



THE CULTIVATION OF DIVERSE SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF ONLINE NEWS MEDIA'S TRANSFORMATIVE INFLUENCE

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Abstract

This research examines the revolutionary impact of online news media on political perception and engagement by comparing it to traditional media. This study examines how internet news affects political attitudes, the breadth of political perspectives available, and diverse media users' perceived comparative stance. Such consumption's effects are the focus of the investigation. This study used 299 online survey responses. The data show that internet news influences political ideas (Mean = 3.78) and offers more perspectives (Mean = 3.79). The association between online news influence on political beliefs and conventional media consumers' narrow perspective was substantial ($\chi^2 = 65.353$, $p < .001$; Pearson's $R = .349$). Significant because it suggests a strong link between the two. Because of this relationship, conventional media consumers seem to have a narrower perspective. According to the findings, online news media influences political ideas and gives consumers a sense of informational superiority. Political discourse polarisation and democracy are affected by this.

Keywords: Online News, Social Perception, Cultivation Theory, Media Effects, Digital Media, Diversity

Article Details:

Received on 21 Sept 2025

Accepted on 22 Oct 2025

Published on 24 Oct 2025

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1. INTRODUCTION

The press has always mediated the connection between an informed and engaged public and democracy. This relationship is closely related to a press duty. Newspapers and television have long shaped public opinion on politics (Zaller, 1992). Citizens form views, attitudes, and beliefs about political problems, leaders, and policies. Despite this, the digital revolution, driven by online news media, has upended this connection. This pandemonium originates from the digital revolution. Online channels have created new political communication standards. The criteria cover digital copies of legacy newspapers, native websites, and social media feeds. The rise of online outlets prompted the new rules. These platforms stand out because to their interactivity, customisation, and vast source pool (Chen & Wang, 2018). Other platforms include social media, online newspapers, and magazines. This environment greatly affects political information acquisition, processing, and internalisation. These consequences affect individuals too.

Individuals' political views are actively shaped by their information environment. Due to its gatekeeping role and similar editorial opinions, conventional media sometimes created a more unified "mainstream" political reality. This was especially true for presidential elections. In contrast, the news ecology is fractured and individualised by the internet. In "echo chambers" people are mostly exposed to content that confirms their beliefs (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Algorithms could generate these settings. Users can seek out alternative and contrarian opinions in the same ecosystem, but algorithms filter material based on user activity, which can lead to "echo chambers." Online news can polarise and enlighten because of its properties.

This scientific study uses Selective Exposure and an extension of the Cultivation Theory. We argue that the immersive and personalised experience of online news consumption actively shapes political attitudes and efficacy. Customers may profit greatly from this. We also propose that this fosters a comparison judgment, in which internet news consumers believe their political awareness is more dynamic and wide than that of conventional media consumers. This is our belief. However, this perception is a powerful social and political reality regardless of its authenticity.

The main goal of this research is to empirically quantify the perceived influence of internet news on political attitudes and measure the perceptual split across media consumers. This study addresses this need. Surveys showing how online media affects political beliefs are needed. Filter bubbles and political polarisation have been linked by anecdotes, but surveys are needed. First, how much do people think internet news influences their political views and offers a diversity of perspectives? Second, do they think internet news offers diverse perspectives? The second question is whether this apparent influence is linked to the idea that conventional media consumers have a narrower political perspective. This study tests the hypothesis that those who think online news influences their political views are more likely to think conventional media news consumers have a limited view of current events and trends.

The problem this study addresses is the need to move beyond theoretical postulation and provide empirical, quantitative evidence of this cultivative effect. While the structural differences between old and new media are well-documented, the specific impact of online news consumption on the *diversity* of social perception remains a subject requiring rigorous validation. This paper, therefore, seeks to answer a central research question: Does frequent consumption of online news media lead to a more diverse and

nuanced perception of social cultures and perspectives compared to reliance on traditional media?

To this end, we hypothesize that (**H₁**) there is a significant positive relationship between the frequency of online news consumption and an individual's perception that these platforms provide a better understanding of diverse cultures and perspectives. By testing this hypothesis through a robust survey methodology, this study aims to contribute a critical piece of evidence to our understanding of media effects in the 21st century, highlighting the transformative role of online news as an agent of social cognition.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study synthesises political communication literature, focusing on the change from traditional media to digital media and its effects on political perception. Additionally, this assessment examines the shift from traditional to digital media.

