

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:

PARTISANS AND CONTROVERSIAL NEWS
ONLINE: COMPARING PERCEIVED BIAS,
CREDIBILITY, AND USER BEHAVIOR
IN MAINSTREAM NEWS VERSUS BLOGS

Mi Hee Kim, Doctor of Philosophy, 2012

Directed By:

Professor Ronald. A. Yaros
Philip Merrill College of Journalism

This 2 (partisan opinion) x 2 (content source) x 2 (content valence) factorial experiment investigates how partisans' prior positions on two controversial issues of same sex marriage ($N = 132$) and guns on campus ($N = 130$) influence their perceptions about online content from either mainstream news source online (the *Associated Press*) or citizen blogs. Partisans' perceptions of the content included perceived bias and credibility. This study also explores how the perceptions affect partisans' online behaviors, including commenting on the content and subsequent information seeking.

Theoretically, the study tests 'hostile media effect' framework with a blog then investigates whether the effect differs when the same content appears on a mainstream news source online (the *Associated Press*). The study also examines the relationship between the hostile media effect and partisans' online behaviors.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions with each containing stimuli manipulated as either pro or anti on the issues on either a mainstream news source online (the *Associated Press*) or a blog.

Similar to previous evidence of a relative hostile media effect in traditional printed news articles and national network broadcasts, this study found that online content also generated the effect regardless if content is produced by professional journalists or citizen bloggers. Partisans evaluated both mainstream online news and blog postings with opposite views as biased and less credible. Particularly, user-generated content, blog postings, generated a stronger relative hostile media effect than mainstream online news.

In addition, hostile media effect appeared to motivate partisans to comment on content that opposes their position to correct perceived bias, and amplify their own position. This study also confirms partisans' selective exposure to additional content that supports their position. However, the hostile media effect did not appear to enhance the tendency for selective exposure.

In their totality, partisan audiences' perceptions of bias and credibility in mainstream online news and blog postings in a hostile direction, followed by commenting and more information seeking, seems to reinforce partisanship rather than encourage consensus between supporters and opponents of the controversial issues.

PARTISANS AND CONTROVERSIAL NEWS ONLINE:
COMPARING PERCEIVED BIAS, CREDIBILITY, AND USER
BEHAVIOR IN MAINSTREAM NEWS VERSUS BLOGS

By

Mi Hee Kim

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Advisory Committee:

Professor Ronald A. Yaros, Chair
Professor Carol L. Rogers
Professor Susan Moeller
Professor Kalyani Chadha
Professor Thomas S. Wallsten

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents,
Kim, Changju and Lim, Myoungja

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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those people who helped and supported me to complete this dissertation. Without their help and support, I would not have achieved my goals for this dissertation.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The advent of the Internet has drastically increased the volume of information and communication in contemporary societies. Vast amounts of opinions and perspectives are now exposed to partisan audiences with differing opinions on controversial issues (Bruns, 2005). The Internet is a unique medium for public discussion through which partisans may examine and criticize diverse arguments (Benkler, 2006), and makes it possible for individuals to take collective action or mobilize around issues (Bruns, 2005). Based on these phenomena, optimists predicted that the Internet would contribute to the enhancement of democracy in a society (i.e. Kling 1996; Negroponte, 1998).

However, others have questioned the democratizing effect of the Internet, pointing out its polarizing rather than its homogenizing effects (Alstyne & Brynjolfsson, 2005). Skeptics argue that the Internet makes it easier for partisan audiences to search content in which they are interested and network with like-minded people (Schonbach, de Waal & Lauf, 2005; Yardi & Boyd, 2010). Consequently, this exposes partisans to opinions that are similar to their own.

As optimists and skeptics paint different pictures about the effects of the Internet, understanding the democratizing effect of the Internet requires the answer to the question “how do partisan audiences process and respond to online content with a perspective different from their own?”

To pursue the answer to this question, this study investigates the interactions of partisan audiences with opposite opinions online. Since mainstream

news sources and user-generated sources (i.e. blogs) both address controversial issues with opposing perspectives, the goal of this study is to examine how diverse content from different sources is perceived by partisan audiences online.

Mainstream Media versus User-Generated Blogs

The web provides audiences with the tools to create and disseminate their own content (Gillmor, 2006). Internet resources and affordable digital equipments to produce content have made this possible (Bruns, 2005; Shirky, 2008).

However, unlike traditional news organizations with professional standards for journalists, there are no established ethical or professional guidelines for individuals to publish on the web (Jenkins, 2009). Individuals can produce content based on their own experiences and perspectives (Benkler, 2006). Virtually, any users can now post their opinions on the web without “conventional social restraints on the expression of unpopular opinions” (Chaffee et al., 2001, p.376). Therefore, user-generated content often reflects a wider range of views on controversial issues with perspectives that can be different from professional journalists (Bruns, 2005). This outcome produces content with multiple perspectives online providing “a voice to a public, which is usually locked out of direct participation in traditional journalism” (Bruns, 2005, p.76).

As a result, content produced by both professional journalists of mainstream media and citizens (non-journalists) coexist and may compete for digital audiences. However, there has been little to no previous research about how audiences perceive a variety of content provided by mainstream media versus user-generated news sources. That is the purpose for this study.

