

Political Participation in the Context of Platformization: A Technological Affordances Perspective

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Abstract. *Introduction.* Social media has become a key space where political participation is shaped and mediated in contemporary societies. Although widely researched over the past decade, practices in the evolving digital sphere still require deeper understanding. The paper explores how technological affordances – visibility, persistence, editability, and association (Treem & Leonardi, 2013) – not only enable but also constrain civic engagement. *Methods.* By using a qualitative research paradigm (focus groups), the paper examines both technological and subjective aspects of political participation. The research question is: *How do social media affordances enable and constrain citizens' online political participation in Lithuania?* *Analysis and results.* The findings reveal that, although technological affordances expand access to political information and enable expression, this empowerment remains uneven and limited. Participants describe tensions related to algorithmic filtering, self-censorship, and low self-efficacy, which lead to a passive and observational mode of participation. *Conclusions.* While platforms promise empowerment, political participation remains shaped by algorithmic filtering and social dynamics that often discourage deeper engagement. In this way, technological affordances both enable and constrain participation in an ongoing, dynamic process, where digital tools and citizens' agency continually interact.

Keywords: political participation on social media, technological affordances, platformisation.

Politinis dalyvavimas platformizacijos kontekste: technologijų kuriamų galimybių perspektyva

Santrauka. *Įvadas.* Socialinės medijos tampa pagrindine erdve, kurioje formuojamas ir medijuojamas politinis dalyvavimas šiuolaikinėse visuomenėse. Nors pastarąjį dešimtmetį šis reiškinys buvo plačiai tyrinėjamas, piliečių veikimo praktikos kintančioje skaitmeninėje aplinkoje vis dar reikalauja gilesnio žvilgsnio. Straipsnyje analizuojama, kaip technologijų kuriamos galimybės – matomumas, pastovumas, galimybė redaguoti ir galimybė susieti (Treem ir Leonardi, 2013) – įgalina arba riboja politinio dalyvavimo procesus. *Metodai.* Straipsnis remiasi kokybine tyrimo prieiga (fokus grupės). Ši prieiga leidžia atskleisti tiek technologinius, tiek ir subjektyvius politinio dalyvavimo aspektus. Tyrimo klausimas: ar technologijų kuriamos galimybės socialinių medijų aplinkoje Lietuvoje įgalina piliečius veikti? *Analizė ir rezultatai.* Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad nors technologijų kuriamos galimybės plečia prieigą prie politinės informacijos ir sudaro sąlygas saviraiškai, šis įgalinimas nėra tolygus ir pasižymi ribotumu. Respondentų patirtys atspindi įtampas, susijusias su algoritmų veikimu, savicenzūra ir žemu politiniu veiksmingumu, kas lemia pasyvumą bei stebėtojišką požiūrį į

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politiką. **Išvados.** Nors platformos žada įgalinimą, politinis dalyvavimas jose yra formuojamas algoritmų, o susiję socialiniai bei psichologiniai aspektai trukdo gilesniam įsitraukimui. Įsijungimas socialinėse medijose gali padidinti piliečių susidomėjimą politika. Vis dėlto piliečių aktyvumas priklauso ne tik nuo technologinių įrankių, bet ir nuo jų asmeninių patirčių, politinio veiksmingumo bei pasitikėjimo pačia dalyvavimo skaitmeninėje erdvėje prasme.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: politinis dalyvavimas socialinėse medijose; technologijų kuriamos galimybės; platformizacija.

Introduction

Processes of mediatisation and platformisation have blurred the boundaries between private and public spheres, embedding political communication into everyday routines – “the media mediate, and via them we are linked to social realities beyond our immediate here and/or now” (Dahlgren, 2011, p. 93). Over the past two decades, social media has become a central part of citizens’ daily communication practices, including exposure to and interaction with political content – at the start of 2023, 77.6% of Lithuanian citizens regularly visited social networks (Datareportal, 2023), and 81% of the population reported reading news online (91% among internet users) (State Data Agency, 2023). For those who use social media regularly, platforms like *Facebook*, *X*, or *TikTok* serve as entry points to access, discuss, and act on political issues.

