

BEYOND POLITICAL DIFFERENCES: THE INFLUENCE OF EXPOSURE TO
DISAGREEMENTS AND THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL RESPONSES ON
SELECTIVE EXPOSURE

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My Heavenly Father

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of exposure to online discussion boards and discussion participation in the online discussion boards on opinion-challenging news use. Based on cognitive dissonance theory and media choice model, a 2 (exposure to disagreement: position-convergent discussion vs. position-divergent discussion) X 2 (discussion participation: participation vs. non-participation) mixed factorial design was employed to examine the role of online discussion boards on selective exposure to political news. In addition, the emotional responses toward discussions were suggested as a mediator between the influence of exposure to disagreements on opinion-challenging news use.

Results showed that when participants were exposed to position-divergent online discussion boards, they perceived the opinion-challenging news articles to be more useful, and showed higher interest to read the opinion-challenging news articles. In addition, discussion participation was found to moderate the effect of the exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards on perceived utility of opinion-challenging news use. Finally, mediation analyses suggested that positive emotional responses and negative emotional responses were significant mediators between exposure to disagreements and opinion-challenging news choices in discussion participation conditions. Theoretical implications of the findings are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Today, we live in an era in which people are surrounded with information. Not only are people surrounded with 24-hour-news channels on television that constantly update what is happening, more people now have access to the Internet which has even faster updates in regards to news and information. People are constantly receiving text messages, emails, and RSS feeds that notify them about what is going on in their world of interest. Simply put, getting information has become as easy as a click on the mouse. For someone who utilizes these constant flows of information, it has never been easier to be knowledgeable about the world's events, including politics.

However, studies show that this common sense approach of 'more information leads to more knowledge' does not seem to be necessarily valid (Prior, 2005). With ever more choices in media content, examining what motivates people to select certain political messages over the other becomes more relevant. People are no longer passive receivers of news but instead are active in selecting the information they use based on their needs and motives. The question then is, when given control, do people have enough motivation to actively pay attention to political news? Also, when they choose to use political news, do they prefer getting balanced information from different perspectives, or will they only pay attention to the sources that mainly support their viewpoints?

So far, the answers to these questions seem disheartening: more channels of information do not correspond to people spending more time learning about politics.

In fact, when they do choose to pay attention to political contents, their choices in news channels and sources seem to be divided according to their political beliefs and ideologies (Prior, 2005; Sustein, 2001). With Internet's advantages of control and flexibility, selectively seeking political sources that reinforce one's belief rather than challenge them are more likely to happen (Valentino, Banks, Hutchings, & Davis, 2009). While selective exposure to political messages has long been of interest to political communication research since the classic Erie County study (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudent, 1948), it has started to become much more relevant to people's choices in political messages with the availability of features on the Internet that allow people to choose only the news that they find interesting and agreeable.

Yet Internet still has the potential to become the public sphere for cross-cutting news use, that is the news use across lines of political differences, with its interactivity and flexibility. With interactivity, people can use the Internet to express their opinions and debate political issues with different people. It can also allow them to express political opinions directly to political elites (Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005). Such flexibility of the Internet makes online political discussions more accessible to the public by reducing the costs of cross-cutting discussions (Cappella, Price, & Nir, 2002). In addition, Internet facilitates the sharing of political perspectives through news comments, hyperlinks and other interactive websites such as social networking sites (Brundidge, 2010a). These are a few of the

advantages of Internet that make online political discussions less intimidating and more frequent than face-to-face interaction that involves political differences.

For this study, it is further suggested that Internet can function as a public sphere that provides frequent access to diverse political opinions that can encourage more balanced political news use. That is, the exposure to political disagreements via online political discussions can influence the pattern of selective exposure to news sources congenial to political opinions and attitudes. The main purpose of this dissertation is to examine the role of online political discussions, especially those involving disagreeing political opinions, in changing the selective news exposure patterns of individuals. This study focuses on online discussion boards as a platform that enables deliberation where people can read the opinions of others who disagree with them and participate more frequently in political discussions than they would in face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, exposure to diverse opinions through online channels can have significant influence in increasing the awareness of others' opinions, triggering interest in learning about an issue through other news channels, and encouraging individuals to engage in cross-cutting news use.

Theoretical significance of the study

Many scholars agree that it is essential to listen to different opinions for democracy to thrive (Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Dryzek, 2002; Jacobs, Cook, & Delli Carpini, 2009; Mutz, 2002, 2006; Mutz & Martin, 2001; Mutz & Mondak, 2006). The question is whether normal citizens have the motivation to be frequently

exposed to disagreeing opinions to acquire the benefits of deliberative democracy. In this regard, this study expands the application of deliberative democracy to include online discussion boards to have similar effects as face-to-face political discussions in providing the benefits of exposure to disagreements in deliberations. The formats of online discussions are not only limited to discussion forums or online communities (Wise, Hamman, & Thorson, 2006), but it can also be applied to social networking sites, such as Facebook or Twitter or online news comment boards (Brundidge, 2010a, 2010b). The main point in this dissertation is to learn the arguments of those who may hold different opinions from oneself as frequently as possible without the socio-psychological factors that may hinder deliberation from happening at everyday life (Ho & McLeod, 2008). That is, not only the quality of deliberation to include disagreeing opinions, but the quantity of chances to participate in deliberation can be increased through online channels.

In addition, this study suggests the benefits of political discussions to include changes in news choices. Exposure to political disagreement via political discussions can provide motivations to people to branch out of one's familiar news sources and actively use news articles even when it may not hold similar opinion with him/her. In other words, with the increased concern about selective exposure to politically agreeable sources using the Internet, participation in online deliberation can provide motivation to use opinion-challenging news sources. Literature in selective exposure has thus far been debating whether people do selectively expose themselves to only their favorable news sources (Chaffee, Saphir, Graf, Sandvig, &

Hahn, 2001; Stroud, 2007, 2010), with only a limited number of efforts to examine what news media or politicians can do to encourage balanced news use across political differences. Frequent exposure to political discussions involving disagreements can emotionally activate citizens to search for further information and provide motivation to break out of familiar information cocoon.

Finally, this study builds a theoretical model that explains the process in which exposure to disagreement will lead to opinion-challenging news use. Here, as contingent conditions in which such processes happen, emotional responses toward political discussions and discussion participation are suggested. First, building on affective intelligence theory, the mediating role of emotional responses toward political discussions is examined studied. Affective intelligence theory postulates that the impact of emotional responses in political decisions is not only largely functional and rational, but it can explain how voters make political judgments (Marcus, Neuman, & Mackuen, 2000). This study examined the role of political discussions with disagreeing opinions to expose citizens to unfamiliar and uncertain context that which encourages deliberative choices in political news via the increase in negative emotional responses, such as anxiety about one's position.

The next contingent condition suggested is discussion participation. Discussion participation is suggested to increase the motivation for individuals to encourage opinion-challenging news use. This variable is built on the conditions that discourage selective exposure to information by early scholars in cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1964; Sears & Freedman, 1967). In other words, this

dissertation picks up where many scholars in selective exposure left, and move further than suggesting that selective exposure happens, but how to discourage selective exposure in political information use.

Design of the dissertation

As an attempt to build a theoretical model explaining the role of political discussion on opinion-challenging news use, several theories are reviewed. First, in the theoretical review section, the deliberative democracy model is reviewed to explain the pros and cons of exposure to disagreeing opinions. Secondly, the studies in cognitive dissonance theory and selective exposure is examined to explain the tendency of citizens to actively engage in agreeable news use and disregard disagreeing news. Then, the conditions in which citizens becomes more balanced in using both opinion-bolstering and opinion-challenging news are explained by applying affective intelligence theory. Finally, uses and gratifications theory and social determination theory will be reviewed to understand the role of discussion participation on opinion-challenging news use.

In the research method section, the experimental design of this study is explained and operational definitions of independent variables, mediating variables and dependent variables are provided. After the findings of the experiment are explained, the theoretical and practical implications of this study are discussed.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Theoretical background of selective exposure to political news

Cognitive dissonance theory postulates that individuals prefer choosing information channels that they know will share similar thoughts and opinions, and not many would voluntarily expose themselves to disagreements (Berelson & Steiner, 1964; Klapper, 1960; Stroud, 2010). Festinger (1957) labeled such tendency of individuals striving for cognitive equilibrium as “selective exposure.” In an attempt to reduce the dissonance between the information people receive and their choices, individuals selectively choose their source of information and type of information. That is, individuals are more likely to read or listen to information that supports their opinion and less likely to attend to it if it challenges their opinion (Festinger, 1957, 1964; Garrett, 2009a).

In addition to cognitive dissonance theory, Stroud (2011) further applied the cognitive miser perspective to explain why people would selective choose agreeable political news. Cognitive miser perspective proposes that people want to conserve cognitive resources. They want to simplify information-processing tasks that result in selective exposure. For political decisions, when new information runs counter to the person’s political ideology, it requires more cognitive resources to process, than consistent information. People avoid contradictory political information because it takes not only more time to process the information, it also creates more noise, fatigue and cognitive overload (Kruglanski, Webster, & Klem, 1993). Such avoidance

of information processing and cognitive overload can easily lead to selective exposure to only agreeable information.

Over the years, studies in mass communication have shown that decisions about political information choices and news information choices are commonly guided by the political beliefs and ideologies of the individuals. For example, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948) suggested that because people choose to watch the political campaigns of the candidates they support, the effect of mass media consequently becomes minimal. They concluded that people select information to reinforce the predispositions that they already had when viewing the campaign (p. 76). People are more likely to use news media outlets that correspond to their political-ideological perspectives (Graber, 1984; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2010). Other scholars showed that political beliefs guided the selection of television political programs (Schramm & Carter, 1959), newspaper (Stempel, 1961), and candidate campaign websites (Bimber & Davis, 2003). These studies conclude that selective exposure to political information is common among individuals and that partisan-based selective exposure may engender a fragmented public, less tolerant of political disagreements.

However, not all studies in selective exposure to news media suggest similar results that show people actively avoiding political disagreements. In terms of selectively choosing news content, early work on selective exposure has failed to distinguish between deliberate or motivated exposure and de facto exposure that was a by-product of voters' personal networks or social context (Iyengar, Hahn,

Krosnick, & Walker, 2008; Sears & Freedman, 1967). In their synopsis of studies on selective exposure, Sears and Freedman (1967) noted that the empirical evidence of people actively avoiding dissonant information was lacking and even contradictory. They claimed that although preference for opinion-reinforcing information exists, people do not actively disengage themselves from using contradictory information. McGuire (1968) similarly claimed that dissonance avoidance was a weak motivation to guide the acquisition of political information. Examining the political news preferences of both adolescents and adults, Chaffee, Saphir, Graf, Sandvig, and Hahn (2001) found that for people who are politically involved with high interest and knowledge, the daily news sources contained both opinion-reinforcing and opinion-challenging channels. They argued for individuals who were politically interested and active, preference for opinion-reinforcing information did not exist and their news consumption consisted of both opinion-reinforcing and opinion-challenging information.

Recently, the increased availability in channels and news media has revived the need to study the patterns of audiences' selective exposure and its influence. The lack of empirical evidence supporting selective exposure in earlier studies, according to Iyengar and Hahn (2009), can be explained by the unbiased "point-counterpoint" media coverage regardless of the channel (See D'Alessio & Allen, 2000). News was not a political message that people would selectively choose according to their political beliefs and ideology because of the limited number of available news channels. However, now with increased availabilities of media

channels, it is not only more likely for people to choose other media contents rather than political news, and when they do decide to use political news, they will seek out news that are agreeable to them (Prior, 2005). In addition, with increased channels to choose from, Mullainathan and Shleifer (2005) suggested that news organizations need to cater to their viewers' political preferences for economic incentives (e.g. niche viewership among conservatives, like Fox News viewers), resulting in increased number of news channels that shows their positions on political issues rather than providing unbiased coverage

Scholars have started to raise concern that the current news media environment discourages audience to choose any news that disagrees with their political opinion, which in turn reduces any chance of cross-cutting exposure that can happen via the news media (Hindman, 2009; Sunstein, 2007). Sunstein (2001), for example, worried that the new media environment with increased choices is promoting a fragmented and polarized citizenry. Refuting the optimistic view of the Internet bringing together diverse groups of people, Hindman (2009) found that the Internet is used to find information that is already in alignment with users' political preferences, not necessarily new and different information sources. Iyengar and Han (2009) focused on the conservative cable news channel *Fox News* and found that although Democrats and Independents showed no preference for news channels except for not choosing *Fox News*, Republicans showed high preference for *Fox News*, not only for hard news but also for soft news topics. These findings suggest that for committed political believers, exposure to political disagreement is

less tolerable, especially when they can choose otherwise (Huckfeldt, Johnson, & Sprague, 2002). Especially with the tendency to perceive news media to be biased against their views (i.e., hostile media phenomenon), cross-cutting exposure becomes less likely among citizens when combined with the already existing tendency of selective exposure (See Goldman & Mutz, 2011, p. 42).

