

## **A New Measure for the Tendency to Select Ideologically Congruent Political Information: Scale Development and Validation**

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Selective exposure is a popular research construct, but the strategies used to operationalize ideologically congruent exposure in contemporary correlational research are problematic. This article offers a novel approach, asking people directly about their tendency to seek information that is ideologically congruent with their opinions. A new measure for the tendency toward congruent selective exposure is proposed and was tested on three different data sets. In all three studies, confirmatory factor analysis revealed a two-factor model, with one factor representing the tendency to select congruent information and the other representing the tendency to avoid incongruent information.

*Keywords: selective exposure, selective avoidance, confirmation bias*

The term *selective exposure* (SE) refers to the fact that “people tend to see and hear communications that are favorable or congenial to their predispositions” (Berelson & Steiner, 1964, p. 529; for similar definitions, see Childs, 1965; Klapper, 1960; Lipset, Lazarsfeld, Barton, & Lintz, 1954). Dating back to the seminal Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948) study, the notion of SE is probably as old as communication research itself, and the tendency of individuals to expose themselves to like-minded communications has been documented in a variety of contexts (for a meta-analysis, see D’Alessio & Allen, 2007). SE is said to be “one of the most widely accepted principles in sociology and social psychology” and “a basic fact in the thinking of many social scientists about communication effects” (Sears & Freedman, 1967, p. 194).

Despite its popularity, SE has also received severe criticism (Sears & Freedman, 1967). However, changes in the media landscape in the past two decades, most importantly, the multiplicity of online

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media channels and cable television and the reemergence of partisan television and online outlets as popular sources of political information for large parts of the electorate, have restored the relevance of the concept of SE to communication scholars (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). Indeed, in the past decade, communication research has seen a major “comeback” of empirical research and conceptual work on SE. The improvements in methods and data quality have enabled scholars to examine the dynamics of SE over the course of time (Stroud, 2008), demonstrate selectivity using behavioral measures (Iyengar, Hahn, Krosnick, & Walker, 2008), and develop a more nuanced understanding of different types of SE, differentiating SE from selective avoidance (Garrett, 2009b). Recent studies also demonstrate that social identity processes explain SE (Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2010), not just individual factors as previously demonstrated (e.g., homophily discussed by Wheelless, 1974).

It would not be exaggerating, then, to say that the notion of SE had an immense influence on the social sciences in the 1950s and 1960s (Festinger, 1957; Hovland, 1959), and that this concept is reemerging as a central line of inquiry about the effects and consumption of news in the contemporary media landscape. Nevertheless, despite the centrality of SE for political communication research, previous studies were severely limited by a lack of standard measures operationalizing the extent to which different people tend to prefer ideologically congruent political information. In this article, I propose a novel strategy for measuring the preference for ideologically congruent SE, present a new measurement tool, and test it in three different contexts. The article also provides some preliminary evidence about the tool’s psychometric qualities and convergent, discriminant, and construct validities.

### **Current Approaches to Measuring SE and Their Limitations**

The extant literature on SE can be divided into laboratory studies offering participants a choice between concordant and discordant information (Iyengar et al., 2008; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2012) and survey studies that typically ask respondents to report on their habitual exposure to various ideologically slanted and mainstream media channels (Stroud, 2008). Of the four strategies employed to measure SE in the literature reviewed by Clay, Barber, and Shook (2013), two were survey-based strategies and the other two were observational. The two survey-based strategies included retrospective reports of whether people had attended to specific types of information in the past and their behavioral intentions to attend to specific types of information in the future; the three studies cited as examples for this approach (e.g., Garrett, 2009a) presented participants with synopses of articles and asked them about their preference for and intention to read the full articles. Beyond the studies reviewed by Clay et al., the self-report retrospective strategy seems to be the most widely used in the extant research on SE, in particular when it comes to survey research (e.g., Daniller, Silver, & Moehler, 2013; Dvir-Gvirsman, 2014; Garrett et al., 2014; J. Kim, 2015; Lawrence, Sides, & Farrell, 2010; Tsfati, Stroud, & Chotiner, 2014).

Although observational approaches have substantial face validity, because the experiments offer the participants a choice between ideologically slanted information sources and measure their subsequent choice, the survey studies using retrospective strategies are limited in several respects in addition to the limitations reviewed by Clay et al. (2013, pp. 151–152; i.e., possible confounding with selective attention or selective retention and possible biases due to self-presentation; see also Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015, Chapter 3). First, such studies typically assume ideological consonance within a given media outlet. For

example, to define which newspapers should be operationalized as conservative and which as liberal, Stroud (2010, pp. 563–566) relied on political endorsements. However, although these publications may have endorsed Bush or Kerry (in 2004), many of them contained reports and op-eds tilted toward the other side of the political spectrum. Stroud defined exposure to Fox News as conservative exposure and exposure to CNN or MSNBC as liberal exposure. Although research generally assumes left-wing or right-wing “biases” in CNN or Fox News, respectively, scholars have also noted that not all Fox News reports and hosts display an overtly right-wing slant in their coverage. Clearly, in the same outlets, some hosts are more ideological than others and some sections of print outlets are more biased (e.g., the op-ed page of *The Wall Street Journal*; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). At times, the outlets that media scholars characterize as right wing or left wing even feature the voices of the opposing political camps. In these cases, it is impossible to be certain that the respondents do not in fact scan these outlets and focus on the more neutral parts or even intentionally tune in to some of the opposing information to balance the outlets’ overall political leanings. In summary, the common measurement strategy in the correlational studies of SE assumes that newspapers endorsing liberal candidates will be biased in their overall political coverage and that ideologically biased outlets are univocal in their slanted presentation of politics. This is probably a fair assumption, but it has its problems.

Second, the conventional retrospective approach to tapping SE in correlational studies assumes that any ideological match between the audience and the media is a result of “selection” or “preference.” However, Sears and Freedman (1967) noted long ago that much of the isomorphism between the audience and the media might not be the result of deliberate selection. Although the increased number of different media outlets and with it the increased ideological options on the menu reduce the possibility of “de facto selectivity,” some of our exposure is still influenced by geographic areas, spousal selection, and simple habits. If readers are liberal and read *The New York Times*, it is not necessarily because they prefer ideologically consonant information. It may be because of the preference of their roommates or partners or because they like the Metro section of the newspaper. In some media markets, geography may explain the match between the readers and the newspapers they choose.

Third, the conventional retrospective measurement strategy of SE in correlational studies is based on asking respondents to report the frequency of their exposure to a variety of ideological outlets such as Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC, as well as more mainstream sources. This approach assumes that audiences are able to recall and report their media diet in great detail and with some degree of accuracy. However, scholars have long ago noted that this approach is prone to measurement error because it is very sensitive to memory decay, social desirability, and additional biases (Price & Zaller, 1993; see also Prior, 2009).

