’s previous platforms, particularly the Liberal decision to go into a budget deficit if elected?

To answer these questions, I’ll first provide some needed technological definitions of key terms, like what is a “platform,” using ideas from the Systems Theory work of Luhmann and Winthrop-Young (Winthrop-Young, 2000; 2015). I’ll then describe the basic issue networks method of counting words and treating words as data in an automated textual analysis, which some have called a key new tool for discourse institutionalism (Ryan, 2015; Dutil & Ryan, 2013; Dutil, Ryan & Grossignac, 2010). The formal analysis of the political manifestos also compares the platform issue networks using an infographic created by a relational mapping software, called RéseauLu.

Using digital methods, this analysis demonstrates a continuation of the 2011 campaign’s middle class focused strategies where the Canadian party platforms targeted the largest voting blocks of their middle class bases through their platform messaging, while limiting rhetoric that constructs idealized regions of Canada or minority subject positions (see Ryan, 2015). Such insights into the platforms provide a starting place to track the issues across other digital media and to hold leaders and the parties to account in terms of achieving their stated goals in the over all political system.

The aims of this paper are modest in that simply using basic content analysis of the party’s new media tools, alongside previously deployed textual analyses and data visualization techniques (i.e. RéseauLu software; see Ryan, 2015), offers scholars a relatively quick and effective means of decoding the kinds of rhetorical strategies parties are using to attract voters, while attempting to maintain their base without alienating them. The partisan strategies identified in the platforms demonstrate what issues, trends, and actors are, and are not, being identified as a part of each rhetorical community and issue network. Overall, the 2015 election offered several notably innovations in terms of both the algorithmic media systems used by parties online and the rhetoric employed in their platforms, particularly by the majority winning Liberals.

I. Research Questions

1. **SYSTEMS THEORY:** How can Systems Theory help us to understand the useful, yet imperfect, analogous relationship of comparing a computer operating platforms to political platforms?
2. **POLITICAL PLATFORMS AND ISSUE NETWORKS:** Which actors and key issues are mentioned frequently in each platform to support the party’s objectives of attracting voters through issues?
3. **TREND ANALYSES:** Are there any common trends in the issues used in the 2011 and 2015 Canadian political platforms?

II. Comparing Mobile Technology Platforms and Political Platforms

This paper originally began as a continuation of the issue network work completed on the 2011 election by Ryan (2015), titled “The Platform as an Agenda-Setting Document,” which identified how the key platform issues selected by the NDP in that election were very unique as compared to the Conservatives and Liberals. The rhetoric used in the NDP’s 2011 platform was arguably one key factor in their historic 2011 campaign that saw them become the Official Opposition for the first time in Canadian history, to the detriment of the longstanding fortunes of Liberal party. However, this paper on “Mobile Platforms” also required an examination of how the party platforms were delivered via algorithmic media, because several key works had identified new technologies that were being used in the 2015 election by the parties, such as the Conservative CIMS apps, the Liberalist software, and the NDP’s Populus (Delacourt, 2016; Marland, 2015; Patten, 2015; Thomas, 2015), but none of these works discussed the innovative Liberal myPlatform and Events apps. These were the only two partisan apps available to the public created by political parties during the 2015 election.

The following review first provides some common definitions of useful information technology (IT) and Systems Theory terms, such as “systems,” “platform,” “software application,” and “hardware,” which will help to answer the first research question posed above, concerning whether or not technological platforms and political platforms have any analogous relationship that might be useful to explore as political communication scholars, in terms of envisioning the limitations of new technologies. By defining these key terms, I believe we can illuminate the relationship between technological media and the rhetoric that is delivered through them via communication tools such as the political platform.

Geoffrey Winthrop Young’s analysis of Luhmann’s System Theory and Kittler’s Media Theory (2000; 2015) describes that there are fundamentally two types of systems:

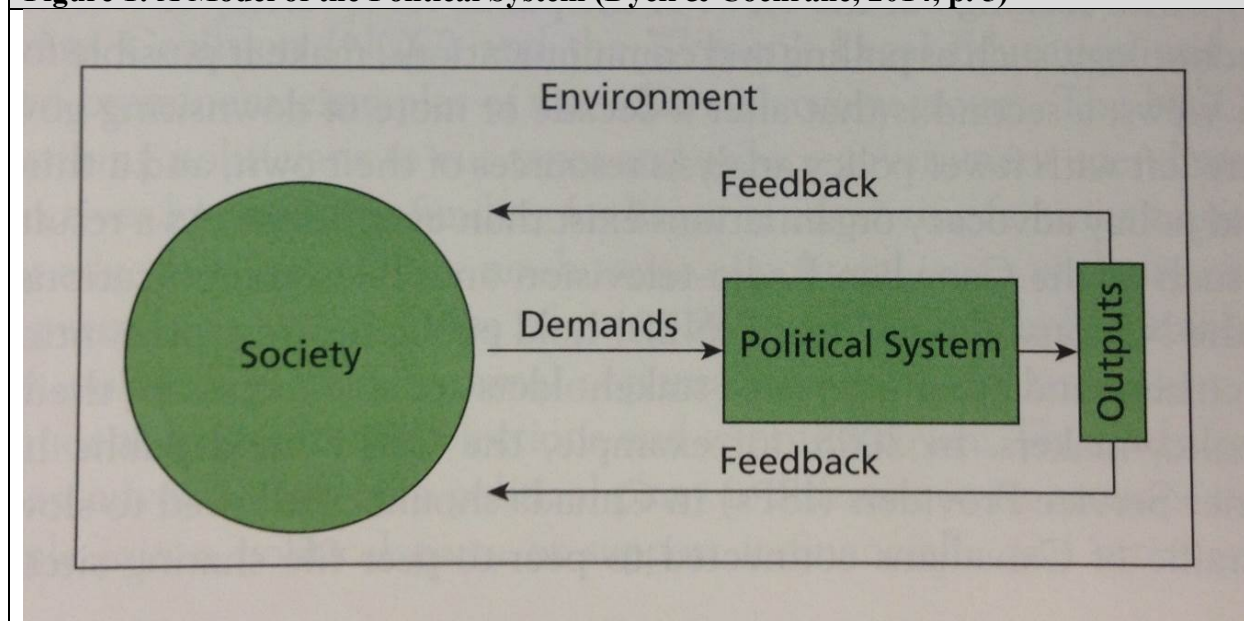
1. **Allopoietic systems** are systems that create a finite product at the end of the systematic process (e.g. a cellphone factory creates cellphones).
2. **Autopoietic systems** in contrast have a continuous ongoing relationship with their structure and environment, possibly changing the system according to the feedback delivered during the process (e.g. living cells).

A “system” is defined broadly here as any process that creates something new. For our purposes, students of the voter choice model of elections might be interested in the latter autopoietic systems’ definition in order to create open, democratic, or living political systems, rather than the former allopoietic type of system that would make voters into a product or client to be bought and sold.

Another connected key concept to understand in Systems Theory is how systems are structured by their inputs and outputs to link with other systems and create feedback within their greater environment. Luhmann argued that we could better understand structured systems by tracking their inputs and outputs. For example, the basic political system model taken from Dyck and Cochrane’s introductory *Canadian Politics* (2014) textbook provides a common foundation for a Systems Theory model (see Figure 1 below). The inputs in their autopoietic system model are society’s demands, which would include common methods of political engagement, like elections, lobbying, judicial challenges, and activism. The outputs from the system are things

like laws, implemented policies, taxes, budget outlays, and so on, which a government can use to exhort desired public behaviours.

Figure 1: A Model of the Political System (Dyck & Cochrane, 2014, p. 5)



In Figure 1, we can note how our social system and political system are “structurally coupled” through the inputs and outputs of each system. Winthrop-Young described Luhmann’s concept of structural coupling as follows:

structural coupling refers to the ongoing engagement between a structure-determined system and its environment or to the recurrent interactions between two (or more) structure-determined systems. A child learning—and an adult continuing—to walk is an example of a system coupling with its environment, while a child talking—and continuing—to talk with its parents is an example of a system interacting with other systems. Language is an essential form of structural coupling.... (2000, p. 400)

This concept of structural coupling is important because it can be used to help identify the differences between the political parties uses of new algorithmic media apps and how they deployed the rhetoric and issue networks as represented in their campaign manifestos linked to apps. Delacourt (2016), for example, explained that Justin Trudeau became the first party leader to ever release their platform through Facebook, with a digital outreach of about thirteen million because of his social media following that had been carefully crafted.

By extension using Systems Theory, we can ask, “What are the inputs and outputs of the campaign systems that political platforms are a part of when they are no longer released as documents alone?” (i.e. are the system’s outputs finite or continuous?). The platforms, after all, represent the demands of the electorate as shaped by the parties to attract voters, and the platforms become an agenda following the throne speech that the electorate and media can then use to hold the government to account.

With these key Systems Theory definitions in mind, I’ll begin to answer our first research question with an analogy that was built from a question first posed to me by some of my

undergraduate students. The basic question the students asked was as follows: **“Is a political platform like a computer platform?”**

My common response has been that, if there is any comparison between a political platform and the IT form of the term “platform,” for example using Systems Theory, then it would necessarily have shortcomings because they are definitely not the same things. Though, it still might be useful to visualize the similarities and differences between the two terms for clarity. In IT terminology a “platform” typically refers to a computer’s operating system (e.g. Microsoft Windows, Apple’s current OS X version, Mountain Lion, or such open source platforms as Linux or Solaris). In other words, an IT platform is the information architecture that allows other software applications to be run on the hardware of a computer.

So, for an example of the similarities, if we were going to create a game called “Politics” on a computer that mirrors all aspects of our political process, then the political platform would become more like a software application (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.), rather than like a computer operating system (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: An Imperfect, but Useful Analogy Comparing IT and Political Platforms?			
	The Medium	The System	The Software Application
Information Technology Terminology	The Hardware (e.g. A Dell Computer, an Apple PowerBook, an IBM tablet, etc.)	The Operating System (e.g. Microsoft Windows, Apple’s OS X: Mountain Lion, etc.)	The Software (e.g. Microsoft PowerPoint, Apple Keynote, Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
Political Analogy Equivalent Terminology	The Political Organization: People working together (i.e. The party officials, candidates, party members, interest groups, etc.)	The Ideological System (e.g. Conservative, Liberal, Social Democrat, etc.)	The Levers of Power: Represented in digital objects (e.g. Platform, Throne Speech, Prime Minister Speeches, Online Media, etc.)

The political platform is the agenda of issues refined by the ideological system and fundamental party principles that will be used by the party to run on during an election campaign. Therefore, the ideological system in this “Politics” computer game is like the operating system, and the party manifesto is just one chosen software application of many, like choosing Microsoft Office PowerPoint or Apple’s KeyNote. In other words, the political platform is just one communication tool among many possible options that can help to shape the party’s communicative campaign. In the game, the accepted strategies for politicians are limited by the choices made in the platform because, to some degree, they must be coded or tailored to voter expectations, as the election plays out through the media using the platform as the guide for

partying messaging, just as the PowerPoint software application allows the user to create PowerPoint presentations, and not Word documents or Excel spreadsheets.

