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Spiral of silence on Social Networking Sites: A comparative Analysis of GenZ and Millennia's Expression of Opinion about Public Police

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ABSTRACT

Social networking sites has altered the desire to express opinion by enhancing social visibility and peer review. Despite the fact that digital plate forms may offer an opportunity to discuss the issues, users tend to practice self-censorship because of perceived social pressure. This research uses Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's Spiral of Silence theory as a basis to analyze the effect of perceived opinion climate and willingness to self-censor on social media. A quantitative cross-sectional survey research method using multi-items Likert scale was used to collect data from social media users who belong to the Genz and Millennial generation cohort. The statistical analyses consisted of correlation test and group comparisons to study the differences between the generations and the predictive relationships. The results reveal that perceived opinion climate is a key factor in self-censorship, accounting for 0.04 correlation in these variables. Further, it is noted that result varies among Genz and Millennials. For Genz discussion about public policy on SNS is more correlated with self-censorship which implies that Genz expressions on social media are still limited by fear of criticism and social judgment despite their high online activities. However, it was noted that millennials express their opinion without any social fear. Trust in public institutions did not play a significant role in determining the expression of opinion for both generations. In general, the research indicates that self-censorship on social media is mainly influenced by perceived social climates and the characteristics of different generations, providing valuable understanding of current digital political communication.

Keywords: *Spiral of Silence, Social Networking Sites, Genz Millennia's Expression, Opinion, Public Police*

Introduction

During the last few years, the number of social media users has been incredibly high which reflects the faster acceptance of the medium and its major role in communication, information sharing and public participation. It has changed the ways through which people obtain news, access information and engage in political discourse. People share their views and support various social and political issues through apps like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok. The number of social media users is increasing day by day. As reported by DataReportal, the figure

of internet users who are active on social media in Pakistan was about 66.9 million (26.4% of the total population) in January 2025 and surged to 79.9 million (31.2%) by October 2025 (DataReportal, 2025; 2026). This indicates a remarkable growth in the use of social media during the year. These platforms enable individuals to express their views and connect with others sharing the same opinion (Cota et al., 2019). Online political activity has an impact on people's perception of the majority in various ways. Those taking part in political discussions through posts, comments and sharing may consider it easier to express their opinion even when their views are not the popular ones. Simultaneously, social media can be so transparent that it might lead to people considering others as being criticized, judged or even attacked for their views. The users of various social media platforms regularly go through hate comments, backlash, social pressure and negative reactions which end up being perceived as normal and as part of the online interaction (Kentmen-Cin, 2025). Even the most active participants would rather remain silent if there is a possibility of receiving criticism, hate comments or getting involved in social problems. Sometimes, this pressure leads to their silence when it comes to expressing their unusual or unpopular opinions (Hampton et al., 2014). This is a proof that the traditional ideas of social psychology and media studies are of great relevancy even today. They not only allow us to understand online behavior but also point out that traditional theories are still applicable in the digital world.

The idea of self-censorship and the suppression of opinion are not new. Fear of losing one's social connections and societal influences have shaped public discussions before the digital media era. In the 1950s, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann came up with the Spiral of Silence theory (1974) to describe the situation where the individuals belonging to minority opinion groups in society are likely to remain silent. Noelle-Neumann, based on her post-World War II interpretation of German public opinion, claimed that social isolation fear was the factor behind individual's conforming to ascendant views rather than rational disagreement. She also argued that the most powerful influence on the individual's choice to speak out or remain silent was the prevailing societal norms and majority opinion. The theory became foundational in explaining how public opinion develops in nations where dissent is socially discouraged or pushed to margins. The advent of internet and then social media has made the dynamics of the Spiral of Silence change. Online platforms provide opportunities for anonymity, rapid dissemination of ideas and participation in virtual communities. Nonetheless, these same platforms have also contributed to making the individual's views more visible and providing the means such as likes, shares, comments and algorithmic boosting that can create social pressure in the same way and even stronger than before. For instance, during the times when there were face-to-face interactions, people would silence their dissents historically. Similarly, the modern users may censor their voices in digital spaces to prevent backlash, damage to their reputation for being socially excluded.

