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# Who is My Neighbor? Identifying Epistemic Peers among Polarized Communities

Alex Hoagland

While philosophers have extensively discussed the problem of disagreement among epistemic peers, they have generally set aside the question of identifying these same peers. However, especially in the context of questions of politics and religion, the labeling of others' opinions as important or meaningless is particularly relevant. In such a situation of disagreement, where the correct<sup>1</sup> opinion is not immediately apparent yet has significant moral weight, whose opinions are worth hearing and under what conditions can we exclude other opinions?

Before beginning a thorough exploration of this topic, I will present some terminology used frequently by philosophers in this conversation.<sup>2</sup> A person is considered your *epistemic peer* in a subject or issue if, loosely speaking, that person is "as good as you at evaluating claims [related to the issue]" (Elga 2006). That is, in performing a complicated mathematical calculation, I would count as an epistemic peer someone who 1) had equivalent mathematical training as I have, 2) had about equivalent experience performing this type of calculation as I have, and 3) was about as likely as I was to make mistakes in the course of the calculation. My peer is someone whom, once I set aside my own reasoning, I think is just as likely as I am to get the "right" answer to a certain question. A person who is more likely to solve the problem correctly than I am would be my *epistemic superior*, while one who is less likely to do so is my *epistemic inferior*.

The classification of a person as an epistemic peer (or superior or inferior) is issue-specific. While I may be inclined, for example, to see a colleague as an epistemic peer in mathematical questions, this labeling does not necessarily extend to any other issue. I would not be under any obligation to classify my graduate advisor as an epistemic superior in politics or religion, even while I may consider her my superior in our field

of research. It is therefore possible—even likely—for a person to fill the roles of epistemic inferior, peer, and superior in relation to another person across a continuum of issues.

The question of epistemic disagreement, then, is as follows: given that I hold an opinion  $p$  about an issue and subsequently discover that someone I consider an epistemic peer holds the opinion  $\sim p$ , how should I alter 1) my belief or 2) my confidence in that belief? There are several hypotheses that attempt to answer this question. For simplicity, I will discuss the two main camps. Those ascribing to the Equal Weight View (Ibid.) assert that you should give your peer's conclusion equal weight as your own—that is, “you should think that the two of you are equally likely to be correct” (Ibid., p. 13). On the other hand, those who deny this view assert that there are some instances in which it is appropriate, even upon discovering that your peer has adopted the opinion  $\sim p$ , to “stick to your guns” and continue to maintain your confidence in your original supposition of  $p$  (Schoenfield 2014, p. 3).

Neither of these views, however, gives any indication regarding who qualifies as an epistemic peer. Therefore, I will take a few steps back in order to answer this question, and then see what this implies about disagreement. This is particularly relevant in issues that are non-mechanistic. Even when performing a complicated calculation, the conditions for considering another person my epistemic peer seem relatively obvious. On the other hand, when discussing the existence of God among a group, there are less well-defined conditions. In fact, Elga discusses a case similar to this in his exposition of the Equal Weights View:

Consider Ann and Beth, two friends who stand at opposite ends of the political spectrum. Consider the claim that abortion is morally permissible. Does Ann consider Beth a peer with respect to this claim? That is: setting aside her own reasoning about the abortion claim, and Beth's contrary view about it, does Ann think Beth would be just as likely as her to get things right? (2006, p. 21).

Elga asserts that the answer to this question is “no,” precisely because “by Ann's lights, Beth has reached wrong conclusions about most closely related questions,” such as “whether human beings have souls, whether it is permissible to withhold treatment from terminally ill infants, and whether rights figure prominently in a correct ethical theory” (Ibid., pp. 21–22). Because the two differ on issues that are *related* to the abortion claim, but somehow separate from the claim itself, each is unlikely to consider the other as her peer. Elga follows this with a moral: “with respect to many controversial issues, the associates who one counts as peers tend to have views that are similar to one's own” (Ibid., p. 23).

Therefore, when looking specifically at what Elga calls “controversial issues”—but which I will refer to as *non-mechanistic issues*<sup>3</sup>—one potential hypothesis about peer classification is Elga's claim that we have an obligation to consider someone an epistemic peer on an issue only if they share our opinions on it. I will refer to this hypothesis as the *community hypothesis*, but I will claim that this hypothesis is problematic, especially among political communities.

