FREEDOM FROM SOCIAL ECHO CHAMBERS:
POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF AN ALGORITHMIC BIAS

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Abstract
Search engines and social networking sites use a number of signals to track interests and preferences online in order to continually display content that retains readership and activity. Building on work done around Filter Bubbles, this paper investigates the cognitive workings of a typical user in sub-consciously constructing “echo chambers” by making use of Facebook’s News Feed. Their interaction with like-minded content and the unintentional consequence of losing access to opposing or challenging information reinforces the confirmation bias that stunts social synthesis and political progression. This largely involuntary binding of users in ideological camps damages the Hegelian social dialectic and demands regulation, especially in states devoid of strong institutional frameworks capable of withstanding polarised polities.

KEYWORDS: Social dialectic, Confirmation Bias, News Feed, Internet, Regulation, Social Networks
INTRODUCTION

The recent susceptibility of political views in the Global North to the polarisation effects of biased algorithms on social media sites has led to an interest in how social media may calcify a person’s political and social views (Borgesius et al., 2016; Wojcieszak, 2011). As a social media platform, Facebook and its News Feed algorithm allow for the formation of “echo chambers” or “social bubbles” that could significantly entrench the ideologies of users without providing an opportunity for these views to be challenged (Bakshy et al., 2015, Borgesius et al., 2016; Bozdag et al., 2014; Bozdag and Hoven, 2015). Should such beliefs and their groupings prove as pervasive as the digital platform they are hosted on, the trend could polarise society and damage the socio-political dialectic (Fukuyama, 2014).

In the Global South, where institutional arrangements are not as robust and political systems less stable, policymakers pushing for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) development must be aware of the risks of unchecked opinion formation and biases vis-à-vis the social dialectic and a pervasive ideological polarisation (Bozdag and Hoven, 2015; Bozdag et al., 2014).

This research will seek to uncover the effects of algorithmic bias on cognitive dissonance by engaging academic literature from the field of psychology before unpacking the Hegel’s theory of dialectics and its interpretation by Francis Fukuyama. The findings will then be contextualised by the weak socio-political institutions familiar to Africa and South Asia. This paper’s conclusion should then evaluate Facebook’s algorithmic bias and its possible social costs in order to better inform policymakers and internet governance role-players. Guiding this intellectual pursuit is the endeavour to answer the following questions:

➢ To what degree does the Facebook News Feed algorithm support the selection and confirmation biases of its users?
➢ Does unchallenged opinion formation entrench existing views and ideas, leading toward ideological polarisation?
➢ Do the long-term effects of such entrenchment support a level of socio-political polarisation that is damaging to the dialectic process?
➢ If so, can the state’s intervention in such an algorithm be justified on the grounds of preserving socio-political growth?

In sum, this paper hopes to answer: does the Facebook News Feed algorithm allow for confirmation bias to entrench the user’s existing opinions without opposition, leading to socio-political polarisation and a compromised social dialectic, thereby necessitating ICT regulation in fragile political systems of the Global South?
ICTS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

ICTs are widely recognised as one of the greatest economic multipliers in history, and are charged with having significant knock-on effects for economic development (Baliamoune-Lutz, 2003; Khuong, 2011, Sassi and Goaied, 2013; Jin and Cho, 2015). This naturally depends on individual, household and business access to ICT devices and services, which in the Global South has become mostly popularised by the mobile phone. Citizens living in countries in Africa and Asia specifically rely more on cheaper devices with more mobile means of access such as GSM wireless networks (Adera et al., 2014; Asongu, Le Roux, 2017). Hence, those individuals that are exposed to ICTs in the Global South tend to make use of the services through the use of mobile smart phones and sometimes tablets (Research ICT Africa, 2014; Asongu, Le Roux, 2017).

At the same time, the trend acknowledged as the most responsible for drawing demand to ICTs, is that of social network activity. Facebook’s popularity and the pull of creating a digital profile online is one of the most significant factors in getting users online in the Global South. The digital profile encourages contact with friends and the growth of a social network formed online, which allows users to view the posts of other contacts in their News Feed as well as accessing news stories. The algorithm searches for the posts of contacts to display on a continuous time-roll when the user logs on. Many of these posts relate to news headlines, reports, articles and opinions. (Dow, Adamic & Friggeri, 2013)

In addition to the popularity of mobile phones and Facebook profiles among users in the Global South, Facebook has launched a zero-rated platform called FreeBasics that does not consume the user’s mobile data, so that cash-strapped users and those new to mobile technology are not excluded from accessing Facebook services. This has created some controversy relating to the implementation of net neutrality principles, but nevertheless encourages new users to create profiles and allows existing users the chance to view posts, news and others, for free.

