

# HOW THE INTERNET CREATED MULTIPLE PUBLICS

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Political identification in the digital age has shifted online: increasingly, people define their political identity in how they come together around issues and news events on the social web.

We adopt online political identities in three major ways: through shared consumption of information on social media platforms; through participation in political movements through hashtags and around news events; or through performance of our political identity via virtue signaling on the Internet. From the alt-right to Bernie bros, online communities coalesce around news articles and other information that allows them to express their political affiliations through the content they read, react to, and share. And through this consumption of similar information, they form little political information universes often referred to as “media ecosystems.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Carolyn E. Schmitt, ‘*Network Propaganda*’ Explored, HARVARD GAZETTE (Oct. 25,

These universes are segregated in the kind of information they consume due to the ways in which the social web is engineered. The Internet caters information to people in highly personalized ways and often delivers more of the same through algorithms rather than serendipitously. It is optimized for the virality of one-punch headlines, not stories with nuance. And this pushes political information universes further apart than they may otherwise naturally be.

Thus, we face a fractured political landscape online—multiple publics, if you will, that are increasingly informing our real-life affiliations, too. And with that, we are also contending with multiple realities and various spectrums of what is politically acceptable to different online groups, when we look at politics as a nation.

This Paper will closely examine group formation around information online through the lens of one platform: Facebook. While this Paper cannot comprehensively study political coalescing online, it offers one example of the effect of online information consumption on political identity formation and the segregation of information universes brought about by this form of online assembling. While Facebook is just one of many social media platforms that play a part in how political identity and political groups are formed in the digital age, analysis of this one platform is enough to shine a broader light on the kinds of issues affecting the political landscape today.

## II. INFORMATION SEGREGATION THROUGH ALGORITHMS

While political identity is shaped by a myriad of factors that exist in the physical world—such as the political leanings of one’s geographical milieu, familial connections, or class-related experiences—a lot of the content we consume on social media platforms has become an increasingly important basis for people’s understanding of politics and thus for their relationship to it. A study of the impact of social media on the 2016 presidential election from Ohio University, for instance, noted that more people cited Facebook as a source for political information than any other news-related site.<sup>2</sup>

The ways in which people consume information on social media platforms like Facebook, however, are very different from traditional media models. Unlike those models where a select number of editors and reporters gather, package, and publish information that consumers will read or consume on their own or in small groups, information on social media is delivered in

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2018), <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2018/10/network-propaganda-takes-a-closer-look-at-media-and-american-politics/> [<https://perma.cc/2Y3H-FL5Z>].

<sup>2</sup> R. Kelly Garrett, *Social Media’s Contribution to Political Misperceptions in U.S. Presidential Elections*, 43 PLoS ONE 1, 1–2 (Mar. 27, 2019), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6436681/> [<https://perma.cc/7ZUC-FKLU>].

highly personalized ways that favor polarizing content. Consuming content on social media may, thus, potentially exacerbate existing political divides. And, as information universes become more segregated, the consumption of articles, posts, and visual content has become a nucleus around which people politically coalesce.

In a way, information consumption is both skewed towards consumers' natural tendencies by virtue of whom people are friends with and what pages they "like," and increasingly through performative acts that online consumers use to signal their political affiliations within these information universes.

Thus, social media users express their politics while consuming it. This can include actions like sharing specific articles from partisan outlets or using verbiage and humor that is oftentimes specific to a person's political information universe. Think for instance of the word "snowflake" that is often used by conservative groups to insult people who identify as liberal for being "too sensitive." Using these words or sharing content that may contain these words is a clear demarcation of oneself politically and serves as a way to self-identify to spectators in semi-public spaces like Facebook.

Political actions like this abound on the social web. From political protesting through hashtags, to sharing articles on Twitter around a specific subject, to the intense discussions in the comment sections of a Facebook post — the social web has turned the Internet into a metaphorical public plaza on which people gather to show their political stripes.

