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Partisan Selective Exposure as Discussion Preparation: The Role of Discussion Expectations and Entertainment Options

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This experiment tested the effects of expectations of future discussion (oriented toward either persuasion or understanding) and the presence (or absence) of non-news entertainment options on partisan selective exposure. Among Democrats but not Republicans, a non-news entertainment option reduced time spent watching other-party media. Republicans responded to expectations of understanding-oriented discussion by watching more own-party media, whereas Democrats responded by watching less own-party media. These findings are important for isolating causal factors that lead to partisan selective exposure and may help suggest conditions under which this phenomenon could be reduced.

Keywords: political communication, selective exposure, entertainment options, partisan exposure, conversation orientation

Recent expansions of media choices, especially the use of social networks sites (SNSs) for news (Pew Research Center, 2013), have signaled vital changes in audiences' selection behaviors (see Panek, 2016). People encounter news from SNSs in a flow of content from diverse sources alongside personal updates from friends and entertainment options, all with prominent discussion features that could further complicate their effects (see Messing & Westwood, 2014).

Entertainment options on social media have arguably led to "a second-order effect of first-order entertainment seeking" (Feezell, 2018, p. 483) as people—especially those with little interest in politics—often prefer entertaining satires over serious political news when both are accessible (Knobloch-Westerwick & Lavis, 2017). Even for partisan viewers, the way news is presented—i.e., hard news versus political satire—results in a significant difference in consumption of in-party media (Knobloch-Westerwick & Lavis, 2017). This growing research, however, often focuses on partisan users' confirmation biases in choosing between hard news and soft news (e.g., satire) without testing whether the presence of generic non-news

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entertainment options conditions partisan selective exposure (see Feldman, Stroud, Bimber, & Wojcieszak, 2013). This study aims to fill this gap in current literature.

The availability of various discussion features in online information environments also makes expectations of future discussion worthy of greater attention. In both online and offline settings, future discussion expectations may ignite motivations to prepare for discussion and lead to more active processing of news content (Eveland, 2004). People do not use media just to confirm their partisan priors; they also use media to prepare for discussions. Crucially, the nature of this preparation greatly depends on the feature of the expected discussion, with persuasion-oriented discussion motivating an acquisition of talking points via partisan media while understanding-oriented discussion motivates a more balanced approach to acquire accurate information and understand both sides (Pingree, 2007).

This study examines how partisan selective exposure is affected by the interplay of discussion expectations and the presence of generic non-news entertainment options. In a novel Web-based experiment, participants were first led to expect either a persuasion- or understanding-oriented discussion on the topic of education reform. They were then given time to freely choose from a list of videos—including five news clips that varied in sources and ideological stances and one non-news entertainment clip available to a randomly selected half of participants—to watch and prepare for this discussion. Here, selective exposure was conceptualized to include both the choice to begin exposure to each video and moreover the choice to continue it; selection was thus measured by automatically recording time spent on videos for each side. We discuss methodological advantages of our experiment, the results, and implications of our findings below.

Utilitarian and Hedonistic Impulsions in Information Selection

Our behaviors are driven by the needs for surveillance, guidance, performance, and reinforcement (Atkin, 1973). Information utility—namely, information's usefulness for addressing uncertainty or problems at hand (Sears & Freedman, 1967)—is a key factor for motivated information seeking (Zillmann, 2000), such that "the more useful a person perceives information to be, the more likely he or she will be to engage with it, regardless of whether it is consistent with or discrepant from preexisting attitudes" (Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2012, p. 171). Empirical evidence suggests people prefer attitudinally dissonant information over congruent content if the former contributes to more effective defenses of their positions (Sears & Freedman, 1967; also see Valentino, Banks, Hutchings, & Davis, 2009). When partisans found their favored candidate was likely to lose a race, they also went across partisan lines to acquire information about the opposing party (Iyengar, Hahn, Krosnick, & Walker, 2008; Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2012).

Alternatively, some argue that "informational utility should be a secondary consideration" (Zillmann, 2000, p. 119), especially when entertainment content satisfies our intrinsic needs for enjoyment (Reinecke et al., 2012). Our motivated information selection is thus affected by hedonistic impulsions (Zillmann, 2000) or "sheer entertainment gratifications rather than utilitarian attributes" (Atkin, Greenberg, Korzenny, & McDermott, 1979, p. 6). Zillmann's (1988a) Mood Management Theory (MMT) proposes that individuals strive for maximization of positive moods like pleasure but seek to minimize negative emotions

like anxiety and stress. Accordingly, we consume entertainment to manage our mood states in desirable ways (Zillmann, 1988b). For example, to combat anxious thoughts and stress moods, one may purposively select comedies with high hedonic valence but avoid news programs without the capacity to alleviate bad moods (Anderson, Collins, Schmitt, & Jacobvitz, 1996). Surely, people do not always prefer messages that trigger positive moods. Rather, people are disposed to avoid entertainment content that may reinforce the negative emotions they aim to reduce (see Medoff, 1982).