In this context, where mobile phones and social media are so pervasive, Facebook and the digital news posts promulgated by its users, and thus and the News Feed algorithm, have become the primary source of news for people with access to them. Given the growing levels of affordability and drive for social media, this trend is unlikely to reverse soon. With this in mind, it is best to understand how the algorithm behind the News Feed scans for posts to present to its users.

THE NEWS FEED ALGORITHM EXPLAINED

When Facebook began constructing digital profiles online and allowing for a network of
individuals to share posts, there was little ingenuity behind it. A simple process of time selection presented the most recent post at the top of the News Feed, at that time the News Feed was not a separate algorithmic extension but was just part of your Facebook Wall which we now refer to as the ‘Timeline’ (Goldsborough, 2017). The engineers at Facebook then got creative and in 2007 they found a way to adjust what would appear immediately at the top of the News Feed, as part of the Timeline, as soon as a user logged in. The ingenuity behind what has now become the News Feed algorithm uses variables such as: 1) the creator’s identity, 2) the post’s popularity, 3) the type of post, as well as 4) previous comments, shares, and likes to prioritise certain posts (Goldsborough, 2017).

This means that Facebook’s algorithm constantly collects data from user’s activities on the social network to figure out who and what each individual is interested in based on what they look at, how long they look at it, comment on, share and like it (Dow, Adamic & Friggeri, 2013). This process and the data collected from it is in constant flux as the engineers attempt to work the analytics towards a better design. Since a detailed extrapolation of the algorithm would exhaust the limits of this paper’s focus, and given that the finer details of it continue to be tweaked daily for better analysis of the data, the focus of this paper is on the outcomes of the base features of the News Feed on its users.

In his book “The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is hiding from you”, Eli Pariser demonstrates how algorithmic techniques of prioritising certain news and posts for users hides all other posts so that that news and opinions more agreeable or “engage-worthy” for the individual user take precedence without allowing them the chance to view all information on offer, leading to lower “crossover” posting as seen in Figure below (Pariser, 2011). It might be naive to expect every News Feed to display the plethora of digital content in Facebook’s vast digital library for each user, but using analytics to determine customised preferences for the sake of extending advertisement viewing time is similar to not being allowed to look at other journals at a newsstand simply because one has not considered them in the past. News stands also do not profess to offer access to every source of information, but what is on offer is equally available for viewership upon each visit.

**Figure 1:** Rate of “crossover” posting between liberal and conservative ideologies
This means that although there might at times be an in-built variable to adjust the “sameness” of News Feed posts through a process of randomisation, the News Feed, and Facebook as a social media site made up of ordinary and unique users, works best by exposing its audience to news, posts and views that they agree with or could use for cognitively reinforcing previously held beliefs and opinions without exposing them to severe critique or new and relevant perspectives (Pariser 2011; DiFranzo & Gloria-Garcia, 2017). Again, this is due to Facebook’s raison d'être not being the provision of unbiased news, but the provision of what users want to see, (what they think would be most useful to them); as well as being the maximisation of time users spend on the platform and increasing exposure to advertising (Shih, 2009).

The formation of echo chambers affects end users to different degrees and different people will react in different ways to the selection of news items in their News Feed. With this being said, there are issues that are universal to human thinking: one of which is the human predilection for searching out material that adheres to one’s already held opinions or, in psychological terms, confirmation bias. The policy implications of a socially divisive social media tool depend heavily on whether it sustains psychological confirmation bias to the point of societal danger as opposed to the degree of confirmation bias that occurs in conventional news provision. In order to determine the risk of such activity, it is imperative that the extent of cognitive heuristics and biases are understood.
CONFIRMATION BIAS AS A COGNITIVE COPING MECHANISM

The human brain, and by extension the mind, is an incredibly complex machine that has evolved to process a large amount of information and make sense of this input to make decisions and provide for insight into one’s position within the material world (Vraga, 2011). Importantly the human brain did not develop to take in the vast amount of information that the current world divulges us in. It developed to ensure the organisms and by extension the species’ survival. The amount of information available to people today cannot be processed efficiently by the human brain. Instead the human brain processes the information in a way that maximises the chance for survival, not in this world but in the world in which it developed. To do this the human brain utilises heuristic processes. Heuristics are processes developed by the human brain to short-cut lengthy decision-making processes, such as deciding whether or not to eat one type of berry over another. This saves time and maximises survivability. Berries with bright colours often red yellow or green may be poisonous and thus these colours come to represent danger. A quick decision can thus be made and passed onto children (Fukuyama, 2011). If one piece of information is considered to be true then it is likely that a similar piece of information is also likely to be true. If lurid coloured fruits are dangerous it makes sense that lurid coloured frogs are also dangerous. We will thus tend to trust the person who tells us don’t eat coloured frogs rather than the person who tells us they are helpful. We will in fact seek out the person who agrees with our preconceived ideas about the colour of food as this person will be more likely to maximise our chance of survival. Thus, the heuristic of confirmation bias born (Metzgar, 2013). Information we hold is likely there due to the fact that we have survived using it, similar information is also likely useful to our survival.

This trait is so strongly ingrained in us that we have a defence mechanism to protect us against it. We often will not seek out information that differs from information that we already hold. However if we are confronted by information that does differ we attempt to reject it. If this information holds up to scrutiny this may cause what psychologist have called cognitive dissonance (Vraga, 2011). This is the ability of the human brain to reject what is patently true and possibly world changing piece of information, and continue with the world constructed within our minds. As we come across more and more information that challenges the views we already hold this confirmation bias and the cognitive dissonance defence mechanism becomes slightly weaker. Eventually the new truth will be accepted, maybe not by the singular person but through the acceptance of the society. In this way society is protected by world changing information that may disrupt the society, but it also allows for progress to be made when the circumstances of survivability are changing. It can be easily seen how useful this would be to our ancestor who lived in small groups in isolated areas. To continue the
metaphor above, if the clan of people moved from one area to another, where now there are bright yellow berries that are not poisonous they would still reject these berries. It may take a brave individual or perhaps a native of the region to show the newcomers that in fact these berries are nutritious. This new information will be rejected for a time, but as it is shown that the berry is not killing people the new truth will be accepted thus the survivability of the individual and the clan is maximised (Vraga, 2011; Metzgar, 2013).

We no longer live like this, we live in a world where the ability to take in new information and process it quickly in order to adapt to the changing world is a survival trait. Unfortunately our brains have not caught up to our social progression. We have not yet adapted our biology to suit the new world (Fukuyama, 2011). This is why the confirmation bias heuristic as well as its cognitive dissonance defence mechanism is so important for understanding the effects that social media can have on us. What happens when the Facebook algorithm only shows us what we want to see?

One bias to note is the congruency bias, which is when the mind accepts a claim without searching for alternative evidence or hypotheses. This type of bias is present in everyday life and most certainly in elements of the News Feed algorithm too, however, this paper is more focussed on the confirmation bias. While the former poses a threat to Facebook users, it is the latter that lends itself more imminently to a cycle of reinforcing beliefs without recalling new evidence or being open to new hypotheses (Nelson, 2014). Where the former tends to aid a person in accepting and believing all new information; the latter only allows in that information which it readily agrees with - rejecting or dis-confirming that which it does not (Miller, 2016).

Now the extent to which the confirmation bias is used in everyday life is subject to each unique individual as they attempt to make sense of the world without being overwhelmed with conflicting evidence or cognitive dissonance (Vraga, 2011; Metzgar, 2013). What this paper is interested in is: are Facebook users more at risk of confirmation bias, since it is built into the popular and ever-scavenging algorithm than a non-user?