Diverging generational characteristics are another factor that affects these dynamics. Gen Z (18-29 years old) and Millennials (30-44 years old) have different social media usage patterns, online political activities and risk assessment. Gen Z, the digital natives, have got used to being constantly exposed to the opinions of others and engaged in controversies and peer evaluations as they have been living all their lives in highly networked online environments. Millennials, who experienced the rise of social media during adolescence or early adulthood may have developed different norms and confidence levels in expressing their political views online. The different

characteristics across generations point out that the Spiral of Silence may function in different ways, having various effects on how much people will engage in self-censorship and the participation of online dialogues in shaping one's expression.

Political communication has been completely transformed by social media which offered massive information sharing, real-time interaction and more opportunities for the public to participate in politics. Although these platforms are very open but that does not necessarily mean that users can always freely express their opinions on public policy. Research shows that a big portion of the population is engaged in self-censorship that involved actively suppressing their dissenting opinions due to fear of social rejection, negative comments and damage to their reputation (Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Chen et al., 2020). On social media, discussions over public policy changes become totally polarized and emotional. Due to interaction affordance of social media, user can easily perceive dominant public opinion on social media which heightens their fear of being marginalized if their opinion is opposite to majority or being subject to negative criticism which makes them less prone to voicing opinions that differ from the one considered to be the most popular. Even though the Spiral of Silence theory is a good explanatory tool regarding this phenomenon but there is still a lack of research on the impact of the mentioned factors like online political activity, trust in media and institutions and generational differences, on this process.

Millennials and Generation Z are those two generations who are extensively users of social media platforms, yet they have different manners of online interaction (Pew Research Center, 2024). Millennials tend to be pretty careful when sharing their views as they have reputational concern (Siddique, Iqbal, h& Anwar, 2024). In contrast, Gen Z is very self-assured in the online arena but highly concerned with their friends' and peers' opinions (Hu, Hu, & Hou, 2022). Despite the differences mentioned above, there is a lack of research that looks into the differences between these two generations in terms of their silence or voicing their opinions about public policy issues on social media. This gap is further widened by the lack of enough thorough studies that look into how self-censorship of various generational cohorts are affected by the perceived opinion environment, online political participation and trust in institutions. To assess the condition of democratic discussion in the digital sphere and to ensure that social media reaches its utmost potential as a platform for informed civic participation, it becomes necessary to understand these processes. This study focuses at how people express their thoughts about public policies on social media through the Lens of the Spiral of Silence idea. It mainly focuses on the differences between Gen Z and Millennials. This study will uncover the complex ways in which social conformity pressures continue to exist in the modern world of social media by analyzing the role of perceived opinion climate, online political engagement and social pressures in self-censorship practices of different generations. By combining a traditional theory with present-day digital behaviors, the study helps to see more clearly how public opinion gets formed, expressed and suppressed in highly visible online environments.

Theoretical Background

Spiral of Silence Theory

In 1974, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann proposed the Spiral of Silence (SOS) hypothesis that clarifies social pressure's effect on public speech. Her theory is that a lot of times people will not say anything that they think is contrary to the majority opinion out of fear of being criticized or rejected. This creates a "spiral" where the viewpoints that are in the majority continue to be

more and more expressed while the minority ones remain unheard. The concept which was initially based on her observations of German society after the Second World War demonstrates how people's perception of what is safe to say is influenced by interpersonal communication, the media and social norms.

The Spiral of Silence concept has found its application in various social and political contexts throughout time. It has also been used in a wide range of media like TV, newspapers, political campaigns and public policy debates. To this, scholars Glynn et al. (1997) and Kiousis et al. (2006) supplemented with theories that people's viewpoints about public opinion and their perception of social support are the major factors that influence their speaking up. The main points of the theory are (a) individuals views about the opinions of the majority and (b) their concern of being isolated socially. These two factors act together to determine if a person will either express their opinion or remain quiet.

