

ABSTRACT

Filter Bubbles, Algorithmic Habituation, and Democratic Public Sphere: A New Theoretical Grounding?

Digital filter bubbles (Pariser 2011) became a widely discussed phenomenon in different fields of media and communication studies in the last decade. Algorithmic personalisation was recognized as problematic for the functioning of the public sphere - filter bubbles, namely, contribute to its fragmentation and polarisation. As many theoretical studies also pointed out, filter bubbles “reduce exposure to counter-attitudinal information” and block “debates and exchanges of ideas that are central to the operation of a democracy” (De Vito 2016, 15). However, despite significant theoretical attention and common recognition of the problem, empirical research did not confirm that the filter bubble effect is of great importance (Haim et al. 2017, Trielli & Diakopoulos 2020). Following these findings, some authors even reduced the filter bubble debate to a mere moral panic (Bruns 2019, 8).

The discrepancy between increased theoretical attention and empirical insignificance presents an initial problem of the research proposal: it seems, namely, that the problem of algorithmic personalization cannot be reduced to the mere technical question of accessibility and visibility of content. On the contrary, I argue that the main problem of algorithmic personalisation is a habitual adaptation, which can explain why users addictively stick to certain content, even if their access to other content is not significantly limited. The main aim of the proposed paper is, therefore, to provide an alternative theoretical grounding for the analysis of the ethical questions surrounding algorithmic personalisation. Therefore, the proposed research focuses on the concept of habit - as it was developed in the history of modern philosophy on the one (Hume, Deleuze, Malabou), and in recent studies on algorithmic personalisation (see especially Chun 2016; Kant 2020 and Seaver 2018) on the other hand – which can help us explain ethical and epistemological issues surrounding algorithmic personalisation.

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