MEDIA ECHO CHAMBERS

Selective Exposure and Confirmation Bias in Media Use, and its Consequences for Political Polarization

Peter M. Dahlgren
M.Sc.
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Abstract
The new digital media landscape has created a high-choice media environment that
has made it easier for people to find news and information that support their
political beliefs and attitudes, and avoid news and information that challenge those
beliefs or attitudes. How does this affect people’s selection of content and political
polarization in the long run? This thesis investigates the relationship between
different political preferences (political party, political interest and ideological
leaning) and selective media use over time among the Swedish population, and
whether this selectivity leads to political polarization (ideological polarization and
affective polarization). The thesis uses longitudinal surveys with a cross-section and
panel design, and also a survey experiment. The results suggest that selectivity has
not increased to the point that people in general only select information that
supports their beliefs or attitudes, nor that people in general necessarily avoid
information that challenge those beliefs or attitudes. Political interest is also one key
motivator for people to select news and information that challenge them politically.
The metaphor of a media echo chamber, where the only voices people hear are
more of the same, is therefore far from reality.