To better understand how information segregation and the resulting politically performative way of consuming, sharing, and opining on information affects social structures and political factioning, it is first important to understand how social media platforms have changed the context in which we consume information:

1. The information people consume is selected algorithmically and based on human, often emotional, reactions to information, rather than editorial selection, resulting in highly personalized information environments, often also referred to as "filter bubbles."<sup>3</sup>
2. Information on the social web is always surrounded by emotional responses from others and designed in a way that encourages participation through emotional reactions, commenting, or sharing. Content is, therefore, automatically contextualized both emotionally and within the social framework of "other people," with the public space turning content consumption into a performative act.

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<sup>3</sup> See generally ELI PARISER, *THE FILTER BUBBLE: WHAT THE INTERNET IS HIDING FROM YOU* (2011).

### III. ALGORITHMIC SELECTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF INFORMATION

What surfaces on the timelines of our social media feeds is largely determined by the data that social media companies collect from consumers' behavior on their platforms.

First, there is the element of the self-selection of information that determines what data is even available in the personalized realm of consumers' information universe. Social media feeds can only contain content produced by the media outlets, publications, and human beings who were selected into the personal information universe of each social media user. On Facebook, self-selection takes two forms: the people one chooses to be "friends" with, as well as the groups and pages that one chooses to include in their interests. The company itself has referred to the content available to surface on one's timeline as "inventory."<sup>4</sup>

Then, the social media companies may use different data points and algorithms to evaluate the content from this inventory. Data points that may be included could be the point in time when a piece of content was published (and in particular its recency to the point in time when a timeline is accessed); how fast one's Internet is; and also, and perhaps more importantly, how people who exist in the information universe of each individual have reacted to or interacted with a piece. Facebook refers to these data points as "signals."<sup>5</sup>

Then, social media platforms use algorithmic decision-making to surface different kinds of content on one's timeline. For Facebook, the process of "ordering" content onto any individual's newsfeed employs algorithmic predictions based on previous data, which can include algorithmically deduced scores on how likely a user is to comment or to hide a story.<sup>6</sup>

While Facebook does not publish its algorithmic ranking mechanism, the company explicitly stated in a press release from January 11, 2018 that their algorithmic ranking of information prioritizes posts "that spark conversations and meaningful interactions between people."<sup>7</sup> As the company states:

To do this, we will predict which posts you might want to interact with your friends about, and show these posts higher in

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<sup>4</sup> Adam Mosseri, *News Feed Ranking in Three Minutes Flat*, FACEBOOK NEWSROOM (May 22, 2018), <https://about.fb.com/news/2018/05/inside-feed-news-feed-ranking/> [<https://perma.cc/JE8D-SGYC>] (minute 1:26).

<sup>5</sup> *How Does News Feed Work?*, FACEBOOK (Oct. 20, 2017), <https://www.facebook.com/facebookapp/videos/10156625242821729/> [<https://perma.cc/F7G6-WQUU>].

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> Mark Zuckerberg, FACEBOOK (Jan. 11, 2018), <https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10104413015393571> [<https://perma.cc/Q2PE-R78L>].

feed. These are posts that inspire back-and-forth discussion in the comments and posts that you might want to share and react to – whether that’s a post from a friend seeking advice, a friend asking for recommendations for a trip, or a news article or video prompting lots of discussion.

We will also prioritize posts from friends and family over public content, consistent with our News Feed values.<sup>8</sup>

In a later update, the company confirmed that this policy is still intact:

“The News Feed algorithms prioritize posts that are predicted to spark conversations among people, whether because of format — for example, live videos tend to lead to more discussions than regular videos — or because the posts were shared by people, groups or Pages you interact with frequently.”<sup>9</sup>

As Meredith Broussard explained in her book, *Artificial Unintelligence: How Computers Misunderstand the World*, a basic understanding of an algorithm is “a computational procedure for deriving a result.”<sup>10</sup> Algorithms often rely on data to evaluate, predict, or make decisions, according to Broussard.<sup>11</sup>

Given Facebook’s prioritizing of posts that “spark conversations,” a lot of the political information that people encounter is informed by decision-making algorithms that likely rely at least in part on the ways in which people emotionally react to posts or how much they partake in the online discussions within the comments of a post.