This shift suggests that political participation is extending beyond formal institutional acts into broader, everyday communicative practices. Citizens engage in a process of information-driven involvement – political interest online may develop into more active expression and action outside the digital space. Cantijoch et al. (2016) describe this as a ‘spill-over manner’, where mobilisation for political action occurs gradually and step by step. Political interest via social media may be viewed as a “potential solution to the knowledge gap” (Bode, 2016, p. 28). Incidental exposure can encourage political participation – the random presentation of news captures attention and encourages engagement, especially among young and less active individuals (Heiss et al., 2020). Political interest that involves effortful processing of incidentally exposed information tends to an increased interest and participation over time (Matthes et al., 2025; Nanz et al., 2025). Engaging people with news by sharing, reacting, or commenting is vital for enhancing civic and political involvement (Kim, 2023).

However, while political interest on social media can serve as a gateway to greater civic engagement, its effects are inconsistent, influenced by incidental exposure, low efficacy, and fragmented information environments. Along with the increasing opportunities for political expression and communication-based action, there is a rise in the spread of hate speech (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023), disinformation, and fake news (Bleyer-Simon et al., 2024; Balčytienė, 2024). Previous research also indicates that such dynamics are associated with lower levels of political efficacy and decreased democratic engagement (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019). Social networks offer opportunities to access more information, but this does not lead to an increase in political knowledge (De Zúñiga et al., 2024).

The main issue discussed in this paper is the ambivalent nature of political participation on social media: although platforms increase opportunities for access and expression, participation often remains fragmented, limited by algorithmic filtering, hostile discussion environments, and low political efficacy. To address this issue, the paper focuses on the following question: *How do social media affordances enable or constrain citizens' online political participation in Lithuania?*

Building on this question, the paper adopts the *technological affordances approach* as an analytical lens. This perspective has been increasingly used to explain how social media platforms structure opportunities for political action (Theocharis et al., 2023; Koc-Michalska et al., 2021). As researchers note, social media are not neutral – i.e., their design, infrastructure, functionality, and interaction logic can be key to studying political participation on social networks (Ruess et al., 2023; Boulianne et al., 2024; Ronzhyn et al., 2023; Kim & Ellison, 2022). This paper examines how social media affordances shape the experiences of political participation in Lithuania – both online and beyond the digital sphere.

Political participation on social media and aspects of platformisation

Classic definitions of political participation primarily describe it as ‘acts’ (Verba & Nie, 1972). Traditionally, political participation is defined as “legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take” (Verba & Nie, 1972, p. 2). The desire to influence political decisions has long been seen as a core part of political participation – voting, contacting public officials, joining political parties, getting involved in election campaigns, and participating in protest actions are all traditionally considered acts of political participation (Schlozman et al., 2018). However, citizens’ ways of engaging in political life have been evolving within a changing, mediatised environment, where new types of participation are emerging and being adopted by individuals (Theocharis & Van Deth, 2018; Waeterloos et al., 2021; Ruess et al., 2023).

Mediatization plays a central role in these transformations. In digital environments, citizens engage in participatory practices that extend beyond the digitisation of traditional acts (*digitally supported participation*) and involve new ways of acting that are only possible within social media environments (*digitally enabled participation*) (Theocharis et al., 2023). Bennett and Segerberg’s (2013) concept of *connective action* captures this shift – political involvement is increasingly tied to individualised communication practices that spread through social networks rather than through traditional organisational structures. In this sense, social media provide the sociotechnical environment where these participatory repertoires of engagement take shape.

Consequently, political participation on social media may be understood as digitally networked participation – “media-based activities carried out by citizens to reveal their own mobilisation and activate their social networks to draw attention to a social or political problem or to exert social and political pressure to solve it” (Theocharis, 2015,

p. 6). In this paper, political participation on social media is defined as mediated actions by citizens aimed at influencing political institutions, processes, or decision-making, as well as proactive or mobilising political expression and interest that leaves a digital footprint. High-intensity forms of participation include activities such as writing messages to politicians, initiating or moderating political discussions, or organising digital campaigns and groups. Low-intensity forms of political engagement involve liking political content, sharing posts, signing online petitions, or providing brief commentary on issues.

Recognising this spectrum of political participation is important for research purposes, as it clarifies what constitutes political engagement on social media and highlights the variety of ways in which it manifests in everyday life. Yet, participation in platforms is not only about individual practices but also about how the platform architecture shapes what is possible. Recently, more attention has been paid to the *technological affordances approach* and how social media platforms enable or limit different forms of political participation (Theocharis et al., 2023; Ruess et al., 2023; Boulianne et al., 2024; Kim & Ellison, 2022).

