International Journal of Communication 16(2022), 1737–1758 1932–8036/20220005

When Does Incidental Exposure Prompt Political Participation? Cross-National Research on the Importance of Individualism and Collectivism

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While people may accidentally come across political information online, the question of the conditions under which this incidental exposure facilitates political participation remains. To answer this question, the current study acknowledges the need to consider the *content* of incidental exposure, namely, information that supports or challenges one's views. Furthermore, this relationship between incidental exposure and political participation may depend on individuals' cultural worldviews of themselves and their social units: individualism and collectivism. By analyzing two panel survey data sets collected before the presidential elections in the United States and South Korea, the current study advances a dual theoretical model in which pro-/counter-attitudinal incidental exposure and collectivism/individualism interact respectively to predict political participation offline and online. We find that pro-attitudinal incidental exposure may be a catalyst for political participation among highly collectivist individuals, whereas counter-attitudinal incidental exposure may be a suppressor among people who hold weak individualist values in the United States rather than in Korea.

Keywords: incidental exposure, cross-cutting exposure, political participation, collectivism, individualism

People are increasingly spending more time online, whether they are surfing the Web or scrolling through social media (Perrin & Kumar, 2019). Regardless of their initial motivations for going online—entertainment or relational goals—many individuals find themselves coming across news and political information (Y. Kim, Chen, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013; Valeriani & Vaccari, 2016; Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009). While these inadvertent encounters with information without active seeking—incidental exposure—took place in the era of TV (e.g., through channel hopping), it is becoming more prevalent in the age of the Internet and social media (Tewksbury, Weaver, & Maddex, 2001; Yamamoto & Morey, 2019). Scholars have examined the democratic implications of incidental exposure to political information, notably, whether it facilitates political participation (PP). While early reports have provided correlational support for this view,

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Date submitted: 2021-02-26

possibly due to incidental exposure's learning and mobilizing potentials (Y. Kim et al., 2013; Valeriani & Vaccari, 2016), recent panel studies suggest that the link between incidental exposure and PP is not uniformly positive (Heiss & Matthes, 2019; Yamamoto & Morey, 2019).

The current study aims to investigate the muddied relationship between incidental exposure and PP and to contribute to the literature in three ways. First, we acknowledge the need to consider the *content* of incidental exposure, specifically to differentiate between two types of incidental exposure: pro-attitudinal incidental exposure (PAIE) and counter-attitudinal incidental exposure (CAIE; see Weeks, Lane, Kim, Lee, & Kwak, 2017). Incidental exposure may have different relationships with PP depending on whether the exposed information supports or challenges individuals' existing political views (Mutz, 2006; Stroud, 2011). Second, we further examine potential moderators of the relationship between types of incidental exposure and PP. Notably, individuals' processing of and subsequent reaction to pro- and counter-attitudinal information is likely contingent on their cultural worldviews of themselves and their social units: individualism and collectivism (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). One theoretical possibility is that for individualist individuals whose personal goals and emotions trump those of their collectives (Triandis, 1995), CAIE becomes a particularly strong prompt for PP. However, PAIE may be a catalyst for collectivist individuals who prioritize harmonious social relationships and the common good over personal gains (Eveland, Song, & Beck, 2015; Kastenmüller, Greitemeyer, Jonas, Fischer, & Frey, 2010). Finally, we test these theoretical possibilities in two different contexts—the United States and South Korea—acknowledging that prior scholarship on the effects of political heterogeneity centers on Western democracies (Hopmann, 2012). The United States and South Korea make a particularly interesting case for cross-national research on online information exposure and PP (see H. Kim, Coyle, & Gould, 2009): The United States and Korea are known as individualist and collectivist countries, respectively (Kitayama et al., 1997), and their Internet penetration rates amount to 96%, marking the highest in the Americas and the Asia-Pacific region (Newman et al., 2021).

For this, we analyzed two data sets collected before the presidential elections in 2016 in the United States and 2017 in South Korea. Both data sets are from a two-wave national survey, allowing us to carefully discuss over-time changes in PP as a function of types of incidental exposure and cultural worldviews. Specifically, we empirically examined a dual theoretical model in which two types of incidental exposure (i.e., to pro- and counter-attitudinal information) and two orthogonal cultural worldviews (i.e., collectivism and individualism; Oyserman et al., 2002) interact, respectively, to predict PP offline and online (Figure 1). The theoretical and practical implications of the findings are then discussed. We also call for more cross-cultural research linking individuals' information behaviors and their political consequences.

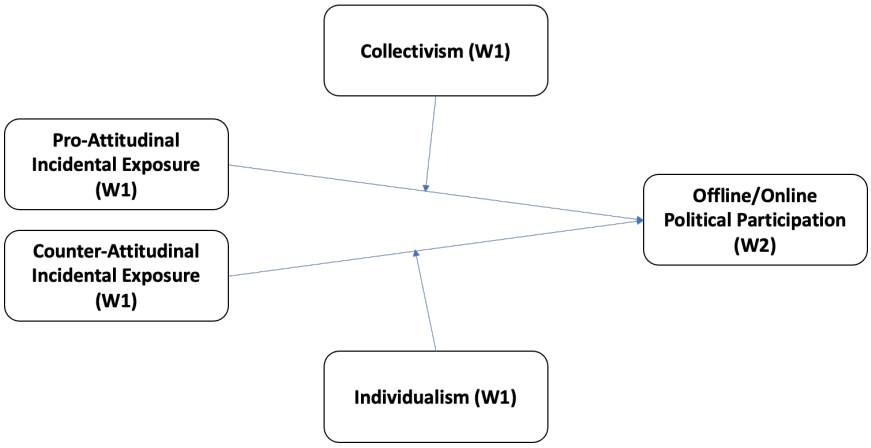


Figure 1. A dual theoretical model: Predicting political participation with two types of incidental exposure and individualism/collectivism.

Incidental Exposure and Political Participation

When online, individuals sometimes find themselves consuming political information after they started navigating the Web or social media for some other purpose (Y. Kim et al., 2013). For example, people may come across political information and viewpoints in leisure online groups that are primarily about socializing, hobbies, or interests (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009). On social media, many users accidentally encounter political information and news shared by their social network members when they did not actively seek it out (Valeriani & Vaccari, 2016). These rather inadvertent encounters with information have been distinguished from selective seeking of information and are subsequently termed *incidental exposure* (Tewksbury et al., 2001).

