

# Polarized Social Norms Against Corruption: A Social Media Experiment in India

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the impact of receiving extreme information through social media on the formation of normative perceptions against corruption. For this purpose, we developed an original mobile application in which two types of randomizations were built-in: First, we randomly circulated news and blogs related to corruption to users; second, we randomly deployed other users' comments on each article. We quantify the degree of extremism in individual perceptions of social norms against corruption by employing a lab-in-the-app experiment and supervised machine learning algorithms. Our estimation results show that users respond to both counter- and pro-attitudinal extreme information by shifting their norms to even more radical directions. Further analysis implies that socialized motivation to conform to other people's opinion is the main driver of polarized social norms relative to social-psychological explanations. Finally, we show that polarized social norms coincide with the segregation of online communities. These results suggest that to curb severe social fragmentation and to eliminate corruption, we need to reconsider the design of information circulation and communication structures in social media.

Keywords: social norm, social media, corruption, machine learning

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