Garrett (2009a, 2009b) claimed that the strength of an individual's aversion to opinion-challenging information is weaker than his or her desire for opinion-reinforcing information. Also, she suggested that once people do choose to read opinion-challenging information, they spend much more time processing it, which reflects a willingness to engage with (not necessarily be persuaded by) the other perspective (Garrett, 2009b, p. 279). Although she provided compelling evidence that people choosing to read opinion-challenging information would spend time processing it, what remains unanswered is under what condition(s) individuals will decide to engage in selective exposure. Without specific reasons or motivations, voluntary cross-cutting news use is not the natural tendency or an easy goal to achieve for most people. Similarly, Brundidge (2010a) argued that exposure to political disagreement in online environment is at best inadvertent, with strong partisans more likely to engage in selective exposure than moderate partisans. Whether selective exposure exists or not is mixed in findings. The unanswered question is how can selective exposure be discouraged and what can motivate ordinary citizens to actively seek diverse political news. Close examination of earlier literature in selective exposure and cognitive dissonance theory provides a few

suggestions. Scholars who questioned the existence of selective exposure suggested that when individuals perceive the opinion-challenging information to be useful, and when are confident they can easily refute the opposing information, they will choose to pay attention to dissonant information and spend time processing it (Valentino et al., 2009). More specifically, Festinger (1964) later revised the cognitive dissonance theory to include some conditions in which people would actively search for information disagreeing with their viewpoints. These conditions included individuals' perceived ability to refute the opposing statements, utility of dissonant information for further decisions, and the opportunity to revise one's decisions (Frey, 1986, p. 47). According to Sears and Freedman (1967), when individuals see the utility of the opinion-challenging information, they are less likely to avoid dissonant information. On a similar note, when the source of supporting information was perceived as credible to users and needed for future references, people preferred to expose themselves to dissonant information (Frey, 1981).

These contingent conditions of selective exposure provide guidelines as to when people are more likely to be balanced in their news use, regardless of the common *comfort* to mainly use news sources that is agreeable to their position. The reason why selective exposure in political news becomes problematic is not only limited to the polarization of information sources. Selective exposure to only agreeable information sources can result in polarization of attitudes as well (Stroud, 2010, 2011). With different information comes different perspective, and such different perspective might hinder any political agreement or compromise needed

for any policy decisions and changes (Stroud, 2007). The tendency of polarization is a result of partisan-based selective exposure to news, and people with strong political commitments were more likely to selectively choose news channels that are congenial to their beliefs and become much more polarized toward opposing perspectives (Stroud, 2007). Such tendency is more profound when the issue is perceived as personally relevant to the individual (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Iyengar et al., 2008) or holds moral values that the individual considers to be highly important (Guttman & Thompson, 1996)

Political discussions involving diverse opinions can motivate people to use more opinion-challenging news sources by making the opinion-challenging information seem more useful to them for future references. In the next section, the benefits of online discussions compared to face-to-face discussions are explained by examining the deliberative democracy model.

Deliberative democracy and political disagreement

Democracy thrives on differences. The significance of democracy over other ruling political system lies in the fact that “everybody sees and hears from different position (Arendt, 1958, p. 57).” Living in a democratic society requires differences to be expressed, acknowledged and appreciated. The notion of deliberative democracy lies on such premise that political differences need to be spoken and discussed so that different information can be shared, better opinions can be formed (or reformed), and further discussion participation can be encouraged. Fishkin (2009) defined it as “the process by which individuals sincerely weight the merits of

competing arguments in discussions together (p. 33).” In other words, deliberative democracy is centered on the process of opinion formation by political discussions instead of voting-centered notions of democracy (Chambers, 2003). During deliberation, differences are expressed and ideally, the best conclusions for public issues can be reached.

Scholars have suggested various types of outcomes from participating in political discussions. First of all, political discussion is found to encourage further political activities. For example, Kim, Wyatt, and Katz (1999) showed that political news use was closely related to not only opinion formation but also opinion expression. That is, the more information an individual has, the more likely he or she will feel confident enough to express the thoughts. Similarly, a person’s exposure to political disagreements via political discussions led to a better understanding of oppositional positions; more knowledge of opposing arguments; and willingness to engage in further political discussions, even with someone who disagrees with him or her (Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Mutz, 2002; Mutz & Martin, 2001; Mutz & Mondak, 2006). Scholars agree that the main benefit of such political discussions is the exposure to various opinions, including opposing opinions and information (J. Kim & Kim, 2008; Price, Cappella, & Nir, 2002).

However, whether the actual discussion can take place in real life outside of formal deliberations, such as Deliberative Polling (Fishkin, 2009), among ordinary citizens is a different issue. Many survey research have continuously indicated that American citizens rarely talk about political affairs (Putnam, 2000), and when they

do talk about politics, it happens among the likeminded (Mutz, 2006). Putnam (2000) argued that it is the decline of social capital that resulted in the decrease of quality political discussions. Mutz (2006) found that when political discussions do happen, it usually revolves around those who share similar opinions, such as family or friends, and those who are active in political discussions are those who are already politically involved and active in expressing their opinion, not those who are less engaged. The problem is not so much the frequency of the political conversation, but the conversations with the likeminded from similar backgrounds do little to promote the cause of deliberation to general public (Fishkin, 2009; Mutz, 2006, p. 54).

Berelson and Steiner (1964) stated, “people tend to see and hear communications that are favorable or congenial to their predispositions” (p. 529). These predispositions include “sex role, educational status, interest and involvement, ethnic status, political attitude, aesthetic position, and indeed, any way of characterizing people that matters to them” (p. 530). In other words, when people consider the topic as relevant and important, they have the tendency to find congenial opinions and information sources to avoid any communication channel that may cause dissonance to them. When choosing conversation/discussion partners, studies show that most Americans who consider politics as an important part of their lives tend to speak about issues mostly with those who agree with them (Mutz, 2006; Mutz & Mondak, 2006). Why would citizens acknowledge the benefits of deliberation involving disagreements yet avoid such interaction? Scholars suggest

there are many social-psychological processes that impedes deliberation or even political conversation involving disagreements from happening. For example, to learn political difference, one has to be exposed to situations where political discussion is held, and it is common for people to feel reluctant to speak out their opinion when their opinions are not the majority (Ho & McLeod, 2008), or feel socially pressured not to express one's political opinion in fear that they might offend others (Mutz, 2006). Dominance in conversation by those who are active and eloquent in the discussions can be another reason why some would refrain from participating in deliberation (Sanders, 1997). Well-known as the spiral of silence effect (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), scholars have found that voicing personal opinions, such as that of political opinions, in a public setting or face-to-face communication settings can be intimidating for most people because of the fear of isolation (Matthes, Rios Morrison, & Schemer, 2010).

For these reasons, some scholars suggested that rather than direct face-to-face deliberation, online deliberation can provide the benefits of exposure to disagreements (Cappella, et al., 2002; Ho & McLeod, 2008; Jacobs, et al., 2009; Price, et al., 2002). Political discussions in a face-to-face interaction has its benefits of providing formal structure to deliberation and providing an environment for civil discourse while still having the chance to listen to disagreeing opinions (Burkhalter, Gastil, & Kelshaw, 2002; Fishkin, 2009; Gastil, 2000), however the availability of such formal deliberation is very limited (Cappella, et al., 2002). Also, findings from specifically orchestrated deliberation forums, such as those suggested by scholars

supporting face to face deliberation, is hard to be generalized or applied to everyday political life (Mutz, 2006, p. 59).

It is not only through direct face-to-face interpersonal communication that people can participate in deliberation. Recent studies show the importance of online discussion boards or comment board as a mean to expose politically diverse opinions (Jacobs, Cook, & Delli Carpini, 2009; Price et al., 2002; Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009). In fact, studies show that most Americans are exposed to politically different and diverse opinions more from online discussion boards or other mass communication channels than from interpersonal communication channels (Mutz & Martin, 2001; Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009).

Scholars who argue that online discussion can serve as an alternative to face-to-face political communication finds that on top of the benefits from face-to-face political discussion, people feel less intimidated to express their political opinions when online because of reduced social-psychological influences, such as fear of isolation (Ho & McLeod, 2008) or social accountability (Mutz, 2006). Online discussions can serve as an effective forum that fosters information gathering and exchanges among citizens (Cappella, Price, & Nir, 2002; Delli Carpini, 2000). The anonymity and reduced social cues can sometimes encourage a more lively and honest discussion about political issues among citizens (Papacharissi, 2004). Brundidge (2010a) argued that online environment enables inadvertent exposure to political differences more likely than face-to-face communication because of the weakened social boundaries between online news and online discussions. These

studies all suggest that if exposure to political differences were to take place, it is much more likely to be seen in the online environment.

In addition, participating in online discussions require further information processing that requires reading and writing others' perspective. Wiley and Voss (1999) found that learning is enhanced when arguments are written based on the provided information. Similarly, Cappella, Price and Nir (2002) suggested that the knowledge of arguments of the issue, counterarguments and refutations, are the measure of the depth of knowledge held (p. 75). That is, when one can identify multiple explanations with evidence, counterarguments to their own explanations, and a resolution in favor of their own explanations, they are considered at the highest levels of knowledge about the issue under discussion. Reading through posts written by those who agree or disagree with each other provides a public sphere where one can learn the reasons for arguments, counterarguments and refutations about the issue. Based on the differential gain model, Scheufele (1999), another unique benefit of online discussion is that learning others' opinions is done via reading their posts which require more careful processing of disagreement than merely listening to others' opinions.

In summary, online discussion boards and other formats of online interactivity can serve as a public sphere where opinions are expressed and disagreements are encountered comparatively more so than interpersonal communication channels in everyday life. Building on this premise, the next chapter

will examine the outcomes of deliberation with specific focus on further information use encouraged by heterogeneity in political discussion environment.

Further outcomes of deliberation: Citizen communication model and news choices

Deliberative democracy links the individual political activities to a more social-level political expression (Scheufele, Niesbet, Brossard, & Niesbet, 2004). Political news media use and political decision-making processes happen at the individual level, and these processes usually lead to some form of social expressions and activities, such as individuals talking about the topic to each other, expressing political opinions together at a demonstration, or participating as a group to support a candidate (Scheufele, Niesbet, et al., 2004). Although individual news media use and decision-making processes are important elements of democratic citizenry, these social activities, such as political discussions and political conversations with members in the social network, has also been considered essential elements to encourage activities in democratic citizenry (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948).

In regards to political discussion and participation, some argued that increased ambivalence resulted from exposure to political disagreement in discussions leads to reduced political participation and voting (Lazarsfeld, et al., 1948; Mutz, 2006). On the other hand, others argue that citizens in politically heterogeneous social environment are no more and no less likely to engage in participatory activities (Huckfeldt, Johnson, & Sprague, 2004; Nir, 2005) and

heterogeneous discussion networks can even promote various forms of political participation (Scheufele, Niesbet, et al., 2004). Fishkin (2007) argued that engaging in a full discourse with a different point of view is different from mere exposure to disagreeing opinions, and mere exposure to disagreement in social settings may hinder further participation in politics. Also, the difference between these two aspects can be explained by how scholars differently operationalized exposure to disagreements. The missing type of exposure to disagreement is via Internet, such as online communities. While different scholars have been interested in different aspects and outcomes of deliberation, these results strongly support how deliberation and discussions are necessary for healthy democracy.

In an attempt to build a model that explains the paths leading from political discussions to other political variables, scholars at the University of Wisconsin theorized such a relationship first into the communication mediation model and later the citizen communication model. First, the communication mediation model (i.e., the O-S-O-R model of communication) was introduced as a corrective to the overly direct models of communication research, the simple stimulus to response (Stimulus (S)-Response(R)) perspectives (Shah, et al., 2007). The simple stimulus-response perspective examined only the direct effect of mass media use on any political participatory behavior. On the other hand, in the O-S-O-R model, 'Orientation' includes "structural, cultural, cognitive and motivational characteristics the audience brings to the reception situation that affect the impact of the message" and the second "O" represents "what is likely to happen between

the reception of the message and the response of the audience member” (McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 1994, p. 146-147). In this model, the interpersonal communication and news use are both considered as a stimuli (S), focusing on how both stimuli jointly mediate the effects of demographic, dispositional, and structural factors on cognitive and behavioral outcomes.

In the citizen communication model, a step for reasoning (R) is introduced between the stimuli (S) and the outcome orientations and subsequent responses (O(Outcome Orientation)-R(Response)). The reasoning step includes mental elaboration (intrapersonal reflection) and collective consideration (an interpersonal and intrapersonal reflection). Cho et al. (2009) stated that because the reasoning may not be limited to rational processing and could be emotionally charged, they operationalized the concept to refer to the depth of reasoning, not necessarily the rationality of reasoning. It takes different forms such as reflection on media content (Eveland, 2001), anticipation of future conversations, or composition of ideas for expressions (Cho, et al., 2009). The citizen communication model, thus, summarizes the process from the individual variables, such as political news use and individual information processing, to the social-level outcomes of political participation.