What often seems to remain unexamined when discussing these decision-making algorithms on Facebook are the *kinds* of data sets that are being used to measure what kind of information sparks conversations. As Rashida Richardson, Jason Schultz, and Kate Crawford argue in their paper, *Dirty Data, Bad Predictions: How Civil Rights Violations Impact Police Data, Predictive Policing Systems, and Justice*, biased data may skew algorithmic

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<sup>8</sup> Adam Mosseri, *Bringing People Closer Together*, FACEBOOK (Jan. 11, 2018), <https://about.fb.com/news/2018/01/news-feed-fyi-bringing-people-closer-together/> [<https://perma.cc/PH5P-KD6D>].

<sup>9</sup> *No, Your News Feed Is Not Limited to Posts From 26 Friends*, FACEBOOK (Feb. 6, 2019), <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/02/inside-feed-facebook-26-friends-algorithm-myth/> [<https://perma.cc/BQF6-8VEG>].

<sup>10</sup> MEREDITH BROUSSARD, *ARTIFICIAL UNINTELLIGENCE: HOW COMPUTERS MISUNDERSTAND THE WORLD* 7 (2018).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 94.

decision-making in ways that replicate biases in policing.<sup>12</sup> They find that policing algorithms that rely “on data produced during documented periods of flawed, racially biased, and sometimes unlawful practices and policies . . . cannot escape the legacies of the unlawful or biased policing practices that they are built on.”<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, it is important to question the kind of data that is used to define what content “sparks conversations,” according to Facebook. While the company has not made public how exactly their algorithms work and what data is used to determine their rankings, there are clues in what kind of longitudinal user data is collected. There are the kinds of data points collected through people’s interactions with posts on their news feeds (reaction buttons such as “haha,” “wow,” “love,” “like,” “angry,” and “sad;” the “hide post” button; the comments; etc.).

While the data collected from these kinds of actions—from emotional reactions to comments—does not seem biased at first, it may be important to consider what is *not* captured in the data collection of social media behavior to truly understand the limitations of the data that powers the algorithms of the timelines of these platforms.

On Facebook, for instance, classification of emotional reactions is limited to the aforementioned six categories, which arguably capture emotions only in their extremes and may omit other, less tangible signals. These less tangible signals may prioritize sparking thoughts and nuance, rather than “conversation” (which often becomes argumentation) and stark emotional reaction. As artist Mimi Onuoha pointed out through her 2016 art installation, *The Library of Missing Data Sets*, we need to consider missing data points as a counterpoint to what *is* measured:

“Missing data sets” are the blank spots that exist in spaces that are otherwise data-saturated. Wherever large amounts of data are collected, there are often empty spaces where no data live. The word “missing” is inherently normative. It implies both a lack and an ought: something does not exist, but it should. That which should be somewhere is not in its expected place; an established system is disrupted by distinct absence. That which we ignore reveals more than what we give our attention to. It’s in these things that we find cultural and colloquial hints of what

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<sup>12</sup> See generally Rashida Richardson et al., *Dirty Data, Bad Predictions: How Civil Rights Violations Impact Police Data, Predictive Policing Systems, and Justice*, 94 N.Y.U. L. REV. ONLINE 192 (2019).

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 204.

is deemed important. Spots that we've left blank reveal our hidden social biases and indifferences.<sup>14</sup>

Within Onuoha's framework, we should understand the data that feeds algorithms in their decision-making within the context of not just of what *is* measured, but more importantly also of what may *not* be measured. For example, comments and reactions may only capture reactions of some of the most vocal consumers of information or may only capture reactions that respond to some of the most provoking and less nuanced content. They may also omit responses to content that either requires more processing time from a person or is not represented in the options that a social media platform's interface offers.<sup>15</sup>

There is also good reason to believe that these "extreme" reactions come from a small but vocal fraction of people who actually consume content on social media. This gives disproportionate influence on the content of a news feed to active and vocal consumers, something that I have called 'the tyranny of the loudest.' For instance, in an experiment published on BuzzFeed News, I measured the number of reactions a video live stream on two partisan Facebook pages, Fusion and Fox News, received against the number of views the platform displayed for the same video.<sup>16</sup> Only two to three percent of the number of people who viewed the videos actually decided to react or comment on either of the two streams.

