

Rethinking the Concept of Digital Citizenship: A Sociological Perspective

Received: 30/11/2566

Revised: 22/12/2566

Accepted: 28/12/2566

Patiphan Pholmat¹

ABSTRACT

This academic article aimed to review the concept of digital citizenship from a sociological perspective. This was the origin of the concept of citizenship in a democratic regime, to ensure that everyone in the state and country had equal access to their rights. Therefore, it was a concept that was not just a description of the status of citizens. Rather, it described the practice of online political participation that included the ability to use digital tools, understanding social issues, including creating a mobilization network to fight against social injustice which is a characteristic of active citizens in a digital society. It was also found that the digital divide is a key issue of digital citizenship. Since people who do not had access to the internet and do not have the digital ability that may affect political participation in a democratic society and learning to develop oneself to be a good citizen of their country.

Keywords: Digital Citizenship, Online Political Participation, Sociology

Introduction

Citizenship is a theory that vibrates the underperforming state while helping the marginalized redistribute state resources. Citizenship was developed by sociologists to explain the rights that the state grants to citizens in societies where capitalism begins to exploit the individual (Marshall, 1950), including the unconventional political participation of individuals in the equitable distribution of the state's scarce resources under democratic regimes (Turner, 1990). Citizenship, then, can only be evident when individuals participate in social injustice when the state fails and interferes with individuals' livelihoods (Turner, 1997). Therefore, individuals

¹ Lecturer, Media and Global Innovative Communication Program, Institute of International Studies,
Ramkhamhaeng University
E-mail: patiphan.p@iis.ru.ac.th

participate in the state in a variety of ways, which is referred to as “active citizenship,” such as forming civic society, social movements, activists, and associations (Janoski & Gran, 2002).

As Emejulu and McGregor (2016) noted, since the original, the dynamics of citizenship have developed through digitization, as has depoliticization. This is because norms for acceptable, responsible use of digital media have been highlighted (Ribble & Bailey, 2007). In formal education, every student practices conscientious use of digital media, demonstrates responsible use of information, and has a positive attitude toward learning with digital media. As a result, this statement did not identify those who engage in political activity on the Internet, which is a term used in the public sphere to call out and join groups against the unjust workings of the state, as a concept such as digital citizenship should be. As a result, there is little literature and research explaining political sociology. According to Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal (2007), digital citizens are people who use digital media frequently, who use digital media for political information to fulfill their civic duties, and who use digital media at work for economic advantage. Similarly, a study by Choi, Glassman, and Cristol (2017) illustrates the nature of digital citizenship. It is political engagement via the Internet to use activity tools, and the digital generation requires technological skills.

Consequently, I argue that the concept of digital citizenship is not merely a status of a person, or even digital literacy required to be a citizen online, but it explains how individuals act political participation, unconventionally. To be clear, the purpose of this article is to examine digital citizenship in light of the above argument and to illustrate how this concept has changed over time from the perspective of political sociology. It could be valuable for anyone who wants to analyze and argue, especially scholars and policy makers in democratic society.

Historical Definition of Citizenship

Sociologist, Marshall (1950) pioneered the concept of citizenship in his book "Citizenship and Social Class", a concept that cares for all people, prevents the exploitation of capitalist society, and bridges the gap between social classes in England. Citizenship thus refers to a set of rights that the state grants to citizens, namely (1) civil rights, which are the freedom to express one's thoughts, own property, and obtain justice in court. (2) political rights are the exercise of power in elections or participation in politics, and (3) social rights are welfare services that the state should provide to citizens, such as education, public

services, food, housing, etc. However, the acquisition of these rights requires that citizens are obliged to provide services to the state in order to maintain solidarity, e.g., participation in wars, child rearing, working, etc. The acquisition requirement was used to include those who were entitled to society's scarce resources. On the other hand, Mann (1987) believes that citizenship is a strategy used by the ruling capitalist class to control the working class by offering them social rights to ensure their welfare. Therefore, welfare under capitalism promotes tranquilly among the working class by offering benefits that reduce the wealth gap and give the working class the appearance of having more power in politics.