For the purposes of this study, I define a ‘mainstream media’ as a large news provider that is primarily owned or subsidized by one or more conglomerates or mass media networks. A ‘mainstream medium’ reaches a large audience (1 million people or more), and operators of that medium invest considerable resources in their news operations.

This study considers the *Associated Press* as part of the mainstream media. The *Associated Press* is a U.S based news wire service that provides continuous coverage of news from the U.S and around the world. The *Associated Press* is a news cooperative owned by American newspaper and broadcast members.¹ In theory, such news services should self-consciously “*avoid* politically based editorial judgments in their news content” (Groeling & Baum, 2007). In this sense, the *Associated Press* can be regarded as a non-partisan news source compared to individual newspapers (i.e. the *New York Times*) and broadcast news organizations (i.e. *Fox News*).² This is one reason why this study tests content provided by the *Associated Press* as a mainstream news source instead of content from newspapers or broadcasts.

In addition, this study tests online blogs as a user-generated news source. Web users publish their own content online, often using various social media such as blogs, microblogs such as Twitter, social networking sites such as Facebook, and video sharing sites like YouTube (Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). These social media provide a set of online tools for generating content and supporting interaction between users (Hansen et al., 2011).

¹ See <http://www.ap.org/company/about-us>

² The reputation of the *New York Times* as a liberal source or that of *Fox News* as a conservative source may influence audiences’ perceptions of content (Groeling et al., 2007; Lyengar et al., 2009).

A blog can be a rich content platform for presenting in-depth information without limitations as compared to other social media. For example, Twitter limits a post to a maximum of 140 characters. Social networking sites focus on connecting friends and colleagues by creating personal information profiles. Video sharing sites provide applications for uploading video (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Audiences of blogs may be different from audiences for other social media. To illustrate, information on Twitter or Facebook is usually shared by networks of followers or friends. Conversely, information on blogs can be accessed by anyone unless bloggers want their postings to be public. In other words, information on blogs may build more general audiences beyond a group of followers or friends. Therefore, blogs and bloggers can be considered as producers of news content that can challenge mainstream media (Hansen et al., 2011). This explains why blogs are tested in this study as a user-generated news source.

A blog tested in this study is an independent and typically smaller provider of information and not a part of a larger mainstream conglomerate. Blogs content is generated by non-journalist citizens without any affiliation with professional news organizations. Bloggers would typically be viewed as ‘independent media’ sources, free from the influence of commercial interests, and more representative of an individual’s viewpoint.

Based on these explications, this study examines whether differences exist in audiences’ perceptions of bias and credibility in content from mainstream media (the *Associated Press*) versus user-generated blogs. This study also explores the audience’s online behaviors after reading the online news content.

Bias and Credibility of Content

Traditionally, balance and fairness in reporting have been regarded as common journalistic practices and important assets in news coverage (Fico & Soffin, 1995). However, it is not uncommon to encounter anecdotal evidences that individuals and groups believe news coverage and sources are biased. As examples, political parties complain that they received unfair treatment by the press especially during their campaigns and members of religious and racial groups frequently denounce news coverage as biased against their positions (Gunther, Miller, & Liebhart, 2009; Gunther, Christen, Liebhart, & Chia, 2001; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985).

According to the Pew Research Center, although 62 % of Americans believe “major news organizations do a good job covering all of the important news stories and subjects that matter to me,” 72% believe “most news sources today are biased in their coverage”(Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Olmstead, 2010) (Figure1).

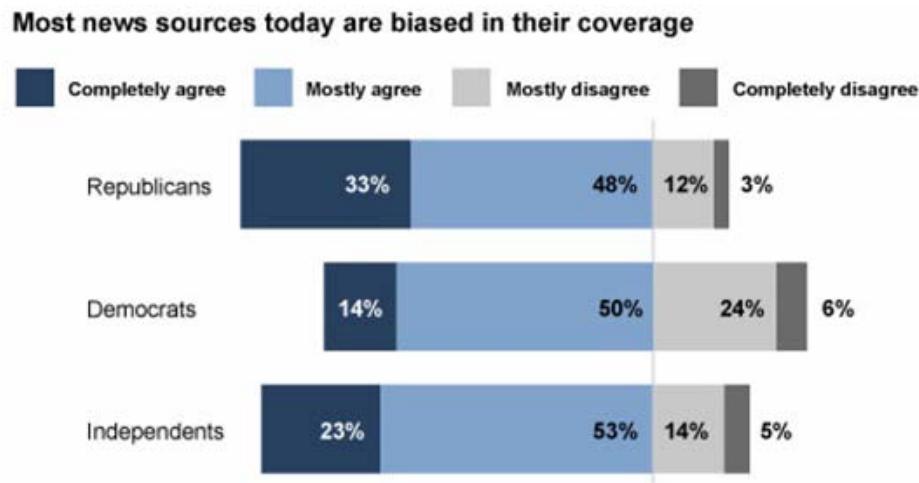


Figure1. Perceived bias of U.S. news coverage
(Source: Purcell et al, 2010, p.18. Reprinted with permission)

Some say this dichotomy is fostered by partisanship. “Liberals and Democrats are more likely to say that large news organizations do a good job on subjects that matter to them, while conservatives and Republicans are likely to perceive coverage as biased” (Purcell et al, 2010, p.6).

Credibility in reporting has also been a valued attribute in journalism (Gunther, 1992). Pew revealed how Democrats and Republicans evaluated credibility differently in identical news coverage. Some believed the news story was trustworthy. