

# **Facebook and Twitter have become a third space for citizens to have freedom of expression on political views**

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## *Abstract*

This article explores social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and how they have become a third space for citizens to have freedom of expression on political views. Drawing on the importance of online communities and how they build social relationships and a way for citizens to engage in political talk and be part of online communities that supports their beliefs and values. It examines the relationships between citizens and the complexities of online communities and how citizens are changing media practices. The third space has become a political sphere where citizens can raise social issues such as gender inequalities, cultural beliefs, and social change. Networked publics have merged with online communities and a new online environment which is changing digital culture that has shaped our everyday media practices and altering citizens behaviors and attitudes. The article reviews how political campaigns are using Facebook and Twitter and politicians' advantage of analysing what citizens are thinking on social issues. Examples of how Donald Trump utilised his Twitter account to engage with his followers by using target analysis and data analytics to divert any content would comprise his presidency. The article looks at the accountability of Facebook and should they be responsible for the free flow of content that citizens can participate in and allow politicians to distribute content for political gain.

#Thirdspace #Freedom #Facebook #Twitter #Politics #Community #tTrump

## *Introduction*

Online platforms are a way for citizens to share, interact, and participate through a network public and build social interactions between other citizens that share similar ideas and interests. Social media and our everyday lives have changed with new media practices altering citizens' behaviors and attitudes. This article discusses the concept of the third space and how this has created a political sphere for citizens to engage in political debates and for citizens to have freedom of expression on social issues based on individual beliefs and values. Facebook and Twitter have become a third-place environment with their technological affordances which provides a way for citizens to engage in discussions that they feel are important and can contribute and make social change. By exploring communitarianism and the relationships between the individual and online communities, we can critically analyse the impact of digital culture and how citizens are engaging on relevant topics that they can participate in. This article provides two examples of political involvement and how politicians can influence citizen's participation and engage content designed to create engagement and public response and influence what citizens decide to comment on. Facebook and Twitter need to be accountable for what some of the content distributed through 'networked publics'. More regulation is needed to protect citizens and their freedom of speech. The digital experience, as altered as social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, has become a third space for citizens to express freedom of expression on political views.

## *Online Communities*

The purpose of creating online communities through social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter are to build social interactions between individuals and to create a participatory culture with user-generated content. Technological advances through these "network publics" have created a digital culture that has shaped and altered everyday media practices and "citizens" behaviors (Hampton & Wellman, 2018, p. 646). Network publics allow citizens to share, engage and participate in similar interests or similar lifestyles and allow citizens to form and interact as 'networked publics. Citizens feel that their contributions matter with a solid

social connection through these online communities (Boyd, 2010, p. 39). The relationship between citizens and their online communities is not just a way for social interactions and connections but a sense of belonging and creating new possibilities for expression and a new realm of social relations and communication (Delanty, 2018, p. 201). Online communities combined with advanced technologies are changing the way citizens interact online. New forms of expression have emerged, impacting social relations and a social relationships system of citizens commenting on foreign matters and issues they feel that are important to them.

Network publics and participatory culture have now merged with online communities. Online communities can form 'networked publics' and have a participatory culture that citizens can now engage and comment on social issues and political matters. This is changing our everyday social behaviors and creating online political communities and changing citizens cultural behaviors (Bertot et al, 2012, p. 30). However, there are further developments with social media platforms and how citizens interact with each other and how online communities develop and engage within a participatory culture is the idea of *'third space.'* The *third space* defines a public space where political discussion can occur with ordinary citizens through online communities. Public spaces that are beyond the home (first space) or work (second space) and political communication engaged through online communities. Political matters are interweaved with political talk, and citizens interact in cultural, social, and education debates (Potter & McDougall, 2017, p. 39). This digital practice for citizens to engage and participate in these political discussions through social media platforms and where political talk is constructed through online communities has created an 'in-between' space for citizens to engage in essential topics. The *in-between* space via public networks continually transforms digital culture (Edirisinghe et al., 2011, p. 410). This digital culture allows citizens to express political views and how they citizens feel they have freedom of speech on these platforms without any consequences. Citizens feel they have the right to have the freedom of expression on these issues and a way to express their views and their contributions matter. Citizens are participating in the political sphere through these digital spaces and user-generated content is passed around, questioning who is responsible for the content flow and what is being shared. Younger people are now commenting on political matters and developing their knowledge about politics and civic matters through social media platforms without the realization of the

consequences of participating on political content such as fake news and being part of online communities that can promote political activity (Harris, 2008, p. 482). Citizens are forming new political practices and commenting on social inequalities such as sexuality, family relations, education and having their views on these matters. The content generated influences everyday media practices and citizen's behavior, and government political parties' impact the political discussions and communications.

### *Twitter and Facebook and the Third Space*

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have become a way for citizens to have their freedom of expression on political affairs and engage with online communities. These social media platforms can influence citizens with the content shared and impact these media practices and then alters citizen's behaviors on how they interact and comment and share information on these networks (Couldry, 2004, p. 117). Facebook and Twitter have become a *third place* for political debate and generating online communities through these public networks. Political communities can form social identities and marginalised citizens thinking. Online communities can be formed into a political sphere that explores citizen's individualism and their beliefs. Citizens can then be part of an online community that supports their cultural beliefs, and citizens feel they contribute to a society and possible social change. (Delanty, 2018, p. 93).