The Role of Entertainment in Partisan Selective Exposure

Though partisan news is believed to affect political outcomes such as presidential elections, Arceneaux and Johnson (2013) found pro-attitudinal news programs had minimal effects on regular news audiences but much stronger impacts on entertainment consumers who otherwise steered away from news. Arceneaux and Johnson's (2013) active audience theory proposes that partisan motivation and news motivation are two competing mechanisms in partisan users' exposure to politically congruent media programs. Relative to regular news consumers, non-news seekers are more likely to diverge from news when given the option of entertainment (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013). Especially with Americans' increasing exposure to entertainment (Prior, 2014) and the prevalence of second-order news seeking (Feezell, 2018), it is important to consider the impact of entertainment options when studying partisan audiences' media preferences.

Turning to the effects of hedonism-oriented content on motivated pursuit of proattitudinal information, Stroud and Muddiman (2013) found that relative to serious news viewers, those who visited a comedic/satirical political site exhibited higher levels of enjoyment and less willingness to consume news incongruent with their viewpoints. Entertainment content is also found to affect partisans' use of in-party media. Knobloch-Westerwick and Lavis (2017) uncovered that as long as the news—either serious or entertaining—aligned with their conservative beliefs, Republicans were disposed to choose it over liberal news; however, Democratic viewers exhibited confirmation bias toward serious news but not toward satirical news. Such findings differ from Stroud and Muddiman's (2013) study, where partisans exhibited preferences for proattitudinal information in their use of satirical news instead of serious news. A possible reason can be variances in the participants used in these two studies (see Knobloch-Westerwick & Lavis, 2017). Still, both engendered a consistent indication; that is, partisan viewers differ in their capacities of detecting political stances in entertaining, satirical news, which in turn affects their consumption of entertaining news.

Then, can generic entertainment options diminish the gap in the time participants spend watching pro- and counter-attitudinal news? Arceneaux and Johnson (2010) uncovered that when provided with entertainment options, participants averagely spent 30.6% of the watching time on proattitudinal shows and 30.4% on counterattitudinal news programs. However, as users' choices of news programs were not direct outcomes in Arceneaux and Johnson's (2010) study, we cannot infer a causal relationship between entertainment options and partisan exposure. In addition, their manipulated entertainment options are news-related, which cannot speak for the effects of non-news entertainment on partisan selectivity (see Feldman et al., 2013).

Grounded on the above empirical findings, this study contends that the presence of non-news entertainment options may alleviate partisan media exposure largely because entertainment options provide alternative avenues to avoid information that would obligate undesirable behaviors (see Howell & Shepperd, 2013). With access to non-news entertainment options, viewers can easily stay away from uncongenial news programs but maintain loyalty to like-minded news.

Effects of Discussion Motivation on Information Selection

Another prevalent feature of the Internet is its great affordance for political discussion through online forums, chat rooms, instant messengers, and other social networking platforms. Optimists contend that the Internet provides an improved forum for discussion by overcoming the constraints of face-to-face conversations (Price & Cappella, 2002). Researchers on the other side, however, argue that the Internet—which unintentionally embraces incivility—sets a greater barrier to deliberative discussion (Sunstein, 2001). Though existing literature revealed supportive evidence for both sides, we know little about the impact of online discussion on people's purposive selection of information. If the content of an individual's post in a threaded online discussion can be influenced by other participants' behaviors (Sui & Pingree, 2016), will the way online users select and use information be affected by certain characteristics of the online communities as well?

The answer is likely to be yes, primarily because the expectations of future discussion can elicit active processing of media content necessary for learning from news (see Eveland, 2004). As found in face-to-face discussions, when participants were asked to deliberately reflect on both the strengths and limitations of all possible solutions, they would exhibit higher levels of confidence with their final decisions and perform confirmatory information processing (Fischer, Fischer, Weisweiler, & Frey, 2010). When viewed in the SNS settings, participants in cross-ideological debates were found more likely to select politically dissimilar partners than those who frequently joined within-ideology conversations (Liang, 2014).

This study identifies persuading and understanding as two basic behavioral manifestations of goals for participating in a discussion that are consistent with Habermas' (1984) distinction of strategic action versus communicative action. While actors of communicative actions "seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement" (Habermas, 1984, p. 86), actors of strategic action pursue their own success. As such, an orientation toward persuading is similar to strategic action, which emphasizes an aim of controlling others; contrarily, an orientation toward understanding is more similar to communicative action and highlights a common-good goal. This obvious distinction between a self-oriented goal and a common good-oriented goal draws a distinguishing line between persuading and understanding motivations, thus pointing to their distinct impacts on the process of information selection.

Specifically, expecting a discussion in which the main goal is to persuade others would motivate seeking effective talking points to better justify one's in-group opinion, whereas expectations of a more open-minded discussion oriented toward achieving a better understanding of an issue may motivate more balanced media selection behaviors (Pingree, 2007). Though expectations of discussion oriented toward understanding versus persuasion have been found to have very different correlates in survey research

(Rojas, 2008), no past experiments have tested the effects of these or any other kinds of future discussion expectations on media selection. Unlike other factors that motivate partisan selective exposure, such as strength of partisanship, discussion expectations are malleable and situational. This makes them not only more tractable for experimental manipulation but also perhaps more promising as points of leverage for reducing selective exposure in the real world.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

We thus begin with perhaps the most obvious potential effect of having the option to choose entertainment, which functions as a substitution of time spent watching news. This may lead to decreased time spent watching both ideologically congruent and incongruent news content. Specifically, we put forward the following hypothesis:

H1: The presence of entertainment options reduces time spent watching (a) ideologically congruent news and (b) ideologically incongruent news.