Incidental exposure to information may have important implications for democracy, notably by facilitating PP among individuals. This is possible given that information people are accidentally exposed to online may not only inform them, but also include mobilizing information (Bode, 2016; Y. Kim et al., 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2001). Early correlational studies largely support this possibility; incidental information exposure positively relates to PP, although the relationship depends on the degree to which individuals are interested in politics rather than entertainment content (Y. Kim et al., 2013; Valeriani & Vaccari, 2016). More recent evidence using panel data, however, suggests that incidental exposure to information—for example, on social media—does not uniformly lead to PP (Heiss & Matthes, 2019; Yamamoto & Morey, 2019). While incidental exposure may facilitate PP if followed by further online information seeking or political expression, the direct relationship between incidental exposure and PP appears rather negative (Yamamoto & Morey, 2019). Another panel study also demonstrates a negative association between incidental exposure and PP among individuals with low political interest (Heiss & Matthes, 2019).

The current study attempts to examine the relationship between incidental exposure and PP by differentiating between two types of incidental exposure: incidental exposure to information supporting

one's existing political view, and information that challenges his or her political attitudes (i.e., PAIE and CAIE; Weeks et al., 2017). For instance, considering that social media users form connections with similar others, as well as those who are different from them, they may inadvertently come across like-minded content along with disagreeable content (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015). The distinction between incidental exposure to pro-attitudinal and counter-attitudinal information is an important one because they may have different relationships with PP.

Taking Types of Incidental Exposure Into Account

Exposure to pro-attitudinal information online has often been examined in the context of selective exposure rather than incidental exposure. Prior scholarship demonstrates that intentional, selective exposure to information that is consistent with one's existing political view facilitates PP (Dilliplane, 2011; Stroud, 2011). Potential mechanisms for this positive link include psychological factors such as heightened attitude extremity (Stroud, 2010) and political self-concept (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2011). Selective exposure to pro-attitudinal information provides further support to one's positions and may help individuals solidify their existing political views, which may mobilize them. Although the relationship between incidental exposure to pro-attitudinal information and PP has yet to be examined, given the ample evidence that pro-attitudinal selective exposure positively predicts PP, we predict the following in the offline and online settings:

H1: Pro-attitudinal incidental exposure (W1) will positively predict (a) offline and (b) online PP (W2).

When it comes to the relationship between exposure to counter-attitudinal information and PP, there are conflicting possibilities (see Matthes, Knoll, Valenzuela, Hopmann, & Von Sikorski, 2019, for a meta-analysis). On the one hand, cross-cutting exposure may suppress PP largely for two reasons: social accountability/harmony and heightened attitudinal ambivalence. First, as individuals encounter disagreeable viewpoints in their social networks, they may notice the possibility of risking their harmonious social relationships if they voice their political stance or take political action openly (Mutz, 2002). This account of cross-cutting exposure dampening PP, nonetheless, may be more likely in the context of interpersonal communication rather than mediated communication. If individuals disagree with family and friends in person, they may threaten their social harmony; however, it may be easier for them to discount opinions expressed on media by speakers they do not personally know (Dilliplane, 2011).

The second account for the negative relationship between cross-cutting exposure and PP centers on attitudinal ambivalence. When individuals are exposed to disagreeing information, their political stance is challenged. This may lead individuals to hold less certainty and more ambivalence about their own political views (Mutz, 2002). On encounters with mixed political views and contradictory ideas, these ambivalent individuals may not voice their views or participate in politics. Relatedly, spiral of silence theory would predict the same pattern (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Individuals who are repeatedly exposed to counter-attitudinal information would perceive that the opinion climate is unfavorable to them. Thinking that their opinion is in the minority, these individuals may silence themselves rather than participate in the politics. This attitudinal ambivalence account has found support in both interpersonal and mediated communication contexts (e.g., Hampton et al., 2014).

On the other hand, there are three reasons to predict that exposure to counter-attitudinal information can facilitate PP: learning, information seeking, and attitude extremity (Matthes et al., 2019). First, cross-cutting exposure helps individuals learn new political perspectives—for example, the strengths of opposing views and the weaknesses of their own views. As these individuals become more politically informed and sophisticated, they should be better prepared for PP, although empirically, informed citizenship and engaged citizenship do not necessarily go hand in hand (e.g., Mutz, 2006). Second, cross-cutting exposure may backfire and result in attitude polarization, which may prompt PP. Prior studies found support for this attitude extremity account in mediated communication settings (e.g., Bail et al., 2018), although this account may appear to conflict with the ambivalence account for the negative relationship between cross-cutting exposure and PP. Third, exposure to counter-attitudinal information may prompt further information search, which may in turn facilitate PP. Potential mechanisms involve cognitive dissonance caused by cross-cutting exposure (Festinger, 1962). Individuals feeling discomfort after encountering attitude-challenging information may seek out further information, possibly attitude-supportive information, as a coping strategy; this may help them to feel confident and certain, leading them to participate in politics (e.g., Weeks et al., 2017). Although most prior studies did not examine cross-cutting exposure in an incidental fashion, some notable exceptions exist. For instance, Weeks and colleagues (2017) found support largely for the information-seeking account among partisans. Another study reported an indirect positive impact of counter-attitudinal incidental exposure on corrective PP through anxiety, although no direct effect was found (Lu, 2019). Given the conflicting possibilities, we advance the following research question:

RQ1: What is the nature of counter-attitudinal incidental exposure's (W1) relationship with (a) offline and (b) online PP (W2)?

Moderating Role by Individualism-Collectivism

We further investigate the potential moderators of the relationship between types of incidental exposure and PP. Importantly, how individuals process and react to the different kinds of information—information that supports or challenges their own political views—may depend on their worldviews of themselves and groups they belong to: individualism and collectivism (Kitayama et al., 1997; Oyserman et al., 2002). Individualism prioritizes personal goals, fate, and values—the personal—over the social, including common goals and values shared by groups and collectives (Triandis, 1995). In contrast, in collectivist societies, individuals are obliged by groups. The social trumps the personal (Oyserman et al., 2002).

