

UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF FILTER BUBBLES IN SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This literature review synthesizes current research on filter bubbles in social media communication, exploring how algorithmic personalization shapes user experiences and informational diversity. **Methodology:** The review examines theoretical frameworks and empirical studies that identify the mechanisms through which filter bubbles form on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. **Results:** Algorithms, driven by user behaviour and engagement metrics, select content that often reinforces pre-existing beliefs, potentially leading to ideological homogeneity. Evidence is presented regarding the prevalence and impact of these bubbles on public discourse, political polarization, and democratic participation. **Discussion:** Mitigation strategies are considered, including algorithmic transparency, digital literacy initiatives, and platform design modifications aimed at promoting exposure to diverse perspectives. Both supporting and critical viewpoints of these dynamics are evaluated, highlighting the nuanced role of filter bubbles in digital communication. **Conclusions:** The study underscores the broader societal implications of filter bubbles and calls for continued interdisciplinary research to develop effective solutions that foster informational diversity and a healthy democratic dialogue in the

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digital age.

Keywords: filter bubbles, social media communication, algorithmic personalization, information diversity, democratic implications.

RESUMEN

Introducción: Esta revisión de literatura sintetiza la investigación actual sobre las burbujas de filtro en la comunicación en redes sociales, explorando cómo la personalización algorítmica moldea las experiencias de los usuarios y la diversidad informativa. **Metodología:** Se revisan marcos teóricos y estudios empíricos que identifican los mecanismos por los cuales se forman las burbujas de filtro en plataformas como Facebook, Twitter y YouTube. **Resultados:** Los algoritmos, impulsados por el comportamiento de los usuarios y las métricas de interacción, seleccionan contenido que frecuentemente refuerza creencias preexistentes, lo que puede llevar a una homogeneidad ideológica. Se presenta evidencia sobre la prevalencia e impacto de estas burbujas en el discurso público, la polarización política y la participación democrática. **Discusión:** Se consideran estrategias de mitigación, incluyendo la transparencia algorítmica, iniciativas de alfabetización digital y modificaciones en el diseño de plataformas para promover la exposición a perspectivas diversas. Se evalúan críticamente tanto los puntos de vista que apoyan como los que cuestionan estas dinámicas, subrayando el papel matizado de las burbujas de filtro en la comunicación digital. **Conclusiones:** El estudio destaca las implicaciones más amplias de las burbujas de filtro para la sociedad y hace un llamado a la investigación interdisciplinaria continua para desarrollar soluciones efectivas que fomenten la diversidad informativa y un diálogo democrático saludable en la era digital.

Palabras clave: burbujas de filtros, comunicación en redes sociales, personalización algorítmica, diversidad informativa, implicaciones democráticas.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, social media platforms have become central conduits of information exchange, entertainment, and public discourse. The phenomenon of the *filter bubble* - the situation in which algorithmic personalization and user-driven preferences shape online environments in such a way that individuals increasingly see, and engage with, content aligning predominantly with their existing worldviews - has attracted heightened interest from academics and practitioners alike. Since Pariser's (2011) seminal work, scholars have debated the impact of algorithmic personalization on information diversity and civic life (Bruns, 2019; Bechmann & Nielbo, 2018; Puschmann, 2019; Terren & Borge, 2021; Whittaker et al., 2021).

This literature review synthesizes findings from a wide range of empirical, theoretical, and methodological scholarship on *filter bubbles*, particularly focusing on social media environments - Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. In so doing, it responds to the call to understand whether social media algorithms - through personalization, recommendation systems, and user interactions - foster informational homogeneity or,

contrarily, enable greater access to diverse content (Sergeant & Tagg, 2019; Plettenberg et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2023).

Filter bubbles are frequently conflated with echo chambers. While both concepts imply the reinforcement of existing opinions, they differ in key respects (Kaiser & Rauchfleisch, 2020; Ferro-Santos et al., 2024). According to Bruns (2019), echo chambers are typically user-driven phenomena that involve the self-selection of like-minded communities, whereas *filter bubbles* often arise from algorithmic sorting processes that do not always involve deliberate user choice. Nevertheless, these two ideas frequently overlap in research and public discourse. Echo chambers, algorithmic curation, homophily, political polarization, fake news, and misinformation are all topics that intertwine with the filter bubble debate (Knudsen, 2023; Kanai & McGrane, 2021; Ackland et al., 2019; Mueller & Saeltzer, 2022).

While certain scholars argue that *filter bubbles* are a marginal or unproven phenomenon (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Bruns, 2019; Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2016), others contend that social media recommendations do create spaces wherein users predominantly encounter content that reaffirms their beliefs, thereby diminishing exposure to alternative views (Roechert et al., 2020; Kaiser & Rauchfleisch, 2020). Further controversy centers on whether *filter bubbles* undermine democratic processes, with some researchers expressing concern about the interplay of personalization and misinformation (Puschmann, 2019; Burbach et al., 2019; Valdez, 2020).

This review seeks to clarify and synthesize the complex landscape of *filter bubbles* in social media by focusing on several interrelated objectives. First, it systematically organizes existing research on *filter bubbles*, connecting diverse studies to present a clear picture of how algorithmic personalization influences user experiences on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. By synthesizing this literature, the review not only maps the terrain but also establishes a foundation for deeper analysis. Secondly, the work distinguishes *filter bubbles* from related concepts such as echo chambers, outlining the main theoretical frameworks and debates that explain the mechanisms behind algorithm-driven content curation and the resulting homogenous information environments. This conceptual clarification paves the way for a nuanced understanding of how these phenomena are interpreted across different scholarly perspectives.

