Laugh, but Don't Seek: A Reassessment of the Gateway Hypothesis

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In this article we revisit the gateway hypothesis, which argues that political satire programs open the door to people using more hard news content. Using over-time survey data, we examine whether use of satire leads people to use more cable news. Although our cross-sectional analyses replicate previous results attempting to assess the gateway hypothesis, our over-time data suggest that satire does not lead to increased use of news programming on cable outlets. However, we did find support for the gateway hypothesis when looking at a mediation model where political attitudes serve as the intervening variable between satire use and cable news use.

Keywords: gateway, political satire, over-time analysis, news use

The field of communication continues to assess why people seek out and avoid different media content (Stroud, 2014). In addition to looking at the relationships among attitudes, beliefs, and information seeking, it is important for scholars to consider any correlations among different forms of communication and whether one form of communication predicts future use of another form (Holbert & Benoit, 2009). Renewed interest in examining any correlations among different modes of communication has become more important as communication technologies have continued to evolve—particularly in a time when technological changes can influence how people interact with traditional modes of media, such as television and newspapers (Snider, 2018). Within political contexts, the increasing various news outlets that are now available on cable and Internet implies it is becoming important to grasp how the use of one outlet is associated with the use of a different one.

Recent theoretical work focused on examining the associations among people's uses of different types of media content has focused on the idea of intramedia mediation (Holbert, 2005) and campaign connectedness (Holbert & Benoit, 2009). This line of inquiry has largely argued (and shown) that previous communication behaviors are important predictors of future communication behaviors. That is, use of conservative TV news outlets is a strong predictor of using conservative radio programming (Holbert &

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Benoit, 2009). Although it is important to assess relationships among similar types of media, it is also important to examine how use of different forms of media are connected across genres of programming.

The idea of testing relationships across different genres of media has been explored by scholars examining soft news and political humor. For instance, Baum (2003) proposed the "gateway hypothesis," which argues that use of entertainment-based programming that includes political information could affect people's subsequent media use through increases in knowledge. In essence, he argued through a review of his published empirical work that use of soft news could increase people's use of hard news outlets (e.g., newspapers, network news, cable news). Subsequent to Baum's (2003) article compiling the basics of the gateway hypothesis, additional studies have shown that using political humor could increase attention to hard news sources (Feldman & Young, 2008; Xenos & Becker, 2009; Young, 2014).

In general, previous studies looking at the gateway hypothesis have relied on cross-sectional survey data to assess whether using satire news programs are associated with higher levels of using news media (Feldman & Young, 2008; Hmielowski, Holbert, & Lee, 2011). Based on our assessment of the literature, few studies have examined the causal assumption at the heart of the gateway hypothesis. In this article, we revisit the gateway hypothesis and provide a more rigorous test using multiwave survey data collected during the 2016 presidential election. Moreover, we expand on the gateway hypothesis by examining whether satire will lead to changes in people's political attitudes, which we hypothesize will then result in increased use of cable news outlets later in the general election season.

Media Fragmentation

The communication environment in the United States has changed rapidly over the past 30 years. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the range of mediated material through television was narrow due to the limited number of broadcast outlets. The expansion of stations with the introduction of cable increased the range of content available to the public, thus changing the way consumers choose which media to follow (Mullen, 2002). With an increase in choices, cable networks began to create niche programming for narrower interests (Webster, 2014). This trend has continued in recent years with the advent of streaming, where consumers can choose to access programs or podcasts that focus on narrow topics like food, home improvement, sports, comedy, and more. Such services have also increased the number of programs offering narrow political views (Dixon, 2013).

Of particular interest for this article is the increase in political satire programming in the modern media environment. Although late night comedy programming has been around for a long time (Timberg, 2002), increases in media fragmentation gave rise to satirical programs in the 2000s, such as *The Daily Show* (Stewart, 1999) and *The Colbert Report* (Gasperak, 2005). Today, the number of programs focused on political satire has continued to grow, with shows produced by *The Daily Show* alums like Samantha Bee (TBS) and John Oliver (HBO). The resulting fragmentation has led scholars to investigate a wide array of questions, such as why people might consume political satire (Hmielowski et al., 2011), the different effects of these programs on people's attitudes and knowledge about important issues (LaMarre, 2013), and, of interest to this article, how political satire use could affect people's use of news outlets (Feldman & Young, 2008).

Intracommunication Hypothesis

With increases in media fragmentation, scholars have gone back to reexamining some ideas from early communication literature. One of these ideas is the interrelated nature of communication (E. Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). There is historical precedent for examining correlations among communication variables. With increases in media fragmentation, there is renewed opportunity for scholars to revive this line of inquiry. One recent example of this is Holbert's (2005) work on intramedia mediation and Holbert and Benoit's (2009) work on campaign connectedness. Holbert's (2005) earlier iteration of intramedia mediation focused on how previous media use would increase use of this same outlet, which would ultimately have a cumulative effect on outcome variables such as political knowledge. The model was updated and expanded with the theory of campaign connectedness, which outlines three axioms that attempt to understand people's over-time use of different forms of communication (Holbert & Benoit, 2009).

The axiom of interest for this study, called the complementary axiom, focuses on how use of one type of media will be associated with use of similar content from other media outlets. For example, if an individual watches political satire—an often opinionated and politicized form of media—(see Young, Bagozzi, Goldring, Poulsen, & Drouin, 2019), the axiom would assume they will later complement that content with use of additional political or opinionated content by watching cable news outlets. Within the area of intramedia mediation and campaign connectedness, there remains several avenues of inquiry that require additional attention. Of particular interest to this article is whether the complementary axiom can explain use of media across the boundary of cable news and political satire programming.