Prior scholarship demonstrates that collectivist individuals tend to follow the middle way and are prone to self-criticism (Kastenmüller et al., 2010). Rather than considering the self to be uniquely talented, collectivist individuals are sensitive to negative self-relevant information in an effort to become a good member of their social units. This tendency toward self-criticism is viewed useful from a collectivist perspective because it can enhance individuals' relational self-improvement (Kitayama et al., 1997). In the same vein, because collectivist individuals highly value harmonious social relationships, they may sacrifice themselves for the common good (Oyserman et al., 2002). When they encounter conflicting views in a group setting, they may be reserved rather than expressive about their feelings and opinions (Triandis, 1995). They may even accept the conflicting views, thinking that both sides may have some truth (Kastenmüller et al., 2010). By contrast, for individualist individuals, a fundamental value involves having a positive sense

about self (Oyserman et al., 2002). For this, they may find self-enhancement useful: sensitivity to positive self-relevant information (Kitayama et al., 1997). Individualist individuals value personal attitudes and opinions that distinguish themselves from the rest, and they enjoy expressing their feelings and views (Triandis, 1995). Attainment of personal goals is considered more important than the common goals of their social units (Oyserman et al., 2002).

Overall, it stands to reason that different types of incidental exposure may prompt individualist and collectivist individuals to voice their opinions and take political action. For individualist individuals, CAIE may be the prompt for PP. On encounters with attitude-challenging information, they will notice that their personal views are not shared by others. Yet, these individualist individuals are likely not afraid to voice their own views, which perhaps benefit them and help them attain their personal goals (Oyserman et al., 2002; Triandis, 1995). For collectivist individuals who value common goals and harmonious social relationships (Oyserman et al., 2002), however, PAIE may provide a sense that others are with them, and be the catalyst for PP. In fact, in the context of interpersonal communication, the positive relationship between political agreement and political behaviors, such as voting and political discussion, was stronger among collectivist countries than individualist countries (Eveland et al., 2015). Along the same lines, it is possible that among individualists, political disagreement or exposure to counter-attitudinal information may be a stronger prompt for PP. We advance the following two hypotheses in the context of online incidental exposure.

H2: Collectivism (W1) will be a moderator of W1 PAIE's relationship with (a) offline and (b) online PP (W2), such that the relationship is most strongly positive among individuals with the highest collectivism (W1).

H3: Individualism (W1) will be a moderator of W1 CAIE's relationship with (a) offline and (b) online PP (W2), such that the relationship is most strongly positive among individuals with the highest individualism (W1).

Finally, considering the criticism that most studies on the effects of political disagreement were conducted in Western democracies (Hopmann, 2012), we test our hypotheses and research questions using data collected in two different contexts—the United States and South Korea—as well as a combined data set, advancing the following research question:

RQ2: Are there cross-national differences between Korea and the United States?

Method

Data

The U.S. Data

The U.S. data were collected before the 2016 presidential election through a contract with a research company, YouGov. To ensure that our sample resembled the American population in terms of

demographics such as age and gender, a matching technique was used for recruitment. Wave 1 was conducted in late September 2016, during the general campaign period of the election (*N* = 1,800, response rate = 29%). A comparison of the demographics of the W1 sample with those of the 2015 American Community Survey (ACS) by the U.S. Census Bureau indicated that the W1 sample was generally reflective of the population in terms of median age (W1 = 51, ACS = 45–54 years), percentage of females (W1 = 56.82%, ACS = 51.4%), median educational attainment among those 25 years old or older (W1 = some college, ACS = some college), and median household income (W1 = US$50,000–US$59,000, ACS = US$53,889). Wave 2 was collected in late October 2016, before election day, with a retention rate of 72% (*N* = 1,293). Our final sample consisted of 1,056 responses after removing respondents who failed attention filter questions.

Korean Data

Korean data were collected before the 2017 presidential election through another contract with YouGov. Quotas involving demographics such as age, gender, household income, and regions were applied to ensure a representative pool of respondents. W1 was collected starting April 11, 2017, during the campaign period of the election (*N* = 2,040, response rate = 10.2%). The demographics of the W1 sample were comparable with those of Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS) census data. In terms of gender, the W1 sample contained slightly more female respondents (W1 = 49.8%, KOSIS = 49.95%), slightly more educated respondents (average education attainment W1 = between junior college/other college and university [bachelor's degree]), KOSIS = junior college/other college), and younger respondents (average age W1 = 34.81 years, KOSIS = 46.82 years) compared with the census data. W2 was collected starting May 3, 2017, before the election day, May 9, with a retention rate of 55.9%. Our final sample was limited to 1,099 respondents who provided valid responses in W2.

Measures

Online Political Participation

Respondents were asked how often they participated in six political activities, such as "donated money to a political party, candidate or political action committee online" and "contacted a public official or politician online." Response options ranged from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*). A composite index was calculated by averaging the six items (U.S.: W1 *M* = 1.43, *SD* = 0.77, *α* = .75; W2 *M* = 1.55, *SD* = 0.89, *α* = .75; Korea: W1 *M* = 1.21, *SD* = 0.60, *α* = .91; W2 *M* = 1.21, *SD* = 0.61, *α* = .91).

Offline Political Participation

Respondents were asked how often they participated in eight political activities, such as "attended a public hearing, town hall meeting, or city council meeting" and "volunteered for a political campaign." Response options ranged from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*). A composite index was calculated by averaging the eight items (U.S.: W1 *M* = 1.40, *SD* = 0.81, *α* = .93; W2 *M* = 1.30, *SD* = 0.70, *α* = .92; Korea: W1 *M* = 1.20, *SD* = 0.59, *α* = .95; W2 *M* = 1.15, *SD* = 0.56, *α* = .96).

Pro-Attitudinal Incidental Exposure

Respondents first read the following prompt: "Other times, people accidentally come across political opinions or news on the Internet that they did not seek out or expect to see." They were then asked how often, in the previous 14 days, they accidentally encountered the following two types of information: "positive about a political candidate or view you support" and "negative about a political candidate that you oppose." Response options ranged from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*). An index was calculated by averaging the two items (U.S.: *M* = 2.98, *SD* = 1.78, *r* = .84; Korea: *M* =3.04, *SD* = 1.61 *r* = .90).

Counter-Attitudinal Incidental Exposure

Respondents were asked, how often, in the previous 14 days, they accidentally encountered the following two types of information: "negative about a political candidate or view you support" and "positive about a political candidate that you oppose." Response options ranged from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*). An index was calculated by averaging the two items (U.S.: *M* = 2.68, *SD* = 1.68, *r* = .77; Korea: *M* = 2.96, *SD* = 1.62, *r* = .91).

