



Global Media Journal

ISSN: 2007-2031

francisco@itesm.mx

Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios
Superiores de Monterrey
México

Galarza Molina, Rocío

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Global Media Journal, vol. 14, núm. 27, noviembre, 2017, pp. 107-123

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FROM LURKERS TO LISTENERS: INTRODUCING THE CONCEPT OF ONLINE LISTENING INTO POLITICAL COMMUNICATION STUDIES

Rocío Galarza Molina

Universidad de Missouri-Columbia, Estados Unidos

Autor para correspondencia: e-mail: rg8w8@mail.missouri.edu

Abstract

This essay argues that the practice of reading others' discussions, comments, posts or tweets — which I call online listening— is meaningful for the listener as a standalone activity, and as part of the interaction between speakers and listeners. Thus, Internet and social media's democratic value is not limited to the opportunity for self and collective expression but also derives from the possibilities they provide for online listening, both for our communication with political elites and in our mutual interactions as members of society. Political communication would benefit from doing research using this concept to have a better discernment of how digital communication processes have altered how humans acquire information, consolidate their opinions, can be exposed to other perspectives, and can enhance their tolerance toward others.

Keywords: deliberation, digital communication, online listening, political communication

Resumen

Este ensayo argumenta que la práctica de leer las discusiones, comentarios o tuits de otros — referida como “online listening”— es significativa para quien la lleva a cabo como una actividad por sí misma, y como parte de la interacción entre hablante y oyente. Por tanto, el valor democrático del Internet y redes sociales no está limitado a la oportunidad de expresión individual o colectiva, sino que también deriva de las posibilidades de practicar “online listening”, tanto para la comunicación con élites políticas como para las interacciones entre ciudadanos. La investigación en el campo de la comunicación política se beneficiaría de introducir este concepto para tener un mejor discernimiento de cómo los procesos de comunicación digital han alterado cómo los humanos adquieren información, cómo consolidan sus opiniones y son expuestos a otras perspectivas, y cómo pueden mejorar su tolerancia hacia otros.

Palabras clave: deliberación, comunicación digital, “online listening”, comunicación política

Recibido: 12/10/2017

Aceptado: 22/11/2017

Global Media Journal México 14(27). Noviembre 2017 - abril 2018. Pp. 107-123.

Introduction

On November of 2015, *The New York Times* published fragments of interviews made to some of the top commenters of its online forum regarding their reasons to participate in this platform. In itself, this article is insightful since, oddly, scholarly work has not paid much attention to individual self-accounts about their experiences as commenters (with few exceptions, e.g., Ziegele, Breiner & Quiring, 2014). Explaining their motivations for participating, some of the interviewees expressed that they want to introduce a different opinion they do not find in a conversation; that they use it as therapy to vent about current issues; and, that they engage in deep conversation to fulfill their civic responsibility in a democracy. Yet, one of the commenters —Justin Riley— brings light to another use of these digital interactions that differs from the purposes of self expression: “When I read the article I have a lot of questions, so I find myself going through as many comments as I can to try and answer my own questions” (Etim, 2015). As the recurrent Internet meme in which Michael Jackson is eating popcorn while he “just came here to read the comments” suggests, this commenter usage of *The New York Times*’ discussion feature appears to be common among Internet users.

Traditionally, media has presented stories that through processes of gatekeeping and framing prioritize certain aspects of an issue over others, and due to limited space and editorial preferences leave out some information. But online comment sections, web forums, and social media platforms now allow for the exchange and challenge of points of view, and for sharing almost an unlimited amount of information. Political communication scholars have focused on studying the use of these digital spaces for discussion and deliberation. However, little attention has been paid to the “popcorn-eaters Michael Jacksons” that just read the comments, as they are considered either freeloaders, or passive actors. When attention is paid, they are referred to as lurkers, a derogative term. However, in this essay, I argue that the practice of reading others’ discussions, comments, posts, or tweets — which I will refer to as online listening— is meaningful for the listener as a standalone activity, and as part of the interaction between speakers and listeners. Thus, Internet and social media’s democratic value is not limited to the opportunity for self and collective expression but also derives from the possibilities they provide for online listening, both for our communication with political elites and in our mutual interactions as members of society. Political communication would benefit from the use of the concept of online listening for research to

have a better discernment of how these new communication processes have revolutionized the way humans acquire information and consolidate their opinions, are exposed to other perspectives, and can enhance their understanding of others. I address several questions surrounding the use of this concept, which would provide assets and present challenges for political communication scholars: what are the possible implications of online listening? How is listening conveyed in an online setting? Is there a need to instruct online listening as a skill? And, what methods do we have available to analyze online listening? In the next sections, I review how listening has been neglected by communication theories, in political communication, and in online settings. Then I introduce the concept of online listening, explaining its origins in education studies, along with the implications and possible uses of this term for the political communication field, particularly as it relates to the increasing practice of online political deliberation. I conclude by addressing the significance of applying the concept for political communication studies.