The Gateway Hypothesis

One example of research exploring complementary relationships among different genres of mediated political communication comes from work on the gateway hypothesis. The gateway hypothesis proposes that entertainment-oriented political programming, like political satire, provides a base level of political knowledge for people to seek out and understand content from more news-centric outlets such as newspapers, cable news, and network news (Baum, 2003; Young, 2006). It argues that political satire and humor-based programs piggyback political information on more entertaining content (Baum, 2003). For instance, a person who is unfamiliar with the Affordable Care Act (ACA) could learn by watching *The Daily Show* (Flanz, Katz, & Noah, 2013; Stewart, 1999) how this law allows children to stay on their parent's insurance until the age of 26. In subsequent viewing of a segment on CNN or reading an article in *The New York Times,* this base level of knowledge from viewing a satire show may allow individuals to understand the more complicated information presented about the ACA in news-centric outlets. As a result of these increases in knowledge, which should be due to the ability of political satire to foster attention and recall of information (Young, 2013), people may seek out additional information from nonhumorous opinionated news outlets such as cable news.

To date, only a few studies have attempted to test the gateway hypothesis in the context of political satire. One study comes from Feldman and Young (2008), which used rolling cross-sectional data to examine whether satire use (e.g., *The Daily Show*) was associated with increased use of news-centric outlets. Using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, the authors found correlational evidence that,

compared with nonviewers, viewers of *The Daily Show* were more likely to pay attention to coverage of the presidential election via news-centric outlets (e.g., network news and cable news). Experimental studies have also shown evidence supporting the gateway hypothesis. Xenos and Becker (2009) found that exposure to satirical news from *The Daily Show* increased the likelihood of choosing a news story related to the comedy clip viewed during the experiment, particularly among those less interested in politics. Moreover, they reported descriptive results that suggested individuals who viewed *The Daily Show* clip spent more time browsing a news portal website. Based on previous research on the gateway hypothesis, we propose the following:

H1:   There will be a positive cross-sectional relationship between use of political satire programming and use of cable news programming, with use of satire associated with greater use of cable news.

Despite the work that has been done on the gateway hypothesis, additional research is needed to rigorously test this idea. An underlying assumption of this hypothesis that has not received adequate attention is that use of political satire at one point in time leads to increased use of news-centric content at a later point. In essence, there is an *over-time* effect of using political satire on the use of news sources. To date, studies that have looked at the gateway hypothesis have largely relied on cross-sectional data. For example, Hmielowski and colleagues (2011) found news use correlated with satire use using cross-sectional data. A better attempt at directly assessing the causal nature of the gateway hypothesis comes from Feldman and Young (2008). Using a rolling cross-sectional data set, the authors conducted a time-series analysis in which they found a consistent relationship between use of satire (e.g., *The Daily Show*) and rate of attention paid to presidential campaign information across the primary election season. They also found that the rates of news use increased among viewers of satire programming. Though this is a better approach, it nonetheless fails to provide a robust test of whether satire use causes use of news-centric outlets, particularly at the individual level (see Kenski, Gottfried, & Jamieson, 2011).

The best evidence showing a causal relationship between using satire programming and increased use of news-centric outlets comes from Xenos and Becker (2009). In their article, they found people spent more time accessing news content when initially shown a satire clip. More specifically, the findings indicated that when an individual was exposed to a satire clip, they were more likely to seek out related news stories on the topic (e.g., the Iraq War) emphasized in the satire clip. Lacking from the analysis, however, is an empirical test that considers the differences in the amount of time spent generally browsing news across their experimental conditions. Nevertheless, the authors did find some evidence for the gateway hypothesis in their experiment. Although social science experiments are high in internal validity, they tend to be low in external validity. Moreover, Xenos and Becker's (2009) study relied on a student sample. In the end, we believe it is important to examine the over-time effects of satire on news consumption using over-time, more representative survey data. This approach would also allow for a clearer test of the complementary axiom, such that satire use at one point will increase use of complementary content (in this case, cable news). Therefore, we propose our second hypothesis:

H2:   There will be an over-time effect in which use of political satire programming leads to increased use of cable news outlets at subsequent time points.

Gateway Mediators

The underlying logic of the gateway hypothesis assumes that the relationship between satire use and news use will be mediated by a third variable such as knowledge (Baum, 2003) or political interest (Xenos & Becker, 2009). While both variables are insightful in explicating the gateway process, they are limiting. Within the broader field of communication, scholars have noted the importance of exploring other intervening variables relevant to the intracommunication process. In political intracommunication research, for example, there is support that *political attitudes* may serve to uncover the conditions for later information seeking (e.g., Feldman, Myers, Hmielowski, & Leiserowitz, 2014; Schemer, 2012). Indeed, while research is limited in regard to downstream effects of attitudinal change in the face of satire, it has at least been quantified that satire can influence political attitude change (Young, 2017).

The ability to produce persuasion effects originates from the complexity of satire, such that it can reduce message comprehension and ultimately interfere with counterargumentation. There are two concepts that can explain this process: the discounting cue (Nabi, Moyer-Gusé, & Byrne, 2007) and resource allocation (Young, 2008). From related research, it has been demonstrated that interference with counterargumentation can influence several types of political attitudes, particularly those around candidate evaluation. Mounting evidence suggests that satirical messages may affect, directly or indirectly, candidate attitudes (e.g., LaMarre, 2013; Young, 2014). For example, less hostile satire has been shown to play an important role in people's evaluations of political candidates, with research indicating such programs can result in people holding more positive attitudes toward candidates (Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2006; Xenos, Moy, & Becker, 2011; Young, 2006). By contrast, more hostile satire that is targeted toward a Republican candidate can reduce positive feelings toward that individual, resulting in people holding negative attitudes toward candidates (Becker, 2012).