Individualism

Respondents rated to what extent they agreed with the following three statements: "I rely on myself most of the time"; "I often do "my own thing"; and "I enjoy working in situations involving competition with others" (Oyserman et al., 2002). Response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A composite index was calculated by averaging the four items (U.S.: *M* = 4.94, *SD* = 1.00, *α* = .48; Korea: *M* = 4.46, *SD* = 0.98, *α* = .60).[1]

Collectivism

Respondents rated to what extent they agreed with the following four statements: "If my friend received a prize, I would feel proud"; "It is important to maintain harmony within my family"; "I would give up an activity that I enjoy very much if my family did not approve of it"; and "I hate to disagree with my family or friends" (Oyserman et al., 2002). Response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A composite index was calculated by averaging the four items (U.S.: *M* = 4.64, *SD* = 1.01, *α* = .58; Korea: *M* = 4.89, *SD* = 0.86, *α* = .52).

Control Variables

First, demographic variables, including age, sex, household income, and education, were controlled for. Also, we controlled for news and politics-related variables. To measure *news use*, respondents were asked how often they used the following five media to get information about social issues and politics. In the U.S. survey, the five media were national nightly news, local TV news, daily newspapers, cable news,

[1] Although we adopted well-established indexes of individualism and collectivism (Oyserman et al., 2002), they showed rather low reliability. This is discussed as a limitation in the Discussion section.

and online news. In the Korean survey, the five media were a news program on network TV, a news program on cable TV, the newspaper (print only), an online news site, and a news program on the radio. Response options ranged from 1 (*I have not used this channel*) to 5 (*every day in the past seven days*). A composite index was calculated by averaging the five items (U.S.: $M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.01$; Korea: $M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.85$). To measure *political interest*, respondents rated the degree to which they agreed with the statement, "I am interested in politics." Response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) (U.S.: $M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.78$; Korea: $M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.53$).

Additionally, we controlled for *pro- and counter-attitudinal selective exposure* (PASE/CASE) online. For *PASE*, respondents first read the following prompt: "Sometimes people intentionally seek out political opinions or news on the Internet." They were then asked how often they intentionally sought information in the previous 14 days that was "positive about a political candidate or view you support" and "negative about a political candidate that you oppose" (U.S.: $M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.65$, $r = .82$; Korea: $M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.50$, $r = .92$). For *CASE,* respondents were asked how often they intentionally sought information in the previous 14 days that was "negative about a political candidate or view you support" and "positive about a political candidate that you oppose" (U.S.: $M = 2.06$, $SD = 1.46$, $r = .79$; Korea: $M = 2.17$, $SD = 1.42$, $r = .91$).

Analysis

To test the theoretical model (Figure 1), we ran ordinary least squares regression analyses. W2 PP was regressed on PAIE, CAIE, individualism, and collectivism, while W1 PP was controlled for along with a range of control variables. Our findings demonstrate how our dependent variables, offline and online PP, changed over time as a function of the independent variables, thereby offering more insights than cross-sectional studies (see Weeks et al., 2017).

Results

The United States

First, we tested H1, which predicted that W1 PAIE would positively predict W2 (a) offline and (b) online PP. We did not find evidence in support of H1; W1 PAIE was not statistically significantly related to W2 PP (a) offline ($b = .01$, $SE = .02$, $p > .05$, Table 1 first column) or (b) online ($b = .01$, $SE = .02$, $p > .05$, Table 1 fourth column). We then turned to RQ1, investigating the nature of W1 CAIE's relationship with (a) offline and (b) online PP (W2). W1 CAIE's relationships with both (a) offline ($b = -.01$, $SE = .02$, $p > .05$) and (b) online PP ($b = -.01$, $SE = .02$, $p > .05$) were not statistically significant.

Table 1. Predicting Offline/Online PP With PAIE/CAIE and Individualism/Collectivism in the United States.

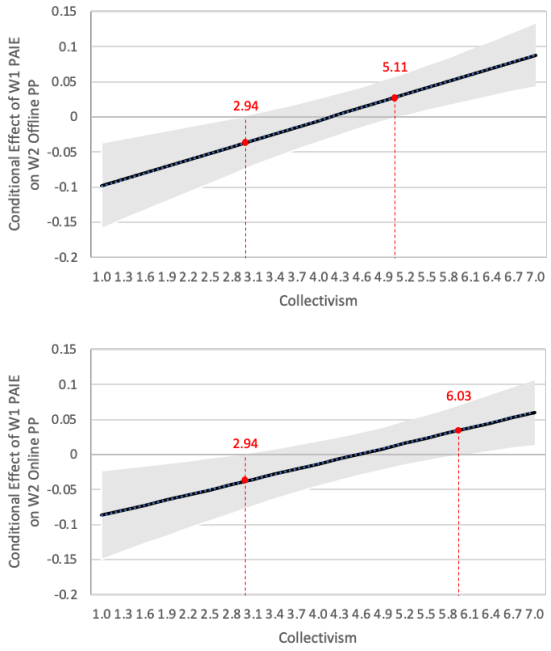
	W2 Offline PP *b*(*SE*)			W2 Online PP *b*(*SE*)		
(Constant)	.56 (.11)**	.93 (.14)**	.92 (.15)**	.48 (.12)**	.77 (.15)**	.80 (.15)**
PAIE	.01 (.02)	−.13 (.04)**	.02 (.01)	.01 (.02)	−.11 (.04)**	.00 (.02)
CAIE	−.01 (.02)	−.01 (.02)	−.17 (.05)**	−.01 (.02)	−.01 (.02)	−.16 (.05)**
Indi.	−.01 (.02)	−.01 (.01)	−.09 (.03)**	−.01 (.02)	.00 (.02)	−.08 (.03)**
Coll.	.00 (.02)	−.10 (.03)**	−.01 (.01)	.00 (.02)	−.08 (.03)**	.00 (.01)
PAIE x Coll.	-	.03 (.01)**	-	-	.02 (.01)**	-
CAIE x Indi.	-	-	.03 (.01)**	-	-	.03 (.01)**
Age	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Sex	−.02 (.03)	−.01 (.03)	−.02 (.03)	−.03 (.03)	−.02 (.03)	−.03 (.03)
Income	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Education	−.01 (.01)	−.01 (.01)	−.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)
News Use	.04 (.02)*	.04 (.02)*	.04 (.02)*	.03 (.02)#	.03 (.02)	.03 (.02)
Political Interest	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)
W1 OnPP	.-	-		.68 (.02)**	.67 (.02)**	-
W1 OffPP	.65 (.02)**	64 (.02)**	.64 (.02)**	-	-	.68 (.02)**
PASE	.00 (.02)	.00 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)
CASE	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.00 (.02)	.00 (.02)	.00 (.02)
df	(13, 1279)	(14, 1278)	(14, 1278)	(13, 1278)	(14, 1277)	(14, 1277)
R^2	.500	.507	.505	.563	.571	.571

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. # p < .10.