Finally, although the conventional approach used by Stroud (2008) and others is well suited to the American context, it may be less suitable in other contexts. In contrast to the mass media system in which the mainstream media contained some liberal-leaning hosts or writers and some conservatives, the development of popular ideologically slanted television outlets in the United States made it easier to ask about the frequency of exposure to a relatively short list of most-watched sources. In other contexts in which the ideological leanings of news outlets are often less clear and relatively little to no academic

research has documented partisan tendencies across outlets, asking about exposure to various outlets may be less useful as a strategy for measuring ideological SE.

### **A Novel Strategy to Measure Ideologically Consistent News Exposure**

In this article, I propose a new strategy for measuring partisan SE. Instead of asking people about the frequency of their exposure to various outlets, determining the ideological leanings of those outlets, and juxtaposing this information with the respondents' reported political ideology, why not simply ask people directly whether they try to watch news sources that accord with their opinions? This approach assumes, first, that people vary in their tendency to seek and select ideologically concordant news sources, and that the underlying driving force behind this tendency is their directional motivations (as opposed to accuracy motivations). This assumption stems first and foremost from the definition of SE as a "tendency" (Clay et al., 2013, p. 147). Political psychologists often assume that people differ in the motivations underlying their processing of political information (see Kunda, 1990; Nir, 2011), with the main motivations being accuracy motivations (motivations aimed at reaching correct beliefs) and directional motivations (motivations aimed at reaching the conclusion that suits one's political preference and rejecting information that threatens the self). This view treats the motivation to seek reinforcing information (and related motivations) as a trait-like individual difference (Lodge & Taber, 2000). Whereas the retrospective approach for the measurement of SE focuses on behavior, the current approach taps this individual difference and focuses on the tendency to seek congruent political information in the news media. Whether this tendency to select congruent information would translate to behavior depends on contextual factors, such as the availability of congruent outlets on one's media menu, as well as specific contextual conditions such as anger- or threat-inducing stimuli (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). Beyond the fact that measuring the actual behavior may be impossible at times, and beyond the genuine interest that some scholars may have in the underlying tendency that guides behavior, the proposed approach may be particularly advantageous when the use of alternative strategies is not feasible.

Second, the proposed approach assumes that people are able to report their habitual tendency to seek concordant, or to avoid discordant, information. This does not contradict the fact that media selection behaviors are probably not deliberate (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015, Chapters 3 & 4). Although each separate media selection decision is spontaneous and unconscious, those people who are routinely driven by directional motivations to consume congruent materials may become aware of their long-term engagement with, interest in, and enjoyment from congruent information, and hence may be capable of reporting it. This is in accord with psychological self-perception theory that argues that people are capable of deducing their tendencies, attitudes, and other internal states from observing their own behavior (Bem, 1972). If a smoker is capable of inferring that s/he enjoys smoking after watching him- or herself chain-smoking, or if someone who knows s/he drinks a lot of soda would tell others that s/he is an addict, a frequent-conservative-Fox-News-watcher or a frequent-liberal-MSNBC-follower is aware that s/he tends to watch congruent news and is capable of reporting this.

Third, although exposing ourselves only to congruent information may be socially undesirable, the current approach is not inferior in this respect compared with other approaches to measuring media exposure (or congruent exposure). This is the case first and foremost because the tendency to seek

congruent materials could be framed in a socially desirable and positive manner as the tendency to select the presumably more accurate and valid information (and in fact this informational utility is part of the basis for SE; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015, Chapter 6). Second, even if the possibility of framing SE positively does not help in reducing social desirability, the proposed approach is not inferior, compared with the retrospective approach, as the reporting attending to the different media outlets (invoked in the question wordings used in the retrospective approach) may itself carry positive or negative valence in the eyes of different respondents. Third, it should be noted that social desirability in this case is expected to bias reports on SE downward, whereas typically self-reports of congruent exposure are overtly inflated (e.g., Prior, 2013). Therefore, the current approach may help cancel the tendency to overreport news exposure.

Fourth, when it comes to ideological media, the proposed approach is superior to the retrospective approach in that it does not relate to specific news channels. Prior (2013) demonstrated that people tend to overreport their exposure to ideological news media. For example, in his study, whereas the rate of self-reported "regular" Fox News Network viewers varied between 22% and 24% of the survey respondents, Nielsen data for the same period suggested that only 6% to 8% of Americans watched at least 60 minutes of the Fox News Network per week (Prior, 2013, p. 115). Prior further implies (e.g., p. 117) that it may be the more politically involved and ideologically committed who overreport their exposure to partisan outlets, and one possible reason for this overreporting is the possibility that some respondents may express their strong ideology through the report of their news habits.

In summary, the proposed approach assumes that the tendency to follow congruent sources is an individual difference, and (following self-perception theory) that people would be willing and able to report about the extent to which they seek sources that accord with their views. Whereas the retrospective approach focuses on SE behavior, the current one treats it as a disposition.

Contemporary approaches to measurement validity (Adcock & Collier, 2001) prefer the term *validation*, which involves a set of working hypotheses, each providing one type of evidence to create a general process of assessment. Convergent validation requires an empirical association between the scores of two alternative indicators of a given concept. In our context, we can hypothesize that the novel measurement of SE will yield results that correlate with those obtained by the older measurement strategies. On the other hand, discriminant validity requires weaker associations between the measures and scores obtained from indicators of related but distinct concepts. In our context, it is important to demonstrate that the correlation between the novel SE measure and indicators of distinct concepts such as political extremism and trust in mainstream media will be weak. Construct validation requires that the novel measures replicate previous findings and provide evidence supporting a "reasonably well-established" hypothesis from the extant literature. Given that research on SE has established an association between partisan SE and political polarization, it was expected that the novel SE measure would be correlated with political polarization.

The measurement tool was tested in three studies conducted in Israel. Studies 1 and 2 were pilot studies conducted on opt-in convenience samples. The third study used the proposed scale on a representative sample of the Jewish Israeli population.

## Study 1

### Sample

Participation in the study was solicited using banner ads published in December 2011 in four online Israeli news outlets: the right-leaning Rotter.net and *Channel 7 News*, the left-leaning Haaretz.com website, and the mainstream news outlet YNET.com (affiliated with Israel's large circulation daily newspaper, *Yedioth Ahronot*). The ads, published online on these websites, invited readers to express their opinion regarding the Israeli news media, using slogans such as "The voice of the capitalists?," "Always takes the side of the weak?," and "What do you have to say about the Israeli media?" Using this strategy, we recruited 2,071 respondents (555 from Rotter.net, 423 from Haaretz.com, 627 from *Channel 7 News*, and 466 from YNET.com). To increase the number of left-wing respondents, we also posted invitations and links to the survey on more overtly left-wing websites (Yesh Gvul, Hagada Ha Smalit, Haoketz, Ha Haverim Shel George, and Magazine Hakibush). Forty-six additional respondents were recruited this way. Full details of the resulting sample, which contained more men (83.4%), Israeli-born individuals (86.9%), Jews (99.6%), religious or ultra-Orthodox Jews (34.5%), and right-wing supporters (68.8%) than the general Israeli population, have been reported by Tsfaty and Chotiner (2015).

