

INFORMATION, PLEASURE, AND PERSUASION:  
HOW MOTIVATIONS FUNCTION IN TALKING POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have long debated the role that communication plays in the formation and functioning of a democratic system. Philosopher John Dewey (1927) suggested that citizen-to-citizen talk serves as the very foundation of democratic life. The sharing of one's opinions and discussion of politics with acquaintances, family, and friends builds the communities that allow the achievement of democratic society. Interestingly, however, while citizen-to-citizen interaction has been theorized and described as the very underpinnings of a vibrant participatory democracy, little empirical research has focused on this most basic communicative act of civic engagement. Employing a longitudinal design with data collected at three time points throughout the 2008 presidential campaign, this study provided empirical evidence to support Dewey's normative theory of democracy. From this research we discovered some of what motivates people to engage in political talk, as well as specific elements that contributed to changes in young citizens' political talk behavior throughout the course of the campaign season. Additionally, this study confirmed that both political talk, and one's motivation to talk politics with others, do indeed contribute to our democratic process.