The citizen communication model introduces individual reasoning to link individual news use to social-level participation. However, this model does not account for the impact of heterogeneity of interpersonal discussion networks, which can be considered as a characteristic of the first S (Stimulus), on the audience’s changing news consumption patterns. To address this important feature of

interpersonal communication as a stimulus, Scheufele et al. (2004) modified the model to include the social settings in which political discussions occur. Naming it the S (Socio-structural Heterogeneity)-S (Stimulus)-O (Orientation)-R (Response) model, their model links not only interpersonal communication but also the character of the interpersonal communication channels, as to whether it is heterogeneous or homogeneous in political opinions to explain outcomes of political discussions. In this model, the first O (orientation) is replaced with the first S, socio-structural variables that include interpersonal communication network diversity. This model explains how the need for information on a wider range of topics could be encouraged by exposure to political disagreements through social settings.

According to Scheufele et al. (2004), there are two roles of the social structures involving heterogeneous discussion that promotes further political participation. First, discussions involving diverse opinions motivate individuals to re-evaluate issues that involve conflicts (Knight & Johnson, 1994; Mutz, 2002). It also leads to a more cognitive processing of political information, such as elaboration, that leads to higher political knowledge (Eveland Jr., 2004). In the S-S-O-R model, authors called such role of network heterogeneity the political “learning function” of heterogeneous political discussions.

The second role of network heterogeneity is the motivation-for-information function. Political discussions and anticipation of future discussions changes the utility of political news (Hively & Eveland, Jr., 2009; McLeod & Becker, 1974). Scheufele et al. (2004) noted that heterogeneous political discussions also lead to

post hoc newsgathering, not only for future political discussion participation but also to bolster one's original opinion and lead the person to perhaps rethink his or her original position. This motivation for further information is not limited to only opinion-reinforcing sources, but because of the differing opinions people heard during the discussion, it will also lead people to examine the opinion-challenging news sources (p. 332).

The S-S-O-R model specified the interpersonal communication setting as to include network heterogeneity that involves political disagreement within the social settings in which political discussion or conversations happened. When the political discussions or conversations happening in interpersonal communication settings include those with opposing political opinions, individuals are forced to follow up on the interaction by seeking out more information in the mass media or other sources that may bolster their initial positions or even rethink their original issue stance (Scheufele et al., 2004, p. 321). That is, activated by the new information or idea in the interpersonal communication, individuals now have different motivation for using the political news and may advance to different sources to verify their claim or the claims made by others. When faced with position-divergent arguments during discussions, individuals try to maintain their cognitive balance and justify their attitudinal position, but they also use opinion-challenging content because it is considered useful in ameliorating the perceived negative consequences described by their opponents (Arpan & Nabi, 2011; Valentino et al., 2009). People want to make sure they can refute the opposing opinions, which leads to not only choosing

to use the opinion-challenging news sources but also to processing them more carefully.

In summary, political discussion with disagreeing others can connect the individual level political activities to a more socio-structural level. Furthermore, exposure to political disagreement via political discussions can encourage more careful use of individual level news use to include more diversified information channels even some that they may not agree with.

Emotional responses to political disagreement: Affective intelligence theory

The definition of *deliberative democracy* emphasizes the role of discussion among citizens, which aims to produce reasonable and well-informed opinions that the participants are willing to revise in light of discussions, new information, and claims by other citizens (Chambers, 2003). However, with such definition of deliberation, it is hard to find space for any emotional responses during discussions and debates. For this reason, some scholars have argued that defining deliberation only via rational discussions is an unrealistic definition of what political debates look like in reality (Eliasoph, 1998; Schudson, 2001). For example, Sanders (1997) argued that deliberative democracy only favors a certain form of expression and discourse that encourages the rational and logical arguments which results in certain people dominating the public dialogue, and it is usually those who already have the privilege within the democratic system dominating the deliberation process. Similarly, Schudson (2001) claimed that only recently did politics become centered around reason and rational thinking and political participation in America

used to be described with enthusiasm and high emotional engagement in partisan involvement. Reaching rational agreements that meet the interests of involved groups is the ideal conclusion for any political discussions and debates. However, when political discussions involve issues of personal interest, it is inevitable that participants show some level of emotional responses caused by apparent disagreements. Interpersonal communication can activate different emotions depending on whether the information exchanged is consistent or contrary to one's political predispositions (Parsons, 2010). For example, Huckfeldt and Sprague (2004; 1987) found that political discussions with like-minded discussants activated positive feelings such as enthusiasm, hope, and pride. On the other hand, political discussions with those holding different political opinions can trigger negative emotions (Mutz, 2006).

Affective intelligence theory (Marcus, et al., 2000) organizes the role of these emotional responses involved in political discussions. As seen from the studies above, political discussions can activate different emotions depending on whether the information exchanged during the discussion is consistent with or contrary to individuals' predispositions. According to affective intelligence theory, political environment activates two separate emotional systems: the disposition system or surveillance system depending on whether people's response to the environment is positive or negative. The two separate systems can work within the individual depending on the political environment he/she faces. When the political environment is consistent with one's knowledge or predisposition, positive

emotional responses are experienced leading to heuristic approach to information (Mackuen, Marcus, Neuman, & Keele, 2007). That is, with consistency in the environment and one's political predispositions, people are not required to sort through the alternatives to reach their best choices. The disposition system is associated with making decisions through existing habits and long held opinions and attitudes. When an individual is not threatened by the information, this in turn produces positive feelings of enthusiasm, hope, pride, elation, happiness and excitement.

The surveillance system, on the contrary, is activated when people are faced with unfamiliar and uncertain political environments (Mackuen, et al., 2007, p. 128). With novel or threatening information that is contrary to existing information, negative feelings such as anxiety, worry or fear are produced. The unfamiliar and uncertain environment triggers negative emotional responses that lead to the deliberative choices route that relies on explicit learning of alternatives and thoughtful consideration of available choices.

Based on affective intelligence theory, the role of emotional responses during political discussion and its influence on opinion-bolstering or opinion-challenging news use can be inferred. When people are part of a discussion with like-minded perspective, it is more likely that they would see the context as familiar and rewarding. Under such familiar context, the need to engage in extensive information search is limited, leading to habituated information choices that rely on routines, such as their ideology convictions. In other words, rational and deliberative

information search is too time-consuming and too costly (Mackuen, et al., 2007). It is more efficient to rely on previously learned routines thus leading to habituated media choices. Emotional responses during such discussion environment will be more positive, such as enthusiasm toward the discussion, which mediates the influence of contexts on information choices.

For political discussions with those who hold dissonant opinions, emotional responses are more likely to be negative mainly due to the uncomfortable stage one experiences when faced with opposition. It is also be perceived as an unfamiliar and uncertain context described in affective intelligence theory that makes participants uncomfortable, mostly anxious, worried and fearful (Marcus, Mackuen, Wolak, & Keele, 2006). The surveillance system thus motivates information choices that is based on what the participants learned from the disagreements as novel surroundings, leading them to be more deliberative, and even balanced in information search (Valentino, et al., 2009). Deliberative information search during political discussion is motivated by the desire to reduce uncertainty (See Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

In political discussions with those who hold similar opinion, familiarity guides people's information choices resulting in habitual information selection. In other words, when surrounded by position-convergent opinions in political discussions, citizens will not be motivated to branch out of the familiar news use cycle and have balanced news use because there's no need for such information. Also, exposure to position-convergent opinions will activate positive emotional

responses toward their position on the issue. As participants experience these positive emotions during position-convergent discussion, they will become more likely to rely on routine news choices such as familiar and agreeable news sources.

Changing the utility of opinion-challenging information: The role of discussion participation in opinion-challenging news use

The final section of the theoretical review assesses the information utility of opinion-challenging news. As mentioned briefly in the earlier section, when individuals see the utility of the opinion-challenging information, and see the opinion-challenging information as necessary and needed, avoidance of dissonant information decreases (Frey, 1986; Sears & Freedman, 1967). In other words, individuals need to have the motivation to use opinion-challenging information.

Research has shown that the motivation for political information is an important predictor of political news use (Diddi & LaRose, 2006; Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Tewksbury & Althaus, 2000). The theoretical background for these claims comes from uses and gratification approach. Uses and gratification (U&G) scholars posit that individuals use news media for many different reasons and are active in choosing what they need when they use the media. U&G perspective from the early 1960s provides theoretical framework that explains the motives of why individuals choose a particular news media (Ruggiero, 2000). For the purpose of this dissertation, the U&G perspective provides explanations for what types of gratifications or motivations can guide individuals to search and pay attention to political news sources that may challenge their opinions.

For earliest researchers in mass communications, mass media was considered to have a powerful influence on users, leading the direction of the study to be generally focused on the effects of mass media (McQuail, 1994). When earlier studies failed to account for the stimulus-effect model of mass media research, scholars began to ask questions about not what media do to people but what people do with the media. U&G emerged as an approach to examine the active use of mass media by the audience and the audience's use of mass media for their own purposes. Blumler and Katz (1974) described the U&G as the social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in need gratifications and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones. According to U&G, people choose the mass media message that fulfills their needs and motives. As Katz, Blumer, and Gurevitz (1974) described, mass media audiences are: (a) active users of mass media (b) who are well aware of their needs, and (c) can actively look for which media (or content) to choose among many options. Unlike earlier audience studies that viewed mass media audience to be passive from a rather elitist perspective, the U&G approach studies the mass media use more from the audience's perspective.

Researchers have applied U&G to study various ways people use mass media for their gratifications. For example, Blumer and Katz (1974) diversified the application of U&G to include movies, books, and even literature. Most studies have applied U&G to study the motives and gratifications of users to both older and

newer forms of mass media, starting with radio (Cantril & Allport, 1935), newspaper (Berelson, 1949), and later the Internet (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Some scholars suggest that the patterns of Internet use can be explained well with U&G because the digital technology has altered the exposure pattern of many media consumers in unprecedented ways (Finn, 1997). With new technologies, more media choices are presented to people, and the motives and satisfactions that guide these choices can be explained by U&G (Ruggiero, 2000).

Over the years of U&G research, scholars have identified different needs and motives among people using mass media contents. The initial categorization of people's needs by Blumer and Katz (1974) included cognitive needs, affective needs (emotional), integrative needs (combination of cognitive and affective needs), integrative function (social needs), and escape. Generally, while using different terms, the common need states described by U&G literature includes surveillance for information, entertainment for diversion, personal relationships, and personal identity for value reinforcement (Katz, Haas, & Gurevitch, 1973; McQuail, Blumer, & Brown, 1972). Surveillance for information is one of the core need states that is identified by most studies and is of particular importance for political news use. For example, Kaye and Johnson (2002) identified four different motives among people who use the Internet to obtain political information: guidance (i.e., to find help making political decisions), surveillance for information, social utility, and entertainment. According to them, guidance and surveillance were the two main

reasons people used the Internet for political information. Getting help in making political decisions and keeping up-to-date with political information and news were important needs that encouraged individuals to choose political content on the Internet.

Studies linking the U&G approach to political communication variables support this claim that surveillance for information need is an influential factor in predicting other political behaviors. For example, surveillance need is usually the most influential factor in predicting political knowledge among college students (Tewksbury & Althaus, 2000; Vincent & Basil, 1997). Similarly, Beaudoin and Thorson (2004) found that the information gratification obtained from media use strongly predicted an increase in political knowledge. In the 2008 U.S. presidential election, information motive was found to be a significant predictor of political knowledge among 12- to 17-year-old teenagers as well (E. Thorson, Mayer, & Jahng, 2009). Having information and surveillance motives can also encourage attitudes toward news media and politics, such as political trust and interest in civic engagement. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) found that when audience used the Internet for information uses, their satisfaction with the media was highest. Also, Shah, Kwak, and Holbert (2001) found that using the Internet to obtain information was a significant predictor of civic trust and civic engagement. Although television has been notoriously blamed for decreasing social capital, such as civic trust and engagement (Putnam, 2000), Shah, Kwak, and Lance (2001) found that even

television, when it is mainly used for hard news, can increase people's level of trust to other people, the government, and civic activities.

The surveillance motives for more political information can easily be fulfilled by the availability of channels through the Internet. As Garrett (2009a) mentioned, once the need of surveillance for opinion-challenging information is triggered, people would spend time processing and understanding the information. What encourages the individual to be at such a state of surveillance for opinion-challenging information is left unanswered, mainly because U&G studies have not diversified the political news use as to include opinion-reinforcing news use or opinion-challenging news use.

Studies on the role of the Internet in U&G can shed light on this question. For example, Ruggireo (2000) claimed that Internet has three features that differentiate itself from traditional media: interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity. In other words, Internet enables two-way interactive communication (interactivity), sends more personalized information to the audience rather than one-way mass information (demassification), and gives people the ability to use the media at their convenient time (asynchronicity).