Based on these remarks, Turner (1990) argued that citizenship, while a byproduct of the capitalist class system, can promote equality for all. Instead, it is a concept that avoids the clash of class revolution in the context of social and economic changes brought about by citizens' unequal access to resources. Turner (1990) redefines citizenship as "legal, economic, and cultural participation associated with individual access to resources" This can be an indication that individuals belong to this community. Thus, the unequal distribution of resources in society is related to the sense of belonging and solidarity. Moreover, Marshall's (1950) definition of citizenship does not distinguish between active and passive citizenship, which obscures the diversity of interactions between people and states. Considering that it is social issues that motivate citizens' engagement with nation-states (Turner, 2000).

In summary, the term "citizenship" in sociology refers to the practice of individuals actively engaging in politics to ensure that everyone has equal access to resources or rights in society, depending on their status as citizens of their own nation-state. Thus, we use this definition to review digital citizenship in this article.

Sociological Model of Citizenship

Turner (1997) presented a sociological model of citizenship under the title "*Citizenship studies: A general theory*" to draw attention to the social institutions embedded in the rights and duties of individuals or members of the political community. Considering that the political science perspective model only considers political rights that include nations as well as people, as Rousseau's Social Contract shows. Sociologists instead focus on conceptualizing citizenship as a system that protects individuals and communities from the negative effects of capitalism's uncertain markets and unequal distribution of resources.

Thus, sociological citizenship plays a role in controlling access to scarce resources by individuals and groups in society because it requires active political participation, as illustrated in Figure 1

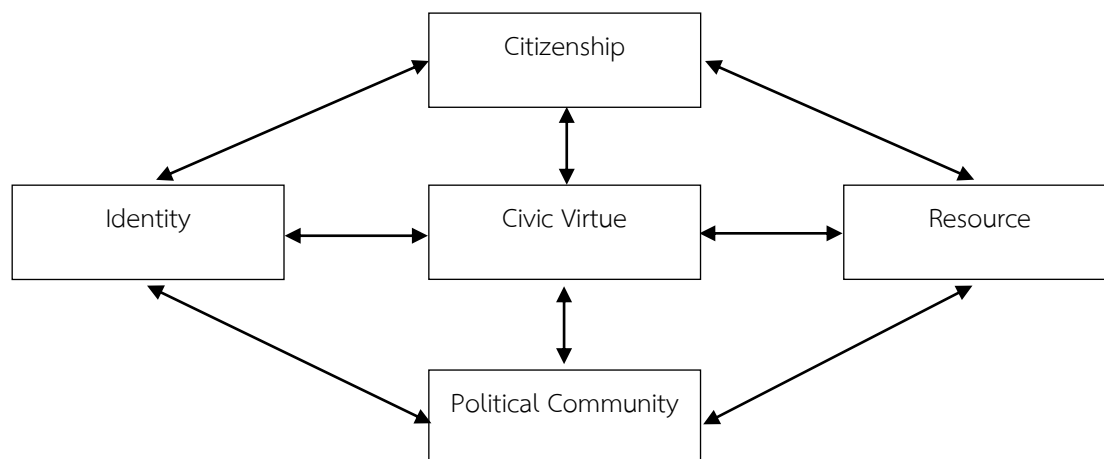


Figure 1 Sociological Model of Citizenship (Turner, 1997)

The model of citizenship in sociology reflects the legal rights and responsibilities that, once made into an institution that can locate an individual's official status, give the individual the right to access society's resources, where "resources" refers to economic resources such as social security, health care, housing, retirement benefits, and tax breaks. Resources also include traditional liberal cultural resources. These could be speaking one's language in public spaces or religious freedom, including access to education, which is consistent with Bourdieu's sociological theory. In addition, citizens have political resources to access social power through the exercise of voting rights and political participation. These three types of resources are called "social rights," which are distinct from human rights, which are a matter of internationalization. However, these rights are granted by individuals who belong to a particular state.

The following part is about "identity", which is more than just the cultural identity of individuals and organizations based on their legal status. However, the term "identity" in the context of identity politics denotes a significant change in contemporary politics. That is, whether the issue of citizenship is a pre-industrial issue of class in the labor market or a postmodern era of cultural identity claims such as sexuality, gay rights, gender equality, and

indigenous rights. In the context of critical pluralism, these concerns are often contested and fought at the level of collective identity. This is because political scientists often question identity in civil society and civic culture when examining access to economic and political resources in society.