Listening overlooked

Listening is crucial in any communicative process, as it allows an interlocutor to construct meaning from spoken or non-verbal messages elicited by others. Listening

involves a “substantive level of human cognitive engagement with the expressed views of another or others involving attention, recognition, interpretation to try to discover meaning, ideally leading to understanding, as well as responding in some way” (Macnamara, 2013, p. 163). Thus, listening is crucial for communication whether we conceive it as relationality—the weaving and reweaving of relationship webs (Condit, 2006)—; as deliberation—carefully reflecting to make decisions (Gastil, 2006)—; or as dissemination—the scattering of seeds that awaits harvesting of meaning in the future (Peters, 2006)—.

However, in spite of its significance, scholars agree that the concept of listening has been overlooked and remains undertheorized (e.g., Dobson, 2012, 2014; Lacey, 2013). In the study of mediated communication, this neglect can be explained by the dominion of politics of expression in detriment of politics of impression (Penman & Turnbull, 2012). As a consequence, the nature and implications of speech and speaking are way more scrutinized. As such, “practically all the attention has been paid to speaking, both in terms of the skills to be developed and the ways in which we should understand what enhancing ‘inclusion’ might mean (i.e., getting more people to speak)” (Dobson, 2012, p. 843). According to Lacey (2013), the disregard for listening can be related to how it is mistakenly perceived as a

passive act, when actually, it is the speech act alone that is static, and “the presence of an active listener introduces the dynamic, the element of intersubjectivity” (Lacey, 2011, p.12). Hence, this omission can have significant costs for our quest to understand how communication allows us to engage, to relate to the other. Such costs can be of special importance for those of us who seek to understand how political communication unfolds and impacts democracy. Conceptualizations of public participation as speech, dialogue, and text can be too restrictive, and thus “theories and practices of media communication and public life miss too much if they don’t give the politics and experience of listening a fair hearing” (Lacey, 2013, p. 199).

Listening in Political Communication

Therefore, this essay attends to the aforementioned gap attempting to explore the need for the study of listening in political communication. In the absence of a listener, “speech is nothing but noise in the ether; more to the point, without a listener there would be no reason, no calling, to speak” (Lacey, 2011, p. 12). To establish the connection of the concept of listening to political communication, first I should discuss its role in the democratic system. Audition has been the primordial civic act for centuries (Peters, 2005). Thus, the role of the

listening subject in a democracy is “to be an intellectual shape-shifter, able to inhabit any other position, one whose opinions have been refined into reasons and arguments” (Peters, 2005, p. 132). Consequentially, acknowledging this role requires stepping away from the idea that “politics begins and ends with talk” because that notion leads us “to misunderstand its nature and undermine its potential” (Dobson, 2014, p. 196). According to Dobson, democracy—at least representative democracy—is definitionally bound up with communication in general, and particularly with listening. Although there is no guarantee that an individual’s preferences will be represented in a democracy, for it to happen that person’s representative has to know what those preferences are. That knowledge can only be achieved through a disposition to listen. Moreover, listening can enhance democracy by fostering understanding, solving or managing disagreements, and strengthening the legitimacy of the decisions that are the product of deliberative interactions (Dobson, 2014). In fact, and contrary to common belief, listening can be construed as a precondition for political action, since “the active life is one in which activity is defined by being open to listen to the world and engage with it” (Lacey, 2011, p. 7). Although speaker and listener are dependent of each other, it is “the openness of the listening position—on either side—which produces

the space in and across which communication can take place” (p. 12).

For Hyde (2012), this openness can make us repair what is broken in the world because it helps us acknowledge the other’s otherness. This process involves putting aside one’s own desires, putting oneself under the skin of others (Coles, 2004), or even a kind of self-annihilation (Bickford, 1996). In this sense, democracy constitutes a political structure that is most true to the openness and otherness of human beings, motivating us to develop a dialogical relationship with each other (Hyde, 2012). Yet, political communication scholars overlook the potential of listening as a tool for analyzing the democratic processes.

