

Conceptualizing Communicative Citizenship in the Fragmented Public Sphere of the Media City: A Meta-Synthesis Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study conceptualizes communicative citizenship within the fragmented public sphere of the media city. As urban life becomes deeply entangled with platforms, data infrastructures, and algorithmic systems, classical citizenship—primarily defined through legal rights, duties, and institutional participation—has become insufficient for explaining contemporary forms of civic agency. Using a qualitative meta-synthesis, 32 scholarly documents selected through a PRISMA-guided screening process were critically interpreted across communication studies, urban sociology, platform studies, and critical smart-city research. The synthesis identifies five interrelated themes: the paradigmatic transformation of citizenship; the media city as a hybrid space of power; the political economy of platforms and extraction; the digital public sphere as a simultaneous site of enablement and constraint; and critical smart-city governance. Across these themes, communicative citizenship emerges as a dynamic position generated through the interaction of structure, agency, and context. It ranges from the passive citizen-as-data, whose everyday activity is converted into economic value, to the active citizen-as-network or communicative citizen, capable of dialogue, mobilization, meaning-making, and participatory regulation. The findings suggest that communicative citizenship is not a fixed legal status but a contested process shaped by unequal infrastructures, platform monopolization, algorithmic governance, and citizens' capacity for critical engagement. Equitable access to communication infrastructures, critical media literacy, and protection of urban-media spaces for dialogue are therefore central conditions for strengthening communicative citizenship.

Keywords: *communicative citizenship; media city; fragmented public sphere; meta-synthesis; communicative action; platform governance*

1. Introduction

Over recent decades, the relationship between urban space and communication technologies has become structural rather than supplementary. The contemporary city can no longer be understood only as a physical arrangement of streets, buildings, institutions, and infrastructures. It increasingly operates as a networked

communicative sphere in which digital media and platforms mediate everyday experience, identity formation, mobility, visibility, and social participation. This transformation is captured by the notion of the media city: an urban condition in which physical space and mediated processes are inseparable (Amin & Thrift, 2002; McQuire, 2008). The expansion of mobile communication, ubiquitous computing, the Internet of Things, big data, and smart

infrastructures has intensified this interdependence and has made the distinction between physical and virtual urban space progressively less tenable.

This transformation creates a conceptual problem for citizenship. Classical citizenship has historically been framed through legal membership, rights and obligations, the territorial state, and participation in formal institutions. Such categories remain important, but they do not fully explain how citizens act, become visible, communicate, and are governed in platformized urban environments (Isin & Nielsen, 2008). In a media city, citizens continuously produce, circulate, interpret, and consume information. They also generate behavioral and locational data that are captured by infrastructures that they neither own nor fully understand. Citizenship therefore increasingly depends on communicative capacities and on the conditions under which communication is organized.

Dahlgren (2005) argues that contemporary citizenship requires cultural and communicative preconditions that exceed formal rights (Dahlgren, 2005). From this perspective, communicative citizenship can be understood as a mode of civic subjectivity centered on the capacity to participate in meaning-making, dialogue, criticism, and collective action. Yet the concept remains theoretically underdeveloped. Its boundaries in relation to digital citizenship, smart citizenship, media citizenship, and participatory citizenship are often unclear, and its distinctive dimensions have not been systematically synthesized across the relevant literatures.

The problem is intensified by the changing character of the public sphere. Digital platforms were initially associated with expectations of open access, plural expression, and democratized participation. In practice, however, digitally mediated public communication has also become fragmented, personalized, commercialized, and affectively intensified. Papacharissi (2010) shows that networked communication often develops through affective publics in which emotional and immediate reactions may displace sustained rational deliberation (Papacharissi, 2010). At the same time, platform architectures sort visibility through opaque algorithms, producing unequal conditions of attention and participation.

The political economy of platforms adds a further layer to this problem. Couldry and Mejias (2019) describe contemporary data extraction as a form of data colonialism in which ordinary activities and relationships are appropriated as raw material for economic value (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). In the urban context, mobility,

consumption, navigation, interaction, and even presence in public space can become data-generating events. Platform infrastructures are therefore not neutral channels of communication. Their commercial models and algorithmic systems shape what citizens see, how they interact, and which forms of action become legible or valuable. Fuchs (2020) similarly emphasizes that digital capitalism commodifies communication and can weaken the democratic potential of the public sphere (Fuchs, 2020).