To further investigate the potential moderators through H2 and H3, we then added two interaction terms between W1 PAIE and W1 collectivism, and between W1 CAIE and W1 individualism to each of the models predicting offline and online PP. H2a expected that collectivism (W1) would be a moderator of the relationship between W1 PAIE and W2 offline PP, such that the relationship would be most strongly positive among individuals with the highest collectivism (W1). The interaction term between W1 PAIE and W1 collectivism appeared positive and significant ($b = .03$, $SE = .01$, $p < .01$). We probed this relationship using the Johnson-Neyman technique. As shown in Figure 2a, the conditional effects of W1 PAIE on W2 offline PP were negative for individuals with collectivism lower than 2.94; for instance, the effects for those holding collectivism of 2.80 were $b = -.04$ (.02), 95% CI [−.082, −.003]. While the effects were not significant among those holding collectivism between 2.94 and 5.11, the conditional effects of W1 PAIE on W2 offline PP became positive for individuals with collectivism higher than 5.11. For example, the effects for those holding collectivism of 5.20 were $b = .03$ (.02), 95% CI [.002, .062], and the effects increased as people held higher collectivism. Overall, we found support for H2a; PAIE appears to be a prompt for offline PP among highly collectivist individuals in the United States.

H2b expected that collectivism (W1) would be a moderator of the relationship between W1 PAIE and W2 online PP, such that the relationship would be most strongly positive among individuals with the highest collectivism (W1). The interaction term between W1 PAIE and W1 collectivism appeared positive

and significant (b = .02, SE = .01, p < .01). As shown in Figure 2b, the conditional effects of W1 PAIE on W2 online PP were negative for individuals with collectivism lower than 2.94; for instance, the effects for those holding collectivism of 2.80 were b = −.04 (.02), 95% CI [−.084, −.002]. While the effects were not significant among those holding collectivism between 2.94 and 6.03, the conditional effects of W1 PAIE on W2 online PP became positive for individuals with collectivism higher than 6.03. For example, the effects for those holding collectivism of 6.10 were b = .04 (.02), 95% CI [.001, .075], and the effects increased as people held higher collectivism. Accordingly, we found support for H2b; PAIE appears to be a prompt for online PP among highly collectivist individuals in the United States.

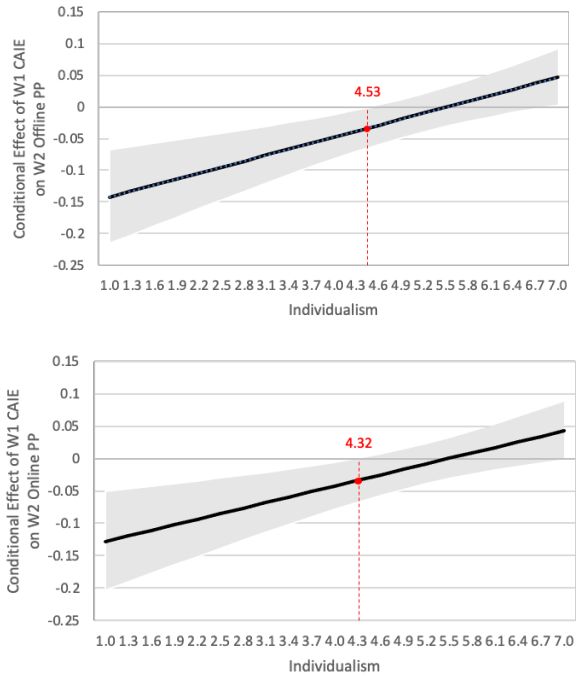


Figures 2a & 2b. Conditional effects of PAIE on offline (Top) and online (Bottom) PP as a function of collectivism in the United States.

Note. The solid line denotes point estimates of conditional effects, and the shaded region represents 95% confidence intervals. Effects are significant in regions in which confidence intervals do not cross zero.

Finally, H3a predicted that individualism (W1) would be a moderator of the relationship between W1 CAIE and W2 offline PP, such that the relationship would be most strongly positive among individuals with the highest individualism (W1). The interaction term between W1 CAIE and W1 individualism appeared positive and significant (b = .03, SE = .01, p < .01). As shown in Figure 3a, the conditional effects of W1 CAIE on W2 offline PP were negative for individuals with individualism lower than 4.53. For instance, the effects for those holding individualism of 4.30 were b = −.03 (.02), 95% CI [−.071, −.006], and the effects became more negative as people held lower individualism. However, the effects were not significant among those holding individualism higher than 4.53. Overall, CAIE appears to be a suppressor for offline PP among individuals with weak individualist values in the United States.

H3b predicted that individualism (W1) would be a moderator of the relationship between W1 CAIE and W2 online PP, such that the relationship would be most strongly positive among individuals with the highest individualism (W1). The interaction term between W1 CAIE and W1 individualism appeared positive and significant (b = .03, SE = .01, p < .01). As shown in Figure 3b, the conditional effects of W1 CAIE on W2 online PP were negative for individuals with individualism lower than 4.32. For instance, the effects for those holding individualism of 4.30 were b = −.03 (.02), 95% CI [−.067, −.0003], and the effects became more negative as people held lower individualism. However, the effects were not significant among those holding individualism higher than 4.32. Overall, CAIE appears to be a suppressor for online PP among individuals with weak individualist values in the United States.



Figures 3a & 3b. Conditional effects of CAIE on offline (Top) and online (Bottom) PP as a function of individualism in the United States.

Korea

We started by testing H1, which predicted that PAIE (W1) would positively predict (a) offline and (b) online PP (W2). We did not find support for H1: W1 PAIE was not statistically significantly associated with W2 offline (b = −.01, SE = .02, p > .05, Table 2 first column) or online PP (b = −.03, SE = .02, p > .05, Table 2 fourth column). RQ1 examined the nature of W1 CAIE's relationships with W2 (a) offline and (b) online PP. W1 CAIE were not statistically significantly related to W2 (a) offline (b = .01, SE = .02, p > .05) or (b) online PP (b = .02, SE = .02, p > .05).