The affordances perspective originates in Gibson's (1979) work in the field of psychology, where he argues that the form of surrounding objects suggests what actions can be taken. From this view, perception and action are closely linked – by perceiving the technological environment, individuals not only receive information, but also interpret it and recognise possibilities for action. In the social media field, affordances are defined as “perceived actual or imagined properties of social media, emerging through the relation of technological, social, and contextual, that enable and constrain specific uses of the platforms” (Ronzhyn et al., 2023, p. 3178). While there is still debate on how to operationalise and measure them, scholars agree that they should not be reduced to platform tools (such as *likes* or *comments*) but rather understood as broader possibilities embedded in the infrastructure (Ronzhyn et al., 2023). This approach highlights how users adapt and reinterpret these possibilities for their own communicative and political purposes.

Building on this perspective, the present paper focuses on four affordances identified by Treem and Leonardi (2013): *visibility* (“social media afford users the ability to make their behaviours, knowledge, preferences, and communication network connections that were once invisible (or at least very hard to see) visible to others in the organization”, p. 150), *persistence* (communication actions may remain on the network for a long time, even after logging out), *editability* (individuals may spend time and effort to create as well as edit a communication unit before others see it), and *association* (as “connections between individuals, between individuals and content, or between an actor and a presentation”, p. 162). These affordances offer a valuable framework for analysing individual experiences through sociotechnical infrastructures of social media, understanding how citizens navigate the space between being informed and becoming politically active.

Data and methodology

The research is based on a qualitative research methodology. To analyse the connection between technological affordances and political participation on social media, the focus group interview data was analysed¹. The implications of technological affordances are best understood through citizens' subjective experiences, reflections, and meanings attached to their social media practices – how individuals obtain information about political issues on *Facebook*, discuss political topics, express their opinions on political issues publicly, share this information, and how they use social networks to act (or not) in politics.

Focus group interviews were conducted in May–June 2019². A purposive sampling strategy was employed, focusing on *Facebook* users³. Five focus group surveys were organised, each with 6–8 participants. To capture a variety of experiences, both more politically active and more passive users were included, as identified through a pre-screening questionnaire, and groups were divided by age (18–24, 25–44, and 45–64 years). Discussions lasted 60–90 minutes, and the participants were informed about the research purpose, anonymity, and recording procedures.

For data analysis, a phenomenographic approach was applied (Niewohner et al., 2016). This approach helps to reveal subjective aspects of individuals' digital experiences. The transcripts were coded inductively, and categories were developed through repeated coding and comparison. This approach made it possible to identify variations in how the respondents interpreted practices of information seeking, political expression, and participation (or disengagement) within the platform environment.

Results

Visibility. Due to the affordance of *visibility*, political actions become observable to others in a networked environment. According to Treem and Leonardi (2013), visibility is shaped by how much effort individuals must invest to notice or locate information. Traditionally, acts such as attending meetings, signing petitions, and engaging in discussions remained private or within small circles, often invisible to the broader public. In contrast, political participation on social media – by virtue of being inherently communicative – unfolds in semi-public or public spaces where others may observe, engage with, and amplify individual expressions. These acts, such as commenting, sharing, or reacting to political content, are not only more visible by default but also amplified through algorithmic cura-

¹ Although the broader research project applied a mixed-methods design, this article focuses on the qualitative part.

² The research was conducted during a politically active period: on March 3 and 17, 2019, Lithuanian municipal council election was held, whereas, on May 12 and 26, 2019, the presidential election of the Republic of Lithuania took place. It can be argued that this period was relevant for the respondents in terms of reflecting on their experiences of political participation and may have contributed to yielding more accurate data.

³ Recruitment was conducted by *Factus Dominus*, a market and public opinion research company. All focus group interviews were carried out by the author in person.

tion, extending their reach to broader and more diverse audiences. In this way, visibility becomes a mechanism for political information to circulate and potentially mobilise others.