Habermas's theory of communicative action provides a critical foundation for examining these developments. Communicative action is oriented toward mutual understanding rather than strategic success, and its rationality depends on the possibility of testing validity claims through unconstrained communication (Habermas, 1984). Habermas's distinction between lifeworld and system is particularly relevant. The lifeworld contains everyday communication, shared meanings, cultural reproduction, and identity formation, whereas systems of money and administrative power operate through instrumental mechanisms. When systemic logics colonize the lifeworld, communicative coordination is displaced by strategic and instrumental action (Habermas, 1987). In the media city, corporate platforms, algorithmic infrastructures, and data economies can be interpreted as powerful systemic forces entering domains of everyday urban communication.

Against this background, the present study asks how communicative citizenship can be theoretically conceptualized under conditions of a fragmented public sphere in the media city. The study examines how the city is conceptualized as a communicative environment; how communicative citizenship differs from classical and digital citizenship; how Habermasian communicative action can inform analysis of urban-platform interactions; how the public sphere is fragmented in contemporary media environments; which communicative, institutional, and media conditions are necessary for communicative citizenship; and which dimensions distinguish it as a multidimensional phenomenon.

The theoretical contribution lies in moving beyond a purely legal-institutional or technology-centered account of citizenship. Rather than treating digital access as equivalent to civic empowerment, this study conceptualizes citizenship as a contested communicative position shaped by platform power, spatial inequalities, cultural conditions, and citizens' capacity to act. The resulting framework connects communication theory, urban sociology, and critical technology studies and provides an analytical basis

for examining democratic participation in increasingly platformized cities.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. *Communicative action and communicative rationality*

Habermas distinguishes communicative action from instrumental or strategic action. Whereas instrumental action is oriented toward success, control, or advantage, communicative action seeks mutual understanding through language. Communication becomes rational when participants can raise and contest claims concerning truth, normative rightness, and sincerity (Habermas, 1984). This framework is important for citizenship because democratic participation requires more than expression. It requires conditions under which citizens can address one another as participants whose claims are open to reciprocal scrutiny. In platform environments, these conditions are complicated by algorithmic ranking, commercial incentives, asymmetries of visibility, and the strategic design of attention.

2.2. *The public sphere and deliberative democracy*

The public sphere is the social and symbolic domain between state and civil society in which citizens discuss matters of common concern and contribute to the formation of public opinion (Habermas, 1989, 1996). Its democratic function depends on access, relative equality, publicity, criticism, and the possibility of reasoned exchange. Historically, Habermas also emphasized the structural transformation of the public sphere under commercialization and mass media. Digital platforms extend this problem: they expand opportunities for participation while simultaneously privatizing the infrastructures through which public communication occurs. The result is not simply a larger public sphere but a fragmented field structured by commercial metrics, personalized information flows, and unequal capacities for visibility.

2.3. *The media city and hybrid spatiality*

McQuire (2008) uses the media city to describe the reorganization of urban spatiality through pervasive media. Urban experience is increasingly hybrid (McQuire, 2008): physical locations are overlaid by mobile interfaces, sensors, databases, screens, and networked information. De

Souza e Silva's account of hybrid spaces similarly emphasizes that mobile technologies integrate physical movement with digital connectivity. The city is therefore not merely a container for media; it is produced and experienced through mediated processes. This transformation has direct implications for citizenship because access to urban space, information, and services becomes intertwined with access to networked infrastructures.

2.4. *Platformization, data extraction, and algorithmic governance*

Critical platform studies show that digital infrastructures are economic and political institutions rather than neutral technical intermediaries. van Dijck et al. (2018) describe a platform society in which public values are increasingly negotiated within privately owned connective systems (van Dijck et al., 2018). Zuboff (2019) identifies surveillance capitalism as an economic logic based on behavioral data extraction and prediction (Zuboff, 2019). Couldry and Mejias (2019) extend this critique through the concept of data colonialism (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). In smart urbanism, algorithmic systems also participate in governance: they classify, predict, optimize, and allocate. These systems can improve coordination, but they can also shift decisions from public-political arenas into opaque technical processes.

2.5. *Communicative citizenship in the platform era*

Within this study, communicative citizenship is treated as a normative and analytical concept describing citizens' capacity to participate meaningfully in the communicative constitution of urban life. It requires more than connectivity. Three conditions are central in the source framework: equitable access to communication infrastructures, critical media literacy, and protection of dialogic urban-media spaces. These conditions connect material access, interpretive competence, and institutional safeguards. They also provide a basis for evaluating whether smart-city and platform infrastructures expand civic agency or merely intensify data extraction and behavioral management.

3. Methods and Materials

This study was situated within an interpretive paradigm, treating social reality as multilayered and meaning-laden rather than as a set of variables reducible to quantitative

measurement. The objective was conceptual understanding and critical interpretation of communicative citizenship as an emergent phenomenon at the intersection of communication, urban sociology, and technology studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A qualitative meta-synthesis was employed. Meta-synthesis is a systematic approach to interpreting and integrating findings from prior qualitative and conceptual studies in order to generate higher-order concepts and theoretical relationships (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2006). It differs from quantitative meta-analysis because it does not aggregate effect sizes; instead, it compares meanings, conceptual patterns, and relationships across heterogeneous texts. This approach was appropriate because the literature relevant to communicative citizenship is dispersed across several disciplines and uses partially overlapping concepts.

