Mixed Media:
Interactions of Social and Traditional Media in Political Decision Making

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Abstract

A study was conducted to understand how social media and traditional news about political candidates might interact to influence potential voters’ views. It was hypothesized that social media operates more on an affective level whereas traditional news operates more on a rational level. Subjects were exposed to Facebook posts and news articles about two candidates in a 2011 U.S. gubernatorial election. One group saw the social media material first and the news articles second. Another group saw the news articles first and the social media material second. Measures were taken of knowledge, affect, and influence on the voting decision. There were no differences in dependent measures after the first exposure, however on the second exposure subjects who saw news first and social media second became less hopeful about, more fearful of, and less likely to vote for one candidate while their liking of the other candidate increased. Social media had more of an impact on affect and likelihood of voting when read in the context of prior knowledge from news sources. Interviews revealed that important social media categories were Pictures, Community Discussion, Politician-Community Interaction, and Policy-Specific Information.

1. Introduction

1.1. Cognition and affect in political judgment

Political decision making has both rational and emotional components. A rational-actor model of political decision making emphasizes the gathering of information, weighing of choices, and reasoning about costs and benefits of various decisions. While such models have been prevalent in political science for many decades [24], they have been challenged by theorists and researchers coming from psychology and other behavioral social sciences [12][34].

One challenge involves the pragmatics of making complex decisions that require significant cognitive resources. Lau [12] points out that many people are unmotivated to put in the cognitive effort required to make complex decisions that can be made effectively enough by using short-cut heuristics. This view falls into a broader category of bounded rationality theories [1][8][9][33][35] in which actors weigh the complexity of a problem against their cognitive and other resources. A popular theory in political psychology is the “on-line running tally” idea that people create an initial, often schema-based concept of a candidate which they then use as a comparator when new information is encountered [13][14][23]. The candidate schema is updated as necessary while the information used for updating might be forgotten.

Social psychologists have spent considerable effort studying the role of emotion in the political arena [5][16]. Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen [17] propose that political judgment is a balance between habit and reason that is mediated largely by emotion. Studies of the impact of media on decision making have also emphasized the role of impression formation and manipulation in forming political judgments [43].

1.2. Social media and politics

The Pew Internet and American Life project reports that 65% of all Americans say that they use social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and Twitter, up from 2% since 2005 [15]. According to a 2011 Nielsen report [21] Americans now spend 23% of their Internet time using blogs and SNSs, a larger percentage than any other online activity. Facebook is the most popular application across all platforms [7].

Controlling for demographic characteristics such as education and income, Internet users are much more likely than non-Internet users to have been involved in civic/political activities such as attending a political rally, trying to influence a vote, and actually voting or reporting intention to vote [7]. Frequent Facebook
users are even more engaged in these civic/political activities [7].

Political discourse has been studied in several types of social media situations, including political blogs [2][37][38][40], discussion forums [22], online videos [4][20], and pure SNSs [10][25][26][27][28][29][41][42]. These studies all examine political discourse within a single context, however. In this study, we begin to explore how different types of media influence each other, and specifically how social media and online traditional news interact.

1.3. Study motivation

In this study we explored how social media and online traditional media interact when subjects are exposed to both in different orders. Information gleaned from prior material has a priming effect on later material [31] and provides a frame in which subsequent material is interpreted. Both of these influences can operate on both a cognitive level, for example influencing what people think is salient, and on an affective level, for example influencing whether people feel good, neutral, or bad about an issue [18][30]. Some researchers feel that cognition and affect work together in political media to influence what people feel is important, and that highly salient issues with negative valence are judged to be most important [30]. There is some evidence that news delivered with a positive tone made people feel that it was less important [30][32].

While non-opinion traditional media is written in a neutral style, there is no such control over the style of information in social media. Indeed, the multiple participants/authors of social media have many goals [3][11] and in the context of political discourse they often seek explicitly to influence others and the emotional tone of the content can be positive and negative [25][26].

We were curious whether the affectively charged content of social media would influence the interpretation of traditional, neutrally phrased media.

2. Method

2.1. Subjects

Twenty three students, 15 males and 8 females, from the University of Hawaii participated in the two conditions described in this study (the two conditions are selected from a larger study involving six conditions and 68 subjects). The students were solicited as part of an optional course participation opportunity.