In short, a political platform is more like a software application in this analogy, when we assess the inputs and outputs of the system. Its use, coordinated with other communication tools, may lead to campaign success or failure, as a party runs its messages through its particular ideologically focused communication systems. The voters in this analogy are the consumer, or user, deciding which system and platform they wish to support, use, or purchase (or donate to); the voters base their final party selection on the branding of the product, packaging, utility, past experiences, and mediated knowledge. This model is commonly known as the voter choice model, or the rationalist model, in political research.

This analogy may help students to understand the inputs and outputs of the electoral system, but it is clear that the analogy has its limits, especially in the fact that humans are not computers. And operating systems are NOT political platforms. However, this analogy does identify the importance of understanding how new IT innovations such as the software applications used by the Liberals in the 2015 election can be viewed as significant shifts when coupled with how their messages were deployed to Canadians during the campaign.

The analogy can also help us to forecast how new apps might only be developed if they serve the party's interests, not necessarily voters'. For example, apps like the Liberal myPlatform and Events apps provide user-generated feedback, but will parties create other apps such as myMediaAdvisory (only available via RSS feeds at the moment), myHansard (to track what MPs state in the House of Commons), myPrimeMinisterSpeech (to track PM speeches on key issues), or MyConsole (to help individuals amalgamate data from all their apps and compare findings among the parties)?

As Small, Jansen, Bastien, Giasson, and Koop (2014) note, scholars must be aware that the new online partisan apps that are available to voters are used by a limited, but growing subset of Canadians. Small et al.'s analysis of *2014 Canadian Online Citizenship Survey* data identified the following trends for online political participation for the roughly 90% of Canadians that actively use the Internet:

The average number of all respondents that accessed political contents including e-government and party/politician websites was just slightly over 25 per cent (26.4 per cent) while less than 10 per cent of them engaged in online political participation activity (7.8 per cent). It appears that the Internet is just one of many venues by which Canadians participate in politics. Indeed, older, traditional ways to doing politics (face-to-face or telephone) remain important in the Internet age. Overall, politics is a minor online activity. On a positive note, however, we see some evidence that young Canadians, who have grown up in the digital age, are more engaged in online political activity than other Canadians. (Small et al., 2014)

In other words, the effects of a new campaign innovation tool, such as the Liberals' myPlatform and Events apps, may possibly only have been used by a subset of less than 26.4 per cent of Canadians online. Other limitations to analyzing the new online algorithmic data tools also include this host of questions about the accuracy of the data they collect:

- 1) How many clear party supporters used the tools? Or conversely, how many voters misrepresented themselves or created bogus pseudonymous accounts simply to explore

the tool?

- 2) How many people used information tools from the multiple party websites to analyze the platform issues before selecting their final choices?
- 3) Were techniques created to track changes in user sentiment over time?
- 4) Is the information better than face-to-face campaign techniques, exit polls, or other such methods, or is the combination beneficial?

None of these questions can be answered without getting behind each party's proprietary firewalls that house the data.

McKelvey (2015) and many others have argued that "Algorithms are not neutral. Algorithms do not function apart from people" (Gillespie, 2016). Using Systems Theory, we can be critical of the limitations of the inputs and outputs of any new technologies that the political parties develop, because as McKelvey and Gillespie warn, humans design our systems with an end purpose in mind. They are not neutral, but instead media systems can determine, or at the very least structure our experiences. In fact, as will be demonstrated in the following analysis, postmodern or hypermodern critiques would argue that none of the new party database systems used in the 2015 election are openly emancipatory in their design or use, in contrast to the uses of Twitter during the Arab Spring for example, where open dialogue was generated across political party lines for all users to view publically.

With these limitations in mind, what purposes do political platforms serve in terms of informing the electorate of each party's proposed agenda in our new media environment?

In Marland, Giasson, and Lees-Marshment's edited work *Political Marketing in Canada* (2012), Marland's chapter on "Amateurs versus Professionals" helps answer the basic questions of what a political platform is and what purposes it serves. He describes how the Canadian political parties have professionalized using public relations experts and information technology strategists, comparing changes between the 1993 and 2006 election campaigns. Of the platform, he states:

A handful of partisans write a Canadian political party's election platform. The authors are members of, or report to, the leader's inner circle and emphasize the party membership's ideological preferences but temper these with domestic market intelligence about the electorate and cost estimates of the pledges. The crafting of this important campaign product involves reflecting on ideas generated in policy conventions, much like a publicly traded business considers the concerns expressed at a shareholders' meeting, and its own perceptions of the consumer marketplace. These might be tested using public opinion research. (Marland, 2012, p. 65)

Partisan ideology marries practical electoral messaging within each new election platform as the influence of branding, ideology, internal party politics, financial resources, brokered support from pressure groups, and external public interests are crafted into words to strategically guide the party and simultaneously attract voters. Political communication and marketing literature has described models and means for tracking and monitoring many aspects of voter political behavior that affect the platform's design, with some analyses actually dismissing the impact of

the platform in terms of swaying voters (Bittner, 2013, p. 258), while others find the document integral to (i) ensuring democratic civil society stability (CIPE, 2012; Kingdon, 1995), (ii) agenda-setting to maintain government and party cohesion (Marland, 2012; 2015), and (iii) shaping the electorate's views of issue ownership (Andrew, Fournier & Soroka, 2013). Overall, Marland's *Brand Command* (2015) situates the platform within the new centralized party branding practice to keep all party members on message, sharing consistent media talking points.