## The Problems of Polarization and Independence

Before explaining the theory's flaws, let us assume it is true. In a world where epistemic hierarchies are created by this thesis, disagreement among epistemic peers is vacuously avoided (except in mechanistic cases)—I will never disagree with someone I consider my epistemic peer. My opinion on an issue will be altered only by interactions with epistemic superiors who hold opinions different from my own,<sup>4</sup> in which case, I will adopt theirs. Recall that an epistemic superior is more likely to arrive at the correct conclusion than you are, this is a desirable result.

However, there is inconsistency in assuming the existence of epistemic superiors with competing opinions in a system that excludes them from being your peer. Under Elga's view, Ann was not Beth's epistemic peer, precisely because Beth could judge—on the basis of fringe issues—that Ann had frequently come to the “wrong” conclusion. Beth would thus consider Ann her epistemic inferior, rather than the other way around.

Under the community hypothesis, then, an agent either holds the same views as you do or is your epistemic inferior, in which case you have no reason to regard their opinion as even remotely valuable. With no reason to bend on any non-mechanistic issues, disagreement then amounts to nothing except angry Facebook posts. This seems to undermine an important function of disagreement, as implied in both Condorcet's Jury Theorem and the Median Voter Theorem: that of generating consensus. The community hypothesis allows individuals to reinforce their own convictions with self-selected epistemic peers while simultaneously removing themselves from their opponents, eliminating the need for compromise altogether. This is the problem of polarization.

Other critiques of this hypothesis seem compelling.<sup>5</sup> Consider one central problem in the abortion scenario: When Ann judges Beth based on her opinions on closely related issues, she is judging Beth inferior on claims that 1) are not fully separable from the issue at hand and 2) are not verifiable; therefore, they are not evidence of Beth's incompetence or irrationality. When considering non-mechanistic issues, such as politics, people tend to form opinions consistent across issues in order to minimize cognitive dissonance.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, judging someone an epistemic peer (which asserts that *independent of your reasoning*, a colleague is as likely to come to the right conclusion as you are) requires you to set aside these ideologies and examine only traits, such as the ability to think critically and rationally. By asserting that these “clusters of controversy” determine an epistemic hierarchy, Elga asserts that disagreement implies inferiority (Ibid, p. 23).

One potential rejection of the community hypothesis is that we have no special obligation to consider anyone an epistemic peer—call this the *stand-alone hypothesis*. Yet this too is problematic. After all, it does seem right to conclude that a person who shares your view on an issue and has no external qualifications for superiority or inferiority should be considered your epistemic peer. Under these conditions, considering her a superior would be to invalidate the independence of your opinion forming, while considering her an inferior would be to invalidate hers. The stand-alone hypothesis thus seems to

violate some core of individual opinion forming by not calling a duck a duck. Call this the problem of independence—without some obligation to view members of a like-minded community peers, these communities devolve into bandwagons.

### **Peer Classification Outside of Like-Minded Groups: The Conversation Hypothesis**

As an alternative to both the community and stand-alone hypotheses, I propose a middle ground: While we ought to consider those sharing our views as epistemic peers,<sup>7</sup> there additionally exist circumstances under which we are obligated to consider those *outside* of our like-minded communities as epistemic peers. My argument for this claim—call it the *conversation hypothesis*—is summarized here:

1. Agent *A* considers agent *B* her epistemic inferior if and only if *A* is more likely to reach the correct solution to *I* than is *B*. A similar definition holds for epistemic superior.
2. With regard to an issue *I*, any agent must consider other agents either her epistemic inferior, superior, or peer.
3. An issue *I* is considered *non-mechanistic* or *controversial* if a third party possessing the sum total of mankind's knowledge could not assess the correct response to *I*.
4. *A* is more likely to reach the correct answer on an issue *I* if and only if *A* has better training, experience, evidence, or history<sup>8</sup> than *B*.
5. When *I* is non-mechanistic, training and experience are irrelevant in determining the likelihood that an agent will reach a correct conclusion. Similarly, a non-mechanistic *I* prohibits there being any history of correctness.
6. Therefore, if agents *A* and *B* share the same evidence *E* on a non-mechanistic issue *I*, it is neither the case that *B* is an epistemic inferior to *A*, nor that *A* is an epistemic inferior to *B*.
7. Thus, when two agents share the same body of evidence on a non-mechanistic issue *I*, they are epistemic peers.

