A New Architecture of the Public Sphere:
Online Deliberation at the Liberal Party of Canada’s 2011 Extraordinary Convention

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Information

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the quality and effectiveness of online political deliberation, within the framework of Jurgen Habermas’ public sphere and discourse theories. The thesis analyzes a deliberative process that took place online, in June 2011, as part of the Liberal Party of Canada’s Extraordinary Convention, specifically through content and discourse analysis of data from online discussion platforms. The analysis sought to ascertain whether the objectives of the convention were met, measured the quality of discourse and identified insights to support the creation of more effective spaces for political deliberation online. Analysis of the results revealed a difference in the discourse quality for each platform, attributed to the synchronicity or asynchronicity of the platform. The thesis concludes with suggestions for a design that makes use of both the synchronous and asynchronous features of the online discussion platforms in order to more specifically target the objectives of the political process.
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Thank you to the Liberal Party of Canada, for giving me a fantastic opportunity in the digital communications team during the 2011 elections, and again during the 2012 Biennial Convention, and allowing me to meet a group of passionate online communications professionals who inspired the subject of this thesis.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There are no dangerous thoughts; Thinking itself is dangerous.
Hannah Arendt (1971)

The history of western democratic thought is fraught with attempts to structure society and government in a way that allows for the creation of a societal framework that is most adapted to what citizens want and need. In the 21st century, Canada is governed by a hierarchy of such frameworks, from political parties and democratic participation mechanisms to federal legislations, each addressing our rights and freedoms in the various spheres in which citizens operate.

This thesis examines an online political deliberation process that took place in June 2011 during a Liberal Party of Canada Convention. It analyzes the ways in which the convention achieved its stated objectives and the quality of discourse online, and seeks to gain insights that can be applied to other online deliberation systems. It situates this process within the public sphere, which, as famously described by Habermas (1962) and Arendt (1958), is the means by which society is shaped by its citizens – a space for idea sharing, consensus building, and policy definition. Habermas argued that, in the 20th century, conditions had arisen which had caused the structural transformation of the public sphere, severely weakening the quality of citizen participation and public deliberation.

However, although the public sphere as a deliberative space may have been eroded through mass communication and citizen disengagement, it seems to have remained strong in political parties (Putnam, 1999; Rosenblum, 2000; Small, 2012). While political parties have used offline engagement in order to address some of Habermas’ elements for deliberative quality, they are now attempting to meet their objectives with online tools as well. These elements have been synthesized by Steenbergen et al (2003) as follows: participation, level and content of justification, respect, inclusion of counterarguments and constructive politics, and will be used further in this paper to analyze discourse quality during the 2011 Extraordinary Convention.

The Liberal Party of Canada organized a virtual convention, so called an “Extraordinary Convention” on June 18, 2011, in order to examine the possibility of changing the party’s Constitution to better prepare for an eventual leadership race. This Convention came 1.5 months after the Liberal Party of Canada’s historical
defeat during the May 2, 2011 federal elections, when it came in third, behind the Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party. According to the Liberal Party of Canada Constitution (2012), National Conventions must be held every two years, except in matters of extraordinary importance. This Convention was held outside of the schedule established by the Party in order to determine the date for the next Convention and the next Leadership Race.

The National Board of the Liberal Party of Canada identified two aims of the Online Convention: “to ask Liberals to approve two specific, one time only, constitutional amendments that would enable a Biennial Convention to occur on January 13-15, 2012 and a leadership selection vote to occur [...] between November 1, 2012 and February 28, 2013.” (Liberal Party of Canada, 2011)

The National Board also identified several broader objectives for the Extraordinary Convention:

- Foster transparency, meritocracy and horizontal participation;
- Promote bilingualism;
- Engage women, youth, Aboriginal and new Canadians, and residents of Quebec;
- Launch a period of re-thinking and organizational re-building;
- Launch the open and democratic selection of a new and permanent leader. (Liberal Party of Canada, 2011)

This thesis seeks to answer three questions:

1. In what ways did the convention achieve its objectives?
2. What was the quality of the online deliberative process during the convention?
3. What insights can we gain from this study that can be applied to online deliberation systems in the public sphere?

In order to answer these questions, analysis of the June 18, 2011 Liberal Party of Canada’s Extraordinary Convention was carried out, using the Discourse Quality Index (DQI), developed by Steenbergen et al in 2003, as a means to assess the quality of the online comments provided by the delegates to the convention. The study also used descriptive analytics to provide a supporting narrative of the findings, comparing datasets consisting of comments from a chat discussion and from a blog used by delegates before and during the Convention.
Largely due to the historical inaccessibility of transcripts from political party conventions, which are now made accessible by the use of online tools, and due to the opening up of party deliberations, possibly due to trends in creating information technologies for transparency and accountability, conducting content analysis of discourse in an online convention would have been difficult even a few years ago. This thesis therefore addresses a gap in the literature, where lessons learned in deliberation processes in political parties can benefit deliberation beyond the party, and the overall architecture of the public sphere. It seeks to contribute to the growing body of work on the restructuring of the public sphere online (Barabas, 2004; Chambers, 1996; Crossley and Roberts, 2004; Dalhberg, 2001; Dalhberg, 2004; Dalhgren 2005; Fraser, 1990; Hinchliffe, 2009; Kellner, 2000; King, 2009; Lupia, 2004; Papacharissi, 2009; Small, 2012; Steenbergen et al, 2003), in the hope that a stronger understanding of this phenomenon's societal impact will lead to better use and more deliberate architectural decisions.

1.1 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS
This section discusses and defines the terms used to frame this study, in order to suggest a specific understanding of political concepts that may have a variety of meanings in the literature.

1.1.1 DEMOCRACY
Democracy in the modern era has been described by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* (1835), who identified it as a system of government defined by the people, meaning majority rule. In order to operationalize majority decision making, a democratic government must organize elections. Since then, many pre-conditions to free and fair elections have been added to this definition, as well as additional elements, such as rights and freedoms, that in effect provide oversight to the day-to-day decisions of the majority in order to develop and guard a societal value system. This study is concerned with the following democratic principles:

1. A democratic government is one ruled by the majority (de Tocqueville, 1835).
2. Where the majority elects a government to represent it, this government must be transparent in its operations and accountable to its electors.
3. Whether part of the majority in a decision or not, each citizen has certain guaranteed rights and freedoms.
4. In order to participate in the election of their representatives and the value system of their society, citizens must have a means by which to deliberate and generate demands.
1.1.2 **PUBLIC SPHERE**

For the purposes of this paper, the definition used will be the bourgeois, or middle-class public sphere defined by Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962): “The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public [...] against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor.”

Arendt (1958) has additional comments about the public sphere, which will be discussed further in the literature review, but that essentially frame it as the manifestation of shared ideas in a shared space, where a kind of truth about the type of society that citizens strive for will emerge.

Succinctly put, the public sphere is the space in which individual citizens come together to define collective demands that they can then expect their representatives in government to legislate. In this sense and as we will see below, we will use the public sphere and the deliberative space interchangeably.

1.1.3 **PRIVATE SPHERE**

Habermas and Arendt define the private sphere as the home (1962, 1958), the space where government usually does not interfere and the individual citizen may develop his or her own unique decision making system. Although, as we will see in Chapter 2, critics argue that the distinction between the private sphere and the public sphere is not so clear-cut (Kellner, 2000) it may be conceptually understood as the space where the individual shapes his or her original ideas before sharing and reshaping them in the public sphere.

1.1.4 **DELIBERATION**

We take a dialectic approach to deliberation assuming that, through discussion, a form of truth will emerge that will shape policy making. The dialectic approach is perhaps best known for its description by Plato, although he is by no means the only political philosopher to have recognized the value of discussion and reasoned argument to obtain a consensus that is beneficial to all. Dialectic philosophies are found in Buddhism, Hinduism and Marxism, amongst others.

Habermas provides a structure for this form of deliberation, defining the type of argument that would qualify as deliberative (1962), which will be used to measure deliberative quality. As a response to Habermas, Steenbergen et al (2003) argue that the quality of a deliberative process is a function of: (1) whether political actors listen to each other; (2) whether they reasonably justify their positions; (3)
whether they show mutual respect; (4) whether they are willing to re-evaluate and eventually (5) revisit mutual preferences.

However, this inquiry claims to have a constructivist starting point, similar to the one set out by Chambers (1996), who argues that deliberation is a fundamental part of the expression of human dignity, allowing each individual affected by a decision to have an equal opportunity to voice his or her opinion and contribute to a debate before that decision is made.

Regarding the scenario under study, the Liberal Party of Canada also provides both a philosophical and operational definition for deliberation, formalizing the deliberative process in the Extraordinary Convention's rules of order as the period of public debate preceding the vote, lasting a minimum of 10 minutes (Liberal Party of Canada, 2011), but possibly much longer.

Additionally, the Liberal Party of Canada's Convention frames the place of public deliberation in society in its preamble, as follows:

"The Liberal Party of Canada recognizes that human dignity in a democratic system requires that all citizens have access to full information concerning the policies and leadership of the Party; the opportunity to participate in open and public assessment of such means, and such modifications of policies and leadership as they deem desirable to promote the political, economic, social, cultural and general well-being of Canadians.

To realize this objective, the Liberal Party of Canada strives to provide a flexible and democratic structure whereby all Canadians can obtain such information, participate in such assessment and militate for such reform through open communications, free dialogue and participatory action both electoral and non-electoral." (Liberal Party of Canada, 2012)

1.1.5 DELIBERATIVE SPACE
Simply put, the deliberative space is the setting, within the public sphere, in which deliberation can take place. As Arendt argues, (1958) there is no deliberation without deliberative space – it is the physical embodiment of the ideal of deliberation. In this study, we categorize the deliberative space as either offline or online, although we recognize the possibility of one deliberative space having both characteristics. Both types of deliberative spaces are defined below.

1.1.6 OFFLINE SPACE
The offline deliberative space encompasses all physical spaces where deliberation has taken place in person. This may include Habermas’ coffee houses in the 19th century (1962), just as it can include modern political deliberation spaces such as town halls and conventions (Rosenblum, 2000).
Habermas conceptualizes the offline public space by modeling it from a very specific male dominated form of public deliberation in the 19th century. However, as Fraser (2000) points out, there were other means of participating in the public sphere at the time, which Habermas does not touch on. For example, women in the 19th century participated actively in workers’ rights advocacy. It is thus important to consider the offline space in terms of any physical gathering in which political deliberation may take place, rather than only one based on the Habermasian coffee house ideal. In this sense, any political convention taking place primarily in a co-located space, such as the Liberal Party of Canada Biennial in January 2012 (Liberal Party of Canada, 2013) qualifies as offline.

1.1.7 **ONLINE SPACE**

This study refers to the online space as a platform for deliberative activities occurring using the World Wide Web, as defined first defined by Tim Berners-Lee (1993):

“The WorldWideWeb (W3) is a wide-area hypermedia information retrieval initiative aiming to give universal access to a large universe of documents.”

Although a technical explanation of this quote is beyond the scope of this paper, it will be assumed that any deliberative activity using technology that allows people to access the Internet through the World Wide Web as defined above takes place in the online space (Tim Berners-Lee, 1993). More recently, online deliberation has taken place primarily using social media technologies, where citizens discuss both synchronously and asynchronously, and many researchers have examined their impact on the quality of democratic participation (Noveck, 2009; Gonzalez-Bailon, 2010).

Figure 1 below shows the relationship between each term in the theoretical framework, where deliberation is a pre-requisite for democracy, and is only possible in a deliberative space, which can be online or offline.
Figure 1: Situation of terms within the theoretical framework
1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

The scenario under review is the Liberal Party of Canada Extraordinary Convention, which took place on June 18, 2011 from 3 to 6 PM EST, following an online discussion that began on June 2, 2011. Its objectives, as outlined in Section 1.1, were to foster transparency, meritocracy and horizontal participation; promote bilingualism; engage women, youth, Aboriginal and new Canadians, and residents of Quebec; launch a period of re-thinking and organizational re-building; and launch the open and democratic selection of a new and permanent leader. The Convention was called just following the May 2, 2011 Canadian Elections. From this point forward, the thesis will refer to this Extraordinary Convention as the Convention.

In addition to its objectives, the Convention was designed to obtain consensus on two constitutional amendments proposed by the party leadership. These amendments were both related to the election of a new party leader to replace outgoing leader Michael Ignatieff.

It should be noted that in June 2011, the Liberal Party of Canada was recovering from the worst electoral loss in its history. On May 2, 2011 the party went from 77 seats and 26.6% of the popular vote to 34 seats and 18.91% of the vote. This slide in power began when Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien was succeeded by Paul Martin in 2003. At this time, the Liberal Party held a majority government, which was reduced to a minority under Paul Martin in 2004. This was partly attributed to a corruption scandal, the so-called “Sponsorship Scandal” which unearthed payments of exorbitant fees to advertising agencies by the party (CBC, 2006). Following a no-confidence motion in 2006, Parliament was dissolved and a new election was called in January 2006, which the party lost. Following this came two party leaders, Stéphane Dion and Michael Ignatieff, who lost the 2008 and 2011 federal elections, respectively. By the time of the Extraordinary Convention, Michael Ignatieff had stepped down in favour of interim leader Bob Rae. Issues such as rebuilding, membership renewal and leadership were at the top of the party’s priority list.

Thus, during the Extraordinary Convention, the amendments to the Liberal Party’s Constitution read as follows:

**Main constitutional proposal 1:**

The meeting of the National Board of Directors required by subsection 54(3) as a consequence of the resignation of the Leader in May 2011 shall be held at any time on or before October 1, 2012: and

At the meeting referred to in Paragraph (a), the National Board of Directors, in consultation with the Caucus and the Council of Presidents and on five (5) months’
notice to the Party, shall set a date for a Leadership Vote between November 1, 2012 and February 28, 2013.

Main constitutional proposal 2:

[...] the next biennial convention of the Party including the related in-person meeting of the Council of Presidents shall be held on January 13 to 15, 2012, at Ottawa, Ontario (Liberal Party of Canada, 2011).

The Convention was orchestrated and managed by the Liberal Party of Canada staff members, situated at the Liberal Party of Canada headquarters in Ottawa, Canada. They set up the rules and objectives of the Convention, set up and moderated the online spaces that the delegates used to deliberate, and took responsibility for outcomes and follow-up. The staff members will now be referred to as Organizers.

After the Convention date was set and a call for delegates was sent out, sub-amendments to the main constitutional proposals were submitted by Party members to the Organizers and published online in order to be included in the deliberative process that will be described below. Each sub-amendment is mutually exclusive and offers a modification to the main constitutional proposal. Thus, Party members would first vote for or against the main constitutional proposal, which would modify the Party's Convention, then vote for or against each sub-amendment. The sub-amendments are mutually exclusive (or contradictory) and are summarized in the table below:

Table 1: Proposed constitutional amendments during Convention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main constitutional proposal</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Contradictory Sub-Amendment 1</th>
<th>Contradictory Sub-Amendment 2</th>
<th>Contradictory Sub-Amendment 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>National Board of Directors to meet by October 1, 2012 and at that point set a date for the Leadership Vote between November 1, 2012 and February 28, 2013. (This means that the party leadership race would start by October 1, 2012 and the new leader of the Board of Directors meet by July 1, 2012 and asks that the leadership vote take place between September 1, 2012 and November 1, 2012, in effect moving the leadership race to an earlier date.</td>
<td>The sub-amendment proposes to have the Board of Directors meet by July 1, 2012 and asks that the leadership vote take place between September 1, 2012 and November 1, 2012, in effect moving the leadership race to an earlier date.</td>
<td>The sub-amendment proposes to have a longer period of time for the leadership race, asking that the vote take place anytime between November 1, 2012 and June 30, 2013.</td>
<td>The sub-amendment proposes to have the Board of Directors meet by February 1, 2013 and asks that the leadership vote take place between March 1, 2013 and June 30, 2013, in effect moving the leadership race to a later date.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Liberal Party would be elected within the timeframe stated above.)

|   | 2 | Hold next biennial convention on 13-15 January, 2012 in Ottawa, Ontario (This sets a date for the election of a new party executive.) | This sub-amendment proposes a later date for the biennial convention, asking that it take place between May 15 and June 30, 2012. | This sub-amendment asks that the location of the convention – Ottawa – be removed from the proposal. |

Three platforms were developed by the Organizers in order to create a fully virtual Conference.

