

ANALYZING PREDICTORS OF KNOWLEDGE, BELIEFS, AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:
HAS POLITICAL ENTERTAINMENT BECOME A FACTOR?

by

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ABSTRACT

Within the backdrop of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, this study collected data from an online survey of college students in considering factors predicting knowledge, beliefs, and public engagement. A proposed model synthesized theoretical contributions from knowledge gap theory, belief gap approaches, and entertainment theories. Predictor variables included four areas of interest: demographics, media use, political views, and political entertainment, with the latter including motivations for engaging (i.e., information-seeking, entertainment value, emotional release, and social involvement). Three research aims guided the conceptualization and operationalization of measures: Research Aim I considered predictors of knowledge about public topics; Research Aim II analyzed predictors of beliefs toward polarizing political issues; and Research Aim III explored factors related to public engagement (e.g., social media news reading, sharing and reacting, and voting intentions).

Statistical analyses included regression tests for each of the three research aims and provided significant results. Regarding Research Aim I, education was found to be a significant predictor of knowledge, such that higher education predicted greater knowledge; news customization was significant, such that those engaging in customization of news feed predicted greater knowledge compared to those not customizing; and, political entertainment was significant, with those engaging for entertainment value and social involvement showing greater knowledge as compared to those without the motivations. Regarding Research Aim II, sex, religion, news source type, and partisanship were found as significant predictors: Females were more liberal in their beliefs as compared to men; those highly involved in church were more

conservative in beliefs as compared to other groups not attending church or infrequently; and those ranking as having a greater polarizing score predicted their beliefs in the same direction as their partisanship view. Regarding Research Aim III, news following and beliefs predicted social media news reading; race, news following, and beliefs predicted social media news sharing; and news following predicted social media news reacting. Also, a greater interest in following news predicted greater reading, sharing, and reacting of stories. In sum, this study found support for a proposed testing model of predictors for the three research aims relating to knowledge, polarizing beliefs, and public engagement.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to those who helped make it possible through your love and support. For those who are only celebrating with me in spirit – I miss you. For the most supportive husband ever, we made it.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

<i>a</i>	Cronbach's index of internal consistency
<i>B</i>	Parameter estimate
<i>df</i>	Degrees of freedom: number of values free to vary after certain restrictions have been placed on the data
<i>F</i>	Fisher's F ratio: A ratio of two variances
<i>M</i>	Mean: the sum of a set of measurements divided by the number of measurements in the set
<i>MS</i>	Mean square
<i>N</i>	Sample size
<i>n</i>	Subset of sample
<i>p</i>	Probability associated with the occurrence under the null hypothesis of a value as extreme as or more extreme than the observed value
<i>r</i>	Pearson product-moment correlation
R^2	Coefficient of determination
<i>SD</i>	Standard deviation
<i>SS</i>	Sum of the squared deviations
<i>t</i>	Computed value of t test
χ^2	Chi-squared test
=	Equal to
%	Percent

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As opportunities to access news from a variety of sources and across platforms increase, understanding how and why people consume media and the resulting effects on knowledge, beliefs, and public engagement about important societal issues are critical. While more information sources and ways to publicly interact have the potential to narrow knowledge gaps and allow greater numbers of people to contribute toward productive discussions of complex issues, the news is not good. A recent Pew Research Center poll (2016) indicated that the United States has increasingly become more divided along ideological lines. Indeed, research has shown that people are more apt to seek out information sources supporting their already held beliefs, thus, potentially limiting knowledge gains and furthering belief gaps (Jang, 2013). Additionally concerning are research findings that have shown rather than social media creating a robust space to consume, process, and share information, 59% of articles shared are not read before shared (Gabiolkov, Ramachandran, Chaintreau, & Legout, 2016). Thus, a large percentage of citizens may be self-limiting knowledge gains, reinforcing partisan beliefs, and, also, then engaging civically as uninformed and biased participants.

As such, this study considered newcomers to the political process and ranking high in social media use—college students—for factors predicting knowledge, beliefs, and public engagement. Within the backdrop of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, a proposed knowledge, belief, and engagement model (see Figure 1^a) is offered as a means to synthesize theoretical contributions from knowledge gap theory, belief gap approaches, and entertainment approaches. This model focuses on four areas of interest for three research aims. Factors within the four

categories of (a) demographics, (b) media use, (c) political views, and (d) political entertainment engagement were included for their predictive value in regards to Research Aim I—an analysis of predictors relating to knowledge, defined as held information about public topics (i.e., historical, health-related, political); Research Aim II—an analysis of predictors relating to beliefs toward polarizing political issues (e.g., legalizing marijuana, requiring identification to vote); and Research Aim III—an analysis of predictors relating to public engagement (e.g., voting intentions and social media news reading, sharing, and reacting).

Conceptual change approaches such as knowledge gap theory traditionally have focused on the causes of knowledge gaps in society, finding that demographics (e.g., socioeconomic status; see Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970) and media use can predict knowledge gaps. These approaches have often explored potential ways to most effectively provide missing information and to correct misconceptions and inaccuracies (Posner, Strike, Hewson, & Gertzog, 1982). Yet, more recent work emerging from knowledge gap has suggested additional considerations. Belief gap approaches have proposed that the principles of these “deficit models”—offering more knowledge to fill gaps—may not necessarily provide a means for increasing knowledge levels, and, as importantly, they may limit consideration of factors potentially influencing the process of reasoning about information (Sinatra, Kienhues, & Hofer, 2014). These later studies have suggested that more information does not necessarily equate to greater accuracy; rather, how people attend to and process input through the prism of a belief system contribute to knowledge (see Hindman, 2009).

Belief gap researchers have proposed that knowledge is, in part, socially constructed, and, as such, knowledge can be considered a set of beliefs, and beliefs, therefore, can be considered knowledge (Gaziano & Gaziano, 2009). Belief gap researchers have proposed that our attitudes

(e.g., negative or positive or neutral) toward a topic and to those relaying messages can affect how incoming information about an issue is processed and interpreted (Gaziano & Gaziano, 2009). This perspective, thus, can explain why people can consume the same information but vary in their perceptions, processing, and reasoning toward information, which can then affect their conclusions and, thus, their positions.

An important factor in studying both knowledge and belief gaps is the consideration of media use, especially in today's increasingly mobile and customizable technological age. Addressing belief gap deficiencies, in part, can, at times require conceptual change—that is, determining how people reach faulty conclusions and undoing misinformation (i.e., debunking). Inaccuracies, both intentional and unintentional, abound online and can become viral, reaching millions in minutes with incredible consequences. Research has shown that debunking misinformation can be especially difficult, with attempts to counter wrong information even potentially more firmly setting incorrect beliefs (Lewandowsky, Ecker, Seifert, Schwarz, & Cook, 2012). Thus, people may possibly amass greater levels of knowledge through media use yet hold faulty perceptions toward the information. In essence, media use may increase knowledge; yet, it may also increase partisan or faulty beliefs that, in turn, affect the processing of information that results in knowledge.

As the number of news sources has increased and proliferated online, social media use has allowed news to be filtered through customized news feeds and a prism of social commentary. Media have become increasingly situated within a space where media-generated content both affects and is affected by social influences and individuals. The information within this new space is framed not only by those generating content but by those sharing articles and additional information within the space. Thus, in essence, the frames become framed and

reframed. The consideration of news consumed and shared on social media is, thus, critical for understanding how people of differing knowledge levels and beliefs are engaging publicly.

While both knowledge gap and belief gap theories have proposed that technological changes can cause people to vary in the ways in which they obtain information and in their selection of information sources, belief gap theory has emphasized that in addition to media use and the presentation of issues (i.e., framing; see McCombs, 2004), gaps can widen based on how societal influences and individual viewpoints, such as political views, shape perceptions of issues (Gaziano & Gaziano, 2009). This study revisited both knowledge gap and belief gap studies in considering the distinction between knowledge—determined as the ability to answer factual statements accurately—and beliefs, specifically policy beliefs—described as viewpoints toward desired actions for solving public issues. Additionally, the predictive strengths of demographics, media use, and political views were analyzed for their roles in knowledge and belief gaps and public engagement.

A fourth area of potential predictive ability for the three research aims was that of entertainment. Research has shown that information presented in engaging narrative formats can lessen resistance to opposing arguments, and, thus, may inform, persuade, and predict engagement through eliciting affective reactions (e.g., humor) to story elements and toward characters delivering the messages (see entertainment education; Slater & Rouner, 2002). An area of particular interest of the study regarding entertainment media was the increased number of political commentary shows designed to primarily entertain rather than inform. For political entertainment shows, politicized topics and political figures provide fodder for hosts to discuss public issues; yet, they may also persuade through satirical humor. Little is known about why people choose to engage with these shows and the effects of these comedic formats.

The increase in the popularity of satirical and comedic news and the sharing of clips of these shows through social media suggest a potential for increased knowledge of and beliefs toward public issues, which, in turn, may drive public engagement (Holbert, 2005). News topics shared on these entertainment venues are presented in a manner intended to be entertaining, often by an openly partisan source, and are often accompanied by visual representations highlighting the comedic angle. A single unflattering image of a politician, for example, can generate affective responses almost instantaneously (e.g., laughter, groans, taunts), and, therefore, frame the information in which the intent is obviously meant for entertainment purposes, yet, still may inform and persuade.

While an entertainment drive seems logically a motivator for those engaging with political entertainment, other motivations may also exist: namely, information-seeking, emotional-release, and social interactions. In other words, some users may seek out information purposefully and be aware of becoming informed while also being entertained; whereas, other users may not be aware of gaining knowledge while engaging with the shows. Similar to other entertainment media, political entertainment may also serve the role of an emotional release, and, in this case, toward public issues; thus, these affective drives may be a motivating factor. Lastly, a desire for social interactions may be an additional entertainment motivational driver, based on self-monitoring mechanisms in which people pay attention to their environments to avoid social exclusion and enhance self-image (see sociometer theory; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Thus, an individual may consume political entertainment in part to be able to interact and share with others rather than possessing solely a desire to apply reasoning skills for learning and forming an opinion about the information itself. The act of consuming with the purpose of interacting with others may be in itself an entertainment engagement activity.

This study has offered a conceptual knowledge, belief, and engagement model (see Figure 1^a) in synthesizing theoretical contributions from knowledge gap theory, belief gap approaches, and entertainment approaches. A testing model was utilized in offering a visual representation of potential predictors (see Figure 1^b) for four areas of interest: demographics, media use, political views, and political entertainment, with the latter including motivations for engaging (i.e., information-seeking, entertainment value, emotional release, and social involvement). Three research aims guided the conceptualization and operationalization of measures within the four areas of interest: Research Aim I considered predictors of knowledge regarding information about public topics (i.e., historical, health-related, political); Research Aim II analyzed predictors of beliefs toward polarizing political issues (e.g., legalizing marijuana, requiring identification to vote); and Research Aim III explored factors related to public engagement (e.g., voting intentions and social media news reading, sharing, and reacting).

Chapter 2 first provides an overview of theoretical contributions regarding knowledge gap theory, belief gap approaches, and entertainment approaches. This overview offers a foundation for conceptualizing and operationalizing the variables within the three research aims. The predictor variables and their relationships within the three research aims are provided visually in the knowledge, belief, and engagement model and the resulting proposed research questions and hypotheses are provided in Table 1. Chapter 3 details the methodology for analyzing the proposed hypotheses and research questions through a survey instrument. Chapter 4 provides the results. Chapter 5 discusses contributions of the research and future directions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study was designed to build from knowledge and belief gap theories in proposing the role of entertainment as a potential bridge between cognitive and affective motivations and the potential relationship for learning, forming opinions, and engaging in discussions regarding public issues. The study included traditional factors supported in prior studies (i.e., demographics, media use, and political views) with an additional consideration of political entertainment engagement and motivations as predictors within three research goals: Research Aim I for analyzing predictors of knowledge; Research Aim II for determining predictors of belief polarization; and, Research Aim III for exploring predictors of public engagement.

Research Aim I – Knowledge Gap Theory

Studies from the first introduction of knowledge gap theory number at more than 230, not including theoretical discussions (Gaziano, 1983/1995/2010), with dozens more added in recent years. These have provided a foundation for considering how the first three areas of interest—demographics, media use, and political views—may predict knowledge gaps as noted below. A discussion of the potential role of a fourth area—political entertainment—follows.

Theoretical premises

A major assumption of the original knowledge gap theory was that media are situated as social structures that create, maintain, and reinforce inequalities (Gaziano & Gaziano, 1996). Almost paradoxically, knowledge gap theory has suggested that mass media affect audiences but that transmitted knowledge creates segmented audiences in which some demonstrate higher

levels of knowledge than others (Tichenor et al., 1970). Within the original theoretical premises, five contributors toward widening knowledge gaps were suggested (Tichenor et al., 1970). The first proposed that differences in communications skills can affect gaps such that those with greater adeptness at social interactions demonstrate greater knowledge levels as compared to those with fewer skills. A second proposed that possessing a greater level of related knowledge prior to learning of a news topic can increase knowledge as compared to others with no prior knowledge, which, in turn, can further gaps. The third factor proposed a connection between social situations and gaps, in that people of higher socioeconomic status (SES) are surrounded by people, activities, and groups that may afford access to a wider range of knowledge, which in turn can increase abilities to understand media topics. The fourth factor suggested that SES groups differ in their abilities to attend to, accept, and process information, in part, because minimal levels of literacy are required to consume information through the various delivery methods media use. The last factor stated that the ways in which news media is used differs from higher-SES than lower-SES with the former more apt to comprehend complex topics, of the type that may receive less repetitive news coverage as compared to simpler topics.

These five propositions established a basis for the vast amounts of research to follow, including an expansion into additional causes of gaps. How these premises have been analyzed vary in contexts and methods. Although limited studies have analyzed the relationship specifically between political entertainment, as discussed in a later section, and knowledge, these prior studies provided a foundation for building from established findings regarding demographics, media use, and political involvement regarding public issues.

Demographics

Knowledge and belief gap studies have typically employed measures to aggregate data into demographic groups that have included such classifications as age, sex, income, partisanship, race, and socioeconomic status (see Gaziano, 2013; Hindman, 2009; Hindman, 2012; Tichenor et al., 1970). Yet, increased opportunities for people to connect with others through social media may contribute to individuals perceiving different group affiliations as more important, as well as multiple groups. Thus, demographic groups may not be the only important factors in considering why knowledge and belief gaps occur. Studies have shown that the type of overall culture can affect knowledge, with SES factors (e.g., education, income) considered most often as contributing to knowledge gaps. Yet, the potential exists, also, that how people perceive their group statuses related to reference groups and their *perceived* SES may be a factor contributing to knowledge gaps. The following first offers a review of SES, followed by a section describing reference groups.

Socioeconomic status. Studies have shown higher-level SES can lead to better encoding, storing, and retrieving of information in a greater variety of formats as compared to low-levels of SES (Grabe, Kamhawi, & Yegiyan, 2009). In analyzing differing types of media news consumption, both traditional and online news, SES was found to be a factor in what media types news consumers choose with lower-SES watching greater levels of television and higher-SES consuming a greater variety of sources and higher levels of online news (Tran, 2013).

Online contexts in the form of blogging have shown SES can be a factor in influencing online community followers (Wei, 2009). An analysis of filter blogs, considered a specific form of providing expressions and information regarding political knowledge, found SES differences in those producing filter blogs as compared to personal blogs (Wei, 2009). Filter bloggers were

found to have higher SES statuses than personal bloggers. In a study of Internet use for accessing news in comparison to traditional forms of media, researchers found Internet use to be a greater factor in knowledge gaps than other medium types, thus, supporting premises of a digital divide (Wei & Hindman, 2011). Yet, a study of knowledge levels in the United States regarding science topics found that increased Internet and television use for science information helped narrow gaps through low-level education groups gaining greater increases in knowledge as compared to high-level education groups (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Corley, 2012).

In a comparison of media use (i.e., radio, newspaper, and television) and individual political knowledge, participation, and socialization, a democratic socialization culture indicated a narrower gap as compared to those within a highly socially stratified culture (Nisbet, 2008). Greater knowledge levels of political information were found for socially privileged groups of highly socially stratified cultures as compared to those less privileged (Nisbet, 2008).

Differences in knowledge gaps can also emerge in local community contexts and age groups. In an analysis of civic participation, researchers found that people living in neighborhoods with lower residential mobility relied on local television news coverage and were more likely to become community participants as compared to those in communities classified at a higher level of mobility means (Kang & Kwak, 2003). Yet, the time of living in the community mattered, with those indicating shorter times less likely to be civically involved as compared to those living in the community greater lengths of time. In an analysis of differences in the ways in which media covered the topic of cancer prevention regionally with the variables of education levels and cancer prevention knowledge, researchers found that regional media coverage did moderate knowledge gaps (Slater, Hayes, Reineke, Long, & Bettinghaus, 2009).

Parker and Fischhoff (2005) developed a system of tasks related to what they consider as representing competent decision makers called the Youth Decision-Making Competence (Y-DMC). These seven categories include (a) the ability to resist framing, (b) the ability to recognize social norms, (c) the demonstration of appearing less or more confident, (d) knowledge about decision rules, (e) a consistency in detecting risks, (6) the ability to choose independent paths, and (f) the ability to resist “sunk costs,” meaning that someone is able to understand that future risks are not lessened by accumulated past losses; think of a gambler suffering severe losses and unwilling to walk away while down. The study found that low-SES teens tend to demonstrate significantly worse performance as compared to high-SES teens for four items: b, c, d, and e. Using this technique for an adult approach (A-DMC) with a diverse population, researchers found the proposed factors were more predictive than SES for knowledge gaps (Bruin, Parker, & Fischhoff, 2007).

In a study of personal interest and behaviors related to a national disaster (i.e., 2010 Haiti earthquake), researchers found that high levels of attention to the event narrowed knowledge gaps internationally and was the strongest predictor of donations toward helping victims (Martin, 2013). Additionally, online expressions measured through social media websites, from emails, and via text messages were found to have a complementary effect when considered with media news attention (Martin, 2013).

Reference groups. The term reference group is a cornerstone concept within the field of sociology (see Hyman, 1942). It refers to the idea that individuals frame their own statuses and qualities based on how they perceive the norms and customs of a group (Asch, 1951; Deutsch & Gerard 1955; Festinger, 1954; Kelley, 1952). These perceptions serve as a means for individuals to compare themselves to both groups in which they believe to be included and groups in which

they may desire to be included or excluded (see Merton, 1949). Reference groups can, therefore, be considered as providing a moral template that guides attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

Three other related concepts are also important to consider: reference point, and the contrasting terms relative deprivation and relative gratification. Reference point refers to the position in which people perceive themselves to be situated based on their perceptions of those around them (see Merton, 1949), while relative deprivation and relative gratification refer to the belief that one is either suffering more than others (deprived) or is blessed to have more than others (gratified; see Olson, Herman, & Zanna, 1986; Stouffer, Suchman, DeVinney, Star, & Williams, 1949; Thompson & Hickey, 2005). An important distinction should be made when considering these terms against the backdrop of society and knowledge gaps. It is the *perception* of the individual that determines to which group he or she belongs, not the groups that others place the person into, that is the social reality for that person. This has important implications for research regarding knowledge and belief gaps because the inclusion of the perceptions of group classifications need to be considered. Thus, for this study, the concept of perceived SES was defined and operationalized for considering its predictive qualities for the three research aims.

In considering the first area of interest—demographics, this study proposed the following hypothesis for Research Aim I—predictors of knowledge:

H1: Demographic factors (race, gender, education, and perceived socioeconomic status) can predict knowledge.

Media Use

Knowledge gap theories have analyzed the effects of media types, media sources, news formats, news interest, and public engagement to support that multiple factors affect knowledge gaps, although some areas have produced contradictory findings. Toward the later part of the

first decade of the 2000s, research began incorporating consideration of the effects of technology and how greater numbers of people can be reached. Studies focusing on Internet use and knowledge gaps have flourished more recently (e.g., Cacciatore, et al., 2012; Grabe, 2009; Ho, 2012; Ho, Lee, & Hameed, 2008; Jebril, DeVreese, Dalen, & Albaek, 2013; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Kim, 2008; Lee, 2009; Shim, 2008; Slater, Hayes, Reineke, Long, & Bettinghaus, 2009; Wei & Hindman, 2011), as well as studies considering public campaigns (Ho, Brossard, & Scheufele, 2007; Shih, Wijaya, & Brossard, 2008; Slater et al., 2009; Viswanath, Breen, Meissner, Moser, Hesse, Steele, & Rakowski, 2006).

News interest. While often news stories about public issues and events have traditionally been presented in a structure in which the most important information is offered first followed by lesser details (i.e., inverted pyramid), research regarding knowledge gaps have explored news formats and following and their effects on how people comprehend information. In a study using an explanatory structure building model in comparison to a standard media news format (i.e., inverted pyramid) to expose participants to complex news stories of which participants had little or no prior knowledge, Yaros (2006) found that those in the model format group indicated greater knowledge levels as compared to the traditional format group. Another study in which news coverage for three countries were analyzed found that incorporating news styles atypical of traditional formats contributed positively to political knowledge gains. Fraile (2013) demonstrated that information-rich contexts using narration as compared to traditional methods of news coverage regarding politics can help to narrow knowledge inequalities.

Other studies have shown that approaching complex political topics using human interest and conflict frames (i.e., soft news formats) as opposed to traditional use of other frames (e.g., hard news formats) promoted greater political knowledge gain (Albæk, Van Dalen, Jebril, & De

Vreese, 2014). Similarly, Jerit (2009) combined individual-level survey data with an analysis of media content and coverage to demonstrate that greater levels of contextual coverage narrowed knowledge gaps as compared to stories using commentary provided by topical experts. The findings indicated that the use of expert commentary contributed to gaps based on SES status, while contextual coverage reduced differences between high- and low-SES groups. Given the propensity of political entertainment shows to provide a mix of story types in nontraditional news formats, the consideration of humor and anecdotal evidence as a format is an important contribution for understanding knowledge and belief gaps, as well as public engagement.

Media types. Knowledge gap studies have indicated that the medium may matter. Earlier studies analyzed mainly television and newspaper coverage, and more recent studies have analyzed online and social media use. In a study of television and newspaper use during a national political campaign, researchers found that television use reduced gaps based on frequency of watching; whereas, newspaper use depended on education levels and campaign interest (Kwak, 1999). When comparing education levels, newspaper use, and interest, Kwak found a significant three-way interaction between newspaper engagement and education levels depending on interest in the campaign. In an analysis of television coverage during an election campaign, researchers found that television watching helped to narrow knowledge gaps; a finding that researchers proposed as being contributed to passive learning through the medium as opposed to active learning (Shehata, 2013).

In an analysis exploring type of news media use and quantity, researchers found that for groups of high- and low-levels of education, gaps were less for heavy users of television news as compared to light users (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). The same was found of newspaper news readers but with weaker correlations. The same study also found that media use was not,

however, predictive of voting, although newspaper use was an indicator of political participation (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). To consider the variety of news sources rather than only the medium type, researchers using a risk-information seeking and process model for considering knowledge gaps related to global warming found that the number of media sources used was a predictor of knowledge: those indicating a greater number of sources ranked higher in knowledge as compared to those using fewer sources (Kahlor & Rosenthal, 2009).

Studies in which online news formats were analyzed have shown differences in knowledge gaps across media. In a media consumption study considering links between SES, traditional and online news use, and knowledge of public affairs, SES was found to be a factor in what media news consumers chose (Tran, 2013). Traditional news consumption was found to mediate the gap-widening effect; whereas, online news use was not found to significantly contribute to political knowledge (Tran, 2013). Two experimental studies offer findings explaining why the potential differences.

In considering the interaction of media channels (i.e., newspaper, television, and Internet formats) with time delay and educational levels, memory measures found that those in the low-level education group as opposed to the high-level group were better able to encode, store, and retrieve television news as compared to the other two formats (Grabe et al., 2009). In contrast, the high-level education group ranked higher for encoding, storing, and retrieving newspaper and Internet information rather than television formats as compared to low-level education group (Grabe et al., 2009). In a second experimental study of newspaper and online formats, the high-level education group indicated more knowledge gains as compared to the low-level education group, although the latter did indicate higher knowledge levels gained through newspaper use rather than online news sources (Yang & Grabe, 2011).

The ways in which news is offered have expanded and the lines determining the medium have blurred. For example, a broadcast can be viewed as a live stream online and broadcast segments can be viewed and shared on social media. While engagement with one media type may be more pronounced for some demographic groups, such as older people engaging with television more often than other medium types as compared to younger adults (Pew Research Center, 2013), differences may be more difficult to determine in today's news climate. Given the proliferation of information sources in a changed mediated and social external environment, the use of political entertainment as a growing potential information source was an important inclusion for this study regardless whether consumed through traditional broadcast channels or online. Additionally, opportunities to customize news have the potential to change the ways in which news consumers are exposed to public issues, acquire knowledge, and store information.

In considering the second area of interest—news media use, this study proposed the following hypothesis for Research Aim I—predictors of knowledge:

H2: News media use (news following and new source type) can predict knowledge.

Political Views

From the earliest studies, knowledge gap theory has focused on exploring the effects of news coverage for polarizing issues. These include politics (e.g., Finnegan, Viswanath, Hannan, Weisbrod, & Jacobs, 1989; Finnegan, Viswanath, Kahn, & Hannan, 1993; Moore, 1987; Palmgren, 1979), health issues (e.g., Bennett, 1988; Dervin, Nilan, & Jacobson, 1982; Ettema, Brown, & Luepker, 1983; Zandpour & Fellow, 1992), environmental issues (e.g., Castonia, 1981), and specific localized community issues (e.g., Donohue, Tichenor, & Olien, 1986; Gaziano, 1984; Sharp, 1984; Tichenor, Olien, & Donohue, 1987; Viswanath, Kosicki, Fredin, & Park, 2000). Studies also explored a variety of approaches, including audience-centered

perspectives (e.g., Dervin, 1989a; Ettema & Kline, 1977), message-focused approaches (e.g., Dervin, 1989b; Wanta & Elliott, 1995), and media-use approaches (e.g., Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Fredin, Eric, Monnett, & Kosicki, 1994; Scherer, 1989; Snyder, 1990; Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1980).

Research into the early 2000s still considered the same topics with special consideration for stories regarding politics (e.g., Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Gaines, Kuklinski, Quirk, Peyton, & Verkuilen, 2007; Holbrook, 2002; Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2005; Liu & Eveland, 2005; McCann & Lawson, 2006; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001), and health campaigns (e.g., Gaziano & Horowitz, 2001; Kahlor, Dunwoody, & Griffin, 2004; Ramanadhan & Viswanath, 2006; Rimal, 2000; Sligo & Jameson, 2000), while also branching into additional methods of study that included psychophysiological reactions (e.g., Grabe, Lang, Zhou, & Bolls, 2000; Hollander, 2005; Livingstone & Markham, 2008).

While political affiliation is often included in knowledge and belief gap studies as a measure of gap differences (e.g., Gaziano, 2013; Hindman, 2009; Hindman, 2012; Veenstra, & Lyons, & Fowler-Dawson, 2016), belief polarization is also an important consideration when exploring how political entertainment may predict knowledge and beliefs. Because political entertainment media often discuss politicized issues in the context of how political figures and groups stand, the potential exists that engagers of political entertainment may differ in how extreme their views are toward their own side and against other viewpoints. Unlike demographic groups in which statuses are fixed (e.g., age, race) or at least momentarily measurable even though potentially changing (e.g., education), partisanship is an accumulation of beliefs toward political platforms, parties, and figures. Those viewpoints can be influenced by media figures,

social contacts, and individual factors. Understanding the factors influencing party affiliation and their strengths of connection are important considerations.

