DigiWorld

ECREA 2026 Pre-Conference – Call for Papers:
The Evolution of Election Campaigning on Social Media

Date: September 7, 2026 (full-day)

Location: Faculty of Social Studies, Joštova 10, 602 00 Brno (room to be specified)

Deadline for submission of abstracts: March 31, 2026

Fee: €25, which covers the coffee break and lunch during the pre-conference

From being a secondary arena for election campaigning, social media quickly became one of the primary spaces for election campaigning, viewed by consultants as being of major importance for having unfiltered and direct access to a wide audience. Thus, studying the campaigns of political parties, presidential candidates, and party leaders on social media platforms offers insights into the broader strategies employed, as well as how they seek to engage audiences specifically via digital platforms. The pre-conference will invite researchers studying national election contests, as well as local, regional, or European Parliament elections, to compare methods of studying, collecting data, and understanding party communication strategies on social media platforms.

The themes the pre-conference will explore are:

1) Are there patterns in content production across contests, across platforms, and across other campaign communication, based on their party/candidate's relative position within nations (normalisation versus equalisation)? How does this map onto the use of page content and advertising?
2) What styles of communication are most utilised (text, graphics, visuals) as a means for capturing attention and gaining reach, and how are these shaped by different platform architectures and affordances?
3) How are different forms of argumentation utilised across platforms? Does content focus on policy or process? Do appeals employ personalisation? How prevalent is populist rhetoric, negativity, and personalised attacks? Are low-quality news, misinformation, or conspiracy theories shared and by which ideological party families, and how are these engaged with by social media audiences?
4) What role do emerging technologies, such as generative artificial intelligence, play in social media campaigning, and how might these uses develop and impact voter engagement during forthcoming elections?
5) How are voters impacted by social media campaigning strategies?
6) What are the best ways to capture, code, and analyse the rich and complex data sources across digital platforms, information systems, and nations?

The six themes allow us to understand at a transnational level the extent that election campaigning on social media has become standardised in terms of the strategies that have been developed as well as the observable patterns within nations, parties/candidates from similar ideological families, and incumbent, challenger, and fringe parties. The themes resonate with ongoing academic debates relating to campaigning, particularly whether social media offers a level playing field for competitors in terms of content production and reach, as well as potential future developments in the use of

technology within campaign communication. The pre-conference seeks to bring together researchers from across the disciplines of political science, communication, media, and computer science.

Please submit a 300-word abstract (excluding references) by emailing it to DLilleker@bournemouth.ac.uk no later than March 31. All submissions will be reviewed by DigiWorld members, and acceptance notifications will be sent by April 30. Information about registration, including the participation confirmation process, will be sent by email to accepted applicants.

Pre-conference organisers: Darren Lilleker (Bournemouth), Martina Novotná (Masaryk University), and Alena Pospíšil Macková (Masaryk University). This pre-conference is linked to DigiWorld (https://digidemo.ifkw.lmu.de/digiworld/), a global research consortium that brings together scholars across countries to systematically analyse election-campaigning strategies on Facebook.