1. **Blog:** The Organizers posted a blog article on their website which described the proposed Constitutional Proposals and Sub-amendments and asked participants to comment on them. The article was posted on June 2, 2011 and was open for commenting until the Convention on June 18, 2011. The blog comments were used as a mechanism for deliberation and were posted sequentially and asynchronously (*See Figure 3*).

2. **Chat:** The Organizers used an interactive chat system called Cover It Live, which allowed for participants to interact through short chat comments during the conference (*See Figure 2*). The chat comments were moderated and approved by Organizers and could be anonymous or self-identified on a voluntary basis (Cover It Live, 2011).

3. **Teleconference:** The Organizers used a telephone system in order to orchestrate voting on the proposed constitutional changes. They called delegates at the beginning of the Convention to invite them to join the teleconference. Then, during the Convention, they allowed the delegates to speak on the teleconference in order to contribute to a debate period preceding each vote, and to vote using their telephone keypad. The audio recording for the teleconference was streamed live on the Convention website.
Figure 2: Screenshot of Convention Chat Platform
Source: Liberal Party of Canada 2011

Figure 3: Screenshot of Convention Blog Platform
Source: Liberal Party of Canada 2011
Although each platform contributed to the deliberative space by allowing participants to voice their opinion, listen to counter-arguments and reach consensus, the third platform was in effect very different from the other two, in terms of architecture and participants, and was therefore not included in the study.

The Liberal Party local ridings selected a total of 2,000 delegates from across Canada to attend the Convention, and only those delegates were permitted to participate in the Teleconference. However, participation to the Blog and the Chat was open, meaning that both delegates and non-delegates participated on an equal footing in these deliberative spaces. We deemed this type of deliberation to be much closer to Habermas’ original deliberative space, which did not require election or membership. As we will see in Chapter 2, deliberative theory from Plato to the present tends to value free and open participation of citizens.

We therefore analyzed comments posted on two deliberative platforms, the Blog and the Chat, in order to answer the questions posed in this study. Figure 4 below shows how the different platforms were used in the deliberative process.
Figure 4: Illustration of the uses of the deliberative platforms by both delegates and non-delegates from June 2 to June 18, 2011
1.3 **Note on Researcher Motivations**

It should be noted that I (the researcher) was a member of the Liberal Party of Canada until the beginning of the research process, although this membership was not renewed during data analysis and writing. In addition, I was a member of the Party’s digital communications team during the 2011 Election, and one of the hosts of the online video programming for the 2012 Biennial Convention. While this familiarity with the Party’s digital operations inspired the study, it is possible that this experience biased the critical analysis.

On April 3, 2011, I participated in the moderation of a public live chat for the launch of the Liberal Party’s electoral platform. This chat used the same technology as the one later used during the June 2011 Extraordinary Convention. In this role, I read comments and approved them for posting, while occasionally responding privately to participants. There were three other moderators during this event, and we filtered several thousand comments in about two hours. Our guidelines were to ignore what we would consider extremely offensive comments, and post everything else. Since we didn’t have time to read all of the comments, we scanned them and approved them as quickly as we could. In my view, there may have been a natural bias towards posting comments in French – since there were less of them we did some positive discrimination. We also tried to give priority to comments bringing forward different points of view.

In addition, both during the election and during the Extraordinary Convention, the members of the digital communications team tended to be fairly idealistic and tech-savvy recent political science graduates. They understood the concept of technology-driven democratic participation, and were committed to providing the best platforms possible to enable this. On the other hand, each person did not necessarily have the time or perspective to explore alternatives in a way permitted by university research.

I was an active member of the party in the Ottawa South riding in 2009 and 2010. During this period, I acted as a member of the Board for the riding, and supported the Liberal candidate’s campaign by accompanying him during door-knocking activities and by organizing membership events. As a member, I helped organize Canada at 150 in March 2010 – in what was termed a “non-partisan conference about what we want our country to be and how we need to get there” (Liberal Party of Canada, 2013). I worked with many active members who contributed to similar events due to policy-driven motivations. That is, many of them wanted to have an impact on the country’s policy directions and felt that membership in a federal party whose values they could relate to was the best way to do this. Because they contributed so much volunteer time to this, they also felt that the party should be accountable to them and were extremely disappointed as the party slid to third place during the May 2011 elections.
The backdrop for this thesis is therefore a desire to better understand the means by which citizens should contribute to policy making at the party level, and what party staff members or political organizers can do to facilitate this. In this vein, I particularly appreciate Hannah Arendt’s framing of politics as an artificial process through which citizens enter in dialogue to develop policies. In my view, the fact that politics can be seen as artificial means that the political process has to be created and managed, rather than left to evolve naturally. With the development of new information and communications technologies, we now have new means to facilitate this dialogue. I therefore hope to better understand the means by which the political process emerges on these new platforms, and make recommendations that will allow them to be used at their full advantage.

1.4 THESIS TRAJECTORY
Chapter 1 introduced the area of study and the research questions, provided definitions and context for the study, and outlined researcher motivations.

In Chapter 2, we will look at literature relevant to the study, starting with the Liberal Party of Canada and Canadian public participation, followed by a discussion on the main elements and critiques of the public sphere, ethical and practical approaches to deliberation, and the Discourse Quality Index.

In Chapter 3, we will describe the methodology and research design, including the data samples and methods of analysis.

In Chapter 4, we will examine the results of the data analysis, starting with the qualitative data analysis and its five components – comment intention, commenter role, response to amendments, reaction to the decision-making process and reference to other participants. We will then look at the results of the Discourse Quality Index and its six components – participation, level of justification, content of justification, respect, counterarguments and constructive politics.

In Chapter 5, we will discuss the findings associated with the two first research questions – in what way did the Convention reach its objectives and what was the quality of the deliberative process during the convention. We will examine the findings in light of the following objectives: fostering transparency, meritocracy and horizontal participation; promoting bilingualism; engaging women, youth, Aboriginal and new Canadians, and residents of Quebec; launching a period of re-thinking and organizational rebuilding; and launching the open and democratic selection of a new and permanent leader. We will then look at the quality of the deliberative process and calculate the Chat and Blog comments indicator rating for each dimension of the Discourse Quality Index.
Here we find that normal participation is possible, that the platform determines both the level and content of justification, that respect, both implicit and explicit, is pervasive, and that counterarguments and mediating proposals are more likely to be included in blog comments than in chat comments.

We will then discuss additional insights that can be gained from this study. In this section, we will examine the value of a combined asynchronous and synchronous platform and make technical recommendations for online deliberative processes, which would include attention to accessibility, multilingualism, transparency and participant engagement.

In Chapter 6, we will outline the conclusions of this thesis, namely that Habermas’ public sphere framework, while an extremely useful conceptual tool, is based on an ideal that excluded participants for both group and individual reasons, such as gender, class, ethnicity and physical and mental ability. In addition, a new socio-technological environment changes the premises of his argument, which were that consumerism and corporatism had eroded the quality of the public sphere in the 20th century. Today we find that, to the contrary, citizens are participating in political deliberation online and efforts must be made to ensure that the design of the online platform through which they participate are designed according to a series of principles that will improve the quality and the effectiveness of the deliberative process.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION
While literature about the public sphere and the potential of Internet technologies to contribute to it is extremely rich and varied, there is still much to be written about the experiences of political parties online, particularly in Canada. This literature review begins by providing context to the online Convention and to the atmosphere in which the deliberative process is inserted. It then briefly examines the public sphere within political theory, and the long tradition of deliberation research from Plato to J.S. Mill to Habermas and Arendt, and to the public sphere in more recent history. It then examines several elements of the diverse literature on online deliberation, as they relate to the scenario at hand, in terms of subject matter and research methodology.

2.2 THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA EXTRAORDINARY CONVENTION IN CONTEXT
Colloquially referred to as Canada’s “natural governing party” for much of the 20th century (Suderman, 2011), the Liberal Party of Canada has spiraled since 2004 from a weak victory, to Official Opposition, to third party, after a devastating defeat during the 2011 General Elections.

Gidengil et al (2009) have identified three short-term factors that could have contributed to the fall of the Liberal Party – the economy, leadership evaluation and issue attitudes, specifically as a result of the 2004 Sponsorship Scandal; a turning point in public trust and perceptions of legitimacy in the Party (Kozolanka, 2006). The Federal Sponsorship Scandal uncovered the payment of $100 million to communications agencies in Quebec in order to raise the profile of the federal government following the 1995 Referendum; a significant portion of which was misappropriated (CBC, 2006).

Gidengil et al (2006) argue that the Sponsorship Scandal had a clear impact on the weakening of the Liberal victory in 2004. While much might have caused an upswing in Liberal fortunes in the decade that followed, Gidengil et al (2009) found that the support of two large groups in the Liberal core – Catholics and visible minorities – dropped significantly in 2004 and has not been recovered since.

In addition, they argued that both a weakening Canadian economy, due in large part to the crisis in the global economy; and a series of party leaders – Paul Martin, Stéphane Dion and Michael Ignatieff – who struggled to garner the enthusiasm of a majority of party members and Liberal supporters; contributed to the fall of the Liberal Party.
It can thus be reasoned that as a response to an atmosphere of distrust, frustration and dissent within the party, it was particularly important for the Liberal Party to be successful in engaging both members and non-members and promoting trust.

The Liberal Party has, since the 2011 Elections, used various mechanisms for citizen engagement. On January 13-15, 2012, the Liberal Party of Canada held its Biennial, which regrouped 3,000 delegates from ridings across Canada. Unlike the June 2011 Extraordinary Convention, which used an online platform for discussion, deliberation and decision-making, this convention used computer-assisted mechanisms only for outreach and discussion, not for deliberation or decision-making (Liberal Party of Canada, 2013).

Online communications and decision-making models are now commonly used in modern town hall meetings, as the decisions made by delegates in-person are both fed by and reported to the general public synchronously. Although some debates may be closed to media and the public, such as those discussing outreach statistics and donor lists, the voting process and announcement of results is usually open to media. By reporting to and conversing with an online public during town hall meetings, the political party is typically able to better control its outgoing message and evaluate the attitudes of the general public or absent membership towards the debates and discussions (Rosenblum, 2000).

Although there was a formal debate set aside for delegates on the teleconference immediately preceding each vote (Liberal Party of Canada, 2011), there were no formal rules established for the online platforms. As such, these platforms served as both group support systems and deliberative spaces, where voting participants and members of the public alike were encouraged to engage freely. But with little formal incentives for participation, what was the driving force behind the manifest flow in comments before and during the Convention?

2.3 CANADA AND ONLINE MODES OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Statistics Canada Canadian Internet Use Survey (Statistics Canada, 2013) finds that in 2010, eight out of ten Canadian households had access to the Internet. In addition, Koop and Jansen (2009) and Barney (2005) write that Canadians actively use online platforms for political participation. In 2012, 14 million Canadians checked their Facebook status on a daily basis, and just as many went online regularly for news. Political parties in Canada use social media actively to engage with their membership, with many discussion pages, Facebook and Twitter feeds, and blogs available for all major parties. For example, over 7,000 Canadians are part of the New Democratic Party’s Facebook page, which allows them to comment on various party activities (https://www.facebook.com/NDP.NPD). Similarly, over 26,000 Canadians are members of the Conservative Party of Canada’s Facebook page which is used in a similar way to the NPD’s

However, Barney (2005) notes that this form of participation, largely unregulated, should be seen as quasi-democratic, where an expectation of participation according to democratic principles exists, but is for the most part unmet. In addition, Small (2012) notes that Canadian political parties do not only make use of the Internet to foster civic participation. They also make extensive use of negative advertising and trolling to put down political adversaries.

Barney (2005) therefore argues that that while there is widespread excitement about the value of online platforms for democratic participation (Noveck, 2009), these tools and deliberative practices cannot truly contribute to democracy unless they are designed in such a way that they adhere to certain set democratic principles and have a guaranteed policy outcome.

Koon and Jansen (2009) echo this statement in their study on Canadian blogs, noting that while the discussions on these forums contain some deliberative elements, they are unequal and often contain unconstructive engagement between participants. As we have seen, the deliberative quality of online discussions is a subject that we will explore throughout this study.

In addition, while most Canadians are active online in one way or another, The Canadian Internet Use Survey (Statistics Canada, 2013) notes that a digital divide still exists in Canada, mainly along socioeconomic, education and age lines, a divide which has not been consistently addressed by the online political deliberative platforms. Internet accessibility will be addressed in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

2.4 INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION

Several studies of Canadian party politics have examined the impulse for participation in political parties, particularly in terms of ideological motivation of the members (Young and Cross, 2002). A 2000 study of the Canadian Political Party Membership (Young and Cross, 2002) suggests that these members tend to be motivated more by ideology and altruism and less by the creation of social networks and community, a finding that contradicts research on political party membership in the United States (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 1999; Rosenblum, 2000).

Literature on incentives to join political parties tends to propose four categories: material, solidary and ideological incentives (Clark and Wilson, 1961) and altruistic incentives (Seyd and Whitley, 1992). While material and solidary incentives can be seen as self-interested (desire to obtain a post in government, desire to network and build social capital), ideological and altruistic incentives are more closely linked to
the common good. On the one hand, the ideologically-driven member will want to drive policy change, and will have a clear societal ideal which (s)he will work to implement in the political system. On the other, the altruistically-driven member will have an emotional attachment to the political party, coupled with a desire to participate (Seyd and Whitley, 1992; Young and Cross, 2002).

While a Habermasian lens imagines the creation of the public sphere for ideological reasons, Arendt, who wrote about the public sphere in *The Human Condition* (1958) four years before Habermas did, assumes that participation in the public sphere should take place for altruistic reasons.

According to Arendt, the public sphere – a common space where citizens can discuss concerns and formulate demands – is a prerequisite to politics and a necessary condition for citizenship, political equality and solidarity. Thus, one can infer that rather than participating in party politics with the expectation of specific policy outputs, as an ideologically-driven member would do, the altruistically-driven member sees participation as an end in itself, from which political freedom will necessarily arise (Arendt, 1958).

This discussion can provide some insight into the motivations of the participants in the convention and the reasoning behind some of their arguments.

### 2.5 Habermas, Arendt and the Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere

The section below outlines the evolution of the main lines of thought in public sphere theory upon which the research design is based.

#### 2.5.1 The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere

In order to adequately frame Habermas’ thesis and the consequent Habermasian and post-Habermasian schools of thought, one must reach back to the platform of classical democratic theory on which he stood.

Although not a democrat per se, Plato, in the 4th Century BCE, examined classical democracy as one of several possible governance structures that could lead to the creation of a just society. In the Republic, he described the way in which deliberation in public forums led to the creation of city-states. He depicted what Popper later claimed to be a utopist democracy, one that, in structure at least, should be used as a model for governance in the 20th century (Popper, 1945).

In Plato's city-state, citizens (albeit only free adult men) met regularly in public forums in order to debate societal ideals and present policy recommendations. In addition, in much of his work, he described dialectic, a method of dialogue which seeks, through rational discussion, to reach consensus between diverging points of view and ultimately to arrive at some kind of truth (Plato, 1992).
In turn, Hannah Arendt (1958) developed a strong theory of the public sphere, which was comprised of a space of political freedom and equality which existed whenever citizens engaged in political discourse and dialectics, and a physical space of artifacts and institutions. She argued that both spaces were critical to citizenship and democracy. If one applies a Platonic lens to her thought, one might say that the form – the ideal of deliberation, materialized in a physical platform, was the essential manifestation of democratic citizenship, one that all humankind should strive towards.

Habermas’ thesis clearly followed from this legacy. In The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962), he explains how economic and political changes in the late 19th Century, such as the separation of Church and State and economic specialization led to the partition of the private and the public spheres. The private sphere became the home, where the individual returned after participating in the public sphere, and the public sphere encompassed both the workplace and the deliberative space, where the individual could contribute to shaping societal discourse.

Each sphere was associated with distinct rights and responsibilities and was located in physical space. The private sphere resided in the home, while the public sphere in the place of work and in other public spaces, such as coffee houses.

However, by 1962, Habermas argued, the quality of the public sphere had been severely eroded, namely by the disintegration of the public space. Rather than actively participating in discussion and societal debate, individuals became passive consumers, receiving information through mass communications channels such as the television and radio, and allowing business lobbies to shape policy making at all levels of government.