### Measurement

**Tendency Toward Congruent Selective Exposure (TECSE) scale.** The newly proposed measure contains five indicators. The items in the TECSE include (1) "I try to avoid exposure to media outlets expressing irritating opinions"; (2) "I try to expose myself only to media outlets and news messages that are in line with my own attitudes"; (3) "I try to expose myself to all the opinions heard in the media equally" (reverse coded); (4) "If I need to select between two op-ed pieces, I'll choose the one that is closer to my opinions"; and (5) "It is important for me to read not just articles supporting my views, but also articles opposing my views" (reverse coded). Reliability for these items was Cronbach's  $\alpha = .76$  ( $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ).

**SE.** Two additional alternative measures of ideological SE were available for the current study. First, we used information about the website from which each respondent was recruited to create an indicator of SE, henceforth called *SE at recruitment*. This served as an indicator of what Clay et al. (2013) termed *observed behavior*. Right-wing respondents recruited on right-wing websites were initially coded +1 (48.4%). Left-wing respondents recruited from left-wing-leaning outlets were initially coded -1 (12.8%). Other respondents (38.8%, recruited while visiting either an incongruent ideological channel or the mainstream YNET.com) were coded 0. Given that we were interested in SE in general (not in right- or left-wing SE), we used the absolute value of this variable, resulting in a variable coded 1 (64.2%) for respondents recruited on ideologically congruent online outlets and 0 for all other respondents.

The biggest advantage of this measure is that it is based on a real-world indicator that does not depend on the accuracy of recall or the predictive validity of intentions (Clay et al., 2013). However, the extent to which respondents regularly visit the ideological websites from which they were recruited is unknown. The possibility of "de facto selectivity" (Sears & Freedman, 1967) also exists, as right-wing respondents may have visited *Channel 7 News* not because of its right-wing political leaning, but rather

because of its in-depth coverage of religious affairs, and leftists may have visited Haaretz.com not because of its dovish political leaning, but rather because of its quality coverage of economic issues.

Thus, our second measure of SE used the more conventional measurement strategy that taps habitual, self-reported exposure to a series of outlets whose ideological leanings were established independently by the researcher. This is in line with what Clay et al. (2013) termed the *retrospective reports* approach. Respondents were asked to what extent they were exposed to a list of right-wing and left-wing outlets. Response categories varied between 0 (*not exposed at all*) and 5 (*exposed to regularly*). In the next phase, we created two separate measures of ideologically congruent right-wing and left-wing exposure by averaging the 15 items measuring right-wing exposure (Cronbach's alpha = .79,  $M = 2.05$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) and the 13 items measuring left-wing exposure (Cronbach's alpha = .85,  $M = 2.01$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ). Respondents reporting incongruent exposure were set to 0 on the appropriate scales. In other words, a right-wing respondent reporting exposure to left-wing outlets received a score of 0 on the measure of selective left-wing exposure. Next, we combined both left-wing and right-wing media exposure scales to create a single directional ideological media exposure measure, varying between -5 for *regular ideologically congruent exposure to left-wing outlets* and +5 for *regular ideologically congruent exposure to right-wing outlets*, with 0 for *no ideologically congruent exposure to ideological outlets* ( $M = 1.04$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ). In the last stage, we took the absolute value of the directional measure to create a scale for ideologically congruent exposure to either left-wing or right-wing channels, varying between 0 (*no exposure*) and 5 (*regular exposure to congruent outlets*;  $M = 1.61$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ).

Measures of polarization, political ideology, and trust in media have been described by Tsfati and Chotiner (2015).

**Table 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Models for Tendency to Select Ideologically Congruent Information, Study 1.**

Measure	Model 1: Single factor	Model 2: Two factors
NFI	.94	.95
RFI	.80	.82
IFI	.94	.95
TLI	.81	.82
CFI	.94	.95
RMSEA	.13	.12
AIC	200.17	159.94

*Note.* NFI = normed fit index; RFI = relative fit index; IFI = incremental fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; AIC = Akaike information criterion.

### Results

Two confirmatory factor analysis models were tested using AMOS: a single-factor model and a two-factor model, with Items 1 and 2 loading separately (as a Selective Avoidance factor) from Items 3, 4, and 5 (SE). This latter model specified a correlation between the two latent factors. Fit statistics for both models are presented in Table 1. In general, both models had a reasonably good fit to the data. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) in both cases was significantly larger than the .05 criterion ( $p < .001$ ). Although the fit indices in the two models were in the same range, Model 2, the two-factor model, performed better on all indices (RMSEA and Akaike information criterion should be as low as possible).<sup>3</sup> Coefficients for this model are presented in Table 2. The correlation between the SE and Selective Avoidance factors was rather strong ( $r = .59, p < .001$ ).

**Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results for a Two-Factor Model, Study 1.**

Factor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Selective Avoidance → (1) I try to avoid exposure to media outlets expressing irritating opinions	0.99	0.04
Selective Avoidance → (2) I try to expose myself only to media outlets and news messages that are in line with my own attitudes	1.00	
Selective Exposure → (3) I try to expose myself to all the opinions heard in the media equally (reverse coded)	1.00	
Selective Exposure → (4) If I need to select between two op-ed pieces, I'll choose the one that is closer to my opinions	1.08	0.06
Selective Exposure → (5) It is important for me to read not just articles supporting my views, but also articles opposing my views (reverse coded)	0.98	0.05

*Note.* All coefficients are significant at the  $p < .001$  level. The coefficients for Items 2 and 3 were set to 1.00 to scale the factors.

For measurement validity, Table 3 presents bivariate Pearson correlations between the two TECSE subscales and the total scale (composed of all five items) with an array of related variables. As explained above, we expected a significant correlation between the new measure and alternative indicators of SE. The correlations between both subscales of SE and selective avoidance and the measures based on recruitment and frequency of self-reported exposure were indeed significant, but rather weak (for SE,  $r = .20$  in both cases; for selective avoidance,  $r = .22$  for recruitment and  $r = .20$  for frequency). In particular, the correlations were weak when comparing them with the correlation between the two other alternative SE measures: the recruitment-based and the retrospective measures ( $r = .65$ ).

<sup>3</sup> Note that a comparison based on the chi-square test was not possible given that the models were not nested.