In considering the third area of interest—political views, this study proposed the following research question for Research Aim I—predictors of knowledge:

RQ1: Do political views (political party affiliation and partisanship) predict knowledge?

Political Entertainment

Entertainment has been described as “any activity designed to delight and, to a smaller degree, enlighten through the exhibition of fortunes and misfortunes of others, but also through the display of special skills by others and/or self” (Zillmann & Bryant, 1994, p. 438).

Entertainment has also been described as a broad yet advanced area of research providing sound findings to define entertainment, explain how it works, demonstrate its effects, and explore why audiences are attracted to it (Vorderer, 2003). Yet, it also has been described as a program built on multiple research approaches and not a single theory (Vorderer, 2003). As such, this study builds from the collective approaches related to entertainment education and disposition theories in analyzing political entertainment media and how such formats may offer experiences similar to other forms of entertainment (i.e., sports and drama). In considering the potential role of political entertainment in predicting knowledge of public issues, entertainment education approaches allow the consideration of educating within primarily entertainment media.

The idea of persuasive messages in media content is a cornerstone of advertising, and the use of incorporating promotions in programming dates back to earliest radio programming. The practice of embedding information and persuasive messages about public issues into entertainment media through storylines and visuals has become an effective means to change attitudes and behaviors (Singhal & Rogers, 2012). Such campaigns have been incorporated into

media programming throughout more than 75 countries for numerous topics regarding health, environmental concerns, parenting, and social causes (Singhal & Rogers, 2012).

These practices began to be studied for their media effects within the context of entertainment education, which defined the techniques as “the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, and change overt behavior” (Singhal & Rogers, 2012, *Preface*). Entertainment-education programming has been proposed as contributing to social change, which is described as the disruptions of the structures and functions of social systems (Singhal & Rogers, 2012). The techniques have been recognized officially for their use in promoting health topics through broadcast programming. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention jointly established the Sentinel for Health Award in partnership with the Hollywood Health and Society organization for honoring media producers raising awareness of public issues.

In explaining how entertainment education techniques may overcome resistance to changes through messaging, Moyer-Gusé (2008) has proposed three potential reasons: First, embedded messages reduce the potential for reacting, counterarguing, and avoiding information because the messages are cloaked in narratives as unobtrusive information; second, the viewing of other’s behaviors may highlight the need for action or what will happen from inaction and, thus, strengthen self-efficacy; and, third, seeing the results of the actions of characters in narratives can affect perceived norms and anticipated outcomes. These techniques are proposed as being effective for informing and persuading based on the key concepts of transportation, which has been described as an immersion into the action of a narrative (see Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004), and character involvement, which has been referred to the ways in which

audiences connect with and think about characters (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). This process of identifying with characters can include wanting to be like the character, feeling as though one possesses similarities with the character, believing a relationship exists with the character, feeling emotionally involved with a character, and modelling behavior of the character.

More than a decade ago, Vorderer (2003) proposed that entertainment research would benefit from addressing problematic areas: one, why people engage with entertainment experiences that evoke negative emotions; two, how individual characteristics and social contexts are intertwined with media engagement; and, three, how newer forms of media should be considered within entertainment approaches. The area addressing the role of negativity and media entertainment has gained interest specifically related to public opinions and politics, and has been termed political entertainment.

Research regarding political comedy shows has indicated viewers hold higher knowledge levels of politics and public issues as compared to non-viewers (Hollander, 2005; Young, 2016). Baum (2003) proposed that humor allows information to be consumed, and, thus, increases knowledge for those not purposely intending to engage in politics. Baum also proposed that satirical shows can act as priming devices to instigate interest in further consuming related political information. Feldman (2013) found, however, that those who watch and classify *The Daily Show* as political showed higher knowledge levels than those who reported the show as entertainment. Thus, *the expectations* viewers have about what they will be consuming may influence how the information is perceived and processed.

Hindman (2009) has proposed that media coverage may transmit cues about partisan viewpoints and, thus, may affect belief gaps, particularly with those engaging in selective exposure processes potentially limiting the range of viewpoints. Because by nature political

entertainment shows discuss topics in a satirical format, often emphasizing party disagreements, the potential for increased knowledge gaps and/or belief gaps exist based on those engaging regularly as compared to those who do not. Yet, the potential also exists that political entertainment shows may reduce scrutiny through the use of humor, thus, minimizing tendencies to filter information.

In considering the fourth area of interest—political entertainment, this study proposed the following research question for Research Aim I—predictors of knowledge:

RQ2: Does political entertainment use (political entertainment engagement and political entertainment motivations) predict knowledge?

Predictors of Knowledge Conceptualized

As described, this study has proposed that demographics, media use, political views, and political entertainment are potential predictors of knowledge gaps. The process of how these potential predictors may be enacted and have a role are visually represented in Figure 1^a and described in the following sections concerning information processing. While information processing research has expanded across much of psychology and other areas, the following concepts are most relevant for how people may form knowledge about public issues. This processing, however, is also proposed through the model as one in which a belief system contributes and is discussed in greater detail in the later section relating to Research Aim II.

Information Processing. Affect and cognition have been discussed as proposed factors in motivated reasoning; yet, there are additional factors potentially contributing to reasons why people engage with information and the effects. A second postulate motivated reasoning research has proposed is that people engage in an information processing in which information is attended to and selected for processing based on selective exposure (Jones & Song, 2014; Kunda,

1990). An overall judgement of the information is whether it is congruent or incongruent with currently held knowledge and beliefs (Jones & Song, 2014). Thus, the ways in which information is perceived can be external through the ways in which information is framed, but, also, the ways in which individuals activate already held notions about the information.

Confirmation bias. The concept of preconceived ideas are related to the third postulate within motivated reasoning approaches and has been proposed as the way in which individuals process information that is congruent with currently held information (Jones & Song, 2014; Kunda, 1990). Researchers have shown that congruent information is processed more quickly than that which is incongruent (Lodge & Taber, 2000; Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). Marcus (2009) proposed confirmation bias as the process of noticing or seeking out information already fitting our perspectives. Researchers showed this tendency in action (Kunda, 1990). In an experiment, participants were told they would be playing a game but first needed to watch someone else play to learn; only, the other player was a confederate and the game rigged so that the confederate would score perfectly. Some participants were told they would be playing with the player and others against. The latter dismissed the player's achievements as lucky; whereas, the others praised the player's skills. Thus, the findings indicated that we scrutinize information to a lesser degree when the results are favorable for us (Kunda, 1990). In essence, the findings have suggested that may we seek out and judge information through others in a variety of ways to support our motivations, which can be based on multiple factors.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of knowledge, beliefs, and engagement processes^a and testing model of knowledge, beliefs, and engagement processes^b.

Figure 1a. Conceptual model of knowledge, beliefs, and engagement processes.

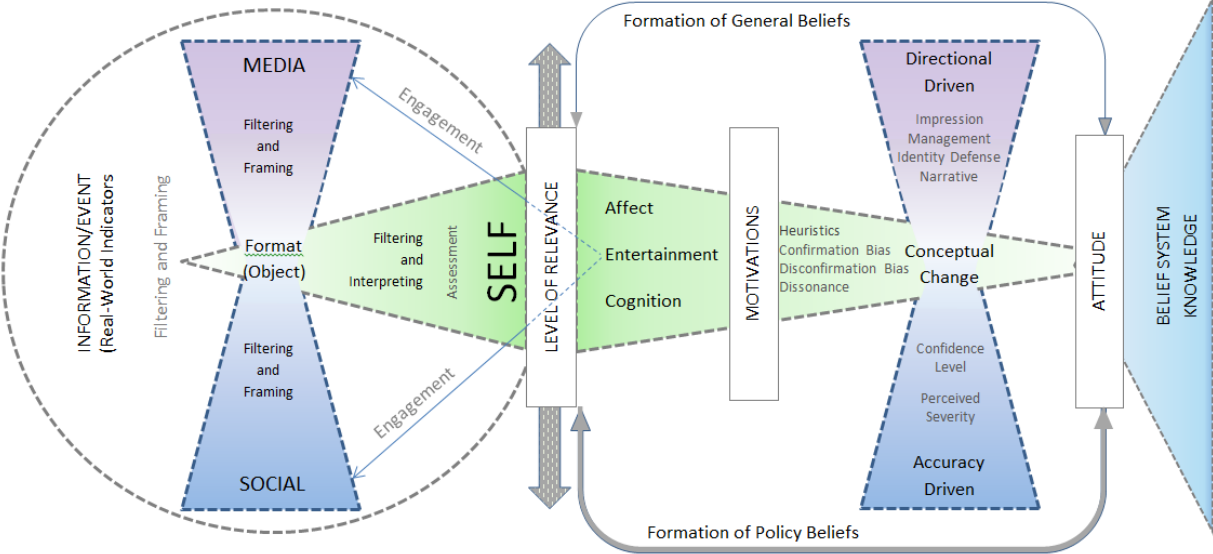
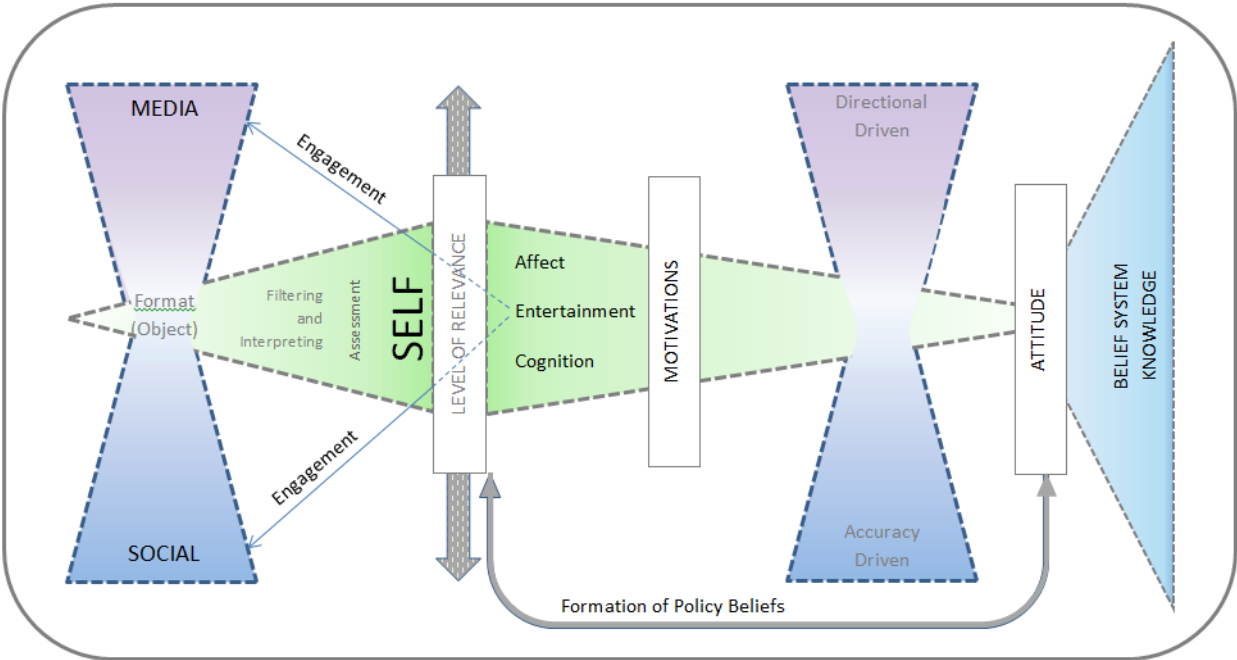


Figure 1b. Testing model of knowledge, beliefs, and engagement processes.



Disconfirmation bias. A fourth postulate of motivated reasoning has been proposed as the mirror concept to confirmation bias—disconfirmation bias (Jones & Song, 2014; Kunda, 1990). The term has been described as information that is incongruent to currently held perspectives and, thus, is processed to a greater degree than that which is congruent in an effort to spot inconsistencies and develop counterarguments (Taber & Lodge, 2006; Taber, Cann, & Kucsova, 2009). A study in which participants were provided biographies of scientists along with their research found that participants were significantly more likely to rank those agreeing with their viewpoints as experts and those opposing their viewpoints as questionable (Kahan, Peters, Wittlin, Slovic, Ouellette, Braman, & Mandel, 2012). Kahan et al. found that participants who had indicated climate change as a concern were 72 percentage points more likely to rank the scientists aligning with their views as experts compared to those who doubted climate change at only 54 percentage points.

Dissonance. Disconfirmation bias can be viewed within motivated reasoning as the motivation driving why information may not be scrutinized, based on low levels of relevance in an effort to avoid confronting currently held positions (Kunda, 1990). The state of holding a perspective that has been challenged is considered dissonance, which is viewed as an undesirable feeling that acts as a motivational drive to resolve the conflict (see Festinger, 1957). Research has shown the ways in which this processing occurs.

While the concepts thus far have indicated how information may be analyzed during information processing, people do not always scrutinize information to a great degree. Rather, other studies have indicated we often rely on currently held information to guide our perceptions of incoming input.

Heuristics. Heuristic processing has been described as employing the use of held knowledge and belief structures based on cues that can reduce the need for cognitive expenditures (Chaiken, 1980; Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989). This type of reliance on stored memories requires having the available information, being able to access the information, and considering the information as applicable to the incoming input (Chen, Duckworth, & Chaiken, 1999). The level of processing and the reliance on heuristics can vary depending on the degree and type of motivation. If a low level of relevance, among other factors, is driving information processing, reliance on heuristics may occur.

Recognition heuristics. Recognition heuristic has been discussed as a process relating to the ability of people to infer value of one object based on knowledge about another object within a logical category set (Goldstein & Gigerenzer, 2002). For example, if a person unfamiliar with geography of a foreign country is asked to rank the population size of a set of cities within that country, the person may have no knowledge of size but does recognize the names of most of the cities. The person may then rank according to how well he or she recognizes the names. This technique has been found to be an extremely effective tool for sorting through and understanding unfamiliar information. Standing (1973) conducted an expansive study in which 10,000 pictures were shown to people followed by a recall measure two days later. The average recall was 8,300 of 10,000 visuals correctly identified, lending support to the notion of people relying on inferences for unfamiliar objects.

Anchoring-and-adjustment heuristics. However, this information processing technique has been shown to have flaws. People can judge unknown objects, their attributes, and, thus, their value, based on anchoring-and-adjustment heuristics depending on how information is framed, which can potential lead to faulty bias (Epley & Gilovich, 2006). For example, if a

person is asked if the U.S. has more or less than 50 million people, the person who does not know the answer may perceive that the actual number is close to the number stated in the question simply based on the framing of the question. One can also compare this anchoring tendency to visual cues. For example, if someone is shown a typical globe in which sizes are not accurate and is asked if the U.S. or the continent of Africa is bigger, the person might believe that the two are similar in land mass based simply on the skewed framing of the images.

While these heuristic tendencies may appear to lend support to the idea of more information equating to narrowed knowledge and belief gaps, research has indicated increased information can actually lead to more bias (Kahan, Peters, Dawson, & Slovic, 2013), as discussed earlier. The ways in which incoming input is first selected based on a level of relevance, then assessed and perceived—which encompasses the ways in which information has been framed—then is evaluated through confirmation bias, disconfirmation bias, dissonance, and heuristics, all collectively, may contribute to motivations driving the reasoning process.

Motivational goals. Motivations have been proposed as two categories: directional goals and accuracy goals (see Kruglanski, 1980; Kruglanski & Ajzen, 1983; Kruglanski & Klar, 1987; Kunda, 1990) and are suggested as reflecting the underlying reasoning processes. Directional goals are considered engaging in reasoning that leads to the most desirable conclusions; whereas, accuracy goals reflect the employment of beliefs and knowledge for problem-solving (Kunda, 1990). These two processes can be important factors in understanding how people form differing beliefs when exposed to the same stimuli.

Directional. While the term directional would seem to imply that individuals may be steering the reasoning process toward a preferred conclusion, the process is not considered one in which the individual is aware of influencing the end goal of a preferred conclusion (Kunda,

1990). The reasoning process is proposed as occurring, in part, because people are motivated to perceive themselves as logical and informed; thus, they seek to have an “illusion of objectivity” (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987). The process is considered an illusion because people engage in reasoning that obscures the true intent of influencing a preferred conclusion (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987). Thus, a preferred conclusion can only be reached if the reasoning process supports it; otherwise, alternative conclusions must be accepted (Kunda, 1990).

Additionally, this process has been suggested as resulting in additional beliefs to reach related preferred conclusions, such that a collection of related beliefs can be built from biased reasoning (Kunda, 1990). The concepts previously discussed—disconfirmation bias, confirmation bias, dissonance, and heuristics—all contribute to directional goal processing. Self-presentation theories (see sociometer theory; Leary et al., 1995) further explain the role of these concepts and how people are motivated to protect and manage their identities, which are based in the narratives individuals construct to make sense of the world and themselves.

Much work in psychology areas have contributed toward understanding that people seek to reach preferred conclusions for the overriding drive of avoiding social exclusion and enhancing social inclusion (Leary et al., 1995). This feeling has been suggested as also extending to inconsistencies about the way one views The Self (Steele, 1988). If an individual believes an external cause is the reason for inconsistencies, the threat to The Self may not be perceived as great as if the inconsistencies are related to one’s own behavior (Cooper & Fazio, 1984). Thus, the level of arousal about a state of inconsistent ideas is proposed as affecting the level of motivation for a desired conclusion (Cooper, Zanna, & Taves, 1978).

The process of reaching a preferred conclusion may be achieved through a variety of information processing. Dissonance is a state proposed as possibly constraining shifts in

attitudes through evaluating the information based on selecting the most self-preserving (Greenbaum & Zemach, 1972). Confirmation bias may initiate a memory search biased toward finding information supporting a preferred conclusion (Kunda, 1990). Disconfirmation bias may filter incoming information and scrutinize that which cannot be avoided to develop counterarguments as compared to congruent information that may not receive the same consideration (Kahan et al., 2013). Heuristics may allow an individual to rely on memories of related information at the expense of scrutinizing new information (Goldstein & Gigerenzer, 2002). These are all in comparison to motivations for reaching a sound conclusion.

Accuracy goals. Reasoning driven by accuracy goals may appear to be more straightforward in that people are reasoning because they value being accurate; however, several factors complicate the process. One primary premise has been built from prior research regarding cognitive effort and perceived importance for correctness (see Simon, 1955). These ideas have proposed accuracy reasoning as a trade-off between the efforts it takes to reason through information and the consequences for being wrong (Kunda, 1990). The latter also considers the context of how information affects the individual's social status.

Studies have shown when participants engage in problem-solving tasks that they think will either be made public or not, those anticipating having to account for their conclusions spend more time considering the information (Freund, Kruglanski, & Shpitzajzen, 1985; Kruglanski & Freund, 1983). The opportunity to shift blame to external factors in stating a conclusion also has been found. In an experimental design in which participants could attribute potential wrong answers to not having enough time, participants indicated reduced accountability (Freund et al., 1985). An unfortunate consequence in reasoning based on accuracy goals is the potential for more biased conclusions than unbiased findings. Reliance on heuristics and

misinterpreting information, can lead to faulty conclusions that the individual believes in more strongly because of the invested cognitive effort (Tetlock, Skitka, & Boettger, 1989). Studies have shown that even when incentives were provided and accuracy emphasized, biases remained (Lord, Lepper, & Preston, 1984).

This study considered if people seek political entertainment for a specific motivation or multiple reasons. Also, motivations of those engaging in political entertainment were analyzed—entertainment-value, information-seeking, emotional release, and social involvement—for their potential in affecting knowledge.

Research Aim II – Belief Gap Research

As knowledge gap studies began considering Internet news use and the effects of social media on knowledge gaps, an additional area of research began to further findings regarding how people process news information through a prism of beliefs regarding implications of public issues. Although only a little more than a decade in the making, the approach termed belief gap has already shown interesting implications.

Theoretical premises

Contrary to deficit models of knowledge, Hamilton (2011) found support that more knowledge was not sufficient to encourage public agreement about climate change; rather, ideological differences were found to be greatest for those more highly educated as compared to those with less education. Hart and Nisbet (2012) proposed that those most knowledgeable about a topic are more likely to hold complex schemas, thus, actually process information in more biased ways that reinforce currently held beliefs. Thus, belief gap studies have supported the proposition that a flaw in deficit models is in the assumption that people will interpret information in the same way (Nisbet, 2005; Nisbet, 2010; Nisbet, Cooper, & Garrett, 2015).

As Hindman (2012) has noted, beliefs are based on values, reference groups, attachments to others, ideologies, among other factors. Because of this, knowledge can be coupled with an attitude toward the information, and, as Hindman has proposed, may shape knowledge more by partisan affiliation than other factors of SES and education. Hindman analyzed the ways in which variables were measured for knowledge gap studies, suggesting that studies have employed a positivistic view of knowledge as existing independent of the observer and building over time. Yet, as Gaziano (2013) has noted, even the earliest knowledge gap studies have often used belief statements rather than measurable “factual” statements. For example, when questioning the extent of agreement with statements of the earth becoming warmer, questions were phrased to ask about participants’ *beliefs* in global warming, not agreement with or disagreement with, for example, a statement concerning that ocean temperatures have increased. Thus, statements of beliefs are not necessarily based on facts but interpretations of information and, in the cases of politicized issues, perhaps beliefs in the causes of an issue and interpretations of the consequences. When considering topics that have become politicized, such as global warming, the potential of such questions assessing not the accuracy of the statement but agreement or disagreement with the *implications* of the issue are a risk. How belief gap approach is complementary to and furthers knowledge gap theory is discussed below regarding the four areas of interest – demographics, media use, political views, and political entertainment.

Demographics

In considering potential contributors to knowledge gaps, belief gap approaches have sought to analyze other factors than socioeconomic status. In knowledge gap and belief gap research and motivated reasoning studies, a dominant approach has been the deficit model to address gaps (Bauer, Allum, & Miller, 2007) with more recent work considering partisanship as

a filter for individuals to attend to and consider information (e.g., Gaziano, 2013; Hindman, 2012; Nisbet, 2005; Nisbet & Goidel, 2007). Mutz (2008) proposed that politicized issues will likely activate partisan beliefs and result in increased polarization. Yet, partisan beliefs have also been proposed as one element interacting with other factors within motivated reasoning to form opinions. In building from approaches in motivated reasoning, social identity, and persuasion, Hart and Nisbet (2012) proposed that group identification may interact with partisanship to influence reactions toward news stories.

In a study where participants were exposed to news stories about climate change in which content emphasized the impact on different social groups, the researchers found that identification with potentially affected groups was contingent on political identification (Hart & Nisbet, 2012). In a national topic receiving high levels of media coverage—the U.S. health care reform bill—Hindman (2012) found that education was not a predictor of knowledge about the bill; rather, age, sex, race, and income showed significant differences, with younger, non-white, lower-income women placing a higher value on health care reform than other respective groups. The study also explored other variables, suggesting future studies should similarly consider a range of factors, finding overall that liberals were more highly educated; yet, highly-educated conservatives were more numerous and ranked higher in income in comparison. Additionally, more highly-educated liberals differed from other groups in distinct ways: they had more years of college, they tended to be younger, they included more non-whites, they enjoyed greater employment numbers, they reported being less religious, they oriented toward complex problem solving, they served less often in the military, and they expressed opinions more often.

Other research has explored the role of religiosity in knowledge beliefs, finding overall that self-reporting conservatives are more likely than liberals to question scientific information

(e.g., Brossard, Scheufele, Kim, & Lewenstein, 2009; Ho, et al., 2008). Gauchat (2012) also found religiosity to be a factor in distrust of science and noted that other factors could be as important as knowledge and education in predicting acceptance of scientific knowledge, such as political leanings, race, income, and social position. Research based on two substantial studies of twins from the U.S. and Australia has even supported that genetics, along with environmental factors, can partially account for ideology (Alford, Funk, & Hibbing, 2005).

In considering the first area of interest—demographics, this study proposed the following hypothesis for Research Aim II—predictors of policy belief polarization:

H3: Demographic factors (race, sex, religion, education, and perceived economic status) can predict beliefs.

Media Use

Researchers have proposed that belief gaps are influenced by motivated reasoning, which promotes further biased beliefs based on processing information to reach desired conclusions (Hart & Nisbet, 2012; Kunda, 1990, Lodge & Taber, 2000; Nisbet et al., 2015). Motivated reasoning has been proposed as reasoning strategies that are employed when attempting to reach a conclusion (see Kunda, 1990). The approach has stated that people process information to reinforce already held viewpoints (i.e., motivational driven) or to reach correct conclusions (i.e., accuracy driven; see Kunda, 1990; Lodge & Taber, 2000; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Researchers have termed the ways both knowledge and belief gap approaches are collectively considered “communication gaps” to refer to the ways in which media use affected individuals within social contexts (Nisbet, 2008; Nisbet et al., 2015).

The concept of motivation has been employed in research seeking to further understanding public opinion formation (Leeper & Slothuus, 2014), due partly to its applicability

in understanding how people process information and hold beliefs toward information, which, in turn, predict belief gaps between groups of which people identify with those viewpoints, such as political parties, among other factors. The ways in which the news industry has experienced changes from technological changes that, in part, allow more interactions with and by audiences further challenge the propositions by deficit models suggesting that more information equates to decreased knowledge gaps. Information, both accurate and inaccurate, can be more easily inserted in the public sphere through online and social media; yet, ways to verify accuracy may have become more problematic. For example, information can be shared and “disconnected” from references to the initial sources, thus, making credibility more difficult to determine. Additionally, the information can become distorted through continued sharing.

Jones and Song (2014) proposed that information inherently contains concepts (i.e., objects) and attributes of those objects, which when perceived, can activate affective and cognitive responses toward information. Affective responses have been termed hot cognition in reference to the emotional reaction toward information as compared to cold cognition processing of information, which implies an unemotional or lesser emotional processing reaction toward objects (Jones & Song, 2014; Lodge & Taber, 2000). A lack of an affective component can occur for a variety of reasons, including a lack of personal relevance, a failure to understand the concepts, and a lack of self-efficacy in being able to react or conclude the processing (Jones & Song, 2014; Lodge & Taber, 2000).

While affective and cognitive processing types have been researched independently, they often are activated together. Researchers have proposed that attention to feelings can mediate the effects of judging information, such as in the context of considering risky behaviors (Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995). These appraisal approach theories have

approached affective considerations of information as a mechanism to guide judgement, make decisions, and process information (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988). Studies have shown that when affect is manipulated to produce negative moods, cognitive assessments of risks can become elevated; however, for those already ranking high in trait anxiety, considered already a high state of affect, participants were not as likely to attribute risks to feelings (Gasper & Clore, 1998). Thus, some people may have more awareness of when they are activating affective decision-making responses than others.

The connection of affect and cognition toward reasoning and the resulting beliefs is a critical component in understanding why individuals process the same information differently and the effects media and social influences can have on these processes. The episodic constraint principle (see Bargh, 1992; Murphy & Zajonc, 1993) has proposed that information processing can lead to unconscious priming of evaluative concepts that influence affect and cognition. For example, media information can be framed to mask persuasive intent (i.e., entertainment education) and accumulate in their effects over time so that perspectives of related information can be influenced (i.e., priming). Researchers have shown that people respond more positively to ideographs with hidden happy faces embedded and more negatively to those with angry faces (Winkielman, Berridge, & Wilbarger, 2005). Thus, reactions to related stimuli without the hidden elements can evoke parallel reactions because of priming effects. In such cases, the later reactions are removed from the original information and source but still predict the processing of information (Strack, Schwartz, & Gschneidinger, 1985).