Premises 1–3 are definitional, and I take them as assumptions. Notice that the first is simply a restatement of the definitions of superiority or inferiority as used by a wide base of the philosophy of disagreement literature (e.g., Elga 2006 and Shoenfield 2014, among others). The second statement provides a complete framework for the binary relation of “epistemological knowledge” and follows immediately from the first definition. If I take any other person and any issue *I*, that person is either more likely, less likely, or equally as likely as I am to reach the correct solution to *I*. Therefore, that person must be exactly my epistemic superior, inferior, or peer.

Premise 3 restricts our attention to the class of issues relevant to our discussion, making it the most important definition. It is important to note that we are not considering issues that have no solution, but those that have no evidence-based or mechanistic solutions. In general, these issues fall into two classes: moral issues and unanswered questions. Elga's abortion case is an excellent example of the first class, as the legality of abortion depends almost entirely on the respective moral weights placed on a person's

freedom to choose and another person's right to life.<sup>9</sup> It may well be the case that, objectively, the freedom to choose ought to be given more moral weight than a person's freedom to life, or it may be that no such objective ranking of moral weights exists. In either case, no amount of knowledge or experience can equip a person to come to a foolproof awareness of their existence or nonexistence, so the issue is non-mechanistic. Similarly, some questions have objective answers that reside outside our current scope of knowledge; it is objectively true either that God exists or that he does not (but not both), but completely impossible for any person to provide a proof of either result, even if that person had access to the complete ken of human knowledge or experience. The class of non-mechanistic issues, then, represents a wide swath of issues, including (among other issues) important political questions related to same-sex marriage or the treatment of refugees. In a later section of this paper dedicated to responding to objections, I will further refine this definition to classify exactly which moral questions belong in the world of non-mechanistic issues.

Premise 4 is a collection of all possible ways one agent could label another as either superior or inferior to them on an issue; I have chosen these categories from the relevant literature on disagreement. No other categories appear to be relevant in determining the likelihood of arriving at the correct response to an issue. While there are some objections (e.g., *B* may have access to an epistemic superior in the issue to whom *A* does not, etc.), these can be handled readily by absorbing them into one of the categories (for example, access to a knowledgeable source on *I* could be considered part of the evidence *E*).

Premise 5 is the heart of the argument. Specifically, it asserts that in the class of non-mechanistic issues to which I have restricted my attention, only evidence can create an epistemic hierarchy. As this is the most important premise in the argument, I will attempt to present a thorough justification for its use. First, consider the roles of training and experience, which are common heuristics in assigning another individual to the role of epistemic superior or inferior. However, I claim that in the case of non-mechanistic issues, this reduces to a fallacious appeal to a false authority. Because a specific issue, say the morality of abortion or the existence of God, is non-mechanistic, there is no system of reasoning or training that has yielded a resolution to the issue. In such a scenario, distinguishing between differences in training or experience is impossible. Who is to say that a nurse who has performed hundreds of abortions is more or less likely to understand the correct moral weights assigned to an abortion than a professor of ethics, or that a physicist is more or less likely to be correct on the existence of God than a priest? Neither the training nor the life experience of any of these four occupations can be considered comparable, but there does not exist a clear way to assert dominance of one over the other. Furthermore, given that no clear path to resolution exists, it is not clear that years of experience or prestige of training would matter in assigning value to a person's opinion. If physics is not a confirmed path to understanding the existence of God, why should Stephen Hawking have any more moral authority on

the issue than a peruser of *A Brief History of Time*? For that matter, why should he have any more authority than a layman with no knowledge of physics whatsoever? Once the issue arises, it is self-perpetuating, and backward induction asserts that it is invalid in any potential comparison based on training or experience.

Second, consider the role of history in examining a non-mechanistic issue. Suppose that there was a history of correctness with regard to such an issue—were this the case, it would be included in the sum total of man’s knowledge, and, therefore, reduced to a mechanistic issue, as a correct solution is known and accessible. Therefore, the second half of the premise follows merely from the definition of a non-mechanistic issue.