Previous research has suggested that the content of these programs might include this harsher form of satire. According to Lichter and Farnsworth (2018) and Farnsworth and Lichter (2020), skewering of Trump was especially partisan and hostile during the 2016 election. Specifically, this type of satire was abundantly present and aimed at Trump in monologues and segments throughout the general election cycle. As a result, it would make sense that viewing these programs could have increased negative views of Donald Trump in 2016. And while research has yet, to our knowledge, to explain satire coverage of Hillary Clinton, we know from recent research that political satire is notably "liberal" in its presentation, with few instances of negatively targeting Democratic candidates—if covered at all (Lichter & Farnsworth, 2018; Young et al., 2019). As such, it is possible the more supportive partisan environment provided by satire during the 2016 presidential election benefited the Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton. Taken together with more recent evidence that Democratic guests tend to be privy to direct effects from appearing on satire programs (Becker & Goldberg, 2017) of which Clinton appeared on several times over the course of the election (IMDb, 2021), we argue Clinton's evaluations should have benefited from appearing on satire programs. In the end, the literature leads us to propose the following hypotheses:

H3:   There will be an over-time relationship between use of political satire and evaluations of Hillary Clinton, with use of satire leading people to hold more positive views of Clinton.

H4:   *There will be an over-time relationship between use of political satire and evaluations of Donald Trump, with use of satire leading people to hold more negative views of Trump.*

Research focused on selective exposure has noted the important role of attitudes driving media use (Stroud, 2014). Indeed, there is extensive evidence showing that liberals/Democrats tend to prefer nonpartisan cable outlets (e.g., CNN) and liberal-leaning news outlets (e.g., MSNBC; Stroud, 2011). By contrast, conservatives/Republicans tend to use conservative outlets such as Fox News and conservative radio programs hosted by personalities such as Sean Hannity (Stroud, 2011). These findings are not limited to variables such as political ideology or party identification. Studies have shown that existing political attitudes and feelings about presidential candidates also serve as important predictors of people's use of partisan media outlets (e.g., Stroud, 2010).

Based on the research presented here, we believe that changes in attitudes toward the 2016 candidates as a result of viewing satire could influence the likelihood of using partisan cable news at a later date. In particular, more positive feelings about Hillary Clinton stemming from use of satire programs would likely lead to increased use of news outlets such as CNN and MSNBC. These changes in evaluations tied to Clinton would likely also lead to decreased use of seemingly challenging news sources such as Fox News. We would expect the opposite pattern of results for changes in people's feelings about Donald Trump. Consequently, we propose our final hypotheses:

H5:   *Satire use in Wave 1 will lead to positive evaluations of Hillary Clinton in Wave 2, which will result in increased use of CNN and MSNBC, and decreased use of Fox News in Wave 3.*

H6:   *Satire use in Wave 1 will lead to negative evaluations of Donald Trump in Wave 2, which will result in increased use of CNN and MSNBC, and decreased use of Fox News in Wave 3.*

Method

Procedure

Data for this study originated from a four-wave panel survey during the 2016 presidential election conducted by an interdisciplinary research center located at a Midwestern university. The survey used a nonprobability sample with quotas[1] collected by Survey Sampling International (SSI—now Dynata) during the election cycle. For the purposes of testing our hypotheses, only Waves 1 through 3 were included in this study. Wave 1 (N = 3,557) was executed prior to the party convention period (July 1–18, 2016) to establish demographics and a baseline for repeated measures such as media use. Wave 2 (N = 2,020) was executed in the six-week lead-up before the presidential election (September 10–16, 2016). Wave 3 (N = 1,234) was

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[1] Quotas included partisan identification (PID) and race. For PID, the quota was used to ensure no more than 50% of the sample identified as Democrat. For race, the quota was used to ensure parity to the U.S. population.

executed a week prior to the election (October 20–29, 2016).[2] Because of a recruitment error,[3] only 893 participants completed all three waves. After removing missing data for those who did not complete all three waves of the survey or who had missing values on variables included in our analyses, 701 people remained in our data set. In the end, our sample did not end up being representative of the U.S. population, which will be detailed later on. All statistics reported in the article are based on the 701 people included in the analyses.

<div align="center">***Endogenous Variables***</div>

Political Satire Use

Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they watched *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert* (Colbert, Stewart, Licht, Purcell, & Julien, 2015), *The Daily Show With Trevor Noah* (Flanz et al., 2013), and *Last Week Tonight With John Oliver* (Oliver, Carvell, Stanton, Taylor, & Thoday, 2014) on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*).[4] While *The Late Show* (Colbert et al., 2015) is typically viewed as a general late-night comedy program, we believe this program can be classified as political satire for four reasons. First, the host, Stephen Colbert, focuses extensively on politics throughout the program (Young, 2019; Young et al., 2019). Second, the monologues and skits tend to criticize the status quo and the elites more so than including jokes focused on the qualities of politicians (Young, 2018, 2019; Young et al., 2019). Third, his jokes illustrate hypocrisy, dishonesty, and opportunism in the government through the mechanism of aggression and judgment (Colletta, 2009; Young, 2019). Lastly, Colbert's messages tend to have a target, such as the press, the political system, or the audience itself (Colletta, 2009; Young, 2018). In essence, this program devotes significant time to content that would be deemed political satire.

Cable News Use

Respondents indicated how frequently they used prime-time cable news programs from nonpartisan, liberal, and conservative cable on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*). The cable programs included in the media use battery in the survey were selected based on their performance in their respective prime-time slots. A total of eight cable news programs were included across the three waves of our data. The programs were separated into three indexes: "CNN" (nonpartisan cable news), "MSNBC" (liberal cable news), and "Fox News" (conservative cable news). The eight programs selected for the study were the top performing prime-time programs to air on each channel in 2016, with two shows selected each from CNN

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[2] Including a built-in estimate, the rate of attrition from Wave 1 to Wave 2 was 43%, and from Wave 1 to Wave 3 was ~35%.