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<sup>14</sup> Mini Onuoha, *The Library of Missing Datasets*, MINI ONUOHA (2016), <http://mimionuoha.com/the-library-of-missing-datasets> [<https://perma.cc/RC4P-NZV3>].

<sup>15</sup> Lam Thuy Vo, *Breaking Free from the Tyranny of the Loudest*, NIEMAN LAB (Dec. 19, 2017), <https://www.niemanlab.org/2017/12/breaking-free-from-the-tyranny-of-the-loudest/> [<https://perma.cc/W3XA-CL5B>].

<sup>16</sup> Lam Thuy Vo & Charlie Warzel, *Here's What Facebook's Live Video Filter Bubble Looks Like*, BUZZFEED NEWS (Feb. 3, 2017), <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/lamvo/this-is-what-facebooks-filter-bubble-actually-looks-like> [<https://perma.cc/5BUQ-6MH6>].



Source: [https://img.buzzfeed.com/buzzfeed-static/static/2017-01/31/15/asset/buzzfeed-prod-jastlane-02/anigif\\_sub-buzz-6711-1485895030-1.gif](https://img.buzzfeed.com/buzzfeed-static/static/2017-01/31/15/asset/buzzfeed-prod-jastlane-02/anigif_sub-buzz-6711-1485895030-1.gif)

Therefore, algorithmic selection of the information that populates the feeds of individuals is heavily skewed towards posts that elicit strong emotional reactions or a large number of comments. This potentially exacerbates existing differences and further segregates information universes instead of giving equal balance to nuanced and moderate voices and those on the outer ends of emotional spectrums.

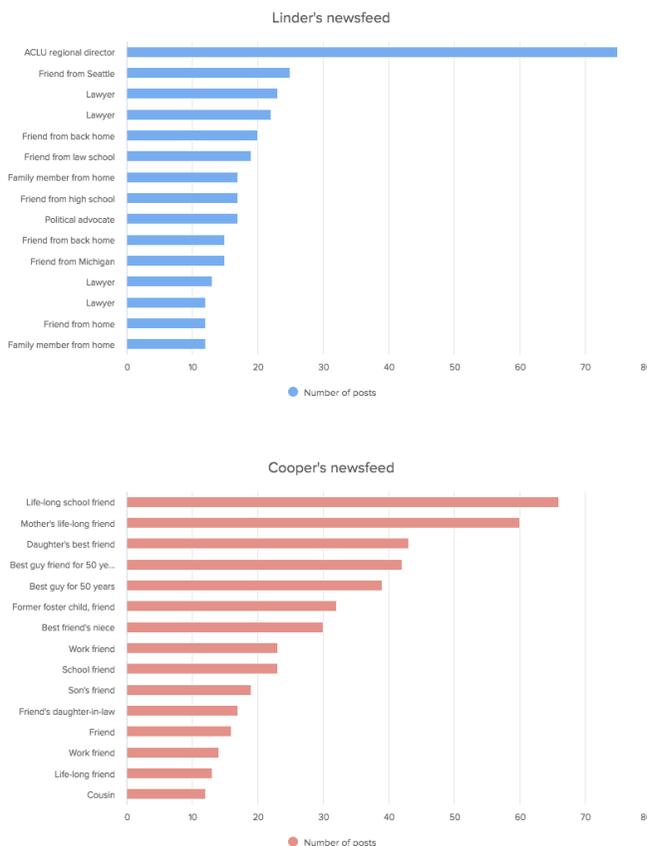
It is difficult to consider this argument in a holistic, empirical way due to the lack of transparency provided by social media companies. However, one experiment conducted for BuzzFeed News may illustrate how algorithmically powered “filter bubbles” can exacerbate existing political differences. The story captured the divergent experiences of information online of a conservative mother and her liberal daughter. These two people care about each other deeply but believe in different political values. They said that their consumption of political information online led to conflicts that they could have otherwise worked through in person.<sup>17</sup>