Table 2. Predicting Offline/Online PP With PAIE/CAIE and Individualism/Collectivism in Korea.

	W2 Offline PP *b*(*SE*)			W2 Online PP *b*(*SE*)		
(Constant)	−.03 (.12)	.20 (.18)	.18 (.16)	.11 (.12)	.09 (.18)	.31 (.16)*
PAIE	−.01 (.02)	−.09 (.05)#	−.09 (.05)	−.03 (.02)	−.02 (.05)	−.02 (.05)
CAIE	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	−.06 (.04)	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)	−.05 (.04)
Indi.	.05 (.02)**	.05 (.02)**	.00 (.03)	.02 (.02)**	.02 (.02)**	−.03 (.03)
Coll.	.02 (.02)	−.03 (.03)	.02 (.02)	−.02 (.02)	−.01 (.03)	−.01 (.02)
PAIE x Coll.	-	.02 (.01)#	-	-	.00 (.01)	-
CAIE x Indi.	-	-	.02 (.01)#	-	-	.02 (.01)#
Age	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)#	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)#	.00 (.00)#	.00 (.00)#
Sex	.00 (.03)	.00 (.03)	.00 (.03)	.00 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.02 (.03)
Income	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Education	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.01)	−.01 (.02)	−.01 (.01)	−.01 (.01)
News Use	.04 (.02)*	.04 (.02)*	.04 (.02)*	.06 (.02)**	.06 (.02)**	.06 (.02)**
Political Interest	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)
W1 OnPP	-	-	-	.80 (.03)**	.80 (.03)**	.79 (.03)**
W1 OffPP	.62 (.02)**	.62 (.02)**	.61 (.02)**	-	-	-
PASE	.00 (.02)	.00 (.02)	.00 (.02)	−.01 (.02)	−.01 (.02)	−.01 (.02)
CASE	.02 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)
df	(13, 1128)	(14, 1127)	(14, 1127)	(13, 1128)	(14, 1127)	(14, 1127)
R^2	.457	.458	.459	.552	.552	.554

** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$. # $p < .10$.

H2 predicted that collectivism (W1) would be a moderator of the relationship between W1 PAIE and W2 (a) offline and (b) online PP, such that the relationship would be most strongly positive among individuals with the highest collectivism (W1). The interaction term between W1 PAIE and W1 collectivism was found to be positive and marginally significant in predicting (a) offline ($b = .02$, $SE = .01$, $p < .10$, Table 2 second column),[2] while appearing not to be significant in predicting (b) online PP ($b = .00$, $SE = .01$, $p > .05$, Table 2 fifth column). Thus, we did not find support for H2.

Next, H3 predicted that individualism (W1) would be a moderator of W1 CAIE's relationship with W2 (a) offline and (b) online PP, such that the relationship would be most strongly positive among individuals with the highest individualism (W1). The interaction term between W1 CAIE and W1 individualism appeared to be positive and marginally significant in predicting both (a) offline ($b = .02$, $SE = .01$, $p < .10$, Table 2 third column) and (b) online PP ($b = .02$, $SE = .01$, $p < .10$, Table 2 sixth column).[3] Accordingly, we did not find support for H3.

[2] Although not statistically significant, among highly collectivist individuals, increased PAIE in W1 was in the direction of encouraging offline PP in W2.

[3] Although not statistically significant, among highly individualist individuals, increased CAIE in W1 was in the direction of encouraging (a) offline and (b) online PP in W2.

Overall Results

To identify overall effects, we tested the model (Figure 1) using a combined set of U.S. and Korean data while additionally controlling for country, a dummy variable (0 = the U.S., 1 = Korea). First, we did not find evidence in support of H1; W1 PAIE was not statistically significantly associated with W2 PP (a) offline (b = .01, SE = .01, p > .05, Table 3 first column) or (b) online (b = −.01, SE = .01, p > .05, Table 3 fourth column). Regarding RQ1, W1 CAIE's relationships with both (a) offline (b = −.01, SE = .01, p > .05) and (b) online PP (b = .00, SE = .01, p > .05) were not statistically significant.

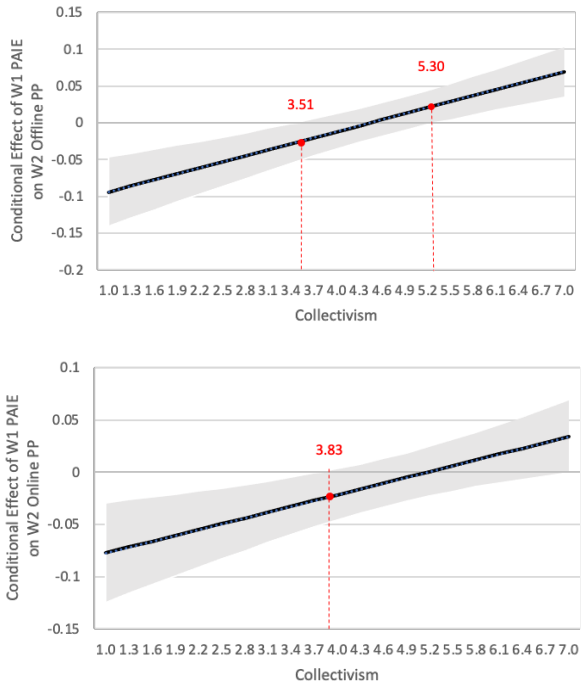
Table 3. Predicting Offline/Online PP With PAIE/CAIE and Individualism/Collectivism.