**Table 3. Examining Convergent/Discriminant and Construct Validity, Pearson Correlations, Study 1.**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Selective exposure (SE)	1.00	.59	.91	.20	.20	-.14	.26	.23
2. Selective avoidance		1.00	.87	.20	.22	-.11	.22	.24
3. Total scale			1.00	.22	.24	-.14	.27	.26
4. SE (frequency of exposure to a list of congruent ideological sources)				1.00	.65	-.22	.53	.38
5. SE (according to recruitment)					1.00	-.14	.41	.32
6. Trust in media						1.00	-.23	-.16
7. Political extremity							1.00	.52
8. Political polarization								1.00

*Note.* All correlations were significant at the  $p < .001$  level; the smallest  $n = 2,051$ . The same patterns of results (in terms of the signs of the coefficient, their magnitude, and significance) were obtained when running partial correlations controlling for demographics and ideology.

To test for discriminant validity, we correlated the TECSE subscales with political extremism and trust in media. In both cases, the correlations were weak, but it is noteworthy that in the case of extremism (.26 in the case of SE, .22 in the case of selective avoidance), the correlations were in fact higher than the correlations testing for other indicators of SE. In terms of discriminant validity (requiring low correlations), the SE subscale did a better job compared with the recruitment-based measure and the retrospective measure: In particular, the associations between the alternative SE measures and extremism were higher ( $r = .53$  for the frequency of exposure measure and  $r = .41$  for the recruitment-based measure). Although these were higher correlations, they still did not pose a threat to discriminant validity.

Construct validity was examined by testing the already well-documented association between SE and polarization using the new TECSE scales. A significant correlation emerged for both subscales ( $r = .23$  for SE,  $r = .24$  for selective avoidance). In other words, the new scales replicated existing findings about the association between SE and polarization.

### **Discussion**

In this study, convergent validation was tested by comparing the current approach (our TECSE scale) with the retrospective reports approach (Clay et al., 2013), on the one hand, and with an observed behavior indicator, on the other.

The first noteworthy finding is that, contrary to expectations, our proposed TECSE scale seemed to be composed of two dimensions—one focusing on ideologically congruent SE and the other on selective avoidance of incongruent materials. Although the proposed scale was supposed to be unidimensional with the separate items loading together on a single factor, the model with two dimensions, one for SE and the

other for selective avoidance, had a better fit to the data. This result is in line with findings reported by Garrett (2009b) demonstrating that SE does not necessarily involve the avoidance of politically incongruent messages. In addition, although the fit indices were satisfactory, the model was far from fitting the data perfectly.

Second, although the results for the tests of divergent and construct validity were satisfactory (the correlations between the SE subscale and extremism and trust in media were weak to moderate), the correlation between the scale and other indicators of SE was only modest in size. One possibility is that the constructs simply measure different phenomena. Reading material that is consistent with one's ideological stance is possible even when relying on mainstream media. This possibility may explain the rather weak correlation between a measure based on preferences for specific channels and the proposed strategy based on a general preference for congruent materials regardless of their origin. Therefore, demonstrating that when faced with a choice, those ranking high on the proposed scale would also tend to select congruent information would strengthen the validity of the scale. This was the aim of Study 2.

A major caveat of Study's 1 data is the unusual composition of the sample with its overrepresentation of men, right-wing supporters, and Orthodox Jews. This distribution stemmed from the sampling technique, and it might have affected the response patterns. Therefore, replicating the results of Study 1 among a diverse population sample was one of the main motivations for Study 3. Another limitation is that Study 1 compared our measure with retrospective and observed measures only (in the language suggested by Clay et al., 2013) and not with what Clay et al. (2013) termed an indicator of *behavioral intentions*. This limitation was addressed in Study 2.

## **Study 2**

The second study was meant to demonstrate that when faced with a choice between two ideologically opposed articles, people selecting the article that is congruent with their own views would rank higher on TECSE than those selecting the incongruent article. This approach in essence compared our proposed TECSE scale with a behavioral intentions indicator (Clay et al., 2013). In addition, the current study provides another test for the scale's bidimensional factor structure.

## **Sample**

Study 2's participants ( $N = 98$ ) were recruited using posts on online blogs and forums that provide science-related information (<http://www.hayadan.org.il/> and <http://www.safeksavir.co.il/>). The posts invited readers to participate in a study about news consumption. Of the participants, 62.2% were men, 85.7% were Jewish (3.1% were Christian; the rest did not report their religion), 75.5% were secular (the rest were traditional or religious), and 77.6% were born in Israel. The average age was 35.56 years ( $SD = 13.28$ ).

The survey included four parts, presented in a random order. In the first part, the respondents were requested to select a proimmigration opinion piece or an anti-immigration opinion piece. In the

second part, the respondents were asked about their attitudes toward immigration. In the third part, they were requested to complete the TECSE items. The fourth part included demographic questions.

### ***Stimulus Materials***

The context for the study was the debate in Israel regarding the policy toward 55,000 illegal immigrants from Africa and proposed government-backed legislation to imprison these immigrants in a special detention camp in the Negev desert to solve social problems in the neighborhoods of South Tel Aviv in which these immigrants reside. The left-wing op-ed, entitled "An Immoral and Inhumane Magic Solution," was written by a left-wing politician (Meretz MK Zehava Gal On) and argued that instead of staining Israel's laws with legislation that harms human rights, Israel should provide shelter and rights to refugees escaping from civil wars in Eritrea and Sudan. The right-wing op-ed, entitled "With Firmness and Sensitivity," was written by a right-wing politician (Likud MK Ofir Akunis) and argued that the African immigrants are not refugees but rather labor immigrants who have turned the lives of the residents of South Tel Aviv and other areas into an unbearable nightmare. The article maintained that the government's proposal is the most moral and humane solution to the problem. The title of each op-ed was presented on the screen with a sentence from each article containing its most important argument. The names of the writers, their party affiliations, and their pictures were also presented to make the political stance promoted by the article clearer and more visible.

We measured attitudes toward the immigration from Africa using four items, worded (1) "Immigrants from Africa are driven to Israel only by economic considerations," (2) "African immigrants hurt the State of Israel," (3) "Those who help African immigrants are driven by the desire to change the nature of this country," and (4) "The real intent of organizations supporting African refugees is to change the Jewish character of the State of Israel." Response categories varied between 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 10 (*strongly agree*). The items, loading on a single factor in an exploratory factor analysis (principal components, varimax, explaining 62.36% of the variance), were averaged to form the Attitudes Toward African Immigration scale (Cronbach's alpha = .80,  $M = 5.14$ ,  $SD = 2.29$ ).

Next, we created an indicator of the consistency between the participants' attitudes toward African immigrants and their story selections. Respondents reporting an anti-immigration stance (with a score higher than 5 on the Attitudes Toward African Immigration scale) who selected the anti-immigration op-ed and respondents reporting a proimmigration stance (with a score less than or equal to 5 on the Attitudes Toward African Immigration scale) who selected the proimmigration op-ed were coded 1 for ideologically congruent exposure (58.2% of participants). Respondents who reported an anti-immigration stance (with a score higher than 5 on the Attitudes Toward African Immigration scale) who selected the proimmigration op-ed and respondents reporting a proimmigration stance (with a score less than or equal to 5 on the Attitudes Toward African Immigration scale) who selected the anti-immigration op-ed were coded 0 for inconsistent exposure (42.8% of respondents).

