THE POWER OF POLITICS: SELECTIVE EXPOSURE AND SOCIAL IDENTITY CUES

by

NOEL T. RIZZUTI

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Dr. Curtis Matthews

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to shed light on the interaction between the theory of selective exposure and social identity theory. Both of these theories describe aspects regarding how individuals expose themselves to information. However, the driving question of the study was to investigate the behavior of individuals whom experience cognitive dissonance from an inconsistent political message, but are receiving that message from a member of their perceived in-group. The expectation was that moderating variables, such as strength of identification with an ideology as well as the level of knowledge would impact who would engage in selective exposure and choose to disregard in-group cues, or choose inconsistent messages to stay true to in-group pressures. In a Qualtrics experiment, participants (*n*=189) were divided into different groups, attitude consistent and attitude inconsistent and were exposed to a series of tweets. Each tweet was politically charged, with the attitude-consistent group presenting consistent messages paired with in-group cues, and in the attitude-inconsistent group presenting a dissonant message was paired with the in-group cue, and visa versa. Two factors revealed themselves to impact results and message choice — knowledge and strength of identification. Results revealed that individuals who had a high level of knowledge chose the consistent message more often than those with low knowledge. The strength of ideology variable influenced differences in both the speed in which they made decisions on which tweet to select, as well as how quickly they identified with an ideology level. This result revealed that those who are strongly identified with an ideology make decisions regarding political messages and ideology faster than those who are weakly identified.

The current study contributes to the plethora of literature regarding these two theories and the political science area of study by supporting knowledge as a moderating variable between cognitive dissonance and social identity pressures. It also provides insight into the trends and

patterns that can arise when time/speed are utilized as a variable to shed light on group

identification differences. The insights with the variables of time, strength of ideology, level of

knowledge, could lead to numerous future studies.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1 - Justification/Rationale

As the number of media outlets and the amount of available information and messages grow, questions about how individuals respond to and search out political messages is becoming more relevant. Every year, elections increase in length and campaigns rise in the amount of money spent (Bowie & Lioz, 2012), causing the amount of information directed at the electorate to increase. This phenomena indicates a need to continue to study the way voters process this influx of information. Research in sociology and social psychology reveal a pattern that individuals often favor messages parallel with their own views and avoid exposing themselves to opinion-challenging content (Donsbach, 1989; Donsbach, 1991). The broad idea explaining this process is called the theory of selective exposure. As the electorate grows in polarization so does the need to identify oneself with a specific political affiliation. The result of these growths could lead to a trend of a continuously decreasing informed constituency that lacks developed and balanced opinions. This would lead to a more polarized and fragmented electorate, and potentially reduce political tolerance as well as decrease the effectiveness of politicians in office (Mutz, 2002; Prior, 2007).

This research study tests assumptions of the theories of cognitive dissonance through selective exposure and its' interaction with social identity theory. These theories have a plethora of research surrounding their hypotheses, however, rarely have the two theories been studied together. The following review of background on these theories reveal similarities between them and the opportunity for the two to be combined into one study. Both of these theories discuss ways in which individuals are influenced in their thinking. Social identity theory seeks to rationalize why and how people categorize themselves into groups and in turn alter or develop

their thoughts and ideas based on the group opinion (Noel, Wann, & Branscombe, 1995). Through social identity theory there is a recognized internal need for positive distinctiveness and the presence of social competition, which motivates the lines drawn between conflicting thought processes and opinions.

However, the interactions individuals have with groups are the balancing act that serves as the basis for attitude formation and development. This is where the theory of cognitive dissonance comes into play. Cognitive dissonance occurs when an individual is presented with information that conflicts with their preconceived beliefs and opinions. This theory states that when dissonance occurs internally, individuals are motivated to reduce experiencing this feeling. One of the major ways dissonance reduction occurs is by engaging in selective exposure.

Statement of Research Question

The question that arose when conceptualizing this research study and throughout reading the theoretical and conceptual research is: What happens when individuals experience cognitive dissonance but are receiving that dissonant information from a member of their perceived in-group? Will they engage in selective exposure and choose to disregard in-group cues, or will the pressure of in-group acceptance and positive distinctiveness override personal internal conflict?

These are the questions this study attempts to shed light upon, and where there is a gap in previous research. Throughout this research study, origins of the theory of selective exposure, which stemmed from the theory of cognitive dissonance, will be discussed in more detail, followed by the theory of social identity theory. Lastly, the development of the current research design and hypotheses are outlined.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review/Theoretical Framework

Theories of Selective Exposure & Cognitive Dissonance

One of the most widely accepted principles in sociology and social psychology is the principle of selective exposure. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944) called selective exposure an indispensable link in their explanation of why political campaigns mainly activate and reinforce preexisting preferences or predispositions (Sears & Freedman, 1967; Stroud, 2008). Selective exposure is defined as "any systematic bias in audience composition," (Stroud, 2008). Perhaps the most general statement was by Berelson and Steiner regarding their propositions about human behavior: "People tend to see and hear communications that are favorable or congenial to their predispositions; they are more likely to see and hear congenial communications than neutral or hostile ones," (Sears & Freedman, 1967; Stroud, 2008). Klapper made a more general point that information campaigns, and mass communication of any kind, rarely have important persuasive impact because of selective exposure (1960).

Festinger's justification for a reason why selective exposure occurs is because of an activity called dissonance reduction. Dissonance reduction is a process individuals undergo in order to eradicate a "feeling of discomfort caused by holding conflicting cognitions such as ideas, beliefs, values, emotional reactions simultaneously," also known as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). This state of discomfort is described as producing a feeling of unease resulting from holding two conflicting beliefs, which produce a plethora of conflicting emotions. According to Festinger, people have a motivational drive to avoid dissonance by engaging in a process he termed "dissonance reduction," (1957). In the book "When Prophecy Fails," Festinger (1957) describes the most famous case in the early study of cognitive dissonance. The authors infiltrated a religious group that was expecting the imminent end of the world on a certain date.

When that date passed without the world ending, the movement did not disband. Instead, the group came to believe they were spared in order to spread their teachings to others, a justification that resolved the conflict between their previous expectations and reality (McLeod, 2008).

Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance dominated beginnings of selective exposure research and basically defined the term of selective exposure in the 1980s (Zillmann & Bryant, 1985). One way individuals participate in dissonance reduction is through "reinterpreting the information" or through selective exposure to information that helps to resolve the cognitive conflict (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). According to selective exposure, individuals prefer attitude-consistent messages and evade counter-attitudinal content. This pattern avoids dissonances but also prevents encountering alternative views that might inspire one's opinion formation. Such selective behavior poses problems for a democratic system in that the avoidance of counter-attitudinal messages inhibits a diverse opinion. People participating in selective exposure would be in danger of persisting in preexisting viewpoints even if an opinion change would be more rational after reading or hearing additional information (Mutz, 2002).

Selective exposure to political messages has long been of interest to communication research and goes back to Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet's Erie County study (1944) in which through one-on-one interviews, 2,400 citizens were reviewed over time on their decision-making during the campaign, and factors that influenced it. Although studying selective exposure is not a new concept, there is only a small set of studies in on which campaign messages are focused (Barlett, Drew, & Fahle, 1974; Freedman & Sears, 1965; Lazarsfeld & Berelson, 1944). A few studies investigated preferences for information in-line with one's party preference by using media use contexts instead of campaign messages. For example, Atkin (1965) designed a study that employed eight versions of a campus newspaper, which differed by political leaning and

headline formatting. The researchers found of both Democrats and Republicans were more likely to read the article if the headline featured the position of their preferred party (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). In an international study performed by Jonas, Graupmann, Fischer, Greitemeyer, and Frey (2005a), news synopses were presented that shed either positive or negative light on the two dominant political parties in Germany. The results showed that partisans of the conservative party exhibited a stronger tendency to prefer attitude-consistent information compared to partisans of the socialist party. There were limitations to these studies however. In both the Atkin study, and the international study, party affiliation was the main variable of differentiation. Participants in both experiments were categorized solely on their partisanship. In those studies there was also only one manipulated headline or "exposure" element.

Not every study, however, has supported the theory of selective exposure. A few years after Festinger's study was widely circulated, an influential study presented by Sears and Freedman(1965) argued that the evidence surrounding avoidance of counter-attitudinal information was inconsistent and contradictory. Klapper (1960) stated "the tendency of people to expose themselves to mass communications in accord with their existing opinions and interests and to avoid unsympathetic material, has been widely demonstrated." Yet McGuire (1968) charged that "the survival of the human race…suggests that people seek information on some basis less primitive than seeking support of what they already know and avoiding any surprises." Zaller (1992) claims that selective exposure is not prevalent; he notes that "most people...are simply not so rigid in their information-seeking behavior that they will expose themselves only to ideas that they find congenial. To the extent selective exposure occurs at all, it appears to do so under special conditions that do not typically arise in situations of mass persuasion." Jonas et

al. (2005a) provide an opposing viewpoint, "When searching for new information, people are often biased in favor of previously held beliefs, expectations, or desired conclusions." Although the theory of cognitive dissonance served as basis for hundreds of social-psychological studies, only a few investigations pertained to selections in the context of mass media use. Many studies focused on effects of post-decisional dissonance. These findings were similar to those presented by Sweeney & Gruber (1984). However, Donsbach (1989; 1991) surveyed 1,400 participants regarding their exposure memory for 350 newspaper articles from three consecutive days. In spite of the great amount of data collected, avoidance of counter-attitudinal information was hardly evident. Other research about selective media use (Chaffee & Nichols, 2001) found support for the theory of cognitive dissonance but was based on general survey data, which has been considered less reliable when it comes to actual message choices (Zillmann & Bryant, 1985). These different conclusions about selective exposure warrant attempts to clarify the concept by suggesting an interaction with another variable, possibly the influence of social identity cues.