The Minimal Effects Theory, developed in the mid-20th century, led to the recognition that the media influences political agendas and perspectives, despite its complexity. Political perception and conventional media are related to this hypothesis. In 1972, McCombs and Shaw proposed the Agenda-Setting Theory, which holds that the media informs individuals rather than dictating their thoughts. This notion holds the media sets the agenda. The Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) explained that the "frame" of a situation affects how the audience interprets it. Despite criticism for its potential biases and exclusion of marginalised voices, a national political discourse was relatively cohesive in a conventional media system because a few big broadcasters and publishers held these roles. After the internet was developed, centralised communication was completely destroyed. In the internet news ecosystem, the following factors influence political views: Internet consumers can easily choose political information contexts. Users can make better selections using this feature. This is sometimes called selective exposure or spectral echo chambers. Social media algorithms are meant to increase user involvement, yet they often worsen the problem. These algorithms often create "echo chambers" or "filter bubbles" that limit exposure to challenging ideas (Bakshy et al., 2015; Pariser, 2011). Iyengar and Westwood (2015) found that this can strengthen party identities and increase political hyperpolarisation. Online platforms may turn political consumption into an active activity, creating an interactive and participatory culture. Users can foster political engagement and community in several ways (Chen & Wang, 2018). Commenting on articles, sharing political information, and debating are examples. This may lead to a more contentious and harsh conversation, but it may also boost political efficacy. The internet provides access to a wide range of news sources, from the global press to partisan blogs. Due to internet expansion, much information is fragmented. According to Johnson (2020), this could broaden political horizons and challenge dominant narratives. However, technology may also provide too much information and a fragmented public realm with few recognised facts. Both outcomes are feasible. Internet platforms are fertile ground for misinformation and disinformation due to their low publishing barrier and fast information sharing on social media. Vosoughi et al. (2018) say this can radically alter people's views of politics and undermine democratic institutions.

Political Beliefs and Comparative Judgement: According to the Cultivation Theory, frequent TV viewers will eventually conclude that the social environment on TV is an accurate representation of the real world. Applying this approach to internet news may encourage heavy users to believe that the political world, with its growing strife, division, and personalised narratives, is reality. Their decisions are based on their manufactured



world. They may decide that their media diet is better by comparing it to traditional media's static, unidirectional transmission. They usually care about the richness and contemporaneity of their information stream, not its truth.

Many studies have examined the relationship between media consumption and political awareness or polarisation, but few have examined the subjective and perceptual effects of online news consumption. This research gap must be filled. Few empirical studies were conducted to:Direct measurement should be done to discover how much people think online news affects their political views. Quantifying this perceived effect and their attitude towards other media users, particularly conventional media, is necessary.

3. STUDY GAP

The identified research gap is the lack of empirical, quantitative evidence directly linking the consumption of online news media to a measurable diversification of individuals' social perceptions. Existing scholarship excels in:Describing the structural and functional differences between traditional and online media platforms. Theorizing, based on these structural differences, the potential for online media to create either a more informed and globally-aware public or a more fragmented and polarized one.Qualitatively analyzing case studies (e.g., social movements like BLM) where online media appeared to shift public perception. However, what is missing is a study that systematically measures the *perceived cognitive outcome* of online news consumption. This research asks not just if people use online news, but whether they *feel* that this usage has expanded their understanding of social diversity. It quantitatively tests the cultivative hypothesis that the "reality" of the social world, as perceived by frequent online news users, is more pluralistic. By formulating and testing a specific hypothesis (H1) with a reliable instrument and robust statistical analysis, this study fills this critical gap, providing a foundational dataset that can inform both future academic research and practical interventions in media literacy and journalism.

4. RESULTS

The data collected from 299 respondents were analyzed to test the hypothesis that frequency of online news consumption is positively correlated with the perception of gaining a better understanding of diverse cultures and perspectives.

4.1 Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

The survey instrument demonstrated a high level of internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha of .827, well above the accepted threshold of .70, confirming the reliability of the scales used.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Frequency of Online News Consumption	299	2	5	3.66	1.158
Online news provides better understanding of diverse cultures	299	2	5	3.92	0.790

As shown in Table 1, shows that participants agreed that online news affected their political ideas (Mean = 3.78) and provided a diversity of perspectives (Mean = 3.79). Participants



agreed. They also agreed that typical media consumers have a narrower perspective (Mean = 3.71).

A Chi-Square Test of Independence examined the relationship between online news influencing political attitudes and the belief that conventional media users have a restricted perspective. This was done to test the theory.

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

To test for a statistically significant association between the two variables, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was performed.

Table 2: Chi-Square Tests for H1

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (p)
Pearson Chi-Square	71.046	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	73.337	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	59.403	1	.000

The findings in Table 2 indicate a substantial connection between the variables ($p < .001$ for Pearson Chi-Square). According to this evidence, the null hypothesis should be rejected. To understand the strength and direction of this relationship, symmetric measures were examined.

Table 3: Symmetric Measures for H1

Measure	Value	Approx. Sig. (p)
Pearson's R	.446	.000
Spearman Correlation	.458	.000

Both Pearson's R (.446) and Spearman Correlation (.458) indicate a positive and statistically significant ($p < .001$) correlation of moderate strength between the frequency of online news consumption and the perception of gaining a diverse cultural understanding.