As stated above the confirmation bias and cognitive dissonance phenomena are part of the human psyche. If they were not there we would be unable to make decisions as we would have to consider every piece of information on its own merit. There is just too much information to do this. Thus human beings have directional goals. We engage in motivated reasoning that colour our input of information to suit our pre-existing goals and attitudes. We spend far more time scrutinising information that is incongruent with our currently held views and accept information that agrees with it (Miller, 2016). This is not a controversial statement and is accepted by the majority of psychological theory. What is important here is that each
time a person takes on a new piece of information they enter into a discourse with it. While refuting a new piece of information, it is likely that the information will have an effect on the person refuting it (Miller, 2016). The new information will slowly tweak the users point of view and slowly but surely change their position (Miller, 2016). This process is known as a dialectic process which will be discussed in depth in the next section. What is important is that incongruent information can cause psychological dissonance and if this happens enough this dissonance cannot be stopped by the confirmation bias. Some new truths must be accepted to alleviate the dissonance. This requires a plethora of multiple news sources (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2015; Miller, 2016)

As shown above this is not the case with the Facebook News Feed. In fact the algorithm ensures that users are fed a steady stream of data that already agrees with their held beliefs. Thus the process of confirmation bias is taken out of the hand of the individual and actively reinforced by the News Feed (Vraga, 2011, Miller, 2016; Goldsborough, 2017). There can be no dissonance and thus no change of opinion if the only information that the user is exposed to is information that they already agree with. In fact the steady stream of information reinforces the beliefs that the user already holds. In this way the Facebook news feed becomes a confirmation bias generating machine that ensures users will return to the stream that agrees with their opinions, which further entrenches said opinion and so on. The danger her lies not in the fact that confirmation bias exists but rather in the fact that the confirmation bias is not challenged. There is no scope for dissonance and thus no scope for an adjustment of opinion (Miller, 2016). It is to the effects that this may have on society and the production of social ideas that this paper now turns.

THE SOCIAL DIALECTIC

Historical phenomenon - forces of synthesis

In his controversial book “The End of History and the Last Man”, Francis Fukuyama (1992) uses the progressive philosophy of Friedrich Hegel to argue for an end point to political history, in his case this end is liberal-capitalist democracy. Whether history does have an end point or not is not the focus of this paper. It is important however that the Hegelian Dialectic provides a useful tool for understanding social movement and progress in the contemporary world (Fukuyama, 1992)

The dialectic is simple in its conception but provides intense philosophical complexity when considering the notions of civil society or the intersection of disparate ideologies. The concepts of the thesis-antithesis-synthesis are often used to describe the process by which Hegel’s Zeitgeist or “Spirit of the Age” comes into being (Updegrove, 2005). It is noteworthy that these terms were very rarely mentioned, if they were used at all, by Hegel himself. They
have been taken from contemporaries of Hegel and students of Emmanuel Kant to illuminate
Hegel's work. The use of this terminology provides an example of the dialectic at work
however (Mueller, 1958).

In Hegel's historical dialectic, history is the product of the contest for recognition by
whichever section of society that feels that its human freedoms and therefore social justice
are being denied by a master class (Fukuyama, 1992). Hegel's mythology of the state of
nature the first two humans met and desire to be recognised as human by the other. This is
in essence a subjective consciousness meeting for the first time something that may also be
another subjective consciousness. The subject requires recognition of its nature as a subject
from the other self-aware subject. Both could recognise each other’s subjectivity rather than
only view it as another object within the perceivable universe, in which case both move on
happy with their respective recognition. If one does not recognise the other's subjectivity,
however then the unrecognised subject must force recognition through conflict. This conflict
can result in one of two outcomes. Firstly one of the combatants is killed, thus negating the
possibility for recognition. Secondly one is a victor and the other is made subservient. The
victor gains recognition as the subject and the loser remains objectified. Thus is born the
slave-master relationship. The master is then free to define the thesis of the society in which
both parties now live with the slave having to acquiesce to their rule. The only recourse for
the slave is to begin the development of an antithesis. Society at any time is made of a
prevailing thesis and a countering antithesis. The thesis comprises the acceptable norms
and values of the current culture. It seeks to keep the current power structures in place and
ensure that the slave-master relationship between rulers and the ruled remains intact

Hegel provides a historical discussion of the number of a social institutions, such as
Feudalism and Bourgeois Mercantilism as examples of the tension created between master
and slave (Hegel, 1967b). In a feudal system for example the masters are represented by
the Aristocracy and Nobility who are recognised for their humanity through their subjugation
of the serfs and commoners who are forced to accept a lowlier status (Fukuyama, 1992).
Importantly the master class and the thesis require the slave class for this recognition.
Without them the master class would have no way of recognising itself as superior. The
thesis here is one of the inherent superiority of one social class over the other. A state that is
recognised by prevailing political norms. Of course the slave class is not content to remain in
the subservient state, its members seek the same fundamental recognition of their humanity
that the ruling class enjoys (Fukuyama, 1992).