Esselment's (2015) history of the platform describes how parties rarely provided detailed "written promises" or fully costed platforms prior to the 1993 Liberal Red Book. However, developments in political marketing have now created a "new normal" (Esselment, 2015, p. 189), where clear talking points are required for the highly mediated government, guided by political marketers. Since 1993, detailed plans have become the standard during elections, eventually evolving into critical parts of the "permanent campaign" during the social media era (Esselment, 2015; Ryan, 2015).

In "Is Winning Everything?" (2015), Flanagan argued that the new Conservative C2G database positioned the Conservatives well to dominate and succeed in the 2015 election, regardless of the Senate Scandal and Duffy trial issues, with his assessment placing concerted political marketing efforts over that of a substantial platform and running record. He noted, perhaps optimistically that voters would overlook minor electoral infractions by the parties, as "[t]here will always be some degree of illegal and unethical behavior in political campaigns, for the same reason that transgressions occur in all other realms: violators can gain an advantage over those who play by the rules" (Flanagan, 2015, p. 178). He argued that at this point in history Canadian elections ethics had probably never been better than now. In his analysis, he missed identifying how the developing social media savvy of the Trudeau Liberals might counterbalance the incumbent Conservative government and NDP opposition for communicating their policy differences.

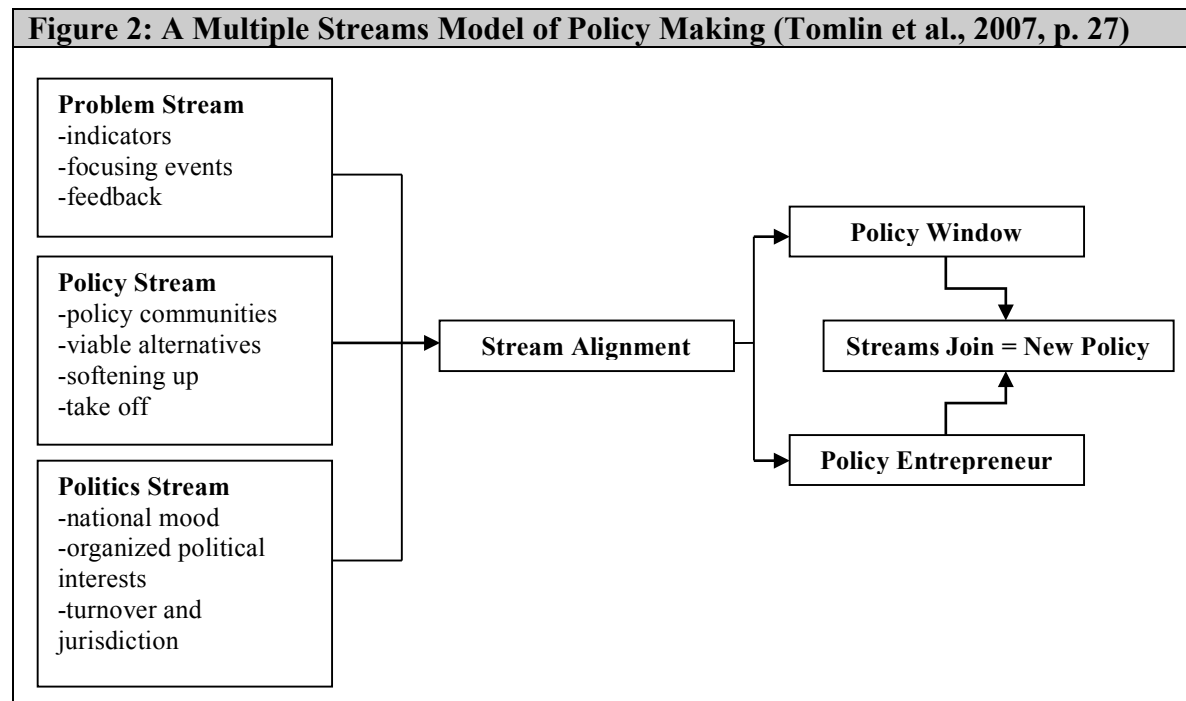
In the run up to the election, many have discussed the updated voter databases of C2G, Liberalist, and Populus (Delacourt, 2016; Marland, 2015; McKelvey, 2015; Thomas, 2015; Watters, 2015). Delacourt's account (2016) particularly describes in detail how Trudeau and his team emphasized the importance of capturing voter intentions via their data systems with their volunteers, which allowed them to identify six different tiers of voters: platinum (sure bet ridings), gold (good prospects of winning), silver (ridings needed to win the election), bronze (the long shots), steel (possible to win in another election), and wood (a riding the Liberals could never win). These tiers were available on maps for the entire country via the "Console."

No one to date has analyzed the link, or structural coupling, between the political platforms and the new software apps used to disseminate the rhetorical options for each party's messages, particular the Liberals myPlatform and Events apps, though Delacourt's work has identified the larger narrative of how that information was used by the Liberal party via their "Console." These innovations are important because parties will now have up-to-date, user-generated tracking of micro-targeted issues released through coordinated technology campaigns, as never before, versus the current voter databases that are party-generated data. Such strategies were not available previously and could become the new normal as a part of the evolving permanent campaign. The issues of user privacy and party owned information come to the forefront in this shift, as does the lack of open or cooperative platforms that each party has avoided as an option for engaging voters.