Social Media and the Spiral of Silence

The expansion of social media platforms has altered the way people communicate with the society and choosing silence over voicing their opinions to a great extent. Unlike newspapers or television, social media makes it easier for the public to communicate with each other, get instant reactions and touch vast audiences. Social media reinforce Spiral of Silence, according to the views of scholars like Cheng et al. (2020) and Lee & Ma (2012) as the number of likes, shares, comments and the visibility of posts make it increasingly perilous to hold and express minority opinions.

Nevertheless, another research says that social media could act as a channel for the less common opinions to be heard. Among the various features that might convince people to speak their minds and hold more open discussions are anonymity, the promotion of online communities and the use of algorithms that show relevant content (Christensen, 2011). On the other hand, the individual's choice of being vocal or not is still largely driven by the perceived opinion climate which is their perception of what most people think. According to the studies, users who think their opinion is in the minority are more likely to limit their interaction and not to publish, discuss or share at all on sensitive topics such as politics and public policy (Bode et al., 2014).

Perceived Opinion Climate and Self-Censorship

Perceived opinion climate refers to the situation in which a person's opinion and the opinion of the majority are the same. According to research, this view has a significant impact on the choice between speaking out and remaining silent. People who considered their opinion to be unpopular were, according to Glynn et al. (1997), very unlikely to share it publicly. The same is true for recent social media studies: if users think that most people hold a different opinion, they may avoid posting or commenting to prevent criticism, negative reactions or even being left out (Kim et al., 2016; Tandoc et al., 2019).

Online Political Engagement and Expression

The term 'online political involvement' refers to the act of participating in online political activities like sharing information, engaging in posts related to politics, expressing one's opinions on public policies or taking part in online campaigns. A study indicates that being active in political matters may lead to a person's higher confidence, political influence perception and ties to such online networks. Hence, people with more involvement in online activities are less likely to keep their views to themselves (Valenzuela, 2013).

However, being engaged on the internet does not equate to being guaranteed free speech. The age factor plays a significant role. Millennials generally feel at ease expressing their views when they are well-informed as they have more exposure to online discussions and politics (Xenos & Moy, 2007). Gen Z, even with their social media expertise, may still restrain themselves because of the lasting nature of their posts, the anxiety over their criticisms and the worries about what others would think (Turner, 2020).

Trust in Government and Opinion Expression

Self-censorship has been predicted by political activity and perceived opinion climate but there has been no consensus on the role of trust in government institutions. A study has shown that people are less afraid to express their opinions in environments characterized by high institutional trust which facilitates open communication (Hetherington, 1998). On the contrary, others argue that trust is not a significant factor especially in the case of online communication where social risks and peer evaluation outweigh trust in political institutions (Kim & Hsu, 2013). This proposition is also confirmed by the results of this study. There was no significant difference between the trusting and the non-trusting when it came to the Gen Z and the Millennial expressing their thoughts in the online spaces (Gen Z: $r = 0.019$, $p = 0.847$; Millennials: $r = 0.086$, $p = 0.403$). Therefore, it may be concluded that in public online spaces, peer influence is stronger than institutional trust in making people choose to be silent.

Generational Differences in Online Expression

Over the years, the different traits of generations have had a major impact on the way people deal with social pressures in the digital world. Millennials have been through political debates in real life as well as on the internet so they might become more self-assured in their views and take part in debates which would lead to their immunity to the Spiral of Silence. On the other hand, Gen Z being the first generation born into digital technology, are highly active but might also be under more social pressure, being more careful although highly engaged at the same time. According to Turner (2020) and Anderson & Jiang (2018) Gen Z's greater awareness of online backlash, cancel culture and peer rating may keep self-censorship patterns even in online environments where one can take part.