	W2 Offline PP *b*(*SE*)			W2 Online PP *b*(*SE*)		
(Constant)	.29 (.08)**	.65 (.08)**	.60 (.10)**	.27 (.08)**	.51 (.11)**	.54 (.11)**
PAIE	.01 (.01)	−.12 (.03)**	.00 (.01)**	−.01 (.01)	−.10 (.03)**	−.01 (.01)
CAIE	−.01 (.01)	−.01 (.01)	−.12 (.03)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	−.10 (.03)**
Indi.	.01 (.01)	.02 (.01)	−.06 (.02)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.02)	−.05 (.02)**
Coll.	.00 (.01)	−.08 (.02)**	.00 (.01)**	−.01 (.01)	−.06 (.01)**	.00 (.01)
PAIE x Coll.	-	.03 (.01)**	-	-	.02 (.01)**	-
CAIE x Indi.	-	-	.02 (.01)**	-	-	.02 (.01)**
Age	.00 (.00)#	.00 (.00)*	.00 (.00)*	.00 (.00)#	.00 (.00)#	.00 (.00)#
Sex	−.01 (.02)	−.01 (.02)	−.01 (.02)	−.01 (.02)	.00 (.02)	−.01 (.02)
Income	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Education	−.01 (.01)	−.01 (.01)	−.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)
News Use	.04 (.01)**	.04 (.01)**	.04 (.01)**	.04 (.01)**	.04 (.01)**	.04 (.01)**
Political Interest	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)
W1 OnPP	-	-	-	.71 (.02)**	.70 (.02)**	.70 (.02)**
W1 OffPP	.64 (.02)**	.63 (.02)**	.63 (.02)**	-	-	-
PASE	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
CASE	.02 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Country	.05 (.03)	.04 (.01)	.04 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.01 (.03)
df	(14, 2420)	(15, 2419)	(15, 2419)	(14, 2419)	(15, 2418)	(15, 2418)
R^2	.487	.492	.491	.567	.569	.569

** p < .01. * p < .05. # p < .10.

Next, the interaction term between W1 PAIE and W1 collectivism appeared positive and significant in predicting (a) offline (b = .03, SE = .01, p < .01, Table 3 second column) and (b) online PP (b = .02, SE = .01, p < .01, Table 3 fifth column, H2). Using the Johnson-Neyman technique (Figure 4a), we first found that the conditional effects of W1 PAIE on W2 offline PP were negative for individuals with collectivism lower

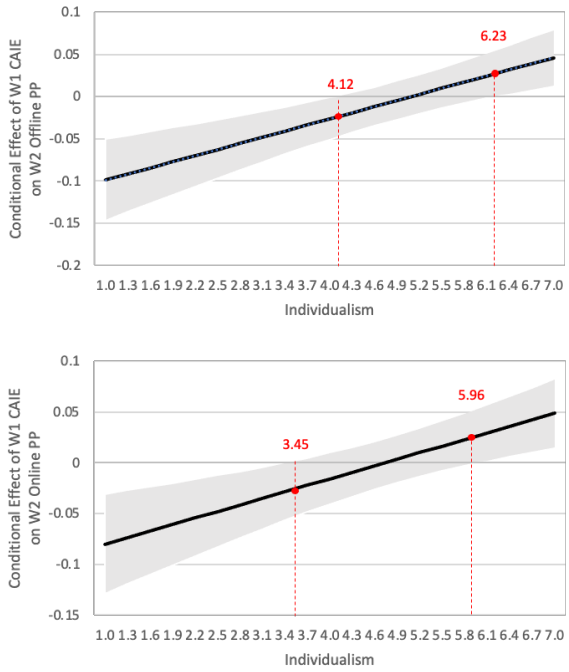
than 3.51. While the effects were not significant among those holding collectivism between 3.51 and 5.30, the conditional effects of W1 PAIE on W2 offline PP became positive for individuals with collectivism of 5.30, and the effects increased as people held higher collectivism. Next, the interaction term between W1 PAIE and W1 collectivism appeared positive and significant in predicting online PP (b = .02, SE = .01, p < .01). As shown in Figure 4b, the conditional effects of W1 PAIE on W2 online PP was negative for individuals with collectivism lower than 3.83. However, the effects were not significant among those holding collectivism higher than 3.83. Overall, PAIE appears to be a suppressor for both offline and online PP among people in the United States and Korea who hold weak collectivist values, while it could serve as a catalyst for offline PP among highly collectivist individuals.



Figures 4a & 4b. Conditional effects of PAIE on offline (Top) and online (Bottom) PP as a function of collectivism.

Finally, the interaction term between W1 CAIE and W1 individualism appeared positive and significant in predicting both (a) offline (b = .02, SE = .01, p < .01, Table 3 third column) and (b) online PP (b = .02, SE = .01, p < .01, Table 3 sixth column, H3). First, the conditional effects of W1 CAIE on W2 offline PP was negative for individuals with individualism lower than 4.12 (Figure 5a). The effects became more negative as people held lower individualism. While the effects were not significant among those holding individualism between 4.12 and 6.23, the conditional effects of W1 CAIE on W2 offline PP became positive for individuals with individualism of 6.23, and the effects increased as people held higher individualism. Second, the conditional effects of W1 CAIE on W2 online PP were negative in predicting online PP for individuals with individualism lower than 3.45 (Figure 5b), and the effects became more negative as people

held lower individualism. While the effects were not significant among those holding individualism between 3.40 and 5.96, the conditional effects of W1 CAIE on W2 online PP became positive for individuals with individualism of 5.96, and the effects increased as people held higher individualism. Overall, CAIE could suppress both offline and online PP among people in the United States and Korea who hold weak individualist values, while it could prompt offline and online PP among highly individualist individuals.



Figures 5a & 5b. Conditional effects of CAIE on offline (Top) and online (Bottom) PP as a function of individualism.

Cross-National Comparison

RQ2 examines cross-national differences between Korea and the United States. In both countries, neither PAIE nor CAIE in W1 had a direct relationship with (a) offline or (b) online PP in W2 (H1, RQ1). When it comes to the potential moderators, first, the interaction between W1 PAIE and W1 collectivism appeared positive and significant in predicting both (a) offline and (b) online PP only in the United States (H2). In Korea, the interaction term was positive and only marginally significant in predicting (a) offline PP, but not significant in predicting (b) online PP. Overall, in the United States, PAIE appears to be a catalyst for offline and online PP among highly collectivist individuals, while it can be a suppressor for PP among Americans with weak collectivist values.

Second, in predicting (a) offline and (b) online PP, the interaction between W1 CAIE and W1 individualism appeared positive and significant in the United States, although it was positive and only marginally significant in Korea (H3). In the United States, CAIE appears to be a suppressor for offline and

online PP among individuals with weak individualist values, while in Korea, CAIE may have the potential to be a catalyst for offline and online PP among highly individualist individuals.[4]

Discussion

The current study investigates whether and under which conditions incidental exposure facilitates PP online. By analyzing two panel survey data sets collected in the United States and South Korea before the presidential elections, this study advances a dual theoretical model in which two types of incidental exposure (i.e., pro- and counter-attitudinal incidental exposure) and individuals' cultural worldviews of themselves and their collectives (i.e., individualism and collectivism) work in concert, respectively, to predict PP in the offline and online settings. We largely find support for the dual theoretical model: Different types of incidental exposure online can prompt or suppress PP among people holding dissimilar cultural worldviews, notably in the United States. Specifically, while PAIE may be a catalyst for PP among highly collectivist individuals, it can be a suppressor for PP among those who hold weak collectivist values. CAIE appears to hinder PP among people who hold weak individualist values.