The interactivity provided by the Internet is of main interest for this study, because the interaction with those who have different political positions based on different information sources can trigger surveillance motives for further news use, even cross-cutting news use (Scheufele, Niesbet, et al., 2004). That is, although interactivity may not be the foremost drive for using the political online news for

many individuals, it is often included in online news websites as a form of discussion on comment boards or chatrooms. These interactive features in political news channels can provide frequent exposure to different political opinions from people outside of one's social network. Exposure to various opinions through such interactivity can drive the surveillance motive for not only opinion-reinforcing news but also opinion-challenging information.

Additionally, media choice model (MCM) can explain the process in which individuals choose to use opinion-challenging information. MCM (E. Thorson & Duffy, 2006) tries to address the limited predictability of U&G by breaking down the blackbox of the process between the need state of individuals and their media choices. According to MCM, there are four different need states in the new media environment: connectivity, information, entertainment, and shopping. These need states interact with different aspects of media use, such as individual differences (e.g., age, income, gender, education, party identification, etc.), aperture (i.e., an opening or opportunity to deliver a message to a consumer at a time of maximum response), media presentation (authoritative, created, opinionated), and media features (e.g., participation, immediacy, interactivity, mobility) to predict the media choices of individuals. The path starts with a person's individual needs and goes through the demographic factors and aperture. After these factors, people would choose media as they compare the media features and media presentation that best fit their needs.

People select the content of opinion-challenging information when they perceive that the reward value of using the message outweighs the costs of receiving the message (Atkin, 1985). Exposure to disagreeing opinions can change the value of opinion-challenging information by encouraging two different need states: connectivity and information. Connectivity is the need to stay connected and engaged with other human beings. Information need is the motive to identify, understand, and cope with the happenings in the environment (Thorson & Duffy, 2006). With media features such as interactivity and online participation, people are exposed to different thoughts and opinions about various topics, including politics. By listening or reading other's opinions about the issue, they will feel more encouraged to think about the issue, thus leading them to have higher information need and even the need to be involved in the discussion (Ng & Detenber, 2005). The willingness to engage in the discussion can be linked as the connectivity need state and the need to organize opinions based on both old and new information. That is, when individuals read different political opinions expressed in the online discussion boards and their positions challenged by other views, the utility of the opinion-challenging information will increase since knowing the opposing arguments can equip the participant with better arguments. U&G and MCM explain the change in people's need state toward opinion-challenging information through increased interactivity of the Internet, not only with people holding similar opinions but also with those who may hold opposing opinion. The process of choosing political information over other media content—through connecting need states, individual

differences, and media features—can also guide the path that explains how people choose opinion-challenging news sources.

Nonetheless, U&G approach is not free of theoretical limitations, especially in regards to providing more detailed explanations of the role of human motivations on information selection. Building on such theoretical limitations, Kim (2007) applied the social psychological approach to motivation on information selections by examining the role of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. She argued that the ultimate motivational forces behind political information processing are the personal issue importance (i.e. intrinsic motivation) and situational information processing goals (i.e. extrinsic motivation). In her experiment, she found that extrinsic motivation overrode the strong influence of personal involvement on political information processing. That is, when participants were asked to explain their position and be accurate in explaining the candidate, they searched for information beyond their personal involvement regardless of one's existing interest in the issue.

Similarly, Turner, Yao, Baker, Goodman and Materese (2010) found when individuals are expecting interactions with others, such as through a debate, they were more likely to seek counter-attitudinal information. Interestingly, they also found that when participants were confident in their position but were not forewarned for further debate with others, they chose less counter-attitudinal information than confident but forewarned participants. The same pattern was found for the unconfident participants. They noted that such use of counter-

attitudinal information was mainly for maintaining one's position and enhancing prior opinions. Yet, it is noteworthy that the earlier claims of scholars in selective exposure were supported by empirical findings.

Participating in political discussion changes the utility of the information by providing the extrinsic motivation for political information processing (Valentino et al., 2009). That is, for a person to bolster his or her political opinion when faced with disagreements, it is best to know the others' reasons and evidences for their claims increasing the likelihood to use opinion-challenging information (Scheufele et al., 2008). Given the motivation for opinion-challenging news use, it is more likely that they will strive to present their opinion more accurately by addressing the information others' used in their opinions. However, when disagreements are not present and people do not have to express their political opinion, the need for further information will not exist, resulting in less use in opinion-challenging news or information.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES AND QUESTIONS

This chapter organizes what the literature suggests about exposure to disagreement and its influence on selective exposure to research hypotheses and research questions guiding this study.

Studies in selective exposure suggest that people prefer information sources, and interpersonal networks that are similar with them. Political opinions guide the news media channel choices and political conversations usually revolves around people holding similar opinions. Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that this is to maintain one's cognitive equilibrium. People are generally cognitive misers who refuse to process further information when they see the effort to be unnecessary, thus leading to selective exposure to agreeable information and use less that challenges their perspectives. Similarly, affective intelligence theory suggests that when people are not exposed to threats, habituated choice route activated leading them to use the familiar information, not the unfamiliar.

On the other hand, when faced with disagreements in online discussions, both theories suggest a different route that suggests the decrease in selective exposure to agreeable news sources. Cognitive dissonance theory postulates that when people consider the opinion-challenging information to be useful, there would be less selective exposure. When reading through online discussions consisted of disagreements, people may not find themselves agreeing to these posts, but being the majority in the discussion boards can motivate them to search for further information, even when the content may challenge one's position. Similar

hypothesis can be drawn from affective intelligence theory. That is, it can be inferred that exposure to disagreeing opinions as the majority of the discussion will likely threaten one's position that will activate deliberative choice route of information use which carefully examines different options of information to reach the best conclusion.

In summary, it can be inferred from the previous literature that when people are exposed to online discussions that are consisted of opinions that are convergent to their position, they will have less motivation to expand their information use to include any news that are not consistent with their position. Thus, the following research hypotheses are stated:

H1: Exposure to position-convergent online discussion boards as a causal factor will result in more selective exposure to agreeable news sources.

H1a: Exposure to position-convergent online discussion boards will cause higher perceived utilities for opinion-bolstering news.

H1b: Exposure to position-convergent online discussion boards will cause participants to choose more number of opinion-bolstering news

On the other hand, when people are exposed to online discussions consisted of majority disagreeing with them, they will be more likely to use opinion-challenging news sources and find them to be helpful. Thus, the second hypothesis is stated as followed:

H2: Exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards as a causal factor will result in less selective exposure to agreeable news sources.

H2a: Exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards will cause higher perceived utility for opinion-challenging news articles.

H2b: Exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards will cause participants to choose more number of opinion-challenging news choices.

Discussion participation changes the utility of opinion-challenging news articles. That is, when people are expecting political discussion to take place, and that they have to express their opinions in the discussion, they would use opinion-challenging news not to be persuaded by the position, but to prepare their arguments. Expectation of discussion motivates people to use more news media, and encourage them to cognitively elaborate on their position more closely (Eveland, 2001; Hively & Eveland Jr., 2009). As Sears and Freedman stated (1967), when people think that they see opinion-challenging information to be useful, their tendency to selectively expose oneself to only agreeable information will decrease. Similarly, studies in deliberative democracy suggest that participating in discussion involving disagreements increased the overall news use on the issue. While these studies did not address whether their increased news use included both opinion-challenging and opinion-bolstering news use, the increased understanding and

tolerance toward disagreement caused by participating in deliberation can suggest that the opinion-challenging news use increased as well.

In summary, discussion participation changes people's motivation for news use. That is, participating in discussions increases the information motives for individuals, which in turn increases the motives for using opinion-challenging news as well. Thus, the second research hypothesis of this study is stated as followed:

H3: Participation in online discussion boards as a causal factor will result in less selective exposure to agreeable news sources.

H3a: Participation in online discussion boards as a causal factor will result in higher perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles.

H3b: Participation in online discussion boards as a causal factor will result in higher number of opinion-challenging news choices.

Both exposure to disagreement via online discussion boards and discussion participation can influence the level of selective exposure. Whether discussion participation will moderate the influence of exposure to disagreement on the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news use and the number of opinion-challenging news choices can be raised as a research question for this study. That is, when participants are required to post their opinions on the online discussion boards mainly consisted of disagreeing opinions, the need to use opinion-challenging news will be higher to address the disagreements. On the other hand,

with no need to prepare their opinion in the non-participation condition in discussion boards that is mainly consisted of agreeing opinions, the need to use opinion-challenging news will be the least because of the lack of motivation to prepare one's argument.

H4: The effects of exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards as a causal factor will be contingent on the discussion participation.

H4a: The impact of exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards on the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news will be higher in discussion participation condition.

H4b: The impact of exposure to position-divergent discussion boards on the number of opinion-challenging news choices will be higher in discussion participation condition.

Finally, emotional responses, both positive and negative emotional responses, are suggested as the mediator between exposure to disagreement and selective exposure. According to affective intelligence theory, disagreements can arouse negative emotional responses, such as anxiety, worries or fear about one's opinion. More specifically, affective intelligence theory suggests these negative emotional responses work as the conditional response leading to more deliberative choices in information. Being exposed to disagreeing opinions can be considered as the unexpected and novel situation that increases uncertainty. In unfamiliar and

uncertain context, such as being exposed to disagreeing opinions, negative emotional responses, such as anxiety, worry or fear, will increase. This will result in more deliberative choices of information in which people carefully consider all the alternative choices of information, including those that have opposing perspective. As a result, less selective exposure to agreeable sources will happen. Thus, the following research hypotheses are stated:

H5a: Negative emotional responses toward the online discussion boards will mediate the relationship between exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards on the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles. That is, exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards will increase the negative emotions of participants, such as anxiety, worry and fear, which will increase the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles.

H5b: Negative emotional responses toward the online discussion will mediate the relationship between exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards on the number of opinion-challenging news article choices. Exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards will increase the negative emotions of participants, such as anxiety, worry and fear, which will increase the number of opinion-challenging news choices.

On the other hand, positive emotional responses, such as hope, pride or enthusiasm about one's opinion are postulated to influence habituated choices route

suggested in affective intelligence theory. When exposed to online discussion boards that are mainly consisted of agreeable opinions, positive emotional responses will increase. In other words, opinion-consistent discussion boards can be considered as the domain of the familiar, which can encourage the habitual information use for it lacks the challenges toward one's opinion. Without being challenged in one's position on the issue, reading through agreeing opinions will in turn decrease the need to thoughtfully consider the alternative choices. Thus, the final research hypotheses of this study states the mediating relationship of positive and negative emotional responses between exposure to disagreement and selective exposure to agreeable news sources:

H6c: Positive emotional responses toward the online discussion board will mediate the relationship between exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards on the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles. That is, exposure to position-convergent online discussion boards will increase the positive emotional responses of participants, such as hope, pride and enthusiasm, which will decrease the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles.

H6d: Positive emotional responses toward the online discussion boards will mediate the relationship between exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards on the number of opinion-challenging news articles. That is, exposure to position-convergent online discussion boards will increase the positive emotions of

participants, such as hope, pride and enthusiasm, which will decrease the number of opinion-challenging news choices.

RESEARCH METHOD

Experimental Design

A 2 (exposure to disagreements: between-subject) × 2 (participation: within-subject) mixed-design experiment was conducted. Exposure to disagreeing opinions are measured based on whether or not participants viewed the online discussion boards that consisted of opinions that ‘matched’ their position, and discussion participation condition was manipulated.

Pilot Study

Before the main experiment, a pilot study was conducted to select the local issue for the main experiment stimuli and determine the opinion-bolstering and opinion-challenging news articles to measure the dependent variables. 98 undergraduate students from journalism courses were recruited and were given extra credits for their participation. Among the participants 78.6% were female, and 21.4% male and their mean age was 19.24. The majority of participants were Caucasian (88.8%), followed by Hispanic/Latino (5.2%), Asian (4.1%), and other (1%).

A total of six local issues were chosen for the pretest: University smoking policy limiting the smoking area on campus, new Missouri law that prohibits teachers from becoming friends with students on Facebook, the installation of surveillance camera in local downtown area, need to continue “Occupy” Movements in Columbia, and carrying guns on University campus. Participants were asked

whether they agreed or disagreed with the issue (1: Strongly Disagree-8: Strongly Agree). Then they were asked in their interest toward the issue, importance of the issue, and how much they followed the news about the issue (1: Not at all- 7: Very much).

Based on the descriptive statistics of the questions, Facebook Ban in Missouri (Agree= 55.1%; Disagree= 44.9%) and “Occupy” movements (Agree=64.3%; Disagree=35.7%) were selected as they had roughly half of the students agreeing and other half disagreeing to the issue (See Table 1). Other questions that asked the involvement of the issue also showed that students were not either too involved or not involved at all about these issue (See Table 2). Thus, it was assumed that these two issues were similar in involvement and interest to the undergraduate student population, thus reducing the possibility of message effect on the dependent variables.