Through philosophy, counter culture, art, economics and a range of other mechanisms the
slave class will attempt to create an antithesis to the reigning thesis (Mueller, 1958; Updegrove, 2005). This antithesis can take any number of radical forms, but it is often revolutionary in nature. It demands recognition from the ruling class and in so doing threatens the existence of the thesis. As much as the ruling class may want it destroyed, the nature of humans to seek out recognition means that if there is ever a group that lacks said recognition an antithesis will develop against the thesis that denies them that recognition (Fukuyama, 2014). The antithesis cannot actually destroy the thesis, even if this may be its stated aim, as to destroy the thesis would be to destroy the part of society that could grant the slave class its recognition. Thus, through this tension, the thesis and the antithesis struggle for mutual recognition. The struggle may remain tense for some time until eventually a disruptive event will occur in the form of a change to economics, or an historical exigency sets a revolutionary chain of events into motion (Hegel, 1967a; 1967b). Through this continued struggle and these watershed moments components of the thesis and the antithesis will come together through necessity, and form the social synthesis. A combination of the most survivable traits of each side of the Zeitgeist. This will form a synthesis which eventually forms a new thesis. There will be a new class recognised by this thesis and a thus a new slave class that must form its own antithesis. This process is the engine of history and societal change (Mueller, 1958; Fukuyama, 1992).

Hegel thus shows that whenever there has been a change in ruling class or progress from one historical period to another it is due to struggle for recognition by a slave class. Hegel believes that the French Revolution began the end of this historical process as the aims were not to replace one master class with another but to provide a political basis for the recognition of all humans (Hegel, 1967b). Whether Hegel or perhaps Fukuyama, with liberal capitalist democracy, is correct is beyond the scope of this paper. What is important is that in modern democratic states recognition is theoretically applied by the state to everyone within that state, often at the constitutional level (Fukuyama, 2014). The social dialectic still functions within society however, as people still seek recognition for their ideas, beliefs and ideological positions (Fukuyama, 1992). Rather than through revolution a dialogue is often used as the means of progressing social change from for the status quo, the thesis, to a more progressive stance by using an antithesis. The creation of a synthesis point can be seen as a form of social justice creation (Young, 1992). The Zeitgeist may deny freedom to one or many groups of people and through a continued dialogue between those who seek to maintain the status quo, and those who seek to destroy it, society moves towards an often progressive direction that attempts to continue to maximise freedom (Mueller, 1958; Updegrove, 2005).

This dialogue requires a well-informed population who are not only able to communicate
effectively with other members of the population but also able to understand the nuances of both theirs and others positions. In democratic states there is now a mechanism for developing a thesis does not require violent revolution or the deconstruction of the state. Through democratic elections populations vote for those candidates that best represent their views (Fukuyama, 1992). Through constant consumption of views and ideas these views may change and warp, in a well-functioning democratic systems this leads to a mix of candidates that reflect a synthesis of the thesis as well as the antithesis (Bozdag and Hoven, 2015). With the advent of information provision that provides for only those news items and opinion pieces that conform with ones held opinions the prevailing thesis and antithesis can become calcified and highly polarised. This can lead to a situation where the thesis and antithesis are no longer in conversation with one another but are in a position of polarity with each side essentially proclaiming their views with little to no consideration of any other opinion. It is worthy of note at this point that the process that generates the synthesis cannot be stopped, however it can be stymied by polarised and calcified opinions (Bozdag et al., 2014). The question here is what effect does this have on the political machine and especially is this necessarily damaging in fragile states such as those found in the Global South?

