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### **Workshop on the Growing Influence of Social Media in Global Politics and Society**

We are hosting to an ambitious, interdisciplinary workshop at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School from August 16<sup>th</sup>-August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The workshop's aim will be to produce a detailed agenda for research on social media's growing influence in global politics and society at large. Our one-day meeting will consist of brief talks and a series of symposia, drawing out connections between work from a diverse range of disciplines, all relevant to the dynamics of human communication and group-formation online. Final products will be (1) a formal proposal for a larger conference to be held in 2019, and (2) a slate of prospective research collaborations.

Social media's early promise was to promote more open and interconnected societies. Distance-bridging, incorporeal virtual interactions were expected to foster communication across physical and demographic boundaries, democratize access to knowledge, facilitate grassroots political movements, and draw fragmented information-age communities closer together. More recently, this optimism has given way to growing anxiety that virtual networks have just the opposite effect. As populations of social-media sites have soared, online activity has been increasingly central to offline cultural and political events such as the UK's Brexit vote and the recent US presidential election. In these and other cases, online networks have appeared prone to splintering, drawing individuals into informational "bubbles" that can incubate ingroup/outgroup hostilities and make participants vulnerable to misinformation and propaganda. These developments raise fundamental questions about the nature of virtual social networks and their impacts on our individual and collective well-being. We believe that an interdisciplinary conversation is needed to address these questions, as the phenomena involved range from the neural reward pathways of individuals up to the structural features of global-scale political movements.

No single academic gathering can produce definitive prescriptions for remedying the social ills playing out online. However, just as ecologists have mobilized their field as a "crisis discipline" that must synthesize current knowledge to address rapid environmental change, we see an urgent need for academics to consolidate what we know about virtual social networks, and to help frame the questions we should be asking next. Planned talks already include, for example, social psychologists on the role of "homophily" (individuals' motivations to confirm preexisting opinions and preferences) in shaping online bond-formation; evolutionary theorists on the conditions that support the stability of "honest" signals and those that permit dishonest signals and signalers to flourish; and scholars of collective action on the structural features of groups that do or do not optimize outcomes through the "wisdom of the crowd." We hope that you will join these and other scholars from fields including social network theory, political science, philosophy, and evolutionary behavioral ecology, to speak, discuss, and forge future collaborations. We expect to lay groundwork for future studies that will be practically useful

for promoting the safety and stability of online communities, and the larger societies with which they increasingly overlap.

*Primary Organizers:*

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