Participants

Participants for the main experiment were recruited from an undergraduate course at the University of Missouri. Students who participated were compensated extra credit. Basil (1996) argued that college students are a relevant sample for examining a hypothesized relationship among variables, as in this study. Using college students can be justified when a study is designed to test theoretically driven multivariate relationships. Thus, as this study examined the influence of exposure to disagreements on selective exposure to news sources, the processes may be similar among various population.

In total, 44 students were recruited from an undergraduate course in strategic communication. Among the participants, 60% was female and 37.8% male. Majority was Caucasian (84.4%), and Asian (6.7%), African American (4.4%), and 2.2% stated they were regarded as other. Most of them were juniors in college, and the average age for the participants was approximately 21 ($M=20.77$). Students were provided with extra credit for their participation in the study.

Procedures

This experiment was conducted as an online experiment in which students received a web link from the researcher that they can complete within a given time. When participants clicked on the link, they first read a paragraph asking their consent with the brief explanation of the procedures. By proceeding with the study, he/she was considered to have agreed with participating in the study. Participants were first asked about their positions on the two issues chosen as the main stimulus. They were also asked for their involvement on the issue by indicating their level of interest, and how much they considered the issue to be important to them.

After answering the first set of questions, participants read the stimulus discussion boards. The order of discussion issues was randomly presented to the participants. They were asked answered questions about their emotional responses toward the discussion, the level of attention they paid to the news stories, interest in reading news articles and the utility of each news articles. After reading the two discussion boards, they were asked to provide their demographic information and

their student identification number so they can receive their extra credit for participation.

Independent variables

Participants viewed the stimulus online discussion boards, which included the explanation of the controversy for both Facebook Ban in Missouri, and Occupy protests in Columbia, MO. Each discussion had a total of 10 postings of fictional opinions on the issues. The nicknames of the person who posted were all controlled to have no indication of any other demographic information. For each issues, two online discussion boards were created where one consisted of 8 opinions supporting the issue and 2 opinions opposing the issue and the other was consisted of 8 opinions opposing the issue and 2 supporting the issue.

Exposure to disagreement

Exposure to disagreement had two levels: exposure to position-convergent online discussion boards and exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards. Exposure to disagreement was run as a between-subject factor which participants only viewed one condition. For exposure to position-divergent online discussion condition, participants' reported agreement toward the stimulus issue (i.e. Facebook ban or Occupy protests in downtown) was matched with the dominant opinion in the discussion board. For example, for someone who disagreed with the new Missouri law banning teacher-student interaction on Facebook, reading the online discussion board with the majority agreeing to the Facebook ban is considered as exposure to position-divergent online discussion whereas for

someone who agreed with the Facebook ban was considered to be in position-convergent online discussion condition. For the second issue, the Occupy protests in downtown, the same logic was used to create either exposure position-convergent or position-divergent online discussion boards.

Discussion participation

Participation in online discussion was run as a within-subject variable where each participant was exposed to both conditions. Participants were asked to be part of the online discussion by writing their opinions or to only read through the online discussion carefully. For required participation condition, respondents were given an instruction with the stimulus online discussion board that after reading through the discussion they would be asked to post their opinions. On the other hand, when participants were in to non-participation condition no such instructions were given and were only asked to carefully read through the discussion boards.

Mediating variable

Emotional reaction toward political disagreements

Emotional response toward political disagreement was measured using the measurement of emotional responses in affective intelligence theory (Marcus, et al., 2006). After viewing each discussion boards, participants were asked how much they felt hope, pride and elation toward the discussions as the positive emotional responses and anxiety, fear, and worry to measure negative emotional responses (1=Not at all; 7= Very much).

Factor analysis was conducted on the items measuring the emotional responses toward disagreements using principal factors extraction with Varimax rotation. The analysis revealed two factors with positive emotional responses (hope, enthusiasm, pride) in the first factor and negative emotional responses (anxiety, fear, worry) loading in the second factor (See Table 3). The reliability score for positive emotional response was .92 and the negative emotional response was .88.

Dependent Variables

Opinion-challenging news choices

After viewing the experiment stimuli, participants were asked to indicate the how many news articles they would like to read about the stimulus issue. In the discussion participation condition, participants were given an instruction to choose news articles they would like to read as they prepare to post their opinions on the discussion board.

Participants were given a list of 8 news articles with headlines and lead sentences. Four titles and synopses included news supporting the issue (e.g. supporting banning minors from becoming Facebook friends with teachers, supporting “Occupy” movement in Columbia), and against the issue (e.g. against Facebook ban, against “Occupy” movements in Columbia). Then, their news choices was matched with their position on the issue and was labeled as opinion-challenging news choices. For example, for someone who agreed on the Facebook ban, the opinion-challenging news choices would be picking among the four articles that covered opposing perspective on the Facebook ban. Similarly, when someone

agreed with allowing Occupy protests in downtown Columbia, the number of opinion-challenging news choices was to pick among the four articles that covered the story opposing the Occupy protests.

Perceived utility opinion-challenging news choices

To measure the perceived utility of using different news sources, the Web Motivation Index (See Rodgers, Wang, Rettie, & Alpert, 2007) was modified to fit the purpose of this study. For each news article used to measure opinion-challenging news choices, the perceived information utility was asked as followed: how much they would use [the article] for “doing research on [issue],” “get information I need on [issue],” and “search the information I need on [issue] (1 = *least used*, 7 = *most used*).” The reliability score for this item was .98.

Control Variables

In this study, the level of attention participants paid to the news articles, both opinion-bolstering and opinion-challenging news is considered as the reasoning step between the stimuli and response and was used as the control variable. According to the citizen communication model, the level of reasoning involved mental elaboration and consideration (Cho, et al., 2009).

To address how much attention participants paid to both opinion-bolstering and opinion-challenging news articles, three items were used: “I paid close attention picking the articles I’d like to read to learn about the (issue),” “I paid close attention to articles that seem to be supportive of my position on the (issue),” and “I paid close attention to articles that didn’t seem to be supportive of my position on the

(issue).” The Pearson correlation indicated that a moderate, positive and significant relationship existed between participants’ attention to news articles and perceived utility of challenging articles, $r(42)=.65, p<.01$ and the number of opinion-challenging news article choices, $r(42)=.32, p<.05$. Based on these procedures, the influence of attention was adjusted to obtain a more precise effect of the independent variables on the dependent variables. The reliability score for this item was .92.

Manipulation Check

To check for the manipulation of position-convergent and position-divergent online discussion boards, participants were asked after reading the discussion board how much they thought the majority opinion in the online discussion boards agreed with them. Participant manipulation was checked by examining whether participants wrote their opinions when they were randomly asked to do so.

Data Analysis

To test the main effects and interaction effects of exposure to disagreement and discussion participation on perceived utility and number of opinion-challenging news choices, repeated-measures MANCOVA was used with attention to news articles as a covariate. The present experimental design included two dimensions of independent variables: one between-subject factor with two levels (i.e. exposure to position-divergent discussion and exposure to position-convergent discussion), and one within-subject factor with two levels (i.e. participation in the discussion and no participation in the discussion).

To test the mediation hypotheses, bootstrapping was used for analysis. The most commonly used statistical method for testing simple mediation and multiple mediations is the bootstrapping method (Hayes, 2009; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Bootstrapping provides the most powerful and reasonable method to examine indirect effects of multiple mediators. According to Preacher and Hayes (2008), bootstrapping generates an empirical representation of the sampling distribution of the indirect effect by treating the obtained sample size of N as a representation of the population. Obtained sample is resampled with replacement, so a new sample, n , is created. From the new sample, the direct and indirect effect is calculated. This procedure is calculated k times so there will be k estimates of the indirect effect. Then, the confidence interval for ab is derived, enabling the researcher to reject the null hypothesis that the indirect effect is zero at the 100-CI% level of significance.

In testing mediation, structural equation modeling is based on the assumption that there is no violation of multivariate normality for the variables in the analysis, making it hard to use on small sample data for experiments. However, bootstrapping does not require meeting such assumption to test indirect effect. Thus, to test H4 stating the mediating role of emotional responses, the bootstrapping macro for estimating indirect effects of multiple mediators in SPSS was used with attention as a covariate.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Participants were asked to indicate how much they agreed/disagreed with the two stimulus issues on 8-point scale (1=). For Facebook Ban, participants were found to generally disagree with the Facebook Ban issue (M=3.73, SD=2.04) and agreed with the Occupy Protests in Columbia (M=4.43, SD=1.59). Based on the opinions they provided for each issue, 22 participants were given position-convergent online discussion boards and 22 position-divergent online discussion boards.

For each issue, participants were also asked to indicate how much they thought the issue was interesting and important (1=Not at all, 7=Very much). In addition, they were also asked how much news they followed about each issue as well (1=Not at all, 7=Very much). Participants showed medium level of interest for both Facebook Ban and Occupy protests (Facebook Ban M=3.77; Occupy Columbia M=3.68). Participants also did not consider either of the issues to be especially more important to them (Importance of Facebook Ban M=3.25; Occupy Columbia M=3.45) It was found that they were not interested in following the news on Facebook Ban (M=2.70) as much as they were for Occupy protests in Columbia (M=3.25). These results are similar with the findings from the pilot study, suggesting that these two issues are similar in their level of interest and personal importance to participants.

Manipulation Check

Participants rated how much they thought the online discussion boards agreed with their opinion for both issues (1=*Everyone disagreed with me*; 7=*Everyone agreed with me*). To check whether participants have perceived the majority of opinions in the stimuli online discussion boards to be either divergent with their opinion (high exposure to disagreement) or convergent with their opinion (low exposure to disagreement), ANOVA was used for analysis.

The results showed that participants rated the position-convergent and position-divergent differently ($F(1,45)=10.912, p<.01$). Participants reading the position-convergent online discussion boards rated them to be consisted of opinions agreeing with them ($M=5.11, SD=.24$) and the position-divergent online discussion boards as consisted of opinions disagreeing with them ($M=4.09, SD=.24$). Thus, the manipulation of position-convergent and position-divergent condition was considered as successful (See Table 4).

While there was no item directly checking the manipulation of discussion participation, every participant in the study wrote his or her opinions for the discussion participation condition. Also, for non-participation condition, participants were not given any instructions indicating that they would post their opinions on the discussion board. Consequently, participants did not write their opinions on the issue for non-discussion participation condition. Thus, discussion-participation manipulation was also considered as successful.

Hypothesis Testing

Exposure to disagreement and selective exposure

H1a: Exposure to position-convergent online discussion boards will cause higher perceived utilities for opinion-bolstering news than exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards.

H1b: Exposure to position-convergent online discussion boards will cause participants to choose more opinion-bolstering news choices than exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards.

H2a: Exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards as a causal factor will result in higher perceived utility for opinion-challenging news articles than exposure to position-convergent online discussion boards.

H2b: Exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards will cause participants to choose more opinion-challenging news choices than exposure to position-convergent online discussion boards.

H1a and H1b hypothesized that participants in position-convergent online discussion boards will report greater perceived utility for opinion-bolstering news (H1a) and more choices in opinion-bolstering news (H1b) than those exposed to position-divergent online discussion boards. Multivariate test in the MANOVA results showed that the effect of exposure to position-convergent online discussion boards was not significant on the two dependent variables, Wilks $\lambda=.912$, $F(2,40)=1.92$, *ns*, $\eta_p^2=.09$, Observed power=.38. Univariate analyses also showed that there was no significant difference in the perceived utility for opinion-

bolstering news articles ($F(1,41)=3.36$, *ns*, $\eta_p^2=.08$, Observed power=.43). In addition, there was no significant difference in the number of opinion-bolstering news choices ($F(1,41)=1.38$, *ns*, $\eta_p^2=.03$, Observed power=.21). Thus, H1a and H1b were not supported (See Table 5, 6).

H2a and H2b predicted that participants in position-divergent online discussion boards will report greater perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles (H2a) and choose more opinion-challenging news articles (H2b). The findings from the MANCOVA revealed that the effect of the exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards was significant on the two dependent variables, Wilks $\lambda=.825$, $F(2,40)=4.250$, $p<.05$, $\eta_p^2=.175$, Observed power=.71. The results of the subsequent univariate analyses also showed that the main effect of exposure to disagreements was significant for participants' perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles ($F(1, 41)=4.972$, $p<.05$, $\eta_p^2=.108$, Observed power=.586) and for the number of opinion-challenging news article choices ($F(1, 36)=4.538$, $p<.05$, $\eta_p^2=.10$, Observed power=.548). These results suggest that being exposed to position-divergent online discussion boards led participants to perceive the opinion-challenging articles to be more useful ($M=4.257$, $SD=.196$), and choose more opinion-challenging news ($M=2.211$, $SD=.200$) than when exposed to position-convergent online discussion boards (Perceived utility of opinion challenging news: $M=3.638$, $SD=.196$; Number of opinion-challenging news choices: $M=1.607$, $SD=.20$). Therefore, H2a and H2b were supported (See Table 5, 6).

