

Look who's talking - An empirical study on the moderating role of self-efficacy, political interest and social anxiety for the spiral of silence

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One of the best-known theories explaining people's participation in public discussions is the spiral of silence theory (SoS, Noelle-Neumann, 1974). However, although the central assumption of the theory, that a perceived minority status of one's opinion negatively effects the willingness to speak out, has been confirmed many times, this relationship is rather small in magnitude (Matthes, Knoll & von Sikorski, 2018). An explanation for this weak relationship is considered in the neglect of individual difference variables which might strengthen or weaken the negative influence of a perceived minority position (Matthes, Rios Morrison, & Schemer, 2010). The present contribution ties in with these considerations and integrates self-efficacy expectation, political interest and social anxiety into the SoS. It is assumed that individuals with high self-efficacy, high political interest or little social anxiety express their opinions in a perceived minority position. The results of an online survey show no moderation effects. However, direct effects of self-efficacy expectation and social anxiety can be confirmed. These effects are of great importance for the spiral of silence: For the development of public opinion it is therefore not only important whether an individual perceives itself in the majority, but which kind of persons hold an opinion.