Literature searches were conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The study-selection process followed a PRISMA-guided workflow. Database searching identified 1,156 records and other sources contributed 47 additional records, yielding 1,203 records in total. After removal of 287 duplicates, 916 records underwent title-and-abstract screening; 743 were excluded as irrelevant to the topic or theoretical foundations. The remaining 173 full-text records were assessed for eligibility, of which 141 were excluded because they lacked the required criteria, had insufficient quality, or did not contribute adequately to the theoretical synthesis. The final meta-synthesis therefore included 32 documents, comprising 21 journal articles, seven book chapters, and four institutional reports.

Analysis proceeded at three levels. First, initial themes were extracted from each document. Second, themes were compared interpretively to identify conceptual networks, tensions, and recurring relationships. Third, theoretical synthesis was used to organize the findings into a framework of communicative citizenship. Analysis continued until theoretical saturation, defined as the point at which additional documents no longer introduced substantively new themes into the analytical framework.

3.1. Search strategy, eligibility, and methodological transparency

Documents were retained when they made a substantive theoretical, conceptual, or qualitative contribution to at least one of the study domains: communicative citizenship, the public sphere, media-city or hybrid urban space, platform political economy, data extraction, algorithmic governance, or critical smart-city studies. Duplicate records, studies unrelated to these domains, and full-text documents judged to provide insufficient analytical or theoretical contribution were excluded. The retained project records do not preserve the complete database-specific search strings, exact search dates, language restrictions, or field restrictions; these parameters are therefore not reconstructed retrospectively.

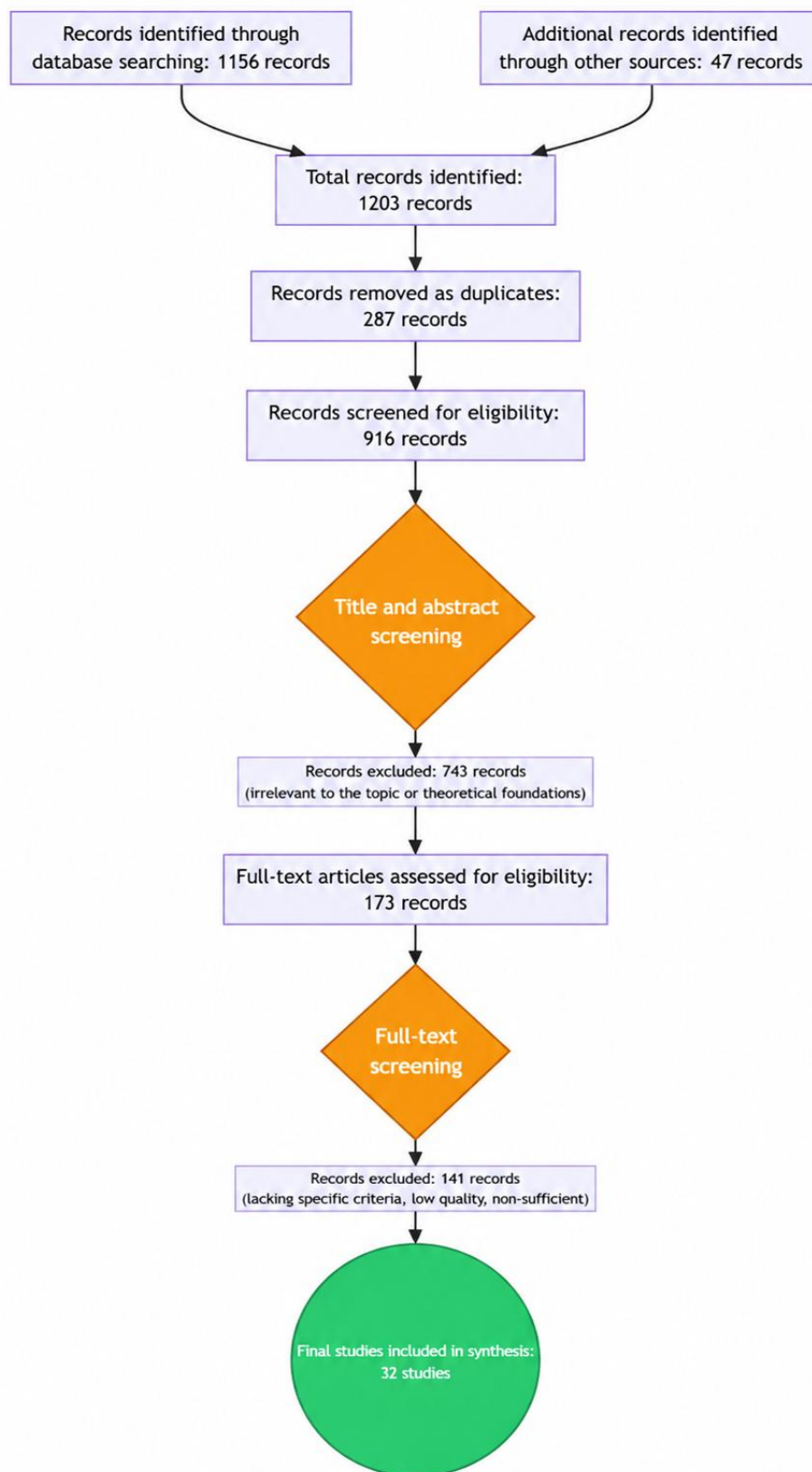
The full-text screening stage included a judgment of relevance and analytical quality. However, the retained methodological record does not identify the use of a standardized critical-appraisal instrument such as CASP or JBI. Accordingly, no formal appraisal score is claimed in this report. This limitation is explicitly considered when interpreting the synthesis.