Research also has shown how affective assessments of information can predict the level of cognitive processing based on an individual's mood state (e.g., Bless, Clore, Schwarz, Golisano, Rabe, & Wölk, 1996; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Schwarz, & Bless, 1991). Thus, affect

can promote processing of information through a prism of negativity or positivity (Schwarz & Bless, 2007) that then can engage heuristic processing or more detailed analysis. Researchers have found that when participants performed secondary tasks requiring general knowledge as opposed to specific steps, those in happy states performed better than those in sad states (see Schwarz & Bless, 2007). Researchers have explained these differences in proposing that sad moods instigated more analysis of information because greater consequences were considered; whereas, positive moods encouraged fewer resources based on not wanting to risk not feeling happy by thinking of negative effects (Schwarz & Bless, 2007). Thus, positive affect may activate greater reliance on internal knowledge and beliefs that reduce challenges to those; while, negative affect may devote more resources to analyzing the external input. For political entertainment shows in which information is being discussed in purposively entertaining ways, the potential for affect and cognition to be factors in why people are motivated to engage in the shows may differ from other types of media engagement.

In considering the second area of interest—new media use, this study proposed the following hypothesis for Research Aim II—predictors of policy belief polarization:

H4: News media use (news following and news source type) can predict beliefs.

Political Views

In a study of the increasing polarization of U.S. citizens based on ideological and partisan lines, Gaziano (2013) considered possible underlying contributors to belief gaps, resulting in furthering the research area. Based on work by Haidt and Graham (2007) in which morality was segmented into five psychological foundations, Gaziano (2013) found that liberals and conservatives construct the lens in which they view the world in differing ways. Of the five categories labeled harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and

purity/sanctity, liberals were found to base their principles on mainly the first two; whereas, conservatives based their principles on all five. In related research, Inbar, Pizarro, and Bloom (2009) conducted a pilot study using the Disgust Sensitivity Scale (DSS; see Haidt, McCauley, & Rozin, 1994) and a political orientation measure to discover a positively correlated link between disgust sensitivity and people identifying as conservative as compared to those identifying as liberal. Hindman (2012) found that self-reported political party choice (i.e., Democrat or Republican) was a more powerful predictor than education for beliefs in regards to information and stances about a proposed healthcare bill.

In analyzing belief gap propositions, Hindman (2012) found that partisanship was a significant predictor of knowledge while education was not and that gaps in beliefs about the topic grew over time as the analyzed issue, health care reform, was debated politically. Thus, Hindman (2012) proposed that higher correlations are found between partisanship and beliefs than correlations between educational level and beliefs and a “positive divergent interaction between time and partisanship in the rate of belief acceptance” (p. 590). To measure these propositions, Hindman (2012) proposed the effects should be observable through aggregated data representing opinions about public issues and over time. The propositions are also proposed as applicable under “conditions of political polarization and ideologically based party consolidation, nonpartisan authoritative sources supporting one set of beliefs and not another, and heavy and sustained media coverage of an issue that identifies elite representatives of political parties taking sides on the issue” (p. 590).

Researchers have shown that people who are the most knowledgeable about a topic as compared to those with less knowledge are more likely to choose being aligned with their ideologies even at the expense of being wrong (Kahan, Peters, Dawson, & Slovic, 2013). In a

study asking people to solve difficult math problems in an effort for forcing participants to engage in mental processing to arrive at correct answers, participants ranking high in math skills registered more time in processing the information, and, indeed, were more likely to arrive at the correct answer; yet, when a politicized issue was used to present the numbers (i.e., gun crimes), math no longer was a predictor of arriving at the correct math answer (Kahan et al., 2013). The predictor became partisanship such that when the information supported a liberal position, more liberals arrived at the correct answer as compared to conservatives; the same pattern was shown when positions were swapped. An additional finding from the study demonstrated that those with weak math skills were 25% more likely to get the answer right when the topic aligned with viewpoints than not, and those with strong math skills were 45% more likely to get the correct answer in the same situation. As demonstrated, political views are potentially a motivator for how information is processed and, thus, a factor in forming knowledge and beliefs.

In considering the third area of interest—political views, this study proposed the following hypothesis for Research Aim II—predictors of policy belief polarization:

H5: Political views (political party affiliation and partisanship) can predict beliefs.

Political Entertainment

As Vorderer (2003) has noted, mood-management and selective-exposure theories were offered to explore why and how people seek entertainment; whereas, disposition theories explain the experiences individuals have while engaging with entertainment, particularly regarding how users think and feel about others being portrayed in the narratives. It is the latter most applicable in explaining how political entertainment has emerged as a subject of inquiry for its effects on knowledge, beliefs, and public engagement. Disposition theory may explain, in part, how political entertainment with its focus on discussing politicized topics while using humor and

satire about political parties and figures to inform and persuade may affect users. The theoretical approach has focused on three areas: humor, drama, and sports, with each potentially explaining how political entertainment engagement may play a role in belief formation.

Disposition of humor theory. One of the first disposition theories proposed was Zillmann and Cantor's (1972) disposition of humor. Based in part on Hobbes' (1668) discussions of hostile humor as being a way in which disparagement of others makes individuals feel better about themselves, Zillmann (2000) found a connection between humor and disposition, such that the disparaging was found to be more humorous when the others were viewed unfavorably rather than just others. A range of studies considered reactions to both the disparager and the disparaged to find that feelings toward both affected responses, as well as group affiliation (Zillmann, 1980; Zillmann, Bryant, & Sapolsky, 1989; Zillmann & Canter, 1972; Zillmann, Taylor, & Lewis, 1998). These studies were rooted in prior studies upon which the theory emerged, including one in which individuals of differing races found humor to be more amusing when the disparager was of the same race as they were when the disparaged were of a differing race (Middleton, 1963).

Zillmann (2000) proposed, however, that the effects of disparaging has limits and is tied with the notion of justice, such that a tipping point exists as to when audiences may no longer attribute their enjoyment to humor cues and begin to view the humor as too extreme (see King, 2003). Disposition of humor theory proposed that humor helps to face grim realities of life in a way that distances individuals from the consequences and helps in the experience to release tension and find relief (King, 2003). For serious subjects involving politicized issues, employing humor as a means of discussing the information may show similar results in allowing audiences

to relieve anxieties and contemplate difficult issues. Additionally, the format of politicized topics as divisive issues may encourage perceptions of sides or opponents and allies.

Disposition theory of drama. Other disposition theories offering reasons for the potential effects of political entertainment have included dramatic content (Zillmann & Cantor, 1977). Raney (2004) explained disposition theory of drama, based in assumptions of a moral code, as encompassing both the cognitive and affective responses people engage for enjoyment with mediated entertainment. This theory, therefore, can be used to explain how a TV drama format, with a buildup of conflict, a climax, and resolved outcomes that then builds conflicts for future episodes can provide audiences with enjoyment by encouraging the watcher to become invested in the fate of characters. The level of liking and disliking toward media characters within dramatic conflicts is part of the entertainment experience and has been proposed by disposition theory as reflecting and reinforcing our moral standards (Zillmann, 2000).

Thus, engagement with media characters can be based, in part, on judgments of the “rightness” and “wrongness” of their actions, triggering empathetic responses as described by Zillmann (2000) from earlier research on a seven-stage model of moral judgment (Zillmann, 1996). More specifically, the model argued that people navigate through stages of media exposure, disposition formation, anticipatory attitudes, media involvement, emotional responses, cognitive processing of anticipated outcomes versus actual outcomes, and assessments of morality. The theory proposed that enjoyment increases when liked characters experience satisfactory or enjoyable outcomes, and, also, when those characters viewed as dislikeable experience negative outcomes, such as punishments for their actions (Raney, 2004). Political entertainment shows often rely on having a host on which the show centers and is promoted to viewers through the use of the host’s name and image. Additionally, shows frequently use

partisan figures as targets of remarks. The potential for engagement with political entertainment to activate disposition tendencies exists. Additionally, the act of discussing politicized issues may encourage an “us” against “them” viewpoint.

Disposition theory of sports spectatorship. The theory of sports spectatorship (see Bryant & Raney, 2000; Zillmann, et al., 1989) proposed that engagement with sports can incite similar responses to that of drama. These premises included the following: one, that enjoyment increases if players and teams viewed positively experience good outcomes and decreases if not; and, two, that enjoyment increases as well if those teams and players viewed negatively fail and decreases if they do well. Raney (2004) proposed an extensive list of categories related to sports fans and entertainment within three broad areas—*affective, cognitive, and behavioral*—of which there are subcategories. These included in order of the three: *entertainment, eustress, self-esteem, and escape in relation to emotional connections; learning and aesthetic motivations related to cognitive processing; a release mechanism, companionship, group belonging, family time, and economic benefits related to behavioral.*

This process of attending to information about characters and plots or teams and players is proposed as initiating emotional states that then affect levels of cognitive processing (Raney, 2004). These states are based on arousal effects such that higher arousal rates may reduce cognitive processing and empathetic tendencies (Zillmann, 1996). Put simply, the longer one remains in a highly aroused state, reduced cognitive processing regarding empathetic tendencies occurs. While viewing intense action on the field or the screen, people become highly aroused and involved such that when an inevitable outcome occurs, they respond strongly based on who is perceived as deserving of a win or loss. Vorderer (2003) suggested this component of entertainment theory explains how people choose mediated images, react to watching the drama

unfold, and then process, both emotionally and cognitively, the outcomes. The aspects of humor, drama, liking and disliking of characters, and fanship are most particularly suited to the emerging field of analyzing the role of political engagement and entertainment in which humor is woven within the storytelling of news and attention is focused on political figures and parties in providing fodder for the audience's amusement. This processing of information from both affective and cognitive cues may lend itself to predicting belief formations.

Disposition theory and politics. Holbert (2005) proposed two central questions in relation to disposition theory and entertainment television and politics; the first in regards to the audience: *To what degree can viewers expect politics or inherently political issues to be raised during the course of a specific piece of media content (whether throughout a program or during a well-defined portion of a program)?*" (p. 443); and the second in regards to messages: *What combination of explicit versus implicit political messages is being provided in a specific piece of entertainment content?*" (p. 443). Holbert proposed that the first relates to the affective and cognitive expectations individuals have about engaging with entertainment, whether seeking entertainment that is purposely political or from media content that includes political messages but does not promote itself as solely political. The second concerns the content itself.

In considering the two guiding questions, Holbert (2005) proposed a nine-part typology for studying entertainment television and politics ranging from primary political and implicit to secondary political and explicit: traditional satire, situation comedy satire, lifeworld content, fictional political dramas, political docudramas, reality-based content, entertainment talk show interviews with politicians, soft news, and entertainment television events. Research since has studied a selection of these areas. Two journals have devoted recent special editions to the developing research: "Breaking boundaries: Working across the methodological and

epistemological divide in the study of political entertainment” in a 2013 edition of the *International Journal of Communication* and “Strike while the iron is hot: Seizing on recent advancements to propel forward the study of political entertainment media” in a 2014 edition of *Mass Communication and Society*. Included in the later publication, Lee and Kwak (2014) analyzed humor in political satire to find that political humor can indirectly increase the likelihood of political participation through awareness of policy stances.

In considering the fourth area of interest—political entertainment, this study proposed the following research question for Research Aim II—predictors of policy belief polarization:

RQ3: Does political entertainment use (political entertainment engagement and political entertainment motivations) predict beliefs?

Predictors of Beliefs Conceptualized

Research in belief gap research has proposed that demographics, media use, political views all contribute to belief formations regarding public issues. Political entertainment approaches suggest that political entertainment engagement and motivations may be an additional factor in how beliefs toward politicized topics may form. These relationships are conceptualized visually in Figure 1^a and further described in the following sections regarding beliefs as a collective and interwoven system of attitudes and differing belief types (i.e., general beliefs and specific or policy beliefs).

Belief system. Four propositions have been discussed related to factors relating to motivated reasoning and knowledge and beliefs (i.e., information processing, selective exposure, confirmation bias, and disconfirmation bias). The fifth and last proposition related to motivated reasoning has proposed that knowledge and prior beliefs are a guiding force in how the other four factors are employed (Jones & Song, 2014; Kunda, 1990). Researchers have proposed that

individuals holding the strongest attitudes toward objects will put forth greater effort to protect those perspectives as compared to those with weaker attitudes (Taber & Lodge, 2006).

Additionally, those with higher levels of knowledge and reasoning abilities are proposed as employing greater effort to maintain current belief systems as compared to those with lower levels (Taber & Lodge, 2006).

Attitudes. Attitudes individuals hold toward objects are considered predisposed viewpoints influencing beliefs and behavior and often expressed as valence statements of liking or disliking (Allport, 1935). In the proposed model (Figure 1^a), attitudes are considered an end point and start point for contemplating input based on currently held knowledge and beliefs and assessments of the object. A cyclical process can occur in the process in which input is acknowledged, evaluated for relevance, and is assessed by engaging currently held attitudes toward related information, which then, in turn, can strengthen or challenge the attitude. The results can be to close the process of evaluating the input, reevaluating the object, or seeking more information. Attitudes in the model are proposed as the affective connections to knowledge, which, in turn, influence beliefs but are distinct from beliefs. Therefore, *attitudes may be congruent with beliefs or incongruent*. For example, an individual can hold a racial belief but be aware of holding that belief and have a negative attitude toward holding that belief. Thus, attitudes can be viewed as a component of motivation toward how information is to be processed, whether motivational or accuracy driven, because they, in part, influence the degree to which current beliefs are valued in assessing new information.

The model (Figure 1^a) proposes a similar relationship in that attitudes toward public issues may be filtered through a prism of beliefs with a consideration of who will be affected and how the individual identifies with those affected. Thus, while knowledge and belief gaps studies

have traditionally analyzed how people rank reactions toward knowledge questions or belief questions about politicized topics, the belief formation model has proposed, and, therefore, this study tested, in part, additional measures that allowed a level of specificity. These are classified as policy beliefs as compared to general beliefs.

General beliefs. In defining general beliefs, a comparison using policy beliefs serves as a reference. This study's model has proposed that policy beliefs are those viewpoints being formed or already stored with an attached affective component accompanying a generalized belief or another policy belief. A general belief is an overall and loosely formed, and, thus, potentially malleable viewpoint toward an object that can be influenced by the system of knowledge and beliefs and attitudes toward each attribute or related objects.

In regards to politicized topics, the concept of a general belief can be classified as partisan in that it polarizes a general belief to be considered positively or negatively aligned; however, the partisanship is the valence and the general belief the collection of all factors influencing the belief. To illustrate: An individual can align (i.e., identify) with a political party, holding a general positive viewpoint toward one and negative toward another, and, thus, toward a public issue, such as climate change based on the preferred party's platform. Incoming related input, such as a news story, may be processed solely on the partisan belief, but not necessarily or likely given social contexts and other individual beliefs. These are apt to combine with partisan views to influence the general belief while the partisan view remains intact for other beliefs. For example, if an individual holds a partisan viewpoint that climate change is probably exaggerated but befriends someone who has been impacted by the negative effects of climate change then that social input is attached to the general belief and challenges the partisan viewpoint. Additionally, the individual could travel and witness effects of climate change, further

challenging the partisan viewpoint. The individual could still hold a partisan perspective overall but hold a differing general belief for partisan topics. Thus, general beliefs are the overall perspective of the information an individual holds, while partisan viewpoints are a component of what may influence those general beliefs; while, policy beliefs are the end result of a desired belief of consequences or needed actions toward a belief that has become more clearly imaged and defined based on specifically considered pieces of information.

Policy beliefs. In further differentiating general beliefs, policy beliefs are defined for their role in the proposed model. General beliefs guide responses to incoming input and collectively help reach more specific conclusions as the need for greater processing, influenced by relevance and motivations, increases. Policy beliefs, therefore, are considered the resulting viewpoint toward an object after assessing input and reasoning toward such within general beliefs collectively in an effort to reach a specific and contextual conclusion. While policy beliefs are proposed as emerging from a collection of general beliefs that are influenced by partisan beliefs, socially contextual beliefs, and individual factors, both general and policy beliefs are not distinct and fixed and, therefore, can change. Yet, they are proposed to exist on a continuum in which general beliefs are more apt to adjust more easily and policy beliefs less so, given more motivated processing has typically occurred to reach a policy belief. As a first step in considering these parameters, this study considered predictors of a collection of policy beliefs.

Research Aim III - Public Engagement

Studies analyzing the institutions of media across countries have indicated that the ways in which people are allowed to participate may also be a factor in what people know and believe. Thus, within some cultures interest may be high yet the opportunities to become involved limited. With the rapid increase of social media options and the pervasiveness of use for most

individuals, opportunities for receiving and relaying knowledge and beliefs about public issues are more available now, thus, allowing citizens to be more publicly engaged than ever before. While traditionally engagement in politicized issues may have been considered the degree to which individuals engage in public forums, technology allows that space of publicness to be reconsidered. As such, this study, conducted during a presidential election cycle, considers public engagement as interactions with news and others through social media (i.e., Facebook) and intentions for voting. Demographics, media use, political views, and political entertainment motivations are considered for their potential to be predictors for public engagement. Additionally, knowledge and beliefs are also considered.

Demographics

Key in how information is perceived and, thus, influences beliefs can be through social interactions with others. This social influence includes the ways in which people self-identify with groups and attend to attitudes from reference groups. Anderson (2015) reported that 16% of registered voters in the United States stated following political candidates and political parties on social media before the 2014 elections, with the number increasing afterward. Reasons given for following politics included being among the first to get breaking news, to bypass traditional news, and to feel personally connected to political figures or parties (Anderson, 2015).

A recent study has indicated affective polarization based on the choice of political party can be as strong of a predictor for political engagement as race (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). In considering attitudes and behaviors toward others, the researchers found evidence supporting that hostile feelings toward opposing political figures and parties can become automated or reflexive processes, and, as such, can instigate judgments and behaviors akin to discriminatory practices, such as based on race. Additionally, the researchers found that these negative responses based

on partisanship are more apt to encourage engagement as compared to wanting to engage for working toward resolutions.

In considering the first area of interest—demographics, this study proposed the following research questions for Research Aim III—predictors of public engagement:

RQ4_a: Do demographics predict social media news reading?

RQ5_a: Do demographics predict social media news sharing?

RQ6_a: Do demographics predict social media news reacting?

RQ7: Are demographics and voting likelihood independent?

Media Use

The past decade has seen a shift in how people obtain news and the ways in which individuals can share information and insert viewpoints alongside news. Prior to social and online media advancements, news was presented in a fairly linear and formatted fashion according to news standards and distribution methods, such as meeting print deadlines or broadcast time constraints. The external space into which information is inserted and resides now can be viewed as changing dramatically, especially in terms of accessibility and opportunities for engagement. While traditional media still operate within some traditional parameters, changes have influenced media and social environments, and, thus, individual engagement with information in several ways.

Regarding accessibility, individuals have increased opportunities to obtain information about real-world indicators from primary sources, thus, possibly minimizing framing by media and others. Second, people have access to more choices of information sources and ways to obtain information at their convenience. Regarding engagement, people are firmly inserted into the space of public information. While media still have powerful agenda-building capabilities,

individuals can interact with and engage in framing of news objects and attributes through reading information shared by media and others, from sharing information, and by contributing to information. Thus, information can be viewed as having life made malleable by potentially many players within the public space.

Examples abound representing the ways in which political figures have used social media to promote messages and engage with citizens. Reports and studies have analyzed the then-Senator Obama's use of social media in his presidential campaign and its effectiveness; yet, as Carr (2015) has discussed, the techniques considered then as trend-setting are now just one of many options for current politicians. In the 2016 primary season, Ted Cruz live-streamed on Periscope; Marco Rubio broadcasted on Snapchat; Rand Paul and Lindsey Graham produced comedic YouTube videos, Bernie Sanders racked up millions of Facebook followers, and Donald Trump tweeted his way into controversy, and, thus, news media shows regularly. In studies analyzing citizenship, contrast models have suggested that personal and political involvement are two separate domains; however, more recent work has shifted to an extension model suggesting political engagement as within other activities (e.g., Bakardjieva, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009; Shak, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). The ways in which media are increasingly available for use within personal settings seem to suggest a blurring of the lines.

Researchers have proposed that media engagement, including social media, for the purpose of acquiring news can lead to political participation; whereas, engagement with media for non-political purposes may have no effect or even negative effects on political involvement (Shak et al., 2001). While no known studies have analyzed the use of social media for the purpose of being politically entertained specifically, some studies lend insight. In a study of social media users engaging passively (i.e., consuming content) as compared to actively (i.e.,

producing content) through nonpolitical sites on Facebook and Twitter, researchers found that active use was positively correlated with political expression despite the non-political nature of the site, although passive engagement was not (Yu, 2016). Researchers have proposed active social media use not necessarily intended for political purposes but that has been incorporated into regular social engagement may increase a sense of political efficacy (Ellison, Vitak, Gray, & Lampe, 2014).

Researchers have proposed that social engagement through social media sites may not be intended as a political forum but that such practices may emerge (e.g., Bakardjieva, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009). Walsh, Jennings, and Stoker (2004) proposed that much of political engagement with others occurs in everyday interactions rather than settings specifically designed to engage political talk. Researchers have indicated that these social interactions can cultivate bonds (Ellison et al., 2014) and promote a sense of group belonging and identity (Bakardjieva, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009). Anderson (2015) has stated that 66% of social media users reported engaging with some form of political activities with media; yet, only a small percentage stated belonging to a site dedicated to politics or social issues. Additionally, 25% stated that they have become more active with a politicized issue after social media engagement, with 16% saying they changed their views because of social media engagement (Anderson, 2015). Interestingly, social media users who stated as agreeing *always* or *mostly* with friend's posts about political content ranked at only 25% of the time yet reported *only sometimes* or *never agreeing* with posts by friends a much greater percentage at 73% of the time. More than 38% of social media users stated that they discovered through social media engagement that a friend's political beliefs differed from what they thought (Anderson, 2015).

In considering the second area of interest—news media use, this study proposed the following research questions for Research Aim III—predictors of public engagement:

RQ4_b: Does news media use predict social media news reading?

RQ5_b: Does news media use predict social media news sharing?

RQ6_b: Does news media use predict social media news reacting?

Political Views

How people engage with media during an election cycle has become especially important given the increased abilities to customize news feeds and engage with others by reading, sharing, and reacting to news through social media. Early studies have indicated that group affiliations have been predictors of partisanship views (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954), with an extensive review of politics and demographics indicating such demographic groups as race, gender, age, geographic location, occupations, and family and peer group political affiliations as affecting political choices and leanings (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960).

More recently, however, additional research has suggested that political party choices may be a distinct group (Greene, 1999; Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2004; Huddy, Mason, & Aarøe, 2010; Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012). As such, the choice of a political party and an alignment with political beliefs may create a sense of group membership, proposed by social identity theorists and entertainment approaches as generating polarization through perceptions of in- and out-group statuses (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). Indeed, these affective evaluations of perceived memberships such that one's own party is seen more positively and other's more negatively have been noted as increasing over the past decades (Haidt & Hetherington, 2012; Iyengar, et al., 2012); similarly, media shows offering information presented in comedic styles

that often ridicule political figures have increased as sources for political news as well (Gottfried & Anderson, 2014).

In considering the third area of interest—political views, this study proposed the following research questions for Research Aim III—predictors of public engagement:

RQ4c: Do political views predict social media news reading?

RQ5c: Do political views predict social media news sharing?

RQ6c: Do political views predict social media news reacting?

Political Entertainment

With the limited number of studies in the new area of research termed political entertainment, few have analyzed why people are motivated to engage with shows combining information and entertainment about public figures and issues. Additionally, little is known about how engagement and motivations to engage may potentially predict knowledge, beliefs, and further engagement with news media and others. Entertainment approaches have explored why and how people choose to engage with entertainment options and the potential role that disposition toward characters and players have in furthering continued engagement. How engagement may contribute toward developing a passionate following is also a factor.

Satirical and comedic news programs have increased in popularity and in number (Boukes, Boomgaarden, Moorman, & de Vreese, 2014) and hosts of such programming have cultivated followings, even to the point of having their images sold on T-shirts and promotional items. Dori-Hacohen (2013) analyzed radio talk shows for similarities to other forms of fandom, proposing that callers are fans and the hosts are considered stars. In an analysis of host-caller interactions, Dori-Hacohen concluded that fandom in a radio talk show context equates to a means for creating “fan-public,” meaning a collective group with similar viewpoints organized

around a host as a type of information leader (p. 2,698). Van Zoonen (2004) described the term more simply to mean a political public within media with a media figure at its center.

This idea of a fandom and identification with a representative public figure may be similar to concepts related to sports fanship. Researchers have found similarities between sports fans and fans of drama using a scale measuring motivations of fans in areas such as liking of players and characters, social interactions with other fans, and entertainment, although sports ranked higher in fanship on the majority of items (Gantz, Wang, Paul, & Potter, 2006). Gantz et al. proposed that sports fanship operates differently from other genres. For instance, even in the off-season, fans were found to heavily engage and stay involved via programming surrounding their favorite teams (Stavros, Meng, Westberg, & Farrelly, 2014). A study comparing respondents who considered themselves fans of a sports team to those expressing fanship for a highly popular drama series (i.e., *The Walking Dead*) found that despite similar media experiences, including second-screen opportunities, show-related events, an after-show discussion show, and being among the top-ranked topics for online comments, the sports fans reported significantly higher levels of fanship in the majority of the 82 items analyzed (Baker & Billings, 2017). The study indicated that the television show fans ranked high in liking the unpredictability of the drama and feeling connected to the characters. Additionally, while not as high in ranking as sports fans, the drama show fans also indicated high levels of passion toward the show and characters, an enjoyment for discussing the upcoming episodes, and liking for being part of a fandom community. Research concerning growth in fantasy sports has also supported many of these motivations for sports fan consumption, finding that additional media options are fulfilled, including enjoyment, entertainment, passing time, social interactions, and surveillance motivations (e.g., obtaining stats on players; Billings & Ruibley, 2013).

Physiological reactions and self-report measures of consuming sports have indicated increased levels of attention and emotional involvement in relation to identification levels while viewing team-related news (Potter, Sparks, Cummins, & Lee, 2004). Stavros et al. (2014) found four themes related to reasons people engage with sports through social media: (a) passion related to the game, teams, and players, (b) hopes for desired outcomes of the upcoming season, (c) esteem related to self and favorite teams, and (d) camaraderie building through identifying with fellow fans and against opposing fans. Similar to sports, politics usually pits one opponent to another (i.e., candidates) and teams (i.e., political parties), and with media coverage, including political entertainment, often focusing on outcomes about polarized topics. With increased media options offering more entertainment options and opportunities for individuals to participate with politics and with others about public issues, the potential for engaging with political entertainment through online forums and with others—in essence, creating a community—may have increased and, thus, affected motivations for engaging with politics.

Entertainment approaches have proposed strong identification with figures within dramatic conflicts can cause intense liking or disliking toward those figures (see affective-disposition theory; Raney, 2004). It is possible that political figures similarly influence beliefs by increasing or decreasing feelings of connection with a political party, which, in turn, can conflict with or be supported by reference group members. How both affective and cognitive processing of public information may contribute toward knowledge and belief formation can be viewed through this prism of entertainment, and, how both of these formations, in turn, are related to public engagement.

In considering the fourth area of interest—political entertainment, this study proposed the following research questions for Research Aim III—predictors of public engagement:

RQ4_d: Do political entertainment motivations predict social media news reading?

RQ5_d: Do political entertainment motivations predict social media news sharing?

RQ6_d: Do political entertainment motivations predict social media news reacting?