Identity politics, then, is another factor that immediately goes hand in hand with the "civic virtue" that is essential to democracy in any community. The virtue of the armed knight is as much a part of the civilizational building process as the status of citizenship, which passes from the royal court to the armed knight. The obligation is to provide for the family and to pursue a job, or there is a level of accountability in private and public affairs. This is consistent with the Roman concept of civic republicanism and possibly with Karl Marx's concept of combating the marginalization of the individual under capitalism.

The final component of the model is the "political community" or nation-state. When a person becomes a citizen, he or she becomes a member of the political community in a particular country and part of the institution of citizenship, acquiring identification or refining civic virtues. Thus, the sociological model of citizenship consists of five components: Institutions of citizenship, resources, identity, civic virtue, and political community. Therefore, it is crucial to thoroughly study digital citizenship in accordance with the above components.

Citizenship as (Un) Conventional Political Participation

Turner (1990), in his "Outline of a Theory of Citizenship, asserts that citizenship should be understood as participation or the movement of individuals under capitalism against injustice. Consequently, citizenship has to do with social belonging and political engagement, both features of modern social citizenship, and equality is a fundamental goal of the theory for understanding the study of citizenship. This includes the formation of social rights as well as the democratic institutional framework. Furthermore, Marxist philosophy uses the core idea of categorizing citizenship to explain a mode of production between classes and capitalism that adversely affects the rights of the lower class. This developed into a political movement focused on the concerns of citizenship with the goal of making rights a political institution. This has been evident since the French Revolution as an expression of the "active citizen" or active political actor, in which people initiated public debates on problems of family, religion, and privacy that led to structural changes to require

the state to decentralize access to resources equitably. In contrast to active citizens, “passive citizens” compare themselves to those who are subject to absolute authority.

According to the “Handbook of Citizenship Studies” (Janoski & Gran, 2002), active citizenship involves participation in political activities and recognition of individuals within one's group. This is especially true for activities that involve conflict between the elite and the grassroots. An engaged citizen may be a member of a political party, a social movement, or other groups and associations that oppose and criticize the political beliefs of the state. This includes the ability to convince others to join the ideology of social change, such as social reformers, grassroots managers, revolutionary activists, etc. These committed citizens may choose to be tough on their opponents because they believe that what they have done is for the good of the people and the country. Participation in political sociology, then, has been synonymous with political participation in noninstitutionalized forms, or what some scholars, according to Dobratz, Walder, and Buzzell (2016), call “unconventional forms” or “contentious politics,” as opposed to conventional political participation, which focuses on citizens' traditional actions in the political system and those with government legitimacy, such as voting, dealing with government officials, pursuing political positions, and so on. In summary, political participation can have a traditional character according to the legislation in political science. However, in sociology, the emphasis is on the expression of citizenship and the defense of one's rights, without waiting until the next election to change the government, and constantly monitoring the performance of the state.

Sociological Perspective on Digital Citizenship

The dynamics of political participation have shifted. Membership or collective activity in the system, such as political parties, labor unions, and so on, is declining, while citizens' individual political participation is increasing both in the environmental and human rights organizations, as well as online social movements such as online claims, fundraising, volunteering, and the rejection of goods for political reasons (boycotting). Digital media is frequently used as a mechanism for participation and expression in a variety of techniques. it empowers citizens to become critical decision-makers. Also, it contributes in the development of self-awareness of one's own political efficacy, mobilization of community groups, and the shift of social and political values (Emejulu & McGregor, 2019).

According to Dalton (2008), these developments suggest a shift from traditional political engagement to citizen-initiated political participation and a focus on policy development. However, some researchers have characterized this as a shift from ideological and grand narratives to social and policy-based political efforts or individualized collective action. Overall, the Internet has influenced citizen political engagement as well as resource mobilization and governance practices. As a result, the practice of citizenship has shifted, and we propose to examine digital citizenship from the perspective of digital sociology as follows.