Visibility, as expressed by participants, is described as an inevitable and integral part of everyday life in a mediatised society. Social media is generally viewed positively as a source of political information that gradually enhances political knowledge: *I think, in general, information is important. (...) [It] keeps knocking and knocking, and eventually, it gets through* (FG2-1, age group 25–44). Internal reflections on one's own political engagement are perceived – the participants see the flow of information as motivating, shaping their own sense of being politically aware and knowledgeable: *It is really useful – you learn a lot, and it encourages you to participate* (FG1, age group 18–24). These are particularly younger participants who are more optimistic and who report greater engagement with politics via visibility: *I remember that I really invited a lot of friends not to go shopping and boycott prices because they had gone up. (...) And I definitely participated in this campaign* (FG2-2, age group 25–44).

However, visibility introduces specific challenges related to platform infrastructure – algorithmic personalisation plays a crucial role in shaping how visible one's political views have become. Even liking or sharing political content is seen as a potential risk, as it could possibly signal political preferences: *It is like catching yourself – someone might think I'm going to vote for him just because I liked his page* (FG1, age group 18–24). Visibility is also seen as a broader risk for personal goals: *Employers check Facebook profiles, and if your posts don't match their views, that could have an impact* (FG2-1, age group 25–44). The need to control visibility is expressed, and media literacy is seen as key to regain control over information as well as one's digital presence: *Facebook can be empowering... but you need to know how to use it, to filter things, to understand where the information flows from* (FG1, age group 18–24).

Moreover, visibility relates to the ability to observe what others are doing (or not) on the platform (Treem and Leonardi, 2013). In the never-ending play of images, participants raise questions about the sense of empowerment – is it just a subjective feeling or does it have some actual political impact: *That empowerment feels [questionable]. Maybe you just feel more empowered* (FG1, age group 18–24). A hostile and uninviting discussion culture fuels doubt, leading to disillusionment and withdrawal.

Overall, visibility both facilitates political engagement and introduces barriers that challenge participants' sense of agency. It functions not only as a means for information circulation, but also as a deeply social and reflexive space. Visibility thus emerges as a double-edged affordance: it encourages political awareness and participation yet simultaneously fosters self-monitoring and caution about one's public image, leading individuals to weigh the risks of expression against the perceived benefits of engagement.

Persistence. In the context of political participation on social media, *persistence* refers to the lasting accessibility of shared discussions, opinions, and information (Treem and Leonardi, 2013). From the empowerment perspective, persistence enables more reflective and engaged connection with political content: *You read various opinions and piece it all together to form your own general conclusion. At least I do that personally* (FG1, age

group 18–24). However, participants do not always perceive social media to be stable – many describe the platforms as dynamic and constantly shifting, which means that social media is not the best place to search for information, even though incidental exposure plays an important part: *I don't search on social media. Whatever information reaches me, I read it there, take a look, but if I want to find something specific, read something or find party programmes, I don't look for it on social media* (FG2-1, age group 25–44).

Younger citizens have a better understanding of how algorithms work in information selection: *If you support Šimonytė's campaign, you see that flow a million times a day – signing some kind of petition, pledging your support, and so on* (FG1, age group 18–24). Older interviewees find incidental exposure on platforms confusing – they perceive social networks as unstable, constantly changing channels where not all information is accessible, which leads to confusion: *There's also a lot of frustration about how they filter things out* (FG3-1, age group 45–64). Due to understanding platform specifics, younger respondents are more confident when evaluating information or generalising. This remains a challenge for older respondents, leading to overall passivity: *I don't do anything there because I don't understand* (FG3-2, age group 45–64).

From an individual's perspective, persistence also affects how they manage their online political identity. The belief that information posted online never disappears causes many people to refrain from sharing their political opinions: *I avoid commenting, [I do it] very rarely. (...) I am afraid of publicity, I must admit. I am afraid to comment there and be misunderstood* (FG1, age group 18–24). Overall, political activity on social media is seen as a risk for self-image, and polarising topics or politics in general are to be avoided: *I try not to post political [information] on my wall because I simply don't want to provoke any discussions if there are any controversial issues. So that the information doesn't leak out somewhere* (FG1, age group 25–44).

As a result, persistence thus emerges as a paradoxical affordance – offering continuity and variety of information, while simultaneously reinforcing caution, passivity, and self-censorship. While younger users feel more confident when navigating algorithmic filtering, older participants describe social media as unpredictable and disorienting, which leads to their withdrawal. At the same time, the persistence of online traces creates reputational risks: citizens hesitate to act, due to fearing misunderstanding or negative consequences.