Knowledge and Beliefs

In analyzing the potential for Internet use to reduce knowledge gaps through increased participation, Wei and Yan (2010) found that knowledge production, described as contributing to discussions of political knowledge through engaging within public spaces, such as through posting comments and pictures, varied across demographics and political ideologies; yet, opportunities to contribute was positively related to political participation and intent to participate. For times when political interests may be elevated, such as election years, knowledge gap studies can contribute toward understanding how voters acquire information and, thus, may vary in knowledge and engagement. Researchers analyzed knowledge gaps during a national political campaign year by comparing information levels for content analyses data to find knowledge gaps emerged (Nadeau, Nevite, Gidengil, & Blais, 2008). The findings indicated that interest and education levels were predictors of information gains, with higher levels of interest and education indicating greater information gains as compared to lower levels. Additionally, greater media coverage was found to predict knowledge levels and showed an effect on intentions to vote.

Yet, other researchers found in an analysis of presidential campaigns from 1976 to 1996 that knowledge gaps ranged depending on levels of interest, media coverage, and political events, such as debates (Holbrook, 2002). In today's society, the potential to be exposed to political entertainment content and to participate in political discussions is enhanced through social media, and, thus, may potentially affect knowledge and beliefs. This study collected data

during an election year when interest may have been heightened through increased news coverage and the ample fodder the election process provided political entertainment shows. As discussed, the process of motivations toward processing information is akin to self-framing input to make sense of the world based on how individuals desire the world to be. This motivated reasoning proposed as potentially driving behavior has proposed that information inherently contains concepts (i.e., objects) and attributes of those objects, which when perceived, can activate affective and cognitive responses (Jones & Song, 2014; Lodge & Taber, 2000).

In considering two additional areas of interest—knowledge and beliefs, this study proposed the following research questions for Research Aim III—predictors of public engagement:

RQ4: Do (e) knowledge and (f) beliefs predict social media news reading?

RQ5: Do (e) knowledge and (f) beliefs predict social media news sharing?

RQ6: Do (e) knowledge and (f) beliefs predict social media news reacting?

Predictors of Public Engagement Conceptualized

The model in Figure 1^a has proposed that the ways in which politicized information is presented can activate both affect and cognition depending on the motivations of the individual. These motivations can be driven by both external cues through framing and the ways in which information can be shared virally. These viral contents can remove the information from its original source, modify it from its original form, and have additional cues added from others that potentially influence the ways in which individuals assess and judge the information's relevance. Both these externals and internal processes lend themselves potentially in predicting knowledge and beliefs and public engagement.

The model has also proposed that entertainment is an internal motivational drive predicting belief formations through a merging of affect and cognition enhanced by elevated mood states. Researchers have proposed that emotions are basically motivational drives that can affect that to which individuals pay attention, influence thought processes, and encourage action (Brader & Corrigan, 2006). The appeal of news has been considered within entertainment approaches, with researchers proposing that the predominantly negative content may serve to fulfill such motivations as self-preservation through being aware of threats in the environment and because of curiosity about the world (Zillmann, 1998).

A characteristic in the appeal of news is its storytelling qualities that offer drama and conflict, which engages emotional reactions, including empathy (Zillmann, 1991) and anxiety (Brader, 2006; Rudolph, Gangl, & Stevens, 2000). Entertainment, thus, can be considered a motivational drive influencing information processing and potentially action through its affective and cognitive components. While engagement with external information may not always activate both responses in equal measures or at the same time, information consumed for the purpose of entertainment may, nonetheless, be processed and become a part of knowledge and beliefs to be activated for later information processing. The concept of transportation, for example, has been proposed as immersion into entertainment such that reality is temporarily suspended; whereas, self-identification has been proposed as an awareness of The Self in connection with a character (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). Yet, while both of these may have minimal consideration of how an individual feels about the effects of the experience during the action, the input may be processed later based on how an individual feels toward and thinks about the engagement. Thus, entertainment motivations are proposed as a factor within the motivated reasoning process, whether immediate or delayed processing is a result. While this study does

not specifically analyze the effects of stimuli on reasoning, it aims to further understanding of the role of entertainment in the political sphere and how it may drive engagement (e.g., social media news reading, sharing, and reacting) and action (e.g., intentions to vote).

The Knowledge, Belief, and Engagement Conceptual Model

The focus of this study aimed to consider predictors of knowledge, beliefs, and public engagement with an emphasis on the potential role of political entertainment as an emerging factor. In analyzing the potential relationship between internal information processing and external stimuli, a conceptual model has provided a visual representation of these potential relationships. As such, a last explanation is provided for synthesizing the previous sections with the key theoretical premises related to the vast body of research supporting how news information and engagement with news media may predict knowledge, beliefs, and public engagement. In addition to social contexts and the reasoning individuals may use in processing information, termed The Self in the model and which has been the primary focus of the discussion thus far, the model recognizes the additional factors potentially affecting media systems and the peripheral role these may exert on how relevant may be perceived and processed. An overview of the vast media effects research relevant to how people attend to and select news information for processing is an important inclusion of the model.

Information Sources

The external area of the model has proposed the individual as a factor in knowledge and belief gaps, yet, focuses on the effects of public information on primarily the ways in which group affiliations of which individuals belong or perceive to belong affect the processes. While this study did not specifically analyze the ways in which information is gathered and the legitimacy of these methods and results, a brief discussion of the concept of information is

warranted. The model has proposed information as that which is observed and/or measured and distinct from evaluations of its value. This concept describes what has been termed “real-world indicators” in referencing the collection of figures and/or objective information about an event or problem or issues in comparison to the process of selecting items to highlight as important based on “news-worthiness” or, in essence, deemed to have value (see agenda-setting; Rogers & Dearing, 1988), with the latter used primarily in relation with media coverage (i.e., media agenda; see McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

While it would seem logical to expect that real world indicators would predict whether or not an issue is elevated to a top public concern or demoted to not as important based on the extent of the problem, that is not always or even often the case. Dearing and Rogers (1996) discussed this disconnect giving short case study summaries from the early and mid-1900s to show the two are not necessarily correlated; and, the findings are still relevant today. For example, extensive media attention toward breast cancer, while obviously a critically important health concern, has been shown to make the topic more salient than other diseases. Researchers have discussed the negative consequences of the misperception that breast cancer is the highest-ranking killer of women when actual figures show heart disease kills far greater numbers than all cancers combined (Sharma & Gulati, 2013). Despite that 8.6 million women a year die from heart disease and only 40,000 from breast cancer, people often incorrectly state the latter as the greatest killer, and doctors have been shown to overlook symptoms and treat heart disease less aggressively for women as compared to men (Sharma & Gulati, 2013).

The model in this study has proposed that information in the environment exists in a manner that can be analyzed both with or free from attitudes toward the information, an important and critical distinction in studies of knowledge and belief gaps for all three areas of

media use, social influences, and the individual. However, the model readily has recognized that the majority of information people obtain is rarely through first-hand experience; thus, obtaining information inherently implies a filtering and framing process that has been done by others in presenting the information and by individuals themselves when obtaining it. In regards to media, the presentation of information is particularly important in considering effects on users.

Media as a News Source

Media are proposed as contributing to our views of topics as we consume, judge, and form attitudes toward content, others, and issues—decades of research have analyzed these premises through theoretical areas, including those of agenda-setting (e.g., McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Rogers & Dearing, 1988), cultivation (e.g., Dominick, 1990; Evra, 1990; Gerbner & Gross, 1976), framing (e.g., McCombs, 2004; McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey, 1997), gatekeeping (McCombs & Shaw, 1976; Dimmick, 1974), priming (e.g., Scheufele, 2001); spiral of silence theory (Noellé-Neumann, 1984), and uses and gratification approaches (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 2011). However, media use is increasingly intertwined with technologies that allow and encourage social interactions of which political entertainment contexts are but one part; thus, these environmental contexts need to be further considered for their role in predicting attitudes and beliefs. Additionally, people are not passive in receiving information; rather, an extensive collection of currently held beliefs, knowledge, and ideological frameworks filters incoming information.

News coverage. Although the term media coverage may suggest news footage of first-hand experiences being relayed by media to the public, most information media convey is not reported live and more than 50% relies on public relations personnel (Harrower, 2013). Thus, information filtered through media is often that which has already been modified from its

original form. It then is reframed or packaged for relaying to the public. While historically media have played a prominent role in guiding what the public perceives as important, changes in the industry have disrupted this process, which prompts a need for considering the ways in which media may now affect knowledge gaps. First, a review of relevant concepts to traditional media news is warranted.

The media presentation of news information can create discussion and debate, resulting in more media consumption of related information, thus elevating the topic to be termed an issue (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Therefore, the media coverage of information can be viewed as the process of inserting a topic into the public arena for inclusion into the public agenda. This debate within the public of an issue can then lead to various sides of the issue calling for changes, which would then progress the issue to a policy agenda. This process of media highlighting an issue is a key component of **agenda setting** (McCombs, 2005).

In the proposed model (Figure 1^a), this process is recognized for the effects media have over the framing of information for the public and the ways in which media filter information in creating an agenda, which in turn can affect knowledge and belief gaps. An increased awareness of issues and the way in which the public considers a topic important is considered the **salience** of the issues (McCombs, 2004). This is still a primary concern in today's society, with increased importance as news has become fragmented and stories shared in ways virally that can divorce the information itself from original sources and, thus, raise concerns about credibility. This study analyzed the types of news story formats chosen for social media sharing as a first step in considering what types of information individuals may be contributing in the process of increased salience.

Media effects research has considered the content of media information as **objects**, which is defined for agenda-setting research as those things toward which individuals have attitudes or opinions (McCombs, 2005). Additionally, the specific characteristics these objects possess, or **attributes** as they are called in agenda setting, are considered as another area of inquiry for their effects on influencing perceptions of objects in the public's mind (McCombs, 2005). For example, a politician (the object) has numerous attributes, but the media may only focus on a few, making those more salient, which then influence the public's perceptions of the politician. For research, these attributes have typically been characterized by valence, meaning that they are presented in either a positive, neutral, or negative way (Scheufele, 2001). With political entertainment, the attributes of politicians and issues are often the crux of the comedic angle, and, thus, objects and attributes are critical components for analyzing the ways in which people select and perceive information and in considering their predictive value on knowledge.

Within media effects studies, **framing** is a concept that has been debated as to whether it is a separate theory or a component of agenda-setting (McCombs, 2004; McCombs, et al., 1997). Additionally, a consensus on what constitutes a frame has been debated (e.g., Miller, Andsager, & Riechert, 1998; Powers & Andsager, 1999). McCombs (2004) made a distinction between frames and attributes, proposing that attributes are considered the various aspects of an object, whereas, framing is the way a particular attribute or collection of attributes is presented; thus, not all attributes are frames. McCombs (2005) proposed that this inclusion of framing within second-level agenda setting does indeed support that media do tell us how to think about objects and not just what to think about. In other words, media do influence the pictures in our head (see Lippmann, 1922) in what has been called "schemata of interpretation" (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). These featured attributes of objects have also been termed "compelling arguments" to indicate

that the dominate frames used to present information construct and organize images in our head in alignment with the ways in which they are crafted (McCombs, 2005, p. 93).

The proposed model in this study has suggested framing as a key component in analyzing how external influences within media, social contexts, and individuals and from those collecting and distributing primary data contribute to and are affected by framing. Additionally, it has proposed framing as a process by which each area can engage; yet, that it is also transforming into a process by which frames can be reframed repeatedly through multiple framers, essentially reducing control of the framed information through the merged space in which frames and the framing processes reside. This study has provided a first step through analyzing social media sharing and reactions of news stories but emerging from traditional online news sources.

The concept of **priming** has considered both first-level effects of salience and second-level effects of valence and framing, to propose that the media do influence the formation and direction of opinions, which can then influence behavior (McCombs, 2004). McCombs, Einsiedel, and Weaver (1991) described priming as not only the process of influencing how people rank news importance but a method in which news stories act as a type of activating agent for stimulating memories related to issues that in turn help people form opinions. This would suggest that even for stories not included in the top news rankings, people could be primed to consider some issues more newsworthy, and, therefore, more worthy of attention by seeing the issue in multiple news sources or over time even though the mentioning of these references may be minor. McCombs (2004) credited this process to the selective attention of the public based on limited cognitive abilities that require some information to be excluded while other stimuli is processed through cognitive shortcuts. The proposed model (Figure 1^a) has not explicitly stated the term priming but does recognize that the process may occur. Continual media coverage and

social sharing of information, along with increased opportunities to engage in selective processing (i.e., filtering) news may further contribute to priming effects. This study queried respondents about news use for considering how individuals select news sources and if reference groups are correlated with those choices.

Agenda-setting research has worked within the assumption that people have an instinctive curiosity about the world, which is defined theoretically as a **need for orientation** about news issues (McCombs, 2005). This concept has two distinct parts: *relevance*, how important someone considers the issue, and *uncertainty*, the level of desire to know of the issue based on a perceived lack of knowledge (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Need for orientation has been operationalized into high, moderate, and low categories, with a high need marked by a high relevance and high uncertainty level, whereas, moderate is a high relevance and low uncertainty, and a low need for orientation classified by a low relevance level (McCombs, 2005). Key components of the proposed model included the motivations driving individuals to engage with information, including those of the level of relevance as part of motivated reasoning.

McCombs and Reynolds (2009) argued that perceptions of issues can be placed on a continuum of polarized concepts based on individual circumstances. They cited research regarding the concept of need for orientation to demonstrate that an issue's relevance and uncertainty to an individual can influence the degree of media effects. With more ways to be exposed to information through social media and online media, these effects could be less relevant or more relevant. While media can still feature a story on a broadcast or in print, news consumers no longer have to sit passively and listen or read with little means to verify. They can watch or read and then go to multiple sources, including social groups, to determine themselves the newsworthiness, thus, possibly minimizing the agenda-setting influence of media. Also, they

could either reduce uncertainty by verifying information. Just as importantly, they no longer have to remain unaware of issues that they could consider newsworthy but aren't included in a newscast or newspaper. Additionally, people can record the news and zip by issues they don't find relevant or customize news feeds to filter information. As McCombs et al. (1991) and McCombs and Reynolds (2009) have pointed out, individuals are influenced to think that stories must be relevant if news media choose to include them in the news.

Paradoxically, the ability of individuals to seek multiple sources for news validation and to determine the newsworthiness of an issue may lead to increased relevance levels if the majority of news and non-news sources feature the same stories. Additionally, a selective perception process may also be influential, in that, people may peruse many sources and believe issues are important merely by noticing them more easily (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). This drastic change in how we can obtain from multiple sources quickly may have an effect on the level of relevance placed toward information based on uncertainty of the credibility of content and sources. Instead of multiple news sources reducing uncertainty through providing more information, the opposite effect could occur if news stories or accompanying commentary are contradictory.

Level of relevance. While framing is a concept analyzed often in communication research referring to the ways in which media present information (i.e., frames) and the ways in which the presentation of information is constructed (i.e., framing; see McCombs, 2004), the term has also been defined and studied within psychology studies (see Chong & Druckman, 2007). The latter has taken a route in considering how framing affects public opinions based on the effects on individual processing of information (e.g., Chong, 1993, Druckman, 2004; Jones & Song, 2014; Nelson & Kinder, 1996). Framing research has been utilized in studies seeking to

understand how people comprehend information and the processes used (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Regarding how The Self processes information, frames are considered those characteristics about information that affect evaluations of the information; whereas, a framing effect is defined as the resulting effects if those qualities alter a person's perspective (Chong & Druckman, 2007). This concept helps to explain how individuals assess information through both the ways in which information has been framed and filtered by others then processed individually depending on the level of relevance.

The Knowledge, Belief, and Engagement Testing Model

While a conceptual model has been proposed as Figure 1^a in an effort for providing an overview of the relationships of factors potentially influencing knowledge, beliefs, and public engagement, this study limited analysis of predictors of the three research goals to those of the four particular areas of interest: demographics, media use, political views, and political entertainment. As such, a testing model emphasizing these areas is offered as Figure 1^b for visually demonstrating the potential relationships and processes for the hypotheses and research questions summarized in Table 1. How the concepts are defined and operationalized for the study are further explained in the following methods section.

Table 1

Summary of Hypotheses and Research Questions

Aim I Considering Variables Related to Knowledge Gaps

H1: Demographic factors (gender, race, education, and perceived socioeconomic status) can predict knowledge.

H2: News media use (news following and new source type) can predict knowledge.

RQ1: Do political views (political party affiliation and partisanship) predict knowledge?

RQ2: Does political entertainment use (political entertainment engagement and political entertainment motivations) predict knowledge?

Aim II Considering Variables Related to Belief Gaps

H3: Demographic factors (race, sex, religion, education, and perceived socioeconomic status) can predict beliefs.

H4: News media use (news following and new source type) can predict beliefs.

H5: Political views (political party affiliation and partisanship) can predict beliefs.

RQ3: Does political entertainment use (political entertainment engagement and political entertainment motivations) predict beliefs?

Aim III Considering Variables Related to Public Engagement

RQ4: Do (a) demographics, (b) news media use, (c) political views, (d) political entertainment motivations, (e) knowledge, and (f) beliefs predict social media news reading?

RQ5: Do (a) demographics, (b) news media use, (c) political views, and (d) political entertainment motivations, (e) knowledge, and (f) beliefs predict social media news sharing?

RQ6: Do (a) demographics, (b) news media use, (c) political views, and (d) political entertainment motivations, (e) knowledge, and (f) beliefs predict social media news reacting?

RQ7: Are demographics and voting likelihood independent?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Overview of Study

An online Qualtrics survey was designed to measure factors potentially related to knowledge, beliefs, and public engagement. In doing so, the study aimed to contribute toward the bodies of work regarding knowledge gap theory, belief gap approaches, and entertainment approaches. Measures aimed, in part, to explore the predictive value of demographics, news media use, political views, and political entertainment involvement and motivations for the three research aims. Prior research has indicated that knowledge gaps and belief polarization in society exist and can further widen based on demographic groups, media use, and political views; therefore, this study served, in part, to also consider these through querying participants about their group affiliations, news interest and following, political party affiliation and partisanship views. The fourth area of interest assessed political entertainment engagement and motivations for engaging (information-seeking, entertainment value, emotional release, and social-seeking) in considering their predictive potential for each of the three research aims.

For the outcome variable knowledge, a scale was created for providing a cumulative total of knowledge levels regarding public issues. For the outcome variable beliefs, a scale of policy beliefs based on conservative and liberal platforms was created in allowing consideration for statistical analyses of political leanings and descriptive data regarding individual items. For the outcome variable social media engagement, three scales of news engagement that included 13

news stories were created from total scores relating to news reading, sharing, and reacting, respectively. For the outcome variable related to public engagement, an additional query regarding intentions to vote was included.

Design

Surveys allow researchers to produce statistics about a target population through inferring characteristics from a valid sample of respondents. Fowler (2009) discussed the process of survey design as, one, a way in which a population can be represented through describing the sample and, two, a means by which survey questions can describe experiences, opinions, and other factors of a population through the responses of a representative sample. In furthering research about political knowledge and beliefs, this study employed an online survey, a tool researchers have described as beneficial in providing anonymity for respondents, for increasing the potential for reaching representative respondents, and in allowing greater flexibility of times and ways for respondents to participate (Biddix & Park, 2008; Denissen, Neumann, & Van Zalk, 2010). Researchers have suggested that online surveys can help researchers decrease costs and reduce time investments (Biddix & Park, 2008).

While administering surveys online has benefits, the inability to observe respondents for evaluating understandability and meaningfulness of developed questions may be problematic; however, pretesting the instrument allows an important check for question design (Fowler, 2009). Thus, this study conducted a lab session for survey testing of volunteer undergraduate students for extra credit Spring 2016 ($N = 20$) that queried respondents about question design and the use of news stories from social media sites. Findings indicated response sets for two questions needed modification to be all-inclusive, which were changed and retested at a second pretesting ($N = 20$). For the second pretesting with a different set of respondents, the completion time was assessed ($M = 24$ minutes, 51 seconds; $SD = 3$ minutes, 10 seconds). A third pretest

was conducted with undergraduate students in which respondents were asked to take the survey at their convenience trying to minimize interruptions using either a computer ($N = 10$) or mobile device ($N = 10$) to assess completion rates and time spent engaged with the survey. The respondents were then asked two days later in a classroom setting for their feedback regarding the survey. Findings indicated all respondents completed the survey, with feedback suggesting the respondents found the survey interesting despite being lengthy (computer use group $M = 29$ minutes, 20 seconds; $SD = 6$ minutes, 2 seconds; mobile device group $M = 36$ minutes, 13 seconds; $SD = 8$ minutes, 44 seconds). However, it was noted after completion of the pretesting that nine respondents failed to advance the survey on the last page, causing the time to be recorded incorrectly as lengthier (computer group = 3; mobile group = 6). No further modifications were made after assessing the time of survey or feedback about the survey design.

Participants

Respondents were college students recruited from communication courses ($N = 407$). Students were those assigned to courses offering credit for participating in research activities, such as a research student pool allowing options of differing types of research as their participation credit. Additionally, the link to the online survey was given to professors wishing to provide their students the opportunity to participate for credit. While completion rates were generally high, after eliminating respondents who failed to complete at least 30% of the survey, a final sample size of 344 respondents remained.

Respondents volunteered to participate based on an information sheet provided as one option of several for receiving extra credit. Students could opt to participate in other extra credit assignments instead and could stop participating in the study at any point of the survey. Participants were provided a consent form explaining the purpose of the study and instructed to

check a box agreeing to continue. A code was provided to participants for submitting to their professors, thus, ensuring anonymity was maintained.

Materials

The survey items included queries for analyzing the four areas of variables, including demographics, media use, political views, and political entertainment engagement (Appendix A). The study followed Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures and requirements, receiving approval prior to administration of the survey during Spring 2016 and Summer 2016 (Appendix B). The study was conducted by the primary researcher. The primary researcher received research certification prior to the study and maintained approved status throughout the administering of the study and data analyses (Appendix C).

Instrument Design

All questionnaire items analyzed in the study are provided as Appendix A. Because of the importance to acquire demographic information and social group affiliations for group comparisons, those related measures were asked first. The remainder of the survey was designed to mix lengthier textual questions requiring more time with shorter queries containing visual components in an effort to minimize participant fatigue. The survey was designed to include predictor variables and outcome variables for each of the three research aims.

The following sections provide the operational definitions and measurement methods for predictor variables of the four areas of interest (i.e., demographic, media use, political views, and political entertainment) and outcome variables (knowledge, beliefs, and engagement). Additionally, a data analysis section is provided for describing the testing methods for the three goals: Research Aim I regarding knowledge, Research Aim II regarding beliefs, and Research Aim III regarding public engagement.

Measures

In discussing the potential relationships of variables, a conceptual model building from prior research in areas of media effects, psychology, and entertainment was offered (see Figure 1^a). As previously discussed, the factors affecting the process of selecting, acquiring, and retaining information is complex. Thus, this study was designed as a first step in focusing specifically on three areas potentially related to knowledge, beliefs, and engagement rather than the entire model. These proposed concepts and relationships have been visually represented in describing how the variables were operationalized for each of the research aims (Figure 1^b) and related to the proposed hypotheses and research questions (Table 1).

Demographics

The first area of interest involved in the study analyzed those factors relating to the individual as represented in the model as The Self (i.e., demographics). The proposed relationships were presented as H1 and H3, and RQ4_a, RQ5_a, RQ6_a, and RQ7. The operationalization of each demographic variable is discussed in the sections below; yet, collectively, these are proposed as potentially related to knowledge, beliefs, and how individuals engage with media and others. Although not analyzed in this study, the concept of level of relevance individuals perceive toward information is proposed and represented in the model (Figure 1^b) as related to the level and types of motivation toward acquiring and assessing information. As such, demographics can predict the capabilities of individuals to gain knowledge, as discussed in knowledge gap theory, form beliefs, as discussed in belief gap theory, and motivate individuals to engage with media and others, as discussed in entertainment approaches.

Media Use

The second area of interest for this study involves the relationship of news media use for gaining knowledge, forming beliefs, and promoting further engagement with media and others. These relationships were proposed in H2 and H4, and RQ4_b, RQ5_b, and RQ6_b.

As shown in the model (Figure 1^b), news engagement, operationalized as news following and news source type and described in the research aims sections below, is proposed as relating to the motivations people have toward information and can be driven by motivations related to affective needs, cognitive abilities and desires, and entertainment drives. Thus, news media engagement may be related to knowledge gains; belief formation, reinforcement, or change; and engagement behaviors. These collectively are proposed as relating to the attitudes toward information and perceived level of relevance, which, in turn, may be related to furthering motivations or reducing motivations.

Political Views

Given the political focus of this study, the third area of interest is the potential relationship of political views being related to knowledge, beliefs, and engagement with media and others. These relationships were proposed in H5 and RQ1, RQ4_c, RQ5_c, and RQ6_c. The concept of political views is situated and visually represented within motivation drives relating to affect, entertainment, and cognition (Figure 1^b) and is operationalized as the variables political party affiliation and partisanship. These operational definitions are provided in the following research aims sections. Political views are proposed as potentially relating to knowledge in regards to how people acquire public policy information, whether mainly through news media and, if so, if the information is filtered through news source customization or not.

Political Entertainment

The last area of great interest in this study is the potential relationship of entertainment with knowledge, beliefs, and engagement with media and others. These relationships were proposed in RQ2, RQ3, RQ4_d, RQ5_d, and RQ6_d. The concept of political entertainment is proposed as being situated within entertainment motivations and, is, thus, visually represented as such (see Figure 1^b) and represents as fulfilling both affective and cognitive drives. The concept of political entertainment is operationalized as the variables political entertainment engagement, number of political entertainment motivations, and the four motivation types of information-seeking, entertainment-seeking, emotional-release, and social-involvement. The operational definitions of each are provided in the following research aims sections. Political entertainment motivations are proposed as relating to the level of motivation toward media engagement and perceived level of relevance, which in turn are related to how individuals obtain and retain information, form and reform beliefs, and further engage with additional media and others.

Research Aim I – Knowledge

The survey instrument included measures of nine predictor variables and one outcome variable to examine the relationships proposed in hypotheses and research questions for Research Aim I regarding knowledge and are provided visually in the proposed model (Figure 1^b).

Predictor variables. The predictor variables for Research Aim I included the following: race, gender, education, perceived socioeconomic status, news following, news type, political party affiliation, partisanship, political entertainment engagement, and political entertainment motivations.

The operationalizing of the first five variables is described below and the measures were designed to analyze the following hypotheses related to the first area of interest—demographics:

H1: Demographic factors (race, gender, education, and perceived socioeconomic status) can predict knowledge.

Race. Historically, white men in the United States have made higher incomes, have accumulated more wealth, and have represented greater numbers for higher paying positions, thus, potentially offering ways to gain more access to others in powerful positions as compared to other groups. Yet, women now outnumber men in typical college enrollments with numbers steadily increasing within the past two decades and with black women increasing at greater percentage rates as compared to black men (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014). For this study, a question within the Qualtrics database was used for acquiring race, asking participants, “*Which of the following do you feel represents you,*” which provided a standard response set. Because of the lack of responses in most categories, the category was collapsed into Black = 1, White = 2, or Other = 3.

Sex. To operationalize sex, a question with the Qualtrics database was again used, asking, “What is your gender?” with *male* and *female* provided as responses, with an additional response of “*I would rather not indicate.*” As no participants indicated the latter, the category was not used in analyses. Thus, men = 0 and women = 1 were used for analysis.

Education. Education was measured by a single question: “What is your classification?” Participants were given six response options: freshman = 1, sophomore = 2, junior = 3, senior = 4, graduated = 5, or don’t attend college = 6. As no respondent checked the latter two, those were not used.

