

[2012] S.Parasie, J.-P.Cointet, « Online press serving local democracy. A morphological analysis of political forums », translated by Michael O'Mahony, *Revue française de science politique*, vol.62, n°1, 2012, p.41-66.

For decades, research has been quite sceptical towards the role journalism plays in local political life. This article shows that news organizations can take advantage of the web to play a new role in local democratic arenas. Based on a statistical and lexicometric analysis of online forums set up by a French regional newspaper (La Voix du Nord), this study shows how the morphology of municipalities impacts the way online discussion unfolds. In providing such online discussion arenas to citizens, the news organization plays the part of a “veil” in small cities – playing down the effects of strong acquaintanceship among individuals – and the part of a “catalyst” in medium-sized cities – promoting the rise of local opinion.