



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

The Journal of Social Studies Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jssr

Homophily, echo chambers, & selective exposure in social networks: What should civic educators do?

Jeff Passe*, Corey Drake, Linda Mayger

The College of New Jersey, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Accepted 3 August 2017

ABSTRACT

Experts in civic education and social media used the "Delphi Method" to address countering social media's "echo chamber" effect. Analyses revealed relative agreement, with required civics courses emerging as the most recommended solution. The need for well-prepared teachers, a coordinated curriculum, and appropriate materials and methods were major considerations.

Copyright © 2017, The International Society for the Social Studies. Published by Elsevier, Inc.

Introduction

One of the startling realizations experienced by many Americans during the 2016 election cycle was how citizens could view the same events so differently. "We aren't exposed to other ideas and viewpoints," according to Eli Pariser, CEO of Upworthy, a liberal news website,

As websites get to know our interests better, they also get better at serving up the content that reinforces those interests, while also filtering out those things we generally don't like...The danger is that increasingly you end up not seeing what people who think differently see and in fact not even knowing that it exists. (NPR, 2016)

A year earlier, President Barack Obama said, "The problem is there is this big gap between who we are as a people and how our politics expresses itself. Part of that has to do with...a media that is so splintered now that we're not in a common conversation" (Maron, 2015).

The lack of a common conversation has been described as an "echo chamber" and has become a growing concern as citizens grapple with the increasingly powerful impact that social media has on political beliefs and behavior. For civic educators, it is not just a matter of shrugging one's shoulders over the echo chamber trend; it is a challenge requiring immediate action. But what should be done?

Consultation with colleagues who have studied civic education and social media yielded the suggestion that a survey of experts may be in order, and that the Delphi Method would be the ideal instrument to reach a consensus among experts in the field. In *Delphi*, participants offer first-round considerations in complete anonymity. Then a cycle of re-estimations or repeated voting occurs—often interspersed with group discussion—until the participants converge on a consensus. Using the Delphi Method, the current study found expert agreement that required civics education presents the best method for addressing homophily and counteracting the echo chamber effect.

* Correspondence to: College of Education and Integrative Studies, Cal Poly Pomona, Pomona, CA 91768

The echo chamber

As social animals, humans tend to foster relationships and form communicative bonds with other similar and proximal humans. This is the basic presumption which underlies the concept of *homophily*, a pattern of human behavior that is operationalized by “the principle that contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people” (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001 p. 416). Segregation, inequality, and reduced inter-group information transfer have all been associated with homophily in social networks. As a result, “questions of social policy can only be answered on the basis of some understanding of how these patterns emerge” (Kossinets & Watts, 2009, p. 434). Academic discourse reveals little doubt that homophily exists as a grouping tendency in humans, but many questions remain as to how homophilic relationships are formed and the effects of these relationships. The following sections explore the study of homophily, the prevalence of homophilic relationships, exposure to cross-ideological content, and addressing homophily in schools.

The study of homophily

The historical timeline for the study of homophily begins with works of classical philosophy—chiefly those of Aristotle and Plato—and continues through to modern studies focusing on the sharing of information through social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogging websites. Current research into homophily has been shaped by McPherson and his associates' (2001) oft-cited article, “Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks.” This work organizes the findings of major studies carried out in the late twentieth century with the intent of providing summative—and potentially definitive—conclusions regarding homogeneity in social networking. The modern interest in the homophilic nature of humans was fostered by key studies of small group homophily in the early 1900s, which then expanded into examinations of peer groups in adolescents and large-scale studies on race and school desegregation in the United States. Most recently, digitalization of social networks has created opportunities for researchers to examine large-scale documentation of virtual relationships using readily available metrics.

Furthermore, McPherson and his associates' (2001) specification of language highlighted the importance of attending to the social structures that influence human interactions. Homogenous interactions occur due to *status homophily*, in which individuals tend to form bonds within their socio-demographic strata or acquired characteristics, or *value homophily*, which finds individuals choosing to associate with others who share their beliefs regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, or occupation. Later work by Kossinets and Watts (2009) also noted that homophily is *induced* when individuals are primarily presented with opportunities to interact in homogeneous networks (p. 407).

Prevalence of homophilic relationships

Homophily is influenced by the structural components of geography, organizational affiliations, and family ties. According to McPherson et al. (2001),

in diverse societies, race, and race-like ethnicity create the most stark divides. Sex, age, religion, and education also strongly structure our relations with others. Occupation, network position, behaviors, and intrapersonal values also show considerable homophily, but they seem to be more specific to certain types of networks and/or derived from the basic facts of sociodemographic homophily. Baseline patterns strongly shape networks by influencing the opportunity structure for contacts, both within large populations and within smaller social settings. (p. 429)

However, the increased use of digital networks that has occurred since the publication of “Birds of a Feather” has provided individuals with new structural opportunities that have transcended physical barriers to contact between people of differing backgrounds and interests.

In an early study of digital networks, Kossinets and Watts (2009) examined the homophilic relationships of more than 30,000 college campus email users for a one-year period, finding both choice and structural constraints played a significant role in the formation of user relationships. Individuals with the fewest shared spaces and the least number of common attributes engaged in minimal or no interactions and individual preferences for associating with similar people corresponded with a lack of interest in forming new ties, leading the authors to conclude that “even a relatively weak preference for homophilous relationships will tend to be amplified over time” (p. 436).

In recent years, online social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have expanded into massive digital architectures that emphasize communication through social sharing of information. The rise of social information sharing has created “the formation of a public sphere, where a diversity of opinion and information can interact, or, conversely, to function as an echo chamber that reinforces established perspectives and opinions” (Colleoni, Rozza, & Arvidsson, 2014, p. 317). Although this virtual public sphere has been heralded by researchers and theorists as holding the promise to reinvigorate healthy public debate and civic engagement, users' preferences for affirmative content with which they already agree exposes them to the dangers of the echo chamber effect (Colleoni et al., 2014). This hazard has been much maligned by theorists, who warn that the use of filtering technologies to screen out dissonant information can “dangerously undermine the two fundamentals of any political system of freedom: civic participation and deliberation for social and human development” (Gozálviz, 2011, p. 133). Thus, digital networks' opportunity to transcend the structural constraints

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات