Master Thesis

The Selective Exposure Hypothesis Revisited: Does Social Networking Make a Difference?

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This thesis aims to answer the following research question: In what ways do the audience's news interaction habits in social networking sites influence online exposure to political difference? The methodology used will employ multidisciplinary discourse analysis, literature review and two case studies. It is argued that the selective exposure hypothesis is still valid in the context of SNSs. However, it is found though that some characteristics promote exposure to political diversity, especially when compared to traditional media. It is the subject's responsibility to exploit the many opportunities presented in SNSs to gain access to and interact with diverse political information.

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The broad use of the Internet in the information age has once again triggered the discussion concerning the information overload phenomenon. Freedom of choice may lead to frustration, which generates passive consuming, personalized news and avoidance of unpleasant, opposite opinions (Pérez 2010, 56). These novel circumstances may lead to "the emotional state of dissatisfaction due to the increasing amount and decreasing quality of information" (Koroleva et al. 2011, 171). Therefore, there is a need to better understand what these relatively new information interaction habits mean for the exposure of an individual to political information.

In the past, the physical layout of a paper, for example, meant that people would be exposed to news even if they did not initially intend to read them. This does not happen in the online environment because the reader proceeds directly to specific portals (Pérez 2010). According to Kamiya, the Internet gives readers what they want, while newspapers give them what they need (2009).

The above statement relates to the selective exposure hypothesis found in media and communication sciences discourse. This hypothesis refers to people's preference for exposure to information that agrees with their pre-existing opinions, rather than to counterattitudinal points of view (Sears and Freedman 1967, 197).

Not surprising, this discussion is now revived. The Internet offers individuals countless choices and opportunities for news and information. However positive this may seem, research has shown that existing media policies do not facilitate exposure to political diversity, but lead to further polarization and fragmentation (Munson 2012, 1). In this environment, people tend to prefer sources that are close to their own views, rather than other, more challenging or contradictory ones. As a result, these information consumption patterns may lead to greater political fragmentation or even to extremes.

In addition, individuals are increasingly filtering political news and information. Today, a popular way to do this is through social networking, which allows large numbers of users to interact and share ideas, activities, events, and interests within their individual networks. In view of the proliferation of social networking sites (SNSs), the explosion of their popularity, and their complex dynamics and behavior, it is certainly important to revisit the selective exposure hypothesis , and study how it is affected by social networking.

In this context, the research question this thesis addresses is formulated as follows*:*

In what ways do the audience's news interaction habits in social networking sites influence online exposure to political difference?

To elaborate on this question I will employ multidisciplinary academic sources, especially from the fields of psychology, sociology, philosophy, and, of course, communication science. Furthermore, I will conduct two case studies in order to examine whether the academic discourse coincides with practice.

The thesis is organized as follows. In the first chapter, I discuss the selective exposure hypothesis. I begin with a historical overview of the debate, while I attempt to define selective exposure. I investigate the criteria the audience applies to choose information and deliberate on how the phenomenon of selective exposure is found in different media. I also initiate the discussion about the concern regarding political fragmentation in the online environment. In particular the question here is whether the audience's habits regarding filtering the news and personalizing information, results in further selective exposure or in increased exposure to political difference and variety.

In the second chapter, I investigate the matter of political diversity, as it is a central concept to this thesis. First, I provide a definition in order to make clear how this notion is perceived in the present thesis. Secondly, I articulate on the topic of pluralism in the media discourse and specify that in this thesis I will focus on its 'internal' conceptual distinction. Finally, I discuss the importance of political diversity in a democracy.

The aim of the third chapter is to offer an analysis of information and news exposure patterns in SNSs. I introduce this topic by addressing the phenomenon of the changing media landscape, as more and more citizens are informed daily through various platforms. Then, I engage with people's interaction habits with political information in the SNSs environment, with a focus on the two most popular SNSs: Facebook and Twitter. In addition, I closely examine the case study of the Facebook Washington Post Social Reader application. I then proceed with determining the meaning of the source in SNSs. I also define and measure information credibility in the context of SNSs. Lastly, I present a historical overview of the theory of media effects to better understand the effectiveness of messages shared on SNSs, especially regarding political communication. To this end, I discuss the possibility towards a return to the theory of limited effects.

In the fourth chapter, my goal is to evaluate a novel version of the selective exposure hypothesis, with a focus on SNSs. Specifically, I discuss whether SNSs lead to further selective exposure or to exposure to increased political difference and variety. In order to accomplish this I elaborate on the role of the inadvertency thesis, online political discussions and the blurring boundaries of cyberspace. Furthermore, I present the case study of "Upworthy", as an example of how exposure to important information may be promoted in the context of SNS and the possibilities towards exposure to political diversity.

In the fifth chapter, my aspiration is to conceptualize the subject. This is done by exploring the concept of "the self". I particularly focus on the theories of the earlier philosophers John Locke and David Hume and the contemporary Daniel Dennett, Paul Ricoeur and Alasdair McIntyre. My principal aim here is to analyze the concept of "the narrative self" and how it may influence selective exposure to information on SNSs.

Finally, the sixth chapter contains my conclusions.

CHAPTER 1: EXPLORING THE SELECTIVE EXPOSURE HYPOTHESIS

The debate this thesis focuses on is selective exposure. In particular, the question here is whether the audience's habits, regarding filtering the news and personalizing information, result into further selective exposure, or into increased exposure to political difference and variety. This subject is not new; it has troubled academic research during the past decades. What kind of information does the audience select to get exposed to? Is this choice made consciously or unconsciously? What are the factors that affect this kind of decisions? Does the phenomenon of selective exposure follow the same patterns in each medium, or are habits of exposure to political information different when choosing a newspaper or watching the news on television, for example?

The above are some of the questions this chapter aims to answer. This discussion is essential in order to proceed with the analysis of a nuanced version of the selective exposure phenomenon, with a focus on SNSs. Therefore, let us begin with diving deeper into the understandings and characteristics of selective exposure throughout the years. In order to better examine this concept we will employ multidisciplinary academic sources, especially within the fields of psychology, sociology and, of course, communication science.

1.1   HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The subject of how one selects information is not new. Paul Lazarsfeld, one of the leaders in 20th-century sociology, et al. (1948) in *Selective Exposure to Communication* where amongst the first who introduced and recognized the selective exposure hypothesis. The authors argue that: "It is likely that a desire for reinforcement of one's own point of view exists" (p. 166). The selective exposure theory, historically, associates preference as an action that favors opinion reinforcement and avoids opinion challenges (Garrett 2009, 267).

Notwithstanding, even with the plausibility of the selective exposure hypothesis in mind, there is no clear evidence that individuals prefer supportive over nonsupportive information (Sears and Freedman 1967, 212; Matthes 2012, 150). The hypothesis remains a debated topic, as research and connected studies' results do not

always point towards the same direction. This creates the need to dive deeper into the origins and arguments of the selective exposure hypothesis.

The early appraisals of selective exposure took place in the period between 1957-time of the first description of cognitive dissonance, while research on the topic grew notably during the 1960s (Sears and Freedman 1967; Ehrlich et al. 1957; Mills et al. 1961; Feather 1963; Rosen 1961; McGinnies and Rosenbaum 1965; Schramm and Carter 1959; Stempel 1961). The then seventeen conducted studies regarding selective exposure presented contradictory results. As John L. Cotton remarks, seven of them found evidence for the effect, nine found no evidence, while one demonstrated mixed results (as found in Zillmann and Bryant 1985, 18).

In their article "Selective Exposure to Information: A Critical Review" (1967), David 0. Sears, Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles, and Jonathan L. Freedman, Associate Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, endeavor to answer the question of which factors or biases account for selectivity. For this purpose they offer an overall analysis, literature overview and understanding of the selective exposure phenomenon. In short, they describe the causes and the effects of selective exposure.

The authors appear critical of the concept in total, as they argue that there is not enough proof that people prefer supportive over non-supportive information. They state that not all research concerning the hypothesis of selective exposure coincides with each other. More precisely, a number of studies indicate that people are not characterized by a general preference for supportive, as opposed to nonsupportive information, where the former is defined as "the communicator's taking the same general position as the subject", while the latter as "his taking the opposite position" (Sears and Freedman 1967, 203).

Therefore, the audience's preference for neither proattitudinal nor counterattitudinal opinions can be characterized as definite. Sears and Freedman (1967) in their review present a number of studies that portray inconsistent results:

> "Five studies showed some preference for supportive
> information: Ehrlich et al. (1957), Freedman and Sears
> (1963), Adams (1g61), Mills et al. (positive articles) (1961),
> and Rosen (positive articles (1961). Eight showed no
> preference: Mills et al. (negative articles) (1959), Feather
> (nonsmokers only) (1962), Feather (1963), Mills and Ross
> (1964), Jecker (1964), Sears (1966), and Sears and Freedman

(1963 and 1965). And five showed a preference for
nonsupportive information: Rosen (choice-reversal articles)
(1961), Brodbeck (1956), Feather (smokers only) (1962),
Sears (1965), and Freedman (1965a)." (p. 207-208)

The authors conclude that the selective exposure hypothesis where people incline toward supportive information is not sufficiently proved.

On the contrary, scholars such as Mills (1968) and Katz (1968), suggest the existence of selective exposure. However, it is noteworthy that some of the earlier studies suffer from various methodological errors (Zillmann and Bryant 1985, 19).

Later research, from 1967 to 1983, brought about more affirmative results for selective exposure (Zillmann and Bryant 1985, 22). One of the aspects investigated more thoroughly was the role of the different levels of dissonance experienced by the individual, especially regarding selective exposure to political information (Rhine 1967). It is shown that individuals with measured levels of dissonance indicate strong selective exposure results, while those with low or very high levels demonstrate little effect. Nonetheless, research overall in this period produced more positive results, indicated several moderating factors and was more cautiously realized.

More recent research has also engaged with the understanding of selective exposure to stories. It has also stressed the significance of the length of exposure (Garrett 2009, 268). Examining story selection at the same time with the time one may dedicate to a story may reveal information about how the individual reacts after choosing a specific piece of information. Superficial elements are not enough in order to get a complete insight of the opinions expressed in the full story. For instance, one may choose a story based on details like a title or a picture. Therefore, dependent to the length of reading the researcher may deeper comprehend the person's responses towards like-minded or opposite opinions. For this reason Garrett (2009), assistant professor in the School of Communication at the Ohio State University, conducted a study that measures both "interest in reading" and "read time" (p. 272). The results support the hypothesis that people consistently seek evaluation of their own attitudes. Also, it is found that they seemingly avoid challenging opinions, without this meaning though that they are not interested in engaging with other angles of the story.

In addition, in the current media environment, the information selection is much more complex than just choosing one type of information over another (Garrett 2009, 267). The complexity is caused by the fact that news stories may include

diverse opinions, viewpoints and evidence about one matter. News outlets offer their audience a collection of stories presenting different impressions and attitudes, independent of the medium they use. Therefore, it is the individual's decision to embrace one newspaper over another, or more often nowadays, to choose among different news outlets, particularly in the online environment (ibid.). As a result, in the context of the selective exposure hypothesis, it is essential also to take into consideration not only what arguments one chooses or avoids to be exposed to, but also how the various opinions and different viewpoints influence his or her interpretation of the story.

In conclusion, selective exposure is undoubtedly a debated topic. Throughout the years of research, different studies have indicated conflicting results. Consequently, this theory has been criticized and tested in numerous occasions. Both early and contemporary researchers have debated on whether they should endorse or reject selective exposure (Stroud 2008, 342).

At this point it is important to stress the fact that the different selective exposure studies have been conducted "on topics as diverse as cars, parenting methods and political preferences" (Stroud 2008, 344). Consequently, the different topics contribute to the studies' conflicting results. Political topics, though, seem especially prone to inspire selective exposure patterns (ibid.).

The selective exposure hypothesis has been criticized by many, while supported by others at the same time. However, the phenomenon will not cease to exist as long as researchers continue to ask right and intriguing questions. As Aronson (1978) stated: "in social sciences, what generally kills a theory is benign neglect - by its critics as well as by its advocates (p. 215)" (as quoted in Zillmann and Bryant 1985, 30).

1.2   DEFINING SELECTIVE EXPOSURE

In Freedman and Sears' influential review, also mentioned above, the authors refer to the phenomenon of selective exposure signifying people's preference to be exposed to information that agrees with their preexisting opinions (p. 197). The most commonly cited explanation for this phenomenon is cognitive dissonance theory (Garrett 2009, 267). In this sense, the cause of selective exposure may be found in people's intention to relief themselves from cognitive dissonance (Sears and Freedman 1967, 208). The latter is defined as "the negative arousal that individuals experience when they encounter anything suggesting that a prior decision has undesirable implications" (Festinger 1957 quoted in Garret and Resnick 2011, 110). Individuals react to this

unpleasant feeling by either seeking for information that validates their existing opinions, defined as *confirmation bias*, or avoiding opposite point of views, an attitude which is described with the term *defensive avoidance* (Garrett and Resnick 2011, 110).

People experience positive feelings when presented with information that confirms their decisions (Garrett 2009, 267-268). Accordingly, they intentionally seek for exposure to communications that agree with their already crystallized opinions, while simultaneously avoid any material that challenges them (Sears and Freedman 1967, 197).

Therefore, the most prominent cause of preference for proattitudinal opinions is, as mentioned above, found in the context of cognitive dissonance theory. Firstly, this may be reasoned because individuals wish for their actions and opinions to remain nonconflicting. Secondly, unwilling exposure to non-supportive communication may result in increased selectivity for supportive information. Thirdly, one's tendency for exposure to like-minded opinions is reversely connected to the amount of confidence he or she has in his or her original opinion (Sears and Freedman 1967, 208). In addition, research suggests that opinion reinforcement is of greater value as opposed to aversion to opinion challenge (Garrett 2009, 265).

On the other hand, Sears and Freedman (1967) identify another view of the selective exposure definition, one that does not recognize any particular cause or bias leading to this behavior; they address it as *de facto* selectivity. The latter is characterized by the audience's "unusual agreement about a matter of opinion" (p. 196). This version of selective exposure concentrates on the fact that exposure is always selective. Therefore it is expected that people will engage with information that agrees with their predispositions, especially regarding matters of opinion.

1.3   CRITERIA OF HOW PEOPLE CHOOSE.

Some factors play a more decisive role than others regarding selective exposure to political information. Under which circumstances does the individual choose to be exposed to opinion reinforcing information and when to information that contradicts their opinion. What are the criteria, consciously or unconsciously, that the audience adopts in order to take a decision?

The most preeminent causes are strong political beliefs and partisanship. It is imperative to explore this phenomenon because, as Stroud (2008), Associate Professor of Communication Studies in the University of Texas at Austin, argues "if

partisan selective exposure is widespread, the public may develop more polarized, or extreme, attitudes in the direction of their political predispositions" (p. 343).

One's self-identity and political dispositions are important criteria that lead people to select congenial media news outlets (Stroud 2008, 345). Partisanship is one of the most powerful indicators of such behavior. Those with strong political predispositions are more likely to choose a news outlet with like-minded information or avoid challenging news in order to attain a desired effect and an agreeable emotional state. This phenomenon is especially enhanced during presidential campaigns when the public's interest for politics is augmented.

For instance, partisanship influences the individual when he or she chooses to be exposed to a certain newspaper or television show. During the presidential campaign of 2004, republicans in the U.S.A. were more often observed reading newspapers that supported Bush or watching FOX News, which are known for their conservative character, rather than more liberal news sources (Garrett 2009, 266).

Even though people's beliefs are among the main motivations to exposure (Best et al. 2005; Chaffee et al. 2001; Ehrlich et al. 1957; Lazarsfeld et al. 1948; McCroskey and Prichard 1967; McGinnies and Rosenbaum 1965; Schramm and Carter 1959; Stempel 1961; Ziemke 1980), other studies show contradictory results. Consequently, attitudes and beliefs are not the sole motivation for selective exposure (Feather 1962; Freedman 1965; Meffert et al. 2006; Mills et al. 1959; Rosen 1961). This leads to the need of examining alternative influential agents that account for selective exposure to political information (Stroud 2008, 344).

Professors Sears and Freedman (1967) note the importance of investigating the different factors that affect voluntary exposure to information (p. 211). In other words, people's preference to supportive or their avoidance to non-supportive communication may also be justified by other elements, independent from one's predispositions and partisan preferences.

Firstly, research has documented that education and social class function as indicators to voluntary exposure habits regarding political and public affairs matters (Sears and Freedman 1967, 209). For example, college-educated persons are more likely to be exposed to more diverse information during presidential campaigns than grade-school education persons (ibid.).

Secondly, "utility of information" is another component of exposure preferences (Sears and Freedman 1967, 210). In other words, the individual is more keen to seek information that has specific personal value that may serve a useful and practical

aspiration. Utility influences people's exposure to a particular subject, even if the information is counterattitudinal to his or her opinion of the matter in question.

Thirdly, another significant determinant is the subject's "past history of exposure on the issue" (Sears and Freedman 1967, 211). Impressively, it has be proven that extended exposure to the one side's rationale, leads to increased openeness to the other side's arguments, as well. This happens because when people are familiar with one side of the story, they inquire to be informed about the opposite position, regardless if the latter attacks or supports their own bias.

In addition, Zillmann and Bryant (1985) note that dissonance-motivated selective exposure may be modified by other factors as well (p. 29). In particular, these factors include the level of dissonance experienced by the subject, the impact of the information choice, demands for honesty and impartiality, attractiveness and refutability of the information (ibid.).

All things considered, the above along with the factors of education and social class, utility of information, and past history of exposure on a particular issue are factors that nonetheless influence preferences (Sears and Freedman 1967, 209-212). Selective exposure is not only influenced by cognitive dissonance, but by other "positive" factors as well.

1.4   SELECTIVE EXPOSURE IN DIFFERENT MEDIA

We have seen that selective exposure is not a novel academic debate, and that certainly, there is a calling for continuing the discussion. Every new medium reinvents the discussion. It is essential to question whether selective exposure habits follow the same patterns in different media. Do print media, television and the Internet provoke selectivity in the same way? It is valuable to answer this question, especially regarding our aim to, later in this thesis, examine the relationship between the medium of social networking sites and selective exposure. Do all media motivate selective exposure equally?

People's news interaction habits are changing due to convergence media and culture (Jenkins 2006); they are collecting information from both traditional media and the online environment. So especially now, it is important to understand the patterns of selective exposure across media types (Stroud 2008, 346).

In print media, an important factor that influences selective exposure is their availability (Stroud 2008, 359). In certain communities there are limited options for subscription to non-local newspapers. Therefore, people in this case are exposed to

like-minded newspapers that, at the same time are responsible for the political predispositions of the community they are addressing. However, it is documented that even in more "open" communities people's political beliefs and predispositions are connected to the newspapers chosen (Stroud 2008, 359). Preference of newspaper is often affected by partisanship, but this is a phenomenon that occurs across media outlets.

On the other hand, in print media the stories' importance is determined by the medium's design and structure, and thus the public affairs related topics occupy more space and are in the front pages. Consequently, readers are exposed to these particular political matters, even in an 'involuntary' or unconscious way (Yang and Grabe 2011, 4).

In television, the audience has a broad spectrum of communication channels to choose from. The phenomenon of expansion of choice leads to the fragmentation and polarization of news media (Arceneaux et al. 2012, 174). In other words, cable news networks are often identified according to their ideological and political lines. Research, however, has also shown that the audience, being aware of the contemporary fragmented media environment develops an "oppositional media hostility". The public has realized that partisan news outlets maintain a certain biased political view and cover the news deliberately, especially when they report on controversial issues. As a result, people become suspicious towards the news.

Furthermore, nowadays television gives viewers the possibility to avoid news channels they do not agree with or even to resign from political information all together. This alteration in influence between traditional and new media may lead to the creation of a "knowledge gap". The original meaning of knowledge gaps can be found in Tichenor et al. (1970):

> "as the infusion of mass media information into a social
> system increases, segments of the population with higher
> socio-economic status tend to acquire this information at a
> faster rate than the lower status segments, so that the gap in
> knowledge between these segments tends to increase rather
> than decrease" (quoted in Yang and Grabe 2011, 3).

Prior (2005) claims that the changing media environment only results into the sharpening of the pre-existing knowledge gaps among the public (p. 578). Free choice makes people concentrate on news that interest them in particular, leaving everything else unexplored. Individuals who prefer (hard) news will have more

knowledge about the political field. On the contrary, people who enjoy entertainment (soft) news will become less exposed to political news, and thus less informed. Soft news preference has increased, as opposed to hard news and this is perceived as a negative influence for democracy. Prior (2005) notes that this "decreasing size of the news audience is not necessarily an indication of reduced political interest" but it may be an indication that before people did not have alternatives (p. 588).

Consequently, people who do not intentionally seek for political information have the opportunity to avoid it by choosing other kinds of information on television. This phenomenon also occurs in the online environment, but we shall discuss the debate concerning the relationship between the Internet and selective exposure extensively in the next subchapter.

1.5 THE INTERNET AND SELECTIVE EXPOSURE

In this subchapter I will address the academic debate that refers to the Internet's role in a pluralistic democracy and the contemporary democratic process. The matter in question is if the variety in quality and quantity of choices available in the Internet actually enhance plurality or do they impose limitations (Kim 2011, 971).

Proponents claim that the increase of personalization and information filtering in the online environment leads to exposure only to similar-minded opinions. In contrast, others say that the Internet is a space where one is exposed to very diverse points of view, and thus, it promotes participation in the political process.

In order to explain the two above parts of the coin, it is important to point out two essential theses that must be taken into consideration by anyone who is concerned with political difference exposure (Kim 2011, 972). The first is the *fragmentation thesis* which relates to "the challenge to coherent societies and effective governments presented by the breakdown of broadly shared social and political experience" (Bennett 1998, 741) which may be augmented by the increasing use of the Internet.

The Internet offers people countless choices and opportunities for news and information. However positive this may seem, research has shown that existing media policies do not facilitate exposure to political diversity, but lead to further polarization and fragmentation (Munson 2012, 1). In this environment, people tend to prefer sources that are close to their own views, rather than other, more challenging ones. As a result, this may lead to even great political fragmentation and extremes (Stroud 2008, 341).

In addition, in their article "Resisting Political Fragmentation on the Internet", R. Kelly Garrett, assistant professor in the School of Communication at the Ohio State University and Paul Resnick, professor in the School of Information at the University of Michigan, also discuss the matter of political fragmentation (2011). The concern in the academic discourse is that because readers choose to follow only the like-minded opinions of their friends and family, they will not be exposed to other views that challenge their preexisting opinions (109).

The authors remark that selective exposure originates significantly more from an attraction to proattitudinal information, and less from an aversion to counterattitudinal information. Individuals personalize the content they get exposed to by seeking for like-minded opinions. Personalization, which is defined as "a form of user-to-system interactivity that uses a set of technological features to adapt the content, delivery, and arrangement of a communication to individual users' explicitly registered and/or implicitly determined preferences" (Thurman and Schifferes 2012, 2), is now common practice in the Internet. People choose where they want their information to come from, and what kind of information they want to get exposed to.

On the contrary, the second is the *inadvertency thesis* (Kim 2011, 972). This suggests that people are likely to be exposed to cross-cutting opinions. The blurring boundaries of cyberspace may facilitate exposure to political difference, as people may be exposed to a diversity of perspectives even without seeking for information. Another interesting finding is that apolitical space is also a fertile ground for political discussion and exposure. This provokes the question of which environment is best suited for political diversity exposure.

In spite of the above, the 'threat' of personalization may be approached also in a more optimistic attitude. Garret and Resnick (2011) assert that "we turn the 'personalization leads to fragmentation' claim on its head by arguing that personalization could instead be a crucial tool for *resisting* fragmentation" (p. 109). They argue that even if the risks of narrow channels are apparent, technology and how people use it is still malleable. A positive argument for this is that the audience expects to be exposed to challenging viewpoints, and it prefers news organizations that offer ideological heterogeneity in the news.

The authors identify the origin of the 'problem' in the way automated personalization services work and pinpoint the need for more sophisticated notions of similarity, as often similarity is interpreted as homogeneity. They suggest techniques that could help people access diverse and challenging information, which include:

> "presenting challenging information only if it exceeds a high
> bar on criteria such as quality and relevance; offering
> challenging information alongside confirmatory information;
> providing an opposing view only when people are most open
> to it; informing people about the prevalence of challenging
> opinions; and reinforcing the norm of balanced exposure."
> (p. 117)

This proposition should make us think about which are the sources individuals will choose from in the online environment of SNSs. This is a matter of growing importance because as Carlos Elías Pérez (2010), professor of journalism in Carlos III University of Madrid, observes:

> "What is truly novel about the digital society is that
> information that was once received, evaluated, and published
> only by the mass media is now also received directly by the
> whole of society, without the need of a journalist as
> intermediary (p. 51)"

Therefore, it is important to explore the types of information sources that appear in peoples' news streams. The Internet and SNSs offer a distribution channel to news sources, while they act as media communicators.

All things considered, in this thesis we must take this debate one step further and question social media personalization techniques. Do they nudge individuals towards challenging information, and thus to political diversity, or do they promote fragmentation and polarization?

Exposure to political information in general, and to more diverse opinions in particular, is an essential ingredient for the well-being of a democracy. The public needs to be informed about all aspects of society and political affairs in order to better function inside the habermasian public sphere[1]. The mechanisms that move society are diverse. Therefore, in order for people originating from different backgrounds to coexist it is essential that opinions and stereotypes people have of each other are as spherical as possible. The same applies for political awareness of the dissimilar.

2.1   DEFINING POLITICAL DIVERSITY

In its more general sense, diversity is defined as the "collections representing multiple views in order to achieve the goal of exposing people to information that may be discordant with their current beliefs" (Munson 2012, 14). This concept embraces the notions of acceptance and respect. Diversity represents the understanding that every individual is unique. It characterized as a political entity that has identifiable cultural and background differences. These alterations are described in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political views and other beliefs.

In addition, political diversity is connected to the term political pluralism. Dr. Avigail Eisenberg (1995), political science professor at the University of Victoria, defines political pluralism as the "theories that seek to organize and conceptualize political phenomena on the basis of the plurality of groups to which individuals belong and by which individuals seek to advance and, more importantly, to develop, their interests" (p. 2). This definition emphasizes more on political rather than metaphysical, philosophical, sociological or psychological pluralism.

Pluralism is often distinguished between political and cultural pluralism. The former is about "the need, in the interests of democracy, for a range of political opinions and viewpoints to be expressed in the media" (Klimkiewicz 2005, 2). Relatively, the latter

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[1] The classical concept of the "public sphere" of Habermas, as defined in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* refers to the "site and subject of liberal democratic practice" (Dean 2003, 95). The public sphere originates from a "framework of an emerging bourgeois state and economy, as well as in specific structures of civil society" (Friedland et al. 2004, 5). In other words, the public sphere is the place where people discuss matters of public concern with the purpose to reach a consensus, at least in the Habermas sense.

is seen as the need for a variety of cultures, reflecting the diversity within society, to find expression in the media.

2.2   MEDIA PLURALISM

The importance of diversity is stressed in the media discourse. The European Union's (2000) commitment to respect freedom and pluralism of the media, as well as the right to information and freedom of expression is praised in Article 11 of the "Charter of Fundamental Rights" (p. C 364/11). Pluralism is connected with the belief that exposure to difference and public dialogue has the goal of discovering of the ingredients that signify the "common good" for all members in society. For instance, some ways in which pluralistic mass media can contribute to diversity include: reflecting differences in society, giving access to different points of view, and offering a wide range of choice (McQuail 1992, 144).

Professor Hoffmann-Riem (1987), legal scholar and a former judge of the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany, while defining political diversity, identifies four main 'dimensions of diversity':

> "-of formats and issues: essentially referring to differences of
> media function, such as entertainment, information,
> education, etc.;
> - of contents: in relation to opinion and topics of information
> and news;
> - of persons and groups: essentially access, but also
> representation;
> - of geographical coverage and relevance"
> (as found in McQuail 1992, 144)

In other words, media pluralism refers to the presence of a variety of media within the habermasian public sphere. Ideally, this diversity has the purpose of providing access to a variety of voices and attitudes, in which citizens can identify themselves (Klimkiewicz 2005, 2).

In the media discourse, media pluralism is often divided into the ideas of 'external' and 'internal' pluralism (Doyle 2002, 12; Klimkiewicz 2005, 2). The former deals with the macro level of media institutions and types where the main concern is media ownership and concentration diversity. The later connects to the micro level of content, practice and performance. This distinction between media ownership and content is the most common regarding the framework on media pluralism.

Therefore, in order to assess media pluralism we need to set a framework that balances between conceptual distinctions (internal, external) and the aspects to which these distinctions apply (media structure, media performance) (figure 1).

Table 1: Framework for the Assessment of Media Pluralism

Media Pluralism	Structural	Performance-Related (content and delivery to audiences)	Normative
External	• ownership structure • concentration of ownership • local and regional media structure • access (market entry and creation of new media outlets)	• media types and profiles • specialised and minority media • thematic media	• legal measures • regulatory policies at the level of media systems
Internal	• editorial independence • employment strategies • production strategies (information sources, content production and recycling, etc.)	• geographical coverage • political coverage • cultural representations • originally produced contents	• media content regulation • internal codes of conduct • in-house agreements

Figure 1: *Framework for the assessment of media pluralism* (Klimkiewicz 2005, 4)

However, the academic discussion around this topic has focused mostly on 'external' media pluralism. Recently though, considering the changing contemporary media landscape, it is argued that there is a need to understand pluralism more in terms of media's role in communicating diverse opinions in the public sphere, rather than in terms of media ownership (Klimkiewicz 2005, 1; Karppinen 2010, 151). Therefore, in this paper we shall refer to political and media diversity in relation to the 'internal' aspect of it, with the aim to address "strong requirements of pluralistic democracy" (Klimkiewicz 2005, 1).

2.3   POLITICAL DIVERSITY'S IMPORTANCE

The positive outcomes of exposure to political diversity are numerous (Munson 2012, 3). Society's exposure only to agreeable information and like-minded opinion may present risks. This subchapter aims to examine in detail the societal benefits of exposure to different views.

Firstly, debates are an essential part of a healthy democracy, and they are only possible when individuals acknowledge both sides of the coin, and not only their own view. Ideal debates are delivered by people, who are open to challenging ideas and

have the common goal of reaching a habermasian consensus rather than focusing on their own interests. Therefore, successful and frequent discussions are only possible when individuals have knowledge of all sides of a particular issue. If this goal is not reached there is a risk for political fragmentation and polarization (Garrett and Resnick 2011, 109). Extensive exposure to like-minded views might lead to extremes (Sunstein 2002, 188) and to risking the democratic discourse, in total. In additions, exposure to different opinions increases tolerance towards different attitudes (Garrett and Resnick 2011, 109).

Secondly, counterattitudinal knowledge enables a more "out of the box" way of thinking, and thus better problem solving, learning and understanding abilities (Munson 2012, 4). When people are exposed to diverse information, they are aware of the different perspectives and relevant information. As a result, they are able to combine this information and seek for more "unconventional" information about each issue. This way people are better prepared for more accurate decision-making.

Thirdly, processing different opinions and points of view is a necessary step in order to accept their actual legitimacy and value (Munson 2012, 5). For instance, it is observed that minorities tend to overestimate the civic value and dimension of their opinion. Exposure to diverse information may help clarify how broad an opinion really is in the whole of society, and hence people can avoid the risk of think of their ideas as normative and be more self-aware. Having a better assessment of the popularity of one's opinion, results into better acceptance of different more popular opinions, rather than resolving to conspiracy theories (Garrett and Resnick 2011, 109).

Therefore, it is essential to maintain exposure to political diversity because it promotes the well-being of public discussion, democratic processes and the coexistence of different groups and communities with different political and cultural backgrounds and interests in the whole of society. Political pluralism may significantly diminish the risks associated with narrow channels of communication that include polarization. Technology is still malleable, and it is in the way people use it that defines how diversity will be managed within the public sphere.

This chapter is concerned with the analysis of exposure to political news and information in social media. Social networking sites (SNSs), as they are referred to in this thesis, are changing the way people communicate. They are defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd and Ellison 2008, 211). In short, in these particular online environments individuals connect and interact with their friends and family and share their own views. Their rapid growth is impressive. In the USA, the traffic for news in social media has increased 57% since 2009 (Mitchell 2012).

This phenomenon justifies the need to do more research about the role of SNSs in news exposure. Social networking sites do not yet hold a significant portion of the news and information share in the media landscape. Nonetheless, the prediction is that SNSs will "certainly have an impact on how information is shared in the future" (Glynn et al. 2012, 119). We must note here that we are referring to the population that has access to the Internet and SNSs.

In this chapter I will focus on people's interaction habits with political information in the environments of the two most popular SNSs: Facebook and Twitter.

I aim to answer questions such as: How are SNSs used by the individuals? How does their network structure affect news distribution? What are the sources of political information in the social media environment? What is the level of political engagement? How does one measure information's credibility in SNSs?

The above are necessary steps in order to later explore how news distribution and SNSs filtering patterns influence individuals' exposure to political difference.

3.1   THE CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE

During recent years, the media landscape is changing. Citizens get their news from more than one different media on a daily basis (Baresch et al. 2011, 4), while interaction with information is taking place in numerous platforms. Print newspapers, television news broadcast, radio and the Internet all converged constitute the mediascape (Jenkins 2006). The routine of news gathering has significantly altered. The morning ritual of reading the newspaper or the evening

watching of news has transformed. The online environment is increasingly occupying an important space for information, and is often prevailing over print media. Not only professionals, but also the audience determines what the news is going to be. Consequently, as Baresch et al. (2011) argue, "the very nature of what we call news itself appears to be in a state of transition" (p. 4).

This "link economy" is opposed to the "ink economy". In the latter one had limited choices for news among the traditional one-way media, without many options for input by the part of the receiver (Baresch et al. 2011, 5-6). In contrast, in the current "link economy" individuals influence the flow and distribution of information by sharing or "liking" a source on Facebook, by "tweeting" something on Twitter or by simply sending an email to a friend. Everyone with Internet access is a potential node to the social information network.

Furthermore, the concept of a news receiver as a news "consumer" is outdated. The increasing possibilities of sharing content has resulted in the reciprocal relation among individuals: they are organizing and allocating the news via their social network, while they expect from other nodes of the network to keep them informed (Baresch et al. 2011, 7). This way of self-filtering information can be compared to the old-fashioned "word of mouth". For instance, Facebook often functions as a referent to other news and media sites.

Consequently, the original meaning of the role of the gatekeeper is changing. As Carlos Elías Pérez (2010), professor of journalism in Carlos III University of Madrid, observes:

> "What is truly novel about the digital society is that
> information that was once received, evaluated, and published
> only by the mass media is now also received directly by the
> whole of society, without the need of a journalist as
> intermediary (p. 51)"

The journalist's role as gatekeeper has altered. Bennet in 2004 wrote that the gate that was needed in the past for the public to gain access to political information is now gone (p. 290). Information is now flowing from all directions. However, he identifies the problem of poor quality in gatekeeping norms. He suggested a new model for news gatekeeping that is driven by different historical and political contexts, the reporter's news judgment values, bureaucratic or organizational news gathering routines, economics, and information and communication (p. 296). The author also predicted that new technological developments would introduce citizens

in the gatekeeping standards, and thus there would be potential for multi-directional press-government-citizen gatekeeping relations (p. 311), where each component will contribute meaningfully to the selection and construction of news. He concluded that it should be the journalists' and politicians' responsibility to use the technology rightfully in order to include citizens more fully in the public sphere.

As Bennet (2004) predicted, messengers in SNSs also function as gatekeepers (Oeldorf-Hirsch 2011, 21). Baresch et al. (2011) note that there is a growing belief by part of the population that "if the news is that important, it will find me" (p.2). Nowadays, sharing information, news and links is becoming common practice, and as a result people count on their connections to keep them informed. The "professional filter" that characterized the informer-audience relationship in more traditional forms of communication is gradually being replaced by the "social filter". The latter means that the audience is playing a more dynamic role in the flow of information (ibid.). "Stumblers", as this novel type of information receiver is described; get almost all their news either incidentally or through socially selected exposure.

In addition, a report delivered by the American University's School of Communication Center for Social Media, indicates five core areas where the idea about how people think about news has changed because of the rise of SNSs: choice, conversation, creation, curation and collaboration (Clark and Aufderheide 2009, 6-7). Individuals are adopting a variety of new roles in the media chain. They are active in seeking, comparing and disseminating information on important issues, while news is collaboratively created and discussed. It is also found that exposure to information posted by a friend, compared to news found on a website, may cause a feeling of personal relevance and thus, augment the person's interest in the story. This increasing participation in SNSs signals a shift in the organizational framework of online communities (Boyd and Ellison 2008, 219). SNSs are principally organized around people, not interests, while they appear to be "egocentric" networks, with the person at the center of their own community.

3.2   ENGAGEMENT WITH INFORMATION IN SNSS

Individuals' motivation for using SNSs has evolved since their appearance (Kaye 2011, 213). Initially people used SNSs in order to set up their individual profile and connect with their friends. Popularity is translated to the number of people in one's 'friends' list, which leads to motivation for further expanding of their network by adding more connections. Therefore, SNSs are mainly used to keep contact with friends, to make new friends, for social surveillance, and for tracking members of

one's social network. In newer research, though, it is found that motivation for SNS usage is also to gather political information (ibid) (figure 2).

Table 10.4 Top-10 motivations for heavily using political blogs and social networking sites for political information

Social networking sites (C2. Social networkers. Heavily use only SNSs)	Mean (range 1–5)
1. Because it's interesting	4.38
2. Because it is entertaining	4.15
3. To give me something to talk about with others	4.12
4. Because I want to learn something new	3.94
5. To keep up with political issues	3.88
6. Because information is easy to obtain	3.88
7. To be in contact with like-minded people	3.86
8. For ongoing political debates and arguments	3.85
9. To access political information at any time	3.82
10. To enjoy the excitement of an election race	3.79

Figure 2: *Motivations for using political blogs and SNSs for political information* (Kaye 2011, 213)

Each day the SNSs population is exposed to the information their connections have chosen to interact with. For instance, when users log in to Facebook, they are introduced to a news feed, outlining their friends' activity and the activity of the pages they have "liked" (Oeldorf-Hirsch 2011, v). Of course, SNSs have their own filtering mechanisms as well. For example, Facebook Newsfeed uses an algorithm to rank content based upon the likely interest to a user to help deliver the most relevant content[2]. But, this thesis will not focus on this, but on the filtering individuals select personally and through their friends. So let us explore how people interact with news in these environments.

SNSs create opportunities for breaking news, because users have the ability to either post their own experience or direct their friends to other information from media outlets (Glynn et al. 2012). The interaction with news on SNSs has word-of-mouth connotations. Recommendations, comments, "likes", "tweets" and "retweets" are elements of these environments that may trigger discussions among the network and even more involvement, interest and influence on political topics.

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[2] http://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook-marketing/sponsor-your-page-posts/10150675727637217

SNSs interaction habits and patterns question the individualistic, top-down ideology of traditional journalism (Hermida 2012, 1). Is it argued that individual intelligence is shifting towards a collective intelligence, where expertise and authority is assorted in the social network. Sending and receiving short messages to all of one's followers or to a selected group of them is as instant as their conception and writing. These interactions are seen by the whole network of friends (Oeldorf-Hirsch 2011, 11). For instance, the 140 characters Twitter text moves the fastest of all new media (Levinson 2009, 134). This is why Levinson (2009) characterizes Twitter as the "epitome of immediacy" (ibid.).

On SNSs people have a broader and more diverse social network online than physical. Here again we observe the new relation between mass and interpersonal communication (Levinson 2009, 135; Oeldorf-Hirsch 2011, 11). Mass media communication processes have been conceptualized as "one-way message transmissions from one source to a large, relatively undifferentiated and anonymous audience" (Walther et al. 2010, 18-19). This way of communication is opposed to interpersonal communication, which is conceived as a two-way message with a small number of participants who exchange messages knowing each other's identities (ibid). These two types of communication are characterized by complementary roles, regarding obtaining and distributing information. However, Chaffee notes that when seeking for sources of information, it is less anticipated to choose based on whether the source originates from a mass media or interpersonal channel.

3.2.1   FACEBOOK

Facebook offers new ways of discussing and sharing news stories with others. Oeldorf-Hirsch (2011) in her dissertation examines the possibility that this activity may result in better engagement with news content in the online environment. It is interesting to examine whether the habits of sharing and commenting on posts should enhance one's feeling of involvement in the story or influence others. Oeldorf-Hirsch's (2011) study examined the participants' responses to different news interactions and conditions (p. iii). First, news sharing conditions may vary from where the story is posted (news feed, friend's wall, or direct message), to what type of comment is made (opinion, question, or no comment), and to if the post involved "tagging" friends. Second, when a Facebook user receives information he or she may react in different ways: read it, comment on it or "like" it. Third, there is the control condition, where individuals read the story on the original source, for example a news website or a blog.

The results surfaced a lot of interesting insights on how people engage with political information in SNSs (Oeldorf-Hirsch 2011, iv). Sharing a story on one's wall showed that he or she gets more involved in a story. However, this feeling is reinforced after a week, especially if the post was accompanied by a question rather than an opinion. Furthermore, a greater sense of community was observed when the post involved tagging friends. Also, the number of "likes" received on a story led to greater interest, involvement, and a feeling of being informed about the topic. Comments that were recognized as favorable had positive psychological effects, too. Lastly, for those who found a piece of information posted by a friend, commenting or seeing other people's comments did not have a revealing feeling of involvement in the story.

In addition, Facebook also presents the "bandwagon effect" (Oeldorf-Hirsch 2011, 24). More precisely, this is connected to the feeling that if someone else likes something, then "I should too". This is especially seen in the number of "likes" a post receives. The more recommendations –in the form of a "like"- a story gets, the more likely it is that it will be perceived as important. As a result, the number of "likes" will be increased as more people will want "to jump on the bandwagon".

However, just being exposed to information does not mean that individuals are actually learning. The Cognitive Mediation Mode defines learning through elaboration defined as "connecting new information to other information stored in the memory, including prior knowledge, personal experiences, or the connection of two new bits of information together in new ways" (Eveland, 2001, p. 573 quoted in Oeldorf-Hirsch 2011, 15). Peer networks are found to influence political participation. This is because elaboration and consequently learning are aided by activities such as discussing or passing on the news (figure 3).
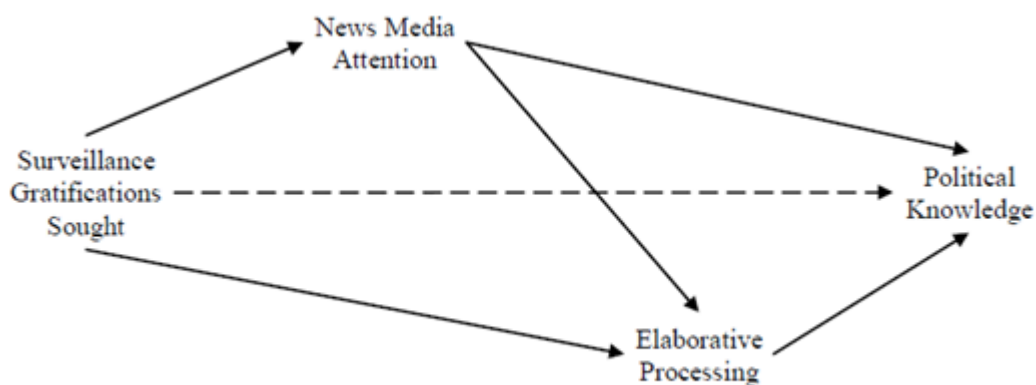

Figure 3: *Cognitive Mediation Model* (Evenland 2001, found in Oeldorf-Hirsch 2011, 15)

Glynn et al. (2012), in their article "All the news that's fit to post: A profile of news use on social networking sites", aim to examine the role and importance that news plays within these social networking sites. More and more news organizations have already established a presence in these sites. Therefore, the continuously growing population of SNSs users will potentially be exposed to news.

In order to further explore news exposure in social media, the authors of this article conducted a study. For this they used a sample of students, faculty, and staff from a large university in order to investigate the factors that are related to news use on Facebook. In short the study's purpose is to: "examine what factors lead to news use on SNSs in the first place" (p.114), by focusing on demographic variables and personality traits. In other words, what types of people are more likely to receive some or all of their news from sites like Facebook?

With the assigned hypotheses of the study, the authors focus on examining some specific factors -age, life satisfaction, extroversion and gender- in order to understand their influence on people's intention to seek news in social media.

The findings indicate that lower life satisfaction results into more SNS usage in search of news that is not considered mainstream. Extroversion does not consist a factor for news reading, posting and sharing. A fact that leads to the question if sharing news content is a more social or political behavior. Also, SNSs are not only used by the younger population, as people of all ages aim to socially connect through social media. Lastly, as far as the role of one's gender, it was found that women were also significantly more likely to use Facebook for news purposes.