Discussion participation and selective exposure

H3a: Participation in online discussion boards as a causal factor will result in higher perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles.

H3b: Participation in online discussion boards as a causal factor will result in greater number of opinion-challenging news article choices.

H3a and H3b predicted that required participation in the online discussion boards will influence the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles (H3a) and the number of opinion-challenging news article choices (H3b). The effect of participation on the two dependent variables was tested using MANCOVA with attention to news articles as a covariate. The result of MANCOVA showed that there was no significant difference in the two dependent variables between participation and non-participation conditions, Wilks $\lambda=.936$, $F(2,40)=1.365$, *ns*, $\eta_p^2=.064$, Observed power=.277). According to the subsequent univariate analyses, there were no statistically significant differences in the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles when participants were asked to participate in the discussion ($M=3.922$, $SD=.143$) vs. when they weren't asked to participate ($M=3.973$, $SD=.159$, $F(1,41)=2.207$, *ns*, $\eta_p^2=.051$, Observed power=.306. In addition, there were no significant differences in the number of opinion-challenging news articles between the participation and non-participation conditions ($F(1,36)=.1572$, *ns*, $\eta_p^2=.023$, Observed power=.161). In sum, H3 was not supported.

Moderating role of participation on the exposure to disagreements

H4: The effects of exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards as a causal factor will be contingent on the discussion participation.

H4a: The impact of exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards on the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news will be higher in discussion participation condition.

H4b: The impact of exposure to position-divergent discussion boards on the number of opinion-challenging news choices will be higher in discussion participation condition.

H4a and H4b stated that there will be an interaction effect of exposure to position-convergent discussion boards and discussion participation on perceived utility of opinion-bolstering news articles (H4a) and the number of opinion-challenging articles chosen (H4b). MANCOVA results showed that there was marginally significant interaction between exposure to disagreement and discussion participation, Wilks' $\lambda = .868$, $F(2,40) = 3.042$, $p < .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .132$. Univariate analyses showed that there was a significant interaction effect for perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles ($F(1,41) = 5.419$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .117$, Observed power = .623), but not for the number of opinion-challenging news choices ($F(1,41) = 1.556$, ns , $\eta_p^2 = .037$, Observed power = .23). Participants' perceived utility for opinion-challenging news articles for participating in position-divergent discussion boards was the highest ($M = 4.37$, $SD = .202$), and the lowest for

participating in position-convergent discussion boards ($M=3.474$, $SD=.202$). Thus, H4 was partially supported (See Table 8; Figure 2).

Mediating role of emotional responses on perceived utility

H5a: Negative emotional responses toward the online discussion will mediate the relationship between exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards on the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles.

H5b: Negative emotional response toward the online discussions will mediate the relationship between exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards on the number of opinion-challenging news choices.

H5 predicted that emotional responses, including both positive emotional responses and negative emotional responses, would mediate the relationship between exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards and perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles. H5a predicted that negative emotional responses toward discussion board will be the positive mediator between the exposure to opinion-divergent discussion boards and the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles. Bootstrapping results showed that negative emotional responses did not mediate the relationship between exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards and the perceived utility of opinion-

challenging news articles in both participation and non-participation condition. Thus, H5a was not supported.

H5b stated that negative emotional responses will be a mediator between exposure to disagreements and the number of opinion-challenging news choices. Bootstrapping results showed that negative emotional response was a significant mediator between exposure to disagreements and the number of opinion-challenging news articles in participation condition. When asked to participate, being exposed to position-divergent online discussion boards decreased the negative emotional responses which led them to decrease the number of opinion-challenging news choices. No significant mediation was found for non-discussion participation condition.

Mediating role of emotional responses on news choices

H5c: Positive emotional responses toward the online discussion boards will mediate the relationship between exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards on the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles.

H5d: Positive emotional responses toward the online discussion board will mediate the relationship between exposure to position-divergent online discussion boards on the number of opinion-challenging news choices.

H5c stated that positive emotional responses will increase as a result of being exposed to position-divergent online discussions subsequently leading to the

decrease of perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles. Bootstrapping results showed that positive emotional responses did not mediate the exposure to disagreement and the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles in neither participation condition nor non-participation condition. H5c was not supported.

H5d stated that negative emotional responses will be a mediator between exposure to disagreements and the number of opinion-challenging news choices. Bootstrapping results showed that negative emotional response was a significant mediator between exposure to disagreements and the number of opinion-challenging news articles in participation condition. When asked to participate, being exposed to position-divergent online discussion boards decreased the negative emotional responses which led them to decrease the number of opinion-challenging news choices. No significant mediation was found for non-discussion participation condition.

DISCUSSION

Summary of key findings

Overall purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of online discussion boards as a public sphere, which enables deliberation to happen more frequently (Price, et al., 2002) and whether exposure to political disagreement can discourage selective exposure to agreeable news sources. That is, online discussion boards function as a channel in which people can be exposed to diverse opinion, including disagreeing opinions that can provide the benefits of deliberation. More specifically, as deliberation encourages individuals to listen through different opinions and to participate in the discussion, this study suggested that the general tendency to prefer news supportive of one's political position will change to include news that covers the issue with disagreeing perspective, based on cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1964) and media choice model (E. Thorson & Duffy, 2006).

According to cognitive dissonance theory, selective exposure to agreeable information is discouraged when people perceive the challenging information to be useful. Similarly, media choice model suggested that motives for using news influences one's media choice decisions. In this study, it was suggested that being exposed to disagreeing opinions and being required to participate in the discussion will change the motives for using opinion-challenging news and increase the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles and also encourage the participants to choose more opinion-challenging news articles for information. To

address these research hypotheses, this study examined the influence of exposure to disagreements and discussion participation on the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles using mixed-design experiment.

Main effects of exposure to disagreement

One of the important findings of this study is that being exposed to position-divergent online discussion boards increased the preference of opinion-challenging news articles. That is, when participants were asked to read through the online discussion boards that were mainly consisted of opinions divergent from one's position on the issue, they perceived the opinion-challenging news articles to be more useful compared to those who read discussion boards consisted of only agreeing opinions. In addition, when participants read the position-divergent online discussion boards, they also chose more opinion-challenging news articles than those asked to read position-convergent online discussion boards.

These findings support the hypothesis that exposure to disagreements can influence people's general preference toward agreeable news and encourage them to deliberately look for further information. According to the previous studies in political discussions and deliberation, one of the benefits of participating in political discussions was the increased interest in following the news on the issue (Jacobs, et al., 2009; McLeod, et al., 1999), and also the increased knowledge of opposing arguments as well (Moy & Gastil, 2006; Mutz & Mondak, 2006). The findings in this study are consistent with the previous findings suggesting the benefits of political discussions involving disagreements to increase the overall news use on the issue.

Additionally, this study also expands the literature in deliberative democracy in that it specifically looked at the interest in using information challenging one's position. It can be inferred from this study that the overall increase in news use found in previous studies can also be seen as increase in finding out about opposing arguments.

Moderating role of discussion participation on the effect of exposure to disagreement

This study found no statistically significant difference between discussion participation and non-participation condition in perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles and the number of opinion-challenging news choices. However, while discussion participation did not have any main effect on participants' perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles or the number of opinion-challenging news choices, there was a significant interaction effect of the two independent variables on the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles.

The significant interaction effect suggested that discussion participation served as a moderator for the influence of exposure to disagreements on both perceived utility of opinion-challenging news. That is, when participants were asked to participate in position-divergent online discussion boards, the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles was found to be the highest. In other words, expressing one's opinion in an online discussion environment consisted mainly of disagreeing opinions caused them to find reading opinion-challenging news articles to be more useful. On the other hand, the lowest perceived utility for opinion-

challenging news articles was found for the participating in position-convergent online discussions.

Mediating role of emotional responses

Finally, this study suggested emotional responses toward discussions as mediating variables for the relationship between exposure to disagreements and decrease in selective exposure. Based on affective intelligence theory (Marcus, et al., 2000), it was suggested that negative emotional responses caused by the exposure to disagreements will increase participants' preference of opinion-challenging news articles. Also, exposure to disagreements was hypothesized to decrease the positive emotional responses toward the discussions which in turn will decrease the preference for opinion-challenging news articles.

Using bootstrapping analysis suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2008), it was found that both positive and negative emotional responses were significant mediators between exposure to disagreement and the number of opinion-challenging news articles in discussion participation condition. However, emotional responses did not mediate the effect of exposure to disagreement on the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles in participation condition. Also, there was no significant mediation effect of emotional responses on either dependent variable for non-participation condition.

Examining the direction of significant mediation found between exposure to disagreements and the number of opinion-challenging news choices, results showed that exposure to disagreement decreased both positive emotional responses and

negative emotional responses. However, decreased positive emotional responses led to decrease in the number of opinion-challenging news choices, while decreased negative emotional responses led to increased number of opinion-challenging news choices.

Theoretical implications

Online discussion as deliberative public sphere and selective exposure

This study suggested that online discussion boards could function as a deliberative forum in which different opinions can be expressed and shared. Scholars in deliberative democracy have debated whether deliberation should be limited to face-to-face discussions or include online deliberation as a new form of political discussions with the same benefits of face-to-face political discussions (Gastil, 2000; Jacobs, et al., 2009). Face-to-face deliberation has its benefits with having a moderator that controls for the civility and quality of the discussions and that such formal environment can provide an atmosphere of respect and learning (Burkhalter, et al., 2002; Gastil & Dillard, 1999). Formal face-to-face deliberation can provide more structured understanding of the issue and putting faces to those who hold opposing opinions. In this regard, it is necessary to participate in face-to-face small group deliberation as much as possible, regardless of the socially uncomfortable nature of political discussions (Fishkin, 2009; Mutz, 2006).

However, if deliberation is limited to face-to-face discussions only, it is inevitable that the frequency and possibility of being exposed to different political opinions are lowered greatly. As studies have continuously found, the likelihood of

people talking about political issues face-to-face with those holding disagreeing opinions are low (Mutz, 2006; Putnam, 2000). In addition, even when political issues are raised as a conversation topic, opinion climate and perception of one's opinions as majority or minority can influence the willingness to pay attention to the discussions (Ho & McLeod, 2008). To consider the benefits of having deliberation and political discussions frequently in a more comfortable anonymity granted, it is necessary to include online discussions as a new format of deliberation (Dahlgren, 2005).

Another theoretical implication of this study about the role of online discussion boards in deliberative democracy model is how online discussion boards triggers interest in learning about different opinions without the anticipation of discussion participation. Compared to face-to-face discussions, online discussion has a unique role to motivate learning about diverse views as it enables people to read through others' opinions without having to express one's opinion. According to Hardy and Scheufele (2004), non-participation in online interaction can provide motivations for increased political activities as much as participating in online interaction can. That is, online discussions provide motives to understand more about different perspectives not only from individuals' anticipation to participate in the discussion, but also from reading through the discussion and learning about different perspectives.

The findings from this study support such unique role of online discussions. While anticipation of discussion participation did not influence the perceived utility

of opinion-challenging news sources or number of opinion-challenging news choices, being exposed to disagreements significantly influenced the interest in using opinion-challenging news articles. In face-to-face deliberative forums, a moderator always make sure that everyone has an equal chance to participate in the discussion(Burkhalter, et al., 2002; Fishkin, 2009; Gastil, 2000). This format does not allow participants to only listen to what others have to say and reflect on one's position. However, this study suggests that such reflection of one's position is possible in online discussions without the pressure to crystallize one's opinion and express it. In fact, the causal effect of exposure to disagreement on both perceived utility of opinion-challenging information and the number of opinion-challenging news choices support that the interest to consider opposing perspective increases by reading through online discussion boards, even when there was no anticipation for discussion participation.

In addition, this study expanded the outcomes of participating in deliberation involving disagreements to include reduction of selective exposure to favorable news. Studies in selective exposure in political news use have mostly focused on whether selective exposure to favorable political news channels exists or not (Garrett, 2009b; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Iyengar, et al., 2008), and what the outcomes of selective exposures are(Stroud, 2010). This study has instead focused on what to do to discourage selective exposure to favorable news and encourage balanced news use that includes paying attention to news sources and news articles that may not support one's position. As such solution to selective exposure in

political information, the findings of this study suggested that reading through online political discussion boards consisted of disagreeing opinions. Brundidge (2010a) suggested that online environment enables the inadvertent exposure to disagreement more likely than offline environment. In other words, while anyone will rarely seek out political differences, online discussion boards can expose people to at least some level of political differences. Even when such exposure to political disagreements happens inadvertently, this study suggests that such exposure to different opinions can encourage more balanced political news use.

