



**CALL FOR PAPERS, 69**

**COMUNICAR**  
Special Issue 2021-4

## **Citizen participation in the digital sphere**

### **Participación ciudadana en la esfera digital**

#### **Editors**

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- **Dr. Marianne Kneuer, University of Hildesheim (Germany)**
- **Dr. Emiliana de Blasio, University LUISS-Rome (Italy)**

#### **Approach**

One of the main questions assumed about the impact of the Internet and social networks states the proliferation of (more or less visible) channels of citizen participation, through the so-called digital sphere. In this sense, literature offers a multiplicity of conflicting views on the nature, dynamics and profile of this new space. On the one hand, digital technologies have been identified as the pathway towards reversing distrust in political institutions and processes of modern democracies. Many scholars have emphasized how digital technologies have succeeded in the promotion and deepening of citizen commitment and participation through a wide catalogue of democratic innovation (both institutional and bottom-up). In this sense, social networks could have a direct impact on mobilization and empowerment, enabling citizens to interact with each other, or with public representatives, sometimes bypassing other more institutionalized communication channels, such as those capitalized by journalists in their gatekeeper role. At best, these processes could lead to a more inclusive and meaningful participation, and intensify public deliberation.

On the other hand, in opposition to these optimistic proposals we have observed critical approaches that emphasize the fragmentation, even atomization, of this potential digital sphere, and the creation of filter bubbles and echo chambers. These phenomena that we are only now beginning to understand, and which might be hidden behind increasing societal polarization. This perspective could include the hegemonic discourse of a few, as well as potential processes of intensive manipulation. Beyond this normative debate, we can find other open questions in regard to aspects such as the possibility of a transnational public sphere based

on online connectivity, the quality of deliberation or the new forms of audiences online.

Research about the digital sphere has been forced to review many of the questions raised in its seminal version, given the serious transformations occurred recently with the application of technological developments not only to the field of communication, but also in education and political processes.

This special issue welcomes theoretical works that contribute to the review of approaches proposed from the fields of communication, education or political science, as well as empirical articles, especially if they have a comparative perspective.

## Topics

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- Citizen participation in public issues of relevance and its increase with the emergence of digital media.
- Proliferation of digital platforms that boost the public sphere.
- Quantity and quality of citizen participation.
- Educational processes that increase participation in the digital sphere.
- Frames that involves communication based on emotions.
- Digital media and its performance in shaping the public sphere, but also its serious threats to privacy and transparency.
- Transformation of political systems, especially in the dimension of accountability and reciprocity.
- Information consumption patterns, sources, and their transformation with the new digital environments.
- Consolidation of spaces for participation and deliberation, and the fragmentation of the digital sphere.
- Political deliberation on social networks and the congregation of citizens with the same ideological predispositions.
- Reduction of borders and generation of transnational digital spheres.
- Digital world and new research techniques (algorithms, machine learning ...).

## Questions

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- Can we verify the increase of citizen participation through digital media? What are the findings regarding the quantity and quality of this participation?
- What experiences do we have from the point of view of education in order to contribute to citizen participation in new environments?
- What innovative forms of participation, interaction and communication are we addressing?
- What kinds of effects can be observed in the transformation of political and media systems, the provision of political news and its consumption?
- Can we confirm the spread of public sphere fragmentation in filter bubbles or echo chambers? What types of mechanisms have these bubbles and chambers developed?
- What is the role played by the public demand of higher levels of transparency in the transformation of the public sphere?
- Can we witness the growth of communication and participatory activities in the emergence of transnational audiences?
- What is the impact of surveillance in new digital spheres? Are there real security risks? Is manipulation a relevant element in these communication processes?
- Are the latest automatic analysis environments offering new useful methodologies for the understanding of these participatory and communicative processes?
- What are the implications of emotional frames in communication processes within social networks?
- What applications can machine learning have for data collection from these tools? Are they effective and adequate to advance the understanding of these complex processes of citizen participation and deliberation?

## About the Thematic Editors

### **Dr. Óscar Luengo, University of Granada (Spain)**

Is Professor in Political Science. European Doctor in Political Science (University Complutense of Madrid) Expert in Data Analysis (CIS) and in Constitutional Law and Political Science (CEPC). Vice Chair of the Research Committee on Political Communication (RC22), International Political Science Association (IPSA). Director of Iberoamerican School of High Studies in Local Government (UIM). Distinguished Visiting Scholar in Florida International University (FIU). Vice Dean of International Relations (2008-12). Researcher and Visiting professor in Florida International University, University of California, Berkeley, European University Institute (Italy), Johannes Gutenberg-Universität (Germany), Amsterdam School of Communication Research (The Netherlands), among other institutions. Author of 4 books and dozens of scientific articles about political communication and marketing. In the last years, active participant in more than 60 conferences.

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Is Full Professor for Political Science and since 2014 holds the position of Director of the Institute of Social Sciences at the University of Hildesheim, Germany. Moreover, she is board member of the Center for Digital Change at this university, co-founded by her in 2018. From 1993 until 1999 Kneuer was member in the planning staff of the Federal President of Germany responsible for political analysis and strategic planning as well as for speech writing. Before that she worked as a political journalist (1989-1993), inter in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Since 2018, Kneuer is President of the International Political Science Association (IPSA). Primary research fields: comparative politics, especially democratization, democracy and autocracy studies; digital media in democracies and autocracies.

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Is professor of Media Studies at Luiss University, Rome, where she teaches Open Government, Sociology of communication and Gender Politics. She is Deputy Director of the CCPS (Centre for Conflict and Participation Studies) and the Scientific coordinator of the Observatory for the Open Government and Political participation. Her main research interests focus on digital technology and politics, open government, citizen participation and populisms. Her most recent publications include: e-Democracy (Milan, 2019), E-Democracy and Digital Activism: From Divergent Paths Toward a New Frame (with M. Sorice) in *International Journal of Communication* (2019); Il governo online (Rome 2018); The rise of populist parties in Italy: Techno-populism between neo-liberalism and direct democracy (with M. Sorice), in Hidalgo-Tenorio, Benítez-Castro & De Cesare (Eds.) *Populist discourse. Critical Approaches to Contemporary Politics* (London, 2019); Open Government und Demokratie. Zwischen Effizienz und Partizipation (with M. Sorice), in Schünemann & Kneuer (eds.) *E-Government und the Netzpolitik im europäischen Vergleich* (Baden-Baden, 2018); Populisms among technology, e-democracy and depoliticisation process (with M. Sorice), in *Revista Internacional de Sociología* (2018); Implementing open government: a qualitative comparative analysis of digital platforms in France, Italy and United Kingdom, in *Quality & Quantity*, (2018).

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## Institutional Co-editors

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