

## Stanford Online Deliberation

I don't know much about Political Science. I come from marketing/info sciences and law

Two attributes of deliberative democracy

- process
- content—I'm more interested in this—how do people find the content that they want?
  - Deliberative democracy requires well-functioning information ecology
    - robust content on topics of minority interest
    - ways for individuals to sort through the clutter

Why is content so important?

- Content can create private positive utility (i.e., satisfy individual needs)
- Content can create positive externalities
  - Better marketplace competition
  - Better informed citizens

Let's consider how individuals get the content they want. This is a problem when there's ongoing creation of a content pool and individuals have heterogeneous preferences:

- too much content (information overload), with wanted and unwanted info intermixed
- searching and sorting are costly
- individuals may have latent interests—might not even know they have the interests

From a communicator's standpoint, reaching interested individuals is hard

- individuals' heterogeneous preferences are undisclosed
- identifying preferences/targeting is costly
- in virtually all cases, communicators will make Type I/Type II errors

So how can regulation help overcome these problems?

Regulatory systems often try to keep unwanted content from reaching individuals.

- Ex: indecency standards
- Ex: CAN-SPAM, anti-telemarketing laws

Why these generally fail:

- Type I/II errors—misses unwanted marketing, blocks wanted marketing
- Communicators can game the system
- Requires enforcement
- If media-specific, must be reinvented with every new medium

Let's look at three specific implementations of regulation to block unwanted content [these tools can apply on a social scale or on a fairly small level, like in message board/chat room]

Opt-ins

- force communicators to other media (intermedia selection)
- increased costs may make some minority communications infeasible
- may lose matches to latent interests

#### Opt-outs

- Need to be personal, granular, dynamic, low transaction cost

#### Metadata (ex: mandatory labels)

- may encourage misgrading (people think they hate advertising)
- mandatory metadata can consume attention without adding value to individuals

Now, rather than developing ways to keep content away from people, let's think about how we help individuals get the content they want

- social welfare is a function of targeting
  - more individuals get what they want, fewer get unwanted content
- communicator targeting improves with individual preference disclosures
- but individual preference disclosures are costly
  - individuals must invest in making/maintaining preferences—takes time, can create lock-in
  - individuals may not want preferences widely known
  - individuals can't express latent interests

#### My preferred solution: personalized algorithmic/AI sorting

- personal software agents (“relevancy devices”)
  - agents should infer preferences based on behavior
  - agents should filter out unwanted content
  - agents should seek out wanted content
- Benefits: personal, granular, dynamic, low transaction cost
- regulatory implications to support solution
  - agents look a lot like adware/spyware
    - Don't restrict communicator targeting
    - Don't restrict passive data gathering
    - Don't restrict software-spawned content displays
  - regulation may be necessary to control intermedia selection to channel more content through software agents
  - if the market isn't developing proper agents, government may need to sponsor it