New Definition with Being Radical Digital Citizen

Three political scientists, Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal (2008), collaborated on the book “Digital Citizenship: The Internet, Society, and Participation” which considered digital citizenship to be close in meaning to Marshall's (1950) and Turner's (1990) political sociological definitions of citizenship. They defined digital citizenship as the ability to participate politically in online societies. There are strategies to develop education in the United States to support democracy and economic progress. The internet is a valuable resource for society. Participation entails using the Internet as a citizen in a democracy. People who utilize digital media to communicate politically as part of their civic responsibilities are referred to as digital citizens. It can also be used to drive the country's economy. As a result, citizenship is surrounded by political communities and possibilities for everybody. Similarly, to Emejulu and McGregor's (2019) study of the meaning of digital citizenship, it should have a radical aspect. Radical digital citizenship is a profoundly political practice of understanding the implications of technological development and use in our lives. They believe that researchers, activists, practitioners, and artists can and should engage in radical digital citizenship practices. There are the two basic parts of radical digital citizenship: (1) critical media analysis and (2) collective action towards the development of emancipatory media.

Critical Components of Digital Citizenship

Choi, Glassman, and Cristol (2017) conducted a factor analysis of digital citizenship. They used a sample group of 18-to 35-year-olds with different gender, ethnic characteristics, and education attainment. Each has a digital device that they use to

access the Internet and reported frequency of Internet access, use of information sources (political, economic, social, and cultural), and various reasons for using the Internet. The sample group was asked to self-assess using questions about digital citizenship, which were divided into four components as follows; (1) Digital Ethics is the appropriate, safe, and responsible use of the Internet. (2) Information and the Media Literacy is defined as the capacity to use the Internet, evaluate information, communicate with others, and collaborate Internet connectivity is essential for learning the technical abilities required to become a digital citizen. (3) Participation/Engagement refers to the use of the internet to engage in political, economic, social, and cultural issues in local, societal, or national events. However, the digital generation can participate in politics on specific concerns through social media. (4) Critical resistance refers to using the Internet to change the status quo and promote social justice is an example of critical resistance. Which is similar to component 3, but the two components differ based on the performer and the goal of the action. However, criticism should be beneficial, unconventional, non-hierarchy. However, upon evaluating confirmatory components using statistical factor analysis, it was discovered that there are five components of digital citizenship in the digital age, which are as follows; (1) Internet Political Activism refers to political activity primarily through the Internet in order to promote and question the present social system. (2) Technical skills refer to knowledge of the Internet and computers including the abilities to use open-source programs to execute numerous Internet activities. (3) Local/Global Awareness refers to an understanding of local and global issues raising awareness of political and social concerns in local, national, and worldwide societies through the ethical use of websites. (4) Critical Perspective entails challenging and rejecting conventional conceptions – hierarchy in online political activity and Internet use, as well as progressive ideology. (5) Networking Agency refers to the ability to communicate and collaborate with others via the Internet. Consequently, there are five components of digital citizenship: political participation on the Internet; having technical skills in the use of the Internet and computers; Awareness of local and global issues; having a critical point of view and networking of actors.

Digital Divide as a Challenge of Digital Citizenship

In the discipline of sociology, digital citizenship currently refers to online political participation. In principle, all citizens can create and disseminate content on the Internet that is directed at a specific audience and motivated by a political goal (Calenda & Meijer, 2009; Lutz, Hoffmann, & Meckel, 2014). It no longer refers simply to online engagement, but also to unconventional political acts (e.g., protesting) and non-political activities (e.g., volunteering for a social cause) (Theocharis & van Deth, 2018). However, numerous citizens continue to struggle to access and use the internet. It affects their digital skills and political participation in some way. As a result, the Internet has the potential to widen the participation gap between engaged and disengaged persons. Norris (2001) emphasized the "Digital Divide" in her theoretical work and defined those who do not have access to the internet at home as part of a democratic divide that encourages the involvement of historically marginalized groups in the democratic process. However, unequal accessibility to the Internet and disparities in the devices used by social groups will lead to a larger democratic divide if people's online democratic engagement is impacted by the sort of device, they use to access the Internet (Fierro, Aroca, & Navia, 2020).

It validates the beneficial impact of Internet use on political engagement, both online and off, from a perspective of policymaking. Thus, offering universal (high-speed) Internet access ought to continue to be a top goal for policy. Given that social media self-efficacy plays a significant mediating role in online political participation, educational policies should aim to increase equal opportunities for all students by offering more intensive training and support at lower educational levels as well as potentially specialized training opportunities (Hoffmann, & Lutz, 2019). Therefore, it is vital to bridge the digital divide if people are not to voice their thoughts online, which undermines political efficacy. Also, an online engaged citizen and civic education was essentially required to have the access (Pholmat & Promgird, 2022).

Conclusion

From a sociological point of view, the notion of "digital citizenship" refers to online political participation as a practice rather than the status of an individual in social media or cyberspace. Historically, the term "unconventional political action" has been used to

describe actions like internet protests, resource mobilization, and volunteerism that people take when they have an issue with how their nation-state is performing. Since having technical abilities and being aware of local and global issues were necessary for active citizens to accomplish their goals of participating in politics online. Such a major obstacle to being an engaged citizen in a digital society is that some citizens still do not have access to the internet. Thus, the development strategy of democratic nations should include this requirement and be implemented by policy makers. Last but not least, social scientists ought to think about using the concept for assessing and investigating digital citizenship; otherwise, the research results won't adequately represent the phenomenon of online political engagement holistically.

References

- Calenda, D., & Meijer, A. (2009). Young people, the internet, and political participation. *Information, Communication & Society*, 12(6), 879–98.
- Choi, M., Glassman, M., & Cristol, D. (2017). What it means to be a citizen in the internet age: Development of a reliable and valid digital citizenship scale. *Computers & Education*, 107, 100–112.
- Dalton, R. J. (2008). Citizenship norms and the expansion of political participation. *Political Studies*, 56(1), 76-98.
- Dobratz, B., Waldner, L., & Buzzell, T. (2016). *Power, politics, and society: An introduction to political sociology*. New York: Routledge
- Emejulu, A., & McGregor, C. (2019). Towards a radical digital citizenship in digital education, *Critical Studies in Education*, 60(1), 131-147.
- Fierro, P., Aroca, P., & Navia, P. (2020). How people access the internet and the democratic divide: Evidence from the Chilean region of Valparaiso 2017, 2018 and 2019. *Technology in Society*, 63, 101432. doi: 10.1016/j.techsoc.2020.1014 32.
- Hoffmann, C., & Lutz, C. (2019). Digital divides in political participation: The mediating role of social media self-efficacy and privacy concerns. *Policy & Internet*, 13(1), 6-29.
- Janoski, T., & Gran, B. (2002). Political citizenship: Foundations of rights. In E. F., Isin, & B. S. Turner. (eds.). *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*. (pp.13-52). London: SAGE Publications.

- Lutz, C., Hoffmann, C. P., & Meckel, M. (2014). Beyond just politics: A systematic literature review of online participation. *First Monday*, 19(7). doi.org/10.5210/fm.v19i7.5260
- Marshall, T. H. (1950). *Citizenship and social class and other essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mann, M. (1987). Ruling class strategies and citizenship. *Sociology*, 21(3). 339–54.
- Mossberger, K., Tolbert, C. J., & McNeal, R. S. (2008). *Digital citizenship: The internet, society, and participation*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Norris, P. (2001). *Digital divide: Civic engagement, information poverty, and the internet worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pholmat, P., & Promgird, P. (2022). The norm of digital citizenship and youths under the digital divide. *Journal of Social Communication Innovation*, 10(1), 50-57. (in Thai).
- Ribble, M., & Bailey, G. (2007). *Digital Citizenship in Schools*. Washington DC: ISTE.
- Theocharis, Y., & van Deth, J. W. (2018). *Political participation in a changing world: Conceptual and empirical challenges in the study of citizen engagement*. New York: Routledge.
- Turner, B. S. (1990). Outline of a theory of citizenship. *Sociology*, 24(2). 189–217.
- Turner, B. S. (1997). Citizenship studies: A general theory, *Citizenship Studies*, 1(1), 5-18.
- Turner, B. S. (2000). Liberal citizenship and cosmopolitan virtue In A. Vandenberg. *Citizenship and Democracy in a Global Era*, London: MacMillan.