[3] The large drop in *N* could be attributed to the vendor when they recruited half of Wave 1 participants from third-party vendors. Because of their origin, it was hard to re-recruit them for Wave 2. However, to meet the built-in attrition rate, the vendor re-recruited those who did not participate in Wave 2 to participate in Wave 3, causing a gap of 337 participants from the final *N* size.

[4] Because our selected satire programs do not air new episodes every day, we reran our analyses using an additive index. The scale resulted in a variable with 0 (no shows watched) as the minimum and 3 (watched all shows) as the maximum values. We did not find any substantive differences between the results reported using the frequency scale or results from this additive scale.

and MSNBC and four from Fox News (A. J. Katz, 2016). See Table 1 for means, standard deviations, and reliability scores of all media use variables.

Table 1. Mean Average Use and Standard Deviations of Endogenous Variables and Political Interest.

Programs	Wave 1			Wave 2			Wave 3		
	Mean	SD	Reliability	Mean	SD	Reliability	Mean	SD	Reliability
Political satire	1.32	0.77	.79	1.31	0.77	.82	1.35	0.80	.78
CNN	1.59	1.11	.88[+]	1.57	1.11	.87[+]	1.63	1.20	.88[+]
MSNBC	1.40	1.05	.90[+]	1.40	1.05	.88[+]	1.45	1.10	.88[+]
Fox News	1.72	1.29	.95	1.69	1.28	.95	1.73	1.29	.93
Gen. TV	3.05	1.43	.70	3.00	1.45	.70	3.00	1.38	.68
Local news	4.01	1.96	—	3.93	1.98	—	4.11	1.95	—
Clinton eval.	41.25	37.75	—	38.44	37.72	—	—	—	—
Trump eval.	42.53	37.75	—	38.02	37.63	—	—	—	—
Political interest	3.65	1.10	.91[+]	3.79	1.09	.90[+]	—	—	—

Note. Descriptive statistics for indexes. Descriptive statistics for remaining variables are reported in text.
[+] indicates reliability measure used the Spearman–Brown coefficient. For the remaining indexes, we report Cronbach's α.

Candidate Evaluations

To measure evaluations of the two presidential candidates, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, we used a feeling thermometer. Each item used the same language and asked respondents to provide their feelings on a scale from 0 (*negative*) to 100 (*positive*) about the two candidates (see Table 1 for mean evaluation scores for both candidates).

Exogenous Variables

Our first set of exogenous variables included demographics: age, gender, race, education, and income. Age was assessed with an open-ended question ("What is your age?"; $M = 57.10$ years, $SD = 13.15$ years). A binary measure was used to assess gender (female = 65%). Race was originally assessed as a 5-point categorical variable and asked participants to designate which racial or ethnic group best described them. Most of the sample identified as White (83%). For our analysis, a binary "White/other" measure was created, with those who did not identify as White (Black, Asian, Native American, other), serving as the reference group. The median level of education was at least an associate's degree and was assessed by a 7-point categorical scale (1 = *less than high school*, 7 = *advanced degree*; $Mdn = 4.00$, $SD = 1.48$). Income was assessed on a 10-point scale (1 = *less than $10,000* to 11 = *$200,000 or more*; $Mdn = 6.00$, $SD = 2.04$), indicating the median income bracket for those surveyed was $50,000 to $79,999.

Our next set of exogenous variables focused on politics. The first of these was political interest, which was measured in Waves 1 and 2 of our data set. Political interest was measured using two variables: "How interested are you in information about what's going on in government and politics?" and "How interested would

you say that you are in following the political campaigns (so far) this year?" These items used the same scaling structure of 1 (*extremely interested*) to 5 (*not at all interested*). The items were reverse coded such that a higher value represented greater interest in politics. The two variables were then averaged together into one index (see Table 1). Second, we included a measure of party identification in all models (measured across all three waves). The original political party item asked participants, "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" We recoded this item into two dummy variables, with Independents and others included in the reference group (e.g., Democrat vs. else and Republican vs. else). In Wave 1, 43.1% of the sample identified as Democrat, while 41.4% identified as Republican. There was a slight change in the identification rate in Wave 2, with 42.8% of the sample identifying as Democrat, and 40.2% identifying as Republican. The percentages largely remained stable in Wave 3, with 42.9% of the sample identifying as Democrat, and 40.1% identifying as Republican.

Our final set of exogenous variables includes the use of local news, general TV use, and social media use (only assessed in Wave 1 of the data set). Use of local nightly news[5] and general television (categories included early morning network shows [e.g., news, breakfast TV], daytime network shows [e.g., talk shows, soap operas], evening network shows [e.g., evening magazines, reruns], and prime-time network shows [e.g., sitcoms, dramas]) were measured on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*). General television items were consolidated into an index for our analyses (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics of these variables). Lastly, social media use was captured by asking how many times a day, on average, the participant logs in to social media (in general) on a scale from 5 (*never*) to 1 (*frequently*) ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.18$). This measure of social media was only included in Wave 1 of the survey, which means we have not included it as an outcome variable in any of our models.

