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ABSTRACT:

Elected representatives have more means of public-facing communication at their disposal than ever before. Several studies examine how representatives use individual mediums, but we lack a baseline understanding of legislators' relative use patterns across platforms. Using a novel data set of the four most widely used forms of written, constituent-facing communication (press releases, e-newsletters, Facebook posts, and Twitter tweets) by members of the US House of Representatives in the 114th (2015–2017), 115th (2017–2019), and 116th (2019–2021) Congresses, we generate a baseline understanding of how representatives communicate across mediums. Our analyses show that institutional, legislator, and district characteristics correspond with differential use of mediums. These findings underscore why medium choice matters, clarifying how a researcher's choice of mediums might amplify the voices of certain legislators and dampen those of others. In addition, they provide guidance to other researchers on how to select the medium(s) that best correspond with different research aims.

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