Perceived socioeconomic status. The concept of perceived socioeconomic status referred to the way people perceived their status when comparing themselves to others typically within their own perceived reference groups, which can result in beliefs of being deprived or fortunate,

regardless of real-world indicators (Merton, 1949). While belief gap studies typically have considered SES as a predictor variable, no known studies have attempted to operationalize perceived status as a comparison to SES and as a predictor variable. The concept was operationalized by asking one question with a ladder visually representing the rungs relating to income (Appendix A): “*How do you feel your circumstances have compared to those around you?*” with responses ranging from *My family has definitely struggled more* = 1; *My family has struggled more at times* = 2; *My family has been about the same as other families* = 3; *My family has been better off than most* = 4, and *My family has been definitely better off than most* = 5.

The operationalizing of variables four and five proposed as relating to knowledge are described below and were designed to analyze the following hypotheses related to the second area of interest—news engagement:

H2: News media use (news following and news source type) can predict knowledge.

News following. While people may align with a political party and intend to vote, neither is necessarily reflective of interest in following political or news about public issues. This study asked one question to measure news following: “*How would you classify your interest in news about current events and/or politics?*” with the following response options: *I never follow news* = 1, *I follow news a little* = 2, *I sometimes follow news* = 3, *I regularly follow news* = 4, and *I am obsessed with following news* = 5.

News source type. News story type was operationalized by asking respondents to indicate how they receive their news, querying about television, radio, print, online, social media, and customization with response options of *Never* = 1, *Rarely* = 2, *Sometimes* = 3, *Often* = 4, and *All the time* = 5. Because so few respondents selected any options other than social media and customization and to assess the potential for self-filtering news to be a potential

indicator as compared to no filtering, the responses were then combined into no customization = 0 and customization = 1.

The operationalizing of variables six and seven proposed as relating to knowledge are described below and were designed to analyze the following research question related to the third area of interest—political views:

RQ1: Do political views (political party affiliation and partisanship) predict knowledge?

Political party affiliation. The concept of party affiliation was operationalized as simply the self-reported choice of a political party. The concept was measured by asking respondents, “*With which party do you identify?*” and providing a response set that include visual representations and the labels of each of the following: *Democrat, Independent, Libertarian, Republican,* and *Not Sure*. The response items were set to be randomized. Because of the limited number of responses in some categories and the lack of viable candidates for the presidential race, the categories were combined for analyses into three: Democrat = 1, Republican = 2, and Not Either = 3.

Partisanship. The concept of political partisanship for this study borrowed from Nivola’s (2005) discussion of polarization to operationalize it as the sorting of convictions toward United States politics into two categories: conservatism as reflective of the Republican Party and liberalism as reflective of the Democratic Party. To capture the degree to which participants felt strongly toward conservatism and liberalism as an indication of how polarization may predict beliefs toward public issues, a semantic differential scale was developed comprising 17 polarized sets of words (e.g., generous – stingy; open-minded – narrow-minded) with answer options ranging from *Definitely* = 1, *Somewhat* = 2, *Not Sure* = 3, *Somewhat* = 4, and *Definitely* = 5 with the polarized words on either side of the 17 word items (Appendix A). The scale was

replicated to ask about both conservatism and liberalism in randomized order with word sets also randomized. The instructions stated, “*Please think about how you feel toward people you know who are [conservative/liberal] – friends, family celebrities, politicians, people you see online – and then indicate for each item below which best describes your views of [conservatism/liberalism].*” To produce a political polarization score from the two scales, the difference between the two means of the tally of each of the two questions was calculated by totaling each of the 17 items per question then averaging the score. The difference between the two means then formed the “gap” in how participants viewed their own political group with those of the other group. Research has indicated that political polarization can lead to selective exposure and also a reversal causal direction in that selective exposure can lead to polarization (Stroud, 2010). The scale was created to explore this relationship.

The operationalizing of remaining variables proposed as relating to knowledge are described below and were designed to analyze the following research question related to the fourth area of interest—political entertainment:

RQ2: Does political entertainment use (political entertainment engagement and political entertainment motivations) predict knowledge?

Political entertainment engagement. The increase in satirical news sites and political comedy shows suggests people may be consuming news with increased intentions to be entertained (Young, 2016), and that people may be learning more about public issues through these newer formats than traditional news sources (Brewer, 2014). Findings have shown that those who watch comedic shows with such hosts as Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert are more actively involved in politics, acquire more news, are more knowledgeable, and more interested in news events (Young, 2016). This study considered this newer phenomenon by querying

participants about engagement with comedy and satirical sources by asking about engagement with such sources, stating, *Please check any of the following talk shows and satirical sites you visit online, watch on TV, or read REGULARLY, not just ones that seem familiar*, which then provided participants a list of 17 choices and an option to add others. The list was compiled through completing a search for top-ranked satirical and comedy news shows then removing those no longer offered. The items were tallied as one point per item to create an additive score. Because responses reflected only a few options for most respondents, the concept of political entertainment engagement was operationalized as either those indicating engaging regularly, which included all respondents indicating regular engagement with at least one show = 1, or those indicating not engaging regularly, representing those indicating no regular engagement with any shows = 0.

Political entertainment motivations. To consider why people may be motivated to engage with political entertainment, a question was asked to explore the motivations when engaging regardless of the extent of engagement. Thus, even if a respondent was not a regular user, the question queried motivations when engaging regardless of the number of shows or level of engagement. The question asked, *“When you think about the political commentary options just listed, what are the reasons you like these? Check any that may explain why you read, listen or watch.”* Seven responses were provided: *It’s humorous = 1; I learn about what’s going on in the world = 2; It’s entertaining to see people in the news being the subject of the jokes = 3; It allows me to have an outlet for my emotions toward politics and public issues (laugh, get angry, etc.) = 4; It helps me form opinions about what’s going on = 5; I can be a part of what people are discussing online/social media = 6, and I can engage with people in person about what was*

discussed = 7. These responses were used to operationalize the number of motivations and the types of motivation as indicated below.

Number of political entertainment motivations. To calculate the number of motivations, the responses were tallied then coded into two groups for analysis: either one motivation = 1 or more than one = 2.

Type of political entertainment motivations. Because political entertainment engagement only offered a comparison of those who engage regularly to those who do not, and the number of motivations only offered a comparison of those who seek political entertainment for only one reason to those with more than one reason, the same question and responses were coded into four response categories.

Information-seeking. Those respondents indicating being motivated by items two and five from the response options were coded as desiring to engage in political entertainment to satisfy information needs. Respondents indicating engagement for either item two or five or both were coded as engaging for information-seeking reasons = 1 as compared to those not indicating engaging for those reasons = 0.

Entertainment-seeking. Those respondents indicating being motivated by items one and three from the response options were coded as desiring to engage in political entertainment to satisfy entertainment needs. Respondents indicating engagement for either item one or three or both were coded as engaging for information-seeking reasons = 1 as compared to those not indicating engaging for those reasons = 0.

Emotional release. Those respondents indicating being motivated by item four were coded as desiring to engage in political entertainment to satisfy emotional release needs.

Respondents indicating engagement for item four was coded as engaging for information-seeking reasons = 1 as compared to those not indicating engaging for those reasons = 0.

Social-seeking. Those respondents indicating being motivated by items six and seven were coded as desiring to engage in political entertainment to satisfy needs for engaging with others. Respondents indicating engagement for either item six or seven or both were coded as engaging for information-seeking reasons = 1 as compared to those not indicating engaging for those reasons = 0.

Outcome variable – knowledge. The outcome variable for Research Aim I— predictors of knowledge gaps—was, indeed, knowledge. In a meta-analysis of knowledge gap studies, researchers found that knowledge about social and political topics showed the highest correlations with the variable of education, while health and science knowledge had the lowest correlations (Hwang & Jeong, 2010). Yet, this study made the distinction between factual knowledge and beliefs. The term knowledge is operationalized as information presented from real-world indicators and, thus, measurable. It does not recognize a “wrongness” or “rightness” of the information as a belief would. For example, a knowledge question from the survey (*e.g., Overall, ocean surface temperature readings have decreased since the 1970s*) differs from that of a belief question that may ask the extent someone may agree or disagree that global warming is occurring. The latter could be open to interpretation if the respondent believes the question is implying that human activity is causing global warming, which is a judgement about the causes of a situation, not necessarily a measure of the accuracy of the information about the event.

This study included 12 knowledge items regarding historical topics, health, and socioeconomic and environmental concerns. These were based on questions asked often in national polling data and can be seen featured on political entertainment shows as part of skits in

which average people stopped on the streets are asked about their knowledge of what current and historical events, typically presented as simplistic, basic questions.

The four historical items were chosen for their importance historically but also because of their insertion into current politics (e.g., discussion of Supreme Court members). The four health questions were selected both for their insertion into politics and their use in public health campaigns. The four remaining questions were selected because they have become debated, and, as such, have become polarizing and politicized topics.

All 12 knowledge items were presented together and randomized for respondents, with the same answer set for each item: *Definitely Accurate*, *Probably Accurate*, *Not Sure*, *Probably Not Accurate*, and *Definitely Not Accurate*. Items were reverse coded as necessary. An item was considered correct if the respondent correctly identified the item as definitely or probably accurate. Responses were coded as either accurate = 1 or as inaccurate = 0. An additive scale was then created with no correct answers = 0 up to all items correctly answered = 12.

Research Aim II – Beliefs

The survey instrument included measures of 10 predictor variables and one outcome variable to examine the relationships proposed in hypotheses and research questions for Research Aim II regarding beliefs. These were also provided visually in the proposed model (Figure 1^b).

Predictor variables. The predictor variables for Research Aim II included and were operationalized the same as Research Aim I for the following: gender, race, education, education, perceived socioeconomic status, news following, news source type, political party affiliation, partisanship, political entertainment engagement, and political entertainment motivations. Additionally, the variable religion was included and was operationalized as described below.

Demographics. For the first area of interest—demographics—the variables race, sex, religion, education, income, and perceived SES were designed to analyze the following hypothesis:

H3: Demographic factors (race, sex, religion, education, and perceived SES) can predict beliefs.

Religion was a measure created through one question: *Please indicate your religious beliefs.* The response set included six options: *I am agnostic or an atheist = 1; I am spiritual but not religious = 2; I attend church sporadically = 3; I attend church fairly regularly = 4; I am highly involved in church activities = 5; and None of these adequately reflects by beliefs or I prefer not to indicate = 6.*

News media use. For the second area of interest—media engagement—the operationalizing of variables seven and eight proposed as relating to beliefs were news following and news source type and were designed to analyze the following hypothesis:

H4: News media use (news following and new source type) can predict beliefs.

Political views. For the third area of interest—political views—the operationalizing of variables nine and 10 proposed as relating to beliefs were political party affiliation and partisanship and were designed to analyze the following hypothesis:

H5: Political views (political party affiliation and partisanship) can predict beliefs.

Political entertainment. For the fourth area of interest—political entertainment—the operationalizing of variables 11 and 12 proposed as relating to beliefs were political entertainment engagement and political entertainment motivations and were designed to analyze the following research question:

RQ3: Does political entertainment use (political entertainment engagement and political entertainment motivations) predict beliefs?

Outcome variable – policy beliefs. The outcome variable for Research Aim II—predictors of belief gaps—is the specific type of belief related to decisions about policies. Hwang and Jeong’s (2009) meta-analysis showed that in regards to knowledge gaps and education, factual knowledge has shown the highest correlations as compared to belief knowledge. As such, this study sought to explore how opportunities for people to interact with others through social media may potentially increase awareness of others’ beliefs. Thus, this study distinguished between not only factual knowledge and beliefs, but general beliefs and policy beliefs, to design a scale of policy beliefs to measure desired actions. Thus, the measure of policy beliefs represents considering a topic and making a decision about outcomes.

General beliefs are considered viewpoints toward statements of topics lacking in specificities (e.g., *Too many people abuse programs that are supposed to help needy people*) as compared to policy beliefs defined as viewpoints toward a public issue statement that proposes specific actions (*Welfare recipients should be tested for drugs*). As compared to factual knowledge, both differ in that each belief type relies on a judgement of an issue rather than accuracy of information. In comparison, a factual statement about the same topic may have offered the number of people on welfare and asked for awareness of the statement’s accuracy.

A 12-item scale of policy items was created from items both historically and currently controversial and polled consistently on national polling sites (e.g., Gallup; Pew Research Center, news organizations). The 12 items were presented together and randomized for respondents, with the same answer set provided for each: *Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Not Sure, Somewhat Disagree, and Strongly Disagree*. However, one item was removed from the

scale because the item, although a current event, could not be classified from polling data sites based on partisan politics to be representing at least more than 50% of a particular party's platform (e.g., *"Doctors should be allowed to refuse services to people who choose not to get vaccinated."*), leaving 11 items to be used as an additive scale. The 11-item scale tally was then coded as either representing a conservative or liberal platform based on polling data, reverse coding as necessary. Tallying the responses created a total score for each respondent with a possible range of -55, representing the most strongly conservative score possible, and 55, representing the most strongly liberal score possible.

Research Aim III – Public Engagement

The survey instrument included measures of 12 predictor variables and three outcome variables to examine the relationships proposed in research questions for Research Aim III regarding public engagement. These relationships are also provided visually in the proposed model (Figure 1^b).

Predictor variables. The predictor variables for Research Aim III included demographics, news engagement, political views, and political entertainment motivations. These variables were operationalized the same as described in Research Aim I and Research Aim II for the following: race, sex, education, perceived SES, news following, news source type, political party affiliation, partisanship, political entertainment engagement, and political entertainment motivations. Additionally, the variables knowledge, as described and operationalized in Research Aim I, and policy beliefs, as described and operationalized in Research Aim II, were included as predictor variables.

Demographics. For the first area of interest—demographics—the variables race, sex, religion, education, income, and perceived SES were designed to analyze the following research questions:

RQ4_a: Do demographics predict social media news reading?

RQ5_a: Do demographics predict social media news sharing?

RQ6_a: Do demographics predict social media news reacting?

RQ7: Are demographics and voting likelihood independent?

News media use. For the second area of interest—media engagement—the variables news following and news source type were designed to analyze the following research questions:

RQ4_b: Does news media use predict social media news reading?

RQ5_b: Does news media use predict social media news sharing?

RQ6_b: Does news media use predict social media news reacting?

Political views. For the third area of interest—political views—the variables political party affiliation and partisanship were designed to analyze the following research questions:

RQ4_c: Do political views predict social media news reading?

RQ5_c: Do political views predict social media news sharing?

RQ6_c: Do political views predict social media news reacting?

Political entertainment. For the fourth area of interest—political entertainment—the variables political entertainment engagement and political entertainment motivations were designed to analyze the following research questions:

RQ4_d: Do political entertainment motivations predict social media news reading?

RQ5_d: Do political entertainment motivations predict social media news sharing?

RQ6_d: Do political entertainment motivations predict social media news reacting?

Knowledge and beliefs. An additional area of interest regarding public engagement was knowledge as described in Research Aim I and beliefs as described in Research Aim II. These were added as predictors to analyze the following research questions:

RQ4: Do (e) knowledge and (f) beliefs predict social media news reading?

RQ5: Do (e) knowledge and (f) beliefs predict social media news sharing?

RQ6: Do (e) knowledge and (f) beliefs predict social media news reacting?

Outcome variables. To consider the relationship of political entertainment on public engagement, three variables related to social news media engagement were considered and operationalized: social media news reading, social media news sharing, and social media news reacting. Additionally, the outcome variable voting likelihood was included.

Social media news engagement. To explore how news through social media is read, shared, and evoke reactions, 13 news stories from traditional online news websites representing topics related to those asked in the knowledge and belief sections were presented with three questions (see Appendix A). For each of the 13 public issues displayed, the following were provided: a screen shot of a news story as it would appear on Facebook, a question asking respondents about the possibility of reading the story, a question asking respondents about the possibility of sharing the story, and a question about the possibility of including an emoticon when sharing. An initial prompt before the 13 stories instructed participants as follows: *For the following 13 items, you will see news stories from Facebook postings. Please indicate those you would read, those you would share on social media, and your reactions to each.*

Thirteen different news stories were selected from traditional online news sites for a variety of topics of which respondents were previously asked about their knowledge and beliefs toward each (e.g., bullying, immigration). The method of selecting the stories was choosing all

stories at the same time from news sites to represent the topics, taking care to select stories with a visual component and with either a positive, negative, or neutral valence. The Facebook icon on the news sites where the stories were obtained was selected to acquire the standard format for a story being shared on Facebook, complete with the photograph of the story, the headline, and the lead or a partial lead. A screen shot was then taken of the image and then cropped for entry into the survey. This technique ensured a consistent presentation for all 13 stories.

Social media news reading. To determine news reading, each story included the question: *Would you read the story?* The question was followed by a response set of *Definitely Not* = 0, *Probably Not* = 1, *Not Sure* = 2, *Probably Yes* = 3, and *Definitely Yes* = 4. To create a composite score, the responses were added for all 13 stories, creating a range of a potential for those not reading any = 0 to those reading all 13 stories = 52.

Social media news sharing. Respondents were asked if they would share the news story for each of the 13 items: *Would you share the story?* The question was followed by a response set of *Definitely Not* = 0, *Probably Not* = 1, *Not Sure* = 2, *Probably Yes* = 3, and *Definitely Yes* = 4. To create a composite score, the responses were added for all 13 stories, creating a range potential of those not sharing any = 0 to those sharing all 13 stories = 52.

Social media news reacting. Respondents were asked if they would include an emoticon when sharing each news story for each of the 13 items, with a set provided to indicate what type of emoticon. To create a composite score, the responses were added for all 13 stories, creating a range potential of those not including any emoji = 0 to those including an emoticon for all 13 stories = 13.

Voting likelihood. Political involvement has been defined as political participation or political engagement (e.g., Scheufele, Shanahan, & Kim, 2002). Yet, for this study, recognizing

college students may have had limited opportunities to be politically active to this point, a question asking their intent to vote in the upcoming presidential election given its dominance in news coverage was asked instead. The responses set provided options ranging from *Definitely Agree* = 1, *Agree* = 2, *Not Sure* = 3, *Disagree* = 4, and *Definitely Disagree* = 5. The responses were then condensed to two: *Likely to Vote* = 1 and *Not likely to Vote* = 0.

Data Analyses

The complete data set was first examined for completion. If a respondent failed to complete the survey through political entertainment engagement queries, those respondents were removed from analyses. Eliminating those respondents provided a data set of 344 respondents. The data were then analyzed for their inclusion in each of the three research aims. Data analyses included analyzing and accounting for missing cases, checks for normality, bivariate correlations, and regression.

Some respondents failed to answer all questionnaire items resulting in missing data. For all analyses, listwise deletion was used. For scales, when participants answered at least 75% of the items, a scale score was calculated for each using the mean of the existing scores for that individual respondent.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

A total of 407 individuals participated in the online survey in exchange for course credit. After eliminating 67 responses for a lack of completed data through political entertainment queries, a critical consideration for the study, 344 usable survey responses remained. First, descriptive analyses were run and are listed below. A general linear model (GLM) approach was used for each of the three research aims and those results follow.

Descriptive Analyses

Demographics

The predictor variables used for the study relating to demographics included the following: sex, race, religion, education, and perceived socioeconomic status. Table 2 provides the descriptive results for demographic variables and the following describes each.

Sex. The sample reflected that 59.7% of respondents indicated the female option ($n = 204$), and 40.3% selected the male option ($n = 138$). No respondents indicated the additional option of preferring not to state; however, two respondents failed to answer.

Race. When indicating race, 57.6% of respondents choose Black/African-American ($n = 198$), 33.7% reported as White ($n = 116$), and the remainder selected one of the other options, which were then combined for analyses to Other at 8.7% ($n = 30$).

Education. The sample for this study considered only college students; thus, education was defined as the undergraduate grade classification. The sample consisted of 20.1% Freshmen ($n = 69$); 22.2% Sophomores ($n = 76$), 29.2% Juniors ($n = 100$) and 28.6% Seniors ($n = 98$).

Perceived social economic status. In considering how respondents viewed their financial status as compared to others, the measure perceived SES asked respondents to consider their circumstances as ranked on a ladder with a bottom rung representing that they perceived their family as struggling more than others to the top rung representing that they perceived as being definitely better off than most. Results indicated the largest group of respondents at 43.3% perceived themselves as about the same as others ($n = 149$); 21.5% as either the bottom rung (2.9%; $n = 10$) or one rung up (18.6%; $n = 64$); and, the remainder at the higher statuses, 30.2% indicating being better off than most ($n = 104$), and 4.9% at the highest rung ($n = 17$).

Religion. Religion was categorized by asking respondents about religious beliefs. The answer set reflects the following: *I am agnostic or an atheist* at 5.2% ($n = 18$); *I am spiritual but not religious* at 19.2% ($n = 66$); *I attend church sporadically* at 27.9% ($n = 96$); *I attend church fairly regularly* at 30.2% ($n = 104$); *I am highly involved in church activities* at 8.7% ($n = 30$); and *None of these adequately reflects my beliefs* at 8.7% ($n = 30$).

Media Use

The predictor variables for Research Aims I, II, and III relating to media use included the following: news media following and news media source type. Table 3 provides the results for news media use and the following describes each.

Table 2

Summary of Demographic Descriptive Data

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Sex		
Male	138	40.3
Female	204	59.7
Race		
Black	198	57.6
White	116	33.7
Other	30	8.7
Education		
Freshmen	69	20.1
Sophomore	76	22.2
Junior	100	29.2
Senior	98	28.6
Perceived SES		
Definitely worse	10	2.9
Worse	64	18.6
Same	149	43.3
Better	104	30.2
Definitely better	17	4.9
Religion		
Agnostic/atheist	18	5.2
Spiritual, not religious	66	19.2
Attend church infrequently	96	27.9
Attend church regularly	104	30.2
Highly involved in church	30	8.7
None of the above	30	8.7

News following. For news following in which respondents were asked on a likert scale to indicate how often they engage with news, approximately a third ($n = 111$) indicated never ($n = 17$; 5.1%) or rarely ($n = 94$; 28%) following the news, with an almost equal number either ($n = 116$) following regularly ($n = 102$; 30.4%) or all the time ($n = 14$; 4.2%); and an almost equal amount indicating sometimes following news ($n = 109$; 32.4%).

Table 3

Summary of News Media Use Descriptive Data

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
News Following		
Never follow news	17	5.1
Follow news a little	94	28.0
Follow news sometimes	109	32.4
Follow news regularly	102	30.4
Follow news obsessively	14	4.2
News Source Type		
Customize news	152	44.4
Do not customize news	190	55.6

News media source type. For news source type, respondents were asked how they obtain their news, either from traditional formats (e.g., print, broadcast, radio), online only (e.g., news websites), social media, multiple ways, or customized. The results indicated that 44.2% of respondents customize their news in greater numbers than any other options ($n = 152$), with 23.5% stating multiple sources ($n = 81$); 10.5% stating social media only ($n = 36$); 3.2% stating online only ($n = 11$); 16.9% choosing the category of none ($n = 58$), and only 1.7% stating traditional sources ($n = 6$). To compare the potential for the choice of customizing or filtering news coverage to predict knowledge as compared to those who do not filter news in the regression model, the categories were collapsed into two: 44.2% choosing customized ($n = 152$) and those at 55.6% selecting no customizing ($n = 190$).

Political Views

The predictor variables for Research Aims I, II, and III relating to political views included the following: political party affiliation and partisanship. Table 4 provides the results for political views and the following describes each.

Table 4.1

Summary of Political Views – Political Party Descriptive Data

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Political Party Affiliation		
Democrat	174	51.6
Republican	73	21.7
Neither	90	26.7

Political party affiliation. The variable party affiliation was operationalized by asking respondents to indicate their choice of a political party with a response set of five options: Democrat, Independent, Libertarian, Republican, and Other/None/Not Sure. Almost half of respondents indicated Democrat at 51.6% ($n = 174$); another 21.7% ($n = 73$) as Republican, 15.4% ($n = 53$) as not sure; 9% ($n = 30$) as Independent; and, 2.3% ($n = 7$) as Libertarian. The latter three groups were combined into the category of Neither Democrat or Republican ($n = 90$; 26.7%).

Partisanship. The variable partisanship for this study borrowed from Nivola’s (2005) discussion of polarization to operationalize it as representing how conservatives reflect views of the platform representing the Republican Party and how liberals reflect views of the platform representing the Democratic Party. Two identical semantic differential scales comprising 17 polarized sets of words (e.g., generous – stingy, open-minded – narrow-minded) with answer options as a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *Definitely* = 0, *Somewhat* = 1, *Neither* = 2, *Somewhat* = 3, and *Definitely* = 4 with the polarized words on either side of the 17 word items were developed (Appendix A). To calculate a partisanship score, the total polarization score from the two scales were subtracted, with the “gap” representing the tendency and strength of partisanship. A lower score represented a more positive view of conservatives and a higher score represented a more positive view of liberals. The scale, thus, included a range from -68 (i.e.,

completely conservative-leaning) to 68 (i.e., completely liberal-leaning). For example, if someone indicated all zeros for conservative items and all fours for liberal items, the composite number would be -68, which would indicate conservative-leaning. Hence, the more negative the score, the more a respondent both viewed conservatism positively and liberalism negatively.

Results indicated that of the total number ($n = 339$), those ranking conservative-leaning with negative numbers totaled 151, those ranking as liberal-leaning at 149, and neutral at 39.

Conservative-leaning partisanship. For individual items within the views of conservatism scale, descriptive analyses indicated a more positive view of conservatives for such items as patriotism, hard-working, and respectful. The greatest negative items were ranked as being biased, narrow-minded, and judgmental (Table 4.2).

Liberal-leaning partisanship. For individual items within the views of liberalism scale, descriptive analyses indicate a more positive view of liberals for such items as being accepting of others as compared to being racist, being open-minded, and being accepting of others as compared to being judgmental. The greatest negative items were ranked as unpredictable, instigators, and unreliable (Table 4.3).

Political Entertainment

The predictor variables for Research Aims I, II, and III relating to political entertainment included the following: political entertainment engagement and political motivations. The latter included the number of motivations and four types: information-seeking, entertainment-seeking, emotional-release, and social-seeking. Table 5 provides the results for political entertainment and the following describes each.

