Social networks established new communication structures and behaviors in society. While citizens and businesses have already extensively used social networks for years, governments continuously increase their interest in the new communication technologies. Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn provide a mechanism for individuals to come together based on a variety of factors such as existing friendships, common interests, or work. People have discovered how the use of social networks can facilitate communication and the exchange/sharing of thoughts and ideas. Governments have also discovered the potential for these sites to aid in government information sharing and outreach. At the same time, there are various issues surrounding such networks, including privacy, information leakage, blurred boundaries, and online addiction that must be addressed when discussing social networks. The Social Media and Social Networking Minitrack tackles social media and networks as it relates to e-government which may include the use of social media and networks by any level of government, the implementation challenges, trust and privacy issues, different patterns and trends of social networks, information sharing, information overload, and mobile social networking.

The Social Media and Social Networking Minitrack highlights the increasing importance of social media and networks in society. This relatively new minitrack is expected to provide an invaluable opportunity for researchers to share their findings in this new area; it includes four papers that show latest findings on the use of social networking in the context of government.

The outstanding paper written by Marius Rohde from Johannesen-University of Agder depicts new spaces for public discourse. Social Capital and the Networked Public Sphere: Implications for Political Social Media Sites depicts eParticipation in the context of social media. The public sphere turns into a networked public sphere where motivations for participation are manifold. It is important to analyze what drives people towards eParticipation by means of social networks and media. The case discussed builds the argument that social media platforms contribute to increased social capital and increased political debate among citizens.

Interactive Effects of Networked Publics and Social Media on Transforming the Public Sphere: A Survey of Iran’s Leaderless ‘Social Media Revolution’ is a paper written by Akemi Chatfield et al. from University of Wollongong. The revolutions in the Arabic web showed the power of social networks when it comes to organizing and mobilizing masses to follow coordinated protests: This is contrary to traditional concepts of leadership that depicted hierarchical structures as the most effective for organizing massive and rapid actions. The paper analysis the digital public sphere as a space for communication when information exchange and discussions are demanded in a society that seeks to control its citizens. The findings are based on posts of Iranian Facebook users before, during and after the 2009 Presidential election and the following citizens’ protests.

Shepherding and Censorship: Discourse Management in the Tea Party Patriots Facebook Group, written by Christopher Mascaro et al., from Drexel University analyses the discourse of political groups on social media sites. The analysis is based on discussions related to the shooting of US Representative Gabrielle Giffords on the Tea Party Patriots Facebooks page. The new communication opportunities lead to collaborative behavior in such user groups that can be realized in different ways. Seemingly open communication platforms can be controlled and manipulated by leading users, by singling out individuals or untraceable removal of opposing arguments.

The paper Tweets and Votes: A Study of the 2011 Singapore Elections, written by Marko Skoric et al, from Singapore Management University identifies the advantages and limitations of Twitter as a mean to predict public opinion. Tweets were analyzed during the official campaign period of the 2011 Singapore General Election, and the vast amount of data and information shared via this social network is a valuable source for identifying relevant issues and opinion making in the public. Even though the Twittersphere allows the authors to draw conclusions related to the outcome of the elections, specific parameters related to the campaigns can influence the accuracy Twitter analysis.