III. Methodology: Linking Agenda Setting and Frames Analysis through Issue Networks

Many political communication researchers are paying attention to tracking political language broadly (Beauvais, 2015; Hart & Lind, 2013). Ryan (2015) and others (Dutil & Ryan, 2013; Dutil, Ryan & Grossignac, 2010) have demonstrated the utility of using the complementary methods of basic content analysis and “issue networks” for understanding how technologies mediate the communication of political issues. To ground “issue networks” as a method, I focus on Kingdon’s work which first linked agenda-setting practices with discussions of policy windows, in an attempt to understand how platform promises and electoral mandates have led to actual policy. Kingdon described how parties and interest groups contributed to the process of agenda setting by framing the issues to advantage their policies. In effect, government actors use carefully controlled language to adjust “policy windows” to accommodate their slated agendas. Kingdon defined “agenda” as “the list of subjects or problems to which government officials, and people outside the government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time” (Kingdon, 1984, p. 3). In essence, the agenda-setting process focused attention, which today is of greater importance in a highly media-saturated political environment.

To describe the agenda-setting process, Kingdon identified three sets of variables in agenda setting that he called “streams”—namely (i) problem streams, (ii) policy streams, and (iii) political streams. These three variables interacted to create openings for policy windows that political participants take advantage of to craft and create policy. For example, Tomlin, Hillmer and Hampson (2007) used Kingdon’s streams model to explain foreign policy changes over time. Tomlin et al. documented how real world events such as the Cold War changed funding capacity and policies for immigration, national defense, and security over time. They created the following visualization of the “Multiple Streams Model of Policy Making” to present the evolutionary nature of Kingdon’s model (see Figure 2 below).



This model demonstrates how ideas evolve and change over time in the three different streams, and when particular factors in each stream reach a critical alignment, then a new policy can be created (or it at least has a higher success rate of being created). Using Figure 2, we can imagine a new issue such as the Syrian Refugee crisis would reflect a “problem stream” issue, as it was not a national issue before the election, but it became a dominant issue that the Liberals gained ownership over, eventually achieving their promise to safely bring 25,000 refugees to Canada once elected.

The following analysis takes the platform as a rhetorical construct created to simultaneously attract and construct idealized voters and communities that could be swayed by a party’s vision of its elected agenda. The analysis links agenda setting and framing literature through the critical work of “issue networks” taken from political communication research (see: Rogers, 2004; Marres & Rogers, 2005). Following from issue networks theory, the rhetoric in the platform creates a list of keywords, goals, issues, and actors identified as acceptable and recognized by the party. The keywords can be followed using digital methods to track them in digital objects that represent parts of the policy streams identified by Kingdon. When we treat words as data, we have direct access to assessing digital objects messages without a filter, not as in a content analysis that recodifies words and phrases to preselected categories, which may not capture new issues developing in the political or problem streams. In this way, this research identifies new innovations in both the apps each party used during the election, and how those apps were structurally coupled to key issues that allowed the Liberal party to better understand their users and voters’ intentions.

We should all be familiar with issue networks as a method because of the ubiquitous counting of digital objects in things like political debates, word clouds, and online trends. Each party now spends millions of dollars to secure public relations firms to complete these analytics, and senior pollsters are often the face of authority paid to deal with the media interpretations (or spin) of the polls in the “permanent campaign” news cycle (Adams, 2010; Kozolanka, 2009). In Canada, Adams (2010) noted, for instance, that since the Reform party era, the Conservative party had shared resources with the U.S. Republicans, specifically the consultant Frank Luntz since the 2006 election, to help frame controversial issues like the environment or other social conservative wedge issues. From Howard Dean’s keynote at the Liberals’ 2006 party leadership convention, to the use of cross-border public relations firms, many of the same strategies were used to attract voters in the political messaging of documents like the platform (see for example, Kozolanka, 2009; McDonald, 2010). Best practices are copied and traded, similar to the creation of annual reports in corporate communications.

During the 2008 election, the Conservative party created a massive communication centre in an Ottawa suburb spending “millions upon millions” of campaign dollars to frame and filter their party messages and refine their tactics by using focus groups and polls to understand how their messages would play with key Canadian demographics (McChandales, 2008). In one instance, the Conservatives spent \$76,000 on focus groups to understand how to sell the Afghanistan war to Canadians; the findings recommended that the mission be described as “peacekeeping” and not a “war on terror” using the framing words “hope” and “liberty” to situate the message (Woods, 2007). The amount of spending on communications in the U.S. is unparalleled in politics, but to many Canadians the Conservatives’ increased spending has been worrisome, especially the “more than \$23 million over the last two years on media monitoring” of its own members of parliament (Raj, 2013).

This type of “key word” monitoring is the exact methodology used in this paper. The method used in this analysis can be summarized as tracking “issue units” (or, words representing issues). The words are counted using automated concordance software to analyze the partisan issues contained in digital objects, in this case the party platforms. This analysis used the freely available Voyant software applications (see: <http://voyeurtools.org/>), housed on the Canadian TAPoR (Textual Analysis Portal, see: <http://www.tapor.ca>). Those tools allowed for descriptive textual analyses of the platforms, rather than a traditional Aristotelian content analysis method; the latter method instead requires the initial steps of categorizing, coding, and classifying information based on the object of research (see for example, Soroka, 2002; Soroka & Andrew, 2010). In other words, this study creates a “bag” of issues by allowing the texts to speak for themselves using newer online tools to track the words as issue units.

IV. Content Analysis of the Mobile Platforms as a Medium

The initial content analysis of the party websites demonstrated that, like in 2011, all of the parties were consistently providing links to social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube channels, alongside traditional donation and volunteer buttons, among other campaign fair. In these ways, the parties have embraced the networked permanent campaign, which was only developing in the 2006 Canadian election, as many have noted (see Delacourt, 2016; Marland, Giasson & Lees-Marshment, 2012; Pammett & Dornan, 2011). In fact, the technological medium innovations for the 2015 election were the new apps that collected the data about voter intentions such as C2G, Liberalist, and Populus (Delacourt, 2016; Marland, 2015; Patten, 2015; Thomas, 2015), though the Liberals were the only party that developed two downloadable apps available to voters.