Table 4.2

Summary of Political Views – Partisanship Conservative Descriptive Data

	Definitely		Somewhat		Neither		Somewhat		Definitely		
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Generous	70	20.6	108	31.9	79	23.3	51	15.0	31	9.1	Stingy
Open-minded	62	18.4	81	24.0	66	19.6	70	20.8	58	17.2	Narrow-minded
Unbiased	32	9.5	72	21.3	98	29.0	68	20.1	68	20.1	Biased
Well-informed	72	21.4	117	34.7	81	24.0	51	15.1	16	4.7	Uninformed
Hard-working	121	35.7	106	31.3	76	22.4	23	6.8	13	3.8	Lazy
Patriotic	104	31.0	97	28.9	98	29.2	24	7.1	13	3.9	Unpatriotic
Respectful	96	28.5	100	29.7	68	20.2	52	15.4	21	6.2	Disrespectful
Moral	62	18.3	105	31.0	78	23.0	63	18.6	31	9.1	Immoral
Accepting	62	18.3	105	31.0	78	23.0	63	18.6	31	9.1	Racist
Calm	60	17.6	114	33.5	101	29.7	49	14.4	16	4.7	Violent
Instigators	37	10.9	95	28.0	109	32.2	72	21.2	26	7.7	Problem-solvers
Virtuous	63	18.8	106	31.6	125	37.3	27	8.1	14	4.2	Evil
Unpredictable	45	13.4	90	26.7	87	25.8	80	23.7	35	10.4	Stable
Unreliable	24	7.2	57	17.0	131	39.1	74	22.1	49	14.6	Dependable
Reasonable	63	18.6	117	34.5	81	23.9	49	14.5	29	8.6	Emotional
Accepting	60	17.6	88	25.9	60	17.6	72	21.2	60	17.6	Judgmental
Genuine	60	17.7	118	34.8	110	32.4	36	10.6	15	4.4	Fake

Table 4.3

Summary of Political Views – Partisanship Liberal Descriptive Data

	Definitely		Somewhat		Neither		Somewhat		Definitely		
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Generous	60	17.7	118	34.8	110	32.4	36	10.6	15	4.4	Stingy
Open-minded	89	26.1	102	29.9	99	29.0	30	8.8	21	6.2	Narrow-minded
Unbiased	43	12.7	76	22.4	116	34.2	67	19.8	37	10.9	Biased
Well-informed	54	15.9	108	31.8	123	36.2	42	12.4	13	3.8	Uninformed
Hard-working	67	19.6	97	28.4	111	32.6	50	14.7	16	4.7	Lazy
Patriotic	37	11.0	105	31.2	135	40.1	46	13.6	14	4.2	Unpatriotic
Respectful	54	15.9	107	31.5	113	33.2	49	14.4	17	5.0	Disrespectful
Moral	55	16.2	108	31.9	116	34.2	45	13.3	15	4.4	Immoral
Accepting	99	29.2	109	32.2	89	26.3	34	10.0	8	2.4	Racist
Calm	49	14.5	98	28.9	134	39.5	43	12.7	15	4.4	Violent
Instigators	32	9.4	89	26.2	128	37.6	61	17.9	30	8.8	Problem-solvers
Virtuous	46	13.5	103	30.2	144	42.2	35	10.3	13	3.8	Evil
Unpredictable	49	14.6	93	27.7	118	35.1	56	16.7	20	6.0	Stable
Unreliable	25	7.4	77	22.6	134	39.4	72	21.2	32	9.4	Dependable
Reasonable	55	16.1	110	32.3	95	27.9	45	13.2	36	10.6	Emotional
Accepting	87	25.7	101	29.9	94	27.8	40	11.8	16	4.7	Judgmental
Genuine	62	18.2	107	31.5	108	31.8	47	13.8	16	4.7	Fake

Political entertainment engagement. This study aimed to consider if political entertainment predicts knowledge levels, contributes to politicized beliefs, and encourages public engagement. Additionally, a specific area of interest concerned the potential reasons people may approach these formats as compared to other types of news media and if these differing motivations may predict the outcome variables. Research has shown that people may engage with satirical news sites and political comedy shows purely to be entertained (Young, 2016); yet may be learning more about public issues through these newer formats than traditional news sources (Brewer, 2014). Additionally, one study has found that those who watch comedic news shows are more actively involved in politics, consume more news, are more knowledgeable, and have a higher interest in current events (Young, 2016). This study found through querying respondents about engagement, emphasizing regular engagement, with an item set of 17 choices and an open-ended response option that only 23.8% indicated no regular engagement ($n = 82$). Of those indicating regular engagement, 29.1% indicated engagement with only one show ($n = 100$); yet, the remainder at a little more than half at 47.1% indicated regular engagement with two or more shows ($n = 162$).

Political entertainment motivations. To determine why people may be motivated to engage with political entertainment, respondents were asked to check any relevant options related to four motivations to explain why they watched shows, regardless of the level of engagement—whether a regular user or just an occasional watcher. All but six respondents ($n = 338$) gave at least one motivational reason.

Number of political entertainment motivations. To consider if people typically have multiple reasons for engaging with political entertainment or seek out shows with a singular purpose, responses for motivational reasons were tallied then coded into two groups for analysis:

either one motivation or more than one. Respondents were divided equally with 50% stating only one reason ($n = 169$), and, likewise, for those stating more than one reason ($n = 169$). Six respondents did not answer.

Table 5

Summary of Political Entertainment Descriptive Data

Political Entertainment Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Engagement		
Engage	262	76.2
No engagement	82	23.8
Number of Motivations		
One motivation	169	50.0
Two or more motivations	169	50.0
Information-Seeking Motivation		
Motivation	221	64.2
No motivation	123	35.8
Entertainment-Seeking Motivation		
Motivation	175	50.9
No motivation	169	49.1
Social-Seeking Motivation		
Motivation	135	39.2
No motivation	209	60.8
Emotional Release Motivation		
Motivation	68	19.8
No motivation	276	80.2

Type of political entertainment motivations. Political entertainment engagement only measured regular engagers as compared to those not engaging, and the number of motivations only compared one motivation to more than one; thus, political entertainment motivations were coded into four response categories to compare if the type of motivation predicted outcome variables.

Information-seeking. Of the total number of respondents, 64.2% indicated a desire to engage in political entertainment to satisfy information needs ($n = 221$); whereas, the remainder at 35.8% failed to indicate an information-seeking motivation ($n = 123$).

Entertainment-seeking. Of the total number of respondents, 49.1% indicated a desire to engage in political entertainment to satisfy entertainment needs ($n = 169$); whereas, the remainder at 50.9% failed to indicate an entertainment motivation ($n = 175$).

Emotional release. Of the total number of respondents, 19.8% indicated a desire to engage in political entertainment for needing an emotional outlet ($n = 68$); whereas, the remainder at 80.2% failed to indicate an emotional-release motivation ($n = 276$).

Social-seeking. Of the total number of respondents, 39.2% indicated desiring to engage in political entertainment to be able to interact with others either in person or online ($n = 135$); whereas, the remainder at 60.8% failed to indicate a social-involvement motivation ($n = 209$).

Results for Research Aim I - Knowledge

The variable knowledge was created from an additive scale of 12 items representing both historical facts and information regarding politicized topics. Care was taken to include only items measuring real-word indicators rather than beliefs in the “rightness” or “wrongness” of how those indicators could be interpreted. Measures included historical references, health questions, and scientific items.

Descriptive Analyses

Results show a low knowledge level overall ($M = 4.33$; $SD = 2.56$) with most items ranking highest in the option of *Don't Know* as compared to respondents answering either accurately or inaccurately (Table 6). No respondent accurately answered all the items correctly, and 34 respondents failed to correctly answer any items.

Table 6

Summary of Descriptive Results for Knowledge

Knowledge Statement	Answered Correctly		Answered Don't Know		Answered Incorrectly	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
The minimum wage is set by the federal government and is required to be at least \$7.25.	232	67.5	72	20.9	40	11.6
Two-thirds of U.S. adults are considered overweight.	215	62.5	97	28.2	32	9.3
Independence Day was established to recognize the end of the Civil War between the North and the South.	168	48.9	107	31.1	69	20.0
More than 90 percent of children in the U.S. receive vaccinations to prevent diseases.	167	48.6	124	36.0	53	15.4
Ronald Reagan was a Democrat when president.	124	36.1	150	43.6	70	20.3
Gun laws are established federally, not by states.	117	34.0	110	32.0	117	34.0
Overall, ocean surface temperature readings have decreased since the 1970s.	99	28.8	175	50.9	70	20.3
Breast cancer is the number one killer disease of women.	98	28.5	83	24.1	163	47.4
Of the almost 1,000 fatal shootings by officers in 2015, more than half involved unarmed citizens.	47	13.6	120	34.9	177	51.5
The rate of violent crimes has increased since the 1980s.	46	13.4	102	29.7	196	56.9
Only a president can remove a Supreme Court justice from the court.	45	13.1	241	70.0	58	16.9

Regression Analyses

In considering potential predictors of knowledge, statistical analyses were run for testing Hypotheses 1 and 2 and Research Questions 1 and 2.

H1: Demographic factors (race, gender, education, perceived socioeconomic status) can predict knowledge.

In considering Hypotheses 1, a GLM framework was used to determine whether demographics (race, gender, education, perceived socioeconomic status) significantly predict knowledge (Table 7). Education was found to be a significant predictor of knowledge $F(3, 330) = 3.85, p = .010$. Post hoc analyses, using Tukey’s HSD, indicate that freshmen ($M = 3.46$) significantly different from both juniors ($M = 4.27$) and seniors ($M = 4.76$). Additionally, sophomores ($M = 3.95$) significantly differed from seniors. Race was also found to be a significant predictor of knowledge $F(2, 330) = 20.05, p < .001$. Post hoc analyses using Tukey’s HSD, indicate that those who identified as White ($M = 5.47$) were significantly different from those who identified as Black ($M = 3.77$) and those who identified as “Other” ($M = 3.08$). Sex, income, and perceived SES were not found to be significant predictors of knowledge. Therefore, H1 is partially supported.

Table 7

Summary of Demographic Factors Predicting Knowledge

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p
Corrected Model	410.46	10	41.05	7.46	<.0001
Intercept	1748.87	1	1748.87	317.85	<.0001
Education	63.54	3	21.18	3.85	.010
Perceived SES	11.17	4	2.79	0.51	.730
Race	220.61	2	110.31	20.05	<.0001
Sex	14.00	1	14.00	2.55	.112
Error	1815.70	330	5.50		

H2: News following and new source type can predict knowledge.

In considering Hypotheses 2, a GLM framework was used to determine whether news media use (news following and news source type) significantly predict knowledge, controlling

for demographic variables (Table 8). News source type was found to be a significant predictor of knowledge, with results indicating that those customizing news have greater knowledge as compared to those not customizing news, $F(1, 318) = 20.28, p < .001$. The parameter estimates (B, SE) are reported in Table 8. News following was not found to be a significant predictor of knowledge. Therefore, H2 is partially supported.

RQ1: Do political views (political party affiliation and partisanship) predict knowledge?

In considering Research Question 1, a regression was run to determine whether political views (political party affiliation and partisanship) significantly predict knowledge, controlling for demographic variables (Table 9). Partisanship was found to be a significant predictor of knowledge $F(1, 316) = 6.51, p = .011$, with those indicating a greater partisanship score also having more knowledge. The parameter estimates (B, SE) are reported in Table 9.

Table 8

Summary of News Media Use Factors Predicting Knowledge

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p	B	SE
Corrected Model	532.58	12	44.38	8.73	<.0001		
Intercept	165.11	1	165.11	32.49	<.0001	1.94	0.86
Education	41.23	3	13.74	2.70	.046		
Perceived SES	6.53	4	1.63	0.321	.864		
Race	177.10	2	88.55	17.43	<.0001		
Sex	29.41	1	29.41	5.79	.017		
News Following	5.63	1	5.63	1.11	.293	0.15	0.14
New Source	103.05	1	103.05	20.28	<.0001	0.33	0.07
Error	1615.92	318	5.08				

Table 9

Summary of Political Views Factors Predicting Knowledge

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p	B	SE
Corrected Model	477.94	12	39.83	7.34	<.0001		
Intercept	667.39	1	667.39	122.97	<.0001	3.14	0.88
Education	48.89	3	16.30	3.00	.031		
Perceived SES	10.24	4	2.56	0.472	.756		
Race	257.04	2	128.52	23.68	<.0001		
Sex	14.92	1	14.92	2.75	.098		
Political Party	2.32	1	2.32	0.43	.514	-0.11	0.17
Partisanship	35.31	1	35.31	6.51	.011	0.02	0.01
Error	1714.95	316	5.43				

RQ2: Does political entertainment use (political entertainment engagement and political entertainment motivations) predict knowledge?

In considering Research Question 2, a regression was run to determine if political entertainment engagement and motivations (information-seeking, entertainment-seeking, emotional release, and social-seeking) predict knowledge, controlling for demographic variables (Table 10). Entertainment motivation was found to be a significant predictor of knowledge, where those who used more entertainment motivation were more knowledgeable, $F(1, 305) = 7.54, p = .006$. The parameter estimates (B, SE) are reported in Table 10.

Table 10

Summary of Political Entertainment Factors Predicting Knowledge

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p	B	SE
Corrected Model	579.88	15	38.66	7.63	<.0001		
Intercept	303.91	1	303.91	60.00	<.0001	1.701	0.82
Education	45.58	3	15.19	3.00	.031		
Perceived SES	17.45	4	4.36	0.86	.487		
Race	204.66	2	102.33	20.20	<.0001		
Sex	19.44	1	19.44	3.84	.051		
Engagement	1.13	1	1.13	0.22	.637	-0.14	0.30
Motivation Entertainment	38.20	1	38.20	7.54	.006	0.71	0.26
Motivation Information	18.64	1	18.64	3.68	.056	0.50	0.26
Motivation Social	112.74	1	112.74	22.26	<.0001	1.22	0.26
Motivation Emotion	0.25	1	0.25	0.05	.826	-0.07	0.32
Error	1646.28	325	5.07				

Results for Research Aim II – Policy Beliefs

The variable policy beliefs was created from an additive scale of 11 items representing a range of statements commonly asked on polling surveys reflecting polarized topics (Table 11). The total range for all added items once reverse coded could potentially have been 11, representing a completely conservative viewpoint (e.g., all strong agreement with conservative stances) to 55, representing a completely liberal viewpoint (e.g., all strong agreement with liberal stances) and a score of 33 representing a total neutral score.

Descriptive Analyses

The overall mean reflected a neutral score of 33.7 with a standard deviation of 6.059. For statistical analyses, the scale was condensed to a range of 0 being neutral and a negative score indicating a conservative viewpoint and a positive score representing a liberal viewpoint. The range was conservative = -9 and liberal = 9 with neutral = 0. While a total score of all items was

used in statistical analyses for the variable policy beliefs, descriptive analyses were run to consider more nuanced stances for all the individual items (Table 11).

Table 11 indicates greater variance for individual items in how individuals may consider specific policies while still reflecting a general conservative, neutral, or liberal stance. For several items the category of neutral ranks as having the greatest number, with the top two numbers for the items being the statements (a) *The gun show loophole should be closed* and (b) *English should be the national language, eliminating requirements to provide government forms, such as a drivers' test, in other languages.*

The three items respondents agreed with most strongly were two conservative-leaning, with the top ranking being the statement *People should be required to provide an ID to vote* and the second ranking as the statement *Welfare recipients should be tested for drugs.* The top liberal-leaning item was the statement *Marijuana should be legalized.*

Overall, respondents had stronger agreements with most of the items than disagreements for each. The two highest ranking items indicated as the ones most strongly disagreed were considered more liberal-leaning with the top ranking item the statement *Airlines and insurance companies should be allowed to charge obese people more* and the second item as *The government should use religion to guide policies.*

Regression Analyses

In considering potential predictors of policy beliefs, statistical analyses were run for testing Hypotheses 3, 4, 5, and Research Question 3.

H3: Demographic factors (race, sex, religion, education, income, and socioeconomic status) can predict policy beliefs.

Table 11

Summary of Descriptive Results for Policy Beliefs

Liberal-Leaning Platform	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Marijuana should be legalized with restrictions similar to cigarettes.	110	32.7	84	25.0	81	24.1	37	11.0	24	7.1
Marriage licenses should be issued to adults regardless of sexual preference.	74	22.2	80	24.0	95	28.4	40	12.0	45	13.5
The death penalty should be banned.	53	15.7	75	22.2	114	33.8	52	15.4	43	12.8
The gun show loophole should be closed.	15	4.4	30	8.9	184	54.4	52	15.4	57	16.9
Conservative-Leaning Platform	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
People should be required to provide an ID to vote.	136	40.4	70	20.8	79	23.4	35	10.4	17	5.0
Welfare recipients should be drug tested.	105	31.3	81	24.2	96	28.7	29	8.7	24	7.2
Churches and religious leaders should have the right to refuse conducting same-sex marriages.	74	22.2	80	24.0	95	28.4	40	12.0	45	13.5
Most abortions should be banned.	55	16.3	49	14.5	99	29.4	66	19.6	68	20.2
English should be the national language, eliminating requirements to provide government forms, such as a drivers' test, in other languages.	42	12.5	58	17.2	123	36.5	56	16.6	58	17.2
Airlines and insurance companies should be allowed to charge obese people more.	19	5.6	52	15.4	116	34.3	65	19.2	86	25.4
The government should use religion to guide policies.	24	7.1	54	16.1	116	34.5	58	17.3	84	25.0

For Hypotheses 3, a GLM framework was used to determine whether demographic variables significantly predict policy beliefs (Table 12). Sex was found to be a significant predictor of policy beliefs, $F(1, 325) = 25.26, p < .001$. Men were more conservative leaning ($M = -1.02$), while women were more liberal leaning ($M = 1.58$). Race was found to be a significant predictor of policy beliefs, $F(2, 325) = 3.82, p = .023$. While the omnibus test indicated that there were significant differences within race, post hoc tests, using Tukey's HSD, failed to identify any significant differences. Finally, religion was found to be a significant predictor of policy beliefs, $F(5, 325) = 10.40, p < .001$. Post hoc analyses, using Tukey's HSD, indicated that those identifying as agnostic or atheist ($M = 4.78$) are significantly different from those who attend church fairly regularly ($M = -0.33$) and from those who are highly involved in church activities ($M = -4.85$). Next, those who reported being spiritual, but not religious ($M = 0.77$) were significantly different from those who reported being highly involved in church activities. Next, those who reported attending church sporadically ($M = 0.77$) were significantly different from those who reported being highly involved in church activities. Next, those who reported attending church fairly regularly were significantly different from those who reported being highly involved in church activities. Finally, those who indicated that none of the response options adequately reflected their beliefs (or if they chose not to answer) ($M = 0.55$) were significantly different from those who were highly involved in church. Education and perceived SES were not found to significantly predict beliefs. Therefore, H3 was partially supported.

Table 12

Summary of Demographic Factors Predicting Beliefs

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p
Corrected Model	1707.87	15	113.86	5.42	<.0001
Intercept	7.19	1	7.19	0.34	.559
Education	39.29	3	13.10	0.62	.600
Perceived SES	104.50	4	26.12	1.24	.292
Race	160.65	2	80.33	3.82	.023
Sex	530.60	1	530.60	25.26	<.0001
Religion	1092.55	5	218.51	10.40	<.0001
Error	6828.08	325	21.01		

H4: News media use (news following and news source type) can predict beliefs.

In considering Hypothesis 4, a regression was run to determine if news media use (news following and news source type) predict beliefs, controlling for demographic variables (Table 13). News source type was found to be a significant predictor of policy beliefs, with results indicating that those customizing news were more likely to hold liberal beliefs compared to those not customizing news $F(1, 313) = 5.23, p = .023$. The parameter estimates (B, SE) are reported in Table 13. News following was not found to be a significant predictor of knowledge. Therefore, H4 is partially supported.

Table 13

Summary of News Media Use Predicting Beliefs

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p	B	SE
Corrected Model	1776.42	17	104.50	4.97	<.0001		
Intercept	17.78	1	17.78	0.85	.359	2.95	1.99
Education	33.69	3	11.23	0.53	.659		
Perceived SES	91.21	4	22.80	1.08	.365		
Race	150.32	2	75.16	3.57	.029		
Sex	430.31	1	430.31	20.45	<.0001		
Religion	1063.94	5	212.79	10.11	<.0001		
News Following	0.04	1	0.04	0.00	.968	0.01	0.29
New Source	110.01	1	110.01	5.23	.023	0.35	0.15
Error	6585.86	313	21.04				

H5: Political views (political party affiliation and partisanship) can predict beliefs.

A regression was run to determine if political party and partisanship predict policy beliefs, controlling for demographic variables (Table 14). Partisanship was shown to be a significant predictor of policy beliefs with those indicating liberal-leaning greater in knowledge levels as compared to those indicating conservative-leaning views $F(1, 311) = 29.79, p < .001$. Political party affiliation was not found to be significant. Therefore, H5 was partially supported.

Table 14

Summary of Political Views Factors Predicting Beliefs

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p	B	SE
Corrected Model	2251.85	17	132.46	6.97	<.0001		
Intercept	3.20	1	3.20	0.17	.682	4.04	1.85
Education	43.18	3	14.39	0.76	.519		
Perceived SES	101.36	4	25.34	1.33	.257		
Race	61.32	2	30.66	1.61	.201		
Sex	392.82	1	392.82	20.67	<.0001		
Religion	749.33	5	149.87	7.89	<.0001		
Political Party	0.01	1	0.01	0.00	.981	-0.01	0.31
Partisanship	566.07	1	566.07	29.79	<.0001	0.09	0.02
Error	5909.90	311	19.00				

RQ3: Does political entertainment use (political entertainment engagement and political entertainment motivations) predict beliefs?

A regression was run to determine if political entertainment engagement and the four types of political entertainment motivations predict policy beliefs, controlling for demographic variables (Table 15). No significant results were found.

Table 15

Summary of Political Entertainment Factors Predicting Beliefs

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p	B	SE
Corrected Model	1797.123	20	89.86	4.27	<.0001		
Intercept	2.30	1	2.30	0.11	.741	3.54	1.88
Education	41.38	3	13.79	0.66	.580		
Perceived SES	91.78	4	22.95	1.09	.362		
Race	142.70	2	71.35	3.39	.035		
Sex	461.27	1	461.27	21.90	<.0001		
Religion	1072.02	5	214.41	10.18	<.0001		
Engagement	0.02	1	0.02	0.00	.973	-0.02	0.61
Motivation Entertainment	2.45	1	2.45	0.12	.734	-0.18	0.54
Motivation Information	20.19	1	20.19	0.96	.328	0.52	0.53
Motivation Social	12.18	1	12.18	0.58	.448	0.41	0.54
Motivation Emotion	44.16	1	44.16	2.10	.149	0.95	0.66
Error	6738.83	320	21.06				

Results for Research Aim III – Public Engagement

In considering the relationships of various factors predicting public engagement, multiple variables were analyzed. Public engagement was considered both the tendency of respondents to engage with news stories shared on social media through reading, sharing, and reacting to the news stories, and likelihood to vote. Each of these is explained in the following sections.

For assessing social media engagement, a series of social media news stories ($N = 13$) were displayed. Respondents were queried about which stories they would read, share, and

include a reaction (i.e., emoji) when sharing. For descriptive purposes, the totals for each story of the three (reading, sharing, reacting) were summed and then categorized for each of the three as explained below in the descriptive analyses section. For statistical analyses, the totals for each of the three variable types (reading, sharing, reacting) were summed for each of the stories, creating a composite score for each of the three as explained in the statistical section below.

For assessing likelihood to vote as public engagement, respondents were asked to indicate their likelihood to vote in the upcoming presidential election.

Descriptive Analyses

Social media news engagement. For assessing public news engagement, a series of social media news stories ($N = 13$) were displayed as would be seen on Facebook postings with photographs, headlines, the lead sentences, and the news sources, all of which reflected traditional news outlets (Appendix A).

Social media news reading. For online news reading, an additive scale was created to tally all responses to 13 stories for statistical analyses, resulting in a total score ranging from all responses of *Definitely Not* reading for all stories = 0 to *Definitely Yes* reading for all the stories = 52. For descriptive purposes, the total number of respondents, the number of respondents for each category (*Definitely Read*, *Probably Read*, *Not Sure*, *Probably Not*, *Definitely Not*), and the percentage of respondents for each category were calculated for each of the 13 stories (Table 16).

Social media news sharing. For online news sharing, an additive scale was created to tally all responses to 13 stories for statistical analyses, resulting in a total score ranging from all responses of *Definitely Not* sharing for all stories = 0 to *Definitely Yes* sharing for all the stories = 52. For descriptive purposes, the total number of respondents, the number of respondents for

each category (*Definitely Read, Probably Read, Not Sure, Probably Not, Definitely Not*), and the percentage of respondents for each category were calculated for each of the 13 stories (Table 16).

Social media news reacting. To consider if people include an emotional response, respondents were queried for what type of emoticon they would share with each of the 13 stories (i.e., *None, Like, Ha-Ha, Ridiculous, Sad, Dislike, and Mad*). The additive scale used in statistical analysis summed the total number of reactions as compared to those with no reaction, resulting in a total score possibility ranging from 0 to 13 for all stories. For descriptive purposes, the number of and the percentage of those including an emoticon were calculated for each story.

Table 16

Summary of Descriptive Results for Social Media Engagement

Article 1: Terrence Cody’s animal-cruelty trial opens with photos of emaciated dog											
	Definitely		Probably		Not Sure		Probably Not		Definitely not		
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Reading (<i>n</i> = 332)	46	13.9	115	34.6	81	24.4	58	17.5	32	9.6	
Sharing (<i>n</i> = 331)	22	6.6	31	9.4	71	21.5	101	30.5	106	32.0	
	Emoji		No Emoji								
Reacting (<i>n</i> = 331)	221	66.8	110	33.2							
Article 2: Coat creates jobs for Detroit’s homeless											
	Definitely		Probably		Not Sure		Probably Not		Definitely not		
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Reading (<i>n</i> = 331)	46	13.9	98	29.6	92	27.8	72	21.8	23	6.9	
Sharing (<i>n</i> = 329)	44	13.4	56	17.0	82	24.9	90	27.4	57	17.3	
	Emoji		No Emoji								
Reacting (<i>n</i> = 330)	215	65.2	115	34.8							

Article 3: Why is it so difficult for Syrian refugees to get into U.S.?

	Definitely		Probably		Not Sure		Probably Not		Definitely not	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Reading (<i>n</i> = 329)	22	6.7	73	22.2	100	30.4	79	24.0	55	16.7
Sharing (<i>n</i> = 328)	14	4.3	27	8.2	83	25.3	113	34.5	91	27.7
	<u>Emoji</u>		<u>No Emoji</u>							
Reacting (<i>n</i> = 329)	93	27.0	236	68.6						

Article 4: Anti-vaccine movement is giving diseases a second life

	Definitely		Probably		Not Sure		Probably Not		Definitely not	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Reading (<i>n</i> = 327)	46	14.1	89	27.2	96	29.4	63	19.3	33	10.1
Sharing (<i>n</i> = 325)	33	10.2	58	17.8	90	27.7	78	24.0	66	20.3
	<u>Emoji</u>		<u>No Emoji</u>							
Reacting (<i>n</i> = 324)	144	44.4	180	55.6						

Article 5: Suspect in San Francisco woman's death deported five times

	Definitely		Probably		Not Sure		Probably Not		Definitely not	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Reading (<i>n</i> = 327)	32	9.8	109	33.3	97	29.7	62	19.0	27	8.3
Sharing (<i>n</i> = 326)	23	7.1	41	12.6	97	29.8	85	26.1	80	24.5
	<u>Emoji</u>		<u>No Emoji</u>							
Reacting (<i>n</i> = 324)	150	46.3	174	53.7						

Article 6: Former SI cover girl: Full-figure models 'unhealthy'

	Definitely		Probably		Not Sure		Probably Not		Definitely not	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Reading (<i>n</i> = 327)	21	6.4	71	21.7	70	21.4	89	27.2	76	23.2
Sharing (<i>n</i> = 328)	11	3.4	31	9.5	65	19.8	95	29.0	126	38.4
	<u>Emoji</u>		<u>No Emoji</u>							
Reacting (<i>n</i> = 323)	106	32.8	217	67.2						

Article 7: Cheerleader asks student with autism to prom

	Definitely		Probably		Not Sure		Probably Not		Definitely not	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Reading (<i>n</i> = 329)	89	27.1	113	34.3	65	19.8	36	10.9	26	7.9
Sharing (<i>n</i> = 328)	69	21.0	88	26.8	66	20.1	48	14.6	57	17.4
	<u>Emoji</u>		<u>No Emoji</u>							
Reacting (<i>n</i> = 329)	223	67.8	106	32.2						

Article 8: A way to start paying student college athletes

	Definitely		Probably		Not Sure		Probably Not		Definitely not	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Reading (<i>n</i> = 327)	74	22.6	100	30.6	64	19.6	43	13.1	46	14.1
Sharing (<i>n</i> = 326)	49	15.0	54	16.6	78	23.9	71	21.8	74	22.7
	<u>Emoji</u>		<u>No Emoji</u>							
Reacting (<i>n</i> = 324)	138	42.6	186	57.4						

Article 9: Sylvania teens to be charged after assault, bullying of teen with disabilities

	Definitely		Probably		Not Sure		Probably Not		Definitely not	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Reading (<i>n</i> = 327)	74	22.6	103	31.5	85	26.0	36	11.0	29	8.9
Sharing (<i>n</i> = 326)	55	16.9	56	17.2	82	25.2	71	21.8	62	19.0
	<u>Emoji</u>		<u>No Emoji</u>							
Reacting (<i>n</i> = 323)	178	55.1	145	44.9						

Article 10: Where free college is not a cure-all

	Definitely		Probably		Not Sure		Probably Not		Definitely not	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Reading (<i>n</i> = 326)	54	16.6	118	36.2	84	25.8	42	12.9	28	8.6
Sharing (<i>n</i> = 326)	41	12.6	65	19.9	98	30.1	62	19.0	60	18.4
	<u>Emoji</u>		<u>No Emoji</u>							
Reacting (<i>n</i> = 320)	91	28.4	229	71.6						

Article 11: Court divided over University of Texas race-conscious admissions

	Definitely		Probably		Not Sure		Probably Not		Definitely not	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Reading (<i>n</i> = 324)	49	15.1	102	31.5	84	25.9	50	15.4	39	12.0
Sharing (<i>n</i> = 327)	39	11.9	45	13.8	99	30.3	72	22.0	72	22.0
	<u>Emoji</u>		<u>No Emoji</u>							
Reacting (<i>n</i> = 321)	78	24.3	243	75.7						

Article 12: FBI now tracks animal abuse just like homicides, arson and assaults

	Definitely		Probably		Not Sure		Probably Not		Definitely not	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Reading (<i>n</i> = 326)	46	14.1	90	27.6	93	28.5	63	19.3	34	10.4
Sharing (<i>n</i> = 326)	32	9.8	60	18.4	86	26.4	84	25.8	64	19.6
	<u>Emoji</u>		<u>No Emoji</u>							
Reacting (<i>n</i> = 320)	119	37.2	201	62.8						

Article 13: Breastfeeding mom at Sanders rally inspires hashtag

	Definitely		Probably		Not Sure		Probably Not		Definitely not	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Reading (<i>n</i> = 327)	29	8.9	69	21.1	82	25.1	87	26.6	60	18.3
Sharing (<i>n</i> = 326)	19	5.8	34	10.4	83	25.5	96	29.4	94	28.8
	<u>Emoji</u>		<u>No Emoji</u>							
Reacting (<i>n</i> = 321)	108	33.6	213	66.4						

Voting Likelihood. For assessing political involvement, voting likelihood was considered as intent toward public engagement. Respondents were asked to indicate their intent to vote in the upcoming election with five options ranging from *Definitely Not* to *Definitely*. While the response set offered five options, the items were changed to a dichotomous variable.