Editability. Technological affordance of *editability* refers to the ability to revise or refine a communication act before it becomes visible to others (Treem and Leonardi, 2013). The possibility to edit is empowering since the act itself is proactive – it is a part of political participation on social media and, simultaneously, a way to control the content.

Firstly, interviewees reflect their experiences in editing messages and content – in this regard, the communicative act of political participation on social media via political expression is associated with responsibility: *I never delete anything, but I look at what I've written, and edit it* (FG2-2, age group 25–44). However, responsibility, combined with low internal efficacy, reduces agency: *I don't comment because I think comments are first and foremost a public thing, and you must be accountable for your words* (FG2-2, age group 25–44).

Yet, editability as a technological affordance expands beyond textual interactions. Choosing not to click *like* or remove it, to un-share the post, refrain from commenting is a part of broader logic of self-regulation in social media environment – and the reason for this is the fear of judgement: *[Talking about an LGBTQ+ discussion on social media] At first, I just waited, then I shared it, but I took it down because I just... I don't know what my friends think, and I don't want to be excluded* (FG3-2, age group 45–64). Importantly, such decisions also reflect one's strategic effort to construct and maintain a certain image: *You create some kind of image of yourself anyway, you think about what to share and what not* (FG2-2, age group 25–44).

On the other hand, the affordance of editability can also be understood as the ability to curate one's social media feed to get preferred content: *I unfriended people – once they started talking politics, that was it* (FG3-1, age group 45–64). Shaping the information stream was more evident among younger participants, who showed a greater awareness of how algorithmic filtering works: *I just went and unliked, unfollowed [those pages]* (FG2-1, age group 25–44). Moreover, platform features such as *like* were often employed strategically – not only as expressions of agreement but also as tools for influencing the algorithm to prioritise certain types of political content.

To sum up, editability operates both as a form of internalised social control and as a continuous performance of digital identity in political contexts. Through practices of revising, withholding, or curating content, participants simultaneously protect themselves from judgment and seek to influence how they are perceived. At the same time, strategic uses of features such as 'like' show that editability is also a tool for shaping information flows and algorithmic exposure.

Association. According to Treem and Leonardi (2013), association refers to the ability to view the content of multiple actors within the network and to be influenced by it, creating awareness of interconnections and shared meaning. Association is formed through active information exchange, which supports and triggers engagement in social networks as well as offline: *And those [who actively discuss politics] – they really inspire me* (FG1, age group 18–24). It may encourage political action in the real world: *By the way, I also saw that ad [referring to Facebook vote counts on election day]. I'm not politically active. I clicked [that I voted], then took out my bike – well, okay, I'm going [to vote]* (FG2-2, age group 25–44).

Generally, citizens look for opportunities to engage politically through social media. However, they feel more connected to civic initiatives – as participants often express a wish to stay away from politics in general: *I'll say this – if it's civic actions like trees, forests, Šančiai [Neighbourhood] (...) – then yes. But no politics – sorry* (FG3-1, age group 45–64). Politics tends to be pushed to the margins of the social media information flow, but this does not necessarily mean lack of engagement in the usual sense: *Politics on social media is simply not something I'm interested in – at all. (...) But I voted because I wanted to do my duty* (FG2-2, age group 25–44).

As discussed above, participants reassess their self-image and sense of agency based on how they think others will see their activity. These imagined reactions are linked to

low self-efficacy and may discourage active political expression: *You think that maybe you could do it too, but you don't feel confident enough* (FG1, age group 18–24). In this sense, association can lead to undermining of one's own role, even in low-intensity acts: *If there are thousands of participants, whether I am interested or not, it doesn't matter at all whether I click or not* (FG2-1, age group 25–44). Participants denoted by lower self-efficacy also tend to align with what they perceive to be the majority opinion, as shaped by their personal media feed: *I'm not very active in politics, so my opinion... it kind of becomes herd instinct. I see what others support – and I support it too, because I don't really know enough, so at least I'm with everyone else* (FG1, age group 18–24).

In summary, the affordance of association plays a complex dual role in shaping political participation on social media. On the one hand, it enables citizens to form connections, feel inspired, and develop a sense of belonging, which can lead to offline political engagement. However, it also creates conditions for social comparison, perceived insignificance and self-censorship, particularly among individuals with low political efficacy.