Selective Exposure Research Today

Although the theory of selective exposure originated many years ago, it is a relevant theory that is still being researched today. The theory has continued to be supported in establishing the fact that most people predominantly seek information supporting rather than conflicting with their opinion. However, further studies have manipulated other variables in order to understand this phenomenon. For example, studies have been performed that examine whether selective exposure increases or decreases when participants are faced with more restrictive limits on information searches (Fischer, Jonas, Frey, & Schulz-Hardt, 2005). The results suggest that objective limits regarding the maximum number of pieces of information the participants could

search for increases the preference for selecting supporting over conflicting information. In a similar experiment, the mere act of giving participants a cue about information scarcity induces the same effect, even in the absence of any objective restrictions (Fischer et al., 2005). There have also been studies that combine the selective exposure phenomenon, called conformation bias, with advice from third parties. Investigations have been done to evaluate the extent to which different types of advisors, who recommend a choice to someone or make a decision on behalf of someone, show the same confirmatory information search (Jonas, Frey, & Schulz-Hardt, 2005b). Some selective exposure studies have been combined with other theories such as mood regulation or the heuristic systematic model (Jonas et al., 2005b). Focusing on similarities between the mood regulation approach and dissonance theory, one study addressed the interplay between dissonance and mood by examining how individuals search for information after making a decision while under the influence of positive versus negative mood (Jonas, Frey, & Graupmann, 2006). Selective exposure studies have often been created in general information searches. Many have also been used in the political science field, especially in regards to campaign communication mediums (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2012; Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2012; Stroud, 2008). Both of these studies examined the 2008 Presidential election and looked at the selective exposure of participants to specific articles (online and newspaper) that included political messages.

A recent study combined the industry of mathematics and numbers with the concept of selective exposure and political bias (Kahan, Peters, Dawson, & Slovic, 2013). The article itself looked at the theory of "Identity-protective Cognition Thesis" (ICT), which states that cultural conflict actually disables the abilities of members of the public to make sense of "decisions-relevant science," which is similar in nature to the phenomenon of selective exposure (Kahan et

al., 2013). In the two-part experimental design, participants were presented with a difficult problem that measured their ability to draw valid causal inferences from empirical data. As expected, subjects with a high level of numeracy skill, a measure of the ability and disposition to make use of quantitative information, did substantially better than participants with low numeracy skills when the data were presented as results from a study of a new skin-rash treatment. In the second part of the study, the exact same numbers were presented to the participants with high numeracy abilities. However, instead of a rash treatment setting, the numbers were said to represent political issues such as gun-control bans. Subjects' responses became politically polarized, and considerably less accurate. In fact, the study revealed that of the two different groups (high and low numeracy participants), subjects with the highest numeracy scores showed high amounts of polarized and inaccurate answers when presented with the politically charged question. The conclusion supported ICT, which predicted that participants with higher numeracy abilities would use their quantitative-reasoning capacity selectively to conform their interpretation of the data to the result most consistent with their political opinions (Kahan et al., 2013). These results are astounding because even though the study was performed with a different theoretical basis – in distinct fields of mathematics and science – the findings are still consistent with the human-activity and message processing habit of being drawn to attitude-confirming information.

Social Identity Approach

The "social identity approach" refers to research and theory pertaining to two intertwined, but distinct, social psychology theories: social identity theory and self-categorization theory (Haslam, 1997; Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994).

Social identity is the portion of an individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group (Turner, Oakes, & Penny, 1986). This social identity can become a huge part of the individual's personal identity and description of oneself. Originally formulated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s and the 1980s, social identity theory introduced the concept of a social identity as a way in which to explain intergroup behavior (2010).

Social identity theory (SIT) is best described as "a theory that predicts certain intergroup behaviors on the basis of perceived group status differences, and the perceived legitimacy and stability of those status differences" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity theory states that social behavior will vary along a continuum between interpersonal behavior and intergroup behavior. On one end of the spectrum, interpersonal behavior is determined solely by the individual characteristics and interpersonal relationships that exist between two or more people. On the other end of the spectrum, intergroup behavior is determined solely by the social category memberships that apply to two or more people (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, the theory, used in a more generalized way, refers to why humans socialize and how they choose with whom they socialize (Haslam, 1997). This has caused social identity theory to be used as a general theory of social categorization (Turner & Reynolds, 2010). This misuse of the first theory led John Turner and his colleagues to develop a cousin theory in the form of self-categorization theory (J. Turner & Oakes and Penny, 1986). Self-categorization theory is built on the insights of social identity theory to produce a more general account of self and group processes (Turner & Reynolds, 2010).

Self-categorization theory describes the circumstances under which a person will perceive collections of people as a group, as well as the consequences of perceiving people in

group terms (Haslam, 1997). It is more accurately thought of as general analysis of the functioning of categorization processes in social perception and interaction that speaks to issues of individual identity as much as group phenomena (Oakes et al., 1994). For example, what makes people define themselves in terms of one group membership rather than another? A social identity is a self-categorization in which a person represents oneself in terms of "shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other social categories" (Malka & Lelkes, 2010). A personal identity, on the other hand, refers to a self-categorization representing one as distinctive and unique from other members of one's relevant social groups. Thus, it is not the structural content of the self-categorization that determines whether it is a social or a personal identity; rather, it is the level of social comparison implicit in the self-categorization at a particular point in time (Malka & Lelkes, 2010). People define themselves in terms of social groupings and are quick to denigrate others who don't fit into those groups (Malka & Lelkes, 2010). Those who share an individual's particular qualities are included in the "in-group," and those who do not are the "out-group."

People may find it psychologically meaningful to view themselves according to their race, culture, gender, or religion (Malka & Lelkes, 2010). It has been found that the psychological membership of social groups and categories is associated with a wide variety of phenomena. Tajfel and Turner (1979) found that people can form in-groups within a matter of minutes and that such groups can form even on the basis of seemingly trivial characteristics, such as preferences for certain paintings. The two resulting characteristics that often accompany strong in-group associations are displays of in-group favoritism, favoring or preferring the in-group methods, thought processes and values above others, and social competition, viewing the

out-group as lesser in comparison to the better in-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These two characteristics are discussed further in the following section.

One area of study that often uses the concept of self-categorization is political science. The reason self-categorization becomes an integral part of these studies is because self-identification in political ideology is often an important part of a research study. A self-categorization as "conservative" will constitute a personal identity when one perceives oneself as conservative in comparison to relevant others, but will constitute a social identity when one's self-perception as conservative is experienced as a point of similarity with other in-group members and as a point of collective difference with out-group members (Malka & Lelkes, 2010).

Positive Distinctiveness & Social Competition

There are two aspects of the social identity theory that are particularly of interest in the current study: positive distinctiveness and social competition. The assumption that individuals are intrinsically motivated to achieve positive distinctiveness implies that individuals "strive for a positive self-concept" (Reynolds, Turner, Haslam, & Ryan, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Individuals are defined and informed by their respective social identities at varying degrees. This impacts the degree to which the individual is motivated to view their social group in a positive way, and therefore the opposing group in a negative way (Reynolds et al., 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Examples of this can be seen in politics from the cognitive pattern of right and wrong thinking. For example, conservatives who strongly believe in small government are also strongly opinionated that liberal views for large government are extremely "wrong," and strive to positively separate themselves from the opposition's pattern of thought. In the concept of social competition, an in-group seeks positive distinctiveness via direct competition with the out-group

11

in the form of in-group favoritism (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In-group favoritism is an effect where individuals give preferential treatment to others when they are perceived to be in the same in-group. This occurs often within political groups and affiliations especially when politicians are reprimanded for something they have said or done. Often when this happens you will see more justification and amnesty given by constituents in the same political group than you would see them give to the opposing politicians (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Strength of Affiliation to In-Group or In-Group Continuum

These approaches, when considered together, present an interesting opportunity to utilize in the political realm. One of the leading factors about this theory is the in-group continuum, indicating that there are varying degrees of identification in groups. This can be seen particularly in political affiliations. According to Leonie Huddy (2001) it is important to recognize the phenomena that occurs with stronger levels of social identification that can reduce one's sense of individuality, minimize in-group differences, and promote conformity; however, it is crucial to note that this does not occur in an "all or nothing" manner. The need for social identification in groups is still seen in the American culture today, even though younger Americans demonstrate a growing aversion to extreme political identities. However, this simply means there are a growing number of those who identify themselves on a scale composed of *independents, moderates, leaning conservatives,* and *leaning liberals* (Huddy, 2001). Huddy (2001)stated that these new "shades" of identity are a direct result of the closeness or distance felt by individuals on the identity continuum, which also indicates the balance between individual and social identity. Branscombe, Wann, and Noel (1995) stated that shades of group identity influence the development of in-group bias and out-group derogation. Another study performed in Japan confirmed their findings, when they found that Japanese students who identify strongly with their

vocational schools are less likely than weak identifiers to belittle their fellow in-group members after reading negative information about their group (Huddy, 2001).