Analysis

To analyze these data, we used OLS regression in SPSS and lagged path analysis in Mplus. Our analysis consisted of both cross-sectional and over-time analyses. The cross-sectional analyses assessed relationships among our key endogenous variables within each wave of data collection including the exogenous controls listed above. Next, we used a lagged regression to assess the over-time relationships among our endogenous variables. In these analyses, we lagged the predictor variables on our outcome while controlling for the previous waves' measure of our dependent variable of interest. For example, when assessing the over-time relationship between use of political satire and CNN, we would include all previous wave assessments on the subsequent wave outcome. The set of Wave 1 variables would include all of our exogenous controls (e.g., demographics, politics, and communication variables), the Wave 1 measures of all endogenous variables (e.g., use of MSNBC and Fox News), and our Wave 1 measure of our dependent variable of interest (e.g., use of CNN). Our model then looks at relationships between Wave 1 and Wave 2 and attempts to assess whether any changes that occur in our key dependent variable (in this case CNN) can be attributed to our media use measure of interest (in this case satire use). Finally, in this lagged approach we included all three waves of data to assess whether the effects of political satire on cable news use flowed through our candidate evaluation measures. To test our mediation hypotheses, we estimated 5,000 bootstrapped estimates to calculate our indirect effects.

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[5] We also ran analyses where we included use of local news as an outcome in our various models. The results of these analyses did not find any correlation between use of satire programing and use of local news.

Results

Cross-Sectional Analyses

We begin by replicating previous studies that have used cross-sectional data to assess the gateway hypothesis. Using multiple regression, our results found extensive evidence from the cross-sectional analysis consistent with previous work. For example, use of political satire was associated with higher use of CNN across all three waves of data (see Table 2 for results). We found a similar pattern of results when looking at the relationship between using political satire and tuning into MSNBC. Once again, across all three waves of our data, there was a positive correlation between MSNBC use and watching satire programs (see Table 2). Our results also found that political satire was positively associated with use of Fox News programs across all three waves of our data set (see Table 2). In the end, these results show support for H1.

Table 2. Cross-Sectional Results for Satire Use and News Use.

	Wave 1			Wave 2			Wave 3		
	CNN	MSNBC	Fox News	CNN	MSNBC	Fox News	CNN	MSNBC	Fox News
Gender	−0.006	−0.051	−0.091	−0.072	−0.020	−0.113	0.011	−0.020	−0.139
	(0.065)	(0.061)	(0.090)	(0.066)	(0.062)	(0.092)	(0.070)	(0.061)	(0.094)
Age	−0.003	0.004	0.017	0.000	0.004	0.014	0.003	0.003	0.012
	(0.003)	(0002)	(0.004)***	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.004)*	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.004)**
Education	−0.015	−0.007	−0.021	−0.033	0.004	0.005	−0.020	−0.007	−0.015
	(0.022)	(0.020)	(0.030)	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.031)	(0.024)	(0.021)	(0.032)
Income	0.013	−0.006	0.012	0.013	−0.012	0.008	0.019	−0.023	0.019
	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.022)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.022)	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.023)
White	0.025	−0.167	0.038	0.007	−0.202	0.065	0.017	−0.200	0.069
	(0.086)	(0.079)*	(0.119)	(0.086)	(0.081)*	(0.121)	(0.092)	(0.080)*	(0.123)
Political interest	0.077	0.029	0.208	0.059	0.055	0.224	0.068	0.029	0.231
	(0.031)*	(0.029)	(0.042)***	(0.031)	(0.029)	(0.043)***	(0.033)*	(0.029)	(0.044)***
Republican	−0.187	0.022	0.451	−0.141	−0.056	0.360	−0.138	−0.054	0.293
	(0.091)*	(0.085)	(0.125)***	(0.088)	(0.083)	(0.123)**	(0.094)	(0.083)	(0.126)*
Democrat	0.118	0.114	−0.393	0.121	0.027	−0.472	0.144	0.083	−0.439
	(0.091)	(0.084)	(0.125)**	(0.089)	(0.084)	(0.123)***	(0.095)	(0.083)	(0.126)**
Social media use	0.010	−0.074	−0.077	0.042	−0.086	−0.062	0.003	−0.032	−0.041
	(0.028)	(0.026)**	(0.038)	(0.028)	(0.026)**	(0.039)	(0.030)	(0.026)**	(0.040)
Local news	−0.018	0.023	0.030	−0.025	0.015	0.010	0.018	0.008	−0.014
	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.025)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.025)	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.026)
General TV	0.106	−0.044	−0.074	0.077	−0.016	−0.018	0.051	−0.019	−0.025
	(0.025)***	(0.023)	(0.035)	(0.024)**	(0.023)	(0.034)	(0.028)	(0.024)	(0.037)
CNN	—	0.386	0.287	—	0.436	0.206	—	0.442	0.199
		(0.032)***	(0.052)***		(0.032)***	(0.053)***		(0.029)***	(0.050)***
MSNBC	0.447	—	−0.027	0.490	—	−0.011	0.584	—	0.061
	(0.037)***		(0.057)	(0.036)***		(0.057)	(0.037)***		(0.058)

Fox News	0.150 (0.027)***	−0.12 (.026)	—	0.104 (0.027)***	−0.005 (.026)	—	0.111 (0.028)***	0.026 (.025)	—
Satire	0.268 (0.054)***	0.458 (0.047)***	0.356 (0.074)***	0.298 (0.052)***	0.369 (0.048)***	0.375 (0.073)***	0.159 (0.054)***	0.429 (0.044)***	0.275 (0.072)***
R^2	.505	.517	.302	.502	.508	.265	.509	.556	.243

Note. OLS regression model with unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$, $N = 701$.