3.2. Data extraction and synthesis

Each included document was assigned a unique identifier (S01-S32). For synthesis, bibliographic characteristics, document type, substantive domain, and conceptual contribution were organized for cross-document comparison. The analysis was theoretically sensitized by Habermas's concepts of communicative action and the public sphere, while the five higher-order themes were produced through comparative interpretation across the included documents. Thus, the final model should be understood as theory-informed rather than as a purely inductive grounded-theory model.

Figure 1

Study procedure flowchart



4. Findings and Results

Interpretive analysis of the 32 final documents produced five major themes and fifteen key subthemes. The thematic

structure presents the frequencies and representative study codes identified in the meta-synthesis. Study identifiers S01–S32 refer to the coded documents included in the analysis.

Table 1

Network of major themes and subthemes derived from the meta-synthesis

Code	Major theme	Subthemes	No. of documents	Representative document codes
T1	Paradigmatic transformation of citizenship	Classical media citizenship; digital citizenship; data-driven citizenship	14	S01, S02, S05, S14, S28, S32
T2	Media city as a hybrid space of power	Digital–physical spatiality; networked infrastructures; urban display/screen culture	12	S01, S07, S08, S11, S23, S26
T3	Political economy of platforms and extraction logic	Platform monopolization; commodification of urban data; algorithmic governance	20	S03, S04, S06, S10, S13, S18, S21, S24, S27
T4	Digital public sphere and enablement/constraint of action	Commercialization of the public sphere; fragmented discourse; revival of civic participation	13	S02, S05, S09, S14, S19, S25, S30
T5	Critical smart city and governance challenges	Algorithmic governance; responsabilization; technological inequalities	16	S12, S15, S16, S17, S20, S22, S29, S31

Theme 1: Paradigmatic transformation of citizenship

The literature indicates a substantial transformation in the meaning of citizenship across the last two decades. Earlier media-oriented accounts emphasized access to information, political awareness, and the capacity to monitor power. In this configuration, the citizen was an informed media user situated largely in relation to centralized media institutions. The spread of digital platforms and the integration of urban life with networked communication altered this model. Documents S02 and S32 emphasize a shift from citizenship based primarily on having information toward citizenship based on being connected, communicating, and participating in networked relations. The boundary between producer and consumer becomes less stable as citizens create, circulate, and respond to content while simultaneously becoming sources of data. The most critical transformation appears in smart-city and data-driven governance. Documents S14 and S28 characterize the citizen as a sensor or living data source whose value is increasingly associated with continuous data production. This produces a conceptual tension between the citizen as a political subject and the citizen as an informational-economic resource. The synthesis therefore places communicative citizenship on a continuum: at one pole is the passive citizen-as-data, whose activities generate value for technological platforms; at the other is the active

citizen-as-network, capable of dialogue, mobilization, and participatory regulation.

Theme 2: The media city as a hybrid space of power

The second theme concerns the hybridization of urban space. Documents S07 and S08 describe an environment in which digital layers overlap with lived physical space, while S23 conceptualizes this process as the augmentation of urban space. A physical location can simultaneously function as a site of information access, surveillance, navigation, interaction, and data generation. This hybridization changes the distribution of urban power. Graham and Marvin's work (S11) shows that networked infrastructures can produce a splintered city in which access to media-rich spaces is uneven. The source synthesis interprets this as a digital-spatial divide: some urban areas are richly connected while others experience communicative deprivation. Power is no longer located only in visible institutions or physical architecture. It is distributed through data flows, routing algorithms, software layers, interfaces, and code. In this sense, code can function as a form of rule-making because software architectures condition possible actions before formal political deliberation occurs. The media city therefore combines concentration and dispersion: power is concentrated in platform infrastructures and servers, yet simultaneously diffused through everyday networked systems. This dual structure creates a central problem for citizenship because

the rules governing participation are embedded partly in technical systems outside conventional democratic procedures.