First, in terms of incidental exposure types, neither PAIE nor CAIE had a significant direct relationship with offline or online PP. Incidental exposure to like-minded information alone may not be sufficient to encourage PP, although prior studies have found that selective exposure to such information tends to facilitate political engagement (Dilliplane, 2011; Stroud, 2011). The same, like-minded information may be processed differently depending on how individuals are exposed to it. When people are incidentally exposed to pro-attitudinal information online, they may less thoroughly or just passively process it, especially if they notice that they are already familiar with this view (cf. Bode, 2016). They likely went online for some other purpose than to receive political information, so they might quickly go back to the activity they were initially doing. In this case, this quick, passive processing of pro-attitudinal information individuals come across incidentally is unlikely to lead to further political action. This speculation, however, would merit further empirical investigation of whether and how the same pro-attitudinal information is processed differently depending on the nature of the encounter: incidental exposure or selective seeking.

In addition, CAIE alone did not have a significant, direct relationship with offline or online PP. In fact, this finding is in line with a meta-analysis of the effects of interpersonal cross-cutting exposure and PP (Matthes et al, 2019). Given that there are potential mechanisms for both positive and negative relationships between cross-cutting exposure and PP (e.g., Mutz, 2006), the suggested mechanisms may have worked simultaneously to cancel one another out. Nevertheless, scholars have called for the need to consider moderator variables for the relationship between exposure to attitude-challenging information and participatory behaviors (Matthes et al., 2019).

[4] We also tested three-way interaction effects to check if the interaction effects proposed in H2 and H3 significantly vary between the United States and Korea. However, the three-way interaction effects were not statistically significant in predicting offline PP (H1a: b = .02, SE = 0.01, p > .10; H2a: b = .02, SE = 0.01, p > .10) and online PP (H1b: b = .02, SE = 0.01, p > .10; H2b: b = .01, SE = 0.01, p > .10).

We demonstrate the importance of cultural worldviews as potential moderators (Eveland et al., 2005). Cultural worldviews of individuals themselves and their social units such as individualism and collectivism may influence how individuals process and react to different types of information (Kastenmüller et al., 2010; Oyserman et al., 2002; Triandis, 1995), which will likely be relevant to their subsequent political behaviors. Our findings suggest that for highly collectivist individuals in the United States, PAIE appears to be a prompt for offline and online PP, while it can hinder PP among Americans who hold weak collectivist values. Among Americans who hold weak individualist values, CAIE appears to be a suppressor, whereas it has the potential to be a catalyst for Koreans who are highly collectivist.

Our cross-national findings on such cultural factors as individualism and collectivism contribute to the larger literature on the effects of political disagreement, considering that most prior studies were conducted in Western democracies (Hopmann, 2012). Notably, statistically significant interaction terms were found between individualism and CAIE as well as between collectivism and PAIE mostly in the United States, rather than in Korea. Significant findings in the United States may make sense considering that the United States is widely known as an individualist country in which oneself is considered unique and distinct from other people, while Korea tends to be a collectivist country (Kitayama et al., 1997) and is generally homogeneous, for example, in terms of race and language. In fact, the standard deviation of collectivism in the United States (SD = 1.01) was larger than that in Korea (SD = 0.86). It is also worth noting that when it comes to the average levels of individualism/collectivism in the United States and Korea, the patterns were as expected. Independent samples t-test results suggest that collectivism was higher among Koreans (M = 4.89) than among Americans (M = 4.64), $t = -8.16$, $p < .01$. Individualism was higher among Americans (M = 4.94, SD = 1.00) than among Koreans (M = 4.46, SD = 0.98), t = 15.11, $p < .01$. Interestingly, the biggest difference was observed in terms of vertical collectivism between Korea (M = 4.40, SD = 1.12) and the United States (M = 3.79, SD = 1.34). However, the average horizontal collectivism value in the United States (M = 5.49, SD = 1.14) was no different from that in Korea (M = 5.38, SD = 1.00), if not higher. Future research may consider different types of individualism and collectivism: horizontal (i.e., perceiving all members of a collective are equal) and vertical (i.e., accepting inequalities within a social unit; Triandis, 1995).

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, we relied on survey data, and self-reported measures of media use may not be the most accurate (Prior, 2009), our efforts to avoid single items for the main variables notwithstanding. Although individualism and collectivism measures were established ones that derived from classic studies of the field (e.g., Oyserman et al., 2002), their reliability levels could be higher. Still, for this study, self-reports were useful given that one of the main variables included cultural worldviews. It is encouraged that the findings be corroborated with future experimental studies, which can further help clarify the causal relationships among types of incidental exposure, individualism/collectivism, and PP, and address potential issues with confounders. Second, care should be taken when interpreting our findings because of the rather small effect sizes. Still, it is worth noting that largely consistent patterns were found in Korea and the United States. Third, although this cross-national study offers more insights than studies analyzing only one country's case, notably those of Western democracies, Korea and the United States are similar in a few ways in terms of representative democracy and widespread use of information technology. It would be useful to put to test the theoretical model in diverse countries, including other collectivist and individualist countries, and find out whether significant

effects are found in individualist, not collectivist, countries, as in the current study. Also, it would be worthwhile to test the model at the country level, considering that individualism-collectivism can be viewed as a foundational cross-cultural difference rather than individual differences.

With the advent of high-speed Internet and widespread use of mobile devices, people are increasingly online. In fact, 8 in 10 American adults (Perrin & Kumar, 2019) and more than 95% of Koreans aged 3 years or older go online on a daily basis (Korean Internet & Security Agency, 2019). When online, individuals may incidentally come across news and political information. Acknowledging the prevalence and mobilizing potentials of incidental exposure, this cross-national study offers a comprehensive understanding of the conditions under which incidental exposure facilitates PP. The types of incidental exposure and individuals' cultural worldviews of themselves and their collectives jointly explain how politically active they become.

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