MindMargin: How Article-Adjacent Comments Challenge Our Opinions

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Introduction

Commenting systems are a popular means for facilitating conversation among readers online. Typically, comments are displayed below articles. However, the increasing prevalence of insulting and low-quality comments has motivated us to question the existing system.

Supported by prior research in education, we hypothesize that article-adjacent comments have the ability to motivate people to consider others' opinions, even those contrary to their own. We present MindMargin, a platform that displays textually anchored comments on an horizontal infinite scroll. This system thus exposes users to a diverse and relevant array of opinions as they read.

MindMargin

We implemented two commenting systems. The first commenting system is MindMargin with anchored comments on a horizontal infinite scroll next to the reference medium.

The MindMargin interface.

The traditional interface.

The second commenting system is a traditional vertical interface with comments below the reference medium.

MindMargin exposes the reader to relevant comments at all times.

Experiment

We performed an online experiment with young adults (N=46 after dropouts) and assigned the participants to either MindMargin or the traditional commenting system. The participants were not asked to interact with the commenting system but to read a controversial article within 10 minutes. Then, a questionnaire for validation and stance exploration was presented.

N = 46*, 30 female, 16 male   * after removing outliers and dropouts
mostly Young Adults (18-25 years)
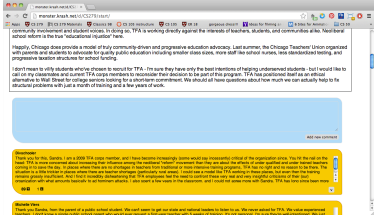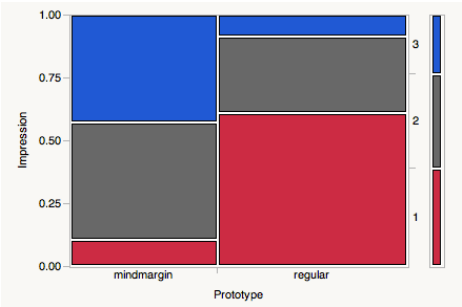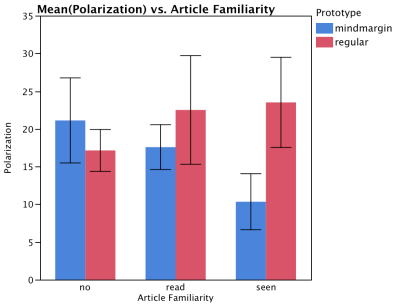**N_mindmargin = 19**
N_traditional = 27

Between-Subject factorial design with two dependent variables:
1. Stance Polarization (SP) capturing participant's personal stance on the article (on a scale from 0-Strongly Pro to 100-Strongly Against)
2. Attitude Toward Comments (ATC) describing their reaction to the comments (classified as Positive, Negative, Neutral and Invalid)

Results

- Participants with prior exposure reported less extreme stance towards the article (m=...

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Discussion

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