CASE STUDY: FACEBOOK WASHINGTON POST SOCIAL READER APPLICATION

People's intentions to seek for political information and news on SNSs have been identified by established news organizations. They seek to engage their audience not only through online news sites, but also SNSs.

For example, the Washington Post developed an application for Facebook with the intention to use the 'social' filter we mentioned before explicitly when interacting with news through the Facebook environment. The "Washington Post Social Reader" was released on the 8th of July. It is a Facebook-based app that lets users read the paper from within their profiles and recommends articles based on what their friends are reading and sharing. The stories one reads are instantly shared with his or her friends, while the user's friends' stories are shared with the individual, as well. The

goal of the application is to create a "socially powered newswire of intriguing articles.³"

 The sources of news include not only Washington post articles, but news coming from other partnering sources, such as the Associated Press, Reuters, Mashable, Slate and many others. The 'front page' listing depends on the user's interests (measured by clicks and "likes") and what his or her friends have been reading (figure 4). This filtering technique functions with the purpose that "the more time you spend with the app, the better it gets to know you.⁴"Also, one may observe one specific friend's activity by selecting him or her from the 'friend's list' and choose from what he or she has been reading. Commenting on stories and initiating discussions also consist features of the social reader. This type of social filtering has also been defined as "Social Collaborative Filtering"; a form of passive personalization in which content recommendations are made based on the behavior of a user's social network (Thurman and Schifferes 2012, 12).
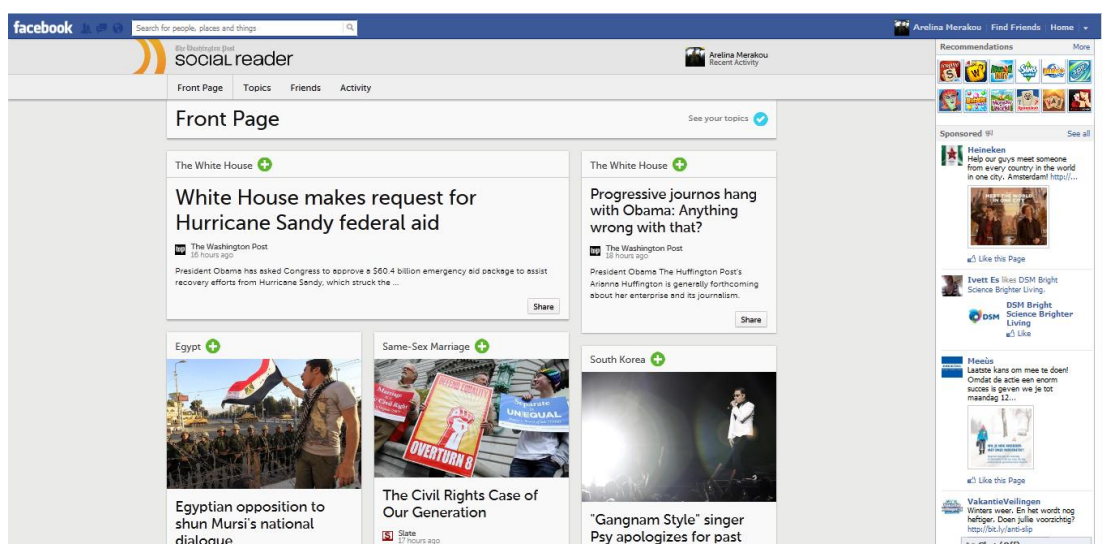
Figure 4: *Washington Post Social Reader 'Front page'*

What is noteworthy about "the Social Reader" is that it functions exclusively in the Facebook environment. This does not come as a surprise since the application is the product of a Washington Post and Facebook partnership. Its purpose is exposure to news through a SNS environment. Seeing what kind of stories friends are reading, liking and commenting on is the driving force of this new type of "newspaper".

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³ http://www.washingtonpost.com/socialreader
⁴ Ibid.

Don Graham, chairman of the Washington Post company promoted the reader by saying that this "friend-centric" news site "new, different, and fun" (Scoble 2011). Vijay Ravindran, chief digital officer, says that "We're absolutely delighted by the audience we've been able to gain". The Washington Post Social Reader has proved popular, with some 9.5 million users signing up for it, nearly two-thirds of whom qualify as active (Bercovici 2012/02/08).

However, the application has received criticism. John Herrman (2012) from BuzzFeed[5], points out that the main reason the Social Reader collected tens of millions of readers when it was first launched, was the obligatory signup screen; in order to read an article Facebook users had to accord with a signup screen (figure 5).

Figure 5: *Washington Post Social Reader signup screen*

Recently, a decline in participation in the Washington Post Social Reader and other social reader applications is being observed (figures 6 and 7). This may be justified by the unbreakable link between the Reader and Facebook. The sign-up obligation is not received positively by the app's users.

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[5] http://www.buzzfeed.com/jwherrman/facebook-social-readers-are-all-collapsing

Figure 6: *Decline in Washington Post Social Reader monthly active users from April to May 2012*
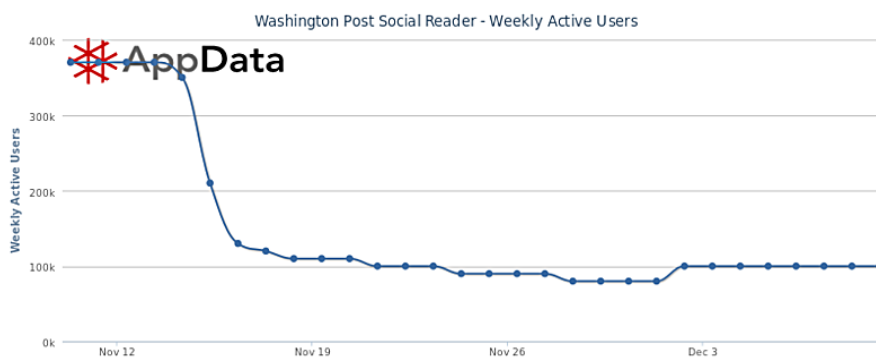

Figure 7: *Decline in Washington Post Social Reader weekly active users from April to May 2012*[6]

In addition, Facebook users who have friends that use the Social Reader seem to be annoyed by the constant autosharing on their Newsfeed and tend to 'hide' these posts from their Newsfeed. It is possible that Facebook autosharing mechanisms for "trending" articles[7] result into non-credible and irritatingly repeated post on friends Newsfeeds (Bercovici 2012/05/07). Stories lose credibility because the receiver acknowledges the fact that his or her friend did not exactly intend to share the particular piece of information. As Kafka from AllthingsDigital (2012) argues "I don't need to automatically know what my friends are reading — I only want to know about the articles they want me to read, and they're pretty good about telling me that. And I

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[6] http://www.appdata.com/apps/facebook/225771117449558-washington-post-social-reader
[7] http://mashable.com/2012/04/18/facebook-trending-articles/

don't want to have to use an app to read them — the Web works just fine". Herrman (2012), demonstrates a brief Facebook survey about why people are disappointed in social readers (figure 8).

Figure 8: *Facebook survey on social readers* (Herrman 2012)

 Another example of a Facebook social reader is the Guardian's application that was announced on the 22nd September 2011 (GNM press office 2011) (figure 9).

Figure 9: *The Guardian Social Reader on Facebook*

This Facebook social reader is described as

> "a great way of reading and sharing Guardian content within
> Facebook. Once you allow the app, whenever you follow
> Guardian links you'll be shown the content on a Facebook
> page. This lets you see what your friends are reading and
> watching, and what is popular amongst Facebook users. You
> will also be able to comment on and discuss articles with your
> friends, or with the whole Guardian community[8]".

It functions in a similar way as the Washington Post Social Reader, with the main difference that it only includes content from the Guardian. The Guardian's app in Facebook though was not as successful as predicted (figure 10).

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[8]http://apps.facebook.com/theguardian/?fb_source=bookmark_apps&ref=bookmarks&count=0&fb_bmpos=3_0
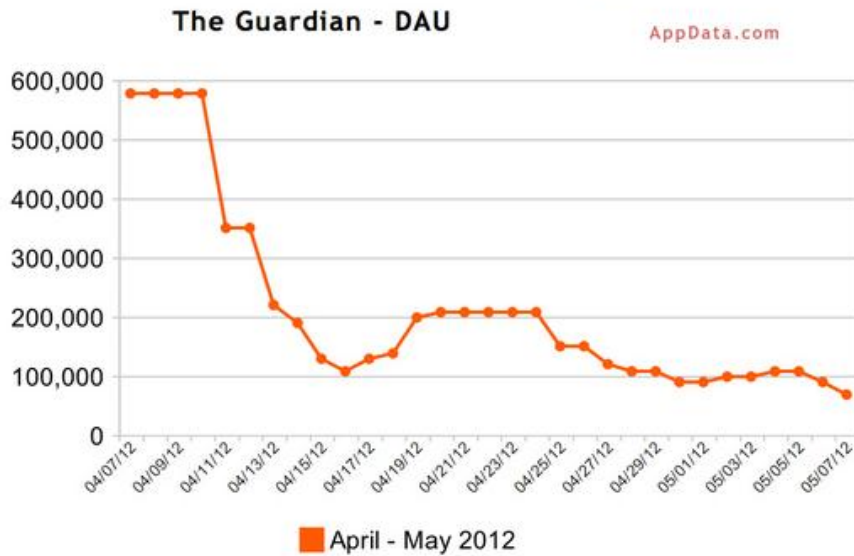
Figure 10: *Decline in the Guardian's Social Reader daily active users from April to May 2012*

Tanya Cordrey, director of digital development for the Guardian, assigns the upswing and downswings in the use of the app to the changes made by Facebook (Ellis 2012).

In addition, readers' comments seen in the articles of Hermann (2012) and Bercovici (2012/05/07) show that the audience that is abandoning Social Readers find them "too intrusive" or "just noise" and with the goal only to "get more viewers". Privacy and content issues also seem to be the 'problem', except for Facebook modules. Therefore, Social Readers need to find a more efficient way to enhance the 'social' filter for the benefit exposure to valuable and quality information.

3.2.2   TWITTER

Twitter is a micro-blogging service that counts millions of users from all over the world. The platform describes itself as a "real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news about what you find interesting."[9] Users share "tweets" of maximum 140 characters, and can refer to the subject of a message by using the hash tag. This allows messages on a specific topic to be identified, tracked and grouped to reflect what new or newsworthy issues are gaining popularity in people's discussions on Twitter. The Twitter Newsfeed may act as an "awareness stream" (Hermida 2012, 3).

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[9] http://twitter.com/about

Twitter has thrived as a network for real-time news and information since its creation in 2006 (Hermida 2012, 3). This phenomenon is affecting the way news are distributed and disseminated. Kwak et al. (2010) from the Department of Computer Science, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, conducted an interesting study to examine whether Twitter acts more as a new medium for information sharing, rather than for social organization (p. 591). Their goal was "to study the topological characteristics of Twitter and its power as a new medium of information sharing" (ibid.).

The authors monitored the whole Twittersphere by obtaining "41:7 million user profiles, 1:47 billion social relations, 4; 262 trending topics, and 106 million tweets", in a time period from June 6th to June 31st, 2009 (p. 600). One of their most important conclusions was that the majority of the 'trending' topics (85%) are headline, breaking and persistent news. The phenomenon that Twitter may 'break the news' first and convince a large part of its audience before other commercial media report the news has been confirmed by more recent research as well (Hu, et al. 2012, 2751). The attention is usually concentrated in a group of 'opinion leaders' which play a key role in spreading the news (ibid.).

Opinion leaders are informally selected by their network, and act as a guide to understanding what is important (Oeldorf-Hirsch 2011, 14). On Facebook and Twitter, in particular, individuals may play this role in their area of expertise, proposing ways of comprehension of current events. We shall later in this thesis refer to the role of opinion leaders, when discussing media effects.

It is essential to see the different relationships inside Twitter as a network and their association to the "power law", meaning that people selections are based on which actor has most links to other nodes of the network. Therefore, the "rich get richer" (Barabási and Bonabeau 2003, 65) as already known mass media become hubs and gain most attention in the online public sphere.

An interesting fact is that on the one hand, the relationship between the number of users one follows and the number of how many are following him or her does not fit to the power law (figure 11) (p. 93). This happens because there is only a very small number (forty) of users with more than a million followers, and this relation is not reciprocated. They exclusively consist of either celebrities or mass media. On the other hand, when users are ranked by how 'retwittable' they are, the distribution does follow the power law. The retweets indicate how deeply one is read. Some of the most popular users in this ranking are characterized as independent news media

distributors. This shows how Twitter may help in the upraise of alternative media (p. 595).
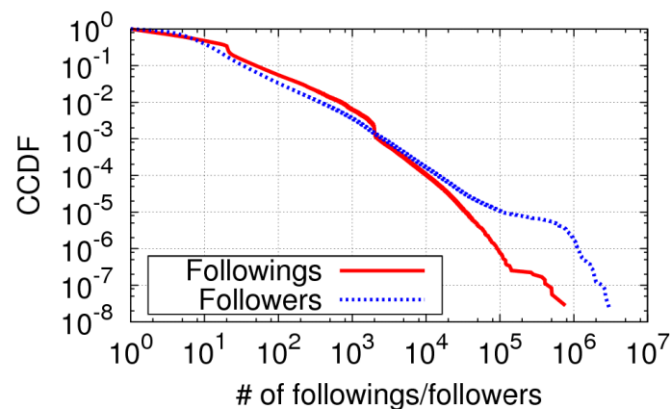

Figure 11: *Number of followings and followers* (Kwak et al. 2010, 93)

However, the practice of retweeting may result in the random gathering of information, in comparison to one's choice to subscribe to a particular form of mass media (e.g., newspapers). This phenomenon can also be read as the "emergence of collective intelligence," as mentioned earlier. Once something is retweeted it is definite that it will reach at least a thousand other users, independently of the number of the original tweet's followers (p. 598).

In addition, another intriguing finding of this study is that reciprocity in following among Twitter users usually goes along with some level of homophily (p. 600). In other words, users with similarities, such as geographic location and popularity, are more likely to be in contact than dissimilar people. This piece of information is valuable when considering how diverse connections are in a SNS, and how this may affect exposure to different opinions.

Finally, research shows that Twitter has great potential as a news medium, thus it is essential to explore the possibilities of exposure to political difference in such an environment.
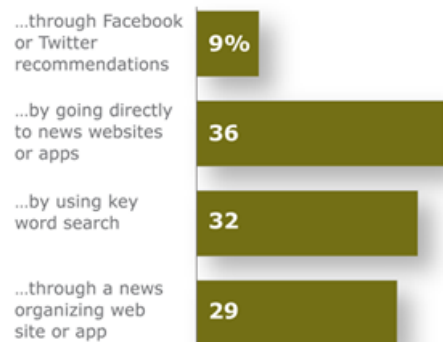
3.2.3 TWITTER - FACEBOOK COMPARISON

Another interesting article is the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism 2012 Report for "The State of the News Media" that reviews "what Facebook and Twitter Mean for News" (Mitchell et al. 2012). The rise in use of SNSs point towards the direction for further examination of their impakt on news. SNSs

may function as pathways to news, but are not yet as large. They act as a supplement for more traditional media (figure 12).