Discussion and conclusions

Generally, the findings show that technological affordances create a complex and ambiguous landscape for political participation. Rather than serving simply as enablers of engagement, they generate conditions characterised by tension, negotiation, and reflexivity. Participants perceive social media platforms as spaces where political engagement is both encouraged and limited simultaneously.

The research question: *How do social media affordances enable or constrain citizens' political participation practices online in Lithuania?* reveals a nuanced picture. Political participation on social media is neither uniform nor universally empowering. Instead, it unfolds as a set of strategic, complex actions shaped not only by intentions, but also by platform architecture: citizens do not passively adopt the tools provided – they tactically “work within the constraints and possibilities of mediated architecture” (Boyd, 2011, p. 55). These findings align with the growing scholarly attention to the perspective of technological affordances in the context of political empowerment (Theocharis et al., 2023; Ronzhyn et al., 2023; Kim & Ellison, 2022).

The research supports the idea that connecting with like-minded individuals, sharing values, and engaging in collective experiences strengthens the sense of belonging and mutual purpose, which may then encourage political action (Wallis & Loy, 2021). The data also support other studies indicating that providing access to information and involvement in low-threshold activities can act as a gateway to more meaningful civic participation offline (Cantijoch et al., 2016; De Zúñiga et al., 2023; Boulianne, 2020).

However, while social media platforms offer a sense of agency, they also impose barriers through algorithmic opacity, social surveillance, and the perception of an audience. The data align with other studies which suggest that technological affordances (such as persistence) may increase self-censorship (Fox & Holt, 2018; Stoycheff, 2016). As a result, on social networks, people often choose silence over expressing their opinions.

These dynamics can reinforce the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), particularly among individuals with low political efficacy, who may refrain from expressing their views or engaging in public life due to fear of judgment. Consequently, the study echoes concerns raised by other researchers about filter bubbles and echo chambers as discussions tend to move into closed or private spaces, isolating certain thematic bubbles from wider public debate. This intensifies polarisation, raises opportunities for disinformation, and undermines the functioning of deliberative democracy (Zamauskė, 2022; Kubin & Skiroski, 2021).

In this context, digital competence becomes an important skill, encompassing not only the technical ability to use tools but also the ability to understand how these tools function. Scholars highlight an expanding field of literacies that have become a new feature of modern society: social media literacy (Manca et al., 2021) and data literacy (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2020). This study shows the growing importance of platform literacy, which refers to the ability not only to operate social media but also to grasp their algorithmic processes, the logic behind information selection, the effects of personalisation, and the mechanisms of data management (Ha & Kim, 2024).

Subjective self-perceptions – how competent and confident citizens feel as political actors – may define agency. In many cases, doubts about political influence, fear of judgment, and perceived disconnection from political institutions and politics outweigh the mobilisation potential of digital platforms. This way, political efficacy, which is defined as an individual's belief in their ability to influence politics or social affairs (Bandura, 1995), becomes a key mediator of civic action. Data support the findings of various quantitative studies conducted in Lithuania, which found lower levels of political efficacy (Morkevičius et al., 2020; Vadvilavičius, 2024). However, the results demonstrate that citizens actively negotiate between empowerment and constraint, often adopting the role of *monitorial citizen* (Schudson, 1998). This reveals political participation on social networks as a fluid, processual, and hybrid phenomenon, aligning with other studies that highlight the diversity in citizens' participation repertoires (Imbrasaitė & Genys, 2022; Lane et al., 2023), where observation on social media does not necessarily imply a lack of proactive real-life engagement.

Limitations and future research. This study is based on focus groups conducted in 2019. The findings therefore reflect the practices and affordance-related experiences of that period. While the mechanisms identified remain analytically relevant, platform logics, user preferences, and sociopolitical contexts have since evolved. Future research should address these shifts through longitudinal and comparative designs, combining qualitative insight with large-scale quantitative data to assess both continuities and changes.

In conclusion, technological affordances do not guarantee democratic engagement; rather, they shape how it is imagined, enacted, and sometimes avoided. This paper has shown that social media affordances both enable and limit political participation, creating a dynamic environment where users negotiate their visibility and sense of agency. The findings highlight that participation is neither linear nor universal, but characterised by continual shifts between motivation and hesitation, expression and silence. The techno-

logical affordances approach helps to explain these dynamics by highlighting not only platform features but also how they shape the emotional experience of being a political participant in digital spaces. Citizens navigate technological structures not in isolation but within socio-technical constraints that affect their agency.

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