

Discussion on “How Technology Encourages Political Selective Exposure”

Jiacheng Wei 52558757

Nowadays, with the development of science and technology, individuals are more and more “controlled” by the information customizability in the communication environment. Following is a debate among scholars: whether the Internet increases the selective exposure, decreases it, or has nothing to do with it. This article focuses on the impact of customizability technology on selective exposure and discusses how this technology extends the Selective Exposure Theory. To be specific, this article advances the field of media effects by comprehensively describing customization techniques and outlining a detailed research program on the effects of selective exposure.

The author first illustrates the role of customizable technologies by discussing empirical evidence and research, then develops the theoretical models of user-driven and system-driven customizability technology to analyze its effect on selective exposure, where several social and psychological variables are discussed. After that, difference between topic-based and ideology-based customizability technology is proposed, and the paper states that usage of the latter one will result in greater level of political selective exposure. Finally, the article combines these various types of technology and analyzes how each type of combination will influence the political selective exposure.

From the analysis of the author, selective political exposure will result in increasing political attitude polarization (i.e., it will encourage individuals to choose from multiple options, thereby reducing the diversity of attitudes). As the stakeholders, they should make use of informational utility to weaken the reinforcing spiral between selective exposure and attitude polarization. As the computer scientists, they should make use of topic-based customizability, and avoid topics that are explicitly partisan when building the system-driven customizability model. Additionally, it is important for companies to examine which type of customizability users prefer, as system-driven, ideology-based customizability technology are most likely to result in the increase of selective exposure. What’s more, the scientists should control the number of customizability options for users to choose when building the website, for too many choices will make users feel difficult to make decision and undermine their experience.

Finally, the result of this paper is that customizability technology is expected to increase the likelihood and degree of selective exposure, thereby amplify individuals' pre-existing tendencies. To be specific, individuals are more likely to read attitude-congruent information, given limited time and large amount of information. There are various social and psychological variables that can mediate this effect, and we need to recognize the importance of customizability technology in today's communication environment.