It is the relevance that social identity theory plays in the group identification of political alignment that makes the element of political affiliation important to this study and integrates with the concept of selective exposure as the explanation and logic behind the formulation of the research hypotheses.

Research Conceptual Framework

Because of the lack of cohesive research including both social identity theory and selective exposure, a gap exists in the literature which points to the importance of conducting a study combining these two ideas. There is much to be said about the importance of exposure to counter-attitudinal information in a democracy (Chaffee & Nichols, 2001; Mutz, 2002). The vital question that surfaces is how individuals select and challenge the information they are presented with based on in-group and out-group environmental pressures. Knowing how individuals respond to dissonant messages and in-group versus out-group cues is vital to the political campaign process and ultimately democracy.

This current research project examines the predictions of selective exposure theory and how it interacts with social identity theory. According to social identity theory, people will naturally categorize themselves and others into groups. This comes with motivations and pressures to view their own group positively and hold consistent opinions and beliefs as others in the group (Turner, Oakes, & Penny, 1986). This feeling of personal acceptance can be upset when presented with dissonant information or counter-attitudinal messages. Therefore, when given the choice, dissonance reduction is likely to occur in the form of selective exposure.

The current research design differs from past work because of the combined approach of examining variables from both social identity theory and selective exposure theories. Thus far, no other study has compared these theories, using selective exposure as a topic, examining for any potential interactions. The experimental study will consist of two distinct groups, attitude-consistent and attitude-inconsistent. The social identity dimension of the experiment will be implemented in the form of pretest questionnaire with self-reported political affiliation and questions about the strength of that affiliation based on positive distinctiveness and social competition. The pre-test must be given before the remainder of the questionnaire was administered in order to allow the Qualtrics Survey Software program to categorize and randomly assign an equal number of politically identified individuals into each group. A study done by Malka and Lelkes (2010), attempted to distinguish between ideological identity (a self-categorization functions) and ideology (an integrated value system). The researchers evaluated whether conservative and liberal identity functions as a readiness to adopt beliefs and attitudes about newly politicized issues that one is told are consistent with the socially prescribed meaning of conservatism and liberalism (Malka & Lelkes, 2010). In the study, results showed a trend of conservatives and liberal identifiers to believe information when it was argued by an ideologically matched source and to disbelieve information when it was argued by an ideologically mismatched source (Malka & Lelkes, 2010). The findings of the research highlight the importance of social influence that connects identity cues with the diverse political attitudes that are currently packaged under the labels of "conservative" and "liberal" (2010). Other studies also support the importance of political social identity and the usage of cues that greatly impact the processing of persuasive messages (Butler & Powell, 2012; Erb, Pierro, Mannetti, Spiegel, &

14

Kruglanski, 2007; Federico & Hunt, 2013). The value of this study to the current study lies in the usage of social ideology identity cues during the experiment.

Because of the distinction found in Malka and Lelkes (2010) between political self-identification and the actual social influences of ideology, other research also points to a difference in self-affiliation in a political group and the strength of that affiliation and association to the political group. One particular study focused on the relationship between the level of self-involvement in politics and extremity of partisanship (Federico & Hunt, 2013). The study found that the interaction between these two aspects moderate the relationship between political information and the importance of ideology in information processing. Results of this study indicate that information was more strongly associated with ideological constraint and with a tendency to give polarized evaluations of conservatives and liberals among those who highly invest the self in politics and those with more extreme partisanship (Federico & Hunt, 2013). The distinction shown in these studies, as well as others, has impacted the experimental design of the current research project. The pretest questionnaire includes a self-identification block of questions for group identification (conservative, independent, liberal). The current study also includes questions to gauge the participant's level of involvement in politics and strength of affiliation regarding social competition with other political ideologies.

Through the use of online survey software, participants were randomly assigned into the attitude-consistent and attitude-inconsistent group. Both groups were exposed to a series of Twitter messages and asked to select one link to a news article for further reading. The messages were paired with an in-group or out-group cue. In the attitude-consistent group, the consonant messages were paired with their expected group cue. For example, the conservative message was paired with the conservative group cue and visa versa. In the attitude-inconsistent group the

15

messages and cues were swapped from the attitude-consistent group. The "in-group cue" was paired with the dissonant message and the consonant message was paired with the "out-group" cue. Below, the table is laid out to reflect the outline of the two experimental groups and the stimuli that is associated with each frequency exposure.

Table 2.1- Stimuli Exposure Layout for Experiment Groups

	Attitude Consistent Group		Attitude Inconsistent Group	
Topic	Spending	Minimum Wage	Spending	Minimum Wage
1	Consonant message In-group cue	Dissonant message Out-group cue	Dissonant message In-group cue	Consonant message Out-group cue
2	Consonant message In-group cue	Dissonant message Out-group cue	Dissonant message In-group cue	Consonant message Out-group cue

This study also differs from previous studies because of the scale defined to categorize participants on political identification. In previous political studies, participants were categorized on two sides of spectrum, either republican (conservative) or democrat (liberal) (Atkin, 1965). Typically the middle identification is not measured. The scale utilized in the current study includes more comprehensive descriptions of political ideology other than simply the two major parties. For example, there were three levels of categorization for each political ideology such as: "moderates," as well as "moderates, leaning liberal," and "moderates, leaning conservative." Lastly, actual exposure was measured in time units through observation, instead of relying on self-reports or selection measures (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). The importance and value of the research, however, is to recognize factors that influence levels of selective exposure and information seeking preferences that could prove valuable to political communication and campaign activities.

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis reflects the anticipated result of the attitude consistent experimental group. In past selective exposure and social identity theory research studies, when individuals are presented with an attitude-consistent (AC) message paired with delivery from their in-group, the individual typically spends more time reading the attitude-consistent information.

Hypothesis 1 (H₁): Strongly identified individuals exposed to consonant messages paired with an in-group cue will choose to read the attitude-consistent information.

The second hypothesis addresses individuals that are weakly identified with an ideology. The hypothesis presented is non-directional because previous literature does not address many individuals who identify as either moderates or who are non-ideological. Therefore, instead of hypothesizing an outcome, the goal is to look at the results to see if there is a significant trend. The assumption is that although these individuals do not identify with an ideology, they will consistently pick the most similar paired Tweet and message across frequencies.

Hypothesis 2 (H₂): Weakly identified individuals will selectively expose themselves to consistent information.

The following hypotheses are directed at the attitude-inconsistent experimental group. Hypotheses three and four also incorporate a moderating variable. As discussed in the literature review in the social identity continuum section, self-identification has different levels of affiliation, which effects how important or dependent an individual is on in-group or out-group cues. Another important aspect of these hypotheses is that they incorporate an additional variable – level of knowledge – that may explain differences between the two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3 (H₃): Strongly partisan individuals in the AIC group, who have a high level of political knowledge, will pick the consistent message, even if the message is from the out-group.

17

Hypothesis 4 (H_4): Strongly partisan individuals in the AIC group, who have a low level of political knowledge, will pick the inconsistent (dissonant) message, from their in-group.

The assumption is that when social categorization is strong in the participant (e.g., they strongly identify themselves as either liberal, moderate, or conservative), cognitive dissonance will occur, and those who have a high level of knowledge, will more easily recognize the message that is in line with their beliefs. In turn, they will choose to read the consistent message, regardless of in/out-group. However, for those who have low knowledge, but strong identification, the overarching need for positive distinctiveness and in-group acceptance will dominate. The individual will choose to read the attitude inconsistent tweet coming from the in-group, rather than the attitude consistent tweet from the out-group.

The fifth hypothesis uses an additional variable in order to explain differences between participants who weakly identify with a political affiliation. The rationale for this hypothesis is that those who strongly identify with a political affiliation will be firmer in their stances and agreement with their in-group, even when they are exposed to the attitude inconsistent messages. However, for those who weakly identify with a group cue, the hesitation to agree with or notice an inconsistency may become more apparent, therefore they are less likely to "strongly agree."

Hypothesis 5 (H_5): Weakly identified individuals, in the AIC group, will report lower "agreement" levels in post-test questionnaire than participants who strongly identified with an ideology.

Similarly, the post-test questionnaire will show participants' support level for a topic/article. In the same trend assumption, the expectation is to see a higher degree of reported support from strongly identified individuals than those who weakly identify with an ideology.

Hypothesis 6 (H₆): Strongly identified individuals, in the AIC group, will have a higher

level of support for the article topic.

The last and final hypothesis introduces time as a variable. Time will be measured at a

variety of instances during the experiment regarding the differences in message (tweet) choice

selection time between the AC and AIC groups.

Hypothesis 7 (H₇): There will be a significant difference in the response times to tweet

message choice between the AC group and the AIC group.

The table below visually shows the variables being measured and manipulated in the

experiment. The variables are divided as independent variables, dependent variables and a

moderating variable.