Over-Time Analyses

We now move to our analyses looking at the over-time relationships between use of political satire programming and use of various cable news outlets. We will start with the relationship between use of political satire and use of CNN. In general, there was no evidence that use of satire increased use of CNN. When looking at use of satire predicting use of CNN, our results found a nonsignificant relationship between these two variables between Wave 1 and Wave 2 ($\beta = 0.04$, $SE = 0.04$, $p > .05$). When looking at the same association from Wave 2 to Wave 3 of our data, our results found that satire use led to *lower* levels of CNN use ($\beta = -0.12$, $SE = 0.02$, $p < .05$). In the end, when looking at CNN, there is no evidence supporting the gateway hypothesis.

Next, we examined the over-time effect of political satire on use of MSNBC. Beginning with the results between Wave 1 and Wave 2 of our data set, our results found a negative relationship between satire use and use of MSNBC ($\beta = -0.08$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .05$). When looking at Wave 2 to Wave 3, our results found that satire use was not associated with use of programs on MSNBC ($\beta = 0.05$, $SE = 0.04$, $p > .05$). Therefore, our results for MSNBC use did not show support for the gateway hypothesis.

We also examined the cross-lagged relationship between use of political satire and Fox News programs. Once again, there was a negative relationship between satire use at Wave 1 and use of Fox News at Wave 2 ($\beta = -0.09$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .05$). In addition, our results once again showed that use of satire was unrelated to use of Fox News from Wave 2 to Wave 3 of our data set ($\beta = -0.04$, $SE = 0.04$, $p > .05$). In the end, our analyses show little support for the gateway hypothesis when considering the over-time relationships between political satire use and subsequent use of cable news outlets during the 2016 presidential election. Therefore, we do not find support for H2 (see Tables 3 and 4 for the full cross-lagged regression models).

Table 3. Cross-Lagged Results for Satire Use and News Use: Wave 1 to Wave 2.

	CNN (W2)	MSNBC (W2)	Fox News (W2)
Gender	−0.031 (0.051)	0.031 (0.038)	−0.012 (0.050)
Age	0.003 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)
Education	−0.010 (0.017)	0.011 (0.013)	0.027 (0.017)
Income	−0.009 (0.013)	−0.013 (0.009)	0.001 (0.012)
White	−0.136 (0.068)*	−0.167 (0.051)**	−0.107 (0.066)
Political interest (W1)	0.028 (0.024)	0.021 (0.018)	0.048 (0.024)*
Republican (W1)	−0.009 (0.072)	0.023 (0.012)	0.024 (0.070)
Democrat (W1)	0.064 (0.071)	0.012 (0.054)	−0.099 (0.070)
Social media use	0.018 (0.022)	−0.014 (0.016)	0.011 (0.021)
Local news (W1)	−0.013 (0.014)	0.010 (0.011)	0.012 (0.014)
General TV (W1)	0.002 (0.020)	−0.007 (0.015)	−0.013 (0.019)*
CNN (W1)	0.790 (0.030)***	0.048 (0.022)*	0.002 (0.029)
MSNBC (W1)	0.028 (0.032)	0.892 (0.024)***	0.011 (0.032)
Fox News (W1)	−0.022 (0.022)	−0.025 (0.016)	0.859 (0.021)
Satire (W1)	0.039 (0.043)	−0.076 (0.32)*	−0.085 (0.042)*
R^2	.693	.809	.782

Note. OLS regression model with unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$, $N = 701$

Table 4. Cross-Lagged Results for Satire Use and News Use: Wave 2 to Wave 3.

	CNN (W3)	MSNBC (W3)	Fox News (W3)
Gender	0.022 (0.055)	−0.023 (0.045)	−0.047 (0.047)
Age	−0.004 (0.002)	−0.002 (0.002)	−0.002 (0.002)
Education	−0.001 (0.018)	−0.012 (0.015)	−0.017 (0.016)
Income	0.013 (0.013)	−0.002 (0.011)	0.013 (0.012)
White	0.012 (0.072)	−0.003 (0.059)	0.015 (0.062)
Political interest (W2)	0.040 (0.026)	0.021 (0.022)	0.042 (0.023)
Republican (W2)	−0.096 (0.074)	−0.051 (0.061)	−0.054 (0.064)
Democrat (W2)	0.034 (0.075)	0.075 (0.061)	0.002 (0.064)
Social media use	−0.033 (0.023)	0.010 (0.019)	−0.003 (0.020)
Local news (W2)	0.013 (0.015)	−0.005 (0.012)	0.009 (0.013)
General TV (W2)	0.014 (0.020)	−0.005 (0.017)	−0.014 (0.018)
CNN (W2)	0.842 (0.032)***	0.013 (0.026)	0.027 (0.028)
MSNBC (W2)	0.102 (0.034)**	0.868 (0.028)***	−0.028 (0.029)
Fox News (W2)	0.002 (0.023)	−0.002 (0.019)	0.900 (0.020)***
Satire (W2)	−0.116 (0.045)**	0.048 (0.037)	−0.036 (0.038)
R^2	.701	.761	.809

Note. OLS regression model with unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$, $N = 701$.

Mediation Model[6]

Finally, we assess the mediated model outlined in the literature review. Before going through the results of the formal hypotheses proposed in the article, we want to highlight that we ran additional analyses using mediators that have been traditionally associated with the gateway hypotheses: political interest and knowledge. For both variables, we did not find evidence that either served as mediating variables. For example, the interest measure outlined in our article did not serve as a mediator when using this same data set. We also looked at candidate knowledge as a potential mediator. Once again, we did not find any evidence that knowledge about either candidate served as a mediating variable between satire and future news use.[7]

We begin with the over-time relationship between political satire use and attitudes about the two presidential candidates. Our results show that use of political satire programs increased positive feelings toward Hillary Clinton. Indeed, use of political satire in Wave 1 was associated with holding more positive views of Clinton at the second wave of data collection, when controlling for Wave 1 evaluations of Clinton, showing support for H3 (β = 4.69, *SE* = 7.77, *p* < .05; see Table 5).

