

To whom it may concern,

I am a third-year PhD student focused on social media both from a political economy as well as a behavioral economics perspective.

During my two previous years of coursework I took several courses in political economy (topics in inequality and redistribution, topics in economic policy, topics in regional economics) and behavioral economics (behavioral decision making, choice in context, topics in microeconomic modelling) and one course specific to media economics.

I am now part of a research group focused media economics comprising several professors (e.g. Maria Petrova, Ruben Enikolopov, Ruben Durante, Fabrizio Germano), post-docs and PhD students of the field.

My current research interest lies in the field of social media and political polarization. Most research has focused on what kind of information we are exposed to and how this may polarize opinion if networks are homophilic – an issue which is now widely discussed under the terms “filter bubble” and “echo chambers”. In contrast, my research focuses on the importance of the design of social media shaping the different possibilities of interaction and how this can lead to polarization even if the network is completely connected.

The idea is that the possible forms of interaction or communication (posting, liking, sharing) only represent a subset of real life interactions. Crucial forms of interaction are absent in an online discourse. A very important feature which is missing is the opportunity to be exposure to negative feedback. In real life, this is conveyed in facial expressions, body language and other forms of low-intensity disapproval.

Therefore, I would like to investigate experimentally how online behavior changes if some key parameters such as possible forms of interaction are changed or how people change their online behavior if they feel more or less anonymous.

Apart from that, I am interested in the structure of the online news market consisting of large online newspapers covering central parts of the political spectrum but also thousands of blogs filling any possible niche and catering the most specific audiences including any kind of conspiracy theory. How does sustained market pressure affect coverage and quality of the news?

These are questions which keep me thinking and I hope that by attending the conference, I could learn about tools and other researchers’ ideas bringing me closer to the answer. Therefore, I am looking forward for your answer and hope for a chance to participate.

Best regards,

Nikolas Schoell