If, then, there are no other criteria by which a person can be labeled an epistemic inferior on some class of issues except through evidence, it follows that two agents who share the same body of evidence each ought to consider the other as their epistemic peer. Notice that this argument solves both the problems of polarization and independence: If these claims are true, and an agent outside of our community has the same evidence we do (even though he has reached a different conclusion), we still ought to consider him our peer. Similarly, those in our like-minded communities (that share evidences as one of their principal functions) will be considered our peers. Additionally, this argument has several critical implications, which I will explore in the subsequent section.

### **Application of the Conversation Hypothesis to Disagreement**

Up to this point, I have been vague about the definition of the “correct” answer to an issue, especially non-mechanistic issues, for which the notion of correctness seems particularly obscure. Notice, however, that one implication of this argument is that the Equal Weights View leads to absurdity. Consider the case of Ann and Beth once more. Assuming, as Elga does, that Ann and Beth have had a lengthy conversation in which each has shared her views and evidences, there is no other criterion to separate Ann and Beth from peer ship. Yet the two have staunchly opposed opinions on the same issue and (at least, after the discussion) evidence that there is no intuition suggesting either will be dissuaded from her view.<sup>10</sup> Were the Equal Weights View legitimate, each would have to judge the other as equally likely to arrive at the correct conclusion, a process that would force both parties into agnosticism about the issue of abortion. Thus, the Equal Weights View, at least for non-mechanistic issues, for which hierarchy is impossible to form except by evidence, seems to imply widespread skepticism about the murkier moral questions.

Many could argue—and indeed, have done so—that these are precisely the questions that need to be answered the most. Indeed, almost every question on political policy can be reduced to a complicated question of balancing moral values.<sup>11</sup> Given that political policy questions (among others) require implementable solutions, skepticism is an undesirable goal. Therefore, it is unavoidable in non-mechanistic issues under the Equal Weights View that situations exist when it is rational to stick to one’s original opinion even in the face of an epistemic peer who disagrees with you. This is precisely the hypothesis of *Steadfastness*. Additionally, this seems to imply<sup>12</sup> a form of *Working Permissivism*. That is, even if non-mechanistic issues have unique, correct solutions (and the

questions of existence and uniqueness are a matter for another paper entirely), it is not irrational for two agents to share a body of evidence and reach different conclusions. I will discuss important applications of this result in a later section. This result is interesting for two principal reasons, depending on the type of non-mechanistic issue at hand: For moral issues, it asserts that policy ought not to be based on unanimity, while for unanswered questions, it maximizes the chance of reaching a solution by jointly expanding the base of evidence. A multiplicity of unchanging viewpoints may lead to policy inefficiencies—it may be the case, for instance, that our policies around abortion cycle depending on fluctuations in a nation’s majority opinion. However, allowing for this variability creates a space for educated conversation amidst the noise of impossible conversion. For moral issues, whose solutions are usually not theoretically attainable given any amount of experimentation or knowledge, working permissivism yields an important implication in political conversation and policy: listening with compassion. For unanswered questions, this is just as important but for a different reason. Allowing for the priest and the physicist to share information while preserving their own views is critical for interdisciplinary studies and the pursuit of further knowledge. Given that no path of training is more viable than another, allowing each to follow their own candidate path while learning from the triumphs and pitfalls of others increases the chance of success.

### **Response to Objections: Moral Absolutes and Subjective Evidence**

I can see a few potential objections to this argument. The first major objection is empirical and rests on the apparent preponderance of unacceptable responses to non-mechanistic issues. Consider, for example, the issue of female infanticide and its proponents—should not the conversation hypothesis allow agents who hold morally repulsive views as epistemic inferiors? This objection can take two forms. The first is a mere rephrasing of the community hypothesis with the question: Is there a threshold level of ideological difference after which I can label an agent my epistemic inferior? The second is a more puzzling question: Is there an objectively identifiable set of opinions that are unacceptable on moral grounds?<sup>13</sup> The answer to the first question is an easy “no”; the epistemic hierarchy cannot be determined based on the distance between opinions but must be based on the likelihood of correctness. To do anything else would be to assert superiority in experience, training, or history, none of which is valid in answering a non-mechanistic question. On the other hand, the second question is a more difficult one; to examine it further, I will formalize it. Two agents—*A* and *B*—disagree on the issue of whether it is morally permissible to murder female infants but share the same evidence *E* on the issue. If agent *B* believes that female infanticide is acceptable, is agent *A* justified in labeling him an epistemic inferior?