The TECSE items were identical to those used in Study 1 (Cronbach's alpha = .72,  $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ).

### Results

As in Study 1, two confirmatory factor analysis models were tested using AMOS: a single-factor model and a two-factor model. The fit statistics for both models are presented in Table 4. In general, both models had a reasonably good fit to the data. RMSEA in both cases was significantly larger than the .05 criterion ( $p < .001$ ). Although the fit indices in the two models were in the same range, Model 2, the two-factor model, again performed better on all indices (RMSEA and the Akaike information criterion should be as low as possible). Coefficients for this model are presented in Table 5. It is worthy to note that the correlation between the SE and Selective Avoidance subscales was rather strong ( $r = .51, p < .001$ ), as in the previous study.

**Table 4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Models for Tendency to Select Ideologically Congruent Information, Study 2.**

Measure	Model 1: Single factor	Model 2: Two factors
NFI	.81	.88
RFI	.62	.70
IFI	.85	.91
TLI	.69	.77
CFI	.84	.91
RMSEA	.17	.14
AIC	49.52	44.53

*Note.* NFI = normed fit index; RFI = relative fit index; IFI = incremental fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; AIC = Akaike information criterion.

As expected, respondents selecting a congruent article scored higher on SE ( $M = 2.71, SD = 0.36$ ) than those selecting an incongruent article ( $M = 2.36, SD = 0.77$ ),  $t(96) = 2.07, p < .05$ . There was no significant difference in selective avoidance between those selecting a congruent ( $M = 2.61, SD = 1.09$ ) and an incongruent ( $M = 2.51, SD = 0.95$ ) op-ed article, although the difference was in the expected direction. The effect for the total TECSE scale also was not significant at the .05 level, but it approached significance ( $p = .089$ , one-tailed) and was in the expected direction. Respondents selecting an ideologically congruent opinion piece scored higher on the total TECSE scale ( $M = 2.66, SD = 0.86$ ) compared with those selecting an incongruent opinion piece ( $M = 2.44, SD = 0.74$ ),  $t(96) = 1.35$ .

### Discussion

The results of Study 2 replicated those of Study 1, again supporting the distinction between SE and selective avoidance items. The study also provided further evidence supporting convergent validity by comparing the proposed TECSE scale with a measure based on the behavioral intentions approach (Clay et

al., 2013). The SE subscale was associated with actually selecting an ideologically congruent op-ed piece. Note that order effects do not explain this finding, because the order of the different parts of the study was fully counterbalanced.

**Table 5. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results for a Two-Factor Model, Study 2.**

Factor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Selective Avoidance → (1) I try to avoid exposure to media outlets expressing irritating opinions	0.99	0.04
Selective Avoidance → (2) I try to expose myself only to media outlets and news messages that are in line with my own attitudes	1.00	
Selective Exposure → (3) I try to expose myself to all the opinions heard in the media equally (reverse coded)	1.00	
Selective Exposure → (4) If I need to select between two op-ed pieces, I'll choose the one that is closer to my opinions	1.08	0.06
Selective Exposure → (5) It is important for me to read not just articles supporting my views, but also articles opposing my views (reverse coded)	0.98	0.05

*Note.* All coefficients were significant at the  $p < .001$  level. The coefficients for Items 2 and 3 were set to 1.00 to scale the factors.

In contrast to the SE subscale, the congruency of the participants' ideological selections was statistically unrelated to selective avoidance. Perhaps the inconsistency of the results has to do with the fact that the participants were asked to *select* which of the op-eds they would like to read, not which one they would like to *avoid*. If SE and selective avoidance are indeed two distinct patterns of communication-seeking behavior, as Garrett (2009b) argued, then perhaps it should come as no surprise that the Selective Avoidance subscale did not correlate with the participants' selections.

Even though Study 2 tested the validity of TECSE against a real and accurate indicator of prospective selectivity (the behavioral intention approach; Clay et al., 2013), it has two main limitations. First, as in Study 1, the sampling strategy led to an unrepresentative sample. Second, the selection of a single article in the context of an unnatural experiment may not reflect people's tendency toward congruent exposure (especially given the fact that participants were presented with only two options; Clay et al., 2013, pp. 154–155), as it might be evinced in real-world exposure patterns. Study 3 corrected these issues, first, by using a much broader sample of the Israeli public and, second, by using actual weblog data collected in a natural setting over an extended period of time as an indicator of the participants' real-world exposure patterns.

### Study 3

The third study had four main goals: (1) to test for the construct's test-retest stability; (2) to improve the proposed TECSE scale by changing the wording of one of the items; (3) to replicate previous findings among a diverse, representative sample of the Israeli population, especially with regard to the bidimensionality and convergent validity of TECSE; and (4) to test for the correlation between the new

TECSE scale and the construct of the need for cognition. We expected that cognitive needs would be inversely related to selective exposure to ideologically congruent materials, because cognitive needs are expected to encourage exposure to all sorts of information (Tsfati & Cappella, 2005), including incongruent information. Thus, adding this correlate to the analysis may shed light on the new scale.

### **Sample**

The analysis presented below is based on an Internet survey conducted a month prior to the 2013 Israeli Election Day among a sample of Israeli Jewish voters as part of a larger study of the effects of online environments on political participation. Data were gathered between December 23 and 25, 2012, by Panels, a survey company specializing in Internet-based research. A second wave of data collection was conducted right after the elections, between January 27 and January 29, 2013. The original TECSE items were measured in Wave 1 of the survey, and the revised version was measured in Wave 2. Of 900 individuals invited by Panels, 351 completed both waves of the survey and were used in the current study. Full details about the Panels' sample have been reported by Dvir-Gvirsman, Tsfati, and Menchen-Trevino (2014).

### **Measures**

First, we used the novel TECSE measure composed of five indicators. In Wave 1, the items were identical to those used in the previous studies. In Wave 2, Indicators 1–4 were retained and the fifth item<sup>4</sup> was changed to (5) "I don't find any use in reading op-ed pieces expressing views that are different than my own." Reliability for these items was Cronbach's alpha = .70 ( $M = 2.48$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ).

**Partisan SE.** As in Study 1, three alternative measures of ideological SE were available. Our second approach used real-world indicators of online ideological news sources. Panels tracks its panelists' online activities (with the panelists' permission). The entire weblog of each panelist was content-analyzed for right-wing, liberal, and mainstream political tendencies (for details, see Dvir-Gvirsman et al., 2014). Right-wing respondents who visited right-wing-leaning websites and left-wing respondents who visited left-wing-leaning outlets were coded 1. Other respondents were coded 0.<sup>5</sup>

As in Study 1, our third measure of SE used the more conventional measurement strategy that taps habitual, self-reported exposure to a series of ideological outlets (with the researcher establishing the ideological tendency of the outlets independently). Respondents were asked to what extent they were exposed to the same list of right-wing and left-wing outlets as in Study 1. Using the same procedure described in Study 1, we created a scale for ideologically congruent exposure to either left-wing or right-wing channels, varying between 0 (*no exposure*) and 5 (*regular exposure to congruent outlets*).