Table 2.2– Variables Outline

Variables Outline	Attitude consistent group			*moderating variable*	Attitude inconsistent group		
IV: political ideology	IV: consonant message			MV: Strength of affiliation	IV: dissonant message		
Conservative (strong)	DV: Choice timing	DV: Post agreement & Support	DV: Article choice	Knowledge	DV: Choice timing	DV: Post agreement & Support	DV: Article choice
Moderate (weak)	DV: Choice timing	DV: Post agreement & Support	DV: Article choice		Choice timing	DV: Post agreement & Support	DV: Article choice
Liberal (strong)	DV: Choice timing	DV: Post agreement & Support	DV: Article choice		DV: Choice timing	DV: Post agreement & Support	DV: Article choice

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Research Design

The method used to test the stated hypotheses is a between-groups experimental design using Qualtrics Online Survey software. The study was between-groups because it was deemed undesirable for the participants to be exposed to both sets of messages (dissonant and consonant). This would interfere with the integrity of the study and could allow for participants to potentially figure out what is being studied and therefore manipulate their actions (intentionally or unintentionally), thus creating bias in the results. The rationale behind choosing to conduct an experiment is based on the lack of previous research and information regarding the interaction of social identity theory and selective exposure. In the wide variety of method choices for conducting research, experimental studies are often utilized when inconsistencies occur in the literature that require flushing out competing variables.

The medium chosen to host the stimulus messages created was a mock Twitter feed with two different "tweets" for the participants to choose to read from that link to an article providing more in-depth information. The rationale behind using Twitter as the message delivery method is based on the desire to use a medium that is preferred by the participants in the study. There have been multiple studies that found that Twitter is used by the members of Generation X and Y as the first choice for their news information source (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010; Swigger, 2013; Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, & Welpe, 2010).

There are some that question the impact of social media and online usage on the political climate for this generation and those that believe Internet and social media activity lowers this generation's involvement/interest in political issues. However, in one study a positive correlation was found between people's amount of social media usage and their support for civil liberties,

which points to the impact of social media usage on political attitudes (Swigger, 2013). A broader study examined online exposure and its impact on political efficacy, knowledge, and participation. The results showed that there was no correlation between online exposure levels and a lower political knowledge, efficacy, or participation (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). Tumsasjan (2010) looked at a German federal election and studied if Twitter was an appropriate forum for political deliberation, and if the outcome of the election could be predicted by political sentiment measures from tweets. The results of this study revealed that the number of tweets and mentions accurately reflected the election results, and that joint mentions of political representatives and organizational ties were consistent in a majority of tweets. A similar study revealed that over 85% of tweets of an entire crawl of "twittersphere" topics were headline news/articles or news related subject (Kwak et al., 2010)

Participant Pool

Following IRB approval, a list of 600 randomly selected names was provided from Kansas State University's Research Compliance Office. This participant pool was chosen from a random sample of the university's student e-mail contact list to ensure unbiased sampling. Although this sample was purposive in nature, it was deemed appropriate for this research design. Out of all Internet users, 67% of young adults use social networks regularly. In June 2013, Twitter had a user count of over 218 million. The demographics for most social networking sites, but particularly Twitter are males and females, with a slightly higher number of females, ages 18-29 (Liu, Cheung, & Lee, 2010). This demographic is of interest because of their growing relevance in political activity, as well as their little known habitual behavior with regards to voting and candidate choice (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2011). With the influx and rapid growth of technological uses for gathering information (Kenski & Stroud, 2006), the changes of decision-

making and habits of these individuals could rapidly be influenced and change as well, which is why this study identified these participants and included a social media message delivery.

Materials

This study's materials included one Qualtrics session, but with various parts: the electronic signed informed consent form, the pretest assessment from all participants, the experiment message presentations, articles the participants read, and post-test questions immediately after stimuli presentation. The study was distributed and conducted electronically through Qualtrics, and the entire study (pre-test, experiment, post-test) was conducted in one sitting, instead of trying to encourage the same participants to complete two sessions at different times.

Although some researchers would discourage a pre-test because of the potential for priming the participants of the experimental material, a pretest was necessary in order to allow Qualtrics to randomly assign individuals to the two groups and ensure that an even number of all political affiliation individuals were represented in each group. The messaging presentations were set for a frequency of two. There were two Twitter feeds with a choice of one tweet to choose from and read further. Both tweet choices were manipulated politically charged messages with the political affiliation cue.

Experimental Design

The experimental design of the study was composed of three stages: A pre-test; stimulus presentation; and a post-test.

Pre-Test

Prior to the experiment, each participant was asked to complete a 17-question test in order to record their social media usage along with a self identification of political ideology and the

strength of that affiliation, measured by questions on positive distinctiveness, social competition, and level of knowledge of political activities. The scaling on the self-reported ideology on the questionnaire is shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1- Pretest Example: Political Ideology Scale

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Liberal	Moderately Liberal	Moderate leaning Liberal	Moderate	Moderate leaning conservative	Moderately Conservative	Strongly Conservative

The second set of the pretest questions recorded the participants' strength of political affiliation. These three questions were used to evaluate the level of positive distinctiveness, social competition, and knowledge or individual involvement in political activities or issues. These concepts are directly associated with variables that measure social identity theory. Included within the pre-test block was an additional set of opinion-formation questions (e.g. sports, movies). These questions served as distractors to lessen the participants' ability to figure out what was being measured, as past research indicates ideology scales can lead to high cognition and primed for politically positioned questions, therefore their responses may be filtered instead of honest. The entire pre-test questionnaire can be reviewed in the Appendix A.

Procedures

Prior to the pretest, each participant was sent to a page with an informed consent form. See Appendix H for the informed consent form used. Once participants completed the pretest questionnaire, they were randomly assigned to a group based on their self-reported ideology responses through the Qualtrics software. Within each ideology group, participants were randomly assigned to two different groups, the "attitude-consistent" and the "attitude-inconsistent" group. Refer to Table 2.1 for an outline of the two groups and the corresponding

stimuli they were presented. The Qualtrics software randomly assigned participants, and also maintained equal numbers of participants in each group. The "attitude-consistent" group was presented the same material as the "attitude-inconsistent" group, however, the messages they received were all consonant messages from the corresponding in-group and a dissonant message from the corresponding out-group. The "attitude-inconsistent" group was presented with the consonant message coming from their out-group and the dissonant message from their in-group.

Qualtrics presented the participant with a series of two false Twitter feeds, each with two tweets to choose from to select and further read the link attached to each. Both tweets presented were mildly politically charged. Each tweet contained a visual cue, a name from the "creator" of the tweet, a 140-character message that was consonant or dissonant with the political bias, and a link to an article. The visual and the name served as the social identity cues manipulated in the experiment to help participants easily and implicitly recognize which tweet is from their in-group. The 140-character tweet text was manipulated with a consonant or dissonant message that corresponded with an article to be read. See Appendix C and D for a visual example of the Twitter feed options.

In order to control for bias on topic choice, both tweets in each frequency were about the same topic. The first set of Tweets focused on federal spending, while the second set of Tweets centered on minimum wage increases. The two topics were selected because of their difference viewpoints conservatively and liberally. In addition, these topics were deemed as non-inflammatory so as to impact the attitude of the participants differently. The message topics were also selected because they are in the same venue of economic policy instead of mixing economic and social topics.

In the attitude consistent group, the political tweets were paired together with the correct political affiliation cue and the consonant message (e.g. conservative cues, with conservative message/in-group cue, consonant message). In the attitude inconsistent group, the messages were switched. The political tweets were paired together with the inconsistent political affiliation cue and the dissonant message (e.g. conservative cues, with liberal message/in-group cue, with dissonant message). Participants were given the chance to choose one article to read; however both tweets forwarded participants to the same article to read in more depth. The articles can be reviewed in Appendix E and F. The articles chosen were selected because of their unbiased nature and even discussion of "both sides." The articles for both topics of spending and minimum wage are located in the Appendix.

Post-Test

The post-test questionnaire was composed of five questions that were presented immediately after the participant read each article. These questions covered how much the participant agreed or disagreed with the article they read and what their thoughts were about their perceived in-group or out-group. The researcher also presented an attitudinal question about the topic they read. The post-test questions can be found in Appendix B.

Chapter 4 - Results

Measure Operationalization

In order to make the analysis process more streamlined and accurate, data cleaning measures were performed. First the amount of time to respond to the overall experiment was taken into consideration. Second, in some instances the researcher wanted to compare strength of ideology, regardless of whether the individual identified as conservative or liberal. Therefore, from the ideology 7-point scale question, a new variable was computed which placed those who identified as Strongly Liberal, Moderately Liberal, Moderately Conservative, and Strongly Conservative, into a "Strong Identification" category. Likewise, the moderate leaning-liberal, moderate, and moderate leaning-conservatives were coded into a "Weak Identification" group. For additional analysis, a new variable was computed that separated the strongly identified conservatives from strongly identified liberals. According to Beck & Hershey (1997), "leaners" often behave as if they were partisans, however, since the ideology scales are self-reported, it is more accurate to categorize them into the "Weak ID" group instead of pulling them into the strong identification grouping.

Post-test questions were combined into one agreement variable by combining the first four post-test questions: 1) agreement with the tweet message, 2) consistency of message, 3) political attitude match, and 4) agreement with article. In the post-test questionnaire, three additional variables were computed based on support for the articles. Support was calculated for both individual topics –spending and minimum wage – and then further collapsed into an overall support variable. Best practices were used in this compression following guidelines by Fazio (1990).

Therefore, response times were then recoded into categorical data for further analysis. A median-split of the response times was used, and participants were placed into two groups, "fast" and "slow" using procedures outlined by Fazio (1990). Figure 4.1 and 4.2 show histograms of overall tweet response time for the AC and AIC groups. The time in stimulus selection ranges from approximately 15.0 milliseconds to 160 milliseconds.