Eighteen of the subjects reported that they were in the 18-20 year old age category and 5 subjects reported that they were in the 21-29 year old age category. The sample contained 8 subjects who identified themselves as Democrats, 9 who identified themselves as Independents, and 6 who identified themselves as Republicans. Table 1 shows means, minimums, and maximums for ratings measuring political ideology and technology use. Taken together, the data suggest that these subjects were distributed along the political spectrum and had high familiarity with ICTs and social networking. They had a moderate interest in politics and little experience in elections.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ideology (1 = Very liberal)</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest in politics (1 = Very low)</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Likelihood of voting (1 = very unlikely)</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Familiarity with ICTs (1 = Very unfamiliar)</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNS frequency (1=high)</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>E-mail use (1=high)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Texting/IM (1=high)</td>
<td>1.08</td>
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Table 1. Subject demographics on 1-5 scales.

2.2. Materials

The social media materials comprised over 700 consecutive posts and their related comments copied from each of the Facebook walls of the two candidates for Governor of Mississippi in 2011: Republican candidate Phil Bryant (~500 posts) and Democratic candidate Johnny Dupree (~300 posts). Governor is the top executive post in U.S. state-level government.

The Mississippi gubernatorial election was selected for several reasons. First, it was one of only four gubernatorial elections held in 2011, and there was a reasonable chance our subject pool (located in a different region of the United States) would have little or no prior knowledge of the candidates. Second, Mississippi’s election was the only gubernatorial race in 2011 without an incumbent candidate, so the assumption was that media coverage would be more even across the candidates. Finally, both Bryant and Dupree maintained active Facebook pages that attracted numerous comments by citizens.

Posts were collected from the August 5, 2011 - November 8, 2011, time period, prior to polls opening on election day. Posts were taken from the candidates’
walls, which contained the top-level posts of the candidates followed by comments from Facebook users. Posts were consistent with the types of posts found in previous research (direct address, evidence, action, rebuttal, joking/ridicule) [26]. These materials were presented to subjects on a browser exactly as they appeared within the Facebook application.

The traditional media materials consisted of the text of three articles from online media sources about the candidates. Two were Associated Press stories and one was from a local news source. The three articles were published in the month leading up to the election, from October 14, 2011, to October 27, 2011. Combined, they comprised just more than three pages. The articles covered candidate viewpoints on the Mississippi "personhood" ballot initiative, the state rainy day fund, and campaign funding. The articles were selected because they provided balanced coverage of the candidates. To check the distribution of news coverage between candidates systematically, we categorized each sentence in each article according to whether it was about Bryant, DuPree, or someone or something else. We then looked at the number of words about each candidate relative to the total number of words in each article. Bryant received slightly more journalistic attention in the "personhood" ballot initiative article (31 percent of the words in the article compared to DuPree's 29 percent), while DuPree received more coverage in the rainy day fund story (38 percent compared to Bryant's 35 percent) and also in the campaign-funding article (40 percent of the article compared to Bryant's 28 percent). But, overall, the total number of words dedicated to discussing each candidate was fairly even across the three articles (35 percent of the words were about DuPree, and 31 percent were about Bryant).

The articles not only dedicated a comparable number of words to each candidate but also provided qualitatively similar coverage. Typically in U.S. politics, Democrats are left of center, and Republicans are right of center. However, in this unusual case, Bryant and DuPree shared similar political positions on the issues in the news articles. We hoped that this would mitigate participants' ability to vote solely along party line and rely on partisan stereotypes.

2.3. Design

The experimental design, Shown in Figure 1, was a 2x2 mixed design with media order as one factor (between groups) and exposure time as a second factor (repeated measures). All subjects were exposed to the same materials, but one group saw the materials in the order of social media first and traditional media second (SM-TM) and the other group saw the materials in the order of traditional media first and social media second (TM-SM).

Dependent measures were taken at pre-exposure, after exposure to the first set of materials (Exposure 1) and then again after exposure to the second set of materials (Exposure 2), as shown in Figure 1. Several scales to assess knowledge and affect were given as dependent measures:

- **Knowledge of the race:** Subjects were asked to “Please indicate your general knowledge level of the 2011 Mississippi governors race” and given the response choices of 1=No knowledge, 2=Low knowledge, 3=Moderate knowledge, 4=High knowledge, 5=Very high knowledge.
- **Knowledge of the candidate:** Before seeing any media, subjects were asked to “Please indicate your knowledge about <candidate name>, a candidate in the 2011 Mississippi governors race.” After exposure to media, subjects were asked a set of
questions about each candidate including to “Please indicate your knowledge about this candidate.” In both cases subjects answered using the response choices of 1=No knowledge, 2=Low knowledge, 3=Moderate knowledge, 4=High knowledge, 5=Very high knowledge.

