A Brave New Democracy:
The impact of Social Media, Algorithms and AI on politics & citizenship

New Media & Society _ Special Issue Call for Papers

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OVERVIEW OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE FOCUS

Contemporary understandings of democratic citizenship and their role in democracy have evolved over the last five decades, generally following periods of change in society, politics, and communication. For example, the mid-Twentieth Century was a period of prosperity and trust in political and media institutions which corresponded to standard views of civic role performance centered on voting in elections and referenda, supporting the campaigns of parties and candidates for office, contacting elected representatives to highlight issues of concern, and being involved in cooperative activities (Verba & Nie, 1972). The subsequent era of economic globalization and related disruptions of civil societies, labor markets and individual security, along with declining levels of institutional trust, shifted focus away from earlier models of *dutiful citizenship* toward more fragmented repertoires of *the monitorial citizens* (Schudson, 1998), *engaged citizens* (Dalton, 2008), or *actualizing citizenship* (Bennett, Freelon & Wells, 2011).

These new forms of citizenship are viewed as responses to challenges associated with globalization, growing inequality and perceived institutional limitations; but also reflect the emergence of identity politics, culture wars, political instability, and democratic erosion (V-Dem, 2022). In addition, the spread of digital communication technologies has offered a broad spectrum of citizens means of connecting across social and even national boundaries, to develop political networks and campaigns focusing on local, national or global issues (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). The current era is defined by a new set of social and political contexts that call for fresh thinking about citizenship and communication, and how evolving new technologies such as algorithmic based social media, artificial intelligence (AI), and the upcoming synthetic media will all sustain or challenge the future of democracy. Dalton's conceptualization of 'the fifth state' (2023) indicates a shift in power dynamics tied to developments in communication technology. These developments have seen the emergence of networked individuals who play a strategic role across different layers of society who are empowered 'citizens of the digital age'. These actors eschew nation-state affairs in favor of global politics, focusing on myriad cross-national causes.

The current era is also one of further technological opportunities and challenges. Digital technology has provided spaces for good democratic citizenship (participation, deliberation, inclusivity and pluralism) as well as destructive democratic citizenship (spreading disinformation and hate speech, silencing opponents aggressively and trolling). As AI enters the common public consciousness due to easily available software, the emerging question is how might AI impact upon our democracies (Jungherr 2023). On the one hand AI can be used to promote pro-democratic behavior. AI tools may moderate deliberation, promote and help construct more rational arguments and facilitate more inclusive consultation between institutions and citizens. AI could support informed discussions and decision-making which close inequality gaps around political participation. At a basic level this could provide the ground for electronic voting. But at a more fundamental level ensure voters feel empowered through having access to sufficient information to participate not only in elections but directly influencing political decisions. These positive views, however, are contingent on who determines the role AI plays. AI can promote disinformation, misinformation, societal biases, and populist propaganda. Governments can harness AI to promote their policies, excluding oppositional or civil society voices. Governments could also harness AI to depress political participation by controlling the flow of information. We can see examples of the positive and negative uses of AI within a range of political

systems, but this area is underexplored. AI is currently under scrutiny, and conversations are taking place between world leaders and tech moguls (such as AI Safety Summit 2023), and there are moves to develop a framework for how AI should function or at least could be constrained to limit its possible harm to democratic institutions. But further research from the fields of political science, and communication is needed to inform these debates, in particular to consider how AI could and should be used and regulated for the enhancement of citizen engagement.

This special issue aims to understand the role of **new communication processes**, the development of multiple platforms and the role of AI in reshaping political and social interactions, and how they are **related to citizens,** and their role as active actors in democratic or non-democratic societies. It aims to explore the roles of **networked active publics** within and across nations and the extent that their deliberative and communicative activities contribute positively or negatively to civic and democratic culture, pluralism and societal cohesion. It also aims to understand how organizations facilitate and employ AI, algorithmic based social media information, and other **technological developments** in building citizenry or on the contrary how they limit the role of individual citizens. Topics may include the construction of new norms and understandings of citizenship across the political spectrum, the replacement of civic groups with networked-based communication, and the proliferation of identity-based language codes. These features of changing citizen-communication ecologies may be involved in building a sense of community, altruism and belonging, but they may also facilitate polarization, antagonism, isolation, and disruption (Koc-Michalska et al., 2023).

Bennett, W. L., Wells, C., & Freelon, D. (2011). Communicating civic engagement: Contrasting models of citizenship in the youth web sphere. *Journal of communication*, *61*(5), 835-856.
Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2013). *The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics*. Cambridge University Press.
Dalton, R. J. (2008). Citizenship norms and the expansion of political participation. *Political studies*, vol. 56, no 1, p. 76-98.
Jungherr, A., (2023). Artificial Intelligence and Democracy: A Conceptual Framework, Social Media + Society (July-September).
Koc-Michalska, K., Klinger, U., Bennett, L., & Römmele, A. (2023). (Digital) Campaigning in Dissonant Public Spheres. Political Communication, 40(3), 255–262. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2023.2173872
Schudson, M. (1998). The good citizen: A history of American civic life.
V-Dem (2022) Democracy report: Autocratization changing nature? https://v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports/
Verba, S., & Nie, N. H. (1972). Participation in America: Political democracy and social equality (University of Chicago Press ed). University of Chicago Press.

Articles submitted to this special issue may address, but are not limited to, such topics as:

- the roles of different social media, algorithms, and platforms in facilitating or restricting active publics;
- the development of the usage of AI for politics, information, and communication;
- do these new media play a role in reshaping or constructing the common civic norms and citizen identities, especially in times of crisis;
- how the adoption of new technologies creates differences in civic practice and mobilization across different publics
- analyses of online public deliberation or lack of it; the role of digital public consultation;
- the politics of platform and AI products regulation and self-regulations.

In general, we are interested in studies depicting how such factors may affect the balances of political power in democratic societies? The overall aim is to revise and update our understanding of citizenship and communication in this era of democratic turbulence, and stark technological changes.

The proposed special edition will tackle questions relating to the role that new technologies play in facilitating and sustaining the performance of citizenship with the following foci:
1. **interdisciplinary theoretical approaches** to understand the psychology, behavior and social context of individuals functioning and communicating in relation to their own performances as citizens, to understand the role of communication in shaping new forms of citizenship and democratic processes. We are also open to manuscripts based on a wider inter-disciplinary cooperation (e.g. economy, law, engineering etc.)
2. **Comprehensive methodological approach**, especially global and inclusive contexts and cross-country studies exploring comparatively the roles of active publics across diverse regimes and political systems.

We specifically invite submissions from CEE, Global South and other regions outside of the Western Democracies. The special issue is open for sound theoretical and data-driven manuscripts, with no limits to the methods used, however, a comparative approach will be privileged.

SUBMISSION PROCESS

Schedule:

1 June 2024	Possible expression of interest sent to the Guest Editors (this is not a preselection process) to bravedemocracy@gmail.com Max. 500 words
15 November 2024	Full manuscript submission (open to all)
November 2025	Online first