Moreover, Dobson (2014) addresses the role of the Internet for democracy, furthering a skeptical vision about new media’s potential because it often privileges the circulation of the message over the value of its content or its contribution to the conversation. The risk in the use of social media is that it becomes an end in itself

rather than part of a process of understanding. In this circumstance, the more that enunciation and circulation become the measure of success, the less listening and understanding are of importance. To the degree that the new social media contribute to this dynamic, they are less a contribution to democracy than a problem for it (Dobson, 2014, p. 185).

However, the attention to circulation and expression does not demerit the value that listening can have in a digital context; to the contrary, it emphasizes how in this new media environment, listening is neglected once more. Far from claiming defeat and declaring new media as problematic for democracy, this neglect further stresses the need for reframing the analysis to give this concept an equal footing.

Listening in online settings

Digital communication through Internet has been praised for its democratic characteristics, commonly celebrating how ICTs give voice to the voiceless (Crawford, 2009). In these circumstances, concepts such as participatory culture have flourished (Jenkins, Purushotma, Wiegel, Clinton, & Robinson, 2009), focusing on the low barriers for artistic expression and civic engagement that have been favored by Internet. From a democratic theory perspective, scholars speak of a deliberative turn advanced by the new media environment (Chambers, 2003; Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004). The Internet is seen as an excellent medium to facilitate a public sphere, an arena where “rational deliberation and the making of public citizens takes place” (Dahlberg, 2000, p. 168). Hence, scholar expectations are that Internet would “help foster a deliberative model that was transparent, free of prejudice or obstacles to

equal participation, and encourage informed dialogue” (Zamith & Lewis, 2014, p. 560). Zamith and Lewis (2014) trace those predictions to the medium’s technological characteristics, which allow for more inclusiveness, expanding the boundaries of discourse, and introduce several tools that facilitate several modes of conversations, be it synchronous or asynchronous. These commendations toward online deliberation and participatory cultures once more are indicative of how speaking trumps listening. But this unbalance leaves us with a narrow understanding of the possibilities afforded by new technologies because “listening has not been given sufficient consideration as a significant practice of intimacy, connection, obligation and participation online; instead, it has often been considered as contributing little value to online communities” (Crawford, 2009, p. 527).

Therefore, what this narrow assumption forgets is that listening is a corollary to having a meaningful voice (Macnamara, 2013) and ignores that “the impact of the electronic age was in treating the eye as an ear, offering immersive, mythic communication, a trend only accelerated by the internet with its ‘anywhere-and-everywhere’ web of connections” (Lacey, 2011, p. 5). The great accomplishment brought by audiovisual media of all kind, and undoubtedly by the Internet, has been to be able to listen to distant others, “of inviting

strangers into the home, of collective listening and intersubjective experience, of constituting communicative spaces that can transgress physical, political and social boundaries” (Lacey, 2011, p. 19). Yet, often the focus continues to be on subjectivity and the individual rather than on intersubjectivity and the collective.

For the study of online discussion, political communication scholars have extensively focused on the deliberative quality of the conversations (e.g., Zhou, Chan, & Peng, 2008), paying particular attention to concept such as incivility (e.g., Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014; Papacharissi, 2002, 2004), civility (e.g., Han & Brazeal, 2015; Hurrell, 2006; Rowe, 2014), and online disinhibition (Suler, 2004). Lacey (2011) attributes this trend to the spread notion of dialogue as the ideal model of communication that denigrates those participants in the process who listen more than they talk, or those who never talk at all. This denigration occurs regardless of the fact that the listener often is part of a collectivity and even though “the experience of listening is, both potentially and very often in practice, an experience of plurality” (Lacey, 2011, p. 14). As such, a dissemination approach that acknowledges the active attitude of listeners as they collectively constitute an audience makes more sense when addressing mediated forms of communication such as navigating on the web to read other people’s discussions.