As discussed above, expectations of future discussion can trigger utilitarian motivations and affect people's media consumption. Specifically, expecting future discussion where the goal is persuasion can translate into a strong intention to defend one's own position and to counterargue the opposing side (Pingree, 2007), which in turn elicits the motive to "arrive at a particular, directional conclusion" (Kunda, 1990, p. 480). Such directional goals often encourage us to seek attitudinally congruent information, although we may not necessarily avoid uncongenial content, especially when we feel capable of refuting the other side (Stroud, 2010). Thus, expecting a persuasion-oriented discussion may lead to the selection of content that is rich in partisan talking points supporting one's own side—such as in-party political media—rather than the opposing media. Contrarily, for people expecting discussion oriented toward understanding, the complexities of an issue may lead instead to an accuracy motivation. According to Kunda (1990), such accuracy-driven reasoning encourages more intensive and deeper processing of information. Thus, users expecting understanding-oriented discussion can be more inclined to understand other perspectives, which may lead to less reliance on in-party political media and more on outparty or neutral media. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2: Expectations of understanding-oriented future discussion, compared with persuasion-oriented future discussion, lead to (a) decreased time spent watching ideologically congruent news and (b) increased time spent watching ideologically incongruent news.

Thus far, our hypotheses have lumped Democrats and Republicans together. While existing literature documents similar selective exposure motives between the political left and right (Frimer, Skitka, & Motyl, 2017)—such as to reduce cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) or to maximize shared reality (Echterhoff, Higgins, & Levine, 2009)—significant variations remain. Democrats, for example, were found to actively pursue attitudinally congruent information; however, Republicans exhibited no tendency to choose proattitudinal sources but instead purposely avoided counterattitudinal content (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; also see Sears & Freedman, 1967, where Republicans consumed more ideologically congruent content than Democrats). Other studies found liberals to engage in cross-ideological linkage

more than conservatives (Hargittai, Gallo, & Kane, 2008; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009), which can be attributed to stark psychological differences among the two groups (Onraet et al., 2015). These studies—despite mixed findings—consistently suggest that the mechanisms leading to selective exposure by Democrats are the same as those for Republicans (see Frimer et al., 2017, for similar argument). Thus, we pose two additional research questions about whether the effects hypothesized in H1 and H2 differ between Democrats and Republicans.

RQ1: Do the effects of the presence of entertainment options differ between Democrats and Republicans in terms of time spent watching (a) ideologically congruent news or (b) ideologically incongruent news?

RQ2: Do the effects of expected future discussion differ between Democrats and Republicans in terms of time spent watching (a) ideologically congruent or (b) ideologically incongruent news?

Method

An online survey experiment was conducted from November 5–12, 2014, to test the above hypotheses and questions. Participants completed a pretest survey inquiring into their pre-existing attitudes toward the issue of education and demographic features. After that, they were randomly assigned to one of four conditions based on a 2 (expected discussion: understanding- versus persuasion-oriented) by 2 (entertainment option: presence versus absence) between-subjects factorial design. Random assignment was based on numbers generated by the Mersenne Twister algorithm in PHP, with equal probability of assignment to each of the four conditions.

Participants

Participants were undergraduates (N = 473) recruited from a large Southern university. Most were women (75.9%), and the average age was 20 (SD = 9.01). Most participants self-reported as White (73.4%) and came from upper-middle-class families (62.2%).[1] Fifty-seven percent self-claimed as Republicans (including strong Republican, Republican, and independent but lean Republican), 33.7% were Democrats (including strong Democrat, Democrat, and independent but lean Democrat), and 9% were independents. This sample was slightly conservative (M = 4.30, SD = 1.38) on a seven-point scale with conservatism coded high. Although both ideology and partisanship were measured on 7-point scales, more participants chose the midpoint "moderate" option for ideology (35.5%) than the midpoint "independent" option for party identity (9%). This, together with past research illustrating that group attachments are more influential than ideological labels (e.g., Kalmoe, 2020; Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017), leads us to focus on party identity instead of ideology as a moderator.

[1] Social class was measured with an item that asked participants "How do you describe your family's social class?" with response options "working class," "lower middle class," upper middle class," "wealthy," or "other."

Stimulus

To investigate whether partisan selective exposure varies when people are motivated to persuade or to understand, we employed a novel chat-room stimulus where participants were led to believe that they would soon "spend a few minutes in a chat room with other participants in this study to talk about education reform."

The issue of "education reform" was selected primarily because of liberals' and conservatives' divided opinions (Wolbrecht & Hartney, 2014). Democrats are more supportive of increased government spending on education than Republicans (Shapiro, Kilibarda, Sinozich, & McClellan, 2016). Though both sides emphasize accountability, conservatives are more concerned with outcome accountability, questioning schools' ability to deliver quality education, and being less tolerant with mediocrity; but liberals are more in favor of process accountability, advocating the use of best approaches to evaluate teachers (Tetlock, Vieider, Patil, & Grant, 2013). Dissents between the two political parties were also heightened in 2014—when this study was conducted—after the Student Success Act was passed in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2013 as revamp of the No Child Left Behind Act. Being a politically debatable issue, "education reform" thus allows participants to diverge in their partisan standpoints and in turn to select content along the ideological spectrum, as we will elaborate below.

