

Chau Tong, PhD
Department of Communication, Cornell University
ctt39@cornell.edu

Abstract

This study examines attitudinal correlates of approval of political news curation performed by journalists or algorithms using survey data from American Internet users (N= 2018). Results show that **online source diversity** and **social media trust** have the **strongest positive effects** on approval of journalistic curation, and algorithmic selection based on personal behavior and social recommendation. **Populist attitudes**, intriguingly, is **strongly associated with support for algorithmic curation**. Moreover, partisans with **extreme opinions** on immigration and climate change differ in attitudes towards journalistic and social gatekeeping. Support for **algorithmic selection** is particularly **stronger for Republicans with selective exposure tendency**. There is, however, no connection between preference for automated political news selection and **likelihood to be in echo chambers**.

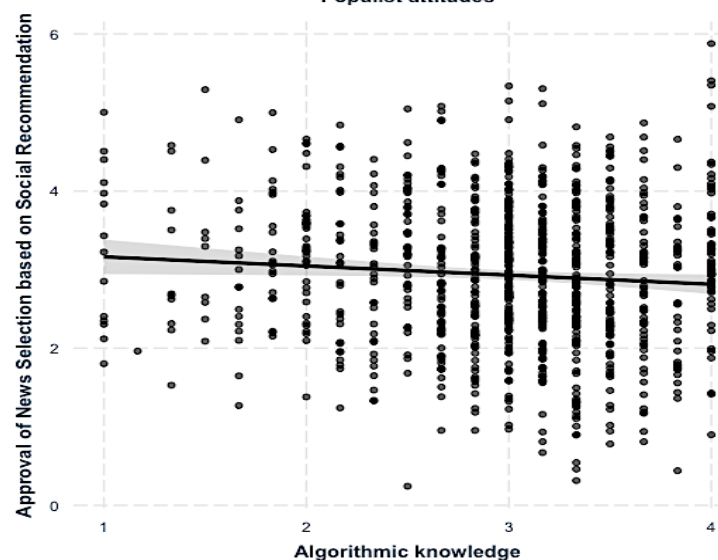
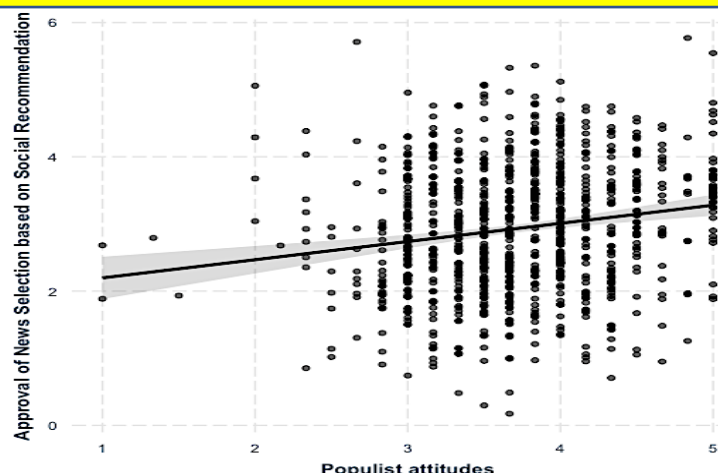
Introduction

Political communication scholars often express concerns about the implications of how citizens select and share political news in the age of partisan and social media. Will the rise of algorithmic news recommendations further increase fragmentation and polarization? This study builds on the literature on users' attitudes towards journalistic and algorithmic news curation (e.g. Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018; Thurman et al., 2019) to **examine who is more likely to prefer algorithmically selected political news**, and **whether polarized partisans are more susceptible to the effects of personalization, whatever these effects are**.

Data & Analysis

Survey data was provided by the **Quello Search Project**, which collected random samples of about 2,000 Internet users aged 18 and older from seven nations in January 2017. The analysis is conducted on the U.S. sample using OLS linear regression models.

Results



- DEMOCRATS' approval of news selection based on Algorithmic Tracking
- REPUBLICANS' approval of news selection based on Algorithmic Tracking
- ◇ DEMOCRATS' approval of news selection based on Social Recommendation
- △ REPUBLICANS' approval of news selection based on Social Recommendation

Discussion & Conclusion

- 1) As algorithmic filtering becomes more important in how people get news online, it is important to understand factors that shape users' acceptance and demand for this technology.
- 2) Some partisan tendencies are more strongly related to demand (or lack thereof) for algorithmic selection, which suggests that **partisans might be differently subjected to news personalization effects**. Whether this is a cause for concern is dependent on what exactly those effects look like.
- 3) Current research states that the claim of political filter bubble online is overstated. But there is **no agreed-upon normative standards** to evaluate how algorithmic recommendation should function, esp. on **issues of diversity and plurality**: Is it desirable that algorithm fosters information homogeneity, or highlights varied information and different viewpoints?

References:
Thurman, N., Judith Moeller, Natali Helberger & Damian Trilling (2019) My Friends, Editors, Algorithms, and I, *Digital Journalism*, 7:4, 447-469.
Fletcher, R. & Nielsen, R. (2018). Generalized skepticism: how people navigate news on social media. *Information, Communication and Society*, 22(12), 1751-1769.