- **Mood/Feeling thermometer:** Subjects were asked to rate the candidates on a “feeling thermometer” with the response choices of 1=“Cold” and 7=“Warm.” Feeling thermometers are commonly used in research on attitudes toward political candidates [39].

- **Mood/Affect checklist:** Subjects were asked to rate the candidates on five affective terms. The checklist questions were in the form “When you think about <candidate name>, how <affect term> does he make you feel?” using the following affect terms: “angry,” “hopeful,” “afraid,” “proud,” and “anxious.” The response scale was 1=“Not <affect term> at all,” 2=“Slightly <affect term>,” 3=“Moderately <affect term>,” 4=“Very <affect term>,” and 5=“Extremely <affect term>.” The first four items on the checklist are used in the American National Election Studies, and “anxious” was added per [17].

- **Mood/Liking:** Subjects were asked to “Please indicate how much you like/dislike this candidate” using the response scale of 1=“Dislike very much,” 2=“Dislike somewhat,” 3=“Neutral,” 4=“Like somewhat,” and 5=“Like very much.”

- **Influence/Likelihood of voting for candidate:** Subjects were asked to “Please indicate how likely it is that you would vote for this candidate” using the response scale of 1=“Definitely would not,” 2=“Probably would not,” 3=“Neutral,” 4=“Probably would,” and 5=“Definitely would.”

### 2.4. Procedure

Subjects were randomly assigned to either the SM-TM group or the TM-SM group. After reading the consent form, each subject was instructed to “Imagine that you were about to move to Mississippi and that you want to decide which candidate to vote for when you get there.” The subjects were instructed that they would be reading materials about the candidates and answering questions about their knowledge and mood.

The experiment was controlled entirely by a computer with all questions and materials appearing online. Each exposure period lasted for 10 minutes during which time subjects were free to read/browse any parts of the appropriate material that they wished. At the end of the entire session an informal, semi-structured interview lasting between 15-20 minutes was conducted by the experimenter(s) in order to understand what subjects were thinking and doing as they browsed the different media types. The study team wished to identify more clearly what categories of information subjects deemed relevant from each respective source, and in turn, determine what helped people when making their voting decisions.

The interview transcripts were coded with Atlas.ti utilizing an approach from grounded theory [36]. We first used open coding to identify general themes made explicit during interviews, which we then reduced under axial coding to four categories.

### 3. Results

Analysis of Variance was used to analyze the mean ratings of the various dependent measures. For the knowledge score, a 3x2 mixed ANOVA was used because the knowledge scale was administered three times (repeated measures factor) to both groups (independent groups factor). For all other measures a 2x2 mixed ANOVA was used since the scales were administered twice.

**Figure 2.** Mean knowledge ratings about the overall gubernatorial race for both media order groups at three exposure points.

#### 3.1. Knowledge scale

Figure 2 shows the mean ratings for the question “Please indicate your general knowledge level of the 2011 Mississippi governor’s race” across the three exposure periods. There was a main effect of exposure, $F(2,42)=89.32, p<.0001$, but no effect of presentation order and no interaction. Before being exposed to anything, subjects reported very low knowledge about the election. After exposure to the first material, perceived knowledge increased significantly regardless of whether subjects read social media or traditional media. There was another increase with exposure to the second material, again regardless of the type of
material. In the end, subjects in both conditions felt that they knew a moderate amount about the election.

The same pattern was present for both questions about specific knowledge of the candidates. There were main effects of exposure for knowledge about Phil Bryant, $F(2,42)=94.95$, $p<.0001$ (mean knowledge scores = 1.04, 2.22, and 2.78 for the Pre-Exposure, Exposure1, and Exposure2 conditions, respectively), and Johnny DuPree, $F(2,42)=66.45$, $p<.0001$, (mean knowledge scores = 1.09, 2.22, and 2.78 for the Pre-Exposure, Exposure1, and Exposure2 conditions, respectively). There were no interactions and no main effect of media order for the knowledge scores.