It may seem immediately apparent that all issues of morality must be non-mechanistic; it appears that any arbiter possessing the totality of human knowledge would be unable to answer correctly any moral question. However, this seems too hasty. For example, it would appear to many that such an arbiter would clearly be able to identify the objectionable nature of murder and could decisively state that murder is morally

impermissible through an appeal to the human experience. If this is the case, then the objection can be rectified by revising premise 3 to say:

3. Agent *A* considers agent *B* her epistemic inferior if and only if *A* is more likely to reach the correct solution to *I* than is *B*, or if *B* has an opinion that requires the violation of a mechanistic moral question (such as the legitimacy of murder).

This revision of premise 3 is also desirable in order to address a similar but perhaps more general objection: one of extreme moral relativism. If we consider any moral issue non-mechanistic, then any response to the current body of evidence is a viable one and policy reflects merely the whims of the majority, whatever they may be. While I do not wish to make any normative claims regarding theories of moral relativism, interpretations of the conversation hypothesis that reduce the illegality of murder to merely the fact that more than 50 percent of the population favor not murdering others seems dubious. It may seem that in some instances, moral questions *can* be answered by enough human experience or experimentation—in such cases, the conversation would not apply, because a moral hierarchy could be built around experience and training, meaning that we need not be permissive about certain ideas, such as murder.

In order to respond fully to this criticism, then, we must address the question: When can a moral issue safely be considered mechanistic, and when can it not? It is likely that this is a question for future responses to the conversation hypothesis and the questions of political disagreement in general. However, I will offer an initial pass at an answer. Recall that a mechanistic issue is answered correctly by examining the complete body of evidence of human experience. We can similarly define a *morally mechanistic issue* as a moral issue that is answered easily by the application of a specific view of morality, such as utilitarianism or the categorical imperative. This is essentially equivalent of reducing moral issues to simple and compound issues; many (if not all) theories of normative ethics would conclude that murder is morally impermissible in the black and white, making murder a morally mechanistic issue. In fact, on simple moral issues, generally acclaimed theories of normative ethics tend to agree, making it almost natural to conclude that the question can be (at least very closely) determined. When context compounds the issues is when these theories diverge. Hence, when a moral issue becomes more non-mechanistic, for example, the “simple” question of murder can be generalized to the “compound” cases of abortion or the question of Jim and the Indians (Smart and Williams 1973). Given that different theories will reach different answers, the arguments above detailing the pitfalls of appealing to experience or training apply, making the issue more non-mechanistic.

A third and final critique lies in my (perhaps) flippant discussion of the evidence surrounding an issue. What exactly constitutes this evidence? Consider, as an example, the case of a jury in a criminal trial; while each juror receives the same evidence provided in the courtroom, might not previous life experiences alter the way evidence is perceived? In this sense, is it ever possible to share evidence completely?

This is exactly the type of problem that the community hypothesis was built to

address. Previous philosophers have relied on arguments such as this to advocate for uniqueness in the face of the empirical evidence of frequently divided juries. However, if we define evidence as strictly objective and tangible (e.g., the testimonies of the witnesses and arguments of the attorneys), the community hypothesis requires no raised eyebrows at the existence of a non-unanimous verdict. While it is true that subjective perception of evidence leads to differing views, this subjectivity is not a problem for non-mechanistic issues.<sup>14</sup> Even among differing perceptions, peer ship is not forfeited.

### **Applications and Conclusion**

Therefore, while we may be under more obligation to view others as our epistemic peers than perhaps previously assumed, we are under less obligation to suspend our own beliefs in order to accommodate disagreement. This result has direct applications to almost any area of interest in the domain of political science, as political activities and behavior are inevitably built on discussion of non-mechanistic issues, such as abortion. In fact, current research in political science empirically substantiates the use of the conversation hypothesis by people utilizing social media sources such as Facebook and Twitter. For example, Kim, Hsu, and de Zuniga (2013) use Facebook network data in the U.S. to conclude that political posts on Facebook contribute to an increased level of “heterogeneity in discussion networks,” or an increased likelihood that a political participant will engage in conversation with other political participants from across the political spectrum.<sup>15</sup> In general, the authors find these increased conversations from “across the aisle” lead to an increase in civic engagement.