The median (AC/μ=66.31, AIC/μ=71.72) and standard deviation (AC/σ=30.83, AIC/σ=39.39) for response times was examined. Outliers that responded more than 2.5 standard deviations from the median were recoded into the slowest and fastest times that still fell under this range. Modified response times were also calculated for the tweet message choices for both topics as well as for the time it took participants to self-identify with an ideology level.

Figure 4.1 - Continuous Speed of Tweet Choice for AC group

RT_Attitude consistent both

Mean = 66.31
Std. Dev. = 30.828
N = 90
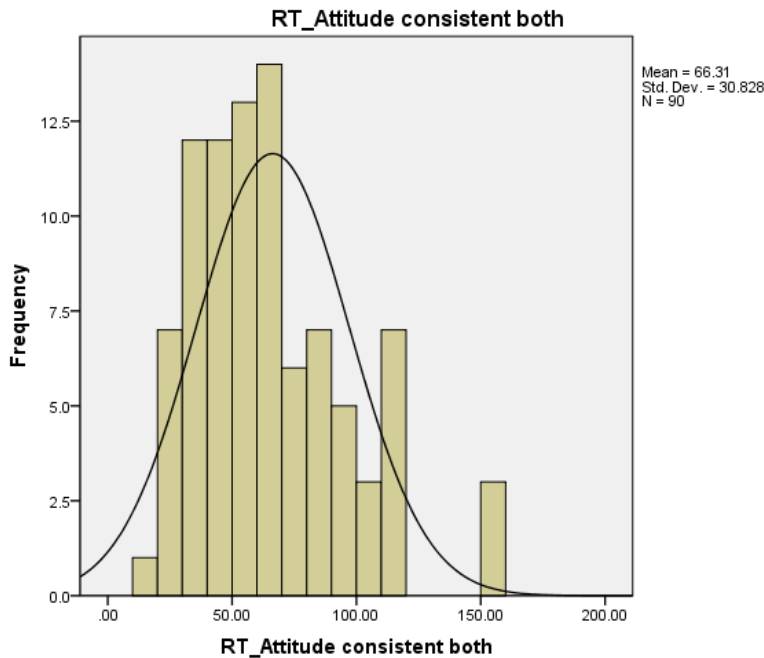
Figure 4.2 - Continuous Speed of Tweet Choice for AIC group
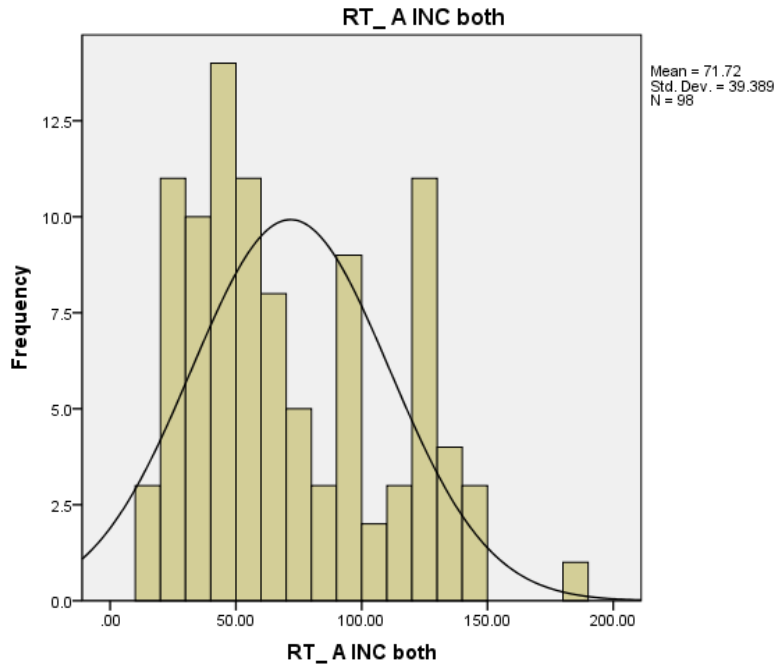
Data Analysis

The demographic results from the participants showed a relatively even distribution across most criteria. Out of the total number of participants (*n*=189), 90 were males and 99 were females. The majority of the participants were between the ages of 18-20 (*n*=76). This group was followed closely by those reporting ages of 21-22 (*n*=75), and ages 23-25 (*n*=35). Only three participants reported their ages as 26 or older.

The majority of participants were seniors (*n*=59) followed by juniors (*n*=49), first-years, and sophomores, with the smallest group identifying themselves as graduate students (*n*=18). The greatest disparity among our demographics was race. Individuals who were Caucasian/white comprised eighty-three percent of the participants followed by six percent Hispanic, and six percent of Asian descent. African-Americans and "Other" comprised approximately two percent each.

The responses on ideology showed a relatively even split, and each group was composed of enough participants for subsequent analysis in each of the seven levels. As shown in Figure 4.3, the largest group of participants is "moderately conservative" followed by those who don't identify with an exact ideology and chose to associate as a "moderate."

Figure 4.3– Frequency of Ideology Identification
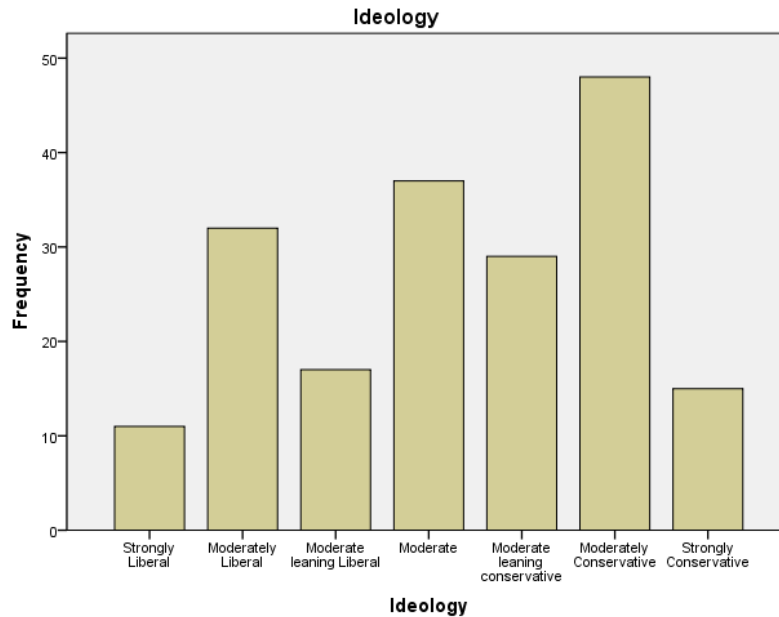
Social media behavior was also collected from our participants in order to compare our results with existing literature about the importance and usage of social media for news and information. When asked to describe their typical behavior on social media sites, thirty-two percent of participants described themselves as "spectators." This group historically engages on social media sites to read updates about friends and family, view photos, and articles, but rarely interacts with other people or post themselves. "Joiners" accounted for twenty-six percent of the participants. This group engages on a low level with friends and family, such as checking statuses, reading articles, sending messages or comments for special occasions. Nearly fifty-five percent of the participants in this research project engage on social media several times a day.

The numbers then drop to eighteen percent for those who engage once a day and twelve percent for those who use social media just a few times a week or rarely.

Hypothesis 1 stated that *strongly identified individuals exposed to consonant messages paired with an in-group cue would choose to read attitude-consistent (AC) information.* Following a Chi-square analysis, partial support was found for H_1. Individuals who were strongly identified, exposed to consonant messages, and paired with an in-group cue chose to read their specified in-group message on the topic of minimum wage, $\chi2$ $(1, n=55) = 7.1, p < .05$, but did not do so on the topic of spending, $\chi2$ $(1, n =55) = 1.2, p >.05$. Based on this finding, the data suggests that the selection of attitude-consistent messages is not a universal decision, but that it may be tempered by content relevancy.

In Hypothesis 1, the researcher focused on just the strongly identified individuals. In Hypothesis 2, the focus turned to weakly identified individuals and the expectation was to see that this group consistently exposed themselves to consistent messages. In both tests, the Chi-square analysis yielded no significant difference regardless of whether the message topic concerned spending, $\chi2$ $(1, n=55) = 1.1, p > .05$, or minimum wage, $\chi2$ $(1, n=55) = 1.5, p > .05$.

In Hypotheses 3 and 4, the researcher investigated the moderating variable of perceived knowledge and whether this could impact the choice of consistent or inconsistent message. Hypothesis 3 stated that individuals in the attitude-inconsistent group, with a higher perceived knowledge level, would selectively expose themselves to consistent message, as opposed to the inconsistent message. Hypothesis 4 predicted that individuals in the attitude-inconsistent group, with a lower perceived knowledge level, would selectively expose themselves to the inconsistent message. A Chi-square analysis of both hypotheses found no significance on either measure, $\chi2$ $(1) = 2.0, p > .05$, and $\chi2$ $(1) = 1.5, p > .05$, respectively. However, these last two findings only

tell part of the story. After executing the initial analysis, an alternative approach is to evaluate

individuals who identified themselves as knowledgeable differed in their message choice from

those who identified as low knowledge. Among those in the attitude inconsistent group, those

with higher knowledge chose attitude consistent messages more than those with low knowledge,

$\chi2(1) = 7.9, p < .05$.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that *weakly identified individuals, in the AIC group, would report lower*

"agreement" levels in post-test questionnaire than participants who strongly identified with an

ideology. The data was analyzed using an independent-samples t-test comparing overall

agreement level in strongly identified individuals in the attitude inconsistent condition versus

weakly identified individuals. Hypothesis 5 was not supported, $t(97) = .17, p > .05$, as there were

no significant difference in the overall support scores for strongly identified individuals (μ=2.9,

σ=.73) and weakly identified individuals (μ=2.9, σ=.54). Hypothesis 6 predicted that *strongly*

identified individuals, in the AIC group, would have a higher level of support for the article

topic. The level of support for both topics was analyzed by individuals who were strongly

identified with an ideology versus those who were weakly identified with an ideology. Using a

Chi-square analysis, it was determined that there was a significant difference between overall

support and strength of identification, $\chi2(8) = 16.1, p < .05$. Participants who more strongly

identified with their ideology exhibited greater support than those who only weakly identified

with their ideology.