3.2. Feeling thermometer

The temperature ratings behaved differently for the two candidates. Johnny DuPree’s rating did not vary across conditions. For Phil Bryant, on the other hand, there was an interaction between the exposure factor and the order factor, $F(1,17)=5.98$, $p<.03$, as shown on the left part of Figure 3. After the first exposure, the temperature rating was the same for Phil Bryant regardless of whether the subjects were exposed to social media or traditional media. However, subjects who read social media at the second exposure decreased their rating such that, in the end they felt significantly colder toward the candidate.

3.3. Affect checklist

There were several interesting interactions present in the affect checklist for one candidate, Phil Bryant. Bryant’s hopeful ratings diverged on the second exposure (middle part of Figure 3), falling when social media came second and rising when traditional media came second, $F(1,21)=10.45$, $p<.005$. Bryant’s fearful ratings diverged marginally on the second exposure (right part of Figure 3), rising when social media came second and falling when traditional media came second, $F(1,21)=3.92$, $p<.06$.

Finally, subjects’ anxiety ratings fell for Johnny Dupree as a function of exposure, $F(1,20)=5.71$, $p<.05$, (mean anxiety scores = 1.91 and 1.55 for the Exposure1 and Exposure2 conditions, respectively).

3.4. Like/Dislike rating

Johnny Dupree’s liking ratings diverged marginally on the second exposure, rising when social media came second, $F(1,21)=4.02$, $p<.06$, see Figure 4.
3.5. Likelihood of voting for a candidate

The rated likelihood of voting for Johnny DuPree (mean = 3.0) remained the same regardless of the condition, but the rated likelihood of voting for Phil Bryant showed a significant interaction between the exposure and order factors, $F(1,21)=6.56$, $p<.02$, as shown in Figure 5. Although subjects were equally likely to vote for Phil Bryant after the first exposure, regardless of what type of media they saw, their likelihood ratings diverged on the second exposure such that they became less likely to vote for him when seeing social media second and more likely to vote for him when seeing traditional media second. In the end, although the subjects saw the same material, the ordering of the material left them 1.24 points apart on the likelihood of voting scale.

3.6. Interview insights

During follow-up interviews, participants from both exposure groups reported obtaining different types of information depending on the media type. Although the order of information influenced subjects, both traditional media and social media played an integral role in the decision-making process.

The majority of subjects claimed to have learned more about the candidates’ stances on issues from traditional media because, firstly, the articles were in-depth, and secondly, the material was better organized thus making it more accessible.

Conversely, with Facebook, some subjects felt overwhelmed by how information was presented to them. One person, for example, described how he believed he would be unable to “get through” the Facebook data in the allotted time:

“I was scrolling along and I looked to the side and it (scroll bar select area) was just like this little dot and I’m way at the top and I’m like Oh God! I’m never going to get through this!”

Similarly, our subjects explained that much of the Facebook content consisted solely of supportive messages, or cheerleading [12], which did not contribute to their knowledge of the candidates. Despite how information was presented via social media, there were four categories of data that subjects reported as contributing to their knowledge (both positively and negatively) of the candidates. The categories were:

- **Pictures:** Subjects reported that Facebook pictures contributed to their knowledge about each candidate. For example, people were able to discern how involved the candidates were in the community.
- **Community Discussion:** Subjects explained how they learned about the candidates based on the community discussions that were taking place on their respective Facebook walls, e.g. the degree to which religion influenced a candidate’s policies.
- **Community Engagement:** Subjects indicated the interactions between politicians and their community contributed to their knowledge, serving a dual purpose. On the one hand, candidates clarified their stances on key issues, thus aiding in the deliberation process. On the other hand, when a candidate did not contribute to community discussions, people had a better understanding of the candidate’s personal nature.
- **Policy-Specific Information:** Subjects indicated that they obtained information through social media about the candidate’s policies that contributed to their knowledge of the candidate.

The type of knowledge people gained through Facebook was more personal than what they could obtain from traditional media (save for Policy-Specific Information), explaining why knowledge still increased after each exposure. These different aspects of Facebook contributed to people’s feelings about the candidates. They contributed to affect, which ultimately contributed to people’s overall voting decisions.