Delanty (2018) defines 'communitarianism' as the connections between the individual and the community they belong to (Delanty, 2018, p. 89). Understanding how communitarianism works in relation to media practices and how citizens are engaging in political communities, which is shaping political communication, and citizens are expressing their point of view and changing values and attitudes.

We can see how influential social media platforms are and their technical design and digital architecture by creating fan pages, group pages, hashtags, and the allowances of Web 2.0 technologies. These social media affordances allow citizens to engage in political content, which is beneficial for politicians and a way to find potential voters rather than the traditional marketing strategies (Treadway, 2020, p. 264). By examining communitarianism, we see how politicians can use this to

create content based on individual beliefs and values such as religion and culture, and patriotism.

Politicians use social media to interact and reach out to their followers and create a third space for citizens to express their political matters. Politicians engage with their followers and interact with 'political talk' by using social media affordances and technological design to change our everyday social media practices. Citizens feel they have the freedom of expression to voice their opinions, and citizens comment on issues such as racism, gender inequalities, and ageism (Swigger, 2013, p. 601). Politicians build their online communities with them on social media platforms and discuss topics that citizens feel important to them. It is to their benefit from creating engagement and public response.

Social media platform 'Facebook' is one of the most influencing networks and allows participatory culture of sharing and connecting and creating user-generated content. The Facebook culture of following a friend and interacting daily on what citizens are doing has developed into sociable interactions and engaging with online communities and finding social groups with similar interests (Parks, 2010, p. 106). However, Facebook has become a third space for political discussion and creating online political communities. Facebook affordances have the opportunity for the freedom of speech that allows citizens to engage in political engagement and influence decision-making and thoughts on political views. Facebook's infrastructures allow the production of user-generated content, and policies are fragmented within their platform, questioning more governance throughout the platform. Facebook's technology affordances need more effective ways of managing the social responsibilities of what content is being shared and participated in. Barack Obama was the first elected president that campaigned his election using the support of social media and engaging with his followers and gained an insight into what his followers were thinking on social inequalities and other political matters (Bertot, Jaeger, Hensen, 2012, p. 30-32).

Twitter is an online social networking communication platform that microblogs, and citizens can tweet their daily activity. One of Twitter's key features is the hashtag, Gerrard (2018) explains the hashtag as "connecting content between two users, who have no preexisting follow/folløee relationship" (Gerrard, 2018, p.

4494). Donald Trump's Twitter account grew in his first election campaigning in 2015. Trump's followers went from 3 million to over 13million followers. (Wells et al., p. 186). By analysing how Trump used his Twitter account @realDonaldTrump to gain citizens' attention, we must understand what content he engaged with his followers. Lewandowsky et al. (2020) analysis is how Trump diverted harmful content created by the media and used keywords to represent his preferred topics. Topics that could be harmful to his presidency and potential conflict were Russia and potential interference with election campaigning and the investigation of the Mueller case; these diversionary Twitter topics were immigration, jobs, and China. Trump was able to target analysis on what citizens were thinking about these political issues and use these analytics of data to respond to the media and deflect some of the media content (Lewandowsky et al., p.10).

Facebook and Twitter have impacted media practices, and citizens have adapted new online behaviors and attitudes with commenting on political issues. These online behaviors are now shifting the way we present ourselves and there are concerns that there are potential consequences to the way we engage in political content.

### *Consequences of the third space*

Government officials have merged with social media networks and engaging with their citizens through a *third space* creating political talk that could have consequences. There are possible consequences for citizens and online communities and their freedom of expression on social issues that could potentially be part of hate speech. There are also concerns that citizens freedom of expression is being monitored and analysed for political gain (De Nardis & Hackel, 2015, p. 761). However, civil rights advocates and free speech experts hold Facebook accountable for misinterpretation of campaigns and advertising that politicians have created for political gain. Citizens can be manipulated into what content is on Facebook should remove all political advertising from their platforms (Romm, 2020).

Social media platforms need to protect their online communities through policies and privacy issues and citizens freedom of speech. Online communities that create opportunities for citizens to discuss and engage on social issues need to look at how they will regulate the free flow of content that their citizens interact in.

## *Conclusion*

Citizens have changed the way they use Facebook and Twitter. These platforms form online communities and create a third space for citizens to engage and participate in content that connects to their beliefs and values. The relationship between citizens and their online communities has created a sense of belonging and citizens to contribute and voice their opinions. Online communities explore citizen's individualism and support citizen's views and social interactions by allowing the freedom of expression and connecting to citizens with similar views. Citizens are engaging in political communication and taking to online communities for daily news feeds and to discuss their views on social issues and discuss social change. This is altering and changing media practices and changing citizen behaviours. Social media platforms and technological advances have also impacted citizen's behaviours and attitudes by interacting on political discussions to generate discussion and public response. This content generated is for political gain and to analyse what citizens are thinking and what they are commenting on. Both Donald Trump and Obama utilised Facebook and Twitter to connect to their followers and target potential voters. Citizens are influenced by what content is created, and politicians use strategic target analysis and keywords to engage with citizens to create engagement and participation. Facebook and Twitter need to change policy infrastructures and regulate the content that politicians create to protect citizens freedom of speech. Social media platforms have become a third space for citizens to have freedom of speech on political views and have shifted media practices, changed citizen's behaviours, and impacted social relations and formed a new social system.

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