The same data was run also as one-way, within-subjects ANOVA, to compare the effect

of strength of identification on overall support in attitude consistent and inconsistent groups. The

ANOVA showed there was not a significant effect of the strength of identification, $F(1) = 1.5, p$

$> .05$.

However, the two analyses indicated a discrepancy. Both questions were worded by asking if the topic was supported, but in order for conservatives to stay consistent with their in-group ideology, strongly identified conservatives would rate low support and strongly identified liberals would rate high support for the topic. In order for the hypothesis to be true — that strength of identification would impact the level of support for the in-group ideology — the researcher would need to examine the difference between the way the strong liberals and strong conservatives answered the support question.

After the initial analysis, an alternative approach included a comparison based on partisan difference to the support scale. That is, determine if strongly identified liberals and strongly identified conservatives will respond with extreme but opposing responses to the topic support question. A one-way, within subjects ANOVA shows that liberals overall support for the article topics (μ=3.65, σ=1.13) was higher than the overall support reported by conservatives (μ=2.33, σ =.747), $F(1)$=52.9, $p < .05$.

Table 4.2- Overall support level (No support 1.0-5.0 Strong support) of topics with differences between strong conservatives (2.0) and liberals (1.0)
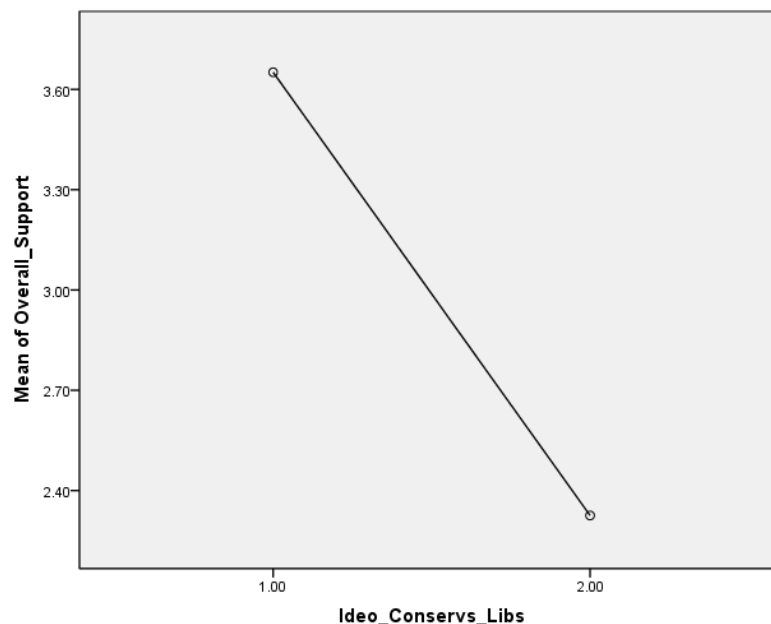
In the final prediction, Hypothesis 7, the researcher returned to the inclusion of time as a variable of interest: *There will be a significant difference in the response times to tweet message choice between the AC group and the AIC group*. An overall main effect for response time differences in the selection of Tweet messages between AC and AIC groups was not supported, $F(1) = 1.1, p > .05$. As noted earlier, the range of response times captured in milliseconds yielded only two participants who responded at the exact same time in their selection of tweet messages.

For the following analyses, a median split was created in order to condense the continuous response time data into categorical variables of *fast* and *slow*. First, the median split categories of each set of tweet exposures were computed into separate variables based on AC and AIC groups. Then the average amount of continuous time for both answer choices (since each participant saw a spending and a minimum wage article), and then computed a median split of the overall tweet choice and grouped everyone above the median into the category of *slow* and those below the median as *fast*.

A chi-square test reveals a strong difference in the relationship between time in choosing ideology and time choosing tweet message, $\chi 2(1) = 14.4, p < .05$. Individuals who quickly identify their ideology were far more likely to quickly select which tweet message to read than those who more slowly identify their ideology.

Earlier analysis in this study indicated that participants did not necessarily respond to each of the two sets of tweet messages in the same manner. A Chi-square analysis was run for the individual median split times (fast, slow) for each topic (spending, minimum wage). Differences were found for the speed with which participants selected the tweet messages in the spending article exposure, $\chi 2(1) = 8.9, p < .05$, where strongly identified individuals responded to the spending Tweet more quickly than weakly identified individuals. However, no significant

difference was found in the reactions time selection of tweet messages in the minimum wage story, $\chi2(1) = 1.7, p > .05$.

A final Chi-square analysis was run to examine the relationship between the speed of choosing the ideology level (fast, slow) and the purported strength of ideology the participant was identified with (strong, weak). The analysis indicates a difference in response times for these variables, $\chi2 (1) = 5.9, p < .05$, such that those that quickly select their ideology are more likely to identify themselves as strongly identified individuals than those who classify themselves as weakly identified.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

The findings from the current research study contribute in many ways to the current body of knowledge regarding the behavior influences of selective exposure and social identity. There were two important relationships found through the empirical analysis. First, perceptions of political knowledge matter: high or low perceived knowledge impacted message choice. Second, strength of identification matters: strong identifiers behaved differently than weak identifiers.

Self-reported knowledge and identification level clearly impacts the behavior of individuals when it comes to the topic of political messages. Individuals who have a perceived high level of knowledge favor message consistency above in-group pressures, even if they strongly associate themselves with the group. However, individuals with a perceived low level of knowledge rely more on in-group cues to expose themselves to political information. This shows that selective exposure does occur across all groups of people, but perceived knowledge regulates between the importance of social group acceptance and congruency. This finding reinforces the importance of issue communication throughout campaigns being ideologically consistent. Since campaigns often target strongly affiliated individuals, those who believe they have high knowledge will recognize an inconsistent message, and be affected more negatively by the discrepancy, and those who believe to have a low knowledge level will trust information that comes from their in-group regardless of message.

Another reason why strongly identified individuals are targeted by campaign messages is because these individuals are more likely to commit stronger levels of support or opposition to issues consistent to what they believe to be consistent with their ideology. Weakly identified individuals revealed that regardless of which messages, consistent or inconsistent, responded with lower levels of support of the topic material.

Strongly identified individuals also behaved differently than weakly identified regarding the speed of their choices. Those who were strongly identified responded faster in choosing their ideology level as well as faster in choosing a tweet to read than their weakly identified counterparts. These findings indicate that those with strong identifications make decisions about what to read in politically charged matters faster than weakly identified individuals. This supports previous research and assumptions that those who have stronger identification typically have already made cognitive decisions regarding their ideological level as well as their stances on issues and how important their social group is to their decisions. Therefore, they will respond quicker and second-guess themselves less on questions and options because of their identification level. However, those whom are weakly identified, will take more time to cognitively make those decisions, or may not have much prior knowledge or opinions regarding the topics.

Lastly, different topic material was seen to influence behavior. The topic of minimum wage yielded different behavior in the case of the speed of tweet choices between the AC and AIC groups. In the case of the minimum wage topic, the participants waited longer when choosing which tweet to read more in depth. The assumption is attributed to the relevancy of the topic matter to the demographics of participants. The topic of minimum wage is also more concrete in nature and produces more immediate personal impact for the lives of college students as opposed to the more abstract concept of federal spending.

Suggestions for Future Research

The current study was just beginning the unpacking process of implications and interactions of the studied variables. In the future, there will be great value in performing more advanced regression models that could incorporate an interaction term to determine how political

knowledge conditions the influence of one's strength of ideology. By utilizing the data from this current study, as well as creating further studies incorporating these subjects, more conclusive information could be drawn as to what variables (knowledge, strength of identification) matter the most in specific instances. A potential subject for an extension study is to evaluate how issue complexity and impacts one's response to the stimulus. Conceivably individuals would respond differently if the topics had covered emotional issues such as abortion, or polarizing issues such as gun control, instead of abstract concepts like government spending. It may be beneficial to have a mixture of social and economic issues, but keeping in mind that topic relevancy to participants is important.

Among the successful results of the study, there is still much to learn much about the behavior of weakly identified individuals. As stated in the previous literature, weakly identified individuals often behave as partisans (Beck & Hershey, 1997). Continuing the investigation of their behavior with political messages would be intriguing. Both weakly and strongly identified individuals' relationship to self-reported knowledge and ideology versus revealed knowledge and ideology could be exceptionally eye opening. Due to time restraints and logistics, it was determined that self-reported values were the best options for this project. However, future research projects should consider measuring the participant's actual understanding and knowledge of political issues as well as strength of ideology instead of relying exclusively on self-reported measures. The revealed measures for these factors could be assessed through quizzes such as the Pew Political Typology for their ideology assessment or the Pew News Quiz to determine political knowledge.