Theme 3: Political economy of platforms and extraction logic

The most frequent theme was the political economy of urban platforms, addressed directly or indirectly in 20 of the 32 documents. Documents S03 and S04 frame platforms as economic-political institutions with monopolistic tendencies rather than neutral technical intermediaries. Their business models depend on extracting, predicting, and exchanging behavioral data. S06 and S10 develop the idea of connection as extraction: routine acts such as using online maps, sharing urban experiences, or interacting through mobile services become sources of raw data. Documents S18 and S24 extend the analysis to algorithmic governance. Urban decisions involving traffic, resource allocation, policing, or energy management can move from public-political deliberation toward private or technical decision systems. S21 argues that such a shift risks reducing democratic governance to data management and citizens to targetable audiences. S27 further shows that extraction reorganizes urban time and space. Citizens are positioned within real-time systems that continuously generate data, while urban environments become increasingly calculable and predictable. The resulting logic converts political subjects into economic objects and embeds civic life within infrastructures whose principal incentives may be commercial rather than deliberative.

Theme 4: Digital public sphere and the enablement/constraint of communicative action

The fourth theme captures a central dialectic: digital media can both enable and constrain communicative action. Document S05, drawing on a Habermasian framework, indicates that digital environments do not reproduce ideal conditions of deliberation but can create new capacities for participation and mobilization. S09 emphasizes that media participate in constructing social reality rather than merely reflecting it, which means mediated environments can become sites for collective meaning-making. S30 provides

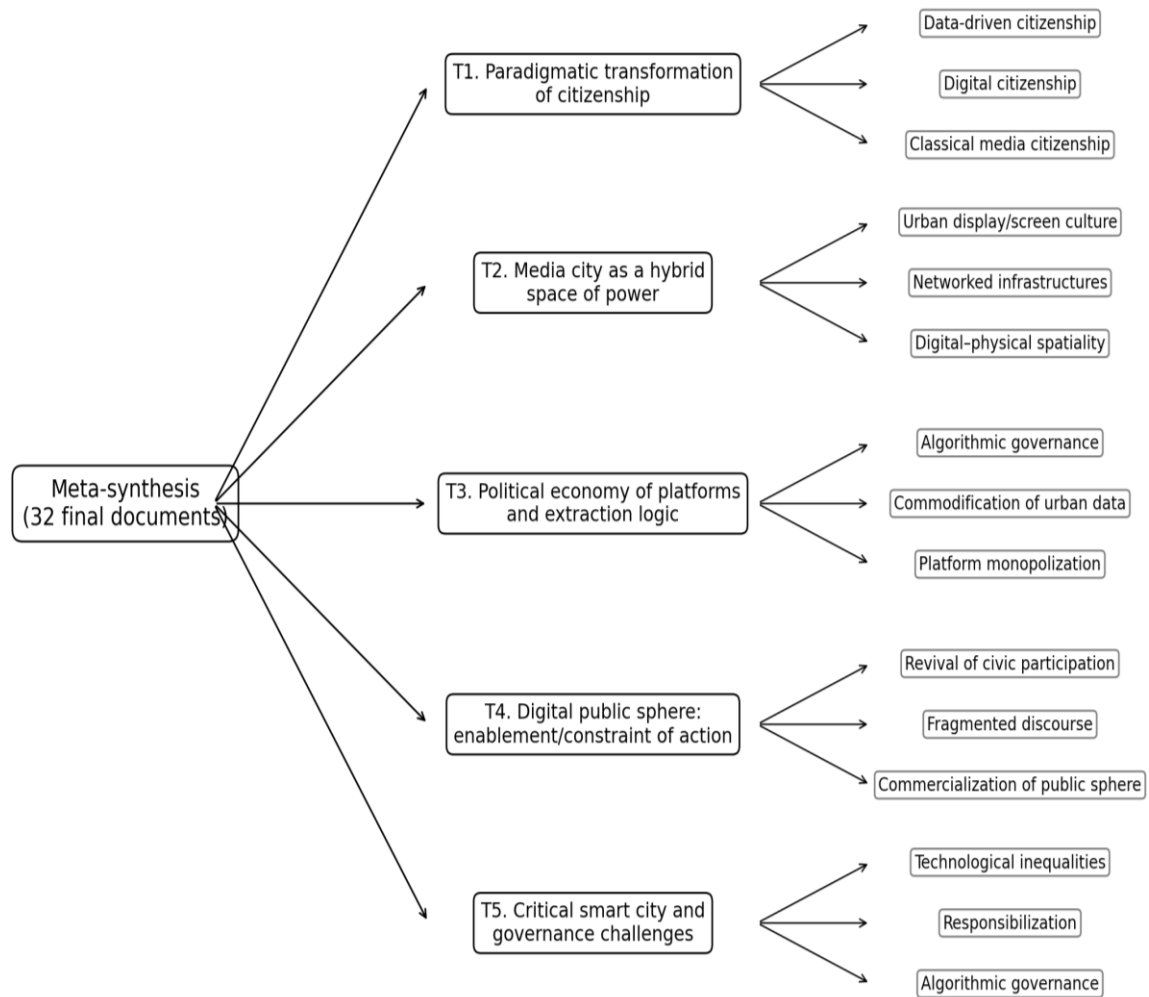
an example through citizen sensing: mobile devices can be used to gather environmental information and mobilize around contested policies. These practices demonstrate the emancipatory potential of networked communication. Yet the same infrastructures can commercialize and fragment public communication. S25 highlights the commercialization of public space through platforms, while personalized algorithms can place citizens within informational bubbles and reduce cross-group dialogue. S19 treats fragmentation as a structural characteristic of the digital public sphere rather than merely a technical defect. The synthesis therefore rejects both technological optimism and technological determinism. The digital public sphere is a dialectical field in which the capacity for communicative citizenship depends on the interaction between technological affordances, commercial architectures, institutional conditions, and citizen agency.