Yet, the act of reading others' conversations in public online spaces without posting any comments has been given the derogatory name of lurking. Crawford (2009) considers this term to have hampered our understanding of online spaces because it minimizes a very important function of lurkers: "rather than freeloaders, lurkers are actively logging in and tracking the contributions of others; they contribute a mode of receptiveness that encourages others to make public contributions" (p. 527). In essence, these lurkers conform an audience that has the potential to incentivize others to engage in digital conversations. Acknowledging these contributions, platforms have incorporated ways in which these listeners can make their presence more visible, with features such as *like* buttons. Notably, some platforms very dynamics greatly depend on systems for evaluating positively or negatively the comments of others (e.g., Reddit). Therefore, "for the growing number of citizens who have access to and use the Internet, particularly interactive sites referred to as 'new media' and 'social media', gaining a voice that matters is predicated on simultaneously gaining an audience who listens" (Macnamara, 2013, p. 166). However, these silent audiences receive little or negative scholar attention in both new media and social media. I propose to use the concept of online listening to bring notoriety through a

neutral lens to this phenomenon. Following, the definition of this concept, along with its origins and implications, are explained.

Online listening

As new technologies have expanded to several contexts, education studies have also focused on digital interactions, aiming to observe the learning processes that occur during asynchronous online discussions among students. Concerned with the negative connotation of the concept of lurking, Wise, Hausknecht, and Zhao (2014) coined the term of *online listening* to refer to the attention to others' posts in an online discussion. As such, using an analogy from face-to-face conversation, this approach considers "the processes of making and accessing contributions in an online discussion as speaking (externalizing one's ideas) and listening (taking in the externalizations of others)" (Wise, Speer, Marbouti, & Hsiao, 2013, p. 25). This notion of listening articulates the listener as an active contributor performing a productive behavior. In this sense, Wise et al. (2014) distinguish listening from the processes related to hearing words or seeing words written on a screen, as listening is considered a complex cognitive activity that requires several mental processes and decisions. In contrast to hearing or just reading words, listening involves being open to the consideration of different ideas, beliefs,

and values distinct from one's own. That is, "hearing is orientated to the self, whereas listening is orientated to the other" (Penman & Turnball, 2012, p. 69).

Furthermore, an important characteristic of online listening is that the asynchrony of the majority of these conversations allows for participants to easily re-attend to comments they found particularly interesting, important, or confusing (Wise et al., 2014). As such, this activity can constitute a vehicle for reflection in which there is more space to think about what is being attended to. Consequentially, there is opportunity for more careful listening, an advantage that this form of communication has in relation to face-to-face interactions and that can be fundamental for citizens that are reflecting about social and political issues to form an opinion and make decisions. This type of use of digital media in the context of political communication will be discussed next.

Online listening in Political Communication

Listening constitutes an important component of democracy. Decisions resulting from democratic processes ideally are preceded by political deliberation, that is, discussion with the purpose of forming well-reasoned informed opinions, in which participating actors are willing to revise their opinions in

respect to new information and to the claims expressed by others (Chambers, 2003). To achieve such reflections, sensible argument and critical-listening must be involved (Gastil, 2000). Political communication scholars highlight features of digital spaces that are conducive to political deliberation such as the possibility they afford to bridge physical distances, reducing costs and barriers for people willing to have political conversations, while also pointing to the fact that Internet platforms can mitigate reluctance for those individuals who are prone to avoid conflict or prefer anonymity (Neblo, Esterling, Kennedy, Lazer, & Sokhey, 2010). Likewise, the Internet is praised for being highly interactive (Stromer, Galley & Wichowski, 2010) allowing for dynamic discussions in which people can actively engage with one another (Sunstein, 2001).

In light of these features, studies have found that web platforms such as newspapers' comment sections can actually be utilized to have a thoughtful political discussion (e.g., Ruíz, Domingo, Micó, Díaz-Noci, Meso, & Masip, 2011). According to this perspective, if rationality—an ideal element in discussion—is achieved mostly by linguistic exchanges, then "there is no reason to believe that online communication conducted through text should be inferior to face-to-face communication in terms of deliberativeness" (Min, 2007, p. 1373).

Nonetheless, other more negative perspectives about the role the Internet plays in political discussions claim that its use does not necessarily translate into the betterment of democracy (Papacharissi, 2002). There are some key barriers for the accomplishment of deliberative ideals from conversations occurring over the Internet: 1) access is not universal thus generating a digital divide between those that use these media and those that do not, 2) there is incivility from some participants that are disruptive of online debates, and 3) there are selective exposure and homogenization of the networks that users interact with (Zamith & Lewis, 2014).