The response time variable as it is conceived now could be capturing a number of things: the accessibility of political information, one's baseline level of decisiveness, or impatience or

desire to finish the study. In prospective studies, this variable could be untangled to describe what the timing variable specifically implies. One opportunity for accomplishing this would be to analyze how long it took for individuals to complete the distractor questions in the questionnaire to get create a baseline responsiveness measure, followed by distinguishing how individuals departed from their baseline measure when confronted with explicitly political stimuli. Those who are knowledgeable may access that political information more readily than those with low knowledge and the same trend may be revealed in the case of ideology strength.

As with most studies, it is always better to have a larger number of participants, however, with a study of this complexity, it is necessary for future studies to have high participant levels. As the number of conditions analyzed in each measure increased and the number of participants was consistently condensed, with more participants, stronger conclusions could be drawn in greater detail.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to shed light on the interaction between the theory of selective exposure and social identity theory. Both of these theories describe aspects regarding how individuals expose themselves to information. One of the assumptions going into the study was that a series of factors that would moderate the differences between whether individuals would succumb to in-group cue pressures, or cognitive dissonance. Two factors revealed themselves to impact results and message choice — self-reported knowledge and strength of identification. Self-reported knowledge was the primary variable of influence when differences were seen between individuals picking the consistent messages. In the attitude inconsistent group, the participants were presented with a conundrum; they would see a consistent message coming from their perceived out-group and an inconsistent message coming from their perceived

in-group. Individuals who had a high level of knowledge chose the consistent message more often than those with low knowledge. Thus in future campaign communication strategies, it is important to remember that message consisitency with ideology is crucial to persuasion of indivudals with high level of perceived knowledge.

The strength of ideology influenced differences in both the speed in which they made decisions on which tweet to select, as well as how quickly they identified with an ideology level. This result revealed that those who are strongly identified with an ideology make decisions regarding political messages and ideology faster than those who are weakly identified.

In the previous literature regarding selective exposure and social identity theory, no study had ever combined these two variables into one experimental design. Additionally, past selective exposure studies have not used time of decision as a dependent variable. The current study contributes to the plethora of literature regarding these two theories and the political science area of study by strengthening support for the theory that knowledge stands as a moderating variable between cognitive dissonance and social identity pressures. It also provides insight into the trends and patterns that can arise when time/speed are utilized as a variable to shed light on group identification differences. The insights with the variables of time, strength of ideology, level of knowledge, could lead to numerous future studies.

With the pattern of strong identification influencing faster decision-making on message exposure as well as strength of ideology, paired with higher knowledge impacting consistent message preference; the relationship between perceived knowledge (high/low) and strength of identification (strong/weak) was explored. The results showed a trend of a direct relationship; that the higher a perceived knowledge, the stronger the level of identification. However, the difference was rendered insignificant. However, for future studies, delving into this relationship

in more depth could reveal a difference in an individual's self-perception of knowledge and

understanding and their strength of identification.

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Appendix A - Pre-Test Questionnaire

1. We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative.

   Where would you put yourself on this scale?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Liberal	Moderately Liberal	Moderate leaning Liberal	Moderate	Moderate leaning conservative	Moderately Conservative	Strongly Conservative

2. How often do you pay attention to what's going on in government and politics?
   a. Always
   b. About half the time
   c. Rarely
   d. Never

3. I wish my political ideology were represented in a more positive way in the media.
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither agree nor disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly Disagree

4. When it comes to my opinions about political issues, I usually feel that my opinion is right, and the opposing opinion is wrong.
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither agree nor disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly Disagree

5. How important do you feel political issues are to you personally?
   a. Very important
   b. Somewhat important
   c. Not important at all

6. With regards to social media and the internet; does the majority of your social media behavior focus on:
   a. I don't participate in social media at all.
   b. Spectating: watch social media sites, view articles, updates, photos, follow, but rarely interact
   c. Joining: you maintain a social site, you interact occasionally with friends on statuses, reading, liking....

d. Conversing: actively comment, like, post, update, etc
e. Sharing: find interesting articles, photos, tweets, posts etc, and actively share other content, more often then your own
f. Creating: original content for the internet
g. I don't participate at all.

7. How often do you interact on social media sites?
   a. Several times per day
   b. Once a day
   c. A few times per week
   d. Once a week
   e. Rarely

8. Please place numbers (1-6) based on where do you go for information and updates for news and entertainment?
   ___Social media sites
   ___Newspapers
   ___News websites
   ___Apps on my smartphone
   ___TV
   ___Radio

9. How would you rate your loyalty to your sports team?
   a. Extremely Loyal
   b. Moderately Loyal
   c. Don't care
   d. Somehwat loyal
   e. Not loyal

10. How often do you pay attention to what's going on in the sports industry?
    a. Always
    b. About half the time
    c. Rarely
    d. Never

11. What would you rate is your knowledge level of sports?
    a. I know a lot about a lot of teams/conferences
    b. I know some about different teams/sports/conferences
    c. I know very little overall
    d. I know nothing

12. How important do you feel sports are to you personally? (daily/weekly impact)
    a. Very important
    b. Sort of important
    c. Not important at all

13. How frequently do you go to a movie?
   a. Twice a week
   b. Once a week
   c. Every other week
   d. Once a month
   e. A couple times a year
   f. Hardly ever

14. Would you identify yourself as a "movie person"?
   a. Yes
   b. No

15. What are your favorite movie genres to watch? (Select all that apply)
   a. Drama
   b. Action
   c. Mystery/Suspense
   d. Romance
   e. Comedy
   f. Horror

16. How often do you pay attention to what's going on in the entertainment industry?
   a. Always
   b. About half the time
   c. Never

17. What would you rate is your knowledge level of current movies?
   a. I know a lot about movies, celebs, etc.
   b. I know some about different movies, celebs, etc.
   c. I know very little overall
   d. I know nothing

Appendix B - Post-Test Questionnaire

1. For the tweet that you clicked, how much did you agree with the message in the tweet?

   Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   Very much

2. How much do you think your political attitudes match those of the author of the tweet?

   Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   Very much

3. To what extent was the message in the tweet consistent with your impression of the author of the tweet?

    Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   Very much

4. How much did you agree with the article in the tweet that you read?

    Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   Very much

**(Question 5/6 changed based on article just read.)

5. How much do you support raising the federal minimum wage?

    Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   Very much

6. How much do you support raising the federal minimum wage?

    Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   Very much

Appendix C - Attitude Consistent Twitter Feeds

AC – Spending

Freedom Alliance for Economic Liberty
@A Conservative organization with goals to improve nation's economic health
[Follow]

Spending from Washington is continuing to spiral out of control. $1.1 trillion dollar spending bill has just passed.
http://www.nytimes.com/2342

← Reply ⇄ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More

3:41 PM - 27 March 14 · Embed this Tweet

Educators of America
@ Liberal organization who work to champion education friendly initiatives
[Follow]

Proud that the White House negotiates $1 billion for Head Start in Congress' new $1.1 trillion spending bill.
http://www.nytimes.com/2342

← Reply ⇄ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More

10:24 AM - 27 March 14 · Embed this Tweet

AC – Minimum Wage

The Constitutional Conservative
@A conservative organization dedicated to upholding the principles established by the Founding Fathers.
[Follow]

Mandating an increase in minimum wage is not the solution to poverty. An estimated 500,000+ jobs would be lost at this spike.
http://www.nytimes.com/8789

← Reply ⇄ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More

8:52 AM - 28 March 14 · Embed this Tweet

Individuals for Equality
@Liberal-minded individuals working towards equality both economically and socially.

The "sub-par minimum wage" will no longer be tolerated! Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D) is committed to raising the minimum wage to $10.10/hr.
http://www.nytimes.com/7884

← Reply ⟲ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More

7:45 PM - 29 March 14 · Embed this Tweet

Appendix D - Attitude Inconsistent Twitter Feeds

AIC – Spending

Freedom Alliance for Economic Liberty
@ A Conservative organization with goals to improve the nation's economic health

Proud that the White House negotiates $1 billion for Head Start in Congress' new $1.1 trillion spending bill.
http://www.nytimes.com/2782

← Reply ⟲ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More

3:41 PM - 27 March 14 · Embed this Tweet

Educators of America
@ Liberal organization who work to champion education friendly initiatives

Spending from Washington is continuing to spiral out of control. $1.1 trillion dollar spending bill has just passed.
http://www.nytimes.com/2342

← Reply ⟲ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More
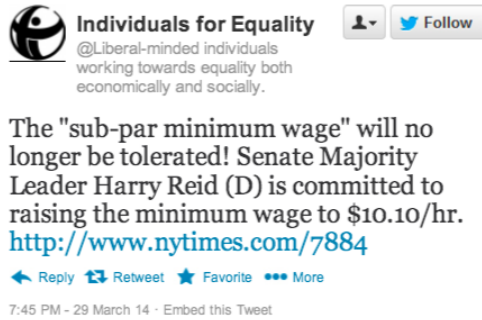
3:41 PM - 20 Jan 13 · Embed this Tweet

AIC – Minimum Wage

The Constitutional Conservative
@A conservative organization dedicated to upholding the principles established by the Founding Fathers.