The differences between the generations reveal the necessity to take into account the social and psychological factors related to each cohort while interpreting the online opinion expression, proving that the Spiral of Silence is a different phenomenon depending on the age group and the digital literacy. Further, extensive investigations have examined the influence of spiral of silence on online political communication but very few studies have conducted direct comparative analysis of Gen Z and Millennials regarding public policy discourse. Most of the existing literature revolves around general political expression instead of existing government policies discussions and reforms. This gap strongly supports the need for a generationally comparative approach to

Research Design

This research utilizes a quantitative, cross-sectional survey approach to analyze and contrast the determinants of Generation Z and Millennials' willingness to publicize political opinions via social media, taking the Spiral of Silence theory as a basis. Besides, using a cross-sectional design is suitable for capturing a momentary view of individuals' perceptions, attitudes and reported behaviors which can then be subjected to comparative analysis between the two age groups. The survey technique is chosen for its capability to gather data from a vast sample quickly,

facilitating making statistical inferences and testing the proposed relationships between major variables.

The researcher deigned following question to investigate present study 1) Does the perceived opinion climate affect the willingness to self-censor while expressing views about public policies on social media? 2) What is the relationship between online public policy discussion and willingness to self-censor among Gen Z and Millennials? 3) What is the relationship between trust in public institutions and willingness to express opinions on public policy on social media?

Population, Sampling, and Participants

The target demographic consists of active social media users who are either members of Generation Z (ages 18–27) or the Millennial (ages 28–45). For this, the researchers will apply a non-probability, purposive sampling technique in order to get a sample that is heterogeneous and proper for the study. The researchers will recruit people from the specified age groups through social media and online panels. The aim set for the researchers is to have at least 400 valid responses, with a target quota of approximately 200 participants from each generation for a better comparative statistical analysis thereby being able to facilitate strong and robust analysis.

Instrumentation and Measures

The main instrument of research is a well-structured online survey that is set up on a platform “Qualtrics”. The questionnaire contains several sections and the core concepts are evaluated through 5-point Likert scales with 1 representing “Strongly Disagree” and 5 denoting “Strongly Agree.”

The primary variables that this study gauges and explains include the following such as:

Willingness to Self-Censor (Spiral of Silence)

Conceptual Definition: The inclination of an individual to silence their real opinion on a controversial issue due to the fear of being judged, criticized or excluded socially (Hayes, Glynn, & Shanahan, 2005).

Operational Definition: The measurement of this construct is done through a 4-item scale that has been modified for social media applications. Participants rated their agreement with the statements about difficulty in expressing one’s opinion in disagreement (Item 7), pressure to conform to avoid conflict (Item 8), behavioral avoidance because of fear (Item 9) and a reverse-coded item regarding comfort in posting (Item 10) on a 5-point Likert scale. A higher summed score means a higher WSC.

Perceived Opinion Climate on Social Media

Conceptual Definition: A subjective interpretation by an individual regarding the opinions of the majority in their social media network on a particular matter which could be opposed to the actual public opinion (Noelle-Neumann, 1974; adapted by Dubois & Szwarc, 2018).

Operational Definition: Perceived opinion climate is measured by a three-item scale. The questions deal with the beliefs of the people in the participant's network being very similar (Item 11), the existence of pressure to fit in (Item 13) and the feared social consequences of being different (Item 12). Participants express their agreement on a 5-point rating system. Giving higher scores means that the participant thinks it would be less or more dangerous to express a contrary opinion.

Online public policy Engagement

Conceptual Definition: A person's degree of participation in government policy discourse and information sharing through social media platforms.

Operational Definition: To measure this, participants are required to respond to three questions regarding self-reported behaviors. These questions are: dissemination of information (sharing government policies content: item 15), active expression of opinions (posting or commenting on policies: item 14) and silent content observing without posting (item 16). This makes it easier to categorize users into information sharers, passive observers (also known as "lurkers" sometimes) or active poster types.