In this chat-room expectation prompt, participants were told that they could use videos to prepare for this discussion. This stimulus was expected to situate participants with varied motivations to choose different news outlets. Expected discussion was manipulated by describing their objectives as either "to take a side and try to persuade others to agree with you" (persuasion-oriented) or "to think together open-mindedly to understand the issue better" (understanding-oriented).

To protect the independence of observations and avoid contamination across conditions, participants were not actually placed in a chat room. Instead, after the video page, all participants saw a screen that appeared to attempt to connect to a chat room and reported that it failed because too few others were taking the study at the time. This page prompted them for open-ended responses of what they would have said in the chat room and asked two follow-up questions as a manipulation check of whether their intended goal in the discussion was to understand or persuade, both measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Their responses to the persuade item were subtracted from their responses to the understanding item, resulting in a measure of how much stronger the understanding motivation was than the persuasion motivation (M = 1.03, SD = 2.35). The mean of this variable was significantly higher in the understanding expectation condition (M = 1.89, SD = 2.33) than in the persuading expectation condition (M = 0.35, SD = 1.83), $t(172)$ = 4.95, $p < .001$. Thus, this manipulation was successful.

On the same page as the discussion expectation manipulation, participants were provided with a brief background introduction to the U.S. education reform debate, in which two oppositional sides were proposed: "While the liberal side of this debate focuses on providing resources, . . . the conservative side focuses on accountability. . . ." This not only set up a controversial situation where different positions existed but also would help participants take sides on the given issue. Especially for participants who were randomly assigned to the persuasion-oriented discussion condition, the provision of two oppositional sides is

particularly important. See Appendix A for exact wording of the stimulus, with discussion expectation manipulation indicated in brackets.

After the chat-room instruction, all participants were exposed to a webpage where a list of video clips was displayed (see Appendix B). Instead of randomly exposing participants to merely one video and measuring how long they watched it, we aimed to maximize this study's external validity by simulating the actual social media environment, where users were free to choose among incidentally encountered content from diverse or even cross-cutting sources (Kim, 2011; Messing & Westwood, 2014). Despite concerns about filter bubbles enabled by algorithmic personalization on social media (Davidson et al., 2010), YouTube's topic-based search still contributes to most video views (Zhou, Khemmarat, & Gao, 2010), which is assumed less dependent on users' profiles or watch activities. Indeed, no up-to-date evidence shows that YouTube confines topic-based search to a particular set of channels. Thus, this study mimics the result of YouTube searches by showing multiple videos from various sources on the same page. Participants were allowed to freely switch video clips at any time and view them in any order. The total run time of all videos was more than 18 minutes, including a three-minute video available only in the entertainment option condition. Participants were required to play at least five minutes[2] of videos but were told it was not necessary to watch all the videos or watch all of any videos they started watching. Custom JavaScript code using the YouTube API caused any clip to pause when another clip was started while recording the amount of time each participant spent playing the clips. Until the total play time reached five minutes, the continue button was disabled and the remaining minimum play time was displayed.

The entertainment option was manipulated by either including a funny cats compilation video or not. Other than the presence or absence of this entertainment video, all content on this page was identical across experimental conditions. For participants in both conditions (cat video presented versus cat video not presented), each video was explicitly titled to inform them of the news source and content. Other than the entertainment option video, all videos were chosen from prominent search results from YouTube on the topic of U.S. education reform at the time of the study. Two discussed U.S. education reform from the conservative side of emphasizing accountability, and another two took the liberal side to focus on providing resources. Specifically, the first video clip was a 1.5-minute nonpartisan introduction to recent U.S. education reforms, such as No Child Left Behind, that motivated the importance of the issue by detailing poor test scores relative to other countries (CCTV America[3]), followed by a three-minute

[2] Despite variations across YouTube viewership reports, many studies have found the average YouTube videos range from one minute to eight minutes (Lang, n.d.) or averagely 11 minutes (Statista Research Department, 2021). Viewers often drop off around the halfway point of the video (Lang, n.d.), leading to an averagely five-minute view duration.

[3] This video was chosen based on its neutral and informative content, high production quality, and because it was prominent in YouTube search rankings on the topic of education reform at the time of the study. CCTV America, which didn't officially offer its service in the United States until January 2012, was likely not a familiar news source to most participants. Despite the lack of Nielsen ratings to capture its exact viewership, the number of subscribers to CCTV America's YouTube channel was only 3,000 in June 2014 (Xie & Boyd-Barrett, 2015). This provides indirect evidence that CCTV America remained in its initial stage and was thus an unfamiliar news channel to U.S. users in 2014. It is possible that relative to Democrats, Republicans may

conservative panel discussion of education reform focusing on education costs, wasteful spending, accountability, and choice (Fox News); a 1.5-minute liberal editorial by journalist Fareed Zakaria on education and escaping poverty, which argued that the United States spends too unequally on schools because of tying school funding to property taxes (CNN); a three-minute interview with former Education Secretary Diane Ravitch criticizing No Child Left Behind as overly punitive and unsuccessful (MSNBC); and a seven-minute segment of the 2012 Arizona Republican Presidential Debate consisting of various conservative views on education (CNN). This novel use of news content varying in both the news source's ideological orientations (Fox versus MSNBC) and the story's distinct ideological stances (liberal versus conservative videos from CNN) is a unique methodological advantage in this study. In addition to the conventional measure of partisan selective exposure as a tendency to choose between two alternative sources such as Fox versus MSNBC (see Iyengar & Hahn, 2009), this study also incorporated two oppositional ideological stances from the same source.[4] Unlike in many other selective exposure studies, but like in real media use, the source alone is not sufficient information to assess the ideological direction of the content, and selection can occur not only before content begins but also at any other point during exposure.