An analysis of 2,367 posts on their newsfeeds showed how their information universes were deeply shaped by the politics of both the outlets they followed, but more importantly, by the people who made up their social circles.

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<sup>17</sup> Lam Thuy Vo, *This Conservative Mom And Liberal Daughter Were Surprised By How Different Their Facebook Feeds Are*, BUZZFEED NEWS (Aug. 1, 2017), <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/lamvo/facebook-filter-bubbles-liberal-daughter-conservative-mom> [<https://perma.cc/85WG-KPP4>].

**Top 15 Facebook friends whose posts appeared on Linder's and Cooper's Facebook News Feeds**



Source: Facebook

Figure 1: A chart that shows content surfaced on the newsfeeds of conservative mother Katherine Cooper and liberal daughter Linsdey Linder

Both subjects told BuzzFeed News that their experiences of political content online was deeply divisive to them and that, when discussing the same issues in person, they were able to speak to one another in a more nuanced way and resolve their issues. This sentiment is further amplified by reports that, in light of a divisive election, people have begun to unfriend or block various people who may oppose their political views, further limiting the inventory of content that may surface on one's timeline.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Carrie Dann, *Unfriended: How the 2016 Election Made Us Battle, Avoid and Block Each Other*, NBC NEWS (Dec. 19, 2016), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/amp/ncna698001> [<https://perma.cc/3YHV-GZLD>].

Thus, it is very plausible that algorithmically-curated timelines are causing people to consume increasingly polarized content that segregates them from their political counterparts.

#### IV. CONSTANTLY CONTEXTUALIZED INFORMATION AND POLITICALLY PERFORMATIVE CONTENT CONSUMPTION

While algorithmic decision-making skews the inventory of content that people encounter online towards partisan (if not hyperpartisan) content, it is people's conduct online that truly turns the consumption of this information into a performance of political identity.

The social web is designed to encourage both participation around information and, to a lesser degree, the actual consumption of and deep engagement with that information. Seldom are passive metrics, like content views or time spent with content, displayed.<sup>19</sup>

It is a somewhat commonly held belief that a large proportion of people share articles and information without having thoroughly engaged with them (often failing to read beyond a headline). There are several product designers who have pointed out that the way that a lot of the social web is designed does not allow for people to thoroughly engage with the content they encounter on social media.

In a Netflix episode of *Abstract*, for instance, an Instagram product designer expressed remorse about bringing the “endless scroll” to viewers, saying that this format does not leave users with time to digest the content they consume.

Similarly, the inventor of the Retweet button on Twitter told BuzzFeed News writer Alex Kantrowitz that he regrets inventing the tool because it made it much easier for users to share content. Before the button's invention, people had to copy and paste messages into their own status bars before ‘retweeting’ it:

“Copying and pasting made people look at what they shared, and think about it, at least for a moment. When the retweet button debuted, that friction diminished. Impulse superseded the at-least-minimal degree of thoughtfulness once baked into sharing.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> On Facebook and other platforms, views are often only displayed for live or one-off videos.

<sup>20</sup> Alex Kantrowitz, *The Man Who Built the Retweet: “We Handed A Loaded Weapon To 4-Year-Olds,”* BUZZFEED NEWS (July 23, 2019), <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/alexkantrowitz/how-the-retweet-ruined-the-internet> [<https://perma.cc/E5UK-PXKP>].

Some design features of online platforms hence encourage quick participation on online platforms, rather than more thoughtful critical engagement.

To some degree, then, the social web—as it is engineered and as has been proclaimed online many times—is where nuance goes to die.