Social media is not an overwhelming driver of news (yet)

Percent of U.S. adults who get news on any digital device very often...

...through Facebook or Twitter recommendations	9%
...by going directly to news websites or apps	36
...by using key word search	32
...through a news organizing web site or app	29

N=3,016

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM
2012 STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA

Figure 12: *SNSs' percentage as a driver of news*

However, there is rising attention to this matter because of its potential influence, and as the Pew Research Center's researchers of the 2011 report stated:

"If searching for news was the most important development of the last decade, sharing news may be among the most important of the next."

The report explores the extent to which people use SNSs for news, how news behavior on Facebook compares with that on Twitter, and who are the people that use social media in such manner (Mitchell et al. 2012). How much are individuals counting on Facebook for their daily news information, particularly when compared to other online distributors like news websites and applications? Where does the content in SNSs come from: friends or news organizations?

The findings indicate that Twitter and Facebook are found to work differently from each other, both in terms of where the information comes from and of how unique the information encountered is perceived to be. In other words, they attract different population of users. On Facebook one is more likely to receive information from family and friends. On Twitter, though, sources come more from a mix of friends and news organizations and experts (figure 13). Furthermore, people are more likely to regard Facebook news as replaceable, than news on Twitter (figure 14). On Twitter

people feel that the received information would not be available in other online sources.

Where social media links come from

Percent who get most of their news links from...
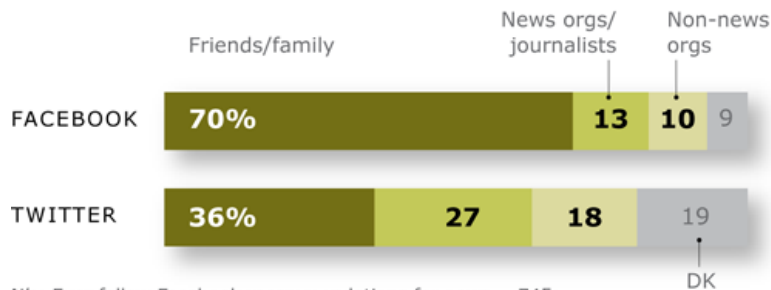
	Friends/family	News orgs/ journalists	Non-news orgs	DK
FACEBOOK	70%	13	10	9
TWITTER	36%	27	18	19

N's: Ever follow Facebook recommendations for news = 745; ever follow Twitter recommendations for news = 239

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM
2012 STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA

Figure 13: *Social media links origins*

Twitter news is viewed as more unique

Percent who say the news they get on each platform is...

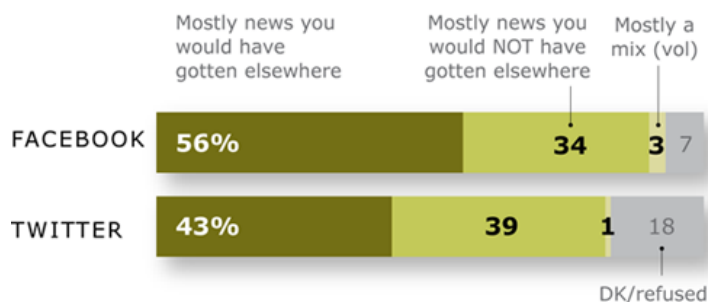|	Mostly news you would have gotten elsewhere	Mostly news you would NOT have gotten elsewhere	Mostly a mix (vol)	DK/refused
FACEBOOK	56%	34	3	7
TWITTER	43%	39	1	18

N's: Ever follow Facebook recommendations for news = 745; ever follow Twitter recommendations for news = 239

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Figure 14: *SNSs as platforms for unique content*

In addition, the two platforms are being used by relatively different audiences. In demographic terms, Facebook news followers accord with the general population to some extent. Twitter news followers are more distinguishable. They tend to be male, highly educated, less white, and younger, especially when compared to Facebook users. Nonetheless, Facebook appears to be the leading platform. Digital news seekers seem to follow news recommendations twice as much as on Facebook than on Twitter.

Paul Levinson (2009), author and professor of Communication & Media Studies at Fordham University, notes that Facebook and Twitter connections may behave as a "real-time knowledge base resource" (p. 122). Sometimes, he says, it is possible that they will answer questions that you may not find otherwise in the Internet. But, what do we mean when referring to a source on SNSs?

Sunday and Nass (2001) argue that the definition of a source is "whatever the Receiver imagines the source to be" (quoted in Oeldorf-Hirsch 2011, 21). The source can be identified as a friend, Twitter, Facebook, a blog, a news organization or even the Internet. It is important to note that SNSs are more about user-distributed content than user-generated content (Oeldorf-Hirsch 2011, 5). Therefore, SNSs users act more as "messengers" by selecting information available elsewhere and distributing it to their social network (ibid, 6).

For instance, on Facebook, messengers share content that they either have produced themselves, "user-generated content", like photographs and status updates or have found in other online sources, such as news sites, blogs, or non-political websites (Baresch et al. 2011, 3). Links to outside content indicate what kind of information Facebook users are exposed to in the online environment in total. This exogenous information flow shows what kind of content, individuals perceive as important and meaningful.

Baresch et al. (2011) conducted a study in order to find out more about how Facebook users are sharing news and other types of content through external links (p. 9). Their intention was to explore the amount, nature, and origin of information shared and how people respond to their friends' links on Facebook. The results indicated that almost half of the participants had the habit of sharing information from external links. Women were found to be more active in posting and commenting than men. The leading genres were of general interest and news, in spite the fact that the leading topics were sports, entertainment and art related. The primary type of content in links was text, (45%), followed by video (22%), photos (11%), audio (5%), interactive (4%) and others (8%) (p.150). The study showed that original sources are varied. Video social networks such as YouTube and Vimeo accounted for 18%, online newspapers were 15%, music sharing sites were 7%, and broadcast news sites and blogs accounted for only 6%; 49% were coded as "other." (p. 16). As Facebook is an interactive medium, individuals were observed to respond with comments and likes

nearly to half of the links shared, with sometimes generating discussions of more than ten comments. Therefore, Facebook users act as information hubs within their Facebook networks.

3.4 CREDIBILITY ISSUES

It is crucial to examine credibility in the SNSs environment. The interpretation of the source affects the information, especially in terms of credibility. Receivers perceive different sources with different levels of credibility. The issues of access and credibility of information have important effects on the contemporary media landscape. Chaffe claims that the former two concepts are more important than the evaluation of mass media versus interpersonal forms, mentioned earlier, regarding information seeking (Walther et al. 2010, 22). How can we measure information credibility in SNSs in the sense that credibility can be "assessed using only the information available in a social media platform" (Castillo, Mendoza and Poblete 2011, 675)?

However, even if people do not selectively avoid counterattitudinal messages, they might put less trust in messages that run counter to their opinions and more trust in messages that promote similar views. There is some support for this idea in the scholarly literature on trust (Koehler, 1993; Meijnders et al., 2009; see for this argument, Earle & Cvetkovich, 1995; but see Tsfati, 2004; Tsfati & Cappella, 2005). As Meijnders et al. concluded, "Message receivers use their assessment of the message source's similarity as a basis for their trust judgment. Sources who express opinions matching their own are perceived as more similar and therefore are trusted more" (p. 1118). Thus, trust needs to be controlled when estimating the effects of cross-pressures on decision timing (Matthes 2012, 151).

3.4.1 DEFINING CREDIBILITY

Credibility is a rather ambiguous term (Metzger and Flanagin 2007, 8). The dominant view is that credibility refers to "the 'believability' of a source or message, which is made up of two primary dimensions: trustworthiness and expertise" (ibid). Of course, these two dimensions can be both objective and subjective factors. For instance, the receiver makes subjective judgments, while the source may have objective characteristics.

The interpretation of credibility varies according to the specific field of study (Metzger and Flanagin 2007, 8).The fields of communication and social psychology

focus on the perceptual aspect of credibility; where credibility is not an attribute given to a certain message, but it is up to the receiver's subjective perception. On the contrary, information science defines credibility in terms of information quality. A piece of information is evaluated over its usefulness, reliability, and accuracy. Therefore, there is a distinction between 'source' and 'information' credibility. Overall, though, credibility is perceived similarly to terms such as trust, reputation, authority, and competence.

3.4.2   CREDIBILITY IN SNSs

Credibility measurement in the digital environment has presented mixed results, compared to traditional media (Metzger and Flanagin 2007, 9). A number of studies indicate that the audience recognizes traditional mass media like newspapers as more credible and trustworthy, while other studies indicate that there are no real differences between traditional and digital channels of information, or even that the latter are more accurate than the former.

For the purpose of this thesis it is essential to note that new forms of digital media applications are emerging rapidly, and among them we find SNSs. Therefore, we must further examine credibility constructions and assessment strategies (Metzger and Flanagin 2007, 10).

In the network structure of the online environment sharing assessments regarding message and source credibility take different forms. First, 'conferred' credibility is connected to the recipient's positive impression of the source as a whole (ibid. 11). For example, on Facebook there is the option to "sponsor your page posts". This means that the 'communicator' selects a desired targeting, run dates, and budget, and then Facebook distributes the most recent post to the page's target audience[10]. As a result, individuals who encounter these pages on their news feed are not aware of this preexisting sponsorship.

Second, the term 'tabulated' credibility refers to the ability of peer rating of an individual, organization or opinion. For instance, in the Huffington Post's online newspaper below (figure 15), one may witness plenty of ways for peer reviews; from sharing who has read the particular article on the Huffington Post's "Social News", to rating the article depending on its effect on the reader (e.g. React: important, funny,

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[10] http://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook-marketing/sponsor-your-page-posts/10150675727637217

typical, scary, outrageous, amazing, innovative, finally). From the individual's point of view, this is a way of evaluating credibility that did not exist until the appearance of networked digital media.

Figure 15 : *The Huffington Post sharing possibilities[11]*

Third, 'reputed' credibility is also met in social network environments (Metzger and Flanagin 2007, 11). A good reputation can act as a 'credibility transfer' (ibid, 12) where people apply the trust they may hold for a particular medium to a single news story or piece of information. This phenomenon explains why Twitter and Facebook users often 'follow' or 'like' already established news organizations like CNN or The New York Times.

Finally, group and social engagement may result into 'emergent' credibility (Metzger and Flanagin 2007, 12). SNSs offer extensive information repositories developed mostly by 'self-coordinating' individuals, and not by leading organizations.

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[11] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/26/payroll-tax-cut-obama-administration_n_2194356.html?ref=topbar

Consequently, credibility is achieved through a pool of resources originating from an open to all system. The most evident example of emergent credibility is Wikipedia.

All things considered, digital media present new challenges to the study of credibility (Metzger and Flanagin 2007, 13). The network media have deeply altered the information landscape. The overload of information results in uncertainty concerning who is to be responsible or believed. The nature of gatekeeping and the level of source and content ambiguity are two of the concerns formulated by the transition to the online environment. For example, in SNSs sometimes it is not evident if content is destined for informative or commercial purposes, in contrast to the more distinguishable differences in print media. Altogether, the basic skills for assessing credibility have not significantly altered. However, there is a need for change regarding the frequency and the strategies people use to assess credibility of sources and information.

For example, on Twitter we find an unusual way of assessing credibility, especially compared to strategies used for traditional media. Twitter functions along system-generated cues that influence a source's credibility. Westerman et al. (2011) conducted a study in order to further examine this phenomenon. Participants were asked to view one of six mock Twitter.com pages that varied both the number of followers and the ratio between followers and follows on the page and report their perceived source credibility (p. 199). The results demonstrated that having too many or too few followers led to lower judgments of expertise and trustworthiness. In contrast, having lower declination between the number of followers and follows resulted into holdings of capability (ibid.).

3.5 MEDIA EFFECTS

3.5.1 POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

The origins of political communication may be found centuries ago, for example in the works of Plato and Aristotle in ancient Greece (Lin 2004, 69). However, during the 1950s it became a cross-disciplinary field, which described a process where "political institutions and citizens interact with each other and political influences are mobilized and transmitted" (Nimmo and Sanders 1981, 12 quoted in Lin 2004, 70). This interdisciplinary nature of political communication explains why so many scholars have specialized in this specific field:

"[Political communication] is not a discipline [or a field] distinguished by manner of explanation but a study guided by the phenomena it explains. It is a field exceedingly diverse in theoretical formulations, research questions, and methods of inquiry that transcend the boundaries of the separate disciplines from which it draws." (Nimmo 1977, 441 quoted in Lin 2004, 71)

As a result, the study of political communication has been influenced by research traditions and techniques coming from other fields. Among these traditions are the older rhetorical analysis of public political discourse, political propaganda, voting studies, mass media effects and the tradition of the press and government in their relation to public opinion.

Political communication is connected with news distribution patterns and their media effects. Researchers are asking more questions about media effects to (Baresch et al. 2011, 3). It is important to comprehend how effective the messages shared on SNSs are.

For this we will engage with the study of media effects theory. Communication scholars have researched this field for many years. The debate around media effects has many sides. Scholars have described different models of media effects, while some have even doubted the existence of these effects (Perse 2001, xi). But let us first discuss a brief historical overview of the media effects discourse.

3.5.2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

One of the fundamental focuses of mass communication studies has been the social, cultural and psychological effects of media content and use, along with examining the processes by which these effects occur (Perse 2001, 1). Media effects, both intentional and unintentional, have been speculated to take place in a variety of contexts. Related examples of effects may be those of political campaigns on voting, of propaganda on ideology, of media impact on the social construction of reality, and the knowledge gain and distribution throughout society (ibid, 2).

Overall, media effects are characterized as cognitive, affective or behavioral (Perse 2001, 3). Cognitive effects refer to information acquisition and learning. Affective effects are those that concern emotional reactions to content and the formation of attitudes. Behavioral effects are "observative actions" caused by media exposure, such as anti- or prosocial behavior. Nevertheless, over the years scholars have suggested other ways of conceptualizing media effects either by the type of effect or the conditions of media impact (Perse 2001, 17). For instance, the most preeminent

dimensions of analysis can be on a micro- versus macrolevel, on intentional versus unintentional effects, content-dependent versus content-irrelevant, short term versus long term, and reinforcement versus change.

Historically, there are three main phases recognized to the study of media effects (Perse 2001, 23). The first phase covers the period from early 20th century until the 1930s, when media are described as "all-powerful". The "magic bullet" or "hypodermic needle" model regards the audience as defenseless to resist the mass media's influence, while it is based on the stimulus-response model that counts direct effects. This model is based on the Frankfurt School's pessimistic approach of the mass society, while two of the most significant contributors where Lasswell (1927) and Lippman (1922).

