

# **A Good Cup of Coffee, A Little Slice of America: Finding Common Ground through Information Flow in a Small-Town Texas Information Ground**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Amid the upheaval of a divided society, a failure to communicate can lead to misunderstandings, unresolved conflict, and exclusion of “the Other.” Common ground spaces are needed to facilitate meaningful information exchanges and authentic social connection. The aim of this study was to explore the community impact of information flow in a small-town information ground. As cafes have long been regarded as democratic spaces of inclusivity, social connection, and information sharing, this autoethnographic case study was conducted in a small-town coffeehouse in rural North Texas, in a community facing the growing pains of rapid urbanization. Using the information grounds theory, the theory of the strength of weak ties, and the concept of third places, this study sought to identify the types of information interactions and the key actors within the space and to explore how the information flow may impact individuals’ sense of belonging and community engagement. Findings show that important social ties were formed through informal information sharing like chit-chat and gossip, and that key actors fulfilled significant social roles that drove the information flow, thereby increasing tie strength. The hospitality shown in this third-place environment provided a common ground in which people with diverse perspectives found proximity with one another, leading to more meaningful connection, a deeper sense of belonging, and increased community engagement. The insights gained in this study may have broader implications for promoting social cohesion in an era of national political polarization and intense social and cultural transformation.

## **ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS**

Information seeking; Information use; Community engagement; Social justice; Sociology of information.

## **AUTHOR KEYWORDS**

Information grounds; Community; Social ties; Common ground; Third places.

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