Theme 5: Critical smart city and governance challenges

The fifth theme reframes the smart city as a political and normative project rather than a purely technical one. Documents S12 and S15 show that smart-city discourse can define citizens as individually responsible, measurable subjects expected to adapt their behavior to optimization systems. S15 conceptualizes this logic as a disciplinary form of smartness that encourages self-monitoring and transfers responsibility from political and social structures to individuals. S20 adds that data-driven systems may operate unevenly across bodies and social groups, reproducing existing inequalities. Documents S29 and S31 call for a critical reorientation of smart urbanism away from technology-centered assumptions and toward citizens' lived conditions. S17 suggests that resistance to smart-city logics can itself constitute communicative action by reopening questions that technical systems present as already solved. The key challenge for communicative citizenship is therefore not simply whether citizens have access to technology, but whether they can question, reinterpret, and participate in governing the systems that mediate urban life.

Figure 2

Thematic network derived from the meta-synthesis



The interpretive synthesis of the five themes produced a middle-range conceptual framework organized around three interacting forces: structure, agency, and context. Structure refers to platform accumulation, algorithmic governance, and data commodification, particularly as identified in the second and third themes. These forces tend to reduce the citizen to an economic object and data source. Agency refers to citizens' capacity for communicative action, meaning-making, participation, and mobilization, especially evident in the first and fourth themes. Agency creates the possibility of resistance and reinterpretation. Context refers to the spatial-geographical, cultural, and institutional characteristics of a particular city, emphasized in the second and fifth themes. It indicates that

communicative citizenship is not experienced identically across urban settings. The interaction of these forces occurs in a hybrid physical-digital arena and produces a spectrum of subject positions. The passive pole is the citizen-as-data; the active pole is the communicative citizen or citizen-as-network. The model therefore treats citizenship not as a binary condition of activity versus passivity, but as a variable and contested position. The Structure-Agency-Context architecture represents the integrative analytical layer of the synthesis: the constituent concepts were informed by the reviewed theoretical traditions, whereas their organization into a continuum from citizen-as-data to communicative citizen is the synthesis proposed by this study.