Building on this foundation, the review then delves into empirical insights, surveying findings that both support and challenge the prevalence and impact of *filter bubbles*. By examining evidence on how algorithms may lead to homogenous content streams, alongside counterarguments suggesting that users can still encounter diverse viewpoints, the review paints a balanced portrait of the phenomenon. This analysis naturally leads into an exploration of the implications for democracy and civic life, where the discussion extends to potential effects on political polarization, public discourse, and citizens' exposure to a variety of opinions. Such implications are critical to understanding how *filter bubbles* might shape electoral behavior and democratic deliberation.

Finally, the review reflects on strategies proposed to mitigate the negative effects of *filter bubbles*, considering recommendations for algorithmic transparency, user education, policy interventions, and platform design changes. This comprehensive synthesis not only illuminates the historical, theoretical, and methodological dimensions of filter bubble research but also points to future directions for addressing these challenges in an evolving digital landscape.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a systematic and structured methodology to explore the phenomenon of *filter bubbles* in social media communication. The following subsections detail each step of the methodological process, from literature identification to thematic analysis.

2.1. Search Strategy

To comprehensively identify relevant literature, a search formula was devised to include major social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now rebranded as X), Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, and Reddit. The Web of Science database was used to execute the search, incorporating the term *filter bubble* in combination with these platforms and the broader category of “social media”.

("filter bubble") AND ("social media" OR "Facebook" OR "Twitter" OR
"Instagram" OR "LinkedIn" OR "TikTok" OR "Snapchat" OR "YouTube" OR
"Reddit")

The results were filtered to the Web of Science “Communication” category to ensure relevance to the discipline. This strategy ensured the inclusion of studies addressing key communication issues, such as audience engagement, media effects, and digital media practices.

2.2. Data Collection

The search process resulted in a collection of 33 articles, all retrieved from the Web of Science “Communication” category. These articles explicitly addressed *filter bubbles* in the context of social media platforms and were published in peer-reviewed outlets relevant to communication and media studies. The inclusion criteria required that articles (1) be peer-reviewed, (2) explicitly address filter bubbles within the context of social media platforms, and (3) be published in English or Spanish. Studies focusing solely on echo chambers or those not directly addressing communication aspects were excluded. The selected articles encompassed conceptual reviews, empirical studies, comparative analyses, and critical commentaries, providing a robust foundation for the literature review.

2.3. Bibliometric Analysis

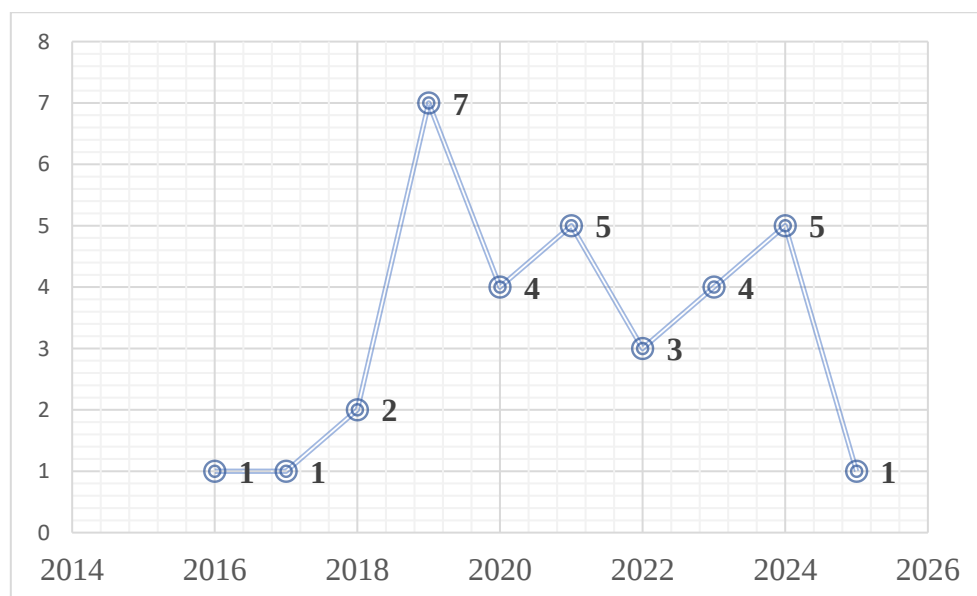
As shown in Figure 1, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of publications addressing the topic of filter bubbles since 2019, with a significant peak in 2020. This upward trend highlights the growing academic interest in the phenomenon, particularly within the field of communication and media studies. The

figure was generated using Microsoft Excel based on the results of the bibliometric analysis conducted through the Biblioshiny package in RStudio.

To analyze the temporal evolution of scientific output in this domain, bibliometric analysis was conducted using the Bibliometrix package in RStudio. By employing the Biblioshiny function, a detailed overview of publication trends was obtained. The analysis revealed a progressive increase in the number of articles, with significant growth starting in 2019. This trend reflects an escalating interest in *filter bubbles* as a pertinent phenomenon in digital communication studies, driven by their growing relevance in both academic and societal contexts. For example, the number of articles grew from one or two per year in the early stages to a consistent increase in later years, peaking in 2024.

Figure 1.