As such, online discussions do not include the voices everyone, there are large groups of people still being left out of the digital world. Moreover, conversations can occur in filter bubbles or echo chambers, in which “increased power of individual choice allows people to sort themselves into innumerable homogeneous groups, which often results in amplifying their preexisting views” (Sunstein, 2001, p. 2). These echo chambers diminish the possibilities of being exposed to different points of view than those already held by Internet users. Moreover, this phenomenon is exacerbated by social media algorithms designed to have users constantly coming back to the platform through keeping them engaged with content that will interest them (Sharma, 2017). Thus, these algorithms curate the information presented to social

media users according to their ideological leanings and to other factors such as whether there was payment to promote a particular post (Hern, 2017). In such context, even false stories denominated as “fake news” are widely shared online likely impacting electoral processes (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Yet, despite these issues—and also because of them—political communication cannot overlook the fact that people derive pleasure and can get both benefits and hindrances from conversing about political issues online through the use of digital media. Thus, it would be a mistake to minimize online political discussions because their execution do not correspond with unattainable ideals of political deliberation (Stromer, Galley & Wichowski, 2010). Internet facilitates public spaces for politics and for individuals to explore new ways to be citizens (Dahlberg, 2007). Consequentially, attention to the concept that is discussed in this essay, online listening can contribute to a better understanding of the processes involving political communication, such as citizens’ discussions of public issues, calls for political protests and interreactions with political elites in online settings.

Importantly, Wise et al. (2014) argue that a key implication of ineffective listening—or altogether the lack of it—is that the communication that results is shallow and disjointed, taking the form of “a series of

parallel monologues rather than a true discussion” (p. 186). In other words, listening is a crucial phase that leads up to making a post, as it provides opportunities for modeling how others make contributions and for evaluating how one’s post fits in the larger discussion. This notion is suitable for the context that these scholars were analyzing when developing the concept of online listening: students’ discussions on web platforms, where they are likely obliged to input a comment. Although these positive implications of online listening are valuable, for the context of online deliberation among Internet users, online listening has the potential as an activity in and on itself, as reading other people’s comments can help users to learn, to get a sense of the distribution of public opinion about a particular issue, and to articulate or consolidate their own point of view for expressing it in the future, even if in a different setting.

Nonnecke, Preece, Andrews, and Voutour’s survey (2004) among members of online communities investigated the reasons why people lurk as opposed to input their comments in digital forums. The overwhelming main argument given by this type of participants was that they get their needs met with just observation rather than by posting. Notably, the reason that was mentioned in second place was that they were still learning about the group, which

coincides with Wise et al.’s (2013) idea of listening to model what others do, a form of vicarious learning. Moreover, the third reason that was provided by lurkers in this survey was that they were shy about posting, which suggests that online listening can be a productive alternative for introvert individuals to be exposed to other people’s ideas and acquiring knowledge from others.

These findings regarding the reasons that people practice online lurking are consistent with what political communication scholars have found with respects with some of the benefits of online political discussion: the possibility of increasing knowledge about an issue being discussed (Min, 2007) and the effect of modeling behavior from a civil conversation (Galarza-Molina & Jennings, 2017).

Furthermore, listening is a deliberate act that involves work, which Macnamara (2013) even refers to as a performance. Digital platforms have introduced measures that takes us away from the negative conception of lurking as passive by incorporating features that make it easier to manifest online listening in more explicit ways: clicking on *like*, voting, retweeting, following an account, reblogging a post, subscribing to certain channel or news bulletin, or recommending a comment in a news media comment section, among others. These features are significant for both speakers and listeners. For the former, they

act as incentives to continue certain behavior or modify it, while for the latter they are ways to convey agreement or disagreement, and therefore, contribute to advance ideas they find meaningful or useful through these forms of encouragement.

For political communication scholars, the success of these features among users is valuable to grasp the importance of the online listening phenomenon and they can be useful as a way to measure the extent of this behavior. For instance, the study of these interactive cues has already been taken into consideration in the context of political protests and their online manifestations in social media. Harlow (2011) and Papacharissi (2014) have observed the role that social media features such as *likes* and retweets play into the expression of support for a political cause in the middle of political uprisings, and how these manifestations can further affect behavior in people witnessing the use of those interactive cues.