Trust in public Institutions

Conceptual Definition: The amount of trust that an individual places in the formal institutions that determine the political information environment with respect to their legitimacy, fairness and truthfulness.

Operational Definition: This is assessed through four questions dealing with the participant's trust in different public policy-related institutions. On a 5-point rating scale, a participant rates how much he/she trusts the government (item 17), social media platforms (item 18) and online news sources (item 19). The last question (item 20) asks whether the trust level affects people's willingness to share their opinions online. The higher the score a person has, the more he/she trusts institutions.

Generational Cohort

Conceptual Definition: A generation can be defined as a group of people that were born during the specific period who have similar historical and technological backgrounds. This research is focused mainly on Millennials and Generation Z.

Operational Definition: The subjects give their birth year and then they are categorized in groups:

- Millennials: Born from 1981 to 1996
 - Generation Z: Born from 1997 to 2012
- The operational definition is: Participants give their birth years and then they are classified into groups:

Pilot Testing and Validity

Before the questionnaire is sent out to all, a small group of 10 to 15 people from the target generations were selected for pilot testing. Through the pilot testing content validity, face validity was measured. The reliability of the scales will be established using Cronbach's alpha,

Data Analysis

Data analysis will be done using statistical software SPSS. To deepen the understanding of the results, the study will use statistical methods like correlational analysis. With these methods, it is possible to see how fear of isolation and social context perception jointly influence people's desire to communicate their opinions. In addition, the research will find out if the age group makes a difference in this effect. To put it simply, it will reveal whether the "spiral of silence" effect is stronger in one generation than in another. Further, the study follows the standard ethical code of conduct. Before the survey, subjects will be informed about the investigation and their consent will be obtained.

Table 1: Correlation Coefficient among Willingness to Self-censor and Perceived Opinion Climate

Variable	1	2
WSC		.409(p.000)
POC	.409(p.000)	

Note. A correlation coefficient analysis was performed to investigate the link between the perceived opinion climate of popular opinion on social media (POC) and the individuals' willingness to self-censor when expressing opinions on public policy (WSC). The output of the analysis indicated a correlation of moderate degree and positive sign between POC and WSC, $\rho=0.409$, $p<0.001$ which meant that the participants who thought that there was a stronger consensus of popular opinion on social media were more likely to self-censor their opinions. The correlation was significant at the statistical level which meant that it was unlikely for the relationship to have happened by chance. The analysis utilized a sample of 198 participants.

Table 2: Correlation Between Online Public Policy Discussion (OPE) and Willingness to Self-Censor (WSC) by Age Group

Generation	r (p)
Gen Z (18–29)	-.004 (p.965)
Millennials (30–44)	-.216*(p.032)

Note. The correlations between Online Public policy discussion (OPD) and Willingness to Self-Censor (WSC) were studied through two different age groups: 18–29 years (Generation Z) and 30–44 years (Millennials). In the case of the younger group (18–29), the correlation between OPE and WSC was weak and non-significant at all ($r = -.004$, $p = .965$) which shows that online political engagement had no influence on the self-censorship of this age group. Alternatively, in the 30–44 age group, a small but significant negative correlation was found ($r = -.216$, $p = .032$) which implies that they were less likely to self-censor the more they were politically engaged online. Thus, the results support the idea that there are generational differences in the relationship between the two phenomena, where younger might experience online engagement as a potential buffer against self-censorship but not older ones.

Table 3: Pearson Correlations between Trust in Public Institutions and Willingness to Express Opinions on Public Policy discussion on social media

Variables	Gen Z	Millennials
TGI & OPE	0.019(p 0.847)	0.086(p 0.403)

Note. Pearson correlation measures taken separately for each generation, it was concluded that there was no significant correlation between trust in government institutions and willingness to express opinions on public policy. The figures for Gen Z are $r = 0.02$, $p = 0.85$ and for Millennials $r = 0.09$, $p = 0.40$ which indicates that for both generations, trust in government is not a significant factor in the expression of opinion.