Temporal evolution of scientific publications on "filter bubbles" in the communication field (Web of Science, 2016–2025)



Source: Own elaboration using Bibliometrix

2.4. Thematic Clustering

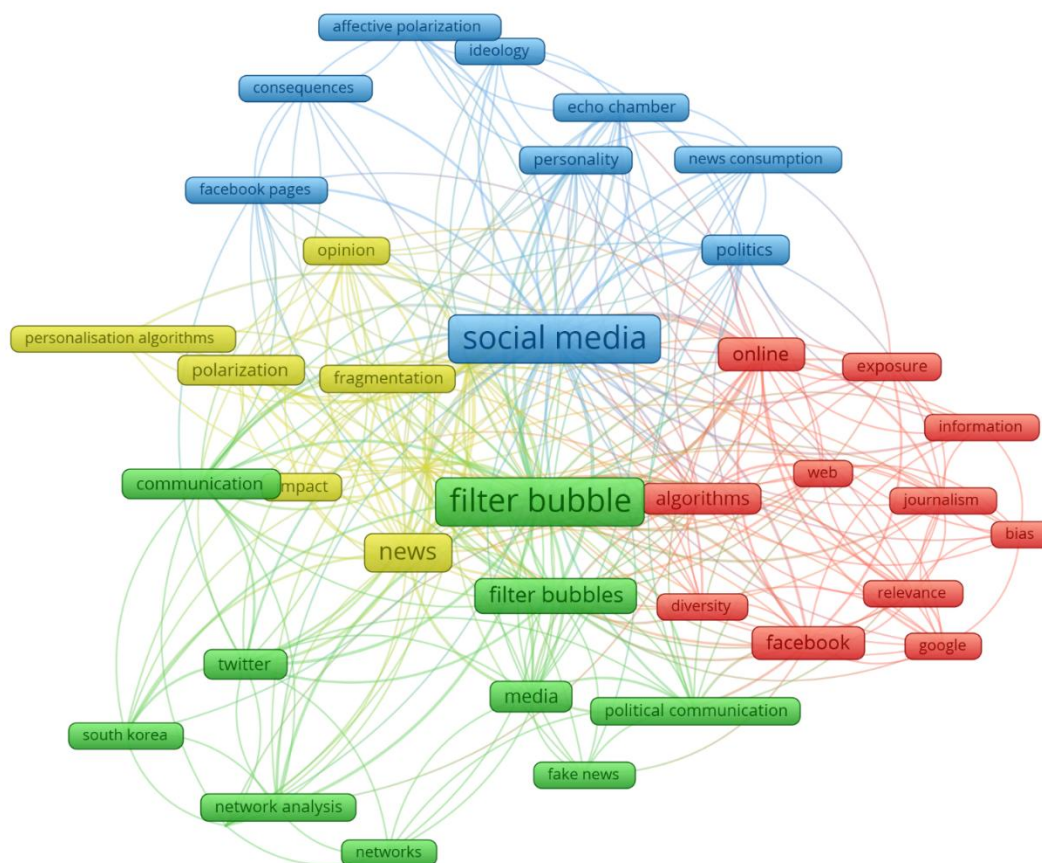
Figure 2 presents the keyword co-occurrence map produced by VOSviewer, identifying the most relevant thematic clusters in the literature on filter bubbles. These clusters include algorithmic personalization and bias (red), communication and political polarization (green), ideological and civic consequences (blue), and media fragmentation and exposure diversity (yellow). This thematic structure informed the organization of the subsequent sections of the review.

Following the bibliometric analysis, thematic clustering of the literature was conducted using VOSviewer software. This tool enabled the identification and visualization of keyword clusters, which were instrumental in organizing the literature review into distinct themes. Four primary clusters emerged:

- Cluster 1: Concepts such as algorithms, bias, diversity, and relevance, addressing the technical and informational aspects of *filter bubbles*.
- Cluster 2: Communication processes, including fake news, network analysis, and political communication, highlighting the intersection of media studies and societal dynamics.
- Cluster 3: Socio-political dimensions, such as affective polarization, ideology, news consumption, and social media usage.
- Cluster 4: Fragmentation, personalization algorithms, and selective exposure, linking these to broader debates about media impact and user behavior.

Figure 2.

Thematic clusters based on keyword co-occurrence in literature on "filter bubbles" (VOSviewer, Web of Science data)



Source: Own elaboration using VOSviewer

2.5. Literature review structure

These clusters provided a basis for structuring the literature review into coherent sections. The review begins by establishing the conceptual foundations of *filter bubbles*, including their definition, distinctions from echo chambers, and emergence in high-choice media environments. This theoretical groundwork lays the foundation for an exploration of empirical findings. The findings are divided into evidence supporting the formation of *filter bubbles* and evidence challenging their prevalence. Supporting

evidence focuses on algorithmic personalization, echo chamber-like dynamics, and the roles of misinformation and selective exposure. Counterarguments include the mitigating effects of incidental exposure and platform affordances, which may reduce the likelihood of *filter bubbles*.

2.6. Analysis of factors and consequences

The review also examines moderating and mediating factors that influence filter bubble effects. These factors include user behaviors and motivations, platform design and corporate incentives, and sociopolitical and cultural contexts. This section highlights the interplay between individual agency and systemic influences in shaping information exposure. Further, the consequences of *filter bubbles* for democracy and civic life are analyzed. Topics include the impact on democratic deliberation, challenges to the public sphere, civic engagement, political participation, and risks associated with manipulation and microtargeting. These discussions emphasize the broader societal implications of *filter bubbles* and their relevance to contemporary debates on media and democracy.

2.7. Mitigation Strategies

Finally, the review explores strategies for mitigating the negative effects of *filter bubbles*. Proposed solutions include platform-level interventions, such as transparency and algorithmic redesign, as well as user-focused approaches like enhancing digital literacy and self-awareness. Policy and regulatory considerations are also discussed, emphasizing the role of governance in fostering a balanced and informed digital ecosystem. Cross-cutting tools and the involvement of content curators are identified as additional avenues for promoting diverse information exposure and mitigating polarization.

3. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

Eli Pariser's (2011) introduction of the term *filter bubble* sparked widespread interest and debate. The concept describes an algorithmically curated environment in which social media users see predominantly content that aligns with their preferences or beliefs, inhibiting the exposure to dissenting opinions (Seargeant & Tagg, 2019). This mechanism, often driven by personalization and engagement-based metrics, can yield an environment that is highly congenial but potentially isolating or polarizing (Bruns, 2019; Jacobson et al., 2016).

Scholars have generally agreed that filter bubbles originate from algorithmic personalization systems that predict user preferences based on prior interactions, such as likes, shares, clicks, and viewing duration (Pariser, 2011; Yang et al., 2021). These algorithms customize content in ways that appear tailored to individual interests, across platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Roehert et al., 2020). As a result, content that contradicts a user's views may become less visible or entirely absent, limiting the diversity of exposure (Bechmann & Nielbo, 2018).

Importantly, scholars differentiate filter bubbles from echo chambers. While both phenomena lead to ideological reinforcement, echo chambers are generally user-driven—formed when individuals consciously seek out like-minded communities (Kaiser & Rauchfleisch, 2020). Filter bubbles, on the other hand, are algorithmically constructed: systems “learn” user behavior and selectively present similar content, even without intentional curation by the user (Ferro-Santos et al., 2024; Bruns, 2019).

Graham (2017) builds on Pariser’s concept by emphasizing how algorithmic filtering not only responds to individual preferences but also strengthens ideological homogeneity over time, creating personalized informational silos. Although some overlap exists between filter bubbles and echo chambers—since user behavior shapes algorithms and vice versa—the distinction between user agency and algorithmic automation remains critical (Mueller & Saeltzer, 2022; Lin et al., 2023).

In today’s high-choice media landscape, filter bubbles gain salience as machine learning systems prioritize engagement metrics, which often correlate with reinforcing content (Puschmann, 2019). This can exacerbate confirmation bias and narrow informational breadth, especially when users are repeatedly exposed to aligned content streams (Knudsen, 2023; Lopes et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, a separate body of work asserts that the online environment, because of its vast and varied nature, can also promote serendipitous encounters with diverse viewpoints (Ackland et al., 2019; Bruns, 2019). Such encounters may occur unintentionally (incidental exposure) or through deliberate exploration, depending on individual motivations (Jones-Jang & Chung, 2024).

4. THEMATIC FINDINGS

For analytical clarity, the extensive research on *filter bubbles* can be grouped into (a) evidence confirming the filter bubble phenomenon, (b) evidence contesting or refuting its prevalence, (c) complexities and contextual factors - such as political contexts or platform affordances - that moderate or mediate filter bubble effects, and (d) broader implications for democracy, political polarization, and user autonomy.

Multiple studies document that social media platforms’ recommendation algorithms foster *homophilous* communities and political segregation. For instance, Kaiser and Rauchfleisch (2020) find that YouTube’s channel recommendation algorithm led to highly *homophilous* clusters of right-wing political channels, effectively creating a filter bubble for users who initially engaged with such content. Similarly, Roechert et al. (2020) demonstrate that political recommendation networks on YouTube exhibit a strong tendency to point users toward ideologically coherent clusters, reinforcing prior beliefs.

Algorithmic personalization can also amplify the repetition of user-preferred content, as discovered by Whittaker et al. (2021). These authors argue that once users interact with far-right content, YouTube’s algorithm systematically suggests similar or more extreme channels, potentially deepening political divides. In other words, the

platform's commercial imperative to maximize engagement interacts with user signals to create a reinforcing system that intensifies content alignment (Knobloch-Westernwick & Westernwick, 2023).

Although echo chambers are not synonymous with *filter bubbles*, they often coincide in real-world usage. Studies show that deliberate choices to follow like-minded individuals magnify algorithmic effects (Mueller & Saeltzer, 2022). The heavier users invest in homogeneous communities, the more the personalization mechanism steers them toward reinforcing information (Bechmann & Nielbo, 2018). On Twitter, for example, individuals frequently retweet posts that reflect their ideological leanings, creating networks where dissenting perspectives are systematically absent (Yang et al., 2021).

Research on misinformation has further validated filter bubble concerns. Valdez (2020) finds that when "fake news" aligns with users' preexisting biases, they are more likely to engage with it. Because social media algorithms privilege content with high engagement metrics, this can lead to an environment in which users are readily fed misinformative stories, further reifying their bubbles. Indeed, Rhodes (2022) shows how participants in politically agreeable "bubbles" often assessed misleading content as more credible compared to those exposed to heterogeneous sources.

A strand of literature posits that *filter bubbles* are an overstated phenomenon. Bruns (2019) famously contends that the "myth of the filter bubble" is perpetuated by anecdotal evidence rather than robust empirical data. Dubois and Blank (2018) echo this skepticism, showing that while individuals do self-select *homophilous* networks to some degree, they also seek out diverse news sources, suggesting that users' media diets are more varied than might be presumed.

Puschmann (2019) similarly notes that concerns about personalization in Google News or other search engines may be overblown, given that actual empirical measurements of personalization often show only modest or minimal effects. This is supported by Haim (2018), who found no evidence of significant personalization in German Google News results.

Several studies highlight that incidental exposure to differing perspectives remains possible and perhaps common (Jones-Jang & Chung, 2024). On platforms like Facebook, users frequently encounter content shared by "weak ties" or acquaintances who might hold different views (Ackland et al., 2019). Such incidental exposure can mitigate polarization, as the mere presence of diverse information can reduce the severity of filter bubble effects (Knudsen, 2023).