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<sup>4</sup> The reason for changing Item 5 ("It is important for me to read not just articles supporting my views, but also articles opposing my views") was that it was assumed that its complex and double-barreled wording made it harder for respondents to answer. As described below, this item also had an unacceptable loading in exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses.

<sup>5</sup> More continuous exposure measures were tried, and these were not significantly related to any of the other measures of congruent exposure used in the current study.

Need for cognition was measured using five items translated from Cacioppo and Petty's (1982) Need for Cognition instrument. The items included (1) "I prefer complex to simple problems," (2) "I usually end up deliberating about issues even when they do not affect me personally," (3) "I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems," (4) "I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve," and (5) "I find satisfaction deliberating long and hard for hours." Response categories varied between 1 (*not at all like me*) and 7 (*very much like me*). The five items loaded on a single factor (Cronbach's alpha = .84).

Measures of polarization, ideology, trust in media, and extremism were identical to those used in Study 1.

**Table 6. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Models for Tendency to Select Ideologically Congruent Information, Study 3, Wave 2.**

Measure	Model 1: Single factor	Model 2: Two factors*
NFI	.98	.99
RFI	.94	.97
IFI	.99	1.00
TLI	.97	1.00
CFI	.99	1.00
RMSEA	.04	.01
AIC	39.53	36.51

Note. \*  $\chi^2 = 4.51$  (4),  $p > .05$ ; NFI = normed fit index; RFI = relative fit index; IFI = incremental fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; AIC = Akaike information criterion.

### Results

Separate confirmatory factor analysis models were run for the TECSE scale in both waves of the study. However, model fit indices were poorer for Wave 1 in comparison to the previous studies (and compared with Wave 2). In addition, the loading for Item 5 ("It is important for me to read not just articles supporting my views, but also articles opposing my views") was unacceptable in both confirmatory and exploratory analyses ( $b = .09$  in confirmatory factor analysis). It was assumed that the complex and double-barreled wording of the item led to this poorer performance and this was the reason a simpler wording was used in Wave 2.

Table 6 presents the confirmatory factor analysis fit indices for the one-factor and two-factor models in Wave 2. The fit indices for both models were much higher than in the previous studies. As in Studies 1 and 2, all of the indices indicated that the two-factor model fit the data better than the single-dimension model. In fact, according to almost all of the indices, the two-factor model had an almost

perfect fit with the data. Of the six models presented in the three studies reported in this article, it was the only one that fit the data according to the more stringent chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 4.51 (4)$ ,  $p > .05$ ). The factor loadings for this model are reported in Table 7. Note that the newly worded Item 5 loaded on selective avoidance rather than on SE.

**Table 7. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results for a Two-Factor Model, Study 3.**

Factor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Selective Avoidance → (1) I try to avoid exposure to media outlets expressing irritating opinions	0.92	0.07
Selective Avoidance → (2) I try to expose myself only to media outlets and news messages that are in line with my own attitudes	1.00	
Selective Avoidance → (5) I don't find any use in reading op-ed pieces expressing views that are different than my own	0.85	0.07
Selective Exposure → (3) I try to expose myself to all the opinions heard in the media equally (reverse coded)	1.00	
Selective Exposure → (4) If I need to select between two op-ed pieces, I'll choose the one that is closer to my opinions	2.35	0.05

*Note.* All coefficients were significant at the  $p < .001$  level. The coefficients for Items 2 and 3 were set to 1.00 to scale the factors.

Table 8 reports the full partial correlations matrix for the variables under study. It is noteworthy that, in both waves of the study, the SE and Selective Avoidance subscales were rather strongly correlated ( $r = .51$ ,  $p < .001$  in Wave 1;  $r = .52$ ,  $p < .001$  in Wave 2). It is also noteworthy that, unsurprisingly, both subscales were highly correlated with the full scale in both waves (in Wave 1 for both subscales,  $r = .87$ ,  $p < .001$ ; in Wave 2,  $r = .85$ ,  $p < .001$  for SE and  $r = .89$ ,  $p < .001$  for selective avoidance). In terms of test-retest stability, the correlation coefficients between Wave 1 and Wave 2 constructs were moderate to strong (for SE,  $r = .43$ ; for selective avoidance,  $r = .50$ ; for the full TECSE scale,  $r = .53$ ; all significant at  $p < .001$ ). Whereas past scores on TECSE strongly predict future scores, the moderate correlations attest that the self-reported tendency to select congruent information is only moderately stable.

Table 8 also reports the correlation between the Wave 1 and 2 TECSE scales and a variety of other variables to test for convergent, discriminant, and construct validity. In terms of convergent validity, although the respondents reporting a strong tendency toward selecting congruent materials tended to visit ideologically consistent outlets, the association was rather weak and only of borderline statistical significance in both waves of the survey (for SE, partial  $r = .09$ ,  $p < .10$  in both waves; for the full TECSE scale, partial  $r = .11$ ,  $p < .05$  in Wave 1 and partial  $r = .09$ ,  $p < .10$  in Wave 2). The SE and Selective Avoidance subscales were generally not significantly correlated with the frequency of SE to congruent

outlets, composed in accordance with the standard retrospective measurement strategy in the extant literature (the only exception was the association between selective avoidance and this measure in Wave 1: partial  $r = .11$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Interestingly, there was no evidence for a significant correlation between this retrospective measure and the weblog-based measure (partial  $r = .05$ , *ns*). This is to say that the widely used retrospective measure failed to converge with an observational indicator of congruent exposure in the current data.

Consistent with Study 1's results, SE was positively and weakly related to political extremism, supporting the test's discriminant validity (in both waves, partial  $r = .12$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The negative and insignificant association with media trust in both waves was also indicative of discriminant validity. As in Study 1, and consistent with prior research (Stroud, 2010), SE was positively related to the polarization score in Wave 2, supporting the test's construct validity. However, this was not the case in Wave 1. Interestingly, and in contrast with Study 1's results, the Selective Avoidance factor did not correlate with extremism, polarization, or trust in media.

Study 3 allowed us to test the association between SE and the need for cognition. We expected a negative association between these two factors, such that people who were interested in obtaining information and deliberating about it would be likely to get information from all types of sources, not just those that were ideologically congruent with their opinions. Our results support this expectation. The SE subscale had a negative (and in Wave 2 borderline significant) association with the need for cognition (in Wave 1, partial  $r = -.16$ ,  $p < .01$ ; in Wave 2, partial  $r = -.09$ ,  $p < .10$ ). Those with cognitive needs were less likely to report a tendency to select ideologically congruent information. Selective avoidance was negatively associated with need for cognition in Wave 1 (partial  $r = -.19$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but not in Wave 2 (partial  $r = -.05$ , *ns*). The same pattern emerged for the full scale.