This methodology has a certain number of limitations. Due to non-probability sampling, the results cannot give an accurate reflection of the entire population. Furthermore, we can expect that some of those who took the survey may give socially approved answers instead of their true opinions, as the survey depends on self-reported returns. The investigation can only show the interrelations among the factors but not their cause-effect, since its nature is cross-sectional and data is gathered at one point in time. Future longitudinal approaches or experimental investigations will be the way to go for these problems to be minimized.

Discussion

The research was done to investigate Genz and Millennials behaviors of expressing opinion on social media about government public policy. The Spiral of Silence theory was used to analyze

the behavior of Gen Z (ages 18–29) and Millennials (ages 30–44). The results confirm the continued applicability of this theory to the present digital environment. The research also revealed generational differences in opinion expression and result shows social pressure affect people's inclination to openly discuss issues related to public policies.

The research demonstrated that individuals' perception of the opinion climate plays a crucial role in self-censorship, which is in line with the Spiral of Silence theory. When people are convinced that only one opinion is dominant on social media, they would rather keep quiet. This confirms past studies (Glynn et al., 1997; Kim et al., 2016) which provide evidence that the perception of the majority opinion has a strong impact on the decision of individuals whether or not to speak online. The overall findings indicate that social pressure which is intensified by instant feedback and observable online reactions, remains an important determinant of expressing in digital scenarios.

The results also revealed a strong divergence among the different generations regarding the self-censorship. Millennials who don't actively participate in online politics to a greater extent are the ones that do less self-censorship ($r = -0.216$, $p = 0.032$) than Gen Z. So, the Millennials that are more involved in online public policy discussions they are the ones that are less likely to remain silent. Such participation gives them a boost in their self-esteem and minimizes their fear of being socially isolated. This is in line with previous research that pointed out that people who maintain less social bounds do not get trapped in the Spiral of Silence as they gain more political self-confidence and become more adept at articulating their opinions online (Valenzuela, 2013). In contrast, among Gen Z there was substantial link found between self-censorship and internet activity. Gen Z, although very active online, are not more likely to share their opinions. This means that social risks, such as the fear of getting trolled, being canceled (Cancel culture) or judged by peers, are still active deterrents for young users. The findings also indicate that the Spiral of Silence functions differently in the case of Gen Z and that mere participation in online activities does not reduce the social pressure so they prefer to remain silent and hide their opinion.

In addition, the research investigation was done to find out trust in public policy Institutions and Willingness to Express Opinions. The trust in government agencies was not a very strong factor in the decision of people to keep quiet on social media. The result revealed that for both generations, trust in government is not a significant factor in the expression of opinion. The data from no generation (Gen Z: $r = 0.019$, $p = 0.847$; Millennials: $r = 0.086$, $p = 0.403$) pointed to such a correlation as being a significant one. These findings are in line with previous literature which suggested that trust in official institutions is not the primary factor in the virtual noise and social pressure and perceived majority belief are more influential (Kim & Hsu, 2013). Nevertheless, the fact that Gen Z is very active on social media does not ensure that they will share their opinions. It seems that their fear of being judged negatively by their peers or losing their good name is stronger than their opinion expression on social media. The findings suggest that when it comes to the factors of self-censorship and the creation of public opinion through the internet, one has to consider the differences in generations, digital literacy, as well as the various norms and cultures of the social media platforms.

Conclusion

The hypothesis on the Spiral of Silence still holds its ground amongst the social media users, as shown in this study. The rationale is that when people think there are more of those who hold

another or a different opinion, they would rather choose to remain silent. So this is a way to illustrate that, even in the virtual world, people's actions continue to be dictated by their anxiety of facing social rejection or being judged.