The second phase, taking place from the late 1950s until the early 1960s, is signified as the era of limited effects. The origin of this model is found in the notion that the audience is selectively choosing and using media content. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) and Lazarsfeld et al. (1965) introduced the "two-step flow of communication" model, which argues that the audience is indirectly receiving information, through "opinion leaders" that are influenced by the messages of mass media (figure 16). Therefore, media influence is seen as limited during this era, where the most common media impact is reinforcement.
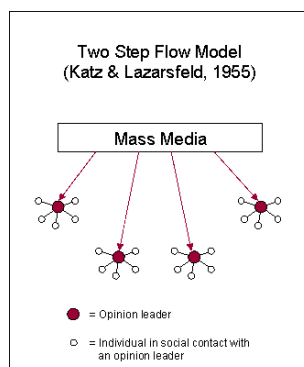
Figure 16: *The Two Step Flow Model*

The third phase began with the embrace of television as the dominant medium during the 1960s. It is known as "the return to the concept of powerful mass media" (Noelle-Neumann 1973, 68 quoted in Perse 2001, 26). Studies during this era found strong media effects and agenda setting and the potential of mass media to tell people "what to think". In this sense, the media's power is recognized in bringing about subtle, but direct media effects.

Throughout these phases various media effects models have been formulated. Some are mentioned above, while the most important include the direct effects, conditional effects, cumulative effects and the cognitive-transactional models.

But how can we perceive media effects concerning exposure to news in the SNSs environment? Do any of the above models apply or should we seek for new ones?

3.5.3 BACK TO LIMITED EFFECTS?

Bennet and Iyengar (2008), express the possibility that we are entering a new era of minimal effects (p. 707). They note that communication models should incorporate the transformations of both society and technology. This will prevent earlier controversies in political communication, and thus models of communication will become more interpretable and socially significant.

Political communication thinkers are always interested in analyzing the social forces connected with the transition from traditional to modern society (Bennet and Iyengar 2008, 715). Therefore, we shall look into these alterations towards the current information/network society. Social and technological context is rapidly changing, just as it happened before with the introduction of television. The audience is exposed to vast amounts of information and to a variety of channels. This turning point signifies the fragmentation of the audience, the alteration of identity formation processes and the decline of the mass audience (ibid, 716). There is a need to rethink the nature of audiences, messages and delivery technologies in political communication processes.

The authors argue that media effects are diminishing, and they propose that society is facing a return to limited media effects (p. 723). Firstly, they claim that acquisition of political information is increasingly unequal. Secondly, selective exposure leads to partisan favoritism and to avoidance of opposing arguments. Thirdly, inadvertent citizens will continue to avoid political communication.

Intriguingly, the debate about media effects in the contemporary media landscape continues. Bennet and Iyengar's article (2008) evoked a response by Holbert et al. (2010). The authors question Bennet and Iyengar's argument concerning the reappearance of minimal effects. Holbert et al. seem more positive about the dimensions of selective exposure noting that Bennet and Iyengar are exaggerating the extent to which people elude counterattitudinal information. Also, Holbert et al. suggest that there are more sources for political information than news. They characterize SNSs like Facebook and Twitter as a new form of tools for opinion

leaders. In other words, individuals' filtering habits in SNSs may act as an alternative to the traditional two-step flow communication model (p. 24). In addition, Holbert et al. found that Bennet and Iyengar are prone to be deterministic regarding technology's role in shaping the political environment (p. 15). Finally, their conclusion is that "a full range of effects is not only plausible, but distinctly probable, even amidst the extraordinary sociotechnical change occurring in our media system and democracy". Notwithstanding, they make sure to stress the fact that they are not trying to oppose Bennet and Iyengar, but to continue a dynamic debate about "our core assumptions, conceptualizations, and operationalizations" (p. 31).

In conclusion, both articles agree on the urgency for the discussion of media effects in SNSs. Opinion leaders are found to play an important role, while the limited effects era seems similar to the current paradigm. However, there is still not a model that yet describes media effects in SNSs.

My aim in this chapter is to discuss a nuanced view of the selective exposure hypothesis, with a focus on social media. In other words, what is the answer to the ongoing debate: Are SNSs leading to further selective exposure or exposure to increased political difference and variety?

Our news are filtered and personalized already by the SNSs' mechanisms and algorithms, but what happens with our own personalization in SNSs? Do they offer opportunities towards exposure to counterattitudinal opinions or do they reassure selective exposure? Is selective exposure theory confirmed by the users' preference towards only agreeable sources or do they seek a combination of agreeable and challenging views of the political environment? What are people's intentions when interacting with information through SNSs: Opinion reinforcement or diversity?

I will assess these questions more closely by identifying the relationship between and selective exposure and SNSs. After print media, television, and the Internet, it is essential to expand the debate to the social media environment. This is important because there is little knowledge about whether SNS use accelerates exposure to political diversity (Kim 2011, 972).

4.1   THE INADVERTENCY THESIS

In the Internet one may choose from a vast amount of information with a variety in quality and quantity. The matter in question is if the options available actually enhance plurality or do they impose limitations. What is important though is that we recognize the need to expand this debate towards the SNSs environment.

Kim (2011) conducted a study that addresses this necessity, to "explore how use of social networking sites influences individuals' exposure to political difference" (p. 971). His main purpose is to examine "what do people do on SNSs for politics, and what would be the consequences of those activities" (p. 971). According to the results, it was found that the positive relationship between SNSs use and exposure to cross-cutting opinions was confirmed (p. 974).

At this point it is important to recall the "fragmentation" thesis discussed in the first chapter. This thesis is popular among discussions about the role of personalization in the Internet and democratic processes (Garrett and Resnick 2011, 111). In a nutshell, it expresses the concern that the rising control of citizens over communication will

lead to further selective exposure, and thus fragmentation of society. On the contrary, others argue that the Internet is a space where individuals can express themselves freely. As a result, exposure to diverse and opposing opinions and discussion with different-minder others will be promoted and accelerated.

Kim (2011) stresses the fact that the inadvertency thesis may act as an opposing attitude to the fragmentation thesis. The habit of coming across, mostly by change, various pieces of information is key to examine whether they are of cross-cutting views. Therefore, it is very interesting to explore the facilitating role of inadvertency in online exposure to diverse information.

Kim (2011) based his study on Brundidge's, Assistant Professor of the Radio, Television, and Film Department in the University of Texas, Austin (2010), argument that

> "inadvertency is facilitated online through (1) less than
> perfect online selective exposure strategies (2) non-avoidance
> of encounters with political difference, (3) weakened social
> boundaries between far flung geographic locations, between
> one discursive space and the next (blurred and porous
> boundaries creating increased interspatiality), between
> political and apolitical spaces of communication, and between
> the private and the public spheres" (p. 687 quoted in Kim
> 2011, 972).

Therefore, the inadvertency thesis suggests that accidental exposure to news and information facilitates exposure to political diversity. In other words, even if people are not looking for cross-cutting opinions, they will be exposed to them because of inadvertency. Kim's study (2011) shows that inadvertent exposure to political difference may be facilitated by SNSs. The study focused on the role of online political messaging and discussion and its connection to selective exposure (ibid.).

4.2 POLITICAL AND NON-POLITICAL SPACES COMBINED

Furthermore, citizens form their opinions through the two basic processes of learning from the news and political discussions (Jun 2012, 1450). Online political discussions usually take place on more traditional online platforms such as chat rooms, discussion websites or message boards. SNSs have altered this landscape, as now these discussions may be realized in the context of Facebook or Twitter. Discussions are translated into posting, tagging, commenting, following, tweeting, "liking",

"retweeting" information. Therefore, it is noteworthy that often political discussions are initiated in spaces with a non-political character, where the political discussion is not the primary goal (Jun 2012, 1452). These ways of exchanging messages may not follow the traditional sense of how a discussion is carried out. Consequently, political discussions in the online environment are also referred to as "interaction" (ibid.).

Kim's (2011) study supported that online political messaging is positively associated with exposure to diversity. More interestingly online political messaging mediates the relationship between SNSs use and exposure to cross-cutting ideas.

Demographic variables, like age, gender, ethnicity and income did not predict selective exposure patterns. In contrast, education played a more important role, as higher educated people are less likely to be exposed to cross-cutting views. The researcher also examined the effect of partisanship on the influence of online political messaging on exposure to political diversity (p. 974-975). It was found that partisanship had significantly moderating effects. Nonpartisans were influenced more, than partisans.

What is intriguing about this particular study by Kim (2011) is that, opposite to the expectations of the author, partisanship did not moderate the influence of SNSs use on exposure to political difference (p. 975). This suggests that the effects of SNSs use where stable across partisan status.

However, we must mention that some scholars claim that inadvertent exposure to political information is in decline (Bennet and Iyengar 2008, 718). Their argument is that the current "self-reflexive" audience identities are less likely to be accidentally exposed to news that they have not chosen themselves. In contrast, during the mass media era, news reached people who were not actively seeking for political information as well, because they had no other choice. For example, if one was waiting to watch his or her favorite TV show, it was most likely that they would be exposed to the news broadcast immediately before.

All things considered, this study shows that inadvertent exposure to political difference may be facilitated by SNSs, even independently from one's political attitudes (p.976). SNSs contribute to expanding societal boundaries and enable political discussions and information exchange.

In conclusion, social information networks are prone to accidental exposure to content (Baresch et al. 2011, 8). In other words, except from intentional information seeking and learning, there is the possibility of unintentional learning, especially for those whose primary goal is not to seek for political information. Apolitical space

offers a fertile ground for political discussion and exposure. SNSs present characteristics of both political and apolitical space. Environments that are primary intended for entertainment purposes, such as social media, may also operate as information providers. They "can actually contribute positively to democratic discourse by providing a gateway to consumers who otherwise would not actively seek out political information" (Glynn et al. 2012, 114). Following links and encountering unexpected sites is common practice in the online environment that may lead the individual to exposure to diverse opinions, different than his or her own.

Therefore, the blurring boundaries of cyberspace are the most important aspect of the online environment that promotes inadvertency, especially compared to traditional media.

4.3   CASE STUDY: "UPWORTHY"

Upworthy began publishing on March 26 2012. It describes itself as "a new social media outfit with a mission: to help people find important content that is as fun to share as a FAIL video of some idiot surfing off his roof."[12]. It was founded by Eli Pariser, the former executive director of MoveOn.org also know from his book "The Filter Bubble", and Peter Koechley, a former managing editor of The Onion who also worked at MoveOn (Carr 2012). The project was realized with the backing of Chris Hughes, one of the founders of Facebook. According to Pariser, their goal is to "give people the information and tools that help make them better, more aware citizens."

David Carr (2012), journalist and author of the New York Times, describes Upworthy as a "news aggregation site that is serious news built for a spreadable age, with super clicky headlines and a visually oriented user interface". In other words, Upworthy is similar to news aggregator sites but with the absolute intention to render content that is found online to be easily sharable in SNSs. This is evident only by observing the websites' interface (figure 17), which clearly offers many opportunities for the reader to share content on SNSs like Facebook and Twitter. In addition, individuals are not allowed to comment in the website itself. This is justified by Upworthy's intention to encourage people to first spread the news via their social network, and then initiate the conversation in the SNS's environment.

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[12] http://www.upworthy.com/could-this-be-the-most-upworthy-site-in-the-history-of-the-internet

Figure 17: *Upworthy.com story page*

The site's rapid growth is confirmed by the increasing number of unique monthly visitors: in July 2012 it reached 2.5 million, 4 million in August, 6 million in September, while it finished October 2012 with 8.7 million monthly unique visitors (Figure18) (Mortesen 2012).

figure 18: Upworthy's internal monthly unique visitors since launch. (Mortesen 2012)

In addition, Upworthy has invested in interactions with Facebook. Pariser argues that "Facebook is a huge piece of the puzzle for us." (ibid.) (figures 19 and 20) As of December 2012, Upworthy had over 815.000 Facebook fans, while more than 300.000 individuals were assigned as "People Talking About This"[13]. This attests the fact that people are actively interacting with the Upworthy Facebook page, and more importantly, that people are seeking for important and challenging views. As Pariser stresses: "That's what gets me so excited: proving the thesis that people don't just want fluff stories" (LaFrance 2012).
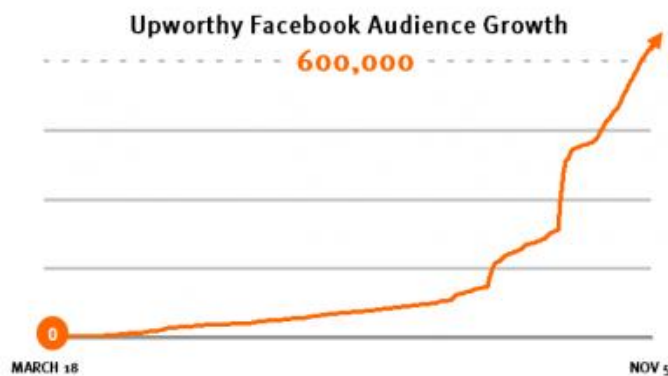
Figure 19: *Upworthy's Facebook growth since launch*. (Mortesen 2012)

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[13] "People Talking About This" is the number of unique users who have created a "story" about a page in a seven-day period. On Facebook, stories are items that display in News Feed. Users create stories when they: like a page; post on the page wall; like a post; comment on a post; share a post; answer a question; RSVP to a page's event; mention the page in a post; tag the page in a photo; check in at a place; share a check-in deal; like a check-in deal; write a recommendation. (Darwell 2012)

Upstream Sites
Which sites did users visit immediately preceding upworthy.com?

% of Unique Visits	Upstream Site
59.34%	facebook.com
7.83%	google.com
1.38%	youtube.com
1.35%	yahoo.com
0.90%	twitter.com
0.88%	live.com
0.71%	huffingtonpost.com
0.45%	amazon.com
0.42%	reddit.com
0.40%	t.co
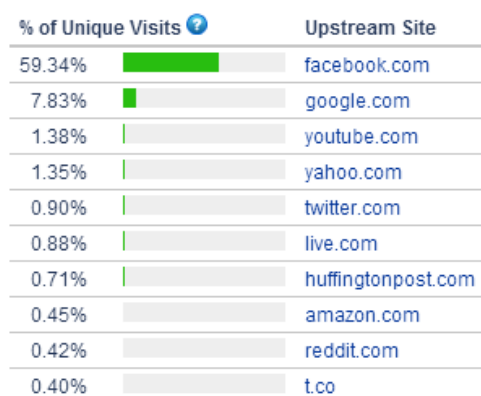
Downstream Sites
Where do visitors go after leaving upworthy.com?

% of Unique Visits	Downstream Site
38.22%	facebook.com
12.33%	google.com
3.82%	youtube.com
1.87%	yahoo.com
1.74%	twitter.com
0.99%	live.com
0.98%	huffingtonpost.com
0.72%	goldieblox.com
0.61%	amazon.com
0.49%	kickstarter.com
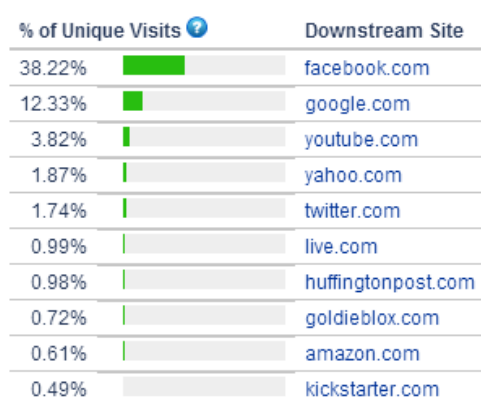
Figure 20: *Upworthy.com upstream and downstream sites* (Alexa.com 2012)

Their strategy is to engage people by making "chocolate-covered news broccoli that actually tastes delicious" (LaFrance 2012). In the slideshow presentation entitled "How To Make That One Thing Go Viral. Just Kidding!" Upworthy founders depict their approach of the 'problem' of making serious information "go viral" just as a frivolous story would. In short, they proceed by first choosing the meaningful piece of information, then they re-contextualize the story in the Upworthy site, and finally they promote the cause or idea behind the content.