It is interesting to examine the discriminant and construct validity results for the more widely used retrospective measure, based on respondents' self-reports of exposure to a list of ideological outlets. Supporting discriminant validity, this measure was only weakly associated with extremism (partial  $r = .11$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and not significantly associated with media trust. Supporting construct validity, this measure was positively associated with polarization (partial  $r = .21$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, the retrospective SE measure based on people's self-reported diet was positively, and not negatively, associated with cognitive needs (partial  $r = .12$ ,  $p < .05$ ), in contrast to expectations.

**Table 8. Examining Convergent/Discriminant and Construct Validity, Partial Correlations (Controlling for Demographics and Political Ideology), Study 3.**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Wave 1 selective exposure (SE)	1.00	.51***	.87***	.40***	.34***	.42***	.03	.09 <sup>#</sup>	-.06	.12*	.03	-.16***
2. Wave 1 selective avoidance		1.00	.87***	.36***	.50***	.50***	.11*	.11*	.02	.06	.06	-.19***
3. Wave 1 total scale			1.00	.43***	.48***	.53***	.08	.11*	-.02	.07	.06	-.20***
4. Wave 2 selective exposure				1.00	.52***	.85***	.06	.09 <sup>#</sup>	-.04	.12*	.11*	-.09 <sup>#</sup>
5. Wave 2 selective avoidance					1.00	.89***	.08	.07	-.03	.06	.03	-.05
6. Wave 2 total scale						1.00	.08	.09 <sup>#</sup>	-.04	.10 <sup>#</sup>	.07	-.08
7. SE (frequency of exposure to a list of congruent ideological sources)							1.00	.05	-.01	.11*	.21***	.13*
8. SE (based on weblog)								1.00	-.03	.19***	.19***	-.01
9. Trust in media									1.00	-.08	-.05	.05
10. Political extremity										1.00	.38***	.12*
11. Political polarization											1.00	.15**
12. Need for cognition												1.00

Note. Smallest  $n = 351$ .

<sup>#</sup> $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

### General Discussion

The three studies reported here used very different sampling procedures, resulting in different samples. The fact that consistent findings emerged across all three studies attests to the external validity of the findings as well as the utility of the TECSE scale in various research contexts. All three studies consistently provided evidence supporting the contention that SE is different from selective avoidance, a result that accords with findings from the extant literature demonstrating that SE does not necessarily entail avoiding incongruent sources (Garrett, 2009b). In all three studies, the two-factor model had a better fit to the data. In addition, all three studies provided evidence supporting the discriminant validity of SE, demonstrating that the TECSE measure captures something that is distinct from political extremism, trust in media, and the need for cognition. The positive association between SE and extremism and its negative association with media trust and with the need for cognition are all in line with expectations and with previous empirical research.

However, one puzzling finding remains unresolved and demands further study. The self-reported tendency toward SE was only weakly associated with other indicators of SE in Study 1 (retrospective and observational) and had even weaker associations with similar indicators (including indicators of actual online SE) in Study 3. The more standard retrospective measure fared better than TECSE in terms of convergent validity in Study 1, but worst in Study 3. That is, SE based on self-reported exposure to ideological channels correlated moderately with the recruitment-based measure in Study 1, but did not significantly correlate with the observational weblog-based indicator of SE in Study 3. In terms of discriminant and construct validity, the TECSE items were not inferior, compared with the more standard retrospective measure, and in some respects their validation results were even better. In particular, the retrospective measure was positively and not negatively correlated with cognitive needs in Study 3.

It seems that the different strategies measure slightly different underlying phenomena, with the retrospective diet measure more related in terms of face validity to behavior and the proposed TECSE scale related to an underlying trait. If the tendency to select congruent political information is indeed a trait, it should be stable. However, the correlations between Wave 1 and Wave 2 TECSE were rather strong, but perhaps not as strong as one would expect from a trait (note that one of the items was changed between Wave 1 and Wave 2). Like other trait-like constructs, the different measures were consistent, but not totally stable, implying that the reported TECSE is influenced by contextual factors such as campaign stages. In our data, both selective avoidance and exposure went down during the course of the campaign:  $M SE_{Time1} = 3.07$ ,  $M SE_{Time2} = 2.91$ , paired  $t = 3.58$ ;  $M selective\ avoidance_{Time1} = 2.67$ ,  $M selective\ avoidance_{Time2} = 2.19$ , paired  $t = 10.54$ ;  $M total\ scale_{Time1} = 2.87$ ,  $M total\ scale_{Time2} = 2.55$ , paired  $t = 8.84$  (all significant at  $p < .05$ ). Perhaps this reflects more defensive information-processing strategies four weeks before Election Day compared with right after the elections. This is in keeping with findings suggesting that exposure to a threat increases congruent SE, at least for some respondents (Clay et al., 2013, pp. 154-155; see also Garrett, 2013, p. 253).

Both approaches have strengths and weaknesses. The retrospective approach is aimed at tapping behavior, but only in one of the two relevant studies was it actually related to behavioral indicators. As suggested in the literature, it may be confounded with selective attention or retention (Clay et al., 2013),

and may be influenced by partisanship (in fact, offering strong partisans an opportunity to express their ideological commitment, as implied by Prior, 2013). Another drawback of this approach is that it necessitates rather extensive research about the ideological tendencies of different media outlets via content analyses or other external criteria (such as newspaper endorsements; e.g., Stroud, 2008), and such research is not always available. In some contexts (such as the United States prior to the rise of cable and online news and a few contemporary European societies), not very many overtly ideological media channels are available on consumers' menus, but consumers can still select to focus on congruent information in mainstream media. In such contexts, using the retrospective, list-based approach is impossible.

TECSE, on the other hand, is aimed at measuring individual differences in the tendency to select congruent information, which is only partly empirically related to exposure to congruent media outlets. Several explanations can be offered for the weak associations: First, people with a tendency to seek congruent information may find such congruent materials (or avoid incongruent information) in regular mainstream media outlets. Whereas all other indicators of exposure in the current investigation related to ideological outlets, it is important to stress that the question wordings in the TECSE scale referred to congruent "op-eds" and "messages" (that can also be found in mainstream media), in addition to congruent "media outlets." Second, the tendency to seek congruent materials may be only weakly related to actual SE behavior inasmuch as attitudes and tendencies in general do not perfectly predict behavior. This is in keeping with recent findings (D. H. Kim & Pasek, 2015) documenting that "information-seeking traits" (e.g., seeking diverse versus congruent information) are only modestly related to information-seeking values and that both information-seeking traits and values are not directly related to behavior. Third, similar to the retrospective measure (Clay et al., 2013), the proposed scale might also confound SE with selective attention or retention.