Figure 3

Initial Model of communicative citizenship in the media city

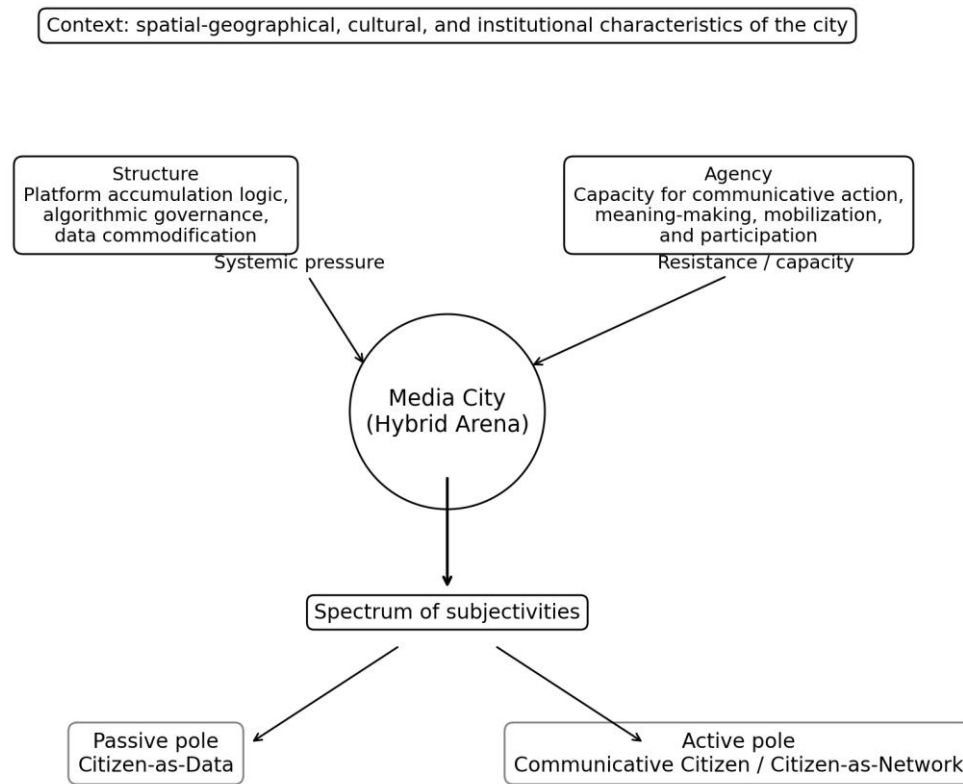


Figure 3. Initial model of communicative citizenship in the media city

5. Discussion

The synthesis suggests that communicative citizenship is best understood as a relational and contested form of citizenship rather than a stable legal status. Its defining question is not simply whether individuals possess formal rights or access digital technologies, but whether they can participate meaningfully in the communicative processes through which urban realities are interpreted, governed, and contested. This distinction is important because connectivity can coexist with political passivity, surveillance, unequal visibility, and extraction. The continuum between citizen-as-data and citizen-as-network is a central theoretical contribution of this study. Binary accounts that classify citizens as either active or passive overlook the fact that the same person can occupy different positions across platforms, situations, and urban contexts. A citizen may be highly active in producing information yet remain structurally passive if platform architectures convert that activity primarily into extractable data.

Conversely, data-generating technologies can be repurposed for civic monitoring, collective interpretation, and mobilization. Citizenship therefore depends on the relation between what citizens do and the institutional-technological conditions that organize the consequences of their actions.

This finding extends Zuboff's (2019) critique of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019). Zuboff focuses on the extraction of behavioral surplus and its implications for autonomy. The present synthesis places this process directly within the public sphere and urban citizenship. Data extraction does not only affect privacy or consumer behavior; it can reshape the communicative conditions of public life. When visibility, attention, and access are organized through proprietary algorithms, platform power influences which voices become prominent, which issues are amplified, and which interactions remain marginal. The findings on hybrid spatiality similarly extend critical urban theory. Graham and Marvin (2001) demonstrated how networked infrastructures can splinter cities by creating uneven patterns of connection (Graham & Marvin, 2001).

The present framework interprets this fragmentation as communicative as well as spatial. Unequal access to digital infrastructures matters, but access alone is insufficient. Citizens also differ in their ability to understand algorithmic mediation, protect their data, make themselves visible, and participate across informational boundaries. Communicative inequality is therefore produced by both material infrastructures and platform architectures.

The political economy theme also clarifies why the digital public sphere cannot be evaluated solely in terms of the number of users or opportunities for expression. Platforms can dramatically expand participation while organizing that participation through commercial incentives. van Dijck's (2014) work on datafication shows how data collection becomes institutionalized as a dominant logic (van Dijck, 2014). In urban contexts, this logic can extend into mobility, service provision, public safety, and environmental management. When decisions migrate into proprietary technical systems, citizens may experience services as efficient while losing opportunities to question the assumptions, classifications, or priorities embedded in those systems. At the same time, the results do not support a purely pessimistic interpretation. Citizen sensing, networked mobilization, collaborative meaning-making, and digitally mediated participation demonstrate that technologies can support communicative agency. The key point is conditionality. The same infrastructure can support participation and extraction, dialogue and fragmentation, empowerment and surveillance. Communicative citizenship therefore requires institutional and cultural conditions that strengthen the citizen's capacity to use communication technologies critically rather than merely consume services or generate data. The fragmented digital public sphere is especially significant in this regard. Personalized information environments and filter bubbles can reduce encounters across social groups (Pariser, 2011), while affective communication can intensify polarization. Yet fragmentation should not be interpreted as the disappearance of public life. Instead, public communication is redistributed across multiple overlapping spaces with different rules, audiences, and visibility regimes. A communicative-citizenship perspective asks whether citizens can move across these spaces, encounter difference, contest claims, and participate in collective problem definition.