The majority of respondents at 74.7% indicated likely or definitely voting ($n = 257$), while only 25.3% indicated a noncommittal response to voting ($n = 87$).

Table 17

Summary of Descriptive Results for Voting Likelihood

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Voting Likelihood		
Definitely	182	52.9
Likely	75	21.8
Not Sure	53	15.4
Not Likely	12	3.5
Definitely Not	22	6.4

Regression Analyses

In considering potential predictors of public engagement, statistical analyses were run for answering Research Questions 4, 5, and 6. For answering Research Question 7, chi squared analyses were run.

RQ4: Do (a) demographics, (b) news media use, (c) political views, (d) political entertainment motivations, (e) knowledge, and (f) beliefs predict social media news reading?

For answering Research Question 4a, a regression was run to determine whether demographic variables significantly predict social media news reading (Table 18). No significant predictors were found.

Table 18

Summary of Demographic Factors Predicting Social Media News Reading

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p
Corrected Model	1904.95	15	127.00	1.48	.110
Intercept	60866.32	1	60866.32	710.19	<.0001
Education	218.93	3	72.98	0.85	.467
Perceived SES	429.04	4	107.26	1.25	.289
Race	122.44	2	61.22	0.71	.490
Sex	128.73	1	128.73	1.50	.221
Religion	700.29	5	140.06	1.63	.151
Error	26397.02	308	85.71		

For answering Research Question 4_{b,c,d,e,f} a regression was run to determine whether news media use (news following and news source type), political views (political party affiliation and partisanship), political entertainment motivations (entertainment-seeking, information-seeking, emotional-release, and social-seeking), knowledge, and beliefs, controlling for demographics predict social media news reading (Table 19). News following was found to be a significant predictor, $F(1, 285) = 18.94$, $p < .001$, where those who followed the news more also read social media more. Knowledge was found to be a significant predictor of social media reading, $F(1, 285) = 5.05$, $p = .025$, where those who had more knowledge read social media more. Finally, policy beliefs was found also to be a significant predictor of social media reading, $F(1, 285) = 5.82$, $p = .016$, where those who were more liberal leaning also read social media more. The parameter estimates (B, SE) are reported in Table 19.

Table 19

Summary of Factors Predicting Social Media News Reading

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p	B	SE
Corrected Model	5385.63	25	215.43	2.79	<.0001		
Intercept	2446.30	1	2446.30	31.69	<.0001	14.23	4.39
Education	230.69	3	76.90	1.00	.395		
Perceived SES	300.64	4	75.16	0.97	.422		
Race	331.50	2	165.75	2.15	.119		
Sex	6.48	1	6.48	0.08	.772		
Religion	1429.54	5	285.91	3.70	.003		
Motivation Entertainment	67.56	1	67.56	0.88	.350	-0.99	1.06
Motivation Information	104.57	1	104.57	1.36	.245	-1.27	1.09
Motivation Social	20.00	1	20.00	0.26	.611	0.57	1.12
Motivation Emotion	13.68	1	13.68	0.18	.674	0.56	1.33
News Following	1461.70	1	1461.70	18.94	<.0001	2.64	0.61
News Source	44.80	1	44.80	0.58	.447	0.25	0.33
Political Party	85.04	1	85.04	1.10	.295	0.69	0.66
Partisanship	32.02	1	32.02	0.42	.520	-0.14	0.21
Knowledge	389.86	1	389.86	5.05	.025	0.53	0.24
Policy Beliefs	449.22	1	449.22	5.82	.016	0.31	0.13
Error	21999.47	285	77.19				

RQ5: Do (a) demographics, (b) news media use, (c) political views, and (d) political entertainment motivations, (e) knowledge, and (f) beliefs predict social media news sharing?

For answering Research Question 5a, a regression was run to determine whether demographic variables significantly predict social media news sharing (Table 20). Race was found to be a significant predictor of social media sharing, $F(2, 308) = 11.86, p < .001$. Post hoc analyses, using Tukey's HSD, indicate that those identifying as White ($M = 15.89$) were significantly different from those identifying as Black ($M = 23.20$), with Blacks engaging in sharing more than Whites.

Table 20

Summary of Demographic Factors Predicting Social Media News Sharing

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p
Corrected Model	6602.45	15	440.16	3.80	<.0001
Intercept	35921.04	1	35921.04	310.13	<.0001
Education	461.12	3	153.71	1.33	.266
Perceived SES	676.53	4	169.13	1.46	.214
Race	2746.24	2	1373.12	11.86	<.0001
Sex	232.84	1	232.84	2.01	.157
Religion	446.91	5	89.38	0.77	.571
Error	35674.59	308	115.83		

For answering Research Question 5_{b,c,d,e,f} a regression was run to determine whether news media use (news following and news source type), political views (political party affiliation and partisanship), political entertainment motivations (entertainment-seeking, information-seeking, emotional release, and social-seeking), knowledge, and beliefs, controlling for demographics predict social media news reading (Table 21). News following was found to be a significant predictor of social media sharing, $F(1, 285) = 8.77, p = .003$, where those who followed news more were also those who shared social media more. Policy beliefs was found also to be a significant predictor of social media sharing, $F(1, 285) = 7.25, p = .008$, where those who held more liberal-leaning beliefs were also those who shared social media more. The parameter estimates (B, SE) are reported in Table 21.

RQ6: Do (a) demographics, (b) news media use, (c) political views, and (d) political entertainment motivations, (e) knowledge, and (f) beliefs predict social media news reactions?

For answering Research Question 6a, a regression was run to determine whether demographic variables significantly predict social media news reacting (Table 22). No significant predictors were found.

Table 21

Summary of Factors Predicting Social Media News Sharing

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p	B	SE
Corrected Model	9715.89	25	388.64	3.57	<.0001		
Intercept	2450.86	1	2450.86	22.53	<.0001	14.47	5.21
Education	606.95	3	202.32	1.86	.137		
Perceived SES	367.22	4	91.81	0.84	.498		
Race	1822.73	2	911.36	8.38	<.0001		
Sex	772.51	1	772.51	7.10	.008		
Religion	1073.67	5	214.73	1.97	.082		
Motivation Entertainment	73.14	1	73.14	0.67	.413	-1.03	1.25
Motivation Information	15.22	1	15.22	0.14	.709	-0.48	1.29
Motivation Social	25.46	1	25.46	0.23	.629	0.64	1.32
Motivation Emotion	268.02	1	268.02	2.46	.118	2.47	1.57
News Following	953.93	1	953.93	8.77	.003	2.14	0.72
News Source	1.47	1	1.47	0.01	.908	0.05	0.39
Political Party	2.69	1	2.69	0.03	.875	0.12	0.78
Partisanship	1.94	1	1.94	0.02	.894	0.03	0.25
Knowledge	153.76	1	153.76	1.41	.235	-0.34	0.28
Policy Beliefs	788.10	1	788.10	7.25	.008	0.41	0.15
Error	30999.68	285	108.77				

Table 22

Summary of Demographic Factors Predicting Social Media News Reacting

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p
Corrected Model	346.41	15	23.09	1.38	.156
Intercept	2479.40	1	2479.40	147.95	<.0001
Education	8.38	3	2.79	0.17	.919
Perceived SES	101.56	4	25.39	1.52	.198
Race	37.98	2	18.99	1.13	.323
Sex	6.81	1	6.81	0.41	.524
Religion	155.69	5	31.14	1.86	.101
Error	5128.15	306	16.76		

For answering Research Question 6_{b,c,d,e,f} a regression was run to determine whether news media use (news following and news source type), political views (political party affiliation and partisanship), political entertainment motivations (entertainment-seeking, information-seeking, emotional release, and social-seeking), knowledge, and beliefs, controlling for demographics predict social media reacting (Table 23). News following was found to be a significant predictor of social media reacting, $F(1, 283) = 4.59, p = .033$, where those who followed news more also reacted to news media more. The parameter estimates (B, SE) are reported in Table 23.

Table 23

Summary of Factors Predicting Social Media News Reacting

Factor	SS	df	MS	F	p	B	SE
Corrected Model	526.47	25	21.06	1.24	.205		
Intercept	92.76	1	92.76	5.45	.020	1.69	2.06
Education	24.14	3	8.05	0.47	.701		
Perceived SES	81.76	4	20.44	1.20	.311		
Race	15.22	2	7.61	0.45	.640		
Sex	3.42	1	3.42	0.20	.654		
Religion	145.21	5	29.04	1.71	.133		
Motivation Entertainment	7.70	1	7.70	0.45	.502	-0.34	0.50
Motivation Information	0.43	1	0.43	0.03	.873	0.08	0.51
Motivation Social	28.03	1	28.03	1.65	.200	0.67	0.53
Motivation Emotion	4.88	1	4.88	0.29	.593	0.33	0.62
News Following	78.16	1	78.16	4.59	.033	0.61	0.29
News Source	7.93	1	7.93	0.47	.495	0.10	0.15
Political Party	0.12	1	0.12	0.01	.933	0.03	0.31
Partisanship	31.75	1	31.75	1.87	.173	-0.14	0.10
Knowledge	0.06	1	0.06	0.00	.953	-0.01	0.11
Policy Beliefs	5.56	1	5.56	0.33	.568	0.04	0.06
Error	4816.71	283	17.02				

RQ7: Are demographics and voting likelihood independent?

For answering Research Question 7, chi squared analyses were run to determine whether demographic variables were independent from voting likelihood (Table 24). There was a significant association between race and voting likelihood, $\chi^2 (2) = 21.12, p < .001$. There was not a significant association between education and voting likelihood, between perceived SES and voting likelihood, between sex and voting likelihood, or between religion and voting likelihood.

Table 24

Crosstabulation of Voting Likelihood and Race

Voting Likelihood	Race		
	Black	White	Other
Not Committed	45	24	18
Likely or Definitely Committed	153	92	12

In considering an overview of the predictors in testing the proposed hypotheses and answering the research questions, Table 26 below indicates significant variables in bold font.

Table 25

Summary of Significant Predictors of Hypotheses and Research Questions

Aim I Considering Variables Related to Knowledge Gaps*

H1: Demographic factors (**race**, sex, **education**, and perceived socioeconomic status) can predict knowledge.

H2: News media use (news following and **new source type**) can predict knowledge, controlling for demographic factors.

RQ1: Do political views (political party affiliation and **partisanship**) predict knowledge, controlling for demographic factors?

RQ2: Does political entertainment use (political entertainment engagement and political entertainment motivations – **entertainment-seeking**, information-seeking, emotional release, **social-seeking**) predict knowledge, controlling for demographic factors?

Aim II Considering Variables Related to Belief Gaps*

H3: Demographic factors (**race, sex, religion**, education, income, and perceived socioeconomic status) can predict beliefs.

H4: News media use (news following and **new source type**) can predict beliefs, controlling for demographic factors.

H5: Political views (political party affiliation and **partisanship**) can predict beliefs, controlling for demographic factors.

RQ3: Does political entertainment use (political entertainment engagement and political entertainment motivations) predict beliefs, controlling for demographic factors?

Aim III Considering Variables Related to Public Engagement*

RQ4: Do (a) demographics – race, sex, religion, education, perceived SES; (b) news media use – **news following**, news source type; (c) political views – political party affiliation, partisanship; (d) political entertainment motivations – entertainment-seeking, information-seeking, emotional release, social-seeking; (e) **knowledge**, and (f) **beliefs** predict social media news reading?

RQ5: Do (a) demographics – **race**, sex, religion, education, income, perceived SES; (b) news media use – **news following**, news source type; (c) political views – political party affiliation, partisanship; (d) political entertainment motivations – entertainment-seeking, information-seeking, emotional release, social-seeking; (e) knowledge, and (f) **beliefs** predict social media news sharing?

RQ6: Do (a) demographics – race, sex, religion, education, income, perceived SES; (b) news media use – **news following**, news source type; (c) political views – political party affiliation, partisanship; (d) political entertainment motivations – entertainment-seeking, information-seeking, emotional release, social-seeking; (e) knowledge, and (f) beliefs predict social media news reactions?

RQ7: Are demographics – **race**, sex, religion, education, perceived SES – and voting likelihood independent?

Note: Significant predictors are noted in bold.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

While political discussions in comedic and satirical shows are not new, the increased number of political entertainment shows with often polarizing content about public issues and political figures is an area of increased research interest and concern. As such this study aimed to both consider the prevalence among young adults often experiencing their first involvement with the political process, such as voting, and to better understand the motivations for those doing so and how these may predict knowledge, beliefs, and public engagement. Additionally, this dissertation included traditional variables often employed in analyzing knowledge and beliefs gaps to build from prior research while exploring the effects of the growing popularity of political entertainment.

Contributions

Research Aim I – Predictors of Knowledge Gaps

As this study was exploratory in nature and did not test causality, the variable knowledge was not designed to test changes in levels over time; rather, knowledge was designed using a series of 12 items to provide a range of questions to establish a knowledge level for comparison. In considering how to measure knowledge for this study in which politicized topics was a major concern, the items offered general questions in such areas as government, health, and social issues. This creation of a knowledge scale is an important contribution for allowing the consideration of multiple predictors for knowledge across a variety of topics, rather than a single

item. Additionally, the knowledge score also allowed a comparison of how knowledge may predict public engagement.

Despite a range of options for common topics, the results indicated a deficiency overall in knowledge scores with only 23% of respondents able to answer at least six or more correctly. However, for individual items, respondents fared better in detecting the correct answers for current topics, such as recognizing two of three people in the U.S. are considered overweight (62.5% answered correctly), and ocean temperatures have not decreased (71.2% answered correctly). For some politicized topics, however, respondents as a group ranked poorly, such as believing the rate of violent crimes has increased instead of decreased (only 13.4% answered correctly) and incorrectly believing that the rate of uninsured children ranks more than 10% (only 21.8% answered correctly). While not tested, perhaps the polarized nature of these topics being discussed in media leads to the topics becoming more salient and, therefore, potentially viewed as more negatively impactful than real-world indicators suggest. Even fundamental and historical items did not fare well with only 66% of respondents able to correctly answer that gun laws are established by states and a mere 36% able to correctly state the correct political party to which Ronald Reagan was elected for his presidency.

While the additive scale used to measure knowledge indicated a less than stellar knowledge base for college students, these figures do track roughly with knowledge of the general public. For example, about 60% of respondents in a national poll did not know the basics of gun laws, including how gun laws are established (Benenson & Connolly, 2013). For descriptive purposes, the knowledge items were designed to allow respondents the ability to indicate not knowing if preferred, with the resulting findings indicating a range of being unsure of basic political items from a low of 20.9% regarding minimum wage to a high of 70%

concerning how a Supreme Court justice can be removed. The inclusion of a “don’t know” option allows an assumption that those answering another option are confident in their choices; yet, incorrect responses ranged from 9.3% regarding the number of people overweight to 56.9% regarding the rate of crimes. This is particularly concerning given important issues, such as what the number one fatal disease for women is, which was incorrectly identified by 47.4% as breast cancer and another 24.1% indicating that they did not know the answer. This important insight into the potential for guessing of knowledge items if a “don’t know” option is not available allows a greater understanding of the number of people actually knowing an answer.

Not necessarily surprising given prior knowledge gap findings but an important contribution of this study was the finding that education is a significant predictor of knowledge. While education is often employed as a predictor variable in knowledge gap studies (Tichenor, et al., 1970), the variable usually reflects those having great variance in education levels, such as high school versus college. The findings from this study, however, suggest that knowledge levels about public issues do increase during time as a college student. This important insight can guide further studies in considering other ways education may need to be further defined.

Also consistent with knowledge gap studies, was the finding of news media use as a significant predictor of knowledge. Interesting, while news following was not found to be significant, customization of news was found to be significant. Knowledge gap studies have shown significant knowledge gaps among users of television, radio, and print; yet, this study indicated little engagement with traditional news sources. Descriptive analyses showed that online and social media are the primary sources of news information for college students and that customization is occurring for approximately half of college students with those customizing news more knowledgeable than those not customizing.

Partisanship as a significant predictor of knowledge is an important contribution given the variable is not typically considered within the theoretical approach. Additionally, the measure was created from two scales considering views representing both parties. The inclusion of both positive and negative views of both conservatives and liberals through semantic differential scales allows partisanship to be a composite score of both.

This dissertation was particular focused on exploring the effects of political entertainment engagement on knowledge. While 82 respondents indicated not engaging regularly in political entertainment, all but six indicated some engagement and at least one type of motivation when engaging. Of the four types of motivations of which the variable was classified (i.e., entertainment-seeking, information-seeking, emotional-release, and social-seeking), entertainment-seekers and those wishing to engage with others socially about political entertainment were found to be significant predictors; whereas, information-seeking was not.

For entertainment-education theoretical approaches in which transportation and identification with characters are important key concepts, finding that engaging with political entertainment for entertainment purposes contributes toward having higher knowledge levels is a critical finding in supporting the theoretical approach. Additionally, the finding may indicate the important role merging information within entertainment shows may have in educating viewers about public issues.

An additional consideration regarding the significant finding of social-seeking engagers as higher in knowledge than those would do not engage for those purposes should be a focus on understanding how viewers may desire to interact with others about what they are watching. How shows can incorporate information while considering those motivations may help increase knowledge. As college students may have a heightened sense of wanting to be accepted by

peers, and, thus, may seek out topics to discuss, this finding may not be unexpected. This finding is an important contribution for considering how motivations other than only information-seeking may play a key role in increasing knowledge. Indeed, information-seeking was not found to be significant, an additional contribution, albeit, puzzling.

Research Aim II – Predictors of Belief Gaps

The variable of policy beliefs was designed to classify respondents according to their viewpoints toward specific actions regarding controversial and politicized public issues. The 11-item additive scale provided a means to establish how respondents may develop their political views separate from the political party of which they indicate being aligned. College students typically are entering into political engagement for the first time, thus, they may be faced with analyzing how their views align with political parties. The composite score from the additive scale allowed respondents to be classified according to their political leanings; however, analyses of individual items also lend some insights.

Overall, college students appear to be rather neutral on many topics about public issues, reflecting that at least one in four up to a little more than half selected the category of not sure for all items. In classifying the items as conservative- or liberal-leaning, the answer sets allowed the consideration of how these compare with the overall percentages of political parties. For example, 54% of respondents expressed agreement with testing welfare recipients for drugs, despite the opposition to such being typically a Democratic talking point of which more of the respondents indicated as their chosen party. Likewise with the item regarding banning abortions, a clearly partisan topic, of which the group disagreeing ranked slightly more at 39% but, otherwise, was split approximately a third each for agreement and neutral.

An important contribution of the study was in differentiating between knowledge questions using real-world indicators and those of attitudes toward public issues. Additionally, creating scales allowed a total score across multiple topics rather than a single item for both knowledge and beliefs. As descriptive analyses of the individual knowledge and belief items showed, scores of individual items ranged greatly and would show differing results as compared to the composite scores.

Sex and race were found to significantly predict policy beliefs, which is, once again, not surprising given national trends showing men and women and those of different races differ greatly on several topics offered in the scale of this study, such as marriage equality and abortions (Pew Research Center, 2016). Yet, the finding is an important contribution when considered collectively with other predictors. Despite interactions typical on college campuses with people of differing backgrounds converging, sex and race were still found to be significant.

News following was not shown to be a predictor of policy beliefs. It is possible that college students are influenced to a greater degree from social contexts given the substantial social interactions through classes and social engagements with others. These interactions may include a greater range of viewpoints than of typical settings for other adults considering the change of classes each semester and, thus, a slate of new professors and classmates. Descriptive analyses indicated the sample customize their news feeds at a greater rate than any other form of news media. Those engaging in customizing were found to be more liberal-leaning in their beliefs as compared to those not engaging in customizing. While no measures considered why this may be the case, the finding does suggest the importance of including the measure when analyzing beliefs.

The inclusion of a partisanship scale is an important contribution for furthering understanding of political views. These scores for individual items may help to understand why political party was not indicated as a predictor but partisanship was. College students may declare a political party choice based on their family and social influences as a child. Yet, the variable partisanship was designed to consider the strength of views toward conservatives and liberals. The greater the partisanship, the more one may be aware of the political stances of parties and perhaps more firmly set in those beliefs. The findings suggest that partisanship may be an important inclusion in future studies concerning beliefs.

Research Aim III – Predictors of Public Engagement

Social media engagement. Descriptive analyses suggested that college students regularly engage with news on Facebook with only approximately 15% stating rarely to never reading news on social media. However, these numbers differ from sharing, with almost 40% ranking as they would never or rarely share the 13 news stories presented. This tracks closely with social media news reacting, with 37.5% ranking as never or rarely including a reaction to stories when shared. Because intent to read is a behavior that relies on both relevance and an implied effort of time, individual items should expect to differ for responses based on subject matter, complexity of the subject, and other such factors, such as valence. The creation of the set of stories is an important first step toward understanding what factors predict news consumed and shared through social media. Descriptive analyses indicated that college students read and share positively valence stories more often than negatively or neutral valence stories. This pattern is similar for human interest (i.e., soft news) stories, which ranked higher as compared to hard news stories.

While few factors that were analyzed predicted reading, sharing, and reacting, some important contributions should still be considered. News following was significant for all three types. While not surprising, the finding does indicate that a greater interest in news can predict engaging with others through social media platforms. Combined with the predictor of news following, is the variable of beliefs as a significant predictor for sharing and reacting, with those liberal-leaning sharing and reacting more than conservative-leaning. These findings suggest the role political views may have in public engagement.

Voting likelihood. Descriptive analyses indicated that compared to the national average of voter turnout in 2012 at 53.6% (DeSilver, 2016), college students stated intent to vote at a higher rate of 74.7%. The statistical analyses indicated race as related to voting intentions, with Blacks indicating a greater interest in voting as compared to Whites and Others.

The Knowledge, Belief, and Engagement Model

This study proposed a conceptual model (Figure 1^a) and testing model (Figure 1^b) in exploring potential predictors of knowledge, beliefs, and public engagement and the possible processes and interactions. Building from theoretical foundations of knowledge gap theory, belief gap approaches, and entertainment approaches, the model offered a basis to consider traditional predictors and other factors within four areas of interest: demographics, news media use, political views, and political entertainment. The model was designed as a step toward understanding how media and the ways in which people engage with media may be related to learning about public issues, developing attitudes about public policies, and engaging with others and politically. Several contributions are gained through the proposed model.

The model proposed engagement with others and media as a process by which cognitive and affective motivations may be related to knowledge acquisition and belief formation, which,

in turn, may be related to public engagement in the form of social media and voting. Based on entertainment approaches, entertainment is proposed as a bridge between cognition and affect with political entertainment as the particular type of entertainment analyzed. Additionally, care was taken to develop measures of knowledge based on real-world indicators and policy beliefs based on attitudes toward specific actions regarding public issues as opposed to general beliefs. Public engagement was designed to consider how people engage with others about public issues using realistic methods of news stories presented on social media. Using a variety of topics of positively, negatively, and neutrally valence allowed for both hard and soft news types, thus, representing a more balanced scale for overall social media reading, sharing, and reacting. As the study collected data during a presidential primary cycle, voting behavior intent was included as an important factor in considering how the four areas of interest may predict knowledge and beliefs and may all then, in turn, be related to publicly engaging in the political process. Both the proposed conceptual model (Figure 1^a) and testing model (Figure 1^b) offer a template for further testing the relationships analyzed in the study and others discussed but not yet tested.

Implications

Overall, this study advances understanding of how a fairly diverse sample of college students ranks in their knowledge and beliefs about public issues and their involvement with political entertainment and within social media contexts. While the sample was slightly more female respondents at 59.3%, the figures are close to that of the national average of 56.4% to 43.6% for public universities (“College Enrollment,” 2016). By recruiting through a range of courses, the sample represented diverse racial makeup and all four undergraduate classifications.

For this study of college students, income was not used as a predictor variable although a query asking about income levels was asked. An option of not knowing their income level was

included in an effort to assess the reliability of using income as a predictor as compared to perceived socioeconomic status. A substantial portion of students indicated not knowing their income, indicating that future studies using income as a variable should also consider additional measures. This inability to know income for some may not be surprising given that college students by the fact of being in college typically may have access to some funds, although perhaps limited, either through family support or financial aid. Additionally, asking about household income can be confusing considering college students may leave home but rely on family support or have roommates who help with shared expenses but not necessarily support the respondent. Additionally, college students may simply not accurately gauge their household income because they have limited life experience with knowing their own income and their family's income.

The inclusion of perceived social economic status has provided an important implication for knowledge and belief gap studies. While college students may have problems reporting household income and are often in situations in which income changes may occur more frequently than that of typical populations, a perception of one's standing compared to others' situations may be more tangible and beneficial in understanding why one political party or figure may appeal more than another.

Deutsch and Gerard (1955) relayed two important functions that reference groups serve: one, they provide a knowledge base and framework for people to incorporate, and, two, they relay knowledge about expected outcomes if people utilize this framework (see also, Dambrun & Taylor, 2013; Lindemann, 2007; Merton, 1938; Walker & Smith, 2001). For example, if a person is situated into low-SES by traditional means of measuring SES but perceives himself or herself to be relatively gratified then that person may not perceive boundaries for acquiring

knowledge and may consider acquiring knowledge and forming beliefs as an important component of enacting social change. In comparison, those of higher SES may perceive themselves as relatively deprived compared to their personal circumstances, resulting in a lack of belief in possessing power for acquiring and enacting upon knowledge.