The following analysis compares the Liberals’ two apps (i.e. the myPlatform and the Events tracker apps), and their Liberalist database system, to what is known about the Conservatives C2G and NDP’s Populus database systems.

The Liberals two apps were interactive and allowed potential users the opportunity to sign-up and subscribe to the services right on their mobile devices or computers (see Figure 3 below). The Liberal Events application offered users options to find speaking events to attend with Justin Trudeau or other party candidates, opportunities to volunteer, track issues important to them, get updates, contact the party, and link to social media. The importance of the Event app is that it also provided the Liberals with basic user information once the app was downloaded onto a person’s phone or mobile device, following their end user agreement. Such metadata could then be linked into other databases.



Similarly, the Liberal myPlatform application was another means for the Liberals to capture such data. The online Web app offered users 105 platform options that they could choose to add to their personal platform or remove from it. In Figure 3 above, two of the platform options are listed (i.e. “Invest Now in our Future” and “Help the Middle-Class”). A user could select the image, then read a fuller description of the platform statement for that issue, then add the issue to their own personal platform, which was then tracked in the Liberal database.

For both Liberal applications, user information could be linked to the Liberal donor information database via “the Console” that Delacourt (2016) described, which could then help create more detailed voter profiles in an ongoing feedback survey or focus group. This is information the other parties did not have. Using the issue networks method, Table 2 identifies the top 30 repeated words for the 105 Liberal myPlatform options.

Table 2: The Top 30 Repeated Words for the 105 myPlatform Options		
ISSUE UNIT	Frequency	Coefficients Within Corpus
canada	5	3.12
new	4	2.27
communities	3	1.42
education	3	1.42
families	3	1.42
government	3	1.42
security	3	1.42
young	3	1.42
canada's	2	0.57
canadian	2	0.57
canadians	2	0.57
caregivers	2	0.57
ending	2	0.57
helping	2	0.57
information	2	0.57
international	2	0.57
investing	2	0.57
jobs	2	0.57
more	2	0.57
national	2	0.57
open	2	0.57
our	2	0.57
oversight	2	0.57
parliamentary	2	0.57
reform	2	0.57
refugees	2	0.57
service	2	0.57
stronger	2	0.57
tax	2	0.57
training	2	0.57
veterans	2	0.57
veterans'	2	0.57

The Liberals' focus on "investing" (rather than "running a deficit"), "refugees," and "veterans" have been described by others as being top issues that created clear choices in Canadians minds that the Liberal platform was different from the Conservatives and the NDP's (Delacourt, 2016). In Section V below, these issues will become more apparent as a party political marketing

differentiation strategy. Other unique Liberal myPlatform issue standouts for rhetorical vocabulary used included the Liberal platform promise to legalize Marijuana and entrench Trans Rights as human rights (with one mention each). In this way, the myPlatform options created a locus outside of the main Liberal platform document, which was after all released near the end of the election, that offered micro-targeting, beyond the general “middle class” narratives, or at the very least was constructing a broader definition of the middle class, especially when we compare this list to the key issue units in the full party platforms (see the next section, Section V below).

In contrast, the Conservative C2G app provided only one field for a party volunteer to select the “Top Issue” that a potential voter might identify on the doorstep or over the phone (see Figure 4 below). The other options provided by the system included requests for a lawn sign, a ride to vote on election day, a donation, volunteering, and if they would like to become a member of the party.

Figure 4: The Conservatives’ Constituent Information Management System (CIMS) 2 Go App (Closed to voters; Party uses internally)

 C2G Admin Sign-Up Form Language: English Applicant Info Name * Specify applicant's first and last name E-mail Address * Specify applicant's e-mail address (for all CIMS user-relevant news, notices, and communications) Phone Number * Applicant's phone number	New Info Joyce Colbert SCRIPT CANCEL SAVE Support Level Current: Undecided ☐ Not discussed ☒ Non-supporter ☐ Undecided ☐ Supporter Top Issue Current: Unknown - Did not discuss - Sign Current: No ☒ Not discussed ☐ Yes - wants sign ☒ No - does not want sign Ride Current: Unknown ☒ Not discussed ☐ Yes - wants ride ☒ No - does not want ride Donation Current: No ☒ Not discussed ☐ Yes - will donate ☒ No - will not donate Volunteering Current: Unknown ☒ Not discussed ☐ Yes - will volunteer ☒ No - will not volunteer Membership Current: No
Source: Watters, 2015	Source: Miller, 2014

These basic options of C2G were similar for the Liberalist and Populus databases (Delacourt, 2016; Marland, 2015). Populus (see Figure 5 below) and Liberalist were not believed to have GPS capabilities for determining locations on the app provided for local grassroots campaigns.

Figure 5: The NDP Populus Login Page


français

populus

Username

☐ Remember my Username

Password

[Forgot your Password?](#)

Login

Source: <https://populus.ndp.ca/>

If we now assess the inputs and outputs of the C2G Conservative app provided by this basic content analysis, we can see that it was in fact an allopoietic system that only allowed for the local party supporters to input data, with a single field for top issues discussed with potential voters. C2G was, therefore, creating voters as a finite product that was set and completed at the end of a conversation on the phone, or a check-in at the front door by party affiliates. The Liberals' two systems, however, allowed for continuous and ongoing autopoietic feedback directly from potential voters.