The critical smart-city literature reinforces this argument by showing that technological optimization is never politically neutral. Systems designed to make cities

efficient also define what counts as a problem, what can be measured, and which behaviors are desirable. When citizens are treated primarily as users, sensors, or responsibilized individuals, structural questions can be reframed as matters of personal compliance. Communicative citizenship requires the opposite movement: opening technical systems to public questioning and treating citizens as participants in defining goals, not merely as data points within optimization models.

Context is the third force that prevents the framework from becoming technologically deterministic. Cultural traditions, institutional arrangements, regulatory systems, spatial inequalities, and forms of governance shape how platform power and civic agency interact. Much of the dominant literature is based on Western liberal-democratic contexts. In more centralized governance settings, platform extraction may intersect with existing institutional structures in ways that further constrain communicative resistance. The framework therefore requires contextual application rather than universal assumptions.

Three practical conditions follow from the synthesis. First, equitable access to communication infrastructures is necessary because exclusion from networked systems increasingly means exclusion from urban services and public communication. Second, critical media literacy is required so that citizens can understand data extraction, algorithmic selection, and the political economy of platforms. Third, dialogic urban-media spaces require protection from complete subordination to commercial monopolies. These conditions do not eliminate conflict; rather, they make democratic contestation more possible. Taken together, the findings reposition citizenship as a struggle over communicative capacity. The media city is simultaneously a technological environment, an economic field, a spatial arrangement, and a public arena. Citizens become communicative citizens to the extent that they can transform connectivity into meaningful participation, challenge the infrastructures that govern visibility and data, and participate in shaping the norms under which urban communication occurs.

5.1. Methodological limitations

Several limitations should qualify interpretation of the findings. First, the retained search documentation does not contain the complete reproducible search strings or exact search dates, which limits replication of the retrieval stage. Second, the synthesis combines heterogeneous source

types, including journal articles, books or book chapters, and institutional reports; these sources differ in methodological form and evidentiary status. Third, no standardized critical-appraisal score is available in the retained methodological record, and independent duplicate coding or inter-coder agreement cannot be documented. Fourth, much of the conceptual literature is grounded in Western and liberal-democratic contexts, which restricts direct transferability to other governance settings. Fifth, the Structure-Agency-Context model and the citizen-as-data-to-communicative-citizen continuum are conceptual products of the synthesis and have not yet been empirically validated. These limitations indicate that the model should be treated as an analytically testable framework rather than as a universally established typology.

6. Conclusion

This qualitative meta-synthesis conceptualized communicative citizenship in the fragmented public sphere of the media city. Across 32 documents, five themes were identified: transformation of citizenship, hybrid urban spatiality, platform political economy and extraction, the contradictory digital public sphere, and critical smart-city governance. These themes converge on a model in which communicative citizenship is produced through the interaction of structure, agency, and context. The principal conclusion is that communicative citizenship is not a fixed status. It is a dynamic and contested position located on a continuum between the citizen-as-data and the communicative citizen or citizen-as-network. Platform accumulation and algorithmic governance can push citizens toward the passive pole by converting everyday life into extractable data and relocating public decisions into opaque systems. Communicative agency can move citizenship toward the active pole through dialogue, meaning-making, mobilization, resistance, and participatory regulation. The framework also indicates that technological access alone cannot guarantee democratic citizenship. Equitable infrastructures, critical media literacy, and protected spaces for dialogue are necessary conditions for converting digital connectivity into communicative agency. Future research can use this framework to examine specific cities, platforms, and governance systems and to operationalize the proposed continuum empirically. Comparative research across institutional and cultural contexts would be particularly valuable for testing how structure, agency, and context interact in different media-city environments.

Authors' Contributions

Seyed Amir Hossein Hosseini: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, and writing—original draft. Neda Soleimani: Conceptualization, methodology, validation, and writing—review and editing. Abbasali Ghaiyoomi: Supervision, validation, interpretation, and writing—review and editing. Seyed Bashir Hosseini: Supervision, conceptualization, validation, and writing—review and editing. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Declaration

Generative AI was used for English-language editing and presentation support during manuscript preparation. The authors reviewed and edited the resulting text and take full responsibility for the final content.

Transparency Statement

The evidence base consists of the published documents included in the meta-synthesis.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

Ethical approval was not required because this qualitative meta-synthesis used only previously published documents and involved no recruitment of human participants, collection of identifiable personal data, intervention, or animal experimentation.

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