Measures

Our primary dependent variables were the total number of seconds spent watching ideologically congruent and incongruent videos, an unobtrusive measure of selective exposure (Knobloch-Westerwick, Johnson, & Westerwick, 2013), and were automatically recorded using JavaScript and the YouTube API. Selective exposure is often conceptualized as viewers' initial selection to begin exposure such as their channel changing behavior, which is typically adopted in scholarly work on partisan selectivity (e.g., Stroud, 2010). However, in other areas—i.e., studies exploring the effects of humor on people's selective exposure to television programs (Wakshlag, Day, & Zillmann, 1981) or the impact of images on people's exposure to news stories (Sargent, 2007)—participants' selection to continue their exposure (or duration of exposure) is also used as a valid measurement of selective exposure. For example, in Westerwick, Johnson, and Knobloch-Westerwick's (2017) study examining the influence of people's selective exposure to online information on their attitudes toward health behaviors, the variable "selective exposure" was captured as the total seconds participants spent reading the articles of their choice. Thus, in this study, our operationalization using total time spent watching videos captures both kinds of selection and provides a more fine-grained and realistic measure of the amount of exposure resulting from this combination of choices to begin and to continue.

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have held a more unfavorable attitude toward China and were thus less likely to watch the content from CCTV. We thus checked the average number of seconds playing each video by party preference, which uncovered a relatively minor difference: Democrats averaged 64 seconds and Republicans averaged 57 seconds on the CCTV clip (see Appendix C).

[4] Two videos from CNN were used for opposite ideological perspectives based on their content: A Diane Ravitch interview criticizing No Child Left Behind was counted as liberal exposure, and a Republican primary debate clip consisting of Republican presidential candidates answering an audience question about education reform was counted as conservative exposure.

Time Spent on Intraparty Media

Intraparty and outparty media are identified in accordance with participants' partisan identities. For participants who self-reported as Democrats, the two liberal-sided news video clips were coded as "intraparty media." For participants who self-identified as Republicans, the other two conservative-sided news video clips were coded as "intraparty media." The total amount of time they spent on these two video clips added up to time spent on intraparty media (M = 44.78, SD = 96.07).

Time Spent on Outparty Media

Following the same logic as stated above, for participants who self-reported as Democrats, the two conservative-sided news video clips were coded as "outparty media." On the other hand, for participants who self-reported as Republicans, the two liberal-sided news video clips were coded as "outparty media." Eventually, the time they spent watching these two video clips added up to time spent on outparty media (M = 30.08, SD = 72.62).

Randomization Check

Random assignment into the four cells produced cell sizes that were well balanced.[5] Although random assignment should tend to evenly distribute potentially confounding variables across treatment conditions, it is important to verify that it has done so. To this end, we ran five analysis of variance (ANOVA) models using the two treatments as predictors and including the interaction term between them, with each model using a different dependent variable measured before treatment exposure (age, gender, partisan identity, political ideology, and importance of the given education issue). None of these tests was even close to significance, so randomization was successful. See details in Appendix D.

Results

Two ANCOVA models were used to test all hypotheses: one for time spent watching intraparty media (adjusted R^2 = 0.093) and one for time spent watching outparty media (adjusted R^2 = 0.127). Because of highly skewed distributions, both dependent variables were converted using a log base 10 function. Each model contained a two-level factor for the discussion expectation manipulation, a two-level factor for the entertainment video presence manipulation, a two-level factor for respondent partisanship,[6] and all interactions among these three factors. Gender, social class, issue importance, and ideology were included as covariates.

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[5] Within the persuasion expectation condition (n = 88), 45 participants were assigned to the entertainment option and 43 to the control condition. Within the understanding expectation condition (n = 94), 50 participants were assigned to the entertainment option and 44 to the control condition.

[6] We also ran alternative versions of each model using ideology in place of partisanship. The pattern of results was generally similar but weaker, probably due to a far larger number of ideological independents (35.5%) than partisan independents (9%).

H1a and H1b predicted that the presence of an entertainment option would decrease time spent watching both intraparty media and outparty media. These hypotheses were tested by the main effect of the entertainment factor in each model. In the model predicting time spent watching own-party media, the entertainment presence factor was significant ($F(1,151) = 4.872$, one-tailed $p < .05$) and in the predicted direction, with a higher mean (logged) time spent in the news only condition ($M = 1.026$, $SE = 0.079$) than in the entertainment option condition ($M = 0.793$, $SE = 0.071$). Thus, H1a was supported. In the model predicting time spent watching other-party media, the pattern of means was also in the predicted direction, with time spent higher in the news only condition ($M = 1.025$, $SE = 0.063$) than in the entertainment option condition ($M = 0.895$, $SE = 0.056$), but this difference was marginally significant ($F(1,153) = 2.397$, one-tailed $p = .062$), so H1b was not strongly supported.