Social and ideological extremes

The fact that traditional media has a certain bias should cause little controversy among academics and the general populace alike. The philosophies of linguistics as well as hermeneutics demonstrate how one can never separate ones of preconceptions and prejudices from what one reads or writes (Boronat, 2015). This is why a free and open media is one of the cornerstones of liberal democracy. A free press is not just about a removal of government interference in the way the media reports the news, but also allowing a plethora of voices to comment in their own way on the news and happenings within society (Borgesius et al., 2016). These multiple sources of information from the newsstand that we approach to gain the information we need as informed citizens without society. The newsstand operator doesn’t care what we consume at their stand. They care that we buy something but what we buy is immaterial to them. While we will likely choose those news sources that appeal to our already preconceived ideas of what is happening in our society we cannot help but be exposed to the other pieces at the newsstand. We may have gone to get our conservative paper or magazine, but we will see the liberal paper sharing equal space right alongside it. We may decide to have a read of what the other side is saying and while we may not agree with it suddenly the new information moves us a little closer to a synthesis between two opposing viewpoints (Bozdag and Hoven, 2015).
Our views become calcified when the newsstand only reflects what we already believe. If the newsstand analysis us and reconfigures itself and reconfigures its items to reflect the items we read and liked in previous visits then it would be fair for us to assume that these pieces represent a true thesis. Why would we consider opposing viewpoints if we are never exposed to them? When we do hear opposing views they are all too easy to dismiss as friend ideas that are not worthy of our consideration (Bozdag et al., 2014). In a liberal model of democracy this is a problem as it firstly, limits our freedom of choice, a specific viewpoint is being forced on us without us even realising that there may be other way to view specific issues. Secondly and perhaps most importantly calcified ideological views that are further entrenched by social media echo chambers lead to weakening of the social dialectic that forms and integral part of deliberative democracy (Wojcieszak, 2011). Social issues that arise within the Zeitgeist are addressed through discourses between opposing views and a rational understanding of the different ways in which these issues may be solved. Deliberation about social issues such as climate change, race relations, sexuality, justice and a plethora of others lead citizens to select their representatives that they believe will solve these issues in the most efficient and productive way possible (Wojcieszak, 2011, Borgesius et al., 2016). Deliberation does not only allow us to understand the nuances of different position but in fact leads to the discovery of greater ideas and facts. This deliberation or discourse lies at the heart of the social dialectic. The discovery of these new facts and truths is the very creation of the Dialectical synthesis. Without it society remains a struggle between two immovable objects (Wojcieszak, 2011). Without this discussion how can we expect citizens to form reasoned ideas of the issues at hand?

The current confirmation bias that the Facebook News Feed creates not only leads to a stymieing of this conversation but allows for extreme viewpoints to gain a large political platform that it would not otherwise have had (Goldsborough, 2017, Shih, 2009). For instance the Neo-Nazi movement has been in existence since the end of the Second World War. Its members remained disparate and few in number. With little chance for any form of cohesive leadership and an inability to organise their membership it seemed that this movement would be relegated to the ash heap of history. The advent of social media and internet networks, however, allowed for these members to find each other and share information (Wojcieszak, 2011). Importantly, however, it also allowed for other citizens with further right political leanings to gain access to their posts and news through their Facebook news feeds among other. As they began to agree more and more with this news the Facebook News feed began to shows them more and more of this type of information. Thus someone who may only have been a bit far right of centre now suddenly found themselves in the midst of a far right group where information on the left was unwelcome (Borgesius et al.,
This of course can happen on both sides of the political spectrum. Leftists may experience the same thing and start to view all conservatives and racists, homophobic Nazis, as that what they are constantly being told these right wing people are. The right wingers see the left as a bunch of bleeding heart snowflakes who are too weak to see what is actually going on. This type of thinking can have serious political ramifications as has been seen in the recent far right swings that have occurred in The United States of America with the election of Donald Trump (Fuchsman, 2017). It is not only the developed world that faces these issues but the Global South too. South Africa for example may find the supporters of leaders such as Julius Malema becoming more and more extreme in their views as those said views get reflected back to them over and over again. It would not be a great stretch of the imagination to see a larger rift begin to form between the different ideologies in countries like South Africa due to social media (Luiz, 2016)

Fragile states

This would seem to be a problem that affects all states that have a strong social media presence, so why is the Global South in need of special policy intervention? The answer to this lies in the fact that global south states tend to be fragile in nature. As can be seen from The United States of America as well as the recent election in The Republic of France, states with advanced checks and balances, stable democratic processes and robust media traditions are able to absorb the negative problems that a polarised electorate can cause. In the United States the checks and balances have ensured that the far right and damaging policies put forward by President Donald Trump are not put into place (2017, Fuchsman; 2017). In France the robust media ensured that the social media issues did not overly affect the election (2017). Both of these examples represent states that are fairly stable, that have had continues peaceful transition of power in recent history (Fukuyama, 1992). In general global south states are characterised by having fragile states and uncertain political situations. These states “…constitute a diverse group of countries affected by conflict, political instability and/or extreme vulnerability” (Feeny et al., 2015).