Additionally, a relevant aspect to consider about those features is that they require some technical knowledge and awareness about formal or most often informal protocols in order to be used adequately (Macnamara, 2013). Thus, online listening studies in the political communication field can be of service to establish the need for incorporating ways to develop technical and cultural skills for effective listening in programs of media

literacy. These skills are especially crucial in the current context where people are overwhelmed by millions of messages that are shared through several channels. Discussions regarding the relationship between posts constitute “an important part of the sense-making that helps one determine where to position oneself in the conversation” (Wise et al., 2014, p. 189). Hence, people need to develop the ability to process this large amount of information in order to make sense of its meaning, at least to the extent of comprehending such aspects that can impact their lives. Macnamara (2013) takes this argument even further, promoting the assessment of the architectures of listening: frameworks “with appropriate policies, structures, resources and facilities that enable voice to matter by gaining attention, recognition, consideration and response” (p. 168). Political communication’s analyses of online listening can be conducive to determine what should those frameworks look like thus contributing to make these conversations fruitful for all participants.

The concept of online listening was originally developed for students (or learners) but for the present purpose it has been transposed to analyze behaviors and motivations of lay Internet users. Yet, there are other actors that can also be assessed with an online listening approach in mind: politicians. During the past decade we witnessed an explosion of the use of websites

and social media by political candidates and public officials. Through incorporating these tools, the political elite has opened the possibility for interactions with citizens, but it is pertinent to assess how much they are actually listening in such interactions. Politicians often leave their online presence to their staff, a practice that has been called delegated listening which only allows for engagement-at-arms-length (Lacey, 2011). Granted that it would be impossible for politicians to read all of the messages they receive from citizens, it is important that they attend to their constituents' (or likely constituents) ideas in a meaningful way.

In contrast, Coleman (2005) presents a more optimistic perspective, claiming that instruments such as blogs can potentially act as vehicles for politicians to listen to the community. Political communication scholars can analyze these contrasting perspectives utilizing the concept of online listening, keeping in mind that, in this context, listening involves more than a reply or a like to a citizen's comment —actions usually tapped by the concept of interactivity—. In turn, listening requires the listener to actually be open to the other's otherness, which should be reflected on more transcendental behaviors of politicians.

One final issue that is worth mentioning is which methods do political communication scholars have to analyze online listening. To study online deliberation,

the preferred methods so far have been quantitative content analysis and more recently experiments. These strategies have been helpful to analyze aspects like the incidence of incivility and its effects on people's attitudes and willingness to participate in a discussion. But turning to the topic that concerns this paper, the study of absence—in this case the absence of comments—is elusive and difficult to observe. I referred before to the features that can serve to convey listening, which are a crucial tool to understand the breadth of this phenomenon. However, to get a deeper sense of whether listening and not just hearing is actually taking place, a qualitative approach methodology would be ideal for getting a better sense of the experiences of both listeners and speakers in relation to the online listening practice. Diaries that keep records of how individuals interact with websites and social media, and interviews that directly inquire users about their activities online could be helpful to tap into this phenomenon.

Conclusion

Nature hath given men one tongue but two ears, that we may hear from others twice as much as we speak.

Epictetus

In recent years political communication scholars have been concerned with how the Internet has influenced the interactions

between the actors of the political communication triad: media, citizens, and politicians. Introducing the concept of online listening to our field of study is essential because it can reframe a behavior that has been consistently considered as vacant and empty (Crawford, 2009) —lurking— into an active and fruitful behavior with many potential effects and along with it, bring about several possible ramifications for study. Notably, considering listeners in the assessment of digital deliberation dynamics also calls for reframing the way we study the actions of the speakers since their motivations and behaviors should be understood in regards to how much they think about and impact the other, the listener.

Aware of the nastiness of some commenters and the impasses that online discussions often lead to, we often question why bother with participating in social media conversations. Are we ever going to convince our counterpart? Should we dedicate time to construct a well-informed argument just to receive criticism or insults about our name,

our profile picture, or a typo we made? This quite discouraging scenario can be reframed if we take online listeners into account. Unlike face-to-face conversations, online discussions have audiences that are larger than those parties who are presenting their opinions. Do we consider other people who listen in our discussions or read that article we share without ever commenting on it? What responsibilities should we assume in regards to those individuals? By conducting research on online listening, the field of political communication can assist in responding these inquiries, enriching our understanding of Internet's value for democracy. More importantly, this type of academic investigations, if efforts of community outreach are made, can even make this concept more salient among Internet users, to the eventual benefit of both speakers and listeners, because with an awareness of this phenomenon, people's actions on the web could take into account the latter and incentivize the former.

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