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[6] We ran a time-reverse analysis on our mediation model to test the causal assumptions of our model. Our model did not yield any indirect effects when reversing the order of the variables (i.e., W1 CNN → W2 Candidate Feelings → W3 Satire use).

[7] Because of space constraints, we did not formalize these hypotheses or include tables outlining our analyses looking at interest or candidate knowledge. Moreover, the measure of candidate knowledge would further decrease our sample; hence, we decided to keep the analysis using the 701 participants identified in this article.

Table 5. Cross-Lagged Results for Satire Use and Feelings Thermometer for Candidates.

	Clinton FT (W2)	Trump FT (W2)
Gender	2.754 (1.848)	1.258 (1.910)
Age	0.073 (0.077)	0.006 (0.078)
Education	−0.276 (0.632)	−1.727 (0.645)
Income	0.442 (0.491)	0.630 (0.523)
White	6.969 (3.007)*	−4.343 (2.278)
Political interest (W1)	−0.197 (0.908)	1.355 (0.826)
Republican (W1)	1.195 (2.211)	4.534 (2.757)
Democrat (W1)	10.375 (2.798)***	2.134 (2.657)
Social media use	−0.702 (0.800)	1.527 (0.847)
Clinton FT (W1)	0.657 (0.040)***	−0.136 (0.036)***
Trump FT (W1)	−0.108 (0.030)***	0.659 (0.038)***
Local news (W1)	−0.378 (0.493)	0.536 (0.492)
General TV (W1)	−0.056 (0.742)	−0.908 (0.683)
CNN (W1)	−0.102 (1.148)	−0.115 (0.929)
MSNBC (W1)	−1.374 (1.458)	−0.371 (1.155)
Fox News (W1)	−0.458 (0.793)	2.473 (0.974)*
Satire (W1)	4.956 (1.765)**	2.485 (1.623)
R^2	.660***	.662***

Note. OLS regression model with unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$, $N = 701$.

We did not find a significant effect for political satire use on people's evaluation of Donald Trump, thus not finding support for H4. The next step was to examine the over-time relationship between evaluations of the two candidates and cable news use. We found significant over-time effects for views of Hillary Clinton and subsequent use of CNN ($\beta = 0.002$, $SE = 0.001$, $p < .05$) and MSNBC ($\beta = 0.002$, $SE = 0.001$, $p < .05$). We did not find a similar relationship for evaluations of Trump and use of Fox News. Our results showed the more favorable views people held toward Clinton in Wave 2 of our survey resulted in higher use of both CNN and MSNBC in Wave 3 of our data set (see Table 6).

Table 6. Cross-Lagged Results for Candidate Feelings and News Media Use.

	CNN (W3)	MSNBC (W3)	Fox News (W3)
Gender	0.025 (0.057)	−0.010 (0.047)	−0.039 (0.050)
Age	−0.002 (0.002)	−0.000 (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)
Education	−0.006 (0.016)	−0.014 (0.015)	−0.018 (0.016)
Income	0.010 (0.014)	−0.005 (0.011)	0.011 (0.013)
White	0.034 (0.083)	0.006 (0.065)	0.024 (0.060)
Political interest (W2)	0.045 (0.026)	0.024 (0.023)	0.045 (0.023)
Republican (W2)	−0.061 (0.058)	−0.014 (0.047)	−0.061 (0.055)
Democrat (W2)	−0.056 (0.077)	0.008 (0.063)	0.007 (0.061)
Social media use	−0.024 (0.027)	0.019 (0.022)	0.006 (0.021)
Local news (W2)	0.009 (0.013)	−0.006 (0.011)	0.007 (0.013)
General TV (W2)	0.007 (0.019)	−0.008 (0.016)	−0.020 (0.019)
CNN (W2)	0.813 (0.050)***	−0.006 (0.039)	0.005 (0.027)
MSNBC (W2)	0.061 (0.062)	0.838 (0.044)***	−0.059 (0.029)*
Fox News (W2)	−0.004 (0.029)	0.003 (0.028)	0.881 (0.027)***
Satire (W1)	0.050 (0.075)	0.169 (0.064)**	0.123 (0.057)*
Clinton FT (W2)	0.002 (0.001)*	0.002 (0.001)**	0.000 (0.001)
Trump FT (W2)	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
R^2	.702***	.772***	.812***

Note. OLS regression model with unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$, $N = 701$.

Lastly, we examined whether there was an indirect effect of using political satire programming on increased use of different cable news outlets through our measures of candidate evaluations. Our results revealed two indirect effects. Specifically, political satire use in Wave 1 was associated with higher use of CNN and MSNBC in Wave 3 through attitudes about Clinton in Wave 2 of our survey. In essence, use of political satire programs in Wave 1 resulted in more positive views of Clinton in Wave 2 of our data set. These increases in views then resulted in increased use of both CNN (point estimate = 0.011, 95% CI [0.002, 0.025]) and MSNBC (point estimate = 0.007, 95% CI [0.001, 0.019]) in the final wave of our data set, which show support for H5. We did not find any indirect effects for political satire use through evaluations of Donald Trump on use of Fox News programming, which means there is no support for H6.

Discussion

Overall, our results were consistent with previous work using cross-sectional data that attempted to examine the gateway hypothesis. We found that use of political satire programming is correlated with higher use of the three (cable) news sources of interest in this article (CNN, MSNBC, & Fox News). However, across the ideological spectrum using over-time data, our results generally did not indicate any increased use of cable news due to satire use. When examining a more complicated mediation model, however, we did find some evidence supporting the idea that satire increases use of opinionated news. Specifically, we examined whether the effects of satire on evaluations of the two presidential candidates in 2016 (i.e., Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton) resulted in increased (or decreased) use of cable news sources. Our results found an over-time, indirect

effect for satire use on increased use of both CNN and MSNBC through holding more positive feelings about Clinton during the election. In the end, we found it is important to examine intervening variables such as changes in attitudes when examining the gateway hypothesis.