Moreover, the research shows clear differences between generations. The Millennials find the online political engagement a boost for their voices during times of social pressure which ultimately brings down the self-censorship a degree. The aforementioned Engagement has not the same impact on the Gen Z's case of self-censorship. This indicates that the Gen Z users even being very active on the internet may still not be expressing their opinions out of fear of being judged by their peers or getting attacked online. The research study has confirmed that the filter through which people in both generations perceive governments does not influence their online expression greatly. On the contrary, online behavior is determined largely by the people's perception of others' reactions to their comments and how they are rated by their peers. To summarize, social pressure and the perception of opinions are still powerful forces determining who speaks and who stays quiet, despite the great number of opportunities that social media offers for people to express their political views. The findings add to the knowledge of online political communication by revealing the role of social pressure and age differences in self-censorship besides the individual's level of online activity. This is a piece of information that researchers, policymakers and social media companies intending to cultivate a hospitable and open environment for public discussions will find invaluable.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is very informative in terms of the different generations and their behaviors if social media is the platform for communication, nevertheless, it has a number of limitations that need to be considered.

Sample and Generalizability

The research involved only survey participants from Gen Z and Millennials which was a limitation in terms of demographics and geographic backgrounds. Consequently, the findings could not be applied to other age groups, cultures or countries with different social media usage and political situations. In order to enhance the generalization of the results, future studies should go for older generations and different cultural or political contexts to work with a bigger and more diverse sample of participants which are thus more inclusive.

Cross-Sectional Design

The study employed a cross-sectional survey method that provided a snapshot of people's opinions and behaviors at a single point in time. While it cannot establish causality, this method is effective in illustrating the differences and connections among the various generations. Future research should consider the use of longitudinal or experimental designs which would observe the changes in the social media landscape and their subsequent impact on online participation and the perceived opinion climate conducive to self-censorship as a gradual process over time.

Measurement Limitations

In measuring perceived opinion climate, online political activity and self-censorship, the study resorted to self-reported responses which could have been influenced by social desirability (i.e. people wanting to give "good" answers) or lapse of memory. Participants may report higher frequency of their internet activities than is actually true or vice versa for their silence. In order to decipher how opinions are actually expressed by people more precisely and fairly, future

research could utilize real behavioral data collection such as postings, comments or social media analytics from which more accurate conclusions can be drawn.

Platform-Specific Dynamics

Social media platforms differ greatly regarding anonymity, size of the audience, visibility of the content and interaction between users. This research might have overlooked some platform-specific impacts since it had no comparison of platforms. Next research could include how different platforms share the opinions of the users, considering the community standards, moderation principles and algorithms in use.

Additional Psychological and Social Factors

Self-censorship can be influenced by a variety of factors, the study only mentioned the perceived opinion climate, engagement and trust in government. There are many factors such as fear of backlash, personality traits (like being outgoing or very open-minded), political beliefs, the people that surround a person and the rules or norms of the platform that could have an effect. These factors could be part of further studies to find out what encourages or discourages people to express their thoughts online.

Future Research Directions

Longitudinal Studies: By observing the same group of people for several years, researchers will not only understand the development of social media but also the differences and interdependencies in self-censorship along with their cause-and-effect relationships.

Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Investigate how the three factors of culture, political situation and internet regulations, among others, will differently affect the Spiral of Silence in various countries.

Platform-Specific Analysis: Determine whether the different social media platforms' characteristics such as algorithms and anonymity influence the desire of users to express their opinions.

Behavioral Data Integration: Unification of genuine digital actions like posting and commenting with self-reports to achieve precise and unbiased measurement of online participation and sharing of opinions.

Broader Psychological Factors: Partner up to explore the ways in which age, personality traits and fear of social risks influence the phenomenon of online self-censorship.

In this way, future research will not only obtain a clearer picture of the social media Spiral of Silence but also be able to deduce the impact of generational traits, platform design and user characteristics on online political discourse by tackling these questions.

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