The decreased feeling thermometer rating and other negative influences on the affect checklist items in the second exposure can be explained with our analysis of the follow-up interview data and the categories identified. Our subjects indicated that the pictures posted on the candidates’ respective Facebook walls influenced their feelings about them. DuPree posted pictures of himself with his volunteers, and
several participants expressed positive feelings towards the pictures on his page (contributing to positive sentiment). As described by one informant:

“...DuPree seemed more sincere... he posted pictures of himself working together with his volunteers...”

On the other hand, the pictures posted on Bryant’s page were, as described by several informants, “very commercial” or only for “media purposes.” One subject described how she disliked the fact that Bryant posted a lot of commercials on his page, in contrast to DuPree. This can explain why people developed negative feelings towards Bryant:

“... DuPree was more like more my views, community like, and not just all based on getting his face out there on just commercials and media.”

This sentiment was not shared by all of our subjects, however, as some subjects claimed that Bryant seemed to be more involved with the community per the pictures posted on his wall when compared to DuPree.

Community discussions also enabled people to develop warm or cold feelings about each candidate. Subjects reported that the community discussions on DuPree’s Facebook wall were “boring”, “irrelevant”, or simple expressions of support (cheerleading). When perusing Bryant’s wall, the feelings seemed to shift from warm to cold, or cold to warm, depending on an individual’s interpretation of the discussions taking place on his wall. On the one hand, a minority of subjects found the interactions between members of Bryant’s community to be informative and helpful in the deliberation process, as they could learn about him through the interactions that had emerged on his wall. On the other hand, several subjects reported having cold feelings towards Bryant as a result of the community dialogue on his public site for two reasons. First, people claimed that his community seemed “ignorant” based on their comments. One informant even claimed that he “couldn’t vote” for Bryant because of how much he disliked his followers—who served as his representatives in the social media landscape. Secondly, the religious rhetoric presented by Bryant’s followers influenced how our particular subjects felt about him in a negative way.

Our subjects also described how each candidate’s level of involvement with the community—what we refer to as Community Engagement—also influenced their feelings towards the candidates. Bryant, on the one hand, interacted with people through Facebook. This contributed positively towards how our subjects felt about him. As explained by one of our subjects:

“On Bryant’s [wall], like one of the guys asked a question and then [Bryant] posted like his response... it shows that he cares.”

DuPree, on the other hand, did not interact with people through Facebook. Some subjects felt that his inability to engage his community reflected poorly on him, thus negatively affecting their feelings towards him. They felt that this showed a lack of caring about his supporters.

Finally, the information that people could obtain about a candidate’s policies also contributed to their feelings towards them. With respect to the information available through traditional media, our subjects reported that they learned more about a candidate’s policies from traditional media than they did through social media. While traditional media did influence how people felt about the candidates, the negative sentiment towards Bryant was more prevalent when social media followed traditional media.

In DuPree’s case, our subjects felt that the information available to them about his policies through Facebook was scarce. This did not result in negative feelings to a great extent. The story is much different in Phil Bryant’s case, however. Our subjects often referred to a post made by Bryant, where he elaborated on his stances on, what people referred to as “key issues,” like abortion and immigration. These were “hot button” issues, and many participants disagreed with his perspective, especially his stance on an abortion-related ballot proposition. Ironically, both candidates held the same view in favor of the ballot proposition, but people learned about this through the Facebook wall in one case and the news articles in the other. Discovery of this issue through social media seems to have caused participants to dislike Bryant’s position more than DuPree’s.

4. Discussion

4.1. Overview

A surprising and consistent finding from the affect scales and feeling thermometer in the case of Phil Bryant was that the influence of media type was only felt on the second exposure and not on the first. It was as if emotional influence only happened when the two media types could be contrasted with each other, and even then the influence differed depending on order. The affect and feeling measures were the same after the first exposure. In other words, it didn’t matter whether subjects read articles about the candidate or material from the candidate’s Facebook wall. Either way, their feelings toward the candidate went to the
same place. This “set point” then served as a contextual frame that influenced the impact of the material that was read at the second exposure point.

Another interesting finding was that the effect was different for the different candidates. With the exception of anxiety, subjects’ emotional feelings about Johnny Dupree did not change with exposure to either type of material even though they stated that their knowledge increased considerably with each exposure. Anxiety was lessened with each exposure to new material, and it did not matter which kind. Our interviews suggest that Dupree’s Facebook page was mostly “cheerleading” and was perceived as “boring.” In contrast, Bryant’s Facebook page contained strong position statements and highly charged comments about those positions. In contrast, feeling scores and likelihood of voting for Bryant were highly influenced in a negative way when social networking material was encountered second. It is an important finding from this study that, even when presented with exactly the same material from both social media and traditional media domains, the order of presentation was very important in determining how a candidate was perceived.