Further, Fletcher and Nielsen (2017), cited in Bruns (2019), show that encountering news incidentally on social media can expand users' overall information diets, not narrow them. Thus, while personalization does occur, it does not necessarily preclude users from seeing or engaging with alternative viewpoints.

One challenge in filter bubble research is that findings often differ by platform. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok each employ distinct ranking algorithms, user

interface designs, and content-sharing logics (Lopes et al., 2023). The existence and severity of *filter bubbles* might thus be contingent upon platform architecture, user demographics, or the specific algorithms employed at a given time (Lin et al., 2023).

Moreover, *filter bubbles* may be more pronounced for users with strong partisan preferences or niche interests (Valdez, 2020; Ferro-Santos et al., 2024), whereas moderate users might experience less pronounced content curation. In other words, different communities and contexts may experience *filter bubbles* to varying degrees, making it difficult to generalize universal claims.

Filter bubble research also emphasizes how user agency and motivations play mediating roles. For instance, Seargeant and Tagg (2019) argue that user actions -“liking,” commenting, or intentionally seeking certain content- can significantly shape the platform’s perception of user preferences and thus feed personalization algorithms. Users who are more open to encountering diverse viewpoints, or who proactively follow accounts outside their typical ideological sphere, might effectively dilute algorithmic reinforcement (Lin et al., 2023).

Users’ digital literacy and awareness of algorithmic curation also influence how strongly *filter bubbles* manifest (Burbach et al., 2019). People who understand that personalization is occurring may adopt strategies to evade or subvert these filters, such as toggling incognito browsing, disabling browser history, or actively exploring contrarian content (Bechmann & Nielbo, 2018).

Platform design decisions significantly affect personalization outcomes. Many platforms rely on advertising-driven business models, where higher user engagement translates to greater advertising revenue (Whittaker et al., 2021). This can inadvertently incentivize the creation of *filter bubbles*, as showing users more content that resonates with them - politically or otherwise - tends to keep them on the platform longer (Meineck, 2018).

At the same time, some designers have begun experimenting with features to reduce algorithmic echoing and encourage exposure to alternative viewpoints. Kaiser and Rauchfleisch (2020) advocate for changes in recommendation systems that highlight cross-cutting content. Others, like Wiard et al. (2022), call for frameworks that measure and promote “source diversity.”

Beyond platform-specific factors, cultural and political contexts also shape filter bubble dynamics (Ackland et al., 2019). In polarized political environments, individuals may already harbor strong biases and utilize social media to reinforce them (Postill, 2018). In less polarized contexts, or in contexts where censorship operates differently, the interplay between personalization algorithms and societal norms might result in distinct forms of information curation.

A recurring concern in filter bubble research is whether social media personalization actively fuels political polarization. Many studies propose that algorithmic sorting and user homophily collectively push users toward more extreme positions (Roechert et al., 2020; Kaiser & Rauchfleisch, 2020). According to Terren and Borge (2021), the

resulting reduction in exposure to opposing viewpoints deepens ideological segregation, potentially hindering the deliberative function of public discourse.

However, others maintain that polarization arises from myriad factors beyond social media alone (Bruns, 2019; Bechmann & Nielbo, 2018). Some groups less active online display equal or greater shifts in polarization over time, as exemplified in data from Boxell et al. (2017), cited in Bruns (2019), highlighting the complexity of attributing polarization to *filter bubbles* exclusively.

Scholars such as Burbach et al. (2019) and Dahlgren (2021) express concern that *filter bubbles* can limit public discourse and stifle critical debate. If citizens predominantly encounter viewpoints they already endorse, fundamental democratic values - like the exposure to competing ideas, reasoned argument, and political compromise - may suffer (Lin et al., 2023). These dynamics are particularly salient given the widespread reliance on social media as a news source (Yang et al., 2021).

In extreme cases, *filter bubbles* might engender “autopropaganda,” whereby personalized feeds shield users from disagreement, leading to echo-chamber-like structures (Whittaker et al., 2021). This self-reinforcement can transform public debate into parallel monologues among groups with little mutual understanding. As a result, democratic processes reliant on compromise and consensus-building may be severely hampered.

A particularly concerning aspect of *filter bubbles* is their intersection with misinformation and fake news (Valdez, 2020). Political campaigns or malicious actors could exploit user preferences to disseminate misleading or manipulative content, embedding it within personalized feeds where users are more receptive (Burbach et al., 2019). Indeed, Cambridge Analytica’s involvement in the 2016 U.S. presidential election is frequently cited to illustrate how microtargeted ads can capitalize on *filter bubbles* to shape users’ perceptions (Burbach et al., 2019; Puschmann, 2019).

At the same time, some authors argue that misinformation is not solely a result of *filter bubbles*; rather, it is symptomatic of broader socioeconomic and technological changes in the information environment (Knobloch-Westerwick & Westerwick, 2023). Nevertheless, the synergy between algorithmic personalization and user predispositions remains a focal point in understanding digital misinformation dynamics.

5. MODERATING AND MEDIATING FACTORS IN FILTER BUBBLE EFFECTS

Studies by Plettenberg et al. (2020) and Burbach et al. (2019) suggest that users who are aware of how personalization algorithms operate exhibit less vulnerability to extreme forms of *filter bubbles*. These individuals might deliberately manipulate their social media behaviors - clicking on diverse content, actively searching for alternative sources - to signal broader interests to the algorithm. When users do so, personalization systems can register these varied signals and introduce more heterogeneous material (Bechmann & Nielbo, 2018).