2.5.2 THE PUBLIC SPHERE AFTER HABERMAS

Although Habermas’ thesis was widely acknowledged and criticized for nearly half a century after its publication, it has more recently been revisited in light of the development of a possible new public sphere – the online space. Noveck (2009) and Bohman (2004) argue that online forums, discussion groups, email lists, and social spaces of all kinds are the new café, not only allowing for a revival of public deliberation, but greatly increasing its inclusiveness and diversity.

Critiques of Habermas’ conceptualization of the public sphere can be divided into two categories: accessibility and technology. A first series of authors, such as Fraser (1990), Kellner (2000) and Hurrel (2005) argue that political deliberation in the public sphere may exclude potential participants, in particular subordinate and minority groups. The literature on which the public sphere concept is based on,
from Plato to Habermas, assumes that the participating citizen is male and free (Plato) or at the very least able to engage in public dialectic (Habermas). Kellner (2000) argues that by focusing too much on the ‘bourgeois’ public sphere, Habermas gives the impression that the 19th century coffee house model was an ideal which should be emulated, rather than a starting point for the development of a conceptual framework. However, this ideal was flawed, primarily because it did nothing to resolve social inequalities that would have hindered public participation. Similarly, Fraser’s primary critique is that the public sphere historically has excluded women, both explicitly and implicitly. Habermas, she argues, makes the mistake of ignoring the spaces where women in the 19th century did engage in political deliberation, for example during workers’ rights advocacy campaigns, thus perpetuating the notion that the public sphere is for men. She adds that this conceptualization of the public sphere continues implicitly to this day, as women tend to be less outspoken and their opinion less valued in deliberative spaces. Similarly, Hurrel argues that deliberative spaces exclude participants who communicate in a different manner than the rest of the discussants, thus breaking social norms in the public sphere. Both authors argue that public sphere design must take accessibility and equality into account during the design phase, elements that Habermas does not consider.

Authors who critique Habermas on communications technology grounds argue that the reasons for which Habermas claimed that the public sphere had become eroded, namely corporate control of discourse through mass media and political disengagement through consumerism and individualism, are no longer relevant in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Papacharissi, 2009; Dalhren, 2005; Dahlberg, 2001). To the contrary, there is evidence that new technologies have already created an online public space, and efforts must be done to ensure that they enable a public sphere (Papacharissi, 2009). That is, as Arendt (1962) would frame it, the space exists; what is necessary is to understand the process by which deliberation take place in this space and, if possible, improve its design.

In their post-Habermasian Discourse Quality Index (DQI), Steenbergen et al (2003) examine six conditions for measuring the quality of discourse that are based on Habermas’ public sphere. These will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2, Section 7. However, the authors make some inferences that are worth discussing further here, namely in terms of the impact of deliberation on policy making and individual motivations when engaging in political decision making.

2.5.3 IMPACT OF DELIBERATION ON POLICY MAKING
According to Habermas (Habermas, 1962; Crossley and Roberts, 2004), in a healthy democracy, consensus and decisions arising from activities within the public sphere have a direct effect on government legislation.
Habermas therefore argues that with the breakdown of the public sphere, the citizen loses his or her opportunity to influence political decision making, thus having no say in the way that the society in which he or she lives is structured.

Similarly, Mill argues that free speech is the foundation upon which citizens are able to shape their society. When citizens are denied the freedom to express thoughts and ideas, decision-making is effectuated by non-citizen actors such as dictators or commercial entities, and the democratic political structure disappears (Mill, 1998).

However, democratic legislation tends to separate free speech from electoral power. For example, the Canadian Constitution grants its citizens freedom of speech, and also allows them to vote in elections for parliamentary representatives (Dodek, 2013). Few democracies today have constitutional provisions bridging the gap between speech and vote – allowing for direct democracy. The most well-known example of a contemporary direct democracy is Switzerland, where citizens have a right to veto each piece of legislation passed by the government. In Canada, the citizen is only granted direct say in legislation during extraordinary circumstances, such as the 1980 and 1995 referendums on Quebec sovereignty (Dodek, 2013).

Membership in political parties, however, provides venues for citizens to directly influence the choice of platforms and leaders in the parties that they will later elect (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995). We will see below how the members of the Liberal Party of Canada negotiate their role in the party and the influence that they have.

Thus, critical to the impact of the public sphere is the shape that it takes, not only in terms of physical venue – be it a salon, town hall, or online forum, but also in terms of expected outputs. It is not enough to allow for a space for discussion; that discussion must also lead to concrete outcomes – in a democracy, this typically takes the shape of a proposal, deliberation and voting process.

In this way, proponents of the public sphere (Arendt, 1958; Habermas, 1962; Crossley and Roberts, 2004; Noveck, 2009) argue that deliberation alone is not enough; it must be embedded in a process that allows for the fruition of beliefs and ideas into decisions and legislations.

2.5.4 Political decision-making: the common good versus group interests

The notion of the common good in political decision-making can be found in much of political theory since Plato. Two political theorists, however, are particularly relevant to this study: J.S. Mill, who wrote in the 19th century, and John Rawls, who wrote in the 20th.
The common good was seen as an objective for political decision making for both Mill and Rawls (Mill, 1998; Rawls, 1998). That is, they rejected the self-interest theory as proposed by Darwin in 1859 (Darwin, 1859) and many political and economic theorists since, which claims that human beings and their societies evolve and thrive only because each person acts in a self-interested way, thus weeding out the weaker and ensuring that any social agreement will benefit the stronger.

Instead, they argued that individuals can only thrive in a society when they look beyond their own self-interest and towards the common good, an equilibrium state at which most people will benefit.

Mill suggested that the best framework to understand the common good was utilitarianism, which, simply put, proposes that every political decision should maximize the number of people that it impacts positively. Thus, the majority rules, and the bigger the majority, the better.

Rawls, in his difference principle (1998), took a different approach, arguing for the common good in terms of inclusion of diverse voices, particularly marginalized groups and minorities. Thus, political decision-making processes should not only give a voice to the minorities, but should also ensure that policies benefit them as much as they benefit the majority.

While Mill’s more homogenous approach is typical in political parties, where dissent and disunity is seen as weakness, Rawls’ theory of heterogeneity appeals to the values of the Liberal Party of Canada, which, as the objectives of the Extraordinary Convention clearly state (Liberal Party of Canada, 2011), historically seek to promote bilingualism, national and ethnic diversity, and minority rights, particularly those of immigrants and Aboriginal communities.

2.6 Ethical and Practical Approaches to Political Deliberation
This section examines issues in the practical implementation of the theories discussed above, as identified in particular by literature about transparency and the online democratic participation.

2.6.1 Transparency
Transparency has long been considered a fundamental democratic value (de Tocqueville, 1835; Panyarachun, 2008). Panyarachun highlights transparency and accountability as one of the seven pillars of a democracy, along with elections, political tolerance, rule of law, freedom of expression, decentralization and civil society. Similarly, Hollyer, Rosendorf and Vreeland (2011) argue that democracies are indeed more transparent, pointing to the need for elected officials to gain the trust of the public through the dissemination of information.
Transparency is not only considered to strengthen trust between citizens and governments, but also privately held institutions and civil society organizations. This can be explained by a mechanism that both Fox (2007) and Humphrey (1984) have described as “the organization of shame”. Information about the operations of institutions and individuals sheds light on the nature of their activities (trustworthy or shameful), and pressure them to act in a manner that will gain public approval. However, this assumes that an individual or institution: a) can be publicly shamed and b) will suffer sanctions once the shameful operations come to light.

As Fox (2007) argues, not all public representatives can in fact be shamed. The prevalence of anti-corruption watchdogs (Kaufmann, 2007) and whistleblowers (Samson, 2010) indicate that transparency can be ineffective in drawing out shameful, or corrupt, behaviour if it is counterfeit, incomplete or unaccompanied by penalties.

Transparency, however, is not only the flip side of corruption; it is also the mechanism by which citizens participate in a democracy. Citizens are engaged at various levels of public decision making, from electing political representatives to supporting policy initiatives through civil society.

As we will see below, political organization, although tied to government, in fact lies in the realm of civil society – an area in which the impact of transparency has not been discussed extensively.

2.6.2 Transparency and the Internet

Over the last two decades, it has been argued (Noveck, 2010; Bertot, Jaeger, Grimes, 2010) that modern information and communications technologies have revolutionized the process of democracy.

Bertot (2010) and Wong and Welch (2001) have been instrumental in illustrating the link between transparency and information and communications technologies, which lies in accessibility. West (2000) developed a framework for assessing the level of transparency of governments by analyzing government websites, defining eGovernment as “the delivery of government information and services online or through other digital means”. Going further, Naurin and Lindstedt (2010) note that for transparency measures to be effective, citizens should have the means to act upon them as well.

In response to discussions about the effectiveness of ICTs for transparency, the Organisation for Cooperation and Economic Development (OECD, 2001) listed three elements which should be taken into account when engaging citizens: interdependence of information, accessibility and accountability. That is, governments should publish as much information as possible online to allow citizens to understand how best to participate and make enlightened decisions. They should also promote accessibility for all citizens,
regardless of gender, language, or physical or mental ability. Finally, they should be accountable, in the sense that expectations should be clearly set and met by both parties, in order to ensure the implementation of citizen decisions.

These three poles of citizen engagement also apply to public consultation, as explained by Transparency International, an anti-corruption advocacy non-profit organization, in a discussion of MyWorld2015, a United Nations-led platform aimed at stimulating civic participation in the development of the post-2015 development goals (Transparency International, 2013). Transparency International argues that the platform, which allows any website visitor to vote for preferred development objectives, lacks a mechanism to measure the actual contribution of the citizen to the decision making process.

Others, such as Coglianese (2009), and Finel and Lord (1999), have argued that transparency initiatives can act against the interest of the public, by hindering the ability of representatives to take action behind closed doors. When discussing the first-term Obama administration’s enthusiasm for making government information available to citizens online, Coglianese coined the term “fish-bowl transparency”, noting that the impact of government transparency online on government, policy making and public perceptions of legitimacy has not yet been proven.

2.6.3 Political Conventions and Citizen Engagement

Literature on modern-day political conventions can be found in both Canada (Young and Cross, 2002) and the United States. Branz notes that conventions remain extremely important to the development of party unity and party platforms. He argues that leadership-membership communications are particularly affected by the use of new technologies (Branz, 2010).

Houten (2009) maps out various features of party organizations, including rules and conventions affecting the relationship between party leadership and local membership. He suggests that this framework be used to evaluate response to crisis situations in political parties.

Farrell (1978) discusses the use of party conventions as legitimating rituals in American policy and describes how Democrats and Republicans used concepts of party unity and conflict in order to ensure that the membership continued to support the party and its chosen leader. On the other hand, Rissman (2009)

1 The raw survey results for this survey can be accessed here: http://ec2-23-22-13-62.compute-1.amazonaws.com/dataset/. As of June 13, 2013, over 600,000 respondents from 194 countries had contributed to the survey, at the following link: http://www.myworld2015.org/.
discusses self-censorship at the 2008 Republican National Convention and explains how the party leadership cited security concerns to limit the expression of membership opinions.

Rosenblum (2000) writes that few scholars of civil society and democratic participation study political party membership. She claims, however, that more than the politicians themselves, national parties set the policy agenda for the entire country. Members are citizens committed to strengthening democracy and advancing their ideological objectives. Since political parties depend on the work and monetary contributions of their supporters, creating information flows and decision making systems that both stimulate the membership and allow the party to obtain or hold onto power is extremely important. Although there is a wealth of research on online platforms as group-support systems in work environments or public social networks (DeSanctis and Gallupe, 1987; Jarvenpaa and Leidner, 1998; Nunamaker and Deokar, 1992; Dongs, Lyons et al, 2012), there is very little about the use of those tools specifically in political parties or voluntary associations. However, several authors have explored both deliberation and policy making involving interactions between government and citizens, and among citizens.

Gonzalez-Bailon (2010), for example, in her analysis of the depth of participation in political discussions on the social networking site Slashdot, notes an increase in the number of citizens who engage politically online. Similarly to Coglianese (2009), she argues that evidence is lacking as to the impact of this increased participation on decision-making and policy development. Dutton (2011) suggests two forms of public participation – open and expert. He notes that individual citizen expertise could be used to enhance political decision-making. Noveck (2009) applies a similar assumption to the creation of her peer-to-patent group support system, based out of New York University, which enables the crowdsourcing of patent review committees from interested, knowledgeable citizens.

Literature on citizen engagement in terms of the grassroots, or the ground-up approach, is critical in understanding the expectations that participants might have when it comes to online platforms.

Although we have discussed the mechanisms by with modern democracies attempt to legislate against the destruction of the democracy, frameworks that measure the quality of citizen engagement against stated political objectives are a non-legislative means by which to hold decision makers accountable.

Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969) and its most notable adaptation at an international level, Hart’s Ladder of Children’s Participation, which was developed in 1994 for UNICEF, have been used extensively to measure citizen participation in the public sphere.
Although Arnstein’s framework remains an effective tool for measuring citizen engagement, it is considered more appropriate for a comparative study, rather than a study of a single scenario. However, one can see that this framework effectively shows possible points of breakdown in the public sphere, and helps us to understand where tensions might exist between creators of a public space and its participants. The framework is broken down into 8 rungs:

1- Manipulation (when the process is used solely to achieve a political objective);

2- Therapy (used to allow citizens to air out grievances and reduce tensions);

3- Informing (used to provide information to citizens);

4- Consultation (used to obtain some information about citizen preferences);

5- Placation (used to ensure that citizens feel listened to);

6- Partnership (used to share decision making with citizens);

7- Delegated Power (used to provide decision power to citizens, including power to hold government accountable); and

8- Citizen Control (used when the distinction between government and citizen is removed, and citizens control every aspect of a policy making process).

One can see in this a gradual shift in the balance of power from government to citizen.

When evaluating the quality of public discourse and engagement, some authors (Freire, 2000; Hart, 1994) have adopted a critical approach, arguing that the Habermasian public sphere can easily be overrun by political interests, quickly creating unequal power dynamics in which those with a stronger voice pull power away from the public sphere into their own semi-private spheres.

Plato himself saw this as one of the dangers of the classical democracy, predicting a cycle for political systems in which the rule of the people will lead to the election of a demagogue to protect the interests of the population, ultimately resulting in the creation of a new tyrannic system (Plato, 1992 - approx. 380 B.C.).

In an online platform such as the one under study, the deliberative space is not in the public domain but is controlled and managed by the Liberal Party of Canada staff. Examples discussed throughout this literature review show a variety of different intentions in online political forums, whether these forums are
government or party or citizen-built. Ultimately, however, online political forums do remain heavily dependent on the people who control the technology upon which they are built.

From the late 1990s (Bimber, 1998) onwards, many authors have reviewed the impact of Internet technologies on democratic engagement and citizen-government information flows. The literature highlights two trends – government-designed communications and citizen-designed communications. Cases in both trends have impacts along the entire Ladder of Citizen Participation, as even citizen-led initiatives can fail to have the desired level of voice and participation.

As early as 1998, Bimber predicted that Internet technologies, rather than creating a new breed of “electronic republic” (Grossman, 1995), would lead to an “accelerated pluralism”, where a growing number of interest groups would become more and more fragmented and disorganized. This relates to rung 2 on the Ladder – therapy; as citizens are placated by a burgeoning social organization without the ability to combine their voices into a coherent policy platform.

In the early 2000s, several authors such as West (2000) and Thomas and Streib (2003) noted that government-to-citizen communications has improved thanks to information technologies, particularly by allowing remote access to government information and services. Citizens thus had the ability to better understand their rights and responsibilities in order to, for instance, contact government services with questions. This points to rung 3 in the Ladder - Informing.

West (2000) and Thomas and Streib’s (2003) criticism is that the potential of information technologies is left untapped by such online repositories. Consequently, one sees a shift in the use of information technologies in the later 2000s, as more governments and political organizations tap into the dialogue made possible by social media (Noveck, 2009), which may correspond to rungs 4-6 in the Ladder of Citizen Participation.

In 2009, for example, the United States and the United Kingdom took the lead in what was named open data – encouraging governments to publish their budgets and expenditures online to promote accountability towards their citizens (Lakhani et al, 2010; Lagace, 2010; Coglianese, 2009; Hindman, 2009). Although this movement generated enthusiasm at a global level, leading, for example, to the creation of the Open Government Partnership (2013), the Sunlight Foundation (2013), the Open Knowledge Foundation (2013), and scores of conferences around the world, one finds that making more information available online to citizens does not directly increase their level of engagement beyond rung 3 - Informing.
The discussion above situates deliberation within a broader discussion on citizen engagement and shows how researchers have highlighted the importance of adequate platforms and methods for effective engagement.

