

# MISQ Archivist

## Understanding Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: The Impact of Social Media on Diversification and Partisan Shifts in News Consumption

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### Abstract

Echo chambers and filter bubbles are potent metaphors that encapsulate widespread public fear that the use of social media may limit the information that users encounter or consume online. Specifically, the concern is that social media algorithms combined with tendencies to interact with like-minded others both limits users' exposure to diverse viewpoints and encourages the adoption of more extreme ideological positions. Yet empirical evidence about how social media shapes information consumption is inconclusive. We articulate how characteristics of platform algorithms and users' online social networks may combine to shape user behavior. We bring greater conceptual clarity to this phenomenon by expanding beyond discussion of a binary presence or absence of echo chambers and filter bubbles to a richer set of outcomes incorporating changes in both diversity and slant of users' information sources. Using a data set with over four years of web browsing history for a representative panel of nearly 200,000 U.S. adults, we analyzed how individuals' social media usage was associated with changes in the information sources they chose to consume. We find differentiated impacts on news consumption by platform. Increased use of Facebook was associated with increased information source diversity and a shift toward more partisan sites in news consumption; increased use of Reddit with increased diversity and a shift toward more moderate sites; and increased use of Twitter with little to no change in either. Our results demonstrate the value of adopting a nuanced multidimensional view of how social media use may shape information consumption.

**Keywords:** Echo chamber, filter bubble, diversity, polarization, slant, news, personalization