The "sub-par minimum wage" will no longer be tolerated! Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D) is committed to raising the minimum wage to $10.10/hr. http://www.nytimes.com/7884

← Reply ⇄ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More

8:52 AM - 28 March 14 · Embed this Tweet

Individuals for Equality
@Liberal-minded individuals working towards equality both economically and socially.

Mandating an increase in minimum wage is not the solution to poverty. An estimated 500,000+ jobs would be lost at this spike. http://www.nytimes.com/8789

← Reply ⇄ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More

7:45 PM - 29 March 14 · Embed this Tweet

Appendix E - Spending Article

From the New York Times:
$1.1 trillion spending bill unveiled

(New York City, NY)

By DAVID ROGERS | 1/13/14 8:08 PM EST Updated: 03/20/14 11:10 AM EST

House-Senate negotiators rolled out a $1.1 trillion spending bill Monday night — a giant package that fills in the blanks of the December budget agreement and promises to restore some order to government funding over the next year.

Under pressure from Republicans, the measure keeps a tight rein on new funding for Wall Street regulators and effectively freezes appropriations for President Barack Obama's health care program at the reduced, post-sequester level.

But the White House retains the flexibility to find the financing it needs to implement the health exchanges and appears satisfied to have avoided the most contentious restrictions proposed by conservatives.

Among his other domestic priorities, Obama secured significant new funding he has wanted for pre-kindergarten education initiatives, albeit more through existing programs like Head Start than the new format he envisioned.
Indeed, the new $8.6 billion funding level for Head Start reflects one of the biggest investments in the bill — an estimated $1 billion, or 13 percent, increase over current funding and $612 million over its initial 2013 enacted appropriation.

At the same time, House Appropriations Committee Chairman Hal Rogers (R-Ky.) came away with two coal-related riders, one affecting mountaintop mining regulations and the other challenging new Export-Import Bank guidelines on the financing of coal-fired power plants overseas.

One legislative provision that all sides embraced would exempt disability pensions for veterans from a cost-of-living cut included in the December budget deal.

The very evident give-and-take caps more than six weeks of often intense bargaining within the Appropriations Committees and sets the stage for what the leadership hopes will be a rapid series of floor votes sending the bill on to Obama by this weekend.

"This bill is a compromise, but it reflects Republican priorities and holds the line on spending in many critical areas," Rogers said.

His Senate counterpart, Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), more colorfully described the deal as an end to "shutdown, slowdown, slam-down politics." And speaking for the White House, Budget Director Sylvia Mathews Burwell suggested lawmakers get on with it. "The administration urges Congress to move quickly to pass it," Burwell said.

To avoid any threat of a shutdown, the House will first take up a short extension of the current stopgap continuing
resolution on Tuesday — moving the deadline back three days to Saturday. This should buy sufficient time for the House to act on the larger omnibus bill Wednesday. And Senate Democrats are hoping that there will be sufficient Republican support to avoid major battles over cloture Thursday and Friday.

This remains a tight time frame, but the rewards are substantial for both parties. And there is a genuine hunger to build on the December budget deal and not risk another government shutdown akin to last October's.

Already, a long-anticipated farm bill has gone off the tracks since lawmakers returned from the holidays. If the omnibus were to fail as well, it would be a huge black eye for both parties.

One positive sign came from Alabama Sen. Richard Shelby, the ranking Republican on Appropriations. In anticipation of the filing, he met with his fellow Republicans on the panel. Shelby said later he would support the bill and asked his colleagues to support it as well.

"I'm on board," Shelby told NY Times. "If the House comes with a big vote, we'll get a big vote, too."

"It's not everything anybody wanted, but we've been working hard at it, and it will lead us, hopefully, to regular order."

As the former chairman of the Senate Banking Committee — and an ardent opponent of the Dodd-Frank reforms — Shelby left an imprint seen in the tight budgets for the Commodity Futures Trading Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission. The administration appears to have avoided restrictive riders proposed in the House, but the price is far less money than the president wants.

Appendix F - Minimum Wage Article

From The New York Times
Some Democrats seek minimum wage deal

(NYC, New York)

By BURGESS EVERETT | 2/26/14 11:17 PM EST

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid isn't budging on a proposal to hike the minimum wage to $10.10 an hour.

But not all of his Democratic colleagues are following their leader on the issue, which is key to the party's election-year messaging. In fact, moderate Democrats — including a handful up for reelection this year — are weighing support of a more modest increase designed to attract Republicans that could save them from having to oppose a tough bill before November.

But liberals and party leaders are standing firm, a position that could leave low-income workers with no wage increase at all in 2014.

Reid sees little reason to negotiate on the $10.10 hourly rate given a widely held Democratic belief that Republicans will reflexively oppose any rate increase, no matter how low. Asked Tuesday if there's a path to an eventual compromise, the Nevada Democrat said simply: "Not with me."

Interviews with a group of deal-seeking Democrats and Republicans indicate that there is room for negotiation.

Elements under discussion include dropping the rate under $10.10 an hour, adding business incentives and re-examining the wage floor for tipped workers, which would rise for the first time in more than 20 years under legislation written by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and co-sponsored by Reid. Under that bill, wages would rise in future years at the rate of inflation.

There is concern about a Congressional Budget Office report that showed a $10.10 hourly minimum wage would pull roughly 900,000 people out of poverty but also cost 500,000 jobs. That same CBO report showed a potential middle ground at $9 an hour, which would lift fewer out of poverty but have less impact on employers.

"Some people say it's a bigger jump than what we've ever taken before. The bottom line is that nobody that works full-time should be in poverty," Manchin said. "We're talking with our bipartisan group that we have right in the middle, to see if they have some comfort level."

Regardless of whether they can get their whole caucus on board, Democratic sources privately acknowledge their $10.10-an-hour quest is futile given that the Republican-controlled House has little appetite for the issue. Democrats still see an upside to a failed vote on the minimum wage — the current federal minimum wage is $7.25 — to draw a clear contrast with Republicans during a midterm battle over the Senate majority. It's part of a larger narrative Democrats are pushing centered on income inequality.

On Wednesday evening, a New York Times survey found that two-thirds of those polled support raising the minimum wage to $10.10 an hour.

And since President Barack Obama endorsed $10.10 an hour after previously supporting a $9-an-hour rate, there is little reason for Reid to reconsider his hard-line stance until the Senate first votes on the Harkin bill.
The party's liberal base is warning Reid not to back down.

The dug-in positions of both parties raise strong doubts about whether Democratic leaders can even gather 60 votes to open debate on the bill. That's precisely the way Democrats want it, according to many Senate Republicans.

"They want the political issue," said Republican Sen. John Thune of South Dakota. "Just check the box: Now we've got them on record."

Still, several Republicans are exploring whether Democrats want a compromise or whether the party is satisfied to paint the GOP as obstructionist and move on. Many Republicans supported past minimum-wage hikes, particularly when linked to business tax breaks.

Sen. Rob Portman (R-Ohio) said he might be open to a package that raises the wage and is coupled "with something that incentivizes hiring." GOP Sen. Susan Collins of Maine won't rule out supporting a "reasonable" increase, acknowledging that "it has been a while since we've had an increase in the minimum wage." But both are wary of Democrats' motives.

"If they want truly to get something done, then a compromise is possible. If people want to just play politics with the issue, then obviously a compromise wouldn't succeed," Collins said.

The wage level that wavering Democrats and Republicans might support is not entirely clear. Pryor has endorsed a 2014 ballot initiative in his home state of Arkansas that would raise the

state rate to $8.50 an hour, which he is touting in his reelection bid against Rep. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.).

"I'm very comfortable with the Arkansas proposal. It's a process where it goes on the ballot and people vote on it. I don't know what's going to happen up here [in the Capitol], so I'll just let it play out," Pryor said. "I'll just wait and see if anybody proposes something different."

Landrieu's focus is on the tipped wage, which would rise from $2.13 an hour to more than $7 an hour by 2019 under the Democrats' bill and is opposed by the restaurant industry. She isn't sure where she will ultimately land on $10.10 an hour but said there "may be" a middle ground.

"I'm considering how high the increase should be," Landrieu said. "So while I'm very supportive and generally supportive, I'm working with a few colleagues to see what maybe we could talk about on that tip wage issue. Republicans, too."

The retiring Harkin said he's open to working with Republicans on sweetening the bill for businesses. But he is unbending on the proposal's core.

"There's things that we can do if people need help for businesses," Harkin said. "But to go to $9 means you still have a sub-poverty minimum wage. I will never support a subpar minimum wage. That's out of the question."

Appendix G - Demographics

Age: 18-20   21-22   23-25   26 and older

Gender: Male   Female

Year in school: First-year   Sophomore   Junior   Senior
Graduate

Ethnicity: Caucasion/White   African-American   Latino   Asian
Other

Are you an international or domestic student?:   International   Domestic

Appendix H - Informed Consent

Thank you for participating in this survey study. The data collected will greatly help in the research for a current master's thesis looking at the interaction of two behaviors.

You will first be asked to fill out a short questionnaire; then you will have the opportunity to choose from two twitter messages and read two articles in more depth. After the

articles have been read, you will answer another small group of questions and then demographic information.

The study is only expected to take approx. 10 minutes.

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

<u>I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.</u>

Agree   Disagree