2.7 The Discourse Quality Index
The Discourse Quality Index (DQI) was developed by Steenbergen et al in 2003 as a means to measure the quality of a deliberative process. This index, initially created as a tool for measuring the quality of speeches in the British Parliament, was cited by post-Habermasian scholars, particularly those looking at methodology for evaluating the quality of online deliberation (Dalhberg, 2004).

Steenbergen et al (2003) argued that Habermas’ pre-conditions for deliberation could be categorized into six areas: participation, level of justification, content of justification, respect, counterarguments and constructive politics. DQI’s coding system will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 3, Section 4 (Methods of Analysis). However, it is important to first examine the relationship between the six categories of the DQI and Habermasian deliberation.

First, a deliberative process may be illustrated as follows, where the participant enters the process with a pre-formed argument, which is then reshaped in a process of ideas exchange. Habermas (1962) argues that through this cycle, which may be repeated as many times and with as many participants as necessary, consensus can be reached.

Figure 5 shows how, in a deliberative process, a starting objective is set – “Consensus needed”. From this, individual arguments are shared in the public sphere. The ensuing discussion leads to enlightenment of the individual participants, who then reshape their arguments, and over time, reach a consensus.
When we add the discourse quality elements provided by Steenbergen et al (2003) to this process, we can observe how they feed into the deliberative process.

*Participation:* This element measures the quality of participation by examining whether or not a speaker was interrupted when he or she spoke. This serves as a basic means of determining whether participants were free to participate or restrained in some way.

*Level and content of justification:* In order to understand the means by which a speaker would strive to enlighten others, this element measures the number of supporting arguments that were offered as justification for an argument, as well as their content. The more the supporting arguments tend towards the common good, first in utilitarian terms and ultimately in terms of the difference principle, the higher their contribution to the deliberative process.

*Respect:* In order for the participants to both gain insight from other arguments and eventually reshape their own argument, they should have respect for their fellow participants. This is measured by examining statements of praise (explicit respect), politeness (implicit respect), and rudeness (no respect).

*Counterarguments:* Next, in order to evaluate whether participants really have taken other arguments into account in order to re-evaluate their arguments, we measure references to counter-arguments in the participants’ statements.
Constructive politics: Finally, we examine participants' willingness to negotiate with others in order to reach consensus. While some participants might stick firmly to their original position, others might be more willing to propose alternatives (offering a new proposal) or to mediate (combining several proposals into one).

The relationship between the Discourse Quality Index and the deliberative process is illustrated below. In Figure 6, we can see that we have the same starting objective – “Consensus needed”. When individuals begin to share their arguments in the public sphere, we begin to measure discourse quality by noting their freedom to participate and the level and content of their initial justifications. During the ensuing discussion, we measure the number of counterarguments used and the respect in the comments, taking note of the quality of the interactions between the individual participants. Finally, as the initial arguments are reshaped, we measure the level at which the politics are constructive – whether individuals stuck to their original positions or instead provided mediating or alternative arguments.

*Figure 6: Discourse Quality Index within the deliberative process*

It should be noted that the DQI has been criticized, most notably by King (2009). King argues that the DQI cannot account for the subjective elements of Habermas’ communications theory. He adds that the categories presented above, while accurately representing Habermas’ preconditions to deliberation, cannot be represented objectively by coders, who are likely to misrepresent them due to their own subjective
beliefs. He concludes that, although the DQI examines the statements made in a deliberative process, it does not assess the quality or content of the consensus itself. This means that the relationship between the quality of the process and the quality of the outcome is unclear, and that a deliberative process that is of high quality, according to the DQI, may not result in particularly representative or consensual policy recommendations.

Habermas (2006), however, has been very forthright in his praise of the DQI as a measurement tool for deliberative quality. Other deliberative democracy scholars, such as Dalhberg (2004), have also applied the tool and found it to be useful.

In our view, while inter-coder agreement and issues of subjectivity were a challenge (as will be shown in Chapter 3), we nevertheless found that the DQI can be used to increase the understanding of a deliberative process.

This literature review gave political context to the study, and highlighted the most important theoretical concepts upon which the research was based. In addition, it examined several issues in the literature that make the subject of online deliberative democracy relevant today, such as transparency and democratic participation. Finally, it gave an overview of the measurement tool used to examine the quality of the deliberative process, and how it relates to the theoretical framework.

In the following chapter, we will outline the methodology that was used to answer the study's research questions.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This section will describe the research design and methodology, including the sample used, the methods of analysis and methodological challenges that arose.

3.1 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH PROCESS
In this study, we collected comments from the Chat and the Blog of the Extraordinary Convention, both of which were available on the Liberal Party of Canada’s website. We used the comments as our source of data from which to perform an analysis that would answer our three research questions: 1- In what ways did the convention achieve its objectives?; 2- What was the quality of the deliberative process during the convention?; and 3- What insights can we gain from this study that can be applied to online deliberation systems in the public sphere?

In order to answer these questions, we performed content analysis using a non-empirical instrument that we designed after having read the comments, which categorized them according to intention, role of the commenter, response to proposed amendments, response to the deliberative process and reference to other participants. This allowed us to identify which comment could be further analyzed for deliberative quality, gave us a sense of the participant to moderator distribution and their interactions, and allowed us to see what opinions were put forward, both in relation to the proposed amendments and to the online platform itself.

We then performed a more formal discourse quality analysis on the comments and assigned a measurement to the Chat and the Blog, followed by an assessment of whether any insight could be gained about whether or not the Organizers had reached their objectives from the coded data.

Once we had answered the first two questions, we discussed further insights that might be applied to other online deliberation systems, and proposed an illustration of what such a system might look like.
3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN
This study examines a single scenario using two forms of content analysis – a series of questions based on the data itself, aimed at gaining a better understanding of the dataset, and a qualitative analysis instrument – the Discourse Quality Index.

The overall research approach, which seeks to understand, rather than explain, falls under an interpretivist framework (Bryman, 2001; Luker, 2008; Walsham, 2009). By seeking to understand the nature of deliberation during the convention, it is hoped that not only will the research questions be answered, but additional insight will also be obtained about the nature of the online public sphere and the means by which it can be better understood to improve the quality of democracy. In this sense, the first and third questions are examined using interpretive and inductive approaches, as described by Walsham (2009), social construction of technology theorists such as Latour (1999) and other post-positivists, and Star (1999) in her work, The Ethnography of Infrastructure.

Although the second research question is answered using a measurement instrument that could also be used for empirical research, it is deliberatively framed to leave room for interpretation, as we find that the discourse quality index is an indicative, but by no means a comprehensive way to assess the quality of a deliberative process.

Bryman (2001) notes that while the objective ontological position asserts that social phenomena exist independently of social actors, the constructivist approach posits that: “social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but are in a constant state of revision”. Steenbergen et al (2003) already adopted a constructivist approach when developing the DQI for political deliberations in the British Parliament, and the online public sphere, with its embedded social structures and networks, is also well suited to this type of approach.

Although the design of the proposed research is inspired by Yin’s (2003) work on case studies, it is not a formal case study, which Yin defines as follows: “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003). Although this study does not take an empirical approach, it does claim to be the analysis of a single scenario in order to yield insight of a broader nature. This fits into one of Yin’s (2003) five rationales for choosing single-case design, rather than multiple-case design. Yin’s fourth rationale, that the case is revelatory, applies to the study of the Liberal Party of Canada. Although there have been several studies on various aspects of political parties in Canada, particularly relating to motivations behind party membership, content analysis of an online convention has
not yet been examined, to the best of the researcher’s knowledge. Thus, the question of the contribution of online methods to democratic deliberation in a political party makes this case potentially insightful.

In this study, some consideration has been given to Yin’s four conditions for case study design – construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability (2003). In terms of construct validity, Yin (2003) proposes the use of multiple sources of evidence during data collection. In this scenario, two data sources were used, and the study also draws on publicly available documentation and records of the Liberal Party. As can be seen throughout this thesis, the research also makes use of logic models used to link extracted themes to the research questions, an approach which seeks to address issues of internal validity. In addition, the research design relies heavily on deliberative democratic theory, addressing external validity claims. Finally, the study makes an attempt to address reliability by using a second coder for the Discourse Quality Index, with mixed results, as we will see in section 3.5.

Using some form of content analysis to examine online discussions, particularly with large datasets, is not entirely new. As early as the 1990s (Willhelm, 1998), researchers have examined the value of online forums to carry out democratic tasks, such as deliberation and decision-making, and have continued using these methods to this day (Wright and Street, 2007; Janssen and Raphael, 2005; Gonzalez-Bailon, 2010). West (2005), for example, used content analysis to evaluate the success of government websites at facilitating government-to-citizen information flows. His study examines a number of variables, such as the presence of online publications, adherence to usability guidelines, email responsiveness and reliability.

Other authors, such as Gonzalez-Bailon (2010), have used data produced through online discussions to evaluate the contribution of the platform to political deliberation. She measures the depth and breadth of the political discussions on the social networking site Slashdot and notes a difference in the structures of discussions of a political nature compared to other types of discussion.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION
Data was collected online from the Liberal Party website at the end of August 2011, at which time it was downloaded by the researcher and input into Excel files. The data consists of two transcripts – one from the Chat discussion during the deliberative process, and one from the Blog discussion that took place in the weeks before the Convention. This data was scraped from the Liberal Party website and stored in Excel spreadsheets on the researcher’s computer.

Chat: The Chat discussion took place from 2:55 PM to 6:00 PM on June 18, 2011. All of the comments from the discussion were collected, which amounted to 2,662 comments from 2,527 unique participants.
The raw data was structured in rows with the following columns: Timestamp, Comment and Commenter Name. The time stamp could not be used as a unique identifier, as time was recorded by the minute only and dozens of comments could therefore have the same time stamp. Before the data was processed, a unique identifier column was therefore added and the comments were numbered from 1 to 2,662.

**Blog:** The online debate began approximately three weeks before the Extraordinary Convention, and was kept open during the Convention, on June 2, 2011. Of the 450 comments published online, the first 150 were collected for analysis. This was done because we determined that the earlier comments could provide more insight into the deliberative process as it is illustrated in Figure 3, as they showed more individual opinions and the early stages of enlightenment and consensus-building. The raw data was also separated into rows per comment, and had the following columns: unique identifier, date, time, commenter name and comment. The data was formatted manually and was not manipulated further before coding.

A summary of the data samples is provided below.

**Table 2: Data samples**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-empirical coding</th>
<th>Discourse quality analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Platform</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat (Synchronous)</td>
<td>Chat (Synchronous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog (Asynchronous)</td>
<td>Blog (Asynchronous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of comments analyzed</strong></td>
<td>Group in total sample rated as “Communicate Opinion (4)” in “Comment Intention” – 1,197 (44.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample – 2,662</td>
<td>30% of total sample – 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30% of total sample</td>
<td>30% of total sample</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.4 METHODS OF ANALYSIS

We first performed a qualitative analysis of the data by coding it according to the trends in data, which in addition to the examination of Party records and documents, served to answer the first research question. We then used the Discourse Quality Index to measure the deliberative quality of the process. Insight gained from both of rounds of analysis then fed into answering the last question. This process is illustrated in Figure 7 below.
Qualitative analysis

In the qualitative analysis, we coded 2,662 Chat comments and 150 Blog comments. The objective of this round of analysis was to gain a better overall understanding of the data set, and as such, questions allowing for referring to several facets of the process – the comment and the commenter, the subject matter and relationships between participants were used. In addition, this round of analysis identified the sample of comments used during the Chat that would be used for the deliberative quality analysis. The sampling method was purposive, as we used our best judgment to identify which comments had enough content to be analyzed further. As we have seen, 44.4% of the Chat data sample used in the first round of analysis was used in the second round of analysis. All Blog comments were deemed to contain enough content to allow for deliberative quality analysis, and none of the original sample of 150 was discarded.
The five dimensions of interest were identified by examining trends in the data that would allow us to understand the motivation behind the comment, the role of the commenter in the discussion and the interaction between commenters.

Table 3: Coding book for qualitative analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Code = 1</th>
<th>Code = 2</th>
<th>Code = 3</th>
<th>Code = 4</th>
<th>Code = 5</th>
<th>Code = 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comment intention</td>
<td>Voting intention</td>
<td>Influence process</td>
<td>Provide information</td>
<td>Communicate opinion</td>
<td>Ask question</td>
<td>Greeting or technical comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commenter role</td>
<td>Moderator</td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to proposed amendments</td>
<td>Agreement with original amendments</td>
<td>Agreement with original amendment with the inclusion of additional sub-amendments</td>
<td>Disagreement with any change in the constitution</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to the deliberative process</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to other participants</td>
<td>Reference to another commenter</td>
<td>No reference</td>
<td>Reference to a speaker in the teleconference portion of the online convention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discourse Quality Index

The discourse quality analysis used the index designed by Steenbergen et al’s (2003), the theory of which we have discussed above. Here, we describe the indicators used in the index and the means for measurement.

Participation: In this scenario, we looked at whether each comment showed signs that the commenter had freely participated or whether the comment interrupted another commenter. Since there was no verbal
interruption, we looked at whether there may have been some censorship in the comment, for example, if it contained claims that a previous comment was irrelevant or inappropriate to the discussion.

**Level of justification:** Here we looked at how a claim was justified in the comment. If a comment contained a claim without any supporting statements, then we gave it a code 0. If a comment contained a claim with one supporting statement that may not be explicitly linked to the claim, we gave it a code 1. For one explicitly linked supporting statement, we gave it a code 2; and for two or more supporting statements, we gave a code 3.

**Content of justification:** Here we looked at what the justification was, in order to consider what type of argument was considered as giving validity to a political statement. When comments concerned group interests, we gave them a code 0. When they contained an explicit statement of the common good in utilitarian terms, for example alluding to benefits for the majority, or the greatest number in the group, we gave them a code 2. When they contained a statement of the common good concerning the difference principle, for example alluding to minority rights or interests, we gave them a code 3. In the absence of any of the above three qualities, we coded the statement as neutral.

**Respect:** We coded a comment as having no respect (0) when it clearly insulted or attacked another commenter, or other participants in the conversation, such as a Liberal Party staff member or the Liberal Party Executive. We coded a comment as having implicit respect if there was no disrespectful comment but no explicitly respectful comment either (1). We coded a comment as having explicit respect if it clearly contained a statement of praise or esteem (2).

**Counterarguments:** In this category we looked at the way that comments alluded to previous claims (or possible other claims) in order to build their argument. We valued more highly a statement that had examined, and valued, a diverging statement.

**Constructive politics:** In this category, we looked at the outcome of the commenter's deliberation process, as expressed in the comment. If the comment clearly stated the commenter's opinion, without an explicit mention of other points of view or an attempt to mediate, we coded it as positional politics (0). If a comment gave an alternative view, bringing in points that are outside the scope of the discussion, we coded it as 1. If a comment clearly brought in one or more diverging arguments in an attempt to conciliate, we coded it as 2.
Table 4: Coding book for Discourse Quality Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/Code</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Interruption of a speaker</td>
<td>Participation is possible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of justification</td>
<td>No justification</td>
<td>Inferior justification</td>
<td>Qualified justification</td>
<td>Sophisticated justification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content of justification</td>
<td>Explicit statement concerning group interests</td>
<td>Neutral statement</td>
<td>Explicit statement of the common good in utilitarian terms</td>
<td>Explicit statement of the common good in terms of the difference principle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>No respect</td>
<td>Implicit respect</td>
<td>Explicit respect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterarguments</td>
<td>Counterarguments ignored</td>
<td>Counterarguments included but degraded</td>
<td>Counterarguments included – neutral</td>
<td>Counterarguments included and valued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive politics</td>
<td>Positional politics</td>
<td>Alternative proposal</td>
<td>Mediating proposal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 Agreement Test

An inter-coder agreement test was conducted for the Discourse Quality Index analysis where a second coder applied the coding manual to 15 Blog comments and 119 Chat comments, or approximately 10% of the sample used in the second round of analysis.

In the table below, we use an observed agreement measure that compares the level of agreement between each coder. We obtain a percentage point for inter-coder agreement and provide an average observed agreement measure for both the chat and the blog.²

² There is considerable debate about the validity of percentage of agreement measures for qualitative data analysis. Here we use an inter-rater agreement measure rather than an inter-rater reliability measure, such as Cohen's kappa, which is considered a simple, but nevertheless acceptable measurement for subjective data analysis. (Tinsley and Brown, 2000).
Table 5: Discourse Quality Index agreement test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Level of justification</th>
<th>Content of justification</th>
<th>Respect</th>
<th>Counter-arguments</th>
<th>Constructive politics</th>
<th>Observed agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chat</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We note here that the lowest agreement point is in the category Content of justification, precisely the category pulled out by King (2009) as most difficult to quantify. In addition, challenges arose when some comments were coded as not applicable by the second coder, pointing to difficulty in applying the instrument to the dataset. At the conclusion of the agreement test, we decided to move forward with the study, noting that results from the DQI analysis, although difficult to assess empirically, can nevertheless prove insightful, pending the development of a more appropriate deliberation quality measurement instrument.

3.6 RESEARCH ETHICS

According to Article 2.2 of the Government of Canada Panel on Research Ethics Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, this research initiative is exempt from the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board Review, as the data collected is publicly available and the participants had no reasonable expectation of privacy during the Extraordinary Convention.

3 The full article of the TCPS reads as follows: Article 2.2 Research that relies exclusively on publicly available information does not require REB review when: (a) the information is legally accessible to the public and appropriately protected by law; or (b) the information is publicly accessible and there is no reasonable expectation of privacy. (Government of Canada Panel on Research Ethics, 2013)
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

In this section we look at the results from the data analysis process. We begin by presenting the non-empirical qualitative data analysis, which consists of a presentation of the Chat and Blog data according to comment intention (Section 4.1.1), commenter role (Section 4.1.2), response to proposed amendments (Section 4.1.3), response to deliberative process (Section 4.1.4) and reference to other participants (Section 4.1.5). We then follow with the Discourse Quality analysis (Section 4.2), which examines the Chat and Blog data according to participation (Section 4.2.1), level and content of justification (Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3), respect (Section 4.2.4), counterarguments (Section 4.2.5) and constructive politics (Section 4.2.6).

4.1 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

We start by examining the results of the qualitative data analysis that was conducted according to a non-empirical exploration of comment intention, commenter role, response to proposed amendments, reaction to decision-making process and reference to other participants. In the Chat, timing of comments was found to be meaningful, as commenters reacted synchronously to the events of the 3-hour online convention.

Due to the sheer number of comments, we aggregated them below into 5-minute periods; a time period which, based on the dataset, allowed for both granularity and a time-series overview. The formula 

\(\text{COUNTIFS}(\text{Time Column}, ">Start Time";\text{Time Column}, "<=End Time";\text{Data Column}, "Code")\)

allowed for both time aggregation and separation of counts by code. We then represented this visually using line charts.

Comments in the Liberal Blog were not aggregated by time, as they were asynchronous and a time series would not have revealed a relationship between time and comment. For visual representation of Blog data, therefore, we used pie charts, where the count for each code represents a percentage of the total number of comments.
4.1.1 **COMMENT INTENTION**

Figure 8 provides a narrative of the flow of the chat discussion, illustrated by the intention of each comment. Each coloured line depicts a type of comment intention coded by the researcher – greeting or technical comment, ask question, communication opinion, influence process, provide information or communicate voting intention. We discuss each type of comment intention below.

![Comment intention graph](chart)

**Figure 8: Time series - Comment intention – Chat**

1. **Greeting or technical comment** (\(n=482; 18.09\%\)) *(green)*

There are three spikes in this line. The first spike corresponds to the beginning of the forum, where participants introduced themselves. Comments such as: “Hello from the Arctic Circle” and “Hello everyone. Ready to watch the rebuilding process unfold!” are illustrative of the general trend in this first spike – participants sharing who they are, where they are from (or what riding they represent), and communicating a sense of optimism about the process to come.

The second spike corresponds to a technical problem where participants communicated their inability to connect to the telephone-based voting system, and the rising concern that their voice would not be counted during the decision making process. Comments included references to the phone call from the Liberal Party which would allow participants to connect: “Call came but was disconnected…” or comments about volume level: “I’m getting an echo on every word”. This period of technical problems seemed to correspond to a
difficulty by the Liberal Party Headquarters to connect the nearly 3,000 delegates to the voting system on time.

The third spike corresponds to the end of the deliberative process, where people thanked each other and disconnected from the forum. Comments such as: “Thank you!” and “Congratulations everyone!” were common during this period.

2. Ask question (n=101; 3.79%) (dark blue)

Although this category of comment occurred least frequently, some participants nevertheless used the forum to ask questions to the forum moderators. Although many participants asked rhetorical questions that were categorized as “communicate opinion”, these questions were more likely neutral process questions, such as: “How long will it take to call all the delegates?” or “Any hashtag for this?”.

3. Provide information (n=310; 11.64%) (pale blue)

The moderators provided information to delegates continuously throughout the process, from notifications about the amendments and speaker order: “Note to all: the agenda for the convention is posted just below” to results of the vote. In the chart, one can see a double spike in this category matching the two first spikes in Category 1. As can be expected, the moderators provided more information at the beginning of the forum, and also responded to the technical concerns that arose. However, the moderators were not alone in providing information; delegates provided information as well, particularly when they had solved a technical query: “A tip for anyone using a hand-held portable phone, set to speaker - put the phone into a glass or pyrex bowl and the volume will increase […].”

4. Communicate opinion (n=1197; 44.4%) (red)

Nearly half of comments were intent on communicating opinion, distributed throughout the process. The delegates debated on the amendments proposed, discussed points made by speakers or other commenters on the forum, and made suggestions for the future of the party: “I think it’s important that the Liberal ground game during campaigns be very personalized to the ridings. Less national spending, more local spending”; “I think Jeff’s proposal does not give sufficient time for the party to reach out to the public before placing a leader”.

However, four noteworthy dips can be seen in the chart above. In the first dip, during the period of technical concern, delegates became distracted from the debate and focused instead on ensuring that the
process ran smoothly. The three following dips took place during the votes, as delegates stopped debating and instead communicated their voting intention.

5. Influence process \((n=274; 10.29\%)( \text{purple} )\)

During the process, there were specific times at which delegates communicated impatience and readiness to shorten the debate and move on to the vote. This can best be seen in the spike immediately preceding the first vote, where delegates signaled that the debate had satisfactorily been conducted and that it was time to move on. The rules of order allowed for a minimum of 10 minutes of general debate before each vote. The first general debate went on for more than 10 minutes, and was closed by a process vote during which the chair asked the delegates to decide if they were ready to vote on the proposed question or wanted more debate. Similar, though smaller spikes occurred before each vote, although they were notably after a much shorter debate. This was due to the fact that the most controversial vote was held first. Typical comments in this category include: “Let’s move on. Most people seem to have made up their minds” and “Time to vote people!”

6. Voting intention \((n=429; 16.10\%)( \text{orange} )\)

Finally, during each voting period, which was conducted using the phone system, delegates also sometimes communicated their vote on the forum. These spikes allow us to identify when the votes happened during the process. Comments categorized in this fashion did not include opinions or reasons for the vote, but rather contained the touch-tone selection only: “#1” ; “Vote 1”.
In Figure 9, we see that 85% of Blog comments appeared to communicate opinion, 11% shared information, 3% asked a question, and 1% influenced the process or tried to communicate voting intention. There were also no generic greetings or technical concerns, as we saw in the chat data.

![Figure 9: Comment intention - Blog](image)

Table 6 shows the count and percentage for each category of comment intention for Blog and Chat comments. For example, 429, or 16.10% of Chat comments communicated voting intention, while 127, or 84.66% of Blog comments communicated an opinion.

**Table 6: Analysis - Comment Intention – Chat and Blog**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Chat = count</th>
<th>Chat = %</th>
<th>Blog = count</th>
<th>Blog = %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voting intention</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>16.10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence process</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>10.29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide information</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>11.64</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate opinion</td>
<td>1197</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>84.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask question</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 4.1.2 Commenter Role

In this section we show the comments separated by commenter role – moderator or participant. The moderators self-identified at the beginning of the Chat and Blog discussions, and continued to contribute throughout the discussion.

**Table:**

| Greeting or technical comment | 482 | 18.09 | 0 | 0 |

**Figure 10: Time series – Role - Chat**

In Figure 10 above, we see that there were only two overt roles in the discussion forum – moderator ($n=134; 5.03\%$) and participant ($n=2530; 94.97\%$). The moderators were Liberal Party staff members who were tasked to guide the process without influencing the vote. There were two permanent moderators – one in English and one in French – who tended to communicate the exact same piece of information in each language. One other moderator provided technical information or updates from the Call Center. Their contribution, shown here, was fairly consistent throughout the process.

The volume and flow of delegate contribution is shown clearly as well, with important spikes upon sign-on and sign-off and at each debate. However, as will be discussed, a certain number of tacit roles emerged during the forum, as participants engaged in dialogue and self-moderation.
As Figure 11 illustrates, in the Blog, the majority of the Blog comments were posted by participants, rather than forum moderators. 7.33% of comments were posted by forum moderators and 92.67% of comments were posted by participants.

Figure 11: Role - Blog

Table 7 shows the count and percentage for each role for each of the Blog and Chat comments. For example, 134, or 5.03% of Chat comments were posted by moderators, while 139, or 92.67% of Blog comments were posted by participants.

Table 7: Commenter role – Chat and Blog

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Chat = n</th>
<th>Chat = %</th>
<th>Blog = n</th>
<th>Blog = %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moderator</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>5.03</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>2530</td>
<td>94.97</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>92.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 Response to Proposed Amendments
In this section we examine the response to proposed amendments contained in the comments. We will recall that the question posed by the Liberal Party on both the Chat and Blog platforms was: “to ask Liberals to approve two specific, one time only, constitutional amendments that would enable a Biennial Convention to occur on January 13-15, 2012 and a leadership selection vote to occur […] between November 1, 2012 and February 28, 2013.” (Liberal Party of Canada, 2011)

![Figure 12: Time series - Response to proposed amendments - Chat](image)

As we see in Figure 12, possible options were: disagree with any amendment to the Constitution \( (n=119; 4.47\%) \), support a sub-amendment to the original amendment \( (n=367; 13.79\%) \), support only the original amendment \( (n=252; 9.46\%) \), and neutral, or no preference stated \( (n=1928; 72.37\%) \).

Although debate took place three times during the process, the critical debate took place during the middle period, where delegates discussed amendments to the Party’s Constitution. Three elements are worth noting here: firstly, those delegates bringing forward or supporting sub-amendments were the first to be vocal. Those who supported the original amendment, as brought forward several weeks before by the Party Executive, tended to comment afterwards. Those wishing to communicate disagreement followed a similar trend, although they were much less vocal than those supporting either the original amendment or subsequent sub-amendments. This trend is confirmed in the voting results for this section.
Figure 13 illustrates that many comments did not discuss the proposed amendments or sub-amendments. Rather, they spoke about rebuilding the party or about reasons for the loss of the 2011 Election. Thus, 56.67% of comments were neutral, 27.33% of comments supported the original amendment, 4% supported the proposed sub-amendments, and 12% rejected any change to the Constitution.

![Figure 13: Response to proposed amendments – Blog](image)

Table 8 shows the count and percentage for each role for each of the Blog and Chat comments. For example, 252, or 9.46% of Chat comments agreed with the original amendments only, while 6, or 4% of Blog comments were in favour of additional sub-amendments.

**Table 8: Response to proposed amendments – Chat and Blog**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Chat = n</th>
<th>Chat = %</th>
<th>Blog = n</th>
<th>Blog = %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreement with original amendments</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>9.46</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement with original amendment with the inclusion of additional sub-amendments</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>13.79</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreement with any change in the constitution</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No preference stated explicitly</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>72.37</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>56.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.4 **RESPONSE TO DELIBERATIVE PROCESS**

This dimension gives us some insight into the general feeling towards the deliberative process, particularly in terms of the technology used and the format, which were used for the first time at a Liberal Party of Canada Convention. In the Chat discussion, as we see in Figure 14, there were three possible codes for this dimension, positive ($n=172; 6.46\%$), negative ($n=47; 1.76\%$) and neutral ($n=2447; 91.85\%$).

Although most comments did not make any reference to the process, four spikes are worth noting. First, a spike in negative comments occurred during the period of technical problems, immediately followed by a smaller spike in positive comments that seemed aimed at balancing out the negative. Second, there was a spike in positive comments immediately following the communication of the results of the first vote, which was the first time that the delegates saw the format lead to a concrete result. Consequently, because the following votes used the same format, there was no upsurge in enthusiasm. Finally, in the last 30-40 minutes of the debate, we can see an increase in positive comments, as delegates anticipated the end of the convention. This led up to a spike in positive comments at the end of the convention, as delegates communicated their opinion on the format before signing-off.
As we see in Figure 15, although most Blog comments did not refer to the deliberative process, those that did tended to appreciate the opportunity to debate. Several comments referred to the blog as the “public place” or “civic space”. Thus, 82% of comments were neutral, 15% of comments were positive and 3% of comments were negative.
Examples of comments that made a positive reference to the space include:

“I would also like to see more of these types of forums where Liberals across Canada can interact with each other and share their opinions and ideas on specific topics.”

“As this blog demonstrates, this is our ‘civic square’ and it is here that the process has started.”

Although there were few negative comments, those few expressed a frustration at a breakdown in the system; that their voice was not being heard:

“As far as I can make out, the internal leaders of the party don’t value En Famille [another similar Liberal Forum], even though the members have contributed hugely to it.”

“Ok i thought we were building from the ground up? Then i get an email stating that the delegates for my riding have been picked and the selection meeting has been scrapped. This is not “from the ground up”...”

Table 9 shows the count and percentage for each for each of the Blog and Chat comments. For example, 172, or 6.46% of Chat comments were positive to the process, while 4, or 2.67% of Blog comments were negative to the process.

Table 9: Response to the deliberative process – Chat and Blog

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Chat = n</th>
<th>Chat = %</th>
<th>Blog = n</th>
<th>Blog = %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>2447</td>
<td>91.85</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.5 REFERENCE TO OTHER PARTICIPANTS

In this dimension, we examined any comments that overtly referred to another delegate or speaker.

When examining the Chat comments, as seen in Figure 16, we found that 173, or 6.49% of comments referred to another commenter on the Chat and that 157 or 5.89% of comments referred to a delegate speaking on the teleconference. For example: “Ok, M. Jedras. But maybe we need this time to think of what we are. I find it a great opportunity to talk freely together, a way we cannot do when we have a leader and when we think all is going great.” It is particularly noteworthy that the majority of comments made no specific
references, making either blanket references: "Hi All... Why do not have a tele-conference like this where we share and debate rebuilding ideas?" or no reference at all (n=2333; 87.58%).

Figure 16: Time series - Reference to commenter - Chat

In addition, less than a quarter of Blog comments referred to a previous post or commenter. Thus, as Figure 17 below shows, 21.33% of posts referred explicitly to a previous comment, while 78.67% of posts made no reference at all. Since the comments were posted before the Convention took place, no comment referred to a speaker.
Table 10 shows how the count and percentage for each type of response for each of the Blog and Chat comments. For example, 173, or 6.49% of Chat comments referred to another commenter, while 118, or 78.67% of Blog comments made no reference at all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Chat = n</th>
<th>Chat = %</th>
<th>Blog = n</th>
<th>Blog = %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reference to another commenter</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>6.49</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reference</td>
<td>2333</td>
<td>87.58</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>78.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to a speaker in the teleconference portion of the online convention</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Reference to other participants – Chat and Blog

4.2 **Discourse Quality Analysis**
As we have seen, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), Habermas presented the ideal of political deliberation in late 19th century Europe, particularly within the predominately male café-going bourgeoisie of England, Germany and France. He argued that important societal transformations in
the 19th century, namely the separation of the Church and State, leading to the creation of a private sphere and a need for a public sphere between the private and the state to allow for public participation in politics and intellectual deliberation, led to a short-lived ideal state in public deliberation; an ideal that was deeply eroded in the 20th century.

However, since then, Habermas himself and many others have argued that modern changes in societal fabric have conspired to revive the public sphere. While some have argued that even in the middle of the 20th century, the public sphere was being revived by post-colonial and labour movements, there have been arguments made that the rise of web 2.0 technologies and online political engagement have created the conditions for a new form of public sphere, qualitatively similar to the ideal bourgeois public sphere of the 19th century, but reaching a much broader base.