Notably though, all three database systems were limited in the options that users were allowed to select. Overall, we would have to argue that the Liberals did provide more options in terms of software applications made available to voters, above the Conservatives closed C2G app and the NDP's closed Populus app, especially in terms of having users select multiple platform issues interactively to track during the election in the myPlatform app.

V. Issue Networks Analysis of the 2015 Platforms

Using the Kingdom streams model, we can start to understand through this practical example how platform issues and an application tracking voter interests become coupled directly together into an "issue networks" feedback system. As described above, the shift from the networked social media campaign to a mobile app coordinated campaign presents one possible technological factor that led to the Liberals 184 seat majority government in 2015, with the Conservatives being reduced to the opposition with 99 seats, and the NDP with 44 seats, the Bloc Quebecois with 10, and the Green party's Elizabeth May holding one seat. More explanation is needed about the platform issues that were released during the campaign to understand how each party constructed their idealized voters through their platform rhetoric.

Since 2006, the Harper Conservatives had led a minority government, battling a Liberal-led official opposition. The 2011 Canadian federal election would change that situation, with the Harper Conservatives winning their first majority with 166 seats in the House of Commons, and the new NDP opposition holding 103 seats based on their historic win, and the Liberals being reduced to 34 seats. Ryan (2015), Ellis and Woolstencraft (2011), Jeffrey (2011), and McGrane (2011) among others have previously identified the Ignatieff leadership problems as a dominant factor in the 2011 Liberal election loss. The Conservatives were able to harness their successful “Economic Action Plan” issue frame, while attacking the Liberals and NDP on another possible coalition government scare or possible budget deficits.

Come 2015, many underestimated the selfie social media savvy of Trudeau and his team to renew the party and come from behind during the 11-week election campaign that started with the Mulcair-led NDP at the top of the polls, flirting with majority government numbers.

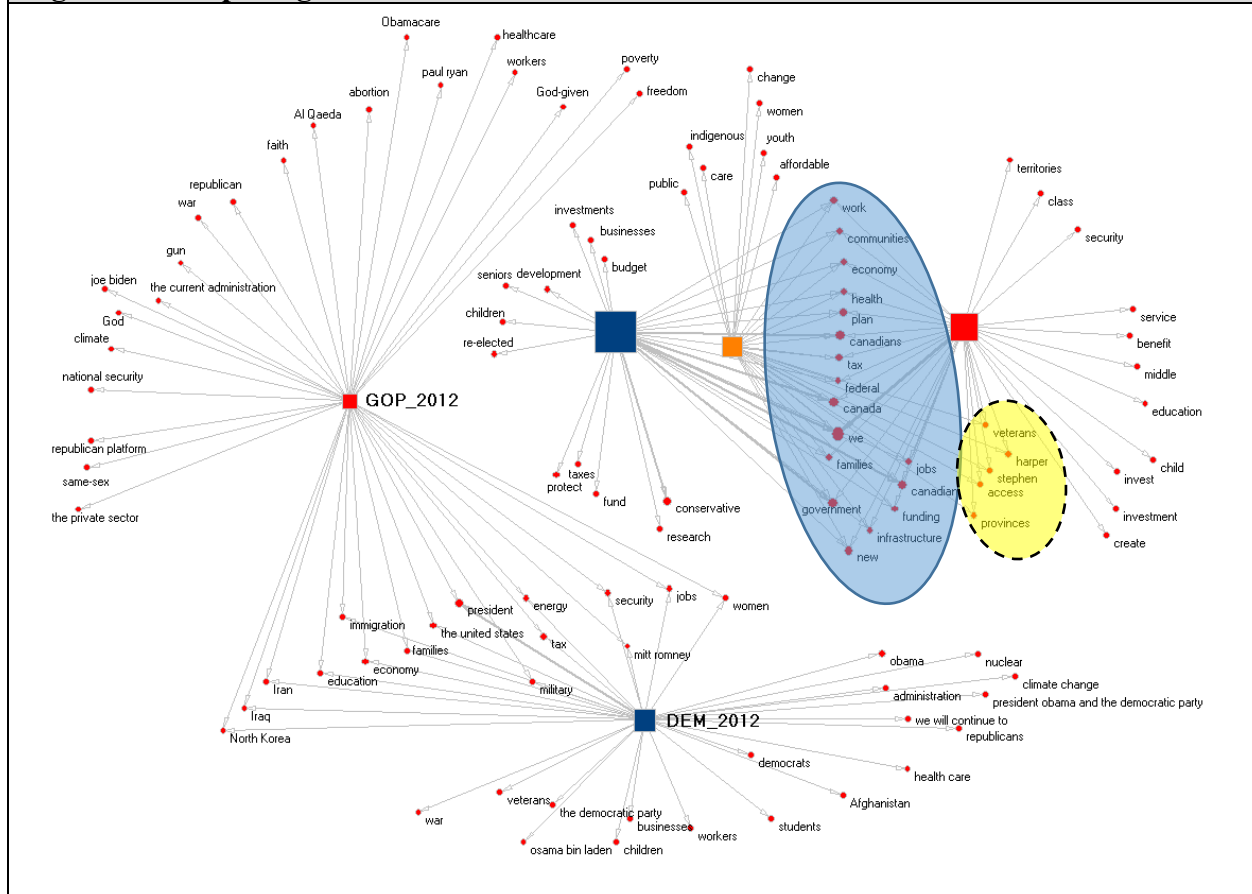
The Canadian platforms for 2015 demonstrate and reflect some of the issue differentiation strategies each party used to stay on message in the election (see Table 3 below). In particular, Table 3 identifies how the Liberals used the key term “invest” to frame their deficit spending proposal.