Nonetheless, online discussions are not without pitfalls that may not only discourage deliberative outcomes, but also encourage more selective exposure to agreeable news to take place. One of the pitfalls of online discussion boards as a deliberative public sphere is the incivility and flaming from the anonymity in the Internet. Studies in online discussions have addressed the issue of incivility often found that many online discussion boards are consisted of uncivil posts attacking the opposing perspectives (Papacharissi, 2004). In fact, Papacharissi (2004) found that most individuals choose to read through the comments and discussion boards instead of posting their opinions. These readers are called the “lurkers” and they constitute the majority of online discussion board users. The initial impression that these lurkers get about the environment of the discussion is likely to influence the likelihood to initiate opinion expression in the discussion (Ng & Detenber, 2005).

While some scholars found that incivility in political discourse, such as political debates or political campaign messages, can increase general political

interest or political participation (Mutz & Reeves, 2006; Brooks & Geer, 2007), incivility in online political discussion can not only withdraw people from expressing their political opinion (Ng & Detenber, 2005) but it can also decrease the overall trust in politics, including the news media channels that include these discussion boards or comment boards (K. Thorson, Vraga, & Ekdale, 2010). When overall trust in politics and political news decreases, it becomes less likely for individuals to pay attention to political news overall but also less likely to be motivated for deliberative news choices that thoroughly examine every possible information sources. Future studies examining the influence of online discussion board contents and tone can address this aspect of online discussion boards.

Mediating role of emotional responses in deliberation

The result of this study suggests the positive and negative emotional responses toward the online discussions as mediators in discussion-participation condition. According to affective intelligence theory, negative emotional responses caused by novel and unfamiliar political situations encourage careful and deliberate processing of information while positive emotional responses caused by the familiar and similar environment leads to more habitual and heuristic information processing.

From the theoretical postulation of affective intelligence theory, being exposed to position-divergent online discussions will cause negative emotional responses to increase and positive emotional responses to decrease. However, the result of this study suggested differently. That is, when required to participate in

online discussions, being exposed to disagreement via online discussion boards reduced the positive emotional responses, which in turn lowered the number of opinion-challenging news choices. In addition, when asked to participate in position-convergent online discussion boards, participants' positive emotional responses increased which in turn increased the number of opinion-challenging news choices.

The opposite direction of mediation effects is likely to have caused the non-significant interaction effect of exposure to disagreement and discussion participation on the number of opinion-challenging news choices. As Hayes (2009) have suggested, indirect mediation effect can still occur even when there is no significant direct effect from the independent variables to the dependent variables. In this study, it is likely that the interaction effect of exposure to disagreements and discussion participation on the number of opinion-challenging news choices was cancelled by opposite direction of positive emotional responses to opinion-challenging news choices and negative emotional responses to opinion-challenging news choices.

According to Marcus et al. (2006), negative emotional responses are consisted of two aspects: anxiety and aversion. They claimed that anxiety increases when the challenging situation is new or unexpected while aversion increases as the stimulus is a familiar challenging. Exposure to disagreements about issues with high involvement or interest can cause aversive emotional responses (Hwang, Pan, & Sun, 2008). In this study, aversion was not included as emotional responses because

the controversies chosen as stimulus responses was specifically chosen to not be intensely divided which can cause aversion to happen. On the other hand, for this study, anxiety was more likely to be considered as the negative emotional response caused by being challenged via position-divergent online discussion boards since the stimuli issues were chosen based on the medium level of interest and involvement.

To address why the negative emotional responses (i.e. anxiety) decreased as a consequence of exposure to position-divergent condition, it needs to be noted that the mediating role of emotional responses was only found for discussion-participation condition. Discussion participation may have influenced how participants felt toward the discussion as they were asked to prepare their arguments on the issue. That is, the “internal reflection” and the “deliberation within” prior to the discussion participation may have prepared the participants to feel less negative about the discussion (Goodin & Niemeyer, 2003).

Also, the expectation of discussion participation can lead participants to see the position-divergent online discussion board not as a new or unexpected challenge that can cause anxiety to increase. As participants knew that they would have the opportunity to express their opinions in the position-divergent online discussions, the anxiety may have decreased as a result of expectation of discussion participation. In sum, the result of this study suggests that the effect of exposure to disagreement moderated by discussion participation to increase the number of

opinion-challenging news choices is found indirectly through lowered negative emotional responses.

Unlike the decrease in negative emotional responses, the increase in positive emotional responses in position-convergent online discussion boards is consistent with the theoretical postulation of affective intelligence theory. However, the overall increase in the number of opinion-challenging news choices caused by the increase in positive emotional responses is not consistent with the research hypothesis.

The explanation of such direction can be found from cognitive dissonance theory and differential gains model. First, as one of the conditions that discourage selective exposure to supportive information, Sears and Freedman (1967) noted that when people feel confident that they can refute the opposing arguments, selective exposure to agreeable information is less likely to happen. Similarly, applying differential gains model, Hardy and Scheufele (2004) claimed that when individuals anticipate having discussions and disagreements with others, they are more likely to use media messages more carefully. In other words, as participants were exposed to discussion posts that hold similar opinions with themselves, and also had the opportunity to express their opinions in the discussion boards which the majority opinions is already supportive of his/her position, the level of confidence may have increased causing them to use more opinion-challenging news (Glynn, Hayes, & Shanahan, 1997). As participants felt more positive as a result of exposure to position-convergent online discussion boards and had the opportunity to express their opinions in the discussion, it is likely they felt less insecure about

their position and felt more confident to explore reading the opinion-challenging news articles.

The mediation analyses in this study provided an opportunity to understand the unique role of emotional responses in discussion participation condition different from the routes suggested by affective intelligence theory. That is, to understand the role of emotional responses for online discussions, discussion participation is playing a significant role to determine the direction of emotional responses. In applying affective intelligence theory to understand the role of political discussions on selective exposure, future studies need to address the issue of whether individuals decide to participate in the discussion or not.

Also, the findings here suggest that there may be additional conditions for deliberative and habitual choice routes of political information processing to take place: cognitive elaboration and individuals' level of confidence in their opinion. This study did not directly address the role of elaboration and confidence in understanding the mediating effects of emotional responses in political discussions. However, it will be meaningful direction for futures studies examining the role of emotional responses toward political disagreements and its influences on selective exposure of political information.

CONCLUSION

Limitations of the study

As with any research, this study comes with several limitations. First, in defining opinion-challenging news use, this study has mainly focused on the information motives and interest in reading articles as dependent variables. Recent studies addressing selective exposure utilizes the development of programming to measure how much time individuals will spend on a certain article, how many articles from a list of articles individuals chose to read, and whether individuals closely read the entire article or not (See Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Iyengar, et al., 2008). While the operational definition of information motives for opinion-challenging news was found to be statistically reliable in this study, future studies can address the level of attention to opinion-challenging news articles for further interpretation.

This study manipulated the discussion participation to see whether it would influence the tendency of selective exposure to agreeable news sources. Thus, this study cannot determine whether feeling free to participate in online discussions will influence the perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles, or the interest to read opinion-challenging news articles. Most types of computer-mediated communications have voluntary nature where individuals can choose to participate or not. In other formats of online discussions, such as comments board on blogs or online news websites and Facebook pages of popular news channels, individuals can freely choose to express their opinions or not. In fact, Wyatt, Kim and Katz (2000)

claimed the level to which individuals feel free to express their opinions can influence individuals' attention to participate in more formal political discussions. A future experimental study where individuals can voluntarily choose to express their opinions in a position-divergent online discussion board can address this issue and examine whether voluntary participation in online discussions can change the information motives toward opinion-challenging news.

In addition, the cross-sectional nature of this experiment limits the ability to address whether the interest in using opinion-challenging news will continue. The limited external validity of experimental study needs to be addressed by longitudinal approaches examining individuals' experiences in deliberation and its long term influence on balanced news use.

Finally, the findings of this study may not be able to address current controversial issues that are considered to be polarized at a national level, such as abortion, gay marriage or gun control. According to Guttman and Thompson (1996), highly polarized issues are generally issues that involve differences in moral principles. In these cases, not only will the online discussions be more divided, which can most likely cause the comments to be less civil, but also because of the differences in moral principles, the role of emotions as mediators will be different from the issues chosen in this study. While this study has controlled the involvement and interest in the issue to focus on the effect of exposure to disagreements and discussion participation on selective exposure, further efforts need to be made to address the role of political discussions on more polarized

issues, and whether online political discussions can discourage the formation of cyber cascade (Sunstein, 2007).

Final remarks

Despite these limitations, this study offers findings with both practical and theoretical implications. Theoretically, it shows that online discussion boards can serve as a public sphere in which the benefits from exposure to disagreements can be found as from any face-to-face political discussions. In addition, the findings of this study can be applied to any types of online interactivity regarding politics, such as Facebook pages of news media channels, Twitter accounts of politicians, or online comment boards. Reading through different opinions on these interactive channels can encourage learning political differences and encourage more deliberative news choices.

As mentioned in the introduction of this study, Internet does have the possibility to encourage the selective exposure to agreeable news with the features that enables users to choose only what they are interested to see. However, this study suggests that the interactive features of the Internet may counter-balance the tendency to build a cyber-cascade by inadvertent exposure to political disagreements. Face-to-face political discussions and online discussions should not be at odds in the deliberative democracy model. Instead, both need to coexist to move individuals to utilize the diversity of news channels in building a more tolerant political environment.

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APPENDIX

List of tables

Table 1 Frequency of agreement/disagreement on local issues

	Agree (%)	Disagree
Facebook Ban in Missouri	54(55.1)	44 (44.9)
Occupy protests in Columbia	35(35.7)	63(64.3)
Gun control on campus	16 (16.3)	82(83.7)
Smoking ban on campus	85 (86.7)	13(13.3)
Downtown Surveillance camera	73(74.5)	25(25.5)
Lecture recording on campus	88(89.8)	10(10.2)

Note: N=98

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for pilot study

		M	SD
Facebook ban	Interest	4.71	1.66
	Importance	4.1	1.70
	Following news	3.56	1.77
Occupy protests in Columbia	Interest	3.74	1.77
	Importance	3.49	1.69
	Following news	3.66	1.48
Gun control on campus	Interest	5.48	1.14
	Importance	5.43	1.32
	Following news	3.65	1.72
Smoking ban on campus	Interest	4.72	1.64
	Importance	4.82	1.64
	Following news	3.34	1.62
Downtown surveillance camera	Interest	4.38	1.50
	Importance	4.27	1.55
	Following news	2.68	1.60
Lecture recording on campus	Interest	4.59	1.62
	Importance	4.39	1.60
	Following news	3.18	1.73

Note: 1=Not at all; 7=Very much

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for main experiment

	M	SD
Participation condition		
Utility of opinion-bolstering news articles	3.89	1.32
Utility of opinion-challenging news articles	3.92	1.37
Number of opinion-bolstering news choices	1.86	1.34
Number of opinion-challenging news choices	1.86	1.17
Non-participation condition		
Utility of opinion-bolstering news articles	3.78	1.38
Utility of opinion-challenging news articles	3.97	1.26
Number of opinion-bolstering news choices	1.89	1.17
Number of opinion-challenging news choices	1.95	1.28

Note: Utility of news articles 1=Not at all; 7=Very much
 Number of news choices (0-8)

Table 4 Factor loadings for emotional responses

	1 Positive emotional responses ^a	2 Negative emotional responses ^b
Proud	.940	
Hopeful	.936	
Enthusiastic	.845	
Anxious		.894
Worried		.891
Afraid		.891

Note: Factor loadings with an absolute value of <.30 are suppressed in this matrix

^a Factor Eigenvalue=3,524; Percent of variance=42.95

^b Factor Eigenvalue=1.548; Percent of variance=41.59

Table 5 Manipulation checks for main study

	M	SD	F	p	η_p^2
Position-convergent online discussion	5.13	1.05	8.034	.007	.178
Position-divergent online discussion	4.17	1.05			

Note: 1=Strongly disagree; 8=Strongly agree

Table 6 MANCOVA result for perceived utility of news articles

		M	SE	F	p	η_p^2
Perceived utility of opinion-bolstering articles						
Exposure to disagreement	Position-convergent	3.56	.21	3.36	.07	.07
	Position-divergent	4.11	.21			
Discussion participation	Participation	3.89	.16	2.21	.15	.05
	Non-participation	3.78	.17			
Exposure X Participation				.58	.45	.01
Covariate						
Attention to news articles				24.91	.000	.28
Perceived utility of opinion-challenging articles						
Exposure to disagreement	Position-convergent	3.64	.20	4.97	.03	.11
	Position-divergent	4.26	.20			
Discussion Participation	Participation	3.92	.143	.19	.67	.07
	Non-participation	3.97	.159			
Exposure X Participation				5.42	.025	.12
Covariate						
Attention to news articles				31.55	.000	.44