We examined the deliberative quality of the comments posted both on the Chat and the Blog using the Deliberation Quality Index (DQI) developed by Steenbergen et al (2003) to analyze political speeches. The Chat comments analyzed in this way were only those coded as “communicate opinion” in the examination of commenter intention in the first round of analysis, which accounted for 44.4% of comments (for a count of 1197). Comments placed in other categories of commenter intention, such as greetings, were discarded as not relevant to a discussion on deliberative quality. All comments in the Blog, however, were used.

The DQI has six components: participation, level of justification, content of justification, respect, counterarguments and constructive politics, each of which will be examined in turn.

4.2.1 Participation

Steenbergen et al (2003) suggest participation as a measure of discourse quality in order to evaluate whether a speaker has the possibility to participate freely in the debate. Two options are given: Interruption of a speaker (0) and normal participation is possible (1). In the first option, Steenbergen et al propose that the speaker should explicitly state that he/she is disturbed by an interruption.

In the online chat platform, participants are not time bound and can, in a sense, speak simultaneously. This means that, to the extent to which participants have access to the platform, all should be free to participate.

However, there were two instances in the chat data during which interruptions were observed. This is due to the fact that even in a live, open chat session such as this one, some group self-moderation exists, where participants attempt to restrict others’ comments in some way. The first instance is where technical difficulties experienced by the participants. Several attempted to restrict the continuation of the discussion until the technical difficulties had been resolved. For example: “Haven’t been called and can’t hear the live
Perhaps you should hold off until more people online”. The second instance occurred at the time of the first vote, after which some participants expressed disappointment. This resulted in some self-censorship in the forum, as shown here: “I don’t care if you like this or not...don’t say the liberals are dead. That’s uncalled for.” Both instances therefore illustrate different reasons for censorship in the conversation – wanting to halt the process in order to ensure full participation, or quorum, and wanting to deter participants from being overly critical of others in the forum.

Our analysis of the Blog comments showed that 147 Blog comments indicated normal participation and 3 comments indicated interruption. The stream of discussion was interrupted at each of these three points by a moderator who suggested that previous comments were not appropriate for the forum.

It should be noted that the Liberal Party explicitly stated that the Blog should be used for deliberation around the proposed amendments to the constitution. However, contrary to the Live Chat, much of the discussion in the Blog was about other political issues related to the Liberal Party, such as reasons for the loss of the 2011 Elections, ideas for rebuilding party membership, and opinions about party values and policies.

Moderators thus attempted (unsuccessfully) to move these comments to another blog, En Famille, that had been set up for that purpose. For example: “Hi all, this comment goes out for anyone who is interested in discussing things other than simply the amendments (eg longer-term renewal). You have a few options: * En Famille (http://enfamille.liberal.ca): this site was actually set up by a grassroots committee within the party in 2008; there are many discussions going on. It’s the closest thing to an official discussion forum we have right now [...]”.

Figure 18 and Table 11 show the count of comments by type of participation for each of the Chat and the Blog comments.
The second component evaluated in the DQI was the depth of justification used by the commenter to support his/her argument. Steenberg et al (2003) provide four levels of justification: (0) No justification; (1) Inferior justification – where an incomplete inference is made; (2) Qualified justification – where a single inference is made; and (3) Sophisticated justification, where at least two inferences are made.

According to our analysis, in the case of the Live Chat, in no case did a commenter make a sophisticated justification. We see in Figure 19 that the majority of comments either had no justification (798) or an inferior justification (381), with 18 comments having a qualified justification.

This differs from the findings from the Liberal Blog, where the level of justification was distributed between the options; with 19-no justification, 59-inferior justification, 46-qualified justification, and 26-
sophisticated justification. The difference in the nature of the platforms here played an important role. While both types of comments would have been permitted on each platform, the Live Chat encouraged short, unsubstantiated statements, while the Liberal Blog fostered longer, more deliberate arguments.

Figure 19 and Table 12 show the count of comments by level of justification for each of the Chat and the Blog comments.

![Figure 19: Level of justification – Chat and Blog](image)

**Table 12: Level of justification – Chat and Blog**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Chat = n</th>
<th>Chat = %</th>
<th>Blog = n</th>
<th>Blog = %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No justification (0)</td>
<td>798 (0)</td>
<td>66.67</td>
<td>19 (0)</td>
<td>12.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferior justification (1)</td>
<td>381 (1)</td>
<td>31.83</td>
<td>59 (1)</td>
<td>39.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified justification (2)</td>
<td>18 (2)</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>46 (2)</td>
<td>30.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophisticated justification (3)</td>
<td>0 (3)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26 (3)</td>
<td>17.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.3 CONTENT OF JUSTIFICATION

The DQI also measures what types of inferences were used to justify the statements. Steenberg en et al (2003) proposed a series of options that measured whether an appeal was made in terms of group interests, the common good, or both. These were: Explicit statement concerning group interests (0); Neutral statement (1); Explicit statement of the common good in utilitarian terms (2); and Explicit statement of the common good in terms of the difference principle (3). Option 2 was selected where the argument was justified in terms of the greatest good for the greatest number (Mill, 1998), whereas option 3 was selected where a reference was made to the less advantaged or minorities (Rawls, 1999).

We see in Figure 20 that, in the Chat, most commenters either made an explicit statement concerning group interests (376) or a neutral statement (737). Only 46 and 38 were coded as options 3 (difference principle) and 2 (common good) respectively.

Once again, the content of justification was much broader for the Liberal Blog, where 60 made explicit statements concerning group interests, 30 made neutral statements, 23 made explicit statements of the common good in utilitarian terms, and 37 made explicit statements of the common good in terms of the difference principle.

In both cases, explicit statements concerning group interests may have been more common due to the underlying goals of the Convention – rebuilding the Party and winning the next election. Where the conversation strayed from Party organizing – in the Liberal Blog – participants were better able to express more subtle societal values.

In the Chat, comments such as “We need to listen to the party elders as they do in our aboriginal communities and understand where we have come from” may express the desire to obtain input from older members of the party or marginalized communities; whereas comments such as “I would add that a Leadership Process is necessarily divisive, and the one thing we DO NOT need at this point is disunity [...]” indicate a preference for majority rule and strength in numbers.

However, comments were more nuanced in the Liberal Blog, with some comments referring specifically to the question of the common good:

“ [...] For example in the area of social responsibility: Why should the government care about poverty, education, health, pension, seniors, women, etc. Is it altruism (“the right thing to do”), or practical [smart healthy Canadians contribute more to the economy], or self-interest (poor sick people will mug me)?”
Figure 20 and Table 13 show the count of comments by content of justification for each of the Chat and the Blog comments.

Figure 20: Analysis - Content of justification – Chat and Blog

Table 13: Content of justification – Chat and Blog

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Chat = n</th>
<th>Chat = %</th>
<th>Blog = n</th>
<th>Blog = %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit statement concerning group interests (0)</td>
<td>376 (0)</td>
<td>31.41</td>
<td>60 (0)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral statement (1)</td>
<td>737 (1)</td>
<td>61.57</td>
<td>30 (1)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit statement of the common good in utilitarian terms (2)</td>
<td>38 (2)</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>23 (2)</td>
<td>15.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit statement of the common good in terms of the difference principle (3)</td>
<td>46 (3)</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>37 (3)</td>
<td>24.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.4 Respect
Three codes were used to evaluate the level of respect for other groups contained in the comments. No respect (0) denoted a negative statement; implicit respect (1) denoted a comment that was neither explicitly negative or positive, and explicit respect (2) denoted a comment that contained at least one explicitly positive reference. In both forums, there were very few explicitly negative comments, with implicit or explicit respect maintained for nearly all comments. As seen in Figure 21 and Table 14, the majority of comments in the Live Chat were implicitly respectful (884), while 241 comments were explicitly respectful and 72 comments were not respectful.

In our analysis of the data, we noted an increase in explicitly respectful comments towards the end of the Live Chat, with many participants signing off: “Congrats to the tech team who put this together and thank you Peter Miliken.” Conversely, there was a spike in comments with no respect at the beginning, coinciding with the period of technical difficulties: “ok, I’m getting pissed off - no call yet”.

Analysis of the Liberal Blog show 13 comments with no respect, 92 comments with implicit respect and 45 comments with explicit respect.

Comments with no respect denoted frustration with the Party’s leadership and relationship with its members: “As far as I’m concerned, ignoring the grassroots members is the NUMBER ONE problem without party”; while comments with explicit respect denoted enthusiasm: “What a great set of comments already, from a person who lives in a predominantly Conservative region it is nice to hear all the voices of the party.”

Figure 21 and Table 14 show the count of comments by level of respect for each of the Chat and the Blog comments.
4.2.5 COUNTERARGUMENTS

This component has echoes in a variable examined in the first round of analysis – reference to speaker. In this case, however, we examine whether previously stated arguments are included in the comment. The choices provided by Steenberg are: (0) counterarguments ignored – there are no references made to other arguments; (1) counterarguments included but degraded; (2) counterargument included neutral – where the argument is included but no additional comment, negative or positive, is made about it; and (3) counterargument included and valued.

As we can see in Figure 22, when analyzing the Live Chat data, it was found that the vast majority of comments ignored counterarguments (1043). Some included but degraded counterarguments (126); but very few either included and valued counterarguments (23); or fell into the neutral category (5).
Again, the comments on the Liberal Blog were much more distributed, with 78 ignoring counterarguments, 17 including but degrading, 26 including and neutral, and 29 including and valued. In comments valuing counterarguments, participants often captured various positions before stating their own, or preferring to wait until further debate: “Armida raises some very critical and relevant points that we must focus on. However, Andre is also right, for the purpose of this exercise.”

Examples of comments that included counterarguments but degraded them in the Live Chat include: “A leader must be part of the rebuild process - waiting until 2013 won’t let this happen.” This differs from the majority of comments, which stated the participant’s position without acknowledging the alternative. “I think a longer time period could allow for an exciting and highly visible/democratic leadership race.”

Figure 22 and Table 15 show the count of comments by inclusion of counterarguments for each of the Chat and the Blog comments.

![Figure 22: Counterarguments - Chat and Blog](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Chat = n</th>
<th>Chat = %</th>
<th>Blog = n</th>
<th>Blog = %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counterarguments ignored (0)</td>
<td>1043 (0)</td>
<td>87.13</td>
<td>78 (0)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterarguments included and</td>
<td>23 (1)</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>29 (1)</td>
<td>19.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.6 **CONSTRUCTIVE POLITICS**

Finally, we analyzed the process of consensus building, by looking at three possible choices. First, positional politics (0), in which participants state their position without attempting to build consensus; second, alternative proposal (1), in which participants speak to a point that is outside the scope of the debate; third, mediating proposal (2), in which participants propose a solution that brings together different points of view.

As shown in Figure 23, the majority of comments in the Chat were coded as positional politics (1072), with some alternative proposals (79) and some mediating proposals (46). Less than half the comments from the Blog, however, were positional (73), while 45 were alternative proposals and 32 were mediating proposals.

The results for the Blog speak to the fact that, as discussed above, many participants used the forum to air grievances about the Party or the loss of election, or attempted to share ideas for rebuilding the party, going beyond the Party's intended scope of discussion. During the Chat, few participants contributed anything that was not immediately related to the points made, and were not given the time to discuss different proposals and present mediating alternatives. For example, a detailed mediating proposal from the Blog can be seen as follows: “I agree that we should wait so I support the proposed amendments. We have very little or nothing to gain by proceeding as per our existing constitution. Definitely, time is on our side and will prove that the recent election results were a huge mistake on the part of the electorate. Although not asked of us currently, I would like to voice my opposition to any formal discussion with and/or about the possibility of merging with the NDP […]”. A typical mediating proposal from the Chat can be seen here: “if we truly want to rebuild invite your neighbors for coffee over to your house and explain to them why YOU are a LIBERAL”. Both refer to previous comments and offer a solution, but the comment from the Blog is much more specific and detailed than the comment from the Chat, something that was observed throughout our analysis.
Figure 23 and Table 16 show the count of comments by level of constructive politics for each of the Chat and the Blog comments.

![Graph showing counts of comments by level of constructive politics for Chat and Blog](image)

**Figure 23: Constructive politics - Chat and Blog**

**Table 16: Constructive politics – Chat and Blog**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Chat = n</th>
<th>Chat = %</th>
<th>Blog = n</th>
<th>Blog = %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positional politics (0)</td>
<td>1072 (0)</td>
<td>89.47%</td>
<td>73 (0)</td>
<td>48.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative proposal (1)</td>
<td>79 (1)</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>45 (1)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediating proposal (2)</td>
<td>46 (2)</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>32 (2)</td>
<td>21.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This Chapter presented and discussed the findings of the qualitative data analysis and the discourse quality analysis on two datasets collected from the deliberative process during the Convention. In the first section, we looked at the intention of the comments, the response to proposed amendments, references to other commenters, opinion of the decision-making process and role of participants. In the second section, we examined freedom to participate, level and content of justification, respect, use of counterarguments and extent to which the statements were constructive, rather than positional. In the following Chapter, we will discuss these findings in relation to the research questions in the hope of gaining greater insights into the development of future online deliberative systems.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter discusses in detail the findings associated to the research questions:

1. In what way did the convention reach its objectives?
2. What was the quality of the deliberative process during the convention?
3. What insights can we gain from this study that can be applied to online deliberation systems in the public sphere?

We recall that the objectives of the Convention were: fostering transparency, meritocracy and horizontal participation; promoting bilingualism; engaging women, youth, Aboriginal and new Canadians, and residents of Quebec; launching a period of re-thinking and organizational re-building; and launching the open and democratic selection of a new and permanent leader (Liberal Party of Canada, 2011). Based on these findings, we then make recommendations that could improve an online deliberative process, either by more closely meeting its objectives, or improving its quality.

5.1 FOSTERING TRANSPARENCY, MERITOCRACY AND HORIZONTAL PARTICIPATION

As was discussed in the literature review, the OECD's (2001) three poles for transparency in citizen engagement can be useful in examining the effectiveness of ICTs for transparency. These three poles are: interdependence of information; accessibility; and accountability mechanisms. If one takes this as a starting point for assessing the transparency of the online deliberative process, one can note the following points.

Information about the process was only partially accessible, as any online viewer (both delegate and non-delegate) could freely follow the discussion. However, as can be seen by some of the comments: "To all: we have literally thousands of comments in queue and are doing our best to get them published"; the Live Chat was moderated by Liberal Party of Canada staff. The criteria by which the comments were considered publishable or not were not made public, making the forum vulnerable to bias.

Accessibility could also be described as partial. While the requirement for Internet connection should not have, in Canada, been considered more of a barrier than travel to an in-person Convention (Sciadas 2001), there is nevertheless a “digital divide (Negroponte, 1995); an inequality in Internet access among Canadians along income lines (Middleton, 2005). Middleton argues that Canadians with lower incomes and less education, along with the elderly, have lower levels of connectivity than their more privileged fellow citizens. The Statistics Canada Canadian Internet Use Survey, conducted in 2010, found that 21 % of Canadian households did not have Internet access at home. In terms of reasons for having no access, 56% stated that they had no need or interest in it, 20% cited the cost of service or equipment, 15% cited the
lack of device such as a computer, and 12% reported a lack of confidence, knowledge or skills (Statistics Canada, 2013). These self-reported reasons for not being online certainly point to age, income and education. It should be stressed that this means that 21% of Canadians wanting to participate in an online deliberative process would need to access Internet outside of their homes in order to do so.

In addition, several unexpected barriers to participation were recorded during the Live Chat. Notably, the technical problems from approximately 3:20 to 3:40 showed that the technology itself provided some barriers that could only be addressed by improving the software and technical flow in the future. In addition, it does not appear that accessibility for visually or motor impaired participants were taken into account in this case, which may have created an additional barrier to participation. Stienstra (in Moll and Shade, 2011) argues that Internet technologies can both be both liberating and a hindrance to citizens with disabilities. She notes that several organizations, including the ARCH Disability Law Centre in Canada, have pushed for telecommunications legislation that would reverse the discrimination that, they argue, is contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. With such legislation, online convention organizers might have better tools to improve accessibility.