TABLE 3: Top Issue Units in the 2015 Canadian Platforms					
Conservatives		Liberals		NDP	
“Protect our Economy.” October 9, 2015.		“A New Plan for a Strong Middle Class.” October 5, 2015.		“Building the Country of our Dreams.” October 9, 2015.	
Pages: 159 (67 in 2011).		Pages: 88 (98 in 2011).		Pages: 81 (28 in 2011).	
Issue Unit	Frequency	Issue Unit	Frequency	Issue Unit	Frequency
government	295	we	502	ndp	158
canadian	272	canadians	153	canada	121
conservative	244	canada	142	we	118
canadians	216	new	125	canadians	110
canada	215	government	101	government	84
we	207	tax	73	>health	80
new	169	work	73	care	76
re-elected	134	canadian	68	plan	64
plan	132	support	67	support	64
>economy	114	plan	58	canadian	62
>families	97	communities	56	communities	62
tax	89	federal	56	new	61
protect	73	*stephen	49	work	59
communities	72	benefit	48	*indigenous	54
jobs	71	>families	48	*stephen	53
businesses	61	*invest	48	infrastructure	44
taxes	60	*harper	46	federal	43
program	59	class	44	tax	41
budget	57	infrastructure	44	*women	41
*children	52	>economy	42	access	40
*research	52	middle	44	>families	40

NOTE: “>” indicates key words that have been identified to represent issue units required to win an election. “*” indicates key issue units for that individual party.

Compared to the 2011 platforms (see Ryan, 2015), the top issue units for the three national party platforms were consistent in focusing on the middle class again; they did not create clear regional differentiations or micro-targeted subject positions. This “middle class” framing consistency appears in Figure 6 below where the solid lined sphere depicts the overlap of top words among the three Canadian party platforms. This trend did not appear dominantly in the 2011 election (see Ryan, 2015), especially as the NDP’s 2011 issue units did not overlap with the Conservatives’ or Liberals’ at all. In Figure 6, we in fact see the Liberals and NDP’s issue units readily overlapped, as the dotted line sphere depicts issue units that only the Liberals and the NDP shared, whereas the Conservatives’ issues did not create unique alignments with another individual party. We can see in the shared issue sphere that both the Liberals and NDP targeted Stephen Harper directly by name; he is in fact the only dominant leader name identified in all the platforms’ top issue units.

Figure 6: Comparing the 2015 Canadian and 2012 U.S. Platform Issue Networks



The 2012 data for the American platforms was included in Figure 6 to demonstrate how after one election cycle the issue units no longer align with their closest Canadian ideological partners, as they readily did in the 2011 election. Overall, these patterns support previous analyses that the Liberal shift to the left helped to out maneuver the NDP during the campaign.

VII. Conclusion

In terms of the “robot war,” the systems used to understand voter intentions in the 2015 election campaign favoured the innovative Liberal apps such as their myPlatform and Event applications based on a Systems Theory analysis of their design. Those two apps helped to create an ongoing feedback system, over that of the closed Conservative C2G app that was not open to the average voter online and was only used internally to the party. We can, however, be critical of each algorithmic media system for limiting user choice, because none of the party systems (i.e. C2G, Liberalist, or Populus) were entirely open or democratic in terms of allowing users to create their own options or provide immediate dynamic feedback to the parties, online at least (beyond emails or in-person encounters).

Despite the limitations of the media used, the analysis of political platform rhetoric demonstrated both the limitations and differentiation tactics used in the 2015 election, as compared to the 2011 issue networks. The evidence helped to support the common claim that the Liberal platform move to the left, adapting NDP ideas of deficit budgets and social spending, to attract voters. As in previous research for 2011 election, the top issues in 2015 were again not targeted at regional, provincial, ethnic, racial, or other subject position variations in the platforms, but instead create a generic national “middle class” nuclear family voter. In other words, the rationalist voter choice model was demonstrated in the issues that created an idealized voter for each party. The Trudeau Liberals’ platform did share more issues with the NDP, as many have already stated. The Liberals did, however, take traditional NDP issues such as going into deficit to spend on infrastructure and social systems away from the NDP to create a unique choice for voters.

In this way, the issue networks method helped to identify the top issues in the election campaign quickly, while also allowing more questions to be raised and explored in future research (e.g. why were many of the top issue units so similar based on ideological lines in 2015, but they were not in 2011, especially in terms of the NDP’s 2011 platform?).

The complete analysis identified several Liberal innovations that contributed to voter differentiation in the 2015 election, in both the media and rhetoric selected. A key problem with algorithmic media studies, especially for proprietary apps, is that many questions remain unanswered for researchers, including what percentage of Canadians interacted with the apps, how accurate were the apps in capturing voter intentions that might have changed over the duration of the long 11-week election, and whether or not the apps might have been a game changer in the election (or a detriment that caused some voters to change their support from one party to another).

The overall benefit of the issue networks research demonstrated here lies in the power of the digital methods and visualizations to present the similarities and differences among partisan platforms, especially the ideological crossover in particular individual themes among the Canadian parties. The exploratory textual analysis delivered direct access to the key actors, issues, and messages in a text, producing data trends that open a text quickly to researchers. The process also provided more questions and patterns to be explored. For instance, why were the top issue units so similar based on ideological lines in Canada’s election in 2015, but not with their American counterparts after only several years? Was the change due to such factors as mandate narratives, ideology, political climate, or coordinated strategies? Or was it simply the progress of time? Such questions can be answered by qualitative interviews and other social science methods; however, the aims of this paper were modest in that it hoped to demonstrate the utility

of the automated issue network analysis in decoding platform language. As well, the basic content analysis helped to identify the unique uses of new apps to inform the creation and dissemination of the rhetorical platforms.

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