Our study makes two contributions to the extant literature. First, our study extends the work that has been done on applying the gateway hypothesis to the study of political satire. To date, most of the work testing the gateway hypothesis has used cross-sectional data. Even though Feldman and Young (2008) attempted to examine the potential causal relationship between satire and news use using a time-series analysis, the data was still cross-sectional in nature. Therefore, it was not possible to test whether satire use caused increases in news use. Our study showed the importance of trying to examine whether satire use does indeed cause changes in people's news use habits, particularly around complementary opinionated cable news use. Our cross-sectional results align with previous work showing support for the gateway hypothesis; however, we could not replicate these findings in causal over-time analyses. If anything, our results found evidence that satire used decreased use of cable news (see Tables 3 and 4). Indeed, satire use was associated with lower levels of use of MSNBC (W1 to W2), Fox News (W1 to W2), and CNN (W2 to W3). The gateway hypothesis, then, may not be about a causal relationship in which watching satire causes people to consume additional news content (e.g., Feldman & Young, 2008). Instead, satire and news use, particularly of opinionated news sources, may simply occur at the same time in today's fragmented media environment (e.g., Feldman, 2013; Xenos & Becker, 2009).

Second, our study shows the importance of adding intervening variables relative to the gateway hypothesis. In its original formulation, the gateway hypothesis proposed that use of political comedy, such as satire, would increase news use because of increases in people's level of political knowledge (Baum, 2003). In later research, political interest was found to also intervene in the gateway process (Xenos & Becker, 2009). As such, the gateway hypothesis supports that there likely needs to be some sort of change on an important individual level factor for people to seek out additional political content from news-centric outlets. Since the publication of ideas and research that culminated in the gateway hypothesis, scholars have identified the importance of examining dynamic communication processes (Slater, 2015). Our article has applied this dynamic approach to the gateway hypothesis by showing that evaluations of candidates (particularly Hillary Clinton) served as an important mediating variable between use of satire and use of CNN and MSNBC over-time. Therefore, our findings suggest it is important to examine a range of intervening variables, beyond knowledge and interest,[8] when taking a dynamic perspective to intracommunication relationships.

The results of this study open the door to future avenues of research examining dynamic processes associated with communication in general, and the effects of political satire, in particular. For example, our findings show the need to further examine political bias associated with satire programs (see Young et al., 2019). Although these programs have often purported to skewer *all* politicians across the political spectrum, it is possible that satire programs have come to acquire political bias. Our over-time results, here, suggest that satire programs appear to be more supportive of liberal policies and candidates. Whether this coverage consistently matters to liberal audience members, however, remains an open question (see Moy et al., 2006) that can be

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[8] As noted in our results section, we ran analyses looking at political interest and candidate knowledge and found no evidence that either of these served as mediating variables.

undertaken in future research. Open to further exploration is also the role of satire as an independent news source in a rapidly changing media environment.

As with any research project, there are weaknesses with the particular data set we used that could have affected our results. First, the use of over-time data means that events that occurred during the presidential campaign (e.g., presidential debates) could have had an effect on our results. In essence, these events may have threatened the internal validity of these findings. That being said, our results are relatively high in external validity. Our findings over-time using panel survey data show how gateway processes could actually play out in the real world. As with any research, scholars need to balance designs that could be high in internal validity and low in external validity versus designs low in internal validity and high in external validity. In the end, the best way to address these issues would be by conducting additional research and replicating results to increase confidence in findings. Second, because of unforeseen changes in the political satire lineup in the late summer/early fall of 2016 (e.g., discontinuation of Larry Wilmore's show and introduction of Samantha Bee's program), this study does not include all of the satirical programs available to the public during the summer and fall of 2016 (similar to Feldman & Young, 2008). As such, our findings are limited to the three programs we tested. Additionally, we acknowledge the phenomenon of the gateway hypothesis, particularly our replication and extension of the model, may not appear in a nonelection year. Future research looking to reassess the gateway hypothesis should look to Xenos and Becker (2009) for guidance on how to test the gateway hypothesis in a nonelection year.

Lastly, the built-in estimates for attrition and the lower retention rate may have affected the number of participants we were able to include in our analyses and biased our sample to look less like the U.S. population. As noted in the Method section, our sample is not representative of the U.S. population. Moreover, the recruitment error decreased the number of people we were able to retain across all three waves of our survey. Given the problems with the data set, it is important to note that the goal of our article is not to make population inferences. In essence, we are not trying to provide polling results that represent the population. Instead, we are trying to test theoretical hypotheses, which means population inferences are less important (Hayes, 2020).

The media environment today continues to fragment into smaller and smaller niche audiences. Streaming services now supplement the programming available over the airwaves. Moreover, broadcast networks now offer streaming services that provide people with content that is not available over their terrestrial outlets. Satire programming also continues to splinter into smaller niche audiences with John Oliver doing longer pieces with extensive research and Samantha Bee taking a more critical, outrage-heavy approach to political comedy. Therefore, it is important for scholars to continue examining the interplay among use of different media outlets and how these outlets combine through interactive (Hmielowski, 2012) or cumulative effects to change people's attitudes and media use (Holbert, 2005). We hope our results will be the catalyst for more investigations into how individuals navigate multiple sources in the modern media climate, especially as it pertains to the individual and complementary roles of satire and cable news in our media diets.

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