Hypotheses 2a/2b assumed that expectations of understanding-oriented discussion would result in less time spent watching own-party media (H2a) and more time spent watching other-party media (H2b) than persuasion-oriented expectations. These were tested by the main effect of the discussion expectation factor in each model. This factor was not a significant predictor of either time spent watching own-side media ($F(1,151) = 0.013$, $p = .908$) or time spent watching other-side media ($F(1,153) = 0.638$, $p = .426$), so neither H2a nor H2b was supported.

Research questions 1a and 1b asked whether partisanship conditions the effects of the presence of entertainment options. These were tested by the interaction terms between party identity and the entertainment option factor. In the model predicting time spent watching own-party media, this interaction was not significant ($F(1,151) = 0.368$, $p = .545$), so no effect was found in answer to RQ1a. In the model predicting time spent watching other-party media, this interaction term was significant ($F(1,153) = 5.156$, $p < .05$). Figure 1 plots estimated means within this interaction, indicating that the presence of entertainment videos reduced Democrats' time spent watching other-side media, but did not affect Republicans who already spent low time watching other-side media. In answer to RQ1b, Democrats were significantly more influenced than Republicans by the presence of an entertainment option in terms of time spent watching other-side media.

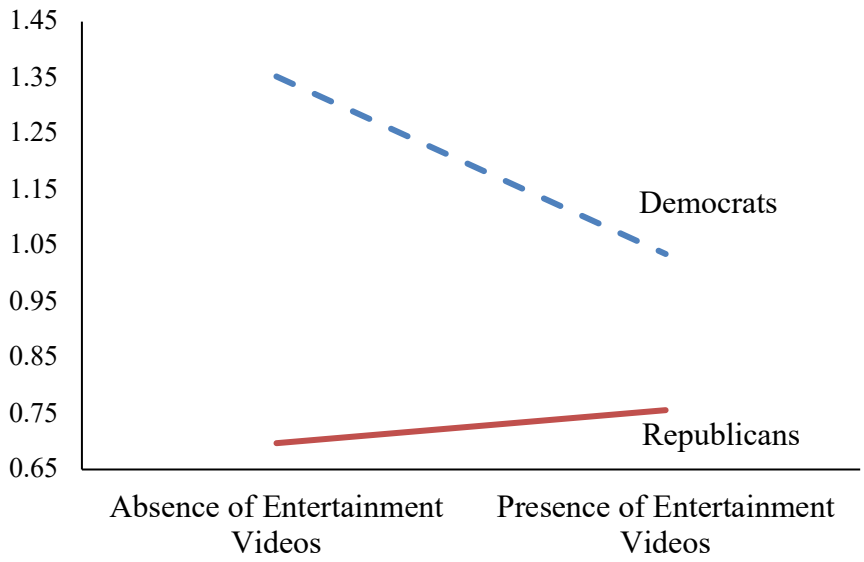

Figure 1. Estimated time (logged) spent on outparty media: Entertainment options X partisan identity.

Research questions 2a and 2b asked whether partisanship conditions the effects of the expected discussion factor. These were tested by the interaction terms between party identity and the discussion expectation factor. In the model predicting time spent watching own-party media, this interaction was significant ($F(1,151) = 4.771$, $p < .05$). Figure 2 plots estimated means within this interaction, indicating a transverse interaction in which Democrats and Republicans spend about the same amount of time watching own-side media when they expect a persuasion-oriented discussion, but diverge significantly when they expect an understanding-oriented discussion such that Republicans seek more own-party media and Democrats seek less.

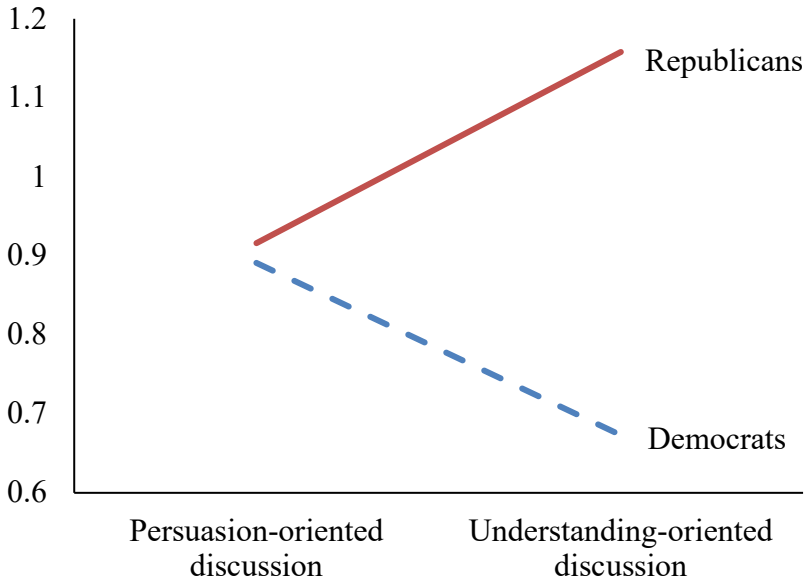

Figure 2. Estimated time (logged) spent on inparty media: Expected discussions X partisan identity.

Because Democrats and Republicans differ in a wide variety of demographic and attitudinal variables, it is possible that any difference found across party lines is actually a proxy for another moderator that is the real active ingredient. We tested this possibility by running supplemental models similar to our hypothesis tests, each replacing party identity with one of four alternative moderators measured before treatment exposure: gender, race, social class, and education importance. Unlike party identity, none of these alternative moderators produced significant interactions with treatments.