The last of the three pillars of transparency – accountability, can be defined as the process by which decisions made by the "public", or those affected by the deliberative process, are implemented or protected by checks and balances. Going beyond the forums themselves, the accountability mechanism for the outcome of the deliberative process was clearly defined, as the delegates were able to vote and change the Party’s Constitution, which, accordingly, the Executive Board would not have had the power to override. Additionally, moderation in forums can provide accountability mechanisms, if the moderators respond to questions and queries from the participants.

Meritocracy implies that support for a comment or argument would be based only on quality, rather than on the position of the commenter in the party. While the conversion rate of comments into votes is unclear from the data, it should be noted that some high profile commenters did choose to publicly identify themselves and strongly voice their positions. For example, both DenisCoderre and Alexandra Mendez, former Members of Parliament, posted their arguments several times, and those that were published were higher than the average number of posts per commenter.

In order to discuss horizontal participation, let us briefly revisit the hierarchy of the Liberal Party, which places, in order of most to least influence, the Executive Board, the elected representatives for each electoral riding, elected officials at the riding level and other committee members, members and supporters.
Although both in-person and virtual decision making processes are inclusive of both riding association representatives and non-executive members, the virtual convention is more accessible to the regular membership who may not have the same time and financial commitments to the party.

In addition, both of the forums analyzed in this paper were accessible to any Internet user, although participation in the decision making process through telephone voting was only available to locally elected delegates. (Liberal Party of Canada, 2011) According to the Liberal Party of Canada Convention, each Electoral Riding Association is allowed to send up to 20 representatives to Party Conventions (Liberal Party of Canada, 2013b). The Convention delegates were therefore elected as representatives from the candidate pool, and the delegates were then registered by the Liberal Party Executive. In addition to being encouraged to participate online on the Liberal Blog and Live Chat, the delegates were asked to provide their contact information and they were called by PrimeContact between 3:00 PM and 3:15 PM on 18 June 2011. Once on the call, they were then able to vote on constitutional amendments and other decisions using their telephone keypad.

Following this discussion we make the following recommendations. In order to foster transparency, meritocracy and horizontal participation, the organizers of the Convention might have taken two additional steps:

1. Increase transparency by clearly communicating the means by which comments are screened and posted. This is done regularly by media sites where commenting takes place below news articles. For example, the Globe and Mail's commenting site links to a community guidelines page and terms and conditions of use (Globe and Mail, 2013).

2. Ensure that each potential participant has an accessible Internet connection. This practice is occasionally used during a social media activity called Twitter meetups, where participants meet in a location which has Internet access to have an online discussion about a specific topic (Mashable, 2009).

5.2 Promoting Bilingualism

The Liberal Party of Canada’s Constitution makes explicit the importance of both official languages: “English and French are the official languages of the Party and have equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all federal institutions of the Party. (Liberal Party of Canada, 2013b)” In addition, it is the right of members to: “communicate with, and to receive available services from, the National Office in English or French.”
Key positions in the party, such as the National Vice-President and the National Campaign Co-Chairs, are shared by two people – one French-speaking and one English-speaking. This policy was implemented in spirit during the Extraordinary Convention Forums, with two moderators – one posting in French, and one posting in English. However, only very few comments were posted in French.

Language claims and political participation in Canada are complex, and the importance of language, beyond its communicative function, in a deliberative process should not be underestimated (Longman, 2007). In light of the traditional importance of bilingualism for the Party, the online deliberative process is strikingly unilingual. A non-English speaker would not be able to participate in the discussion, nor could someone posting in French expect to participate in a fruitful deliberative exchange. In this case, therefore, simply applying the Party’s Constitution and the country’s Charter is not enough – an active commitment has to be made to make the deliberative process bilingual.

Experiences from the European Union can shed light on the potential for multilingual democratic participation online. Wodak and Wright (2006), for example, suggest that comments were more linguistically diverse when discussion threads were started in a language other than English. This could suggest an active approach, where French-speaking participants are actively encouraged to post in French.

Successful multilingual forums, however, such as the United Nations bodies and the European Union Parliament, go beyond allowing and encouraging speakers to use their native languages, but provide translation for a set number of languages. The United Nations provides translation at all times into its 6 official languages – Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish (assuming that the speaker is using one of these languages), and the European Union provides translation for 11 official languages. Technically, providing the ability to translate each post into one of the two official languages of Canada has become more and more common in online spaces, with near-simultaneous tools such as Google Translate providing better and better quality translations for written text.

In order to further promote bilingualism, the Convention organizers might have used the following practices.

1. Automatically translate into one or the other language once they are posted. This can be done using an automatic translation tool, such as Google Translate. A good example of a multilingual online forum in practice – Dudu – can be found here: http://dudu.com/.

2. Develop a strategy in advance of the online convention to engage francophone participants. Targeted offline outreach for online participation was conducted, for example, by the United Nations Global Survey on the Post-2015 Millennium Development Goals
The organizers of the survey wanted to ensure broad participation from developing countries, where citizens might not have access to the Internet. Local organizations from these countries were therefore recruited to encourage their audiences to complete the survey, occasionally completing the survey offline and then importing the contents directly into the online survey database.

5.3 Engaging Women, Youth, Aboriginal and New Canadians, and Residents of Quebec

A partial understanding of this objective of the Convention can be observed by an overview of self-identification in the forums. Participants self-identified as women, youth, Aboriginal and new Canadians, and residents of Quebec.

For example, one commenter writes: “The youth, including myself since I’m 25, understand the primacy of choosing a leader sooner rather than later. The older liberals seem to be a bit more reserved in choosing a leader. Perhaps because of the bitter taste of our recent defeat.” Another one seems to identify as an Aboriginal Canadian, writing; “We must have a leader whom takes the time to understand the grass roots, which include aboriginal people. Especially on reserve!”

This objective implies a commitment to pluralism on the part of the Liberal Party. In the Party’s Constitution, it commits to “the enhancement of our unique and diverse cultural community” (Liberal Party of Canada, 2013b), “the equal participation of men and women at all levels of the Party” and “the principle of equal participation of men and women and the recognition of English and French as the official languages of Canada and geographic regions”. There are also provisions for ensuring that women are represented in the Caucus and in various commissions and positions, especially through the National Women’s Liberal Commission.

Provisions are also in place to ensure the participation of Aboriginal peoples of Canada, in particular through the Aboriginal People’s Commission.

Youth interests in the Party are represented by the Commission of Young Liberals of Canada (Art. 44). Cross and Young (2004), in their 2000 survey of the members of the five major political parties in Canada, found that youth are underrepresented in party politics. They suggest that, more than other age groups, youth members tend to be recruited into political parties, rather than joining of their own volition. They also bring forward two hypotheses – one ideological, and one structural, for the decline of youth membership; arguing that while younger Canadians may prefer flatter, more direct forms of participation
to the hierarchical party approach, they may also have less time to engage in extracurricular activities, preferring to spend their free time working or studying (Cross and Young, 2004).

Liberal initiatives just before and after the Extraordinary Convention suggest that the Party's Executive was well aware of the challenge and of the potential in properly engaging youth in the Party’s rebuilding process.

It is important to note here that:

1. Senior citizens are part of the only interest group that is guaranteed a commission in the Party Constitution (the Senior Liberals’ Commission) and that is not mentioned in the objectives of the Extraordinary Convention.

2. Neither new Canadians nor residents are Quebec are provided with a commission in the Constitution, although evidence shows that they are often cited as important interest groups in Liberal Party of Canada initiatives.

3. There is no evidence in either online forum that group interests are being represented; rather, opinions expressed are at an individual level only.

Let us address each point in turn. First, while youth membership has been a concern for the Liberal Party of Canada, senior membership has not. Literature shows that senior citizens consistently form a strong base in the membership of a political party, participating broadly across its different structures (Campbell, 2003; Cross and Young, 2004). Although a Senior Liberals’ Commission might recognize the needs of senior members and might draw on their experience in order to shape policies that would positively affect senior Canadians, its intervention might not be needed to ensure senior participation in the deliberative space.

Second, while new Canadians have historically been part of the Liberal Party of Canada's natural constituency, the last decade shows a shift in their political preferences towards other parties, particularly the Conservative Party of Canada. Taylor et al (2012) and Kelly and Tossutti (2012) note that during the 2011 Elections, the Conservative Party made strong gains among immigrant voters, largely at the expense of the Liberal Party. This trend can be traced back to 2000, severely eroding what was considered a bastion of Liberal support during the latter half of the 20th century (Gidengil et al, 2009; Kelly and Tossutti, 2012).

In addition, as we have seen, the serious electoral loss in Quebec during the 2011 Election understandably caused concern for the Party Executive. While federally, the Liberal Party had lost to the Bloc Quebecois, a party exclusively dedicated to promoting the interests of Quebec, as a provincial and ethno-linguistic entity, in 2011 they lost half of their seats in Quebec, and surprisingly, mostly to the New Democratic Party.
In light of the importance of engaging the above clusters, not merely to consider their interests but also to raise collapsing pillars of Liberal support, there is little evidence from the data that the Liberal Party engaged in active outreach of these groups. Comments show that individual commenters self-identified as part of these clusters, but again, there is little evidence to show that their comments represented group claims or viewpoints.

Organizers of the convention might use the following strategies to engage women, youth, Aboriginal and new Canadians, and residents of Quebec.

1. Develop and implement a strategy in advance of the online convention to engage each of these groups; drawing out group preferences and positions;
2. Include mechanisms to ensure that these group positions are presented and defended as such during the online convention (see section 5.2 for details on the My World 2015 study, which recruited local organizations to engage citizens offline to determine their preferences for the next global development agenda).

5.4 LAUNCHING A PERIOD OF RE-THINKING AND ORGANIZATIONAL RE-BUILDING
It is unclear whether this objective – launching a period of re-thinking and organizational re-building – could have been accomplished differently in an offline setting. The data did not allow us to measure this objective, although it may be inferred that, by default, re-thinking organizational re-building would have been launched simply by identifying as a convention objective. However, the act of holding the Convention symbolized the launch of a new period for the Party, rising from its defeat during the May 2011 General Elections. There is no doubt that the simple act of holding a convention at this time would have had this effect.

5.5 LAUNCHING THE OPEN AND DEMOCRATIC SELECTION OF A NEW AND PERMANENT LEADER
It is clear that the main outcome of the Convention was the change in the Constitution in order to clearly lay out the path towards the leadership vote which took place in April 2013. However, it should be noted that this was a clear expected outcome of the Convention, which would likely have been reached whether the process was online or offline.

5.6 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: OBJECTIVES OF THE CONVENTION
Table 17 illustrates the findings of the study related to whether or not the objectives of the Convention were met. In addition, it shows recommendations that stem from the findings, which may serve to better meet similar Convention objectives in the future.
### Table 17: Objectives of the Convention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fostering transparency, meritocracy and horizontal participation</td>
<td>Transparency is partial: Meritocracy is promoted, to a certain point Participation is horizontal</td>
<td>Increase transparency by clearly communicating the means by which comments are screened and posted; Ensure that each potential participant has an accessible Internet connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting bilingualism</td>
<td>Bilingualism is permitted but not promoted; English is much more represented than French.</td>
<td>Automatically translate into one or the other language once they are posted; Develop a strategy in advance of the online convention to engage francophone participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage women, youth, Aboriginal and new Canadians, and residents of Quebec</td>
<td>Although, as seen above, participation is horizontal, none of these interest groups are specifically engaged.</td>
<td>Develop and implement a strategy in advance of the online convention to engage each of these groups; drawing out group preferences and positions; Include mechanisms to ensure that these group positions are presented and defended as such during the online convention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launch a period of re-thinking and organizational re-building</td>
<td>By default, a period of re-thinking and organizational rebuilding is launched.</td>
<td>No additional recommendation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launch the open and democratic selection of a new and permanent leader</td>
<td>By default, the open and democratic selection of a new and permanent leader is launched.</td>
<td>No additional recommendation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.7 Discussion of Findings: Quality of the Deliberative Process
The following section discusses the findings from the Discourse Quality analysis.

5.7.1 **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: QUALITY OF THE DELIBERATIVE PROCESS**

In order to quantify the quality indicator, a value was calculated (cv), based on the sum of the count of comments associated with each code multiplied by the numeric value associated with that code; divided by the Total Possible Value (tpv), which is made up of the sum of the count of comments associated with each code, multiplied by the highest possible code value for that dimension.

\[
    cv = c_0 \cdot 0 + c_1 \cdot 1 + c_2 \cdot 2 + \ldots + c_n \cdot n \\
    tpv = (c_0 + c_1 + c_2 + \ldots + c_n) \cdot n
\]

For example, when measuring Constructive Politics for the Chat comments (Section 4.2.6), we coded 1072 comments as 0, positional politics; 79 comments as 1, alternative proposal; and 46 comments as 2, mediating proposal. In order to obtain the calculated value, we made the following calculation:

\[
    cv = 1072 \cdot 0 + 79 \cdot 1 + 46 \cdot 2
\]

Which gave us a cv of 171. The total possible value (tpv) is the sum of all comments times the maximum possible value for that dimension. In order to obtain the tpv for Constructive Politics, we made the following calculation:

\[
    tpv = (1072 + 79 + 46) \cdot 2
\]

Which gave us a value of 2394. In order to obtain the quality indicator, we calculated \( \frac{cv}{tpv} \), which gave us a value of 0.07. The quality indicator is therefore a number between 0 and 1, where 1 is the highest score and 0 is the lowest score. After calculating the indicator for each component of the Discourse Quality Index, we averaged them to obtain the Index rating for both the Chat and the Blog. Table 18 shows the calculations for the indicators and index of the Chat and the Blog comments, as well as the findings that these calculations point to. We elaborate on these findings in Sections 5.7.2 - 5.7.6.
Table 18: Discourse Quality Index for the Convention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Chat indicator rating</th>
<th>Blog indicator rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Normal participation is possible</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of justification</td>
<td>Justification is more sophisticated on the blog platform than on the chat.</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content of justification</td>
<td>Justification has a greater tendency towards the common good (utilitarian or difference principle) on the Blog than on the Chat</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Respect is pervasive on both platforms.</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterarguments</td>
<td>Although counterarguments tend to be ignored, they are more often included on the blog platform.</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive Politics</td>
<td>Politics are more constructive during deliberation on the blog platform.</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberative Quality Index</td>
<td>There is room to improve the deliberative quality of both the synchronous and the asynchronous platforms.</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.7.2 Normal participation is possible
As can be expected, online platforms allow citizens to participate without interruption – since the conversation is simultaneous, each commenter is able to complete his/her argument and if necessary revise it before posting it. As such, there do not seem to be obvious barriers to participation; quite the contrary. Not only do commenters not have to be members of the Liberal Party of Canada to participate, but they also don’t face financial or time constraints, as was discussed above. It should be noted, however, that real barriers to online participation would not have been recorded here. Sciadas (2010), writing on behalf of Statistics Canada, observes some, but rapidly diminishing digital divides in Canada, noting that Internet penetration is nearly at 100% in Canadian households, and that, with schools and public libraries, every Canadian should have access to the Internet.

5.7.3 The platform determines both the level and the content of justification
As we have seen, the Live Chat as a format is not conducive to justification. Justifications in the Blog are more explicit and nuanced, and contain elements of political deliberation included by Steenbergen et al (2003), namely in terms of the common good and the difference principle. The conclusion here is that allowing space and time for deliberation may lead to an increase in the number of justifications in a comment and in the number of comments including references to either the common good or the difference principles.

5.7.4 Respect – both implicit and explicit, is pervasive
In this case, the level of respect in the online deliberative process does not differ from the level of respect that would exist in an in-person process. It can be argued that the nature of the group – whose members and moderators share common objectives, creates the preconditions for respect in any deliberative forum.

5.7.5 Although counterarguments tend to be ignored, when given the appropriate platform, there is a higher likelihood that they will be included.
Just as justifications will be less when space and time are limited, so will counterarguments. We can argue, however, that while this reduces the quality of deliberation in the Live Chat, it does not mean that the elements of dialectic are not present. Participants may implicitly consider and respond to counterargument, without explicitly mentioning them.

5.7.6 An appropriate platform must be provided to allow for mediating proposals
Similarly, mediating proposals are more likely to be presented as such in the Liberal Blog. Comments that are framed as positional in the Live Chat may be the result of previous consideration and debate.
Additionally, alternative proposals are much more commented on in the Liberal Blog, suggesting a need for broader, thematic discussions before the live plenary rather than the proposed one-track discussion.