On the other hand, users who remain ignorant of algorithmic sorting or assume an inherently “objective” feed are more prone to encountering only content the algorithm deems relevant to their existing patterns (Rhodes, 2022). A consistent theme is that digital literacy programs, platform transparency, and user education can collectively mitigate the more deleterious impacts of *filter bubbles* (Meineck, 2018).

Not all personalization is equally potent. Variation in algorithmic design, whether manual or machine-learning-based, can significantly shape user exposure. Platforms with recommender systems that privilege “engagement” and “similar content” signals, such as watch time and click rates, often intensify filter bubble creation (Kaiser & Rauchfleisch, 2020). In contrast, algorithms that incorporate diversity metrics or randomization strategies may reduce the risk of homogeneous information diets (Knudsen, 2023).

Thus, *filter bubbles* are not an inevitable byproduct of social media. They arise from specific design choices at the intersection of technical constraints, commercial imperatives, and corporate values (Ferro-Santos et al., 2024). Regulatory discussions have emerged, questioning the degree to which platforms should be obliged to ensure a certain level of viewpoint diversity (Lin et al., 2023).

A further mediating factor is the group-level dynamic. Even within a given platform, certain communities form more cohesive *filter bubbles* than others (Mueller & Saeltzer, 2022). For instance, extremist or niche ideological communities might display intense in-group reinforcement, while broader interest communities experience more cross-cutting engagement. In a large, mainstream user population, interactions can occasionally yield more ideological mixing, though this is not guaranteed (Jones-Jang & Chung, 2024).

Additionally, group polarization is not solely an algorithmic result, but also a social process, wherein like-minded groups reinforce each other’s beliefs over time (Valdez, 2020). For instance, “filter bubble pseudo-realities” can proliferate, prompting certain collectives to interpret mainstream factual claims as biased or to adopt conspiratorial viewpoints (Kanai & McGrane, 2021).

6. CONSEQUENCES FOR DEMOCRACY AND CIVIC LIFE

Many authors address how *filter bubbles* might undermine democratic dialogue. Dahlgren (2021) warns that personalization and high-choice media environments may fragment the public sphere into micro-publics that do not meaningfully intersect, hampering mutual understanding. In tandem, Roechert et al. (2020) illustrate how algorithmic recommendations to increasingly homogeneous political content can limit awareness of diverse policy options, potentially skewing voter judgments. Rodríguez-Ferrandiz (2019) cautions that personalized algorithms not only narrow users’ informational horizons but also fragment the public sphere into segmented ‘markets of truth,’ thereby exacerbating polarization and threatening democratic dialogue.

Nonetheless, empirical evidence remains mixed on the precise magnitude of this threat. Bruns (2019) and Dubois and Blank (2018) suggest that while *filter bubbles* exist

in certain segments of the population, broad generalizations risk overlooking how many users do, in fact, see cross-cutting information. Moreover, in some contexts, social media can facilitate incidental exposure to alternative perspectives, thereby fostering, rather than undermining, democratic deliberation (Sergeant & Tagg, 2019).

Research on the interplay between *filter bubbles* and political participation is similarly nuanced. On one hand, *filter bubbles* might mobilize political involvement within tightly knit communities by reinforcing shared identities and grievances (Postill, 2018). On the other hand, such effects can exacerbate tensions, reduce willingness to compromise, and entrench partisan hostility (Roechert et al., 2020).

Lopes et al. (2023) observe that certain platforms - like TikTok - rapidly generate personalized feeds that capture user attention, potentially intensifying a single-sided flow of political messages. Meanwhile, others, such as Twitter, can be used both to galvanize protest movements and to reinforce in-groups through retweet networks (Ferro-Santos et al., 2024).

Microtargeting, using user data to deliver highly tailored messages or advertisements, raises critical ethical questions about the intersection of *filter bubbles* and democracy (Burbach et al., 2019). If individuals inhabit personalized informational cocoons, political campaigns might exploit those cocoons by distributing false or misleading narratives specifically curated to amplify existing biases (Valdez, 2020). This tactic can undermine a free marketplace of ideas, for voters are never presented with neutral or alternative perspectives but are instead enveloped in content that resonates with their prejudices (Kaiser & Rauchfleisch, 2020).

At the same time, some scholars consider microtargeting to be simply a refined version of conventional political advertising and do not see it as entirely novel or uniquely dangerous (Bechmann & Nielbo, 2018). The debate hinges on how effectively *filter bubbles* can be exploited for manipulative ends.

7. PROPOSED MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Many scholars have advocated design changes to platforms to counter the creation and reinforcement of *filter bubbles*. Recommendations include incorporating explicit diversity metrics in personalization algorithms, randomizing a portion of suggested content, or offering user-friendly toggles to adjust the “strength” of personalization (Puschmann, 2019; Kaiser & Rauchfleisch, 2020).

Lin, Wang, Lee and Kim (2023) and Knudsen (2023) both highlight the importance of “counterfactual scenarios,” in which platforms might test versions of algorithms that actively diversify user feeds and track the outcomes. Such experiments could illuminate whether users prefer or benefit from heterogeneous exposure. Others propose an “algorithmic transparency requirement,” where users can see precisely why certain content is recommended, thereby giving them a sense of control (Burbach et al., 2019; Rhodes, 2022).