Discussion

One stand-out contribution this study makes to partisan selectivity literature is the effects of non-news entertaining content, which has greatly proliferated in today's online environment. This expands extant scholarship that primarily investigates the effects of satirical news, soft news, or other news-like entertainment options on partisans' exposure to like-minded media to an additional layer (see similar arguments made in Feldman et al., 2013). In line with existing work, this study finds non-news entertainment option discourages exposure to political news by reducing both own-party and other-party news consumption; in particular, such effects concentrate among Democrats in the case of other-party news use. Adding the option of a funny cat compilation video made Democrats spend less time watching conservative videos.

The effect is perhaps unsurprising and likely was a matter of time displacement. However, partisan differences in the effects of the presence of entertainment options warrant more attention. Among Democrats, the presence of an entertainment option caused a reduction in use of other-party

media, whereas among Republicans other-party media use remained low regardless of whether an entertainment option was present. This may point to a genuine partisan difference in Democrats' versus Republicans' selective exposure such that Republican avoidance of other-party media is more stable (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Hargittai et al., 2008; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). This may in part be because of stronger negative attitudes about outparty media sources among Republicans, but could also be explained via personality variables associated with conservatism (Crowson, 2010). It is also possible that Democrats saw Fox News as a relatively uninformative but entertaining option, so the presence of another entertaining option provided an alternative. Future research could clarify these possibilities by following up with participants to probe the reasons for their selections and their attitudes about the sources and stimulus options.

However, this same result could also be idiosyncratic to the stimuli used here. In particular, because CNN was used for one liberal clip and for one conservative clip, partisan differences in use of outparty media could be an artifact of Republicans trusting CNN less than Democrats. Note that CNN may be generally perceived as a relatively liberal source today, but in the early and mid-2010s when this study was conducted, CNN was considered relatively unbiased in many industrial reports (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2014) and in academic studies (e.g., Kaye & Johnson, 2016). It is important to keep in mind here, as in any other experiment, that although the manipulated variables are intended to represent broad categories of content (e.g., entertainment videos, media associated with a particular party, etc.) by necessity, they are only a few examples of those broader categories of content. Thus, these results should be replicated in future research with other entertainment options and other media options for each party.

Republicans and Democrats also responded differently to an expectation of understanding-oriented discussion. Specifically, expecting an understanding-oriented discussion caused Republicans and Democrats to diverge in their use of own-party media, with Republicans using more own party media but Democrats using less. Democrats and Republicans used similar amounts of own-party media when they expected a persuasion-oriented discussion, but the two parties diverged in their use of own-party media when they expected an understanding-oriented discussion. Democrats sought less own-party media to prepare for understanding-oriented discussion, which is in line with our expectations of understanding motivations leading to more balanced media use behaviors than persuasion motivations. However, for Republicans, the effect was reversed: expecting an understanding-oriented discussion led them to spend *more* time watching own-party media, not less. This raises several intriguing possibilities of real differences between how Republicans and Democrats think about using media to understand the other side. It could be because Republicans typically have lower opinions of outparty media as a way to understand the other party's arguments, perhaps for good reasons. It could also be that Republicans prefer strawman versions of the other side's arguments received from inparty media. Or perhaps the parties differ in their willingness to go along with the manipulation and actually prepare for understanding-oriented discussion. However, this result could also simply represent a partisan difference idiosyncratic to the education issue at the time; for example, Republicans may have happened to feel they already understood Democrats' arguments on education and were more in need of a review of their own side's arguments.

As with any empirical studies using a convenience sample, external validity is our primary limitation. As student participants are often younger and more familiar with social networking sites (Pempek,

Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009), the ways in which they consume intraparty and outparty media may not apply to the general U.S. population. Another source of external validity limitation is the possibly idiosyncratic treatment of entertainment options, which is a likely common downside for most experimental studies. For example, in Feldman and colleagues' (2013) experiment, the entertaining news options adopted—e.g., "Madonna and Lady Gaga" and "Summer in Barcelona" stories—seemed more appealing to some segments of the participants than to the others. Similarly, in their exploration of entertainment media's impact on information processing, Kim and Vishak (2008) used a likely idiosyncratic treatment like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (Katz, Flanz, & Pennolino, 2015). As a result, although the funny cat compilation was found to have different effects on outparty media exposure among Democrats and Republicans, it might simply happen because Democrats like cats more than Republicans do. Future work may find even stronger effects using a diverse set of entertainment options so that a larger proportion of respondents finds at least one of the entertainment options appealing.

Another limitation arises from the use of ideologically charged frames (i.e., liberal, conservative) in the chat-room prompt (see Appendix A). While this approach—by priming participants to think about the "education reform" issue from an ideological perspective—can effectively set up a controversial context and equips participants with varied opinions for the chatroom task, it also gives rise to likely skewed results. Specifically, the observed effects of discussion motivation and entertainment options can be weaker in situations where nonpartisan or nonpolitical prompts are used than what this present study found.

