

Positive Online Spaces in an Era of Digital Violence

SCM Special Issue – Call for Papers

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Digital media has become a vital part of our everyday life in a matter of decades. However, concerns have been raised about its potential detrimental effects on society. The idea that people's worst qualities—like incivility, polarization, and manipulative intent—are amplified in online spaces is prevalent in both public and scholarly discourse (DePaula et al., 2018; Karmasin et al., 2024; Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2022). Although its negative impact is well established, the role of digital media as a resource for beneficial outcomes is often overlooked. As argued by Raney (2021), media usage is inherently linked to the pursuit of well-being, entertainment, human connection, and intellectual growth. Prior studies have documented digital spaces' capacity to facilitate social support (Bachl & Link, 2022; Erčulj & Pavšič Mrevlje, 2023), foster deliberation (Friess et al., 2021; Naab et al., 2025), and positively affect users through exposing them to inspiring and entertaining content (Oliver, 2022; Rieger & Klimmt, 2019). Yet, the factors giving rise to such positive effects receive comparably little attention. This special issue aims to shed light on where and under what conditions users encounter positive and rewarding online experiences, and how this can help improve negative online spaces.

Several lines of inquiry have emerged in recent years to address this gap. The research field of positive media psychology puts processes and relationships “leading to thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that contribute to individual wellbeing and flourishing” (Raney, 2021, p. 2) at the center of investigation. Relatedly, digital well-being research focuses on how individuals balance threats and benefits in the context of abundant digital media use options and permanent connectivity (Büchi, 2024; Vanden Abeele, 2021; Vanden Abeele & Nguyen, 2022). A related, yet distinct, strand of research in political communication investigates characteristics of deliberative online debates, such as respectfulness, constructiveness, and reciprocity (Fournier-Tombs & Di Marzo Serugendo, 2020; Jaidka et al., 2021; Naab et al., 2025), focusing on the democratic benefits of online spaces.

Hence, while prior studies offer first insights, the research field is fragmented. It is yet unclear what conditions must be met for the emergence of positive online spaces—that is, spaces that foster beneficial individual and democratic outcomes such as well-being, deliberation, and high-quality exchange. Several factors may interact in complex ways, which may include, but are not limited to, content features, the size and composition of online communities, platform affordances, and users' literacy, motivations, and characteristics. While it is relatively well-known which factors foster negative interactions, such as digital hate or incivility (Brüher et al., 2024; Ng et al., 2020), this special issue aims to advance our understanding of antecedents

and characteristics of positive online spaces in their diversity and across various contexts and platforms. We welcome diverse contributions, spanning theory-building and empirical work, case studies and comparative studies, using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approaches.

Individual submissions may engage with, but are not limited to, one of the following themes:

- Theoretical contributions that advance our understanding of positive online spaces.
- Applications and extensions of theoretical approaches fostering positive experiences (e.g., positive media psychology) within digital contexts, such as investigations into digital well-being or prosocial outcomes.
- Content characteristics for fostering positive online spaces, such as inspiring, transcendent, or entertaining media content.
- Characteristics of online communities and their impact on the emergence of positive online spaces, such as their size, level of homophily, norms, and practices.
- Technological affordances and their effects on positive online spaces, such as anonymity, persistence, or visibility.
- Individual-level differences in relation to positive online spaces, including the question of who benefits from which forms of digital environments.
- Media literacy and intervention approaches designed to cultivate positive online practices.

Submission Instructions

SCM is an Open Access Journal of the German Communication Association (DGPK) and Affiliate Journal of the International Communication Association (ICA). Accepted papers will be published as Open Access without additional costs.

We welcome submissions that fit the following SCM formats: *Extended paper* (50–60 pages), *Full paper* (15–20 pages), and *Research-in-brief* (5–10 pages).

Manuscripts should be prepared in accordance with the SCM guidelines:

<https://www.nomos.de/en/journals/scm/#directions-for-authors> (English)

<https://www.nomos.de/zeitschriften/scm/#autorenhinweise> (German)

Timeline:

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| • Full paper deadline: | 31 March 2026 |
| • Peer review process: | April 2026 – October 2026 |
| • Publication of the special issue: | December 2026 (SCM issue 4/2026) |

Manuscripts are to be submitted to marlis.stubenvoll@aau.at and christina.seeger@aau.at. Please also contact both guest editors for any inquiries regarding the special issue

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