In these states the social dialectic that takes place is of the utmost importance, it deals with continuing issues of freedom, social justice, and the basic structure of democratic checks and balances. These governments of these states find it difficult to provide the basics of what lies within the scope of administration. Security, service delivery, stability and providing Rule of Law are all aspects that weak to some extent in these fragile states (Davies, 2011). These social issues require a robust social dialogue for citizens to be able to select the representatives that will best serve their interests and have the capabilities to provide basic
political services. The drivers of state fragility are many and varied ranging from neo-colonials, corruption, a lack of skills and economic stagnation. This paper cannot delve into the reason or the solutions to this state fragility, however it is important to note that one of the ways that state fragility can be mitigated is through a well-informed populace with access to avenues of debate (Brinkerhoff, 2014).

Here thus lies the crux of the why the confirmation bias inherent in social media algorithms such as the Facebook news feed can be so disruptive to the development project that is taking place within the global south. If the calcification of pre-existing political prejudices is allowed to continue within these fragile states the social dialectic that leads to the formation of a stronger and progressive social synthesis and thus a progressive Zeitgeist, these states are unlikely to be able to absorb the issues that this confirmation and calcification causes. In short the electronic newsstands within these countries must be free to show the widest range of news and information to global south citizens. Giving them the freedom to choose and form greater and more nuanced opinions. If the newsvendor only shows those pieces to which the citizen already agrees the dialectic will polarise and thus so will representatives. A polarised legislature is the last thing that a fragile state needs.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

With the consideration of all the arguments laid out above taken together, it can be seen that the Facebook News Feed artificially reinforces the confirmation bias by extending it from the user’s own mind to an algorithmic function. These echo chambers negate the possibility for there to be a strong cognitive dissonance that may lead to the formation of new opinions, and thus an inculcation and calcification of a user’s political and social views. This has an image in the formation of a social synthesis as a product of a social dialectical process as when opposing viewpoints move further and further away from each other on the ideological spectrum the scope for the formation of a middle ground becomes less and less likely. The dialogue becomes more of a soapbox to assert one’s opinion rather than a conversation between two people. This leads to a much more combatant political landscape where opposing views do not seek a middle ground but rather fight for their own position against all others. In fragile states this can have frightening implications. If a state’s institutions and array of checks and balances cannot hold the different institutions against partisan views and strong ideological attempts to capture said institutions it will be difficult for the state to remain stable and execute political power for the sake of service provision.

This then brings this paper to what policy implications should be considered to deal with this problem. Fragile states that exist within the global south cannot afford to allow the social dysfunction that a breakdown in the dialectic may cause. It thus becomes important for the
state to intervene in the causes of such dysfunction. It is the suggestion of this paper that states adopt a policy position that forces organisation like Facebook that control News Feed algorithms to show a wide range of political, social and ideological views. This could be done by a slight adjustment to the logic of the algorithm. If a user likes a specific article that shares a specific ideological position it should be the role of the algorithm to not only show more of this type of content but to also show items that may have a position on the other side of the discourses spectrum. This of course would require Facebook to start to take its role as a provider of news seriously and began to edit and collate its news items seriously. This structure of an editorial team would also allow for the removal of news considered “Fake”.

Facebook relies on advertising revenue to grow and continue to provide services. States in the global south often have a high degree of control of their telecommunications infrastructure, thus it should be fairly easy to incentives services like Facebook with greater bandwidth allocation or a decrease in data usage to spread their services to a greater number. If a more punitive policy is necessary it would also be possible to suppress said bandwidth. The other option from an advertising standpoint is to disallow advertsises to do so on Facebook. This would dry up the source of revenue that Facebook relies on and thus force the company to agree to the terms of the policy.

It is of course understood here that such policies are far from simple and require further research and understanding. This paper’s role however was to acknowledge that there is a need for such a policy. The ways in which the policy outcomes could be reached are myriad.
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