Gender and Online Politics
Special Issue of the *Social Science Computer Review*
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SSCR Vol. 39, No. 2
Published online, July 2019; published in print April, 2021

Gender and Online Politics: Digital Media as Friend and Foe in Times of Change/ Shelley Boulianne, Karolina Koc-Michalska, & Thierry Vedel
    Abstract: This volume highlights gender issues related to using digital media for online politics. The submissions offer a balanced perspective about the role of digital media; this tool can be used for social change or to limit social change. The submissions use qualitative and quantitative analyses of digital trace data and survey data to present a rich perspective on gender and online politics. The collection offers a cross-national perspective, including research on China, Germany, Norway, Spain, the United States and the United Kingdom.

The gender gap in online news comment sections / Emily Van Duyn, Cynthia Peacock, & Natalie Jomini Stroud
    Abstract: Women are less likely than men to discuss or engage in politics. This study extends research on the gender gap in politics to an online context by exploring whether women are less likely to engage in political discussion online, whether this follows socialization theories of a private versus public sphere distinction, and whether perceptions of incivility help to explain these gender differences. Through a survey of commenters and comment readers based on a probability sample in the United States (n=965) and a survey of actual commenters and comment readers across 20 news sites (n=12,110), we find that women are less likely than men to comment online, particularly on state, national, or international topics. However, women are more likely than men to comment on local news. We also find that perceptions of incivility are related to commenting, although they do little to explain gender differences in commenting. Our results suggest that the gender gap in online political discussion is the product of women’s political socialization more so than the civility of the site.

From online political posting to mansplaining: The gender gap and social media in political discussion / Karolina Koc-Michalska, Anya Schiffrin, Anamaria Lopez, Shelley Boulianne, & Bruce Bimber
    Abstract: The gender dynamics of political discussion are important. These dynamics shape who shares their political views, how they share their views and reactions to these views. Using representative survey data from the United States and the United Kingdom, we investigate how social media platforms shape the gender dynamics of political posting. We find that on Facebook, gender does not predict political posting, whereas, on Twitter, the gender gap is more pronounced. We also examine the concept of ‘mansplaining’ - a term used to describe a patronizing form of communication directed at women by men. Firstly, we find that posting about political issues to Twitter is more likely
to result in being an *explaine*e but also being an *explainer* of political issues. Furthermore, posting to Twitter increases the likelihood of men reporting having been accused of mansplaining and women reporting having experienced it. In general, more than half of the women say they have experienced mansplaining, especially those who are younger, well-educated, and left-leaning. We argue that the possibility of being mansplained affects who is willing to post their opinions online and as such, caution should be exercised when using digital trace data to represent public opinion.

Gender differences in critical digital political engagement in China: The consequences for protest attitudes / Kevin Wagner, Jason Gainous, & Jason P. Abbott

Abstract: We use original survey data from China to examine gender differences in exposure to, and the exchange of, information critical of their respective governments via the internet and social media. Existing research suggests that men, generally, tend to be more politically engaged than women. We set out to test whether this extended to dissident political engagement in the Chinese context, and if it translated into variation in support for protest across gender, and across political context. Compared to other Asian nations, China has relatively high gender equality. Yet, due to the social, cultural, and political structures in China, we expect that women will be less active online, less likely to consume critical media, and less likely to engage in political dissidence than their male counterparts. We did find that men were more likely to be critically digitally engaged in China. However, we found that while critical digital engagement was positively related to support for protest, this effect was actually stronger for women in China. We offer some speculation regarding these counterintuitive results.

Feminism! What Is It Good For? The Role of Feminism and Political Self-Efficacy in Women’s Online Political Participation/ Katharina Heger & Christian P. Hoffmann

Abstract: Despite initial hopes for more egalitarian access to democracy, research has shown that political participation on the Internet remains as stratified as its offline counterpart. Gender is among the characteristics affecting an individual’s degree of political engagement on the Internet – even when controlling for socio-economic status. To explain this gender divide, it is necessary to go beyond purely resource-based perspectives. Social-cognitive theory allows for an analysis of how environmental factors shape cognitions, such as political efficacy, which, in turn, foster political participation. Political efficacy has been shown to be lower among women compared to men. This study explores determinants of gendered online political participation (OPP), by analysing how self-efficacy mediates the effect of newly developed measures of three different waves of feminist attitudes on OPP. Based on a survey of 1078 Internet users in Germany, 70% of them women, we analyse the effects of feminism on political efficacy and participation. Feminism is associated with higher internal political efficacy. Also, some feminist paradigms are shown to empower women to participate politically online. This effect, however, is not mediated through efficacy. This finding sheds light on opportunities to foster women’s political participation.