Users' actions are also seen by a semi-public audience, making these actions always somewhat performative. These performative actions then become a way in which the content that surfaces online is framed. Information on the social web is always surrounded by emotional responses from others and hence will, to some degree, require users not just to take in and process the content at hand, but also to take sides. The question faced by users ultimately becomes: Do I agree with the predominant emotion that has been generated by this piece of content or not? The other option is to opt out of participating and to consume silently, but even without political participation, opting out while remaining a consumer of content may exacerbate the effect that the loudest voices have on skewing what kind of content appears on people's social media timelines.

This performativity is particularly pronounced both around polarizing news events and when people coalesce around prominent political personalities, demonstrating just how personal politics has become for online users.

For example, in a previous article about Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, I looked at the fandom and anti-fandom practices around the highly visible congresswoman, and showed how the use and remixing of memes about her can be seen as political acts demarcating the contours of political factions:

. . . Virality, meme culture, and fandom are interwoven with how we view and understand politicians. As politics has crept more and more into our timelines and Instagram feeds, it's also arguably become more personal than ever. Not everyone is obsessed with #AOC, but media cycles and viral social posts sure make it seem as if we should be.

The internet has turned politics into cliques that mimic a lot of high school dynamics: Each clique comes with its own lingo, its own way of celebrating its heroes or putting down its opponents.

Do we side with the popular girl? Do we demonize her and show the world just how "stupid" she is by bullying her? Or do

we sit in the corner of the cafeteria and watch it all silently, unclear as to where we belong?<sup>21</sup>

## V. A SHIFT OF WHAT IS POLITICALLY ACCEPTABLE

Given these two conditions—the skewing of political content users see on social media and the increasing performativity of consumption online—and given the clustering of Internet communities around these polarized political information universes, it is perhaps useful to take a closer look at what ideas are acceptable within these universes.

The concept of the Overton Window has recently received a lot of media attention in light of U.S. President Donald Trump’s rhetoric and has been a helpful framework for people to understand how the U.S.’s “political imagination” has shifted under Trump’s presidency.<sup>22</sup> The concept may also be helpful in examining the political filter bubbles that exist online.

The conservative think tank that originated the term defines it as a:

model for understanding how ideas in society change over time and influence politics. The core concept is that politicians are limited in what policy ideas they can support — they generally only pursue policies that are widely accepted throughout society as legitimate policy options. These policies lie inside the Overton Window. Other policy ideas exist, but politicians risk losing popular support if they champion these ideas. These policies lie outside the Overton Window.<sup>23</sup>

While this concept is often applied to society as a whole, it is important to note that information segregation and performative information consumption have potentially also created political landscapes with groups that each contain their own Overton Windows. If political groups are increasingly consuming different sets of facts and are inhabiting these universes in ever more finely cut factions, it may be logical to assume that those consumers also have varied understandings of what is a politically defensible policy or behavior.

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<sup>21</sup> Lam Thuy Vo, *Why Is Everyone So Obsessed With AOC? Let's Analyze the Memes*, BUZZFEED NEWS (May 3, 2019), <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/lamvo/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-aoc-conservatives-liberals-meme> [https://perma.cc/8E3F-4RLN].

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., Derek Robertson, *How an Obscure Conservative Theory Became the Trump Era's Go-to Nerd Phrase*, HILL (Feb. 25, 2018), <https://thehill.com/homenews/news/470687-conservatives-seek-to-stifle-new-alt-right-movement-seeped-in-anti-semitism> [https://perma.cc/P6HD-PL5H].

<sup>23</sup> *The Overton Window*, MACKINAC CTR FOR PUB POL'Y (Jan. 24, 2020), <https://www.mackinac.org/OvertonWindow> [https://perma.cc/QP2B-BUWC].