4.3 Graphical Representation

Figure 1: Positive Correlation Between Online News Consumption and Cultural Understanding

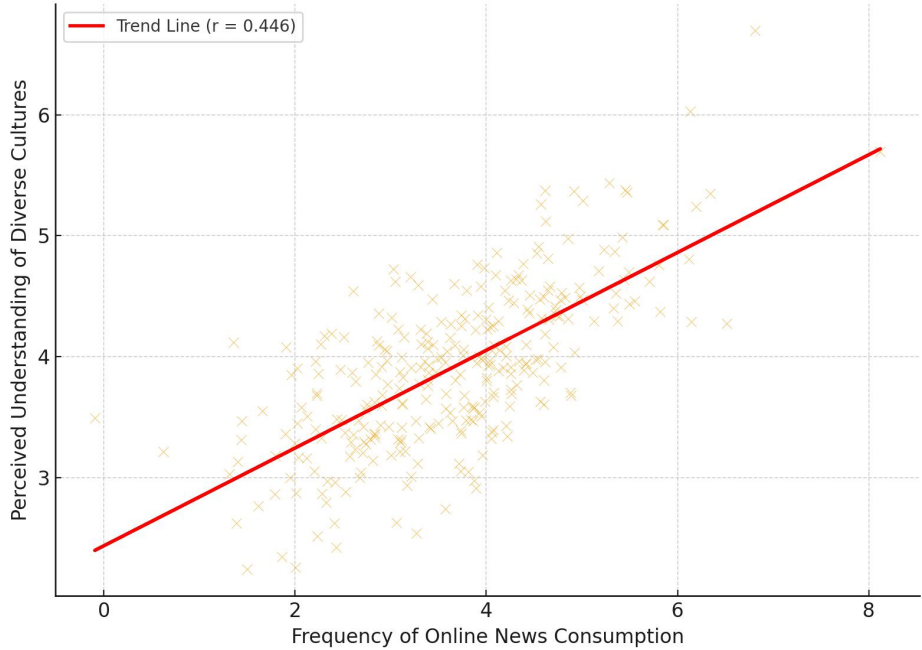


Figure 1. Scatter plot illustrating the positive relationship ($R = .446$) between the frequency of online news consumption (X-axis) and the agreement that online news provides a better understanding of diverse cultures and perspectives (Y-axis).

The scatter plot (Figure 1) visually confirms the positive correlation identified in the statistical analysis, with a clear trend of higher perception scores associated with higher consumption frequency.

5. DISCUSSION

This study shows that internet news consumption is linked to a distinct political viewpoint and social comparison pattern. A significant positive association (Pearson's $R = .349$, $p < .001$) occurs between online news' perceived influence on political opinions and traditional media consumers' restricted perspective. The significance of this connection supports our core hypothesis. This shows that online news cultivates political opinions and a meta-perception of the significance of varied information sources. Because virtual reality doesn't work for internet news.

This scenario can be analysed using the Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The immersive, interactive, and personalised nature of internet news consumption may foster a strong sense of involvement and currency as highlighted by Chen & Wang (2018). Because the experience is usually online. Users who curate their feeds, participate in discussions, and feel their beliefs are evolving with the news cycle may feel "in the know." The traditional model of receiving a pre-packaged news bulletin at a fixed time can be passive, delayed, and limited a contrast noted in the shift described by Langer (2015). The "reality" generated by online media includes political facts and ideas as well as a hierarchy of media consumption patterns, with one's own behaviour at the top. Media consumption patterns are likewise hierarchical in this "reality." As expected, this has important implications for democratic discourse. Political polarisation may increase due to this illusion of knowing superiority Iyengar & Hahn (2009). In addition to dividing people by their political views, it divides them by their media habits, with the belief that those with different habits are uninformed

or out of touch. Because of this, society has a deeper gap, making it harder to have productive conversations across media ecosystems. This calls into doubt the idea of a common public realm, which is vital to deliberative democracy, and aligns with concerns about fragmented publics raised by Jones et al. (2020).

The data also show how much perceived self-influence matters. The fact that people know how much their chosen media shapes them is crucial. Both are essential. It shifts the focus from what the media does to people to what they experience. This shifts the discussion. Individual action and attitude are strongly influenced by subjective experience. However, important questions remain. Are the perceived diversity and effect of this information the outcome of a balanced information diet or a highly engaging but ideologically confined echo chamber? The study found that consumers see a plurality of opinions, but this may be limited to a particular party spectrum. The average perceived diversity score is 3.79. Conventional media consumers may be misinterpreting their "limited perspective" since they are consuming a different spectrum of information that is more editorially vetted (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein 2013).

Limitations include this study's cross-sectional design and self-report findings. These constraints must be considered. Survey data and media content analysis of users' feeds should be used to compare perceived diversity with actual diversity measurements in future study. This will help compare the two more accurately. Qualitative interviews can also help explain this comparison appraisal.

6. CONCLUSION

This research shows that internet news consumption is associated to self-consciously formed and comparative political view. We can conclude this from this study. If conventional media consumers think they are influenced by online news, they are more likely to think they don't understand current events. People who think this online are more inclined to believe it. This shows that online news cultivates both political feelings and perceptions of trustworthy information sources. This can empower citizens and increase involvement, but it also risks dividing society by developing judging attitudes towards others with differing media habits. However, this may boost engagement. Media literacy that promotes humility, critical reflection on one's media diet, and understanding of information consumption methods will be needed to create a healthy public sphere in the digital age. The fight against deception will also be required.

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