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**Process of Online Political Discussions and Public Opinion(s)
Formation/Expression: A Three-Stage Model Based Upon Emergent
Social Identities**

(Travel Grant – Ethnicity and Race in Communication Division)

Abstract:

With the deepening permeation of the Internet into modern citizens' political life, numerous discussion-facilitating cyber spaces have given rise to discourse-centric forms of political participation. Current scholarship on online political discussion and public opinion tends to rely on variance-based, deliberative models of political communication, thus unnecessarily overlooking 1) alternative models of political discursive participation and 2) the temporality of ever-unfolding online political discursive interactions. Based on the social identity perspective, the current paper takes a process approach to develop a three-stage model that aims to describe and explain how the patterns of discursive interactions, the trajectories of the diversity of social identities and public opinions, and the levels of agreement and understanding among online political discussants develop over time. This paper represents an attempt to understand how emergent social identities, evolving discursive interactions and public opinion(s) formation/expression may potentially influence the functioning of democracy in the Internet era.