Changes in U.S. partisan politics, particularly since 2016, also raise intriguing possibilities for future research about how these results would differ if this study were replicated today. For example, partisan media divides have widened from 2014 to 2019, largely because of Republican viewers' deteriorated trust in mainstream outlets; yet no similar movement was found among Democrats (Jurkowitz, Mitchell, Shearer, & Walker, 2020). On the other hand, the trust Democrats and Republicans have in government has been in a dynamic fluctuation—while Republicans had higher trust in the government during Donald Trump's presidency than Democrats did, this flipped under Joe Biden's administration (Pew Research Center, 2021). This points to a potentially bigger impact of entertainment on today's partisan selective exposure. If neutral news outlets are not ideal alternatives for outparty media, partisan viewers—especially Republicans—are more likely to see entertaining content from inparty media (see Knobloch-Westerwick & Lavis, 2017) or to seek generic entertainment from any platforms such as SSNs.

If findings from this present study do replicate in future work, they would have important pragmatic implications for consequences of partisan selective exposure in the increasingly diverse media environment. Particularly in social networking sites where many now encounter much of their news, users are often exposed to serious policy news from various sources right alongside non-news content, with a discussion accompanying each news item. This is quite different from traditional news use experience where audiences select one news outlet and are then exposed to news content from that outlet, with less entertainment content or at least with that content separated from the news content, and with discussion typically less salient as a future possibility in conversations over the next several days, instead of as an immediate possibility within seconds or minutes. More selective exposure experiments are sorely needed in general, and particularly experiments such as this one that explore mechanisms that new media environments are introducing or making more salient. We hope other researchers will join us in exploring this wide-open area.

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Appendix A: Text of Chatroom Stimulus

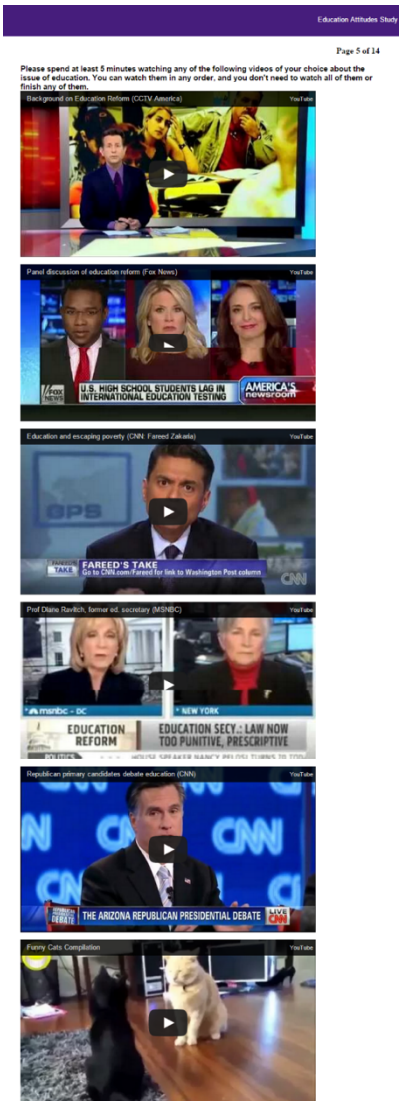
Chat Room

After the next page, we will ask you to spend a few minutes in a chat room with other participants in this study to talk about education reform. In this discussion, we want you **[persuading-oriented motivation:** to take a side and try to persuade others to agree with you**]/[understanding-oriented motivation:** to try to think together open-mindedly to understand the issue better. Please try not to take a side or persuade others to agree with you**]**. Use the videos on the next page to help prepare yourself for this discussion.

Education Reform Background

This study focuses on one aspect of the U.S. education reform debate: what to do about poorly performing teachers and schools. The liberal side of this debate focuses on providing ***resources*** they say these schools need. The conservative side focuses on ***accountability***, meaning penalties for poorly performing teachers and schools.

Appendix B: Video Stimulus Page



Appendix C. Participant Exposure to Each Video by Party Preference.

	Average seconds of play time		Percent of users at least starting video	
	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans
CCTV nonpartisan background clip	64	57	71	68
Fox News panel (Rep)	111	79	80	64
CNN Fareed Zakaria (Dem)	44	24	63	43
MSNBC Diane Ravitch (Dem)	59	40	54	39
CNN Republican primary debate (Rep)	93	116	63	68
Funny cat compilation (entertainment)	30	31	25	28

Appendix D. Univariate Analysis of Variance Tests for Randomization Check.

	Outcome variables: Demographic variables before treatment				
Predictors	Age	Gender	Partisanship	Political ideology	Importance of "education" issue
Expectation treatment	$F(1) = 1.02$ $p = 0.313$	$F(1) = 0.57$ $p = 0.453$	$F(1) = 0.79$ $p = 0.373$	$F(1) = 0.36$ $p = 0.548$	$F(1) = 2.07$ $p = 0.151$
Entertainment treatment	$F(1) = 0.97$ $p = 0.326$	$F(1) = 1.58$ $p = 0.210$	$F(1) = 0.43$ $p = 0.508$	$F(1) = 1.01$ $p = 0.315$	$F(1) = 0.39$ $p = 0.533$
Expectation X Entertainment treatment	$F(1)=0.98$ $p = 0.322$	$F(1) = 1.23$ $p = 0.269$	$F(1) = 0.05$ $p = 0.815$	$F(1) = 0.13$ $p = 0.710$	$F(1) = 0.34$ $p = 0.562$

Note. Here we treated all demographic variables as continuous for ANOVA tests, though some of them (i.e., gender) are categorical. Additional logistic analyses were also performed to predict gender as a function of the treatment factors, which yielded similar results as reported here. Thus, we focused on these ANOVA models for consistency and brevity.