Therefore, in order to reach 'virality', the founders believe that online packaging and distribution, is of equal importance as the quality of content. A revealing example is that of a 13-minute video about the NYPD's controversial stop-and-frisk policy, initially published by The Nation (2012). Upworthy redistributed the video under the 'catchy' title "Meet The 17-Year-Old Who Blew The Lid Off Racial Profiling With His iPod"; the video has now reached over 800 thousand views on YouTube (figure 21).

Video statistics

Views and discovery

Key discovery events

A First embedded on: huffingtonpost.com
Oct 9, 2012 – 13,710 views

B First referral from: facebook.com
Oct 9, 2012 – 13,848 views

C First embedded on: facebook.com
Oct 9, 2012 – 15,320 views

D First embedded on: gawker.com
Oct 9, 2012 – 15,663 views

E First view from a mobile device
Oct 9, 2012 – 35,639 views

F First embedded on: thenation.com
Oct 9, 2012 – 48,150 views

G First embedded on: upworthy.com
Oct 11, 2012 – 433,690 views

H First embedded on: techcrunch.com
Oct 15, 2012 – 8,740 views

I First embedded on: zerohedge.com
Oct 20, 2012 – 10,018 views

Figure 21: *YouTube video statistics: increase of views since the video was first embedded in upworthy.com)[14]*

The Upworthy staff attributes their success in their practice to equally value the effort they dedicate to presenting their audience with proficient content, headline, and social packaging (LaFrance 2012). For instance, before selecting a title, they write down 25 headlines in order to choose the most attractive one. The importance of the social headline is appointed at the need to create a "curiosity gap" that will drive the readers to actually engage with and learn from the content (figure 22).

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[14]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rWtDMPaRD8&list=UUDGECor7yw2AkrgAcHkcJxQ&index=6&feature=plpp_video

Figure22: *Why social headline need a "Curiosity Gap"* (Upworthy, 2012, slideshare)

But what is considered as 'content that matters'? Koechley, Upworthy cofounder, explains that Unworthy curators are required to ask themselves: "If 1 million people saw this, would it make the world a better place?" (LaFrance 2012). The exposition of the site's content aims for an emotional reaction by the receiver. At the same time though, the newsworthy element is also a prerequisite.

Pariser (2011) has addressed the issue of personalization in the Internet in general and in SNSs in particular in his book "The Filter Bubble". He argues that "your computer monitor is a kind of one-way mirror, reflecting your own interests while algorithmic observers watch what you click" (p. 3). As a result, prediction engines and the filtering individuals choose for themselves create "filter bubbles", which are defined as "unique universes of information for each of us" (p. 9). The cost of personalization, according to Pariser (2011) is that people will not be exposed to anything that does not have themselves as the center of attention (p.11). He is concerned that through Facebook-like personalized feeds, information that is important for the well-being of the public sphere becomes invisible or that individuals are exposed only to like-minded opinions.

However, the "filter bubble" is based on a number of assumptions, such as that it causes or enables social segregation by politics (Stray 2012). Therefore if our aim is to address political fragmentation we must start at the beginning. The "filter bubble" concept appears vague regarding how diversity is defined or why the author advocated that better filtering will indeed benefit society.

The preeminent goal of Upworthy is to diminish the "knowledge gap" discussed earlier in this thesis. This means that it promotes exposure to public affairs information that has societal benefit. It aims to overcome the information overload confusion by distinguishing and then nurturing exposure to news that serve democracy and public discussion.

Therefore, the question here is if the information showcased in Upworthy is of similar minded opinions or of crosscutting views. Is this initiative promoting exposure to political diversity or not?

UPWORTHY DECLARATION

Upworthy founders claim that they are driven by their purpose to promote news that are both "sensational and substantial; entertaining and enlightening; shocking and significant" as they believe that "things that matter in the world don't have to be boring and guilt-inducing". In other words, content that matters should be distinguished among the vast amount of information available in the Internet.

If this is the case, it is important to take into consideration the founders' background. Given their previous activities, it is apparent that their political orientation points left. However, they point out that they are not interested in showcasing partisan information –neither Democratic nor Republican- but in exploring the truth. Nonetheless, Upworthy seems to stand more to the left, and one could claim that the news they post are pro democratic, especially during the 2012 American pre-election period. This is a fact they do not deny, as they state that "we do have a point of view. We're pro-gay marriage, and we're anti-child poverty. We think the media is horrible to women, we think climate change is real, and we think the government has a lot to learn from the Internet about efficiency, disruption, and effectiveness.[15]"

This may lead to the conclusion that Upworthy enhances exposure to like-minded opinions. A positive factor though for the opposite -that is exposure to political diverse opinions- may be supported by the fact that the different curators may represent different sides, and often disagree on some issues. As a result, Upworthy presents different sides of a topic, encouraging public discussion and debate.

UPWORTHY SOURCES

In addition, Upworthy does not produce its own content, but redistributes content from other online sources. As we have discepted previously, diversity of sources

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[15] http://www.upworthy.com/about

promotes diversity; especially the combination of political with non-political spaces. The more news sources one reads from, the more he or she will come to understand topics from different angles. The broadening of resources has the effect of engaging the reader, through empathy, with those who see the world differently than him or she.

Furthermore, the interaction with news that Upworthy advocates for may contribute to exposure to political diversity, even if it seems to have a subtle inclination to the left. Jun (2012) conducted a study in order to find out the extent to which Internet news use alters the effect of selective online interaction on political diversity in individuals' social networks (p. 1451). Is it possible the negative outcomes of selective online interaction on political diversity may be moderated by Internet news use?" (p. 1456). The results confirmed the hypothesis that Internet news use could reduce the negative influence of selective online interaction and indirectly contribute to political diversity in individuals' social relationships. In the online environment, structure and motivation can drive exposure to political diversity, while one is browsing the news.

All things considered, the question remains: What do social readers and sites like Upworthy mean for the nature of exposure to information: one more reason to be concerned with selective expose or does this promote exposure to cross-cutting ideas? Do they help in narrowing down the knowledge gap? Do they increase the publics' interaction with news and political information in general?

4.3   TOWARDS POLITICAL DIVERSITY IN SNSs

Freedom of press is signified by the existence of numerous sources of information. When on buys a specific newspaper he or she is exposed to a particular political attitude, even if it is broadened by its differences throughout its pages. On the contrary, on the Internet and on SNSs in particular, one is exposed to a lot of different opinions, even if they are contrary to one's own views. This phenomenon promotes democracy because as Voltaire said "I may disagree with what you have to say, but I shall defend to the death your right to say it". Discussion, consideration of different opinions, and critique are the ingredients of democracy.

First of all, in this chapter we have discussed the inadvertency thesis (Kim 2011) and how it is approached regarding SNSs. In short, the benefit in this lies in the argument that SNSs combine sources originating from both political and non-political spaces. As a result, individuals are inadvertently exposed to a variety of content that is likely to include not only like-minded, but also challenging information and opinions.

Furthermore, people's practices of filtering information on SNSs should be done in a conscious manner. At the same time, their intentions are important: education and awareness of the phenomenon of selective exposure could be found valuable. Selecting sources -what one "likes" on Facebook, or "follows" on Twitter- is an important procedure. In the SNSs environment there are more opportunities for receiving unbiased information from blogs, or directly from politicians. This way it is more evident where the source stands in the political spectrum, and consequently avoids biased information. Previously, one was exposed only to the views and opinions of traditional media, now individuals are exposed to the political attitudes of their fellow citizens. This is also because SNSs promote and contribute to freedom of speech because they are based on communities. These communities have knowledge of their members, something that is significantly different than what happened with newspaper that were transmitting one way messages to an unknown mass audience. Therefore, information is more targeted. However, this does not mean that SNS sources are not biased and may not be truthful or accurate.

For example, Twitter may offer possibilities that no other medium can: brief and accurate information, while attaching files or links for additional information, and all in one page. This type of networking and bidirectional relationship among the users-'messengers' is a novel phenomenon that is non-existent in other media. For instance, a lot has been said about the effect of social media on the "Arab Spring". SNSs like Facebook and Twitter contributed in organizing the uprisings, while information that was uploaded in SNSs played an important role in covering the events and even more commercial news organizations (like Al Jazeera) gathered the news from Twitter in real time.

However, this phenomenon is accompanied by selectivity and personalization of information. As we have already seen in this thesis, this can be threatening against exposure to diversity. Therefore, the individual must manage his or her own sources (followers, friends, recommendations) in order to ensure receiving cross-cutting ideologies, and not only the opinions of like-minded friends. Twitter offers this possibility, in a more fertile way than Facebook. This is because in Twitter it is commonly seen that users follow other individuals as 'experts' that act as 'opinion leaders'. It is more common for people to follow specific journalist, politicians, and other kinds of experts, especially compared to Facebook. User motivation is different for the two SNSs, thus, there are common as well as different ways to promote exposure to political diversity in these online environments.

Nonetheless, there are some concerns about SNSs and the manner in which they expose the audience to political diversity, especially expressed by journalists. One risk is that the information shared in SNSs may be false. No one can stop the SNSs' users to post something on their wall or tweet about something; the flow of information is unstoppable. Immediacy encloses the threat of misinformation and lack of news accuracy, but it as fast as it can be. Communication of information must have truth as its goal, thus because information shared is shared by everyone and not constantly checked, there is the fear that truth is dubious.

In addition, people show what they want others to believe about them. In the past, if people could read that meant that they could get informed through the newspapers they chose to read. Similarly, in the current mediascape if people are media literate, then they are able to participate in the readability of information. It is important to stress the fact that a digital divide exists (Norris 2003, 3).

In this chapter we will question subjectivity in the environment of SNSs. In other words, is the subject acting on free will or is it driven by other outer forces?

The concept of free will is central in the philosophy of ethics. It is often considered as 'the free will problem'. The philosophical disagreement regards the existence and nature of free will. This unresolved matter is important because only if free will exists one may be seen as responsible for his or her actions, choices and behavior. Free will is not only connected to moral responsibility, but also to the autonomy and dignity of persons and the value asserted to love and friendship (O'Connor 2011).

The main philosophical debate about free will concerns its compatibility with deterministic forces: physical/causal; psychological; biological; theological. Determinism may be defined as the metaphysical thesis that "the facts of the past, in conjunction with the laws of nature, entail every truth about the future" (McKenna 2009).

On the one hand, incompatibilists argue that free will is not compatible with determinism (Vihvelin 2011). The incompatibilist theories fall under three main groups. Hard determinists deny that free will exists because of the existence of determinism. Libertarianism defends that determinism is false, and thus free will is real because the future is not predetermined. Lastly, pessimistic incompatibilists, or hard indeterminists, deny that both determinism and free will are true.

On the other hand, compatibilism is the thesis that free will is compatible with determinism (McKenna 2009). Compatibilism was introduced by the Greek Stoics, while it was supported by early modern philosophers like David Hume. For the purpose of this thesis, we will focus on the contemporary philosopher Daniel Dennett.

Free will, and in particular self-concept, analysis will aid this thesis by examining how it operates in the SNSs environment. How accountable is the subject for the filtering of information and presentation of his or her identity?

5.1 SELF IDENTITY

The concept of the self, discussed in this chapter, is a key notion of modern thought (Kihlstrom et al. 2003, 68). In particular, this subchapter focuses on the common sense of John Locke and the skepticism of David Hume.

John Locke is a British philosopher, Oxford academic and widely known as the Father of Classical Liberalism (Uzgalis 2012). His theory of the mind is considered as one of the origins of the concepts of identity and the self. In contrast to the Cartesian philosophy[16], Locke argues that the mind is a blank slate or 'tabula rasa'. According to his theory people are born without innate ideas, while knowledge is formulated by experience originating from sense perception (Baird and Kaufmann 2008, 528; Locke 1894, 539). Locke defines the self as "that conscious thinking thing, (whatever substance, made up of whether spiritual, or material, simple, or compounded, it matters not) which is sensible, or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extends"(Locke 1997, 307). He describes the person as "a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places" (Essay II, xxvii, 2 as quoted in Wiggins 1976, 131).

Knowledge of the self is represented in the subject's memory (Locke 1690, as found in Kihlstrom et al. 2003, 70). Locke finds identity not only in the conscious experience of thinking, but considers the extension of consciousness backward in time. He claims that past experiences, thoughts or actions are part of one's identity only under the condition that he or she remembers them. Locke, as an empiricist, articulates that self-knowledge is realized a posteriori' from experiences of sensation and reflection. However, the notion of 'I' exists only in distinction from other objects and people, is a notion that is given 'a priori'.

Locke's concept of the self is connected with the subject's conscious thoughts with regard to reflection and reason. In addition, the self is represented in memory. In the context of SNSs the individuals' actions are all documented, recorded and archived. One's stream of thought is visible to the self, but also to others. For example, Facebook's Timeline documents all the thoughts and content posted by the individual. This has an influence on how individuals are filtering their information, as they are now more conscious of how their identity is displayed.

David Hume, in the Treatise of Human Nature (1739-1740, Book I, Part 4, Section 6), also confirms the connection between identity and memory. He asserts though, that "the role of memory is to permit us to comprehend the causal relations among events" (Kihlstrom et al. 2003, 71). This means that the subject's self-concept extends to the memories of what he or she may have experienced, even if it indeed happened

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[16] Rene Descartes in his Meditations (1964) realised that based on his experience of himself that there was one thing he could not doubt: his own existence. As a result, he formulated the conscious self, known as "Cogito ergo sum".

or not. Therefore, the difference between Locke and Hume is that the former bases the self-as-memory on the ability of reproducing experiences from memory, while the latter in the ability to reconstruct experiences in memory. In addition, Freud also connects identity with memory, by stressing the idea that the important memories are unconscious (ibid.).

Philosopher David Hume, known as the last of the "British empiricists" (Morris 2012), argued that the self was the result of perceptions. However, Hume notes that these impressions cannot be coherent and invariable through the whole course of the subject's life (Brinthaupt 1992, 16). Hume asserts that "the identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one" (Hume 1739-1740, 540 as quoted in Brinthaupt 1992, 17). This is followed by his notion that people are "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed one another with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement" (Hume 1739-1740, 534 as quoted in Brinthaupt 1992, 17).

Similarly, Nietzsche ([1887] 1968) suggests that the subject is just the fiction that many similar states are the result of one foundation (p. 268-269). It is the subject that creates the notion of 'similarity' and thus adjusts the facts to be similar.