Variables analyzing news following and what types of news sources are used indicated that the sample of college students are divided fairly equally between those who pay little attention to the news with those following news sometimes and those following the news often. When compared with engagement with political entertainment, however, the number of students exposed to news content increases substantially to all but six indicating some engagement and little more than three-fourths engaging regularly. The effects of social and online news following on how college students are obtaining information about public issues is equally substantial with more than 44% customizing news feeds and fewer than 20% indicating no news sources or traditional forms. These findings have important implications for considering how college students obtain news and, just as importantly, filter out news.

In considering the political knowledge and beliefs the sample of college students brought to their engagement with media and political entertainment, the measure of their political party indicated a little more than half identify with the Democratic Party, a little more than 20% with the Republican Party, and the remainder as another party or undecided. The 51.7% of the sample identifying with the Democratic Party tracks closely with the national average of college graduates identifying or leaning Democrat at 53%; however, the sample indicated far fewer who identify or lean Republican than the national average of 41% for college graduates (“Party Affiliation,” 2016). The survey collected data during the primary, which for the Republican Party, had many candidates vying for the position; thus, potentially affecting Republican-

identifying numbers. Nonetheless, the additional inclusion of partisanship as a measure of political views has important implications for understanding the role of political party choice and beliefs toward public issues.

The use of multiple items for two scales measuring conservatism and liberalism to create a composite score allowed a ranking of partisanship with political party choice. Yet, the measure potentially has value in measuring disposition toward both parties if each scale is considered individually. Interestingly, the measure indicated a higher percentage of respondents viewed conservatives more positively than liberals, which contradicts the higher number of respondents reporting being more strongly affiliated with the Democrat Party.

The development of a knowledge scale with the inclusion of a “don’t know” option and its prevalence as a choice has important implications for how knowledge is measured. The high percentage of respondents indicating not knowing an answer suggests queries limiting choices to only those measuring likelihood of accuracy may not reflect an accurate picture of knowledge. Rather, respondents may be engaging in guesswork. Additionally, a “don’t know” option provides an important insight into the extent an individual believes in the correctness of an answer. An important implication of considering college classification for the variable education is the significant finding that knowledge gains occur over time through college.

While traditional measures of news use indicated few college students follow traditional news, an important inclusion was the consideration of whether or not students are engaging in customizing their news sources, which was shown to be a significant predictor for knowledge but not beliefs. It could be that college students may have greater interactions with others in person, and, thus, may be exposed to a greater range of viewpoints than of typical settings for other adults considering the change of classes each semester and new professors and classmates.

Additionally, customizing news implies an engagement with news at a minimal level at least in order to tailor news feeds. Thus, it is not surprising that knowledge was greater for those customizing.

As college students may have a heightened sense of wanting to be accepted by peers, and, thus, may seek out topics to discuss, finding that those engaging with political entertainment for social-seeking reasons significantly predict greater knowledge compared to those who do not may not be unexpected. Additionally, as the question did not specify what type of social interactions, respondents may interpret the item to include interactions in the classroom, for which being able to discuss current events may be particularly salient and perceived as important. Of interest, however, is the lack of information-seeking motivations being significant for knowledge. Perhaps, however, those with information-seeking motivations are initially less informed and recognize this deficiency and, thus, seek to become more knowledgeable. Likewise, it is possible that those seeking information may be engaging in selective exposure and only retaining confirming information and discarding disconfirming.

The consideration of predictors for public engagement has important implications for understanding the role of social news media and the role of interaction with others. While not significant, those ranking less knowledgeable number greater for being likely to share news articles than those of greater knowledge. This has important implications for considering the importance of social media news for what is being shared and by whom.

Given the intense news coverage of the media, the polarizing rhetoric of the 2016 presidential campaign, and the overlap in news and entertainment, such as one candidate being on reality television shows, it seems logical that an active interest in following news amidst the coverage would indicate greater intent to vote. This seems to also support the finding of a

political entertainment emotional-release motivation for engagement as significant while other motivations were not. Given the negative tone of the election, seeking a means to immerse into media content that encourages, even expects, ridicule of the situation may allow a type of coping mechanism or possibly a reinforcing of disposition desires, such as seeing the “other” side being ridiculed for the actions and stances. Indeed, 41.9% of respondents indicated a motivation to engage because political entertainment is humorous and 25% stated specifically a motivation to see politicians be the subject of jokes.

The conceptual model (Figure 1^a) and testing model (Figure 1^b) proposed in this study offered a visual representation of the potential predictors of knowledge, beliefs, and public engagement and suggested processes and interactions of those relationships. Through analyzing the results of the study, several implications relating to the theoretical foundations of knowledge gap theory, belief gap approaches, and entertainment approaches are gained for the four areas of interest: demographics, news media use, political views, and political entertainment, and most particularly for the latter.

College students were found to be regular engagers of political entertainment in great numbers and to have varying motivation types when engaging. Yet, information-seeking was not found to be a significant predictor of any of the outcome variables while entertainment-seeking and social-seeking was for knowledge and emotional-release for voting. Given that the format of political entertainment shows are rooted in discussing public issues using entertaining cues, a lack of significant differences in those seeking the venues for cognitive motivations while increasing knowledge may have implications of its own. It may be that people expect to be entertained and informed, thus, may engage in less processing and, thus, have less recall than when motivated by a desire to engage for greater interacting with others. The latter suggests

perhaps greater attention may be given to the information based on increased relevance; similarly, with political entertainment emotional-release motivations and intentions to vote. Those engaging with high levels of affect may be demonstrating increased levels of relevance and, thus, engage with shows that then led to greater intentions to vote. Entertainment education premises suggest that affective responses may contribute to learning and to be drivers of action.

Limitations and Directions for Future Studies

This dissertation had the main goal of exploring the potential role of entertainment in knowledge, beliefs, and public engagement. The findings do provide valuable contributions toward supporting prior findings for knowledge and belief gap research while also expanding potential variables in considering new forms of media content, namely, political entertainment shows. However, this dissertation is but a start along with other recent findings considering the role of political entertainment for educating and persuading regarding public issues and promoting greater public involvement in the political process and public policies. In considering the proposed relationships represented in the proposed conceptual and testing model (Figures 1^a and 1^b), several limitations of this study must be recognized and guidelines for additional research proposed.

The development of a knowledge scale as opposed to a single item offered a way for considering knowledge at one point in time and shows promise for use in other studies in which a more comprehensive summing of knowledge is beneficial while perhaps also considering individual topics. While the basic template could be used, the scale can be adjusted for current news stories and tailored for types of coverage, such as top stories, local coverage, or by subject matter. Additionally, the basic template can be customized for considering news formats, such as stories trending online, in newspapers, national stories, local stories, and others. However, as

this study was neither experimental nor longitudinal, the findings do not allow analyses of knowledge and changes over time. Future studies should consider media engagement and other predictors with news coverage for greater understanding of the relationships and the effects on knowledge gaps.

Education and news source type were found to be significant predictors of knowledge; however, for this study, the variable education was limited to the classification of college students. While this rarely used form of operationalizing education lends an important contribution toward understanding the process of knowledge gains for college students, further research should include additional groups, such as those with no college and those who are post-college. News following was not found to be significant; however, news following was operationalized by asking respondents of the news engagement behaviors, not actually analyzing behavior. Because of the various ways in which people can consume news and even may differ in how they define news and news sources, designing a study in which behaviors are tracked rather than relying on self-report may lend greater understanding of the role of news following. Descriptive analyses indicated the sample customize their news feeds at a greater rate than any other form of news media; yet, the measure did not query respondents about how they customize news feeds or their preferred news sources. Additionally, the term news was not defined in the questionnaire item. It could be that students do not necessarily follow news about politics and public issues as much as other types of news, such as sports or entertainment.

Of value toward furthering research regarding beliefs was the inclusion of perceived SES as an additional income consideration. The measure of SES was not found as significant; yet, descriptive analyses suggest students may not view their income status the same as their actual income. This suggests the typical measure of income may not adequately reflect the income

situation in which students were raised and their changing situations. However, perceived SES may actually be misleading. Although the question queried respondents about how they perceived their financial status as compared to others, no measure actually considered what respondents considered others to be. For example, some respondents could have interpreted the idea of the visual representation of rungs of a ladder to mean their situation as compared to others with whom they interact in their personal lives, while others may have interpreted the query to that of general others. For future studies, the query should clarify the comparison and perhaps test for both types of others, both general others and peers.

The inclusion of a measure specifically considering partisanship as compared to only political party may be a more fruitful way to consider how people view their own parties and other parties. However, the use of a composite score computed from the two scales may not necessarily accurately reflect partisanship. Measures comparing individually perceptions of political parties may be more reflective of partisanship. Additionally, it is possible that the use of liberal and conservative instead of political party names may be confusing to respondents. A study of visual literacy in which respondents were asked to identify common U.S. images indicated that almost 40% of respondents not only did not know the symbol of Republican and Democratic parties but actually reversed naming them (Emanuel, Challons-Lipton, & Baker, 2014). Thus, perhaps it is possible that respondents may know political party names but not necessarily the terms conservative or liberal as in how these are associated with political parties.

The proposed testing model (Figure 1^b) offered a relationship between beliefs and knowledge, such that knowledge is filtered through the prism of beliefs, and, as such, multiple factors, such as individual abilities, desires, and needs, are situated within social contexts of peer influences, media involvement, and information formats to then predict responses toward

incoming input based on individual motivations. The role of entertainment was proposed as a bridge between affective and cognitive reactions, such that entertainment formats may allow information to bypass preconceived assumptions (i.e., general beliefs) and motivation types aiming to reinforce current beliefs (i.e., directional motivations) to then allow one to analyze the validity of the content more objectively through affective responses reducing cognitive barriers. While the findings of this dissertation lend insight to the role of entertainment, many more questions arise regarding why people are motivated to engage in political entertainment and how engagement and these motivations predict knowledge, beliefs, and public engagement.

The measuring of political entertainment engagement has a similar concern as that of news following. While the study used a fairly extensive list of political entertainment shows, the consistent and continual use of such for future studies is difficult across multiple studies given the frequent changes in the shows offered and hosts. Also, determining the amount of time people engage and how are problematic. Clips from political entertainment shows are often used on other news shows when discussing politics and are shared frequently on social media and through online clips on sites such as YouTube. It is possible that people rarely watch an entire show, therefore, may not consider themselves as engagers but actually do watch clips often. Differentiating between these may be necessary. This study found that almost all ($n = 338$) respondents engage with political entertainment; yet, 86 respondents indicated not regularly. Developing measures for time of engagement is an important consideration for future studies.

Regarding motivations for engaging with political entertainment, this study measured the types of motivations by asking people to self-report reasons for engaging in watching the shows; however, this measure could be problematic. People may not necessarily know the reasons for engaging. Additionally, the measure does not differentiate motivations for different shows. For

example, a person may watch one show for entertainment reasons and another show or host because peers do, and, in doing so, is attempting to fulfill a social-seeking motivation.

A social-seeking motivation to engage with political entertainment was found significant for knowledge. This suggests further research to verify and then determine the ways to use these findings may potentially reduce gaps. For example, using satire and comedic angles to present information about public issues while stressing the benefits of social connections may enhance learning and open-mindedness, or at least more developed reasoning skills. Likewise, studies to further explore the potential of using research to encourage greater public involvement in the political process are needed. For example, political entertainment shows and public campaigns aiming to get people to vote could emphasize affective qualities of topics.

Interestingly, an information-seeking motivation was not found as significant for any outcome variables. This is perplexing and needs further investigation. Additionally, as this study indicated political entertainment engagement and motivations may be factors in how people learn about public issues and engage in the political process, additional studies need to establish designs to test causality. For example, it could be that people who are already high in knowledge levels may be highly motivated to engage for information needs in seeking out political entertainment or the opposite, that those low in knowledge engage because of an awareness of needing information, or possibly both.

An additional contribution of this study was the consideration of variables potentially predicting social media reading, sharing, and reacting. While a first step in determining how people differ in their interactions with news through social media, the study raises more questions that need further analyses. For example, one finding not significant but interesting was noting that those with greater SES numbered higher in sharing than those of lower SES.

However, it is not clear as to why this would be the case. Facebook is one of the most popular social media platforms and should be fairly easy to use for any college students; thus, the potential for engaging with news through the site should be a level playing field. It is possible the findings support traditional knowledge gap theory premises suggesting higher SES groups have more abilities to interact with others of higher knowledge and, therefore, have more potential people of which to share stories with and receive stories (Tichenor et al., 1970). Further studies should explore if these numbers reflect significant differences when varying news story types and other considerations.

Beliefs were found as significant for social media news sharing and reacting. Further studies should seek to affirm and further explore why the differences. Additionally, experimental studies have the potential to understand if any intervening factors may affect sharing and reacting. It is possible that social media news reading, sharing, and reacting may depend on other factors related to entertainment theory, such as mood management; in that, when in a positive mood, negative stories are less likely to be read or a similar effect. Yet, these affective motivations were not analyzed.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations as described above, this dissertation contributes to the collection of knowledge and belief gap studies and explores emerging areas of media interests while providing new directions for future studies. First, the proposed conceptual model (Figure 1^a) allowed a theoretical basis from which to consider how multiple factors may contribute toward cognitive and affective processes in the relationships among knowledge, beliefs, and engagement with media and others concerning public issues. By considering the various and extensive variables the model offers when developing future studies, a syntheses of prior media effects

findings within a changing media landscape is beneficial. Second, the study explored the potential for entertainment to be considered in additional realms of media studies by merging the contributions of prior entertainment findings within the backdrop of a contentious election year for a sample of young adults entering the political process. Last, it is hoped the study sparks interest in considering ways future studies can contribute toward practical application of findings indicating how people may become better informed and, thus, make more sound decisions as a member of society.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Survey Instrument

You have signed up for a research study called *Knowledge and Belief Gaps: Assessing Effects of Media Use and Social Contexts on Political Perspectives*. The online survey will ask demographic questions, your media use habits, your political preferences, and your knowledge and beliefs about public issues. This study is being conducted to obtain information about how people differ in their knowledge and beliefs about public issues. The results of the study may help us uncover the similarities and differences in how people form opinions about public issues that affect public policies. More specifically, the information may help further understanding of knowledge and belief gap theories, which propose that people differ in knowledge and beliefs based on economic factors and social influences. The estimated time to complete the survey is 20 minutes.

We will protect your confidentiality by using Qualtrics, a survey creation software company, and the UA computer system. No personal identifying information is accessible to the researcher. Participation in the study for course credit is noted through the use of the number provided by your professor. The results of the study will not be published with any identifying information. All data collected will be referenced by participant numbers that are not referenced within the surveys. After the study, all data will remain in a locked office until no longer needed. When data are no longer needed, they will be destroyed. Only summarized data will be presented at meetings or in publications.

You will receive course credit for your participation as described by your professor. Additionally, through participating in the survey, you have the opportunity to learn about how research is conducted.

The chief risk is that some of the questions may make you uncomfortable. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer or quit at any time.

If you have questions or concerns or complaints about the study, please call the researcher Kim Baker, a doctoral student in the College of Communication and Information Sciences, at (334) 799-2137 or by email at krbaker1@crimson.ua.edu. You may also contact the supervising faculty member Dr. Kimberly Bissell, Professor and Associate Dean and Director for the Institute for Communication and Information Research in the College of Communication and Information Sciences, at kbissell@ua.edu or (205) 348-8247.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant, contact Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer, at (205) 348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

If you have complaints or concerns about this study, file them through the UA IRB outreach website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html. Also, if you participate, you are encouraged to complete the short Survey for Research Participants online at this website. This helps UA improve its protection of human research participants.

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY. You are free not to participate or to stop participating any time.

If you understand the statements above, are at least 18 years old, and freely consent to be in this study, click on the CONTINUE button to begin.

YES/CONTINUE

NO

If NO: You do not qualify to take the survey based on your selection. If you have any questions about the study or the procedures, you can contact Kim Baker by mail at the College of Communication and Information Sciences, Doctoral Program, Reese Phifer Hall, Tuscaloosa, AL 36487, or by email at krbaker1@crimson.ua.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html or email at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

1. What is your gender?
Male (1)
Female (2)
2. What university do you or did you attend?

3. What is your classification?
 - Freshman (1)
 - Sophomore (2)
 - Junior (3)
 - Senior (4)
 - Graduated (5)
 - Don't attend college (6)

4. What race do you feel identifies you?
 - African Descent (2)
 - Asian (3)
 - Black/African-American (1)
 - Hispanic (4)
 - Native American (5)
 - Pacific Islander (6)
 - White/Caucasian (7)
 - Other (8)
 - Rather not indicate (9)

5. Please indicate your religious beliefs
 - I am agnostic or an atheist. (1)
 - I am spiritual but not religious. (2)
 - I attend church sporadically. (3)
 - I attend church fairly regularly. (4)
 - I am highly involved in church activities. (5)
 - None of these adequately reflects my beliefs or I prefer not to indicate. (6)

6. Please estimate what your household income is currently, including income from any others whom you may rely on for financial support.
- less than \$20,000 (1)
 - 20,000-29,999 (2)
 - 30,000-39,999 (3)
 - 40,000-49,999 (4)
 - 50,000-59,999 (5)
 - 60,000-69,999 (6)
 - 70,000-79,999 (7)
 - 80,000-89,999 (8)
 - 90,000-99,999 (9)
 - 100,000-109,999 (10)
 - 110,000-119,999 (11)
 - 120,000-129,999 (12)
 - 130,000-139,999 (13)
 - 140,000-149,999 (14)
 - 150,000+ (15)
 - Don't Know (16)

7. If you imagine wealth to be distributed similar to a ladder with the wealthiest at the top having the most money and the nicest things and those at the bottom having little money and very few nice things, how do you feel your family compared to others when you were growing up?
- Bottom rung: My family definitely struggled more.
 - My family struggled more at times.
 - My family was about the same as other families.
 - My family was better off than most.
 - Top rung: My family was definitely better off than most.



8. With which party do you identify? {Randomized options}
- Democrat (1)
 - Independent (2)
 - Libertarian (3)
 - Republican (4)
 - Other/None/Not Sure (5)



Note: Questions 9 and 10 are displayed according to randomization.

9. Please think about how you feel about people you know who are conservatives - friends, family, celebrities, politicians, people you see online - and then indicate for each item below which best describes your views of conservatives. {Randomized Options}

10. Please think about how you feel about people you know who are liberals - friends, family, celebrities, politicians, people you see online - and then indicate for each item below which best describes your views of liberals. {Randomized Options}

	Definitely	Somewhat	Neither	Somewhat	Definitely	
Generous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Stingy
Open-minded	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Narrow-minded
Unbiased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Biased
Well-informed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Uninformed
Hard-working	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Lazy
Patriotic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unpatriotic
Respectful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Disrespectful
Moral	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Immoral
Accepting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Racist
Calm	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Violent
Instigators	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Problem-solvers
Virtuous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Evil
Unpredictable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Stable
Unreliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Dependable
Reasonable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Emotional
Accepting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Judgmental
Genuine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Fake

11. Will you vote in the upcoming presidential election?

- Definitely
- Likely
- Not sure
- Not likely
- Definitely Not

12. How would you classify your interest in news about current world events and/or politics?

- I never follow news. (1)
- I follow news a little. (2)
- I sometimes follow news. (3)
- I follow news regularly. (4)
- I'm obsessed with following news. (5)

13. Please select a response for each of the items below regarding how you obtain news:
 {Randomized Questions}

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Very Often (5)
I watch news on TV.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I read print newspapers for news.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I get news from websites of traditional news websites, such as CNN, Fox, New York Times, local news, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I get news from websites of "new" news media, such as BuzzFeed, Quartz, Vox, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I listen to talk radio for news.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I listen to news on satellite radio.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I get news through social media feeds, such as FaceBook, Twitter, Snapchat, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I customize my news feeds for my own tastes, such as through phone apps and social media.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I get news from posts and shares from friends and family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. Please check any of the following talk shows and satirical sites you visit online, watch on TV, or read REGULARLY, not just ones that seem familiar:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> @midnight | <input type="checkbox"/> Late Night with Seth Meyers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Borowitz Report | <input type="checkbox"/> The Late Show with Stephen Colbert |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Daily Show with Trevor Noah | <input type="checkbox"/> The Onion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Full Frontal with Samantha Bee | <input type="checkbox"/> The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jimmy Kimmel Live! | <input type="checkbox"/> Real Time with Bill Maher |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Join or Die with Craig Ferguson | <input type="checkbox"/> Saturday Night Live |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Last Call with Carson Daley | <input type="checkbox"/> Snopes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Last Week Tonight with John Oliver | <input type="checkbox"/> The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Late Late Show with James Corden | <input type="checkbox"/> Enter others not mentioned |
| | <input type="text"/> |

15. When you think about the political commentary options, what are the reasons you like these? Check any that may explain why you read, listen or watch:

- It's humorous. (1)
- I learn about what's going on in the world. (2)
- It's entertaining to see people in the news being the subject of the jokes. (3)
- It allows me to have an outlet for my emotions toward politics and public issues (laugh, get angry, etc.). (5)
- It helps me form opinions about what's going on. (6)
- I can be a part of what people are discussing online/social media. (7)
- I can engage with people in person about what was discussed. (8)

16. Please select a response for each of the items below: {Randomized Questions}

	Definitely accurate (1)	Probably accurate (2)	Not Sure (3)	Probably not accurate (4)	Definitely not accurate (5)
Ronald Reagan was a Democrat when elected to be president.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Only a president can remove a Supreme Court justice from the court.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gun laws are established federally, not by individual states.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Independence Day was established to recognize the end of the Civil War between the North and the South.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Definitely accurate (1)	Probably accurate (2)	Not Sure (3)	Probably not accurate (4)	Definitely not accurate (5)
More than 90 percent of children in the U.S. receive vaccinations to prevent diseases, such as polio and measles.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
More than 90 percent of children in the U.S. have health insurance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Approximately two-thirds of U.S. adults are considered overweight.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Breast cancer is the number one killer disease of women.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Definitely accurate (1)	Probably accurate (2)	Not Sure (3)	Probably not accurate (4)	Definitely not accurate (5)
The rate of violent crimes in the U.S. has increased since the 1980s.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Of the almost 1,000 fatal shootings by officers in 2015, more than half involved unarmed citizens.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The minimum wage is set by the federal government and is required to be at least \$7.25.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, ocean surface temperature readings have decreased since the 1970s.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. Indicate your stance about the following: {Randomized Questions}

	Strongly Agree (1)	Somewhat Agree (2)	Not Sure (3)	Somewhat Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
People should be required to provide an ID to vote.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Marijuana should be legal.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Marriage licenses should be issued to adults regardless of sexual preference.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Churches and religious leaders should have the right to refuse conducting same-sex marriages.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The death penalty should be banned.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Welfare recipients should be tested for drugs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Government should use religion to guide policies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Abortions should be banned in most cases.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The gun show loophole should be closed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Doctors should be allowed to refuse services to people who choose not to get vaccinated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Airlines and insurance companies should be allowed to charge obese people more.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
English should be the national language, eliminating requirements to provide government forms, such as a driver's test, in other languages.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. For the following 13 items, you will see news stories from Facebook postings. Please indicate those you would read, those you would share on social media, and your reactions. {Instructions Only}

Would you read the story?

Definitely not

Probably not

Might or might not

Probably yes

Definitely yes

Would you share the story?

Definitely not

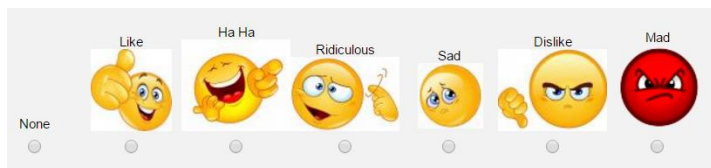
Probably not

Might or might not

Probably yes

Definitely yes

Even if you would not typically share on social media, what type of emoji would you add to the story?





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NYTIMES.COM | BY ELIZA GRISWOLD



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TODAY.COM

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In Norway, where universities don't charge tuition, the children of parents who lack college degrees typically don't pursue a higher education, either.

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^



Court divided over University of Texas race-conscious admissions

Conservative justices seem to think the program should lapse, while liberals say it has benefits.

WASHINGTONPOST.COM | BY ROBERT BARNES

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Model Cheryl Tiegs said that she doesn't like the use of full-figure models in Sports Illustrated's swimsuit issue because they are "unhealthy."

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Sylvania teens to be charged after bullying, assault of student with disabilities

SYLVANIA, Ohio -- Two Sylvania teenagers are facing charges after the assault of a student with mental disabilities. The two 14-year-old boys are being charged with a safe schools...

NBC24.COM | BY SINCLAIR BROADCAST GROUP

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Suspect in San Francisco woman's death deported 5 times

The man accused of shooting and killing a San Francisco woman had previously been deported five times, ICE says.

CNN.COM | BY STEVE ALMASY, PAMELA BROWN AND AUGCIE MARTIN, CNN

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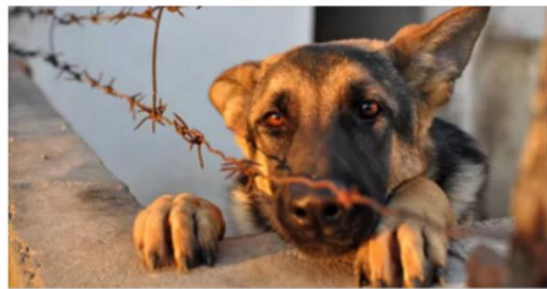


Anti-vaccine movement is giving diseases a 2nd life

Medical experts are worried that an increasing number of children may become susceptible to diseases such as measles and whooping cough

USATODAY.COM

7)



FBI Now Tracks Animal Abuse Just Like Homicides, Arson and Assault

Because if you abuse animals, there's a chance you abuse people, too.

HUFFINGTONPOST.COM



A Way to Start Paying College Athletes

A salary cap for college football and men's basketball players would not break the bank or completely abandon free-market principles. Here's how it might work.

NYTIMES.COM | BY JOE NOCERA

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You have finished answering questions.

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE SURVEY!!

If you have any questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you can contact Kim Baker by mail at the College of Communication and Information Sciences, Doctoral Program, Reese Phifer Hall, Tuscaloosa, AL 36487, or by email at krbaker1@crimson.ua.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html or email at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

Appendix B – Internal Review Board Approval



Office of the Vice President for
Research & Economic Development
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

April 20, 2016

Kim Baker
Department of Journalism
College of Communication & Information Sciences
Box 870172

Re: IRB # 16-OR-169, "Knowledge and Belief Gaps: Assessing Effects of Media Use and Social Contexts on Political Perspectives"

Dear Ms. Baker:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of written documentation of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

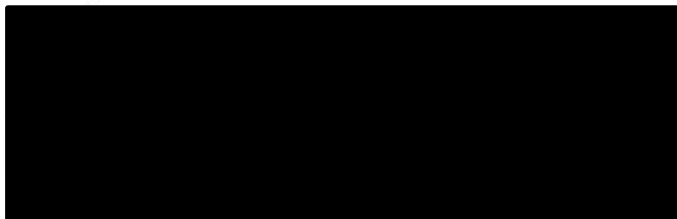
(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on April 19, 2017. If your research will continue beyond this date, please complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure Form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



1000 University Blvd., Suite 300 | Tuscaloosa, AL 35689-0300
205-588-8000 | Fax: 205-348-5100 | www.ua.edu/irb

Appendix C – Certificate of Training