Recent reports around the impeachment hearings, for instance, have pointed out that Trump supporters may be inhabiting worlds of information that are almost entirely divorced from information presented by the witnesses.<sup>24</sup> As Washington Post reporter Isaac Stanley-Becker, who examined the comments of Trump supporters from a private Facebook group, phrases it:

“Trump’s most ardent supporters have fashioned alternative realities for themselves—as well as for Republican lawmakers aiming to turn the charge of corruption back on those investigating the president.”<sup>25</sup>

In this instance, online political coalescing around information has created a different understanding of what is and is not constitutional behavior by a president.

To better understand the political edges of the Overton Window in any given political online group, it may be helpful to observe the infighting among group members. By snarkily or humorously expressing dislike of the political leanings of a piece of content or of a political or public figure’s actions (a process sometimes described as “dunking”<sup>26</sup>), or by celebrating and amplifying other political messages, online users within each political online faction are helping consumers understand the edges of their Overton Windows.

Given that most online users have curated their online social milieus to consist of people and institutions who are more likely to echo their own points of view, understanding these edges becomes even more important. The edges of each information universe are thus defined by people who are already in similar political camps.

An article about how supporters of presidential candidate Bernie Sanders attacked candidate Elizabeth Warren online by posting emojis in her Twitter replies en masse and running campaigns to undermine her may help illuminate just how narrow the Overton Window is for what is politically

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<sup>24</sup> Isaac Stanley-Becker, *Fact-based Impeachment Can’t Penetrate the Pro-Trump Web*, WASH. POST. (Dec. 13, 2019), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/fact-based-impeachment-cant-penetrate-the-pro-trump-web/2019/12/13/6319317c-1db8-11ea-87f7-f2e91143c60d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/fact-based-impeachment-cant-penetrate-the-pro-trump-web/2019/12/13/6319317c-1db8-11ea-87f7-f2e91143c60d_story.html) [<https://perma.cc/V326-U669>].

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> See Heather Schwedel, *“Dunking” is Delicious Sport*, SLATE (Dec. 4, 2017), <https://slate.com/technology/2017/12/dunking-is-delicious-and-also-probably-making-twitter-terrible.html> [<https://perma.cc/4JKA-YQSF>].

acceptable for this group of online users.<sup>27</sup> Both Sanders and Warren were arguably considered the most progressive among the Democratic presidential candidates at the time and, due to their proximity in political affiliation, may have been more prone to attack one another online, where information universes are deeply connected to existing political likeness. It is, for example, less likely for Sanders supporters to encounter deeply conservative information online and to join an online group “dunking” of Mitt Romney supporters than it is for those Sanders supporters to do so to Warren supporters, due to the afore explained information segregation.

Similarly, there is evidence of infighting within far-right movements on college campuses<sup>28</sup> that speaks of a fairly narrow Overton Window in the far-right information universe.

Multiple value systems have previously co-existed in society, but people’s increasing reliance on social media for political information has exacerbated previous trends:

- **Information segregation:** With much of our information distribution systems relying on automated mechanisms, many online consumers have lost exposure to the information that others consume and thus, of one another’s realities.
- **Consuming information is a political performance:** The way we consume information on social media always encourages us to react to it emotionally in semi-public settings, rather than to internalize it on our own. Thus, the way we interact with content signals our political affiliations to others.
- **Parallel realities:** Many online users are now building values based on a common set of facts, a trend that has clearly also started affecting the kinds of Overton Windows that politicians can move within as well.

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<sup>27</sup> Ryan Brooks, *Bernie Sanders’ Very Online Fans are Filling Elizabeth Warren’s Twitter Mentions with Snakes*, BUZZFEED NEWS (Jan. 15, 2020), <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ryancbrooks/warren-bernie-snake-twitter-2020> [<https://perma.cc/679L-MYLD>].

<sup>28</sup> See Jane Coaston, *Why Alt-Right Trolls Shouted Down Donald Trump Jr.*, VOX (Nov. 11, 2019), <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/11/11/20948317/alt-right-donald-trump-jr-conservative-tpusa-yaf-racism-antisemitism> [<https://perma.cc/BYK6-JCSM>].