Several empirical studies indicate that user-driven strategies can diminish filter bubble risks. Bechmann and Nielbo (2018) and Plettenberg et al. (2020) demonstrate how digital literacy programs that teach users about personalization can prompt them to actively seek out alternative viewpoints. Encouraging practices such as subscribing to ideologically diverse media outlets, critically assessing source credibility, and periodically clearing cookies or search histories can help broaden recommendation pools (Mueller & Saeltzer, 2022).

Additionally, “algorithmic accountability” frameworks might help to educate users on how their behaviors feed back into personalization systems (Seargeant & Tagg, 2019). Platforms could also embed prompts - akin to “are you sure you want to see more like this?” - to nudge users toward reflecting on their consumption patterns.

Filter bubbles often intersect with heated discussions on platform governance and policy. Some scholars advocate for policy interventions that enforce transparency around algorithms, user data usage, and microtargeting practices (Whittaker et al., 2021; Dahlgren, 2021). The rationale is that if personalization is openly disclosed, users are better equipped to counteract potential limitations in their media diets (Knudsen, 2023).

At the same time, critics worry about government overreach and the potential stifling of innovation (Bruns, 2019). Regulatory frameworks, it is argued, must balance the need to protect public discourse from manipulative or polarizing personalization with the principle of free expression.

An array of “bubble-bursting” tools has been developed by third-party organizations to help individuals see how algorithms shape their feeds. For instance, websites or plugins that compare a user’s social media feed with alternative vantage points or that highlight how certain topics appear from different ideological stances (Plettenberg et al., 2020). Some researchers encourage news organizations to incorporate bridging or cross-cutting content to actively promote balanced coverage across the political spectrum, mitigating filter bubble effects from the supply side (Bechmann & Nielbo, 2018).

8. DISCUSSION

The literature on *filter bubbles* reveals a multifaceted and intricate landscape where algorithmic personalization, user agency, and sociopolitical context interact in complex ways. While some studies (e.g., Kaiser & Rauchfleisch, 2020; Roechert et al., 2020) provide evidence of algorithm-driven *homophilous* clusters guiding users toward ideologically uniform content streams, other scholars (Bruns, 2019; Dubois & Blank, 2018) challenge the notion that such processes are as widespread or severe as often portrayed. This discourse suggests that while *filter bubbles* exist, their influence may not be as monolithic or deterministic as originally feared.

A recurring theme in the research emphasizes the pivotal role of user agency in both reinforcing and countering filter bubble formation. Mueller and Saeltzer (2022) note that although algorithmic curation frequently amplifies confirmation biases by

reacting to user behavior, the outcome is not predetermined. Savvy users can actively engage with platform features to diversify their content exposure. For example, by seeking out a variety of sources or deliberately following accounts with differing viewpoints, users can signal to algorithms that their interests are broad, thereby mitigating the narrowing effect of homogenous recommendations. Seargeant and Tagg (2019) support this by showing how individual interpretations and anticipations of algorithmic behavior significantly shape filtering outcomes. This suggests that empowerment through digital literacy and critical engagement is a key strategy in combating the isolation that *filter bubbles* might cause.

Moreover, the argument that *filter bubbles* uniformly erode democratic dialogue oversimplifies the broader media ecology. Bechmann and Nielbo (2018) highlight that the Internet, particularly social media, offers unprecedented access to diverse sources and viewpoints. Whether a user's media environment becomes more diverse or homogeneous hinges on a nuanced interplay of factors: personal preferences, social network structures, technological design choices, and contextual influences. This complexity means that generalizations about the detrimental effects of *filter bubbles* may overlook the varied experiences of different users and communities. Knudsen (2023) and Lin et al. (2023) argue that such interplay should be examined carefully to understand the net impact on information diversity.

The discussion of *filter bubbles* also has to be situated within larger trends in digital communication, such as the commodification of user data, increased surveillance, and the transition from traditional broadcast models to more decentralized, many-to-many networked interactions (Puschmann, 2019; Kanai & McGrane, 2021). In this rapidly evolving environment, the debate shifts from a binary question of the existence of *filter bubbles* to a more profound inquiry into how these phenomena shape user autonomy, influence political identity formation, and potentially exacerbate partisan divides. Valdez (2020) warns that the consequences may go beyond passive content consumption, affecting how individuals perceive their political realities and engage in civic life.

The term *filter bubble* itself has become a powerful metaphor in public discourse, sometimes provoking moral panic. Whittaker et al. (2021) critique this alarmist tone, suggesting that an excessive focus on *filter bubbles* can distract from other critical issues like data privacy, online harassment, or disinformation campaigns orchestrated by foreign entities (Badawy et al., 2019). This points to a need for balanced debates that consider *filter bubbles* within a broader framework of digital challenges, rather than treating them as an isolated or singularly catastrophic issue.

Navigating this complexity requires a more dynamic and nuanced understanding of *filter bubbles*. Instead of viewing algorithms as inexorable forces that trap users in ideological silos, it is helpful to recognize the role of human decision-making and broader systemic factors. For instance, as Mueller and Saeltzer (2022) suggest, user behavior can either amplify or counteract algorithmic tendencies. If users consciously seek out diverse perspectives, they can disrupt the feedback loop that reinforces

homogeneity. This underscores the idea that technological determinism is not absolute; human choices and interventions matter.

Furthermore, acknowledging the variability across platforms and contexts is crucial. Different social media platforms implement distinct algorithms and affordances that shape how *filter bubbles* might form. The severity and nature of these effects can vary depending on the platform's design, user demographic, and prevailing sociopolitical climate. Recognizing these variations can guide more targeted strategies for mitigation and inform platform-specific interventions.