The proposed TECSE scale and its subcomponents will be particularly useful when other strategies are not feasible; in particular, in international comparative settings when asking about exposure to a unified list of ideological outlets is impossible, or when the ideological tendencies of local media outlets have not been substantiated empirically. The concise nature of the TECSE scale (five items only) is another major strength, compared with lengthy questionnaires asking respondents to report their exposure to long lists of news media outlets. Even in rather lengthy questionnaires, adding the five TECSE items (to the retrospective measures) may allow scholars to test their hypotheses using another indicator of SE, adding to the robustness of their findings. Finally, when their theoretical motivation relates to information-seeking traits, scholars should consider measuring TECSE, as it may more closely reflect underlying personality differences directing some individuals to congruent political information.

This is not to say that the TECSE scale is limited to studies of information-seeking traits. As Garrett (2013, p. 253) notes, recent evidence points to the context-dependent and dynamic nature of SE, and although TECSE taps the tendency toward SE, it is still sensitive to such contextual developments. In addition to the general decrease in SE along the four weeks of the campaign as discussed above, this point could be illustrated by examining between-waves variations in TECSE between supporters of the two largest parties. In the context of the Israeli 2013 elections, the right-wing Likud party had a substantial lead in the polls four weeks prior to Election Day, with polls predicting that it would win 37 of the 120

Knesset seats. The same poll predicted that the centrist Yesh Atid would receive only 9 seats. Election results were grim news for Likud supporters, with Likud receiving only 31 seats and failing to secure a coalition with their “natural” partners from right-wing and religious parties. Yesh Atid received 19 seats, an almost unprecedented achievement for a new centrist party. In this context, the drop in the selective exposure between the pre–post waves was significantly larger for Yesh Atid voters (mean Wave 1 – Wave 2 difference in  $SE = 0.52$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ), compared with Likud voters (mean Wave 1 – Wave 2 difference in  $SE = 0.17$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ),  $t(116) = 2.26$ ,  $p < .05$ . It might be that Likud voters were threatened by the election results and this threat kept their selectivity level relatively high (see Clay et al., 2013, pp. 154–155). In any case, this finding demonstrates the sensitivity of TECSE to contextual forces and campaign dynamics, despite the fact that it taps trait-like individual differences.

It is worthwhile noting that in both Studies 2 and 3, the convergent validity of the SE subscale was superior to the convergent validity of the Selective Avoidance subscale. In Study 2, SE predicted actual selection behavior, and in Study 3 it was associated with actual weblog data. In contrast, in both of these studies, selective avoidance was not significantly associated with these constructs. It is clear from previous research that this difference may stem from the fact that in the real world, avoidance behaviors are different from selection behaviors. This finding further substantiates the distinction between these constructs highlighted in the present investigation, as well as in the literature at large (Garrett, 2009b). The appropriate test for the convergent validity of the Selective Avoidance subscale is still unclear from the literature because empirical research on ideologically based avoidance behavior is still relatively scant compared with the vast research tradition on selective preferences. We do know that people’s engagement in congruent exposure does not mean that they actively avoid incongruent information (Garrett, 2009b). This previous finding was echoed in the current data in the moderate correlation between the SE and the selective avoidance construct in all three studies. The lower level of selective avoidance compared with SE in the studies with broader and more diverse samples—Study 1,  $M_{SE} = 2.64$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ;  $M_{\text{Selective Avoidance}} = 2.44$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ , paired  $t(2,098) = 10.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Study 3,  $M_{SE} = 2.91$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ;  $M_{\text{Selective Avoidance}} = 2.19$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ , paired  $t(397) = 16.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ; in Study 2, there were no significant differences between SE and selective avoidance)—also reflects findings from the previous literature that avoidance is less prevalent than congruent exposure.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of limitations, an obvious weakness of Studies 1 and 2 relates to their opt-in sampling strategy and the resulting unrepresentative samples. Whereas the recruitment strategy in Study 1 had the advantages of using a real-world indicator of exposure and a sample of online users of ideological and mainstream media, the resulting disadvantage is that the sample was skewed toward including more men and more religious and right-wing respondents, and was somewhat younger than the typical representative sample of the Israeli public. However, as many have stressed (see in particular Shapiro, 2002), although using representative samples is critical when trying to predict population parameters

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<sup>6</sup> It is also noteworthy that the variability in the Selective Avoidance subscale was somewhat larger than that in the SE subscale. It might be that it is harder for people to notice their own avoidance compared with exposure (as the avoidance items ask people to report something they do not do). Another speculative explanation may be related to the fact that reporting avoidance is less socially desirable (somewhat like reporting close-mindedness), and this may be the source of greater variability.

(e.g., in election polling), it is much less important when conducting research aimed at broadening our understating of theoretical processes. In these cases, it is much more important that the sample represents the variance in theoretically meaningful characteristics, and this condition was satisfied in Studies 1 and 2.

The lack of representativeness of the sample, in particular in Study 1, could also be addressed empirically. When running the same analyses when focusing only on moderates (scoring between 3 and 5 on a 1–7 ideology scale,  $n = 765$ ), the same patterns of results emerged. That is, the two-factor model fared better compared with a single-factor model, and the signs and the significance of the correlation coefficients in Table 3 remained the same. The same results were also replicated using sample weights, calculated according to age and religiosity estimates of the Israeli Central Bureau for Statistics (2011) to correct for the disparity between the sample and the adult Jewish Israeli population.

It is important to note that the findings are limited to the Israeli context. Israel is an example of an extreme multiparty system with a coalition power structure. The partisan media options available for the Israeli audience at the time of study included only print and online outlets (the right-wing-leaning television Channel 20 still did not operate in 2013). Moreover, the level of political extremism, polarization, and hatred is very high in the Israeli context, and the political discourse is extremely vitriolic and vocal, especially on ideological outlets. Although these characteristics make Israel an interesting context to study ideological media exposure, it is important to note that perhaps the Israeli context is too unique to generalize to other contexts.

Of the two versions of the TECSE scale presented in this article, the revised version performed better in terms of model fit and thus is the recommended version. However, future research could use a similar strategy and offer further revisions, potentially resulting in an even superior scale.

This article has offered a novel approach to the measurement of congruent and incongruent exposure and some preliminary evidence of its utility and validity. This novel approach has obvious advantages for international studies of SE and for the longitudinal tracking of the tendency toward congruent exposure and avoidance over time. The story told by the data is somewhat more complicated than initially expected. First, we are talking not about a single-factor construct but rather about two subtypes of exposure and avoidance. Second, the validity of the SE subscale appears to be stronger than that of the Selective Avoidance subscale. Thus, future research should continue to substantiate and examine the validity of the proposed measurement. As Adcock and Collier (2001) argue, validation is a process, not an issue easily resolved using snapshot evidence.

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