5.8 WHAT INSIGHT CAN WE GAIN FROM THIS STUDY THAT CAN BE APPLIED TO STRENGTHENING POLITICAL DELIBERATION IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE, BEYOND THE POLITICAL PARTY?

The combined use of both synchronous and asynchronous platforms – the Chat and the Blog – allowed the Party to attain many of its objectives. However, a more deliberate approach to architecting both spaces would have allowed for more objectives to be met and would have increased the overall quality of the deliberative process.

In an in-person Convention, organized by the Liberal Party two deliberative spaces are provided. The first is a thematic workshop, where in-depth discussion about specific subjects (such as foreign policy, the Canadian North, fundraising) takes place and policy recommendations emerge (Liberal Party of Canada, 2011). The second is the plenary, where the policy recommendations are shared and more public deliberation takes place, before moving on to a vote.

In an online setting, these two spaces were, and should continue to be, modeled on synchronous and asynchronous group support systems.

In the synchronous space, we can expect high levels of participation, respect and positional politics; and a lower presence of justification, acknowledgement of counterarguments and mediating statements. In other words, the statements are short and to the point.

In the asynchronous space, a longer, pre-convention deliberative process, we can also expect high levels of participation and respect, but much more variety and subtlety in terms of justifications, and more reevaluating and revisiting positions based on counterarguments. In other words, the statements contain a higher level of analysis and more breadth in subject matter. A combination of the synchronous and the asynchronous spaces can designed and managed such that transparency is fostered and participation is broader.

In addition, multilingualism should be supported actively by providing direct translation through automatic translation software – both in the synchronous and asynchronous spaces.

4 Google Translate provides plugins for direct translation of online content and websites. (http://translate.google.com)
The deliberative architecture should be broader, particularly in the asynchronous space, allowing for several thematic, spontaneous and interest-based spaces. In the synchronous space, it should allow for the separation out of comments with other intentions, particularly those wishing to ask procedural questions, and those reporting technical problems. This would facilitate response and reduce the number of non-deliberative comments in the deliberative space.

Should the objective of the discussion be to draw in representation from specific groups, such as, in this case, Aboriginal Canadians, youth, women, new Canadians and residents of Quebec, a more concerted effort must be made to ensure representation in advance, and a deliberate effort to present group positions, rather than only individual positions, should be considered.

Thus, while proponents of digital democracy and online deliberation are correct in claiming that online technologies offer the potential for a renewed public sphere, this potential can only be realized with the creation of technologically and theoretically sound platforms.

This Convention is not the only online deliberation exercise that encountered technical difficulties hindering its objectives; Delborne et al (2009), for example, found that technical obstacles were one of the main reasons that the deliberative process that they examined failed to meet all of its stated objectives. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to be prescriptive in terms of technology, it should be noted that current dynamic, database-driven web technologies, using content management systems such as Wordpress or Drupal, for example, offer ample possibility for the development of such platforms. Systems built on similar technologies are already extensive used on systems created for online interaction, such as social media networks (Facebook, Twitter) and policy spaces (World We Want 2015).

Finally, user adoption mechanisms should be considered, with the expectation that, particularly in a setting where the deliberation participants have a common identity and common objective, better understanding of and buy-in to the process will lead to higher deliberative quality and increased likelihood of meeting the objectives of the deliberative process.

These findings reflect those of another study in deliberative democracy, conducted by Delborne et al (2009). The authors argue that the asynchronous and the synchronous platforms can complement each other during a deliberative process, with the synchronous platform providing a dialogue and immediate interaction quality, and the asynchronous platform providing thematic diversity. They propose a software solution that encompasses both types of platforms – a virtual whiteboard, which acts like a forum, on which
participants can post comments on a variety of topics, and a chat, which acts in the same way as the Chat under study here.

Returning to deliberative theory, we can see that these findings support Arendt’s dualistic public sphere. While the ideal of political deliberation, as described by Habermas, already exists, simply by being possible in any human society, it can only be materialized through the provision of the appropriate infrastructure.

A new architecture of the public sphere must therefore be designed according to the objectives of each deliberative process as they arise. Based on the findings of this study, we propose a slightly more complex architecture for online deliberation that addresses the online components of the deliberative process.

In the illustration below, we take into account four important features of an online deliberative process – open participation (characterized by accessibility and freedom from interruption), multilingualism (which should be actively promoted if required), transparency (particularly when it comes to explaining the outcomes of the process and defining the screening process for the comments), and engagement (in order to target and foster participation among specific interest or minority groups). In addition, in comparison to the first illustration of the deliberative process used by the Liberal Party (repeated below), we add thematic spaces created by participants in the synchronous platform. These spaces can be used to promoted deliberation on specific issues, and may allow for higher deliberative quality in these spaces. Finally, we note the importance of the parallel use of synchronous and asynchronous platforms and recommend retaining this feature of the original platform.
Figure 24: Recommended illustration of online deliberative process (with legend)

Repetition of the first illustration of the deliberative process, used in the Convention, for comparative purposes
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In this study, we examined the deliberative process from the Liberal Party of Canada’s June 2011 Extraordinary Convention. Starting from a Habermasian theoretical framework, we analyzed public Chat and Blog comments that were posted before and during the Convention. The analysis of these datasets allowed us to gain some insight into the way in which convention objectives were used, as well as the quality of deliberation.

The objectives of the Convention were to foster transparency, meritocracy and horizontal participation; promote bilingualism; engage youth, women, Aboriginal and new Canadians, and residents of Quebec; launch a period of re-thinking and organizational re-building; and launch the open and democratic selection of a new and permanent leader.

We collected 2,662 comments from a Chat forum used by the Party during the 3-hour convention and 150 comments from a Blog used for two weeks of discussion prior to the convention. These comments were analyzed first using a non-empirical coding scheme that examined comment intention, commenter role, response to proposed amendments, reaction to decision-making process and reference to other participants. Then, they were analyzed using the Discourse Quality Index (Steenbergen et al, 2003), which measured the quality of the deliberative process from a Habermasian perspective, and categorized comments in terms of participation, level of justification, content of justification, respect, counterarguments and constructive politics. The results of this analysis yielded insight about the architecture of online deliberative process.

In summary, we found that the use of synchronous and asynchronous platforms was an effective means of designing online deliberation, even though deliberative quality was higher in asynchronous platforms than it was in synchronous platforms. We also found that, in meeting the convention objectives, the platform could have benefitted from a more targeted approach, notably emphasizing open participation, multilingualism, transparency and engagement, all of which require an active intention in the design of the deliberative system. We conclude that the public sphere framework is particularly well suited to the analysis of online deliberative systems, and that, with additional research, more appropriate measures for deliberative quality of online comments may be found.

In relation to these conclusions, we made the following recommendations:

1. Increase transparency by clearly communicating the means by which comments are screened and posted;
2. Ensure that each potential participant has an accessible Internet connection;
3. Automatically translate into one or the other language once comments are posted;
4. Develop a strategy in advance of the convention to engage francophone participants;
5. Develop and implement a strategy in advance of the convention to engage each interest group, drawing out group preferences and positions;
6. Include mechanisms to ensure that these group positions are presented and defended as such during the online convention

Returning to Habermasian and post-Habermasian literature, we find that the public sphere framework, although a useful starting point, may require revision in order to make it more relevant to the digital age. As Dahlberg (2001; 2004) and Dalhgren (2005) point out, better understanding of the uses of Internet technologies for deliberation will allow us to design more appropriate platforms that allow for citizens to develop policy positions and decision-makers to be held accountable.

However, as Fraser (1990) and Hurrel (2005) note, the Habermasian public sphere does not address social or individual factors that may cause inequalities in the deliberative process. As we increase the importance of public deliberation in the policy-making process, moving from a representative to a more direct form of governance, we must ensure that all citizens have equal voice just as they had equal vote. Assuming that in a democracy each citizen has guaranteed rights and freedoms (de Tocqueville, 1835), then we may infer that in a deliberative democracy, the right to express opinions and shape public discourse must be guaranteed in some way.

Provisions for inclusion and accessibility would not only have supported the Liberal Party of Canada’s efforts to meet the objectives of the Convention, but may also have increased the quality of the deliberative process, by amplifying the diversity of viewpoints and therefore the need for more justification, counterarguments and mediating opinions.

It may be as well, as Fraser (1990) argues, that a different starting point for the public sphere model might be beneficial, particularly when it comes to the inclusion of women. Idealizing a deliberative process that is dominated by one gender, class and ethnic group - the 19th century European bourgeois male, gives a sense that women, working class citizens and ethnic minorities, for example, are included as an after-thought, much like a revision of a platonic direct democracy should include anyone who was not a male, free citizen of Athens.
The same goes for citizens with disabilities, and those that have, as Hurrel (2005) puts it, different modes of communicating. Accessibility in this sense should be considered from two viewpoints. First, deliberation in and of itself tends to favour those who speak loudest, unless provisions are made to avoid this (Hurrel, 2005). Second, online deliberation is plagued with the same accessibility issue as any Internet technologies – the digital divide (Negroponte, 1995; Statistics Canada, 2013; Stienstra, in Moll and Shade 2011), which still finds inequalities in access by socioeconomic stratus and physical and mental ability.

Continuing in this line of thought, the issue of multilingualism may well be seen as relating to accessibility and quality of deliberation, as well as, in the current inquiry, political objectives. Just as multilingual offline deliberation in the European Union and the United Nations, for example, has benefited from the implementation of simultaneous translation – a fairly effective, though costly exercise – so will multilingual online deliberation benefit from carefully designed translation processes.

Although it may be a resource-intensive exercise, this study infers that the Liberal Party of Canada would not be able to achieve a bilingual deliberative process, on the Chat or the Blog as stated in the Convention objectives unless it provided translation for each comment posted.

Additionally, Bertot (2010); Naurin and Lindsedt (2010); Wong and Welch (2001) and West (2000) all argue that the political participation of citizens must be designed with transparency and accountability in mind. This is, as the OECD’s 2001 guidelines for citizen engagement explain, a two-way process, where the owner of the deliberative process (in our study, the Liberal Party of Canada’s Executive Board) and the participant must be transparent about intentions and expectations. The quality of the deliberative process requires respect and inclusion of counterarguments and opinions, not just by the forum participants but by those who will eventually implement the outcomes of the deliberative process.

Finally, we have seen that the use of both synchronous and asynchronous platforms jointly may provide a more effective means to reach the objectives of the deliberative process than the use of one or the other alone. Prosseda (2007) documents the research on asynchronous and synchronous processes for online deliberation and notes that asynchronous forums, such as Blogs, have attracted much more attention than forums in which participants are all online simultaneously.

However, Prosseda notes that synchronicity does have value when developing political deliberation online, particularly as it stems from a tradition of in-person political deliberation where all participants are in the same room during the discussion (see Liberal Party of Canada 2012 Biennial Convention, 2013). She notes that participants in this type of deliberation may differ from broader and more citizen-driven discussions,
such as those on the Slashdot forum discussed by Gonzalez-Bailon (2010). She provides two characteristics of the political deliberation participant that may well apply to the profile of the Liberal Party Member (Cross, 2004). These participants have previous knowledge about the topic under discussion and have clearly defined objectives with a consensus on policy approaches specified as the final outcome. Prosseda notes that deliberative processes of this nature are better suited to synchronous processes where the process begins at a specific time and ends with specific decisions made.

On the other hand, there are many reasons for developing an asynchronous deliberative platform, including, as we have seen, because it allows for interactions of higher deliberative quality. In particular, as we saw during the discourse quality analysis, the asynchronous platform provided much more sophisticated justifications which contained a greater tendency towards the common good; and included more counterarguments and mediating statements.

This leads us to conclude that there is unexplored research in online deliberative democracy. Paths for future research, for example, might include:

1. Testing the proposed online deliberation architecture to see if it can be more successful in reaching objectives of a deliberative process and if it promotes higher deliberative quality;
2. Comparing various online deliberative processes;
3. Developing a measurement tool that would better address issues of subjectivity and might be more suited to online deliberation, particularly to the nature of the comments that emerge from these processes.

The presentation of the analysis of the online deliberation process that occurred during the Liberal Party of Canada’s June 2011 Extraordinary Convention concludes with a hope that ultimately, the study can contribute to the development of a new public sphere, where citizens are actively contributing their opinions and demands, shaping their arguments, seeking enlightenment and continuously striving for consensus, so that the policies that shape our democracies more closely reflect the aspirations of all citizens that inhabit them. There are many paths to the development of such a public sphere, some of which have been explored here, and many of which will certainly be examined in future research in the growing field of online deliberative democracy.
WORKS CITED


Branz, T. (2010). Have nominating conventions lost power? University of Central Florida.<<more info?


Appendix A: Convention agenda and amendments

1. Introduction and welcome from the Convention Chair, Hon. Peter Milliken

2. Report from the Leader, Hon. Bob Rae

3. Report from the Convention Returning Officer, Beatrice Raffoul

4. Introduction of Constitutional Proposals and Sub Amendments 1,2,3

Main Constitutional Proposal 1 - Background from Hon. Lucienne Robillard

1. The members of the Party assembled in convention, as a Special Resolution, amend the Constitution to add as section 82(1) the following:

Notwithstanding anything else contained in this Constitution (including, but not limited to, section 54):

(a) the meeting of the National Board of Directors required by subsection 54(3) as a consequence of the resignation of the Leader in May 2011 shall be held at any time on or before October 1, 2012; and

(b) at the meeting referred to in Paragraph (a), the National Board of Directors, in consultation with the Caucus and the Council of Presidents and on five (5) months’ notice to the Party, shall set a date for a Leadership Vote between November 1, 2012 and February 28, 2013.

This subsection (1) shall no longer be of force or effect on the later of the conclusion of the Leadership Vote contemplated by Paragraph (a) and February 28, 2013.

Contradictory Sub-amendment 1

Moved by: Jeff Jedras, Scarborough-Centre

Proposed constitutional amendment 1 to be amended as follows:

1. In (a), strike “October 1, 2012” and replace with July 1, 2012

2. In (b), strike “November 1, 2012 and February 28, 2013” and replace with “September 1, 2012 and November 30, 2012”

3. In (b), strike “February 28, 2013” and replace with “November 30, 2012”

Contradictory Sub-amendment 2

Moved by: Gregg Guptill, Summerside, PE (Egmont)

That Amendment 1, proposed by the National Board and presented on the Party’s web site, to amend the Constitution by adding section 82(1), be amended as follows:

1. Paragraph (b) Substitute “June 30” for “February 28”

2. Last paragraph Substitute “June 30” for “February 28”

Contradictory Sub-amendment 3

Moved by: Taleeb Noormohamed, North Vancouver
Proposed constitutional amendment 1 be amended as follows:

1. in (a), strike “October 1, 2012” and replace with “February 1, 2013”

2. in (b), strike “November 1, 2012 and February 28, 2013” and replace with “March 1, 2013 and June 30, 2013”

3. in (b), strike “February 28, 2013” and replace with “June 30, 2013”

Proponents’ supporting detail: Rebuild First sub-amendment resolution and rationale

5. Debate

6. Voting

7. Introduction of Constitutional Proposals and Sub Amendments 4,5

Main Constitutional Proposal 2 - Background from Craig Munroe

The members of the Party assembled in convention, as a Special Resolution, amend the Constitution to add as section 82(2) the following:

Notwithstanding anything else contained in this Constitution (including, but not limited to, section 65), the next biennial convention of the Party (which is the rescheduled biennial convention of the Party originally called for June 17, 2011) including the related in-person meeting of the Council of Presidents shall be held on January 13 to 15, 2012 at Ottawa, Ontario. This subsection (2) shall no longer be of force or effect on January 15, 2012.

Sub-amendment 4

Moved by: Gregg Guptill, Summerside, PE (Egmont)

That Amendment 2, proposed by the National Board and presented on the Party’s web site, to amend the Constitution by adding section 82(2), be amended as follows:

1. Second last line: Substitute “between May 15 and June 30” for “on January 13 to 15”

2. Last line: Substitute “June 30” for “January 15”

Sub-amendment 5

Moved by: Gregg Guptill, Summerside, PE (Egmont)

That Amendment 2, proposed by the National Board and presented on the Party’s web site, to amend the Constitution by adding section 82(2), be amended as follows:

1. Second last line: Delete “at Ottawa, Ontario”

8. Debate

9. Voting

10. Conclusion