Table 7 MANCOVA result for the number of news choices

		M	SE	F	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
Number of opinion-bolstering news choices						
Exposure to disagreement	Position-convergent	1.69	.22	1.38	.25	.03
	Position-divergent	2.06	.22			
Discussion participation	Participation	1.86	.20	.63	.43	.01
	Non-participation	1.89	.17			
Exposure X Participation				2.83	.10	.06
Covariate						
Attention to news articles				2.14	.15	.05
Number of opinion-challenging news choices						
Exposure to disagreement	Position-convergent	1.60	.20	4.53	.04	.10
	Position-divergent	2.21	.20			
Participation	Participation	1.86	.18	.97	.33	.02
	Non-participation	1.95	.171			
Exposure X Participation				1.56	.21	.04
Covariate						
Attention to news articles				4.06	.04	.10

Table 8 Descriptive statistics for the interaction effect of perceived utility of opinion-challenging news

Independent variables		M	SE	F (1,41)
Position-convergent	Participation	3.47	.20	5.42*
	Non-participation	3.80	.23	
Position-divergent	Participation	4.37	.20	
	Non-participation	4.15	.23	

Note: Perceived utility of opinion-challenging news * $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$, Observed power = .62

Table 9 Descriptive statistics for the interaction effect of the number of opinion-challenging news choices

Independent variables		M	SE	F (1,41)
Position-convergent	Participation	1.69	.26	1.56
	Non-participation	1.52	.24	
Position-divergent	Participation	2.04	.26	
	Non-participation	2.39	.24	

Note: Perceived utility of opinion-bolstering news *ns*, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, Observed power = .23

Table 10 Mediation of emotional responses on perceived utility of opinion-challenging news in participation condition

Exposure to disagreement to mediators			
	Coefficient	SE	t
Positive	-.104**	.336	-3.09
Negative	-.87*	.361	-2.41
Mediators to perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles			
	Coefficient	SE	t
Positive	-.131	.149	-.879
Negative	.174	.139	1.26

Total effect (c path) $\beta=.93^*$, SE=.28, $t=3.34$, $*p<.01$
 Direct effect (c' path) $\beta=.94^*$, SE=.31, $t=3.02$, $*p<.01$
 R-square=.59

Note: 5,000 bootstrap samples. Attention as covariate. ** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$

Table 11 Mediation of emotional responses on number of opinion-challenging news choices in participation condition

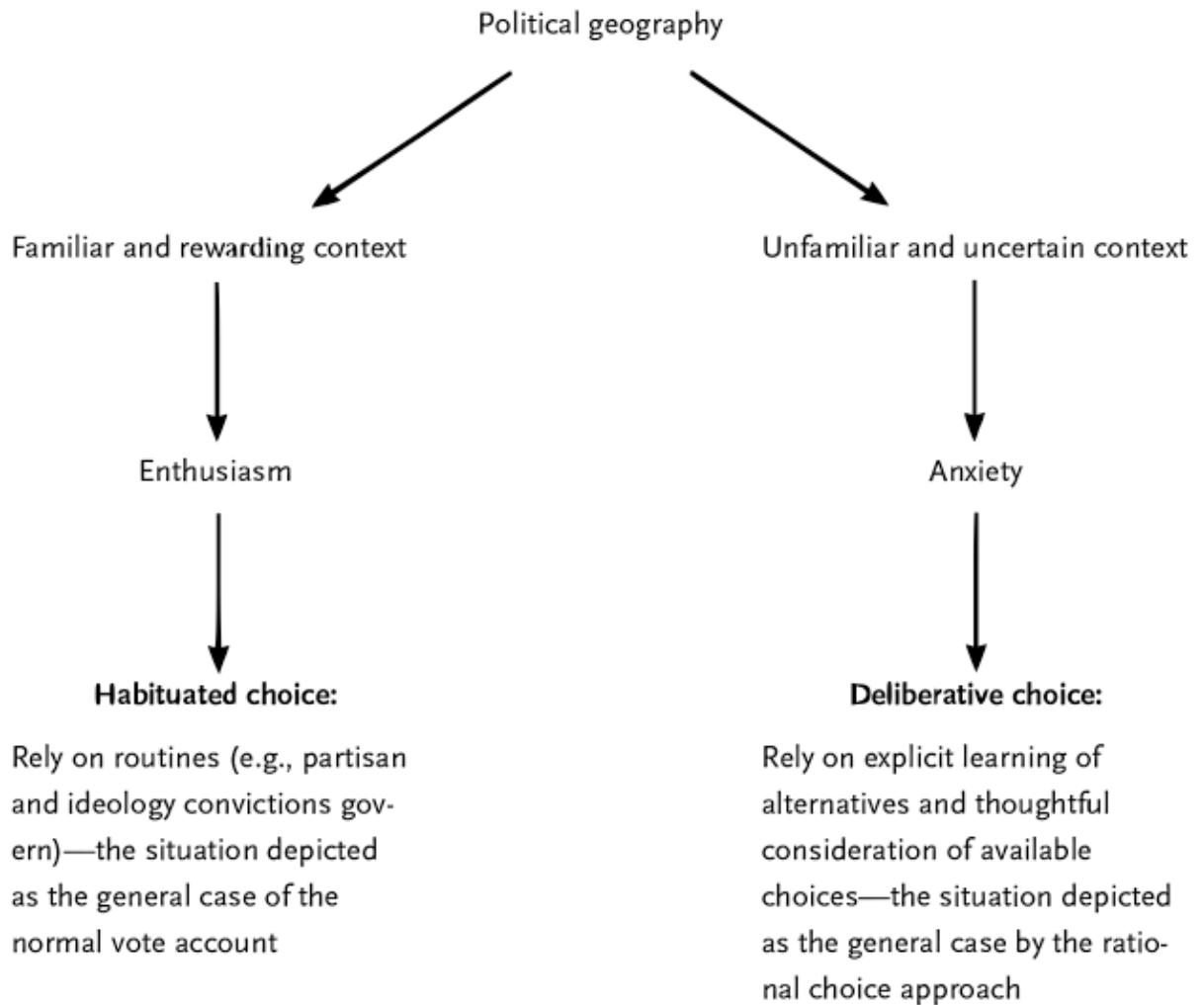
Exposure to disagreement to mediators			
	Point Estimate	SE	t
Positive	-.104**	.336	-3.09
Negative	-.87*	.361	-2.41
Mediators to perceived utility of opinion-challenging news articles			
	Point estimate	SE	t
Positive	.41*	.18	2.25
Negative	-.352*	.17	-2.08

Total effect (c path) $\beta=.347$, SE=.36, $t=.97$, *ns*
 Direct effect (c' path) $\beta=.47$, SE=.38, $t=1.23$, *ns*
 R-square=.19

Note: 5,000 bootstrap samples. Attention as covariate. ** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$

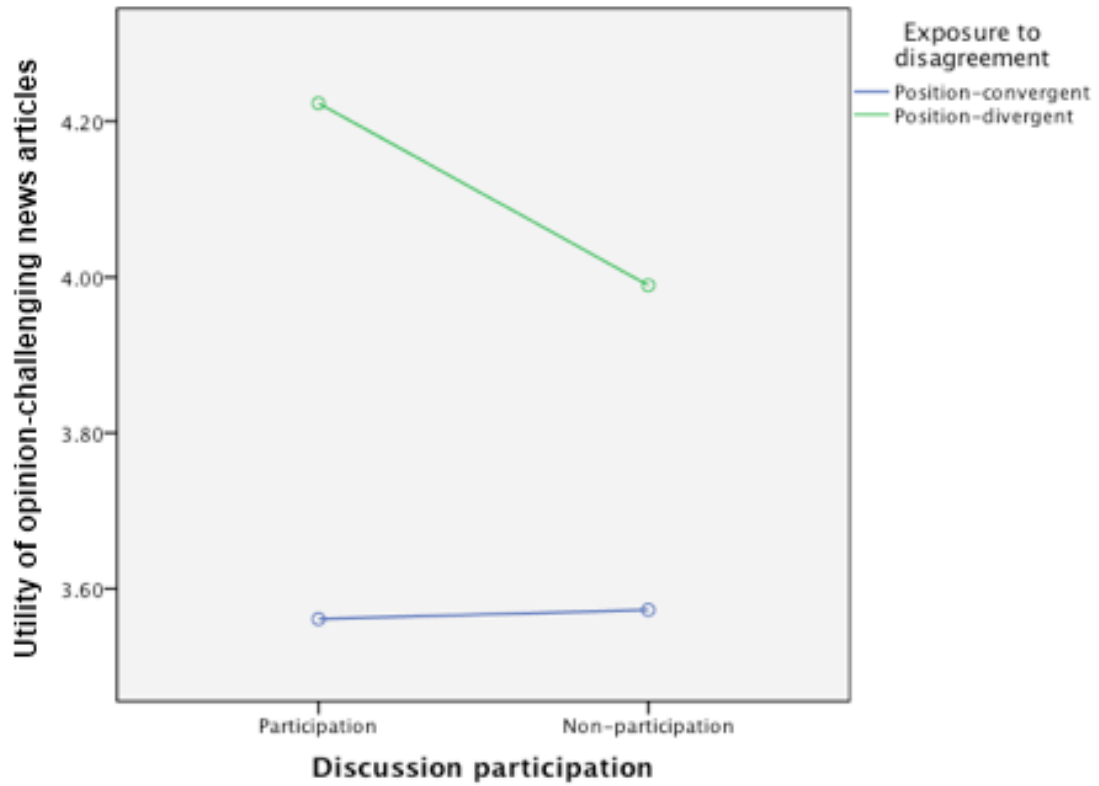
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Figure 1 Role of positive/negative emotional responses in affective intelligence theory



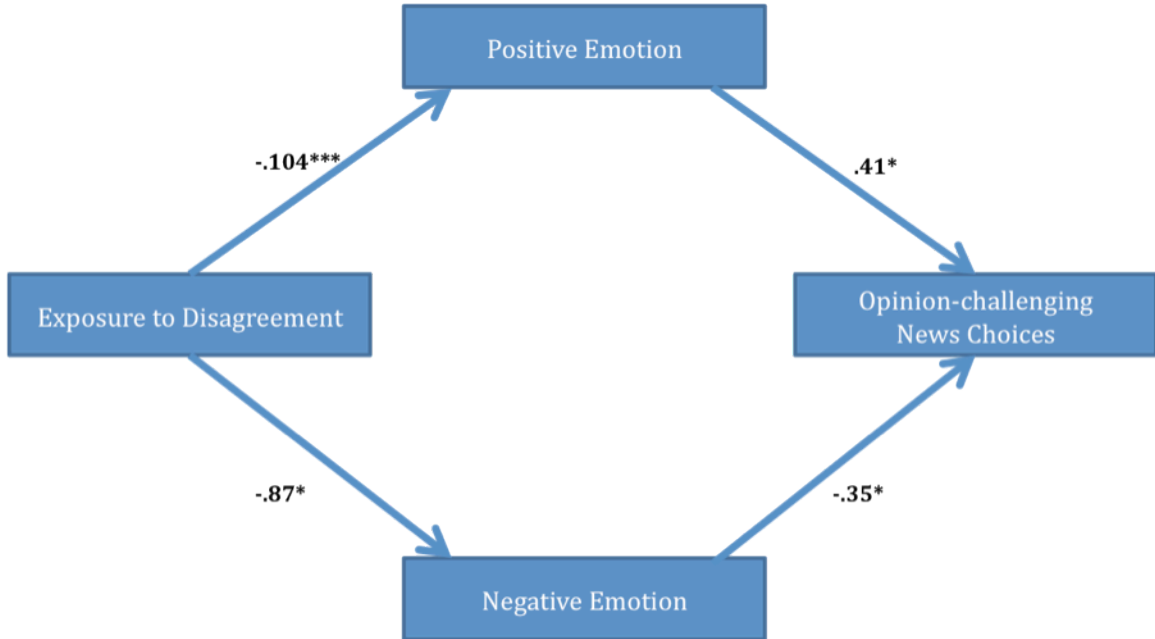
Note: Adapted from *The Affect Effect: Dynamics of Emotion in Political Thinking and Behavior*. (p. 129), by Neuman, W.R., Marcus, G.E., Crigler, A.M., & Mackuen, M. 2007, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Figure 2 Interaction effect on perceived utility of opinion-challenging news



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: attention = 3.7588

Figure 3 Mediation effect of positive/negative emotional responses



Note: *** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$

VITA

Mi Rosie Jahng was born March 21st, 1980 in Seoul, South Korea. Prior to completing her Ph.D in Journalism at the University of Missouri in 2012, she received B.A. in Telecommunication from Sookmyung Women's University in Seoul, Korea (2004), an M.A. in Communication from Seoul National University in Seoul, Korea (2006), and an M.A. in Journalism from University of Texas-Austin (2008).