Therefore, Hume and Nietzsche's remark that the fictional identity is regarded by the subject as a coherent identity, even if it is a bundle of diverse perceptions that may or may not be accurate. As a result, one may argue that the filtering of information is based on this construction of the self. People will tend to accord their activity to their previous behavior. More precisely, when selecting political information one may desire to be exposed to similar minded opinions, in order to maintain his or her identity sovereign.

However, it is significant to note the role of the psychological unconscious regarding the subject's choices of behavior. Since the psychoanalytic tradition initiated by Sigmund Freud, the concept of the psychological unconscious introduces the notion that some of the mental states that influence people's behavior may be inaccessible to both 'conscious awareness' and 'conscious control' (Kihlstrom 1990).

In more detail, Kihlstrom (1990), psychology professor at the University of California, Berkeley, specializing on cognition in personal and social contexts, demonstrates that consciousness has two aspects. First, by virtue of 'conscious awareness' people "gain introspective access to the mental states, the cognitions, emotions, and motives that cause us to behave the way they do". Second, by the virtue

of 'conscious control' subjects gain deliberate control over the mental processes that produce the above states and as a result of their behavior.

5.1.1   THE "STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS"

Furthermore, what is important, especially in the context of this thesis, is Locke's definition of the self in terms of the continuity of consciousness, found under the concept of 'stream of consciousness'.

According to Locke, the concept of the self is connected with the continuity of consciousness (Wiggins 1976, 131). The latter is explained in terms of memory, which uses the material appearing in the subject's flow of experience in order to structure the idea of a person.

William James (1892), philosopher and psychologist, coined the term "stream of consciousness". In this sense the stream of thought, consciousness, or subjective life "does not appear to itself as chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing joined; it flows; a 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described". According to James (1892) the stream of consciousness has four characteristics. Firstly, every 'state' tends to be part of a personal consciousness. Secondly, within each personal consciousness states are always changing. Thirdly, personal consciousness is continuous. This means that even if there is a time-gap, consciousness connects previous thoughts as another aspect of the same self. Lastly, James (1892) remarks that consciousness is always interested more in one part of its object than in another, and welcomes and rejects, or chooses, all the while it thinks.

We must note here that the last two characteristics may play a role in selective exposure and deliberate will. Within the stream of consciousness the subject is enabled, or not, to decide, or not, to filter or not information. In the SNS environment one may find a resemblance of a "collective stream of consciousness" (Bonini 2012, 20). For instance, in a Facebook page one may observe users' posts and comments by the minute, and thus draw conclusions on their identity.

5.2   THE "NARRATIVE SELF"

The narrative is a way of making things intelligible, different from causal or scientific explanation (McCarthy 2007). A minimal definition is that for something to be a narrative "at least two events must be depicted in a narrative and there must be some

more or less loose, albeit non-logical relation between the events. Crucially, there is a temporal dimension in narrative" (Lamarque, 2004, 394 as quoted in Menary 2008, 64). The concept of the "narrative self" indicates that the subject is not a whole entity by itself, but only in relation to the stories that he or she tells about him or herself and others that form a unified identity. It is important to look into how the self is connected to people's capability to produce narratives out of disconnected events in their lives. The focus here will be on the theories of philosophers Daniel Dennett, Paul Ricoeur and Alasdair MacIntyre.

5.2.1   DANIEL DENNETT'S "SELF AS A CENTER OF NARRATIVE GRAVITY"

Daniel Dennett, American philosopher, writer and cognitive scientist whose research centers on the philosophy of the mind, is attributed as a compatibilist on free will. In "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity" (1992) he attempts to answer the question of "What is a self?".

Initially he develops an analogy between the self and the center of gravity of an object. This abstract object of the center of gravity may be manipulated. As a result, he characterizes the center of gravity as a fictional object that nonetheless has "a perfectly legitimate place within serious, sober, *echt* physical science." The physicist does an interpretation of the object and its behavior, and results in the theoretical abstraction of a center of gravity, which also functions as a prediction tool for future behavior of the object in certain conditions.

Similarly, the hermeneuticist, phenomenologist or anthropologist is faced with the problem of interpreting another central abstraction: "each person has a self" (other-interpretation). In addition, the subject must assume a self for himself (self-interpretation).

Nevertheless, the self is a much more complicated concept than the center of gravity. In order to further analyze the self, Dennett uses another analogy: fictional characters. In literature, fictional characters are defined by the stories told about them. Correspondingly, the self is characterized by the narratives he or she presumes of itself or the stories of others.

Dennett claims that the interpretation of a novel written by a dumb machine robot is the same with the discussion of other 'normal' novels. Therefore, he argues that the subject interprets the story as an expression of the self (the subject). This analogy may seem to fail because of the fact that writings are dead and lifeless: "you might

think they (the writings) spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them…they always say only one and the same thing" (Plato Phaedrus 275d, as quoted in Gunkel 2008, 494). Dennett though, presents the possibility of a dialogue with the writer, and then more narrative as a response. In addition, he argues that talking to oneself, like our ancestors, signifies self-instruction.

He also remarks that one may have more than one self. People are disunited as it is difficult to formulate a coherent story, also because some part of the narrative may be guessed or even wrong. He allows for the possibility of several "selves" ("centers of narrative gravity") existing within the same body. However, this distinction between what is real and what is an illusion regarding the narratives of the self is not clear, or as McCarthy (2007) remarks it is "ontologically fragile". Dennett concludes with David Hume's observation that: "no one has ever seen a self", just like the manipulable center of gravity.

DENNETT'S DECISION MAKING MODEL

Having discussed Dennett's concept of the self, we will proceed with his theory about the self's train of thought when making decisions. In contrast to libertarian positions, Dennett (1978) presents a two-stage model of decision making.

> The model of decision making I am proposing has the following feature: when we are faced with an important decision, a consideration-generator whose output is to some degree undetermined produces a series of considerations, some of which may of course be immediately rejected as irrelevant by the agent (consciously or unconsciously). Those considerations that are selected by the agent as having a more than negligible bearing on the decision then figure in a reasoning process, and if the agent is in the main reasonable, those considerations ultimately serve as predictors and explicators of the agent's final decision (p. 295).

When making a decision the subject produces a series of considerations, some of which will be immediately rejected, while others will be selected. Then through a reasoning process, these final considerations may predict and finally explain the subject's choice.

Dennett (1978) supports this model with six arguments (p.295-298). First, "intelligence makes the difference here" (p. 295) because in the processes of selecting and examining the considerations, microscopic indeterminacies get intensified and

become significant macroscopic determines of the final decision. Second, "it installs indeterminism in the right place for the libertarian, if there is a right place at all", which is prior to the final assessment of the considerations. Third, even from a biological engineering point of view it is more efficient and rational that decision making should occur in this way, for example because of time pressure. Fourthly, the model allows for moral education "to make a difference, without making all the difference" (p. 296), meaning that moral education is proved to exist contrary to the libertarian argument. Fifth, and more importantly according to Dennett, "it provides some account of our important intuition that we are the authors of our moral decisions" by distinguishing authorship and blunt implication in a "causal chain". Finally, the model stresses the abundance of decisions that surround moral decisions, and that prior decisions may be more important than the sense for free will, regarding the final decision.

The above model introduces an intriguing point concerning the environment of SNSs. A common habit of the subject on SNSs is to select online sources of information and share it on his or her profile. During this activity, according to Dennett's model for decision making, the individual feels as he or she is responsible for selecting a particular piece of information among the vast variety of content online. Therefore, the intermediate step is an important aspect for selectivity of information or of social contacts. For instance, the decision making process is seen differently by subjects with opposite moral education.

5.2.2   PAUL RICOEUR'S EMPLOTMENT

In addition, Ricoeur presents a narrative view of the self. He focuses on the ability of plots to synthesize reality. The self becomes a meaningful whole because of the plot, which unifies a chaotic series of events. The plot ties together intentions, causal relations and chance of different actions and events. These plots are assembled in a complex interaction between events, imagination, significant others, routines and habits, and the formation of the discourse that shapes a person's self-narrative.

Ricoeur's (1992) concept of selfhood, as expressed in *Oneself as Another*, entails otherness. The self is related to the other, while they have a dialectic relationship. In addition, Taylor (2011) explains that dialogue with other people's understandings of the subject's identity helps him or her to develop a conception of the self (p. 154).

In *Time and Narrative*, he indicates that both historical action and interpretive imagination form narratives (Ezzy2005, 244). For Ricoeur, the narrative has a double

function: live experience shapes and precedes the narrative, while the narrative influences practical action (ibid). Most importantly emplotment, defined as the process that adds up experience in a narrative "endows the experience of time with meaning" (ibid, 245).

5.2.3 ALASDAIR MACINTYRE AND THE ROLE OF THE OTHER

MacIntyre (1984) in *After Virtue*, also supports the narrative theory of personal identity. The self has no meaning without a story. What is interesting here is his observation that the subject's personal identity is constrained by one's social surroundings. The context of the narrative plays an important role. "The subject is what s/he is justifiably considered by others to be for the duration of the story that he/she unfolds from his/her birth to his/her death" (MacIntyre 1985, 213, 215, 217 as quoted in Mela 2011, 106).

5.2.4 THE "NARRATIVE SELF" IN SNSs

The concept of the "narrative self" as presented above may find numerous applications in the context of SNSs. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this thesis, we shall focus on those concerning selectivity of information. The narrative self on SNSs is constructed by the choices one makes and the behavior presented. People select their information by consciously deciding their social network and their interactions within it. Therefore, the identity of one's self is only whole when accompanied by the stories he or she has to tell about him or herself and others.

In addition, self-identity in SNSs is also described as a "public identity" (Krasnova et al. 2009, 42). The nonanonymous and disclosed character of these platforms influences the subject's narrative, as he or she aims for an idealized projection of the self, through the exposed behavior. This is also referred to as 'self-presentation', defined as "the goal-directed activity of publishing information on the Internet in order to influence the impressions formed by an online community about oneself" (Lang 2012, 6). In this manner, the phenomenon of "conscious control" discussed earlier is common practice, especially because of privacy concerns and impressions management (ibid, 47).

Political communication in the context of SNSs is an activity that may be characterized as disclosed. It is a mediated experience, where everyday interactions are articulated, visible to the subject's social network, deliberately critiqued and eventually managed. As a result, the subject's behavior and thought are affected by the way these transitional experiences are realized in SNSs. The profiles of people in SNSs like Facebook constitute a self-identity narrative for each subject; photographs,

discussions regarding relationships and current affairs, groups, following particular pages all are examples of how one creates his or her personal narrative (Robards 2012, 386). Social life is mediated online.

It is also important to note that the relationships that are mediated on SNSs like Facebook are in their majority based on pre-existing networks formed offline (Robards 2012, 387). In addition, SNSs do not only provide a space for social experience with others, but also with one's self; "a self-conscious conversation of self with self" (Henderson et al. 2007, 24 quoted in Robards 2012, 388).

These narratives leave a "digital trace". SNSs are not only spaces in which the subject can form a self-identity through socialization and communication, but also spaces where all activity is commented upon, recorded and archived (Robards 2012, 394). For instance, the subject's political discussions and placements on Facebook or Twitter on the one hand, form a narrative of his or her political identity, but also they may be used by bystanders in a positive or negative way. One of the most outstanding examples of this is Facebook's 'Timeline'. There the stories that shape the narrative self are showcased in chronological order. It is noteworthy that even the Facebook mechanism enhances this notion as the platform itself describes timeline status updated as "stories".

All things considered, exploring the philosophical history of the self has contributed in questioning a number of assumptions of subjectivity and how it is formed in the context of SNSs.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have considered the selective exposure hypothesis and its role in exposure to political diversity in social networking sites. The primary goal was to present a nuanced version of the debate in question. In order to accomplish this I followed a number of steps.

In the first chapter, I deliberated on the selective exposure hypothesis by offering a historical overview and a definition. I dived deeper into the debate by extending the discussion towards other media, and especially the Internet.

In the second chapter, I demonstrated the numerous societal benefits of political diversity. It is essential for various political points of view to be present in the media. I stressed the fact that the media must be pluralistic not only in terms of ownership, but also in content.

In the third chapter, I commented on the changing media landscape and signified the increasingly growing importance of SNSs regarding the public's engagement with information. For this reason I examined the news interaction habits of individuals in the context of SNSs, and particularly in those of Facebook and Twitter. In addition, I considered the matters of credibility and media effects in SNSs. The latter play a key role in determining people's engagement with information.

In the fourth chapter, I explored the relationship between SNSs and the selective exposure hypothesis. I criticized SNSs' different characteristics in order to investigate whether or not they promote exposure to politically diverse information. Furthermore, I employed a case study to examine whether the theory was confirmed.

In the last chapter, my aim was to conceptualize the subject, in order to address certain implicit assumption of subjectivity. I focused on the concept of the self and its relationship to the process of selecting information, according to the subject's identity. The "narrative self" was found to be a notion corresponding to the 'public self' found in SNSs context.

All things considered, it is fruitful now to readdress the research question of this thesis directly:

In what ways do the audience's news interaction habits in social networking sites influence online exposure to political difference?

What has become evident throughout the discourse of this thesis is that technology and the way the audience uses it is still malleable. SNSs, such as Facebook and Twitter have their own personalization techniques and mechanisms. However, one is able to manage the kind of information he or she is exposed to. In this manner SNSs do not differ from the selective exposure hypothesis in other media.

Notwithstanding, the relationship between traditional media and the Internet, and selective exposure is not the same as with SNSs. One obvious difference is the vast amount of information on a variety of topics and interests available in the Internet. However, this information overload may result in personalization of information. This phenomenon entails the danger of political fragmentation, which may result to extremes, as argued earlier in this thesis.

Furthermore, information on SNSs is communicated by the individual's social network. Therefore, the filtering of the information is realized mainly by like-minded friends. However, this environment may also have positive effects for exposure to information as it creates opportunities for immediacy and breaking news.

In addition, individuals present themselves in the form of a "narrative self". This may have positive outcomes because people are able to figure out each other's background more easily. In contrast, this may be described as negative as well because profiles on SNSs are constructed by projecting one's ideal self. This identity is not true to ones beliefs and actions, as it is destined for this particular environment. In this way, one may develop a false perception of the other, with an impact on the information he or she chooses.

Therefore, under what conditions is exposure to political diversity in SNSs enhanced? In what ways do SNSs promote exposure to challenging opinions, rather than proattitudinal points of view?

SNSs have the perspective to promote exposure to diversity due to the inadvertency thesis and the combination of political and non-political spaces, as discussed in the fourth chapter. In addition, political discussions and interactions with others have the effect of engaging people with diverse information. Lastly, if people are media literate they will be able to realize the dimensions of the narrative self in these environments. Consequently, individuals will most probably make conscious choices regarding the information they select. For instance, one should be aware of the circumstances that lead to 'filter bubbles' and thus deliberately act in order to expand his or her sources and friends.

In conclusion, the selective exposure hypothesis is still valid in the context of SNSs. It is found though that some characteristics promote exposure to political diversity, especially when compared to traditional media. However, it is the subject's responsibility to exploit the many opportunities presented in SNSs to gain access to and interact with diverse political information.

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