One important gap in this research, however, is an examination of the results of such cross-partisan discussions. Specifically, current political science research has been silent on the ways these conversations affect the initial opinions of their participants. Future researchers may focus on analyzing these political conversations in a setting that allows them to determine whether the conversation 1) brought the participants to a “middle ground” solution, as predicted by the Median Voter Theorem; 2) polarized the participants even more, as suggested by either the community hypothesis or the stand-alone hypothesis; or 3) encouraged a socially beneficial conversation without shifting each agent’s own political opinions, as predicted by the conversation hypothesis. This research would have important political implications on fostering political discussion among heterogeneous groups and answer questions such as ideological selectivity in social media use (Iyengar and Hahn 2009). Once established, these results extend to almost any aspect of political science that relies on political dialogue about non-mechanistic issues, such as policy formation, political economy, and international relations.

On issues the collective human spirit has not adequately addressed, we have no sufficient criteria for distinguishing epistemic superiority and, therefore, cannot close our ears or minds to the arguments of those who have reached different conclusions than us. However, this does not need to lead to widespread skepticism or the sur-

rendering of belief. Rather, the exposure to different views on the same evidence can have a purely positive impact on discussion and embodiment overall. As Nietzsche wrote, “let us not be ungrateful toward such resolute reversals of the familiar perspectives . . . to see differently in this way for once, to *want* to see differently, is no small discipline and [serves] . . . so that one knows how to make precisely the *difference* in perspectives and affective interpretations useful for knowledge” (*On the Genealogy of Morality*, III.12).

#### NOTES

1. I recognize that for many of the issues discussed in this paper, the use of the word “correct” to describe a solution to the issue may seem vague. Over the course of the paper, I hope to clarify this sentiment.
2. These definitions appear in broad strokes—there are many variations on a theme when it comes to the semantics of the debate. However, in order to focus on the more critical issues, I will attempt to use definitions that appeal to many philosophers’ views.
3. As a pass at a definition of these types of issues (which I think synthesizes the views of philosophers such as Elga who have written on the subject), I assert that an issue is non-mechanistic if it is impossible to amass a body of evidence *E* large enough to arrive at a unique answer to the question being considered. According to another way of thinking, an issue could be considered mechanistic if we could reasonably conceive of a computer or robot possessing the sum total of humanity’s knowledge answering the question for us, thereby eliminating the need to handle disagreement stemming from human error. I will clarify this definition further in the next section of the paper.
4. We can assume, for the purposes of this paper, that the discovery that an epistemic superior holds an opinion contradictory to your own is strong enough evidence for you to change your opinion. Whether this is true is a matter for another paper.
5. For one thing, it seems to be begging the question by arguing that a label of epistemic peer is conditional on minimizing disagreement.
6. The validity of this claim is questioned by some, who maintain that we merely *think* that we do this when, in fact, our opinions are quite inconsistent. While this may be true, it is the very perception of opinion-forming that I am concerned with, and so this objection is an irrelevant one.
7. Unless some obvious condition exists, which labels one of us as superior.
8. i.e., a better history of being correct on issues similar to (or exactly identical to, in the case of mechanistic issues).
9. This is a broad-strokes portrayal of the issue in order to avoid a larger tangent.
10. Even Elga avoids claiming this, as the bulk of human interaction would suggest the opposite.
11. As in the case of abortion, in which different opinions arise from assigning different preferences to the values of freedom and the right to life.
12. Although the argument for this conclusion would take substantially more work.
13. An even more basic question may arise concerning the labelling of any view as morally repulsive within the domain of a non-mechanistic issue. Here, we must remember that non-mechanistic issues are not unsolvable ones—opinions held by agents assessing a body of evidence are considered candidate solutions to an issue, and one agent’s candidate solution may be viewed as repugnant or extremely off-base by another agent. Specifically, a view may be repulsive because of its implications for other, more mechanistic issues, rather than its contrast to the true solution (which is inaccessible for these questions). For example, within the question of abortion’s morality, it may be the case that a particular agent holds that children hold no rights at all until they are able to contribute to society, thereby condoning not only abortion but also other forms of child abuse (such as female infanticide). This candidate solution would be viewed as morally repulsive by many, even though there is no true solution with which to compare the idea.

14. Indeed, no standard of objectivity exists.
15. This article also includes important references to other studies attempting to understand the role of political conversation on social media sites in elevating offline political participation, and the role of different personal characteristics in mitigating these results.

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