Silencing women? Gender and online harassment / Marjan Nadim & Audun Fladmoe
Abstract: While gendered online harassment has received increased attention in academic and public debates, there is a lack of empirical studies examining gender differences in experiences with online harassment. Relying on two independent large-scale population surveys carried out in Norway, this article examines whether women experience more — and different — online harassment than men, to what extent different types of online harassment silence its targets, and whether there are gendered patterns in how online harassment works as a silencing mechanism. Analytically, we distinguish between different levels of severity of online harassment, and what the harassment is directed towards. Contrary to popular expectations, we find that more men than women have experienced online harassment. The main reason is that men receive more comments directed at their opinions and attitudes; women and men are equally exposed to harassment directed towards group characteristics. However, targeted women are more likely than targeted men to become more cautious in expressing their opinions publicly. Furthermore, the gender differences increase as the harassment becomes more aggressive and directed towards group characteristics.

Twitter, Incivility and ‘Everyday’ Gendered Othering: An Analysis of Tweets Sent to UK Members of Parliament / Rosalynd Southern & Emily Harmer

Abstract: Recently, widely reported studies assessed messages sent to UK female MPs online and concluded that they suffer high levels of abuse (Stamboliva, 2017; Marin, 2018). However, these studies tended to focus on the most high-profile MPs and the worst instances of abuse or did not include male MPs in their study for comparison. This study aims to assess more subtle forms of incivility and othering and the experiences of less prominent MPs online. It takes a mixed methods approach to analysing 117,802 tweets sent to members of parliament over a 14-day period for evidence of incivility. Firstly, models assessing the factors associated with receiving incivility on Twitter are presented and furthermore an in-depth thematic analysis of gendered tweets is conducted. The findings suggest that for the receipt of certain types of incivility there is little difference between female and male MPs. However, female MPs were more likely to receive generally uncivil tweets, tweets with stereotypes about their identity and tweets questioning their position as politicians than male MPs. Qualitatively, in terms of gendered othering, we found several instances of tweets containing misogynistic abuse, tweets demonising and objectifying female MPs as well as tweets feminising male MPs.

#MeToo, Networked Acknowledgement, and Connective Action: How ‘Empowerment Through Empathy’ Launched a Social Movement / Jiyoun Suk, Aman Abhishek, Yini Zhang, So Yun Ahn, Teresa Correa, Christine Garlough, & Dhavan V. Shah

Abstract: How did efforts that prompted the sharing of personal experiences of sexual violence and harassment around #MeToo coalesce into calls for action across a range of institutions and communities? We argue that sharing experiences of trauma in digital spaces created a network of acknowledgement, which supported and sustained nascent #MeToo activism based on the logic of connective action. This paper attempts to (a) understand the temporal dynamics of these different discourses within the #MeToo Movement on Twitter, (b) reveal the accounts animating these discourses and the most
prominent themes within them, and (c) model the overtime relationship between these discourses and their relationship to major news event and #MeToo revelations. To do so, we analyze a 1% sample of tweets from the five-month period following the revelations about Harvey Weinstein in early October 2017, employing a range of computational approaches, including part-of-speech tagging, hashtags extraction, and retweet network analysis – to identify key discourses, actors, and themes. We then conduct time-series analysis to identify the relationship between the two discourses and predict how the ebbs and flows of each discourse are shaped by news events.

Twitter Activism and Ethical Witnessing: Possibilities and Challenges of Feminist Politics Against Gender-Based Violence / Sonia Núñez Puente, Sergio D’Antonio Maceiras, & Diana Fernández Romero

Abstract: This article examines digital activism on Twitter against gender-based violence with regards to the March 8, 2017 feminist movement in Spain (8M). We explore a sample of 20,000 messages (tweets, retweets, and mentions) of the most commonly utilized hashtags in this context, such as #8M and #NiUnaMenos (Not one less [woman]). We analyze if, in the case of 8M in Spain, digital feminist activism constituted a challenge to the hegemonic frames of representation of gender-based violence. Using the concept of “ethical testimony” (Oliver, 2001, 2004), we demonstrate the opportunity that giving testimony on gender-based violence offers to digital feminist activism to act in an effective, political manner on Twitter, circumventing invisibility. These hashtags do not form strong conversational communities, but rather serve to diffuse messages at a mass scale. Within these conversational communities, the term “victim” is rarely utilized, which we interpret as an accomplishment of women as agents capable of resisting their position of vulnerability.