The discourse on *filter bubbles* also invites reflection on how societies value diversity of thought and debate. In a healthy democracy, exposure to a range of opinions is vital for informed decision-making and mutual understanding. While *filter bubbles* can hinder this exposure, they are not entirely beyond remedy. Initiatives aimed at increasing algorithmic transparency, educating users about digital literacy, and encouraging platforms to design features that promote diverse content can play a role in countering these isolating tendencies.

In summary, the discussion surrounding *filter bubbles* is far from settled. This phenomenon exists, but its impacts are mediated by user actions, platform design choices, and wider social forces. A clear, logical understanding of these interdependencies enriches the conversation, moving it beyond simplistic binaries of existence versus non-existence. Instead, it frames *filter bubbles* as part of a larger, dynamic system where human agency, technological design, and policy decisions converge. This perspective allows for more constructive approaches to mitigate the negative effects, emphasizing user empowerment, transparent design, and context-sensitive interventions.

9. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of *filter bubbles* on social media challenges simple characterizations and invites a nuanced understanding that emerges from an interplay of algorithms, user behaviors, and sociopolitical contexts. After a comprehensive review of the literature, several interesting conclusions can be drawn, pointing to both the intricacy of the problem and potential pathways forward.

First, while the idea of *filter bubbles* originally sparked alarm over the potential for social media to isolate users in ideological silos, the evidence paints a more complex picture. It becomes clear that algorithmic curation does not operate in a vacuum: it is influenced by user interactions, design choices, and broader cultural forces. Algorithms are reactive to user behavior and preferences, and while they can guide users toward reinforcing content, they also occasionally expose users to serendipitous encounters with diverse viewpoints. This dual capacity indicates that the impacts of *filter bubbles* are not uniform but vary widely across platforms and among different user demographics.

A key insight from the literature is the reciprocal relationship between user agency and algorithmic personalization. Users are not merely passive recipients of content;

their choices, actions, and awareness significantly shape the extent of filter bubble effects. Those with higher digital literacy or a conscious desire to encounter divergent perspectives can actively mitigate the insularity of their media diet. This suggests that empowering users with knowledge and tools to understand and navigate algorithmic biases can be as important as technical reforms on the platforms themselves. It frames the conversation not just around what algorithms do, but how individuals can and do interact with these algorithms to shape their information ecosystems.

Furthermore, the research underscores that *filter bubbles* should be considered within the broader dynamics of media consumption and political discourse. The concern is not solely that algorithms create echo chambers, but that they might amplify preexisting biases and accelerate polarization. However, attributing political polarization exclusively to *filter bubbles* risks oversimplification. Polarization is multifaceted and driven by numerous social, economic, and psychological factors. While *filter bubbles* may contribute to isolation from opposing views, they must be seen as one element within a complex mosaic that influences public opinion and democratic processes.

Another important conclusion is that the design and business models of social media platforms significantly drive the extent to which *filter bubbles* form. Platforms optimized for engagement often favor content that resonates strongly with user preferences, creating environments ripe for homogenous information flows. Yet, evidence suggests that these same platforms can be reoriented or modified to introduce diversity. By redesigning recommendation algorithms to prioritize balanced viewpoints or by incorporating features that highlight alternative perspectives, platforms can subtly nudge users out of their informational comfort zones. The willingness of designers and corporate stakeholders to experiment with such interventions is crucial and hints at a path toward more pluralistic digital environments.

The role of policy and regulation emerges as another significant factor. Transparency measures that require platforms to disclose how their algorithms work and how user data drives content recommendations could empower users and researchers alike. Regulatory frameworks need to strike a balance between protecting the public sphere and preserving freedom of expression. Moving forward, effective policy interventions will likely require collaborative efforts that bring together technologists, policymakers, academics, and civil society groups to co-create guidelines that ensure both innovation and democratic integrity.

The consequences for democracy and civic life are also profound and multifaceted. On the one hand, *filter bubbles* risk narrowing public discourse and undermining deliberative processes vital to a healthy democracy by creating segmented and insular communities. On the other hand, the same networked technologies that make *filter bubbles* possible also hold the promise of connecting diverse groups, fostering empathy, and facilitating new forms of civic engagement when harnessed deliberately. Therefore, one promising conclusion is that combating the negative effects of *filter*

bubbles is not solely about preventing insularity, but about actively cultivating spaces for cross-cutting dialogue and critical engagement.

What the literature suggests is that interventions to counter *filter bubbles* can be both technological and social. Education campaigns that improve digital literacy empower users to question and diversify their information sources. Community-driven initiatives and cross-ideological projects can promote understanding and bridge divides, reducing the likelihood of radicalization within isolated bubbles. These grassroots efforts complement top-down strategies by providing a holistic approach that addresses both the supply and demand sides of the information equation.

In reflecting on these insights, an important takeaway is that the discourse on *filter bubbles* should shift from fatalistic narratives of inevitable isolation to discussions of agency, responsibility, and design. Rather than viewing *filter bubbles* as an intractable threat, the community can explore ways to harness the underlying technologies for positive ends. This reframing encourages optimism that through a combination of user empowerment, thoughtful design, transparent governance, and responsive policy frameworks, the adverse effects of *filter bubbles* can be mitigated.

Finally, the journey of understanding *filter bubbles* is ongoing. As social media platforms evolve and user behaviors shift, continuous research will be required to track new patterns, test interventions, and adapt strategies to maintain a healthy information environment. Future work should embrace interdisciplinary approaches, combining insights from communication studies, computer science, political theory, and psychology to develop a richer, more actionable understanding of how to foster a digital public sphere that is both diverse and democratic.

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*Understanding the Dynamics of Filter Bubbles in Social Media Communication:
A Literature Review*

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