In the context of voting, social media content on its own is often perceived as not being helpful or even being confusing and overwhelming. Subjects who read the social media material first expressed more frustration and confusion about the voting decision. However, they did begin to form an impression of the candidates’ character from the social media material.

Goffman [6] discusses how people tend to create and manage impressions of themselves that they want to make publicly visible. When interacting with others our actions influence people’s impression of us, and thus we conduct ourselves in a certain way in order to manage how we are perceived. Goffman described face-to-face interactions, but others have applied his concept to explain how people present themselves on the Internet [19]. Similarly, our data suggests that the Facebook pages of both Bryant and DuPree played a key role in people’s formation of impressions about each respective candidate. They judged the candidates on the basis of posted images, responsiveness, and engagement more than on content. This worked against Dupree, whose social media material was considered more uninteresting.

To our surprise, our subjects judged the candidates based on their impressions of each individual’s supporters. Thus, in the online public sphere, impressions are not only formed through how an individual attempts to present himself or herself to others. We must also consider how those in our community are a reflection of us—irrespective of the fact that we may not choose those supporters or agree with how they are acting.

If voting involves both cognitive and affective decision components, then our data suggests that people will go to social media for the affective information and seek content information elsewhere. Although many people stated that the Facebook information was irrelevant and unimportant, they also indicated that it had emotional impact. For example, failure of a candidate to address issues appearing on their Facebook wall made people upset and resulted in a judgment about the candidate’s lack of caring about voters. Being too commercial and not utilizing the community aspect of social media made people question a candidate’s community spirit. In a “judge you by your friends” effect, even the behavior of the community represented on the Facebook wall contributed to a sense of candidates’ characters.

4.2. Limitations and future directions

We constrained the exposure times in order to equalize the exposure to both types of media. Eliminating the time constraints would likely reduce the pressure that subjects felt to come to a decision and might change their browsing strategies. Given more time with the social media, subjects might be able to browse it more thoroughly and find it less confusing and overwhelming.

The forced ordering of the media was part of the experimental design, but in real life people can mix various forms of media. In future research we will allow subjects to browse multiple types of materials in whatever order, and for whatever time periods, they choose. In doing this we may learn more about their strategies for information seeking and impression formation across media types.

Our sample is not representative of the U.S. population. We recruited college freshmen at a large university and hence our results are only generalizable to young people with the demographic characteristics described in Table 1. Our objective here was to determine whether or not affectively charged social media content could influence the interpretation of traditional, neutrally phrased media, and we have shown that it does for young voters with little prior political experience and low initial knowledge of the candidates.

Finally, our interviews were retrospective and do not capture what subjects were thinking at the time that they were encountering the materials. Think aloud studies are necessary in order to fully understand the rationales for their choices, the impact of they are reading, and the evolution of their voting decision.
Despite the fact that we forced a specific ordering on our subjects, it was telling that they often felt overwhelmed when perusing the candidate’s Facebook walls. This underscores some of Facebook’s design flaws with respect to information acquisition, and brings attention to the fact that a restructuring of the presentation of Facebook data might be beneficial to people when needing to consume and interpret data in short periods of time. The development of data extraction tools, which can interpret and disseminate information gathered from Facebook in a more efficient way, would improve how we access and discuss information.

4.3. Conclusion

We conclude that social media and traditional media do influence each other in important ways. In fact, social media might be more important for its influence on the interpretation of other media than for its stand-alone contribution. We were surprised not to find differences in knowledge, mood, or voting likelihood measures between traditional news and social media at initial exposure. However, we did find movement on several of these measures (except for knowledge) on second exposure. The influence of mixed media seems to be in the interaction, with one media type setting a context for interpretation of the other media type. Once people have formed an impression of a candidate from social media, this impression may then impact how they approach more substantive news articles and how important they think the candidate’s positions are. On the other hand, once people have learned about a candidate’s positions from substantive news articles, the impressions they get from later exposure to social media can greatly influence their feelings and attitudes about that candidate.

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6. References