

**Title:** The siloization of the public sphere

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### **Abstract**

The perspectives for democracy online have been debated since the mid-nineties. It has been claimed that the Internet can facilitate a revitalization of the public sphere, in line with theoretical ideals of for instance Jürgen Habermas and John Dewey. The integration of social network sites in citizens' everyday life and social interactions have strengthened such hopes. Facebook for instance has been turned into a "one stop public" (Linaa Jensen, 2013), a portal for interactions which combines small talk among friends with news sharing and political discussions. Everyday life and politics interact seamlessly. Benkler (2006) has talked about "a networked public sphere" and danah boyd (2011) has discussed the potential of "networked publics".

I will argue that although Facebook and other social network sites may facilitate political interaction and enhanced democratic awareness among citizens, such phenomena are far from a classic notions of the public sphere with large collective discussions steering political agendas and discussions.

Based on examples from the Arab spring, European election campaigns and Danish political Facebook groups, I demonstrate that although citizens might feel emotionally involved and politically empowered by discussing politics via social network sites, the wider political consequences are limited. The debates only to a limited extent affect overall political decision-making and the mobilization is often short-lived. The communities and "sense of togetherness" coming out of debates and groups are often ephemeral communities. Social network sites are good for mobilizing around single issues or facilitating online protests where citizens are united against corrupt politicians or oppressive regimes. However, when it comes to long lasting mobilization and dedicated, binding political participation, the engagement often evaporates.

Further, the many online discussion groups, debates and campaigns do not form a single coherent political agenda. Rather, they are separate public spheres, defined by affinity and interest (Gitlin, 1998). The personal one stop public of Facebook is an example that you are exposed to only your own network and not the entire society with its diversified attitudes, norms and interest. You are wrapped in your own social silo, whether on Facebook, Twitter or

in a certain blog universe. When more and more news consumption and political communication takes place in such personalized communicative spaces, the consequences is a siloization of the public sphere in general. The public debates take place in segregated places rather than in a united public sphere. People might get more engaged but less connected with overall society.

**Title:** Like-Minded Publics on Facebook. An Analysis of the Black Pete Discussion

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### **Abstract**

Facebook, and social media more generally, has been perceived as a space where a great variety of opinions and perspectives on societal issues are played out. In our research we investigate the fast mobilization of like-minded publics on Facebook surrounding the controversial Black Pete discussion in The Netherlands using digital methods and data visualization tools. Additionally, through platform analysis, we consider how the Black Pete discussion has been shaped by the technical design and interface of the Facebook Pages and by how these Pages have been administrated. The research question we address is how the like-mindedness of the ‘Pietitie’ and ‘Zwarte Piet is Racisme’ Pages (the two dominant Facebook Pages surrounding the topic), and the opportunities to deviate from the dominant opinion therein, has repercussions on the notion of the public sphere and for ideas of a deliberative democracy.

So far, we have downloaded all posts – over 100,000 - (and likes) from the ‘Pietitie’ and ‘Zwarte Piet is Racisme’ Pages. With the insights garnered from our empirical data we intend to intervene in the academic debate on social media as public sphere and deliberative democracy. More exactly, using both quantitative and qualitative methods we reflect on: Attention distribution: Despite the promise that anyone can participate in societal issues, by responding to a post for instance, our data suggests that attention is unevenly distributed. Technical design: The uneven distribution of attention on Facebook Pages relates to the technical design of the platform. Empirically we can show that attention for comments (measured through the amount of likes) is limited to the first hundred responses to a post. Also, we consider how the administrator of a Page has the ‘power’ to select the topics discussed (and even moderate these). Like-minded publics: Our initial data suggests that the ‘Pietitie’ Page and the ‘Zwarte Piet is Racisme’ Page are dominated by one-sided sentiment. The former provides space for those in favor of preserving Black Pete, and the latter Page is

where people assembled who were in favor of abolishing this figure from the Dutch Sint Nicolaas tradition.

In other words, communities of liked-minded publics flock to a particular Page with minimal interest in oppositional views and debate. We test this hypothesis by checking for overlap between these two publics, and do a qualitative exploration of a representative sample of comments from both Pages.

**Title:** Engagement of users in a Facebook-based counter public

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### **Abstract**

The Habermasian ideal of the public sphere draws a picture of highly engaged public discussions, where all issues are granted equal attention. In real life there can be some distortions, so that a format of the message can increase or reduce engagement regardless of the content. There are two main factors causing such distortions. First of all, different formats of a message may activate different ways of information processing. This hypothesis comes from the elaboration likelihood model. Secondly, the personal motives to use Facebook can be different. Therefore, a user can perform different types of engagement by giving preference to the «like»-, «share»- or the «comment»-button. As a result, different patterns of engagement can emerge, again regardless of the content. The hypotheses are tested with the data from the Facebook profiles of the right-wing political organizations in Germany, 21 pages, more than 14 000 single posts. Main methods are mean comparison and factor analysis, both performed in SPSS.

The paper provides a brief overview of the studies employing the theory of counter public and studies about the online right-wing counter public in Germany. It also discusses elaboration likelihood model, Facebook studies employing uses and gratification theory, as well as visual framing studies. The methodological section explains data collection on Facebook and data analysis. The findings are: (1) There is a clear correlation between the format of a message (status, video, picture, link) and quantitative values of engagement (amount of «likes», «shares» and «comments»). Messages with embedded video are the most engaged ones. (2) There are two clear types of engagement: liking and sharing versus commenting. The findings confirm that the platform specific features can influence how the users engage in public discussions and content creation, and, thus, how they contribute to an online counter public sphere.

**Title:** Stay-at-Home Citizens: Pinterest and the Gendered Domestic Public Sphere

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**Abstract:**

Described on its “About” page as “a virtual pinboard,” the social media site Pinterest allows users to collect, organize and share visual content and links culled from around the web. Launched in 2010 by male start-up founders, Pinterest rapidly gained media attention, user loyalty, and a reputation as a specifically feminine-gendered space. As a media platform that is both relatively “new” and widely used (but not necessarily widely or “authoritatively” understood), Pinterest provides media scholars an opportunity to study a medium’s unfinished identity formation as it continues to unfold.

This paper interrogates the potentials of Pinterest to disrupt historical gendered norms of private and public spaces, particularly as related to political activism. While Pinterest’s reputation as a domestically-oriented women’s realm might suggest that it simply replicates historical exclusions of femininity from public spaces, I deploy Rick Altman’s crisis historiography model to argue that users in fact contest this monolithic identity. Most saliently, users’ inclusion of political content and conversation in this nonetheless feminine online space serves as an important case study in the potentials of social media to transform gendered conceptions of publicness. Through a rereading of Lauren Berlant’s theory of intimate publics, I argue that Pinterest demonstrates the potential of gendered affect to exceed the juxtapolitical constraints suggested by Berlant, showing how women can be at home in the political.