Internet Use and Political Interest: Growth Curves and Reinforcing Spirals During Adolescence

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Abstract:

This study analyses reinforcing spirals between online media usage and political interest among adolescents. By applying a two-dimensional conceptualization of online media usage distinguishing between content and interactivity characteristics, the study focuses on the mechanisms and processes stimulating the long-term development of political interest during adolescence.

Findings from a unique six-wave panel study conducted in Sweden over a period of five years, suggest that reinforcing spirals are driven primarily by non-interactive political information usages of online media. These results contribute to a better understanding of the factors leading to the development of political interest during a crucial life phase, as well as the growing body of literature that theorize media and selection effects as part of reinforcing processes during adolescence.