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How Social Media Algorithms Shape Offline Civic Participation: A Framework of Social-Psychological Processes

Haesung Jung, Wenhao Dai, and Dolores Albarracín

Abstract

Even though social media platforms have created opportunities for more efficient and convenient civic participation, they are unlikely to bring about social change if the online actions do not propagate to offline civic participation. This article begins by reviewing the meta-analytic evidence on the relation between social media use and offline civic participation. Following this discussion, we present a theoretical framework that incorporates the attitudinal, motivational, and relational processes that may mediate the effect of social media use on offline civic participation. The framework highlights how social media algorithms may shape attitudes on important societal issues, promote generalized action goals among habitual users, and build social capital. We further discuss factors that may strengthen or undermine each of these processes, suggest ways to design and implement algorithms that may promote offline civic participation, and propose questions for future research.

Keywords

social media, algorithm, civic participation, activism, action

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Many contemporary social movements have been curated on social media. For example, although the Occupy Wall Street protests against economic inequality rarely appeared in legacy media in its early