

# Social media provides space for 'digital cosmopolitanism,' argue researchers

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Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have repeatedly been the subject of negative news coverage. As a result, the positive aspects associated with digital platforms have been overlooked. In light

of this, a recent study has explored the social media activity of a carefully selected group of individuals who use the microblogging platform Twitter.

The authors, Dr. Roman Lietz from Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU) and Dr. Fergal Lenehan from the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena, observe that socially engaged Twitter users share unexpected similarities despite their different backgrounds. "These digital cosmopolitans share similar values and are guided by similar motivations and perspectives on society," explained Dr. Roman Lietz from the Faculty of Translation Studies, Linguistics, and Cultural Studies at JGU.

## **'Digital cosmopolitanism' has been only sparsely researched so far**

There is hardly a message on social media that does not express some form of criticism. The way in which Donald Trump instrumentalized Twitter in a new manner and the radicalization and networking of far-right terrorists via social media has meant that a special focus on the right-wing populist, agitator potential of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Telegram and other platforms has dominated research. Scholars rarely view the other side: Social media as a space for the spread of values such as solidarity and understanding.

In their study "Tweeting the World a Better Place," Dr. Roman Lietz and Dr. Fergal Lenehan investigate this digital cosmopolitanism. They examine the motives, biographies, and traits that lead ten different people across Europe to take positions on Twitter in support of human rights and tolerance, against authoritarianism. The qualitative study focuses on regular people rather than popular accounts of influencers.

## Parallels between traditional volunteering and social Twitter engagement

The study finds that the Twitter users interviewed—regardless of age, place of residence, and specific interests such as climate protection, the combating of anti-Semitism, or the advocacy for LGBT rights—possess surprising similarities in terms of values, motivations, and perspectives on society and on social developments. Furthermore, parallels between traditional volunteering and cosmopolitan Twitter are clearly visible.

"We perceive this as a form of digital civic engagement," explained Lietz, describing the results. The study concludes by addressing how this form of commitment and dedication to "the world as a whole" can be accomplished in the sometimes harsh environment of [social media](#).

The work is published in the journal *Persona Studies*.

**More information:** Roman Lietz et al, Tweeting the World a Better Place, *Persona Studies* (2023). [DOI: 10.21153/psj2022vol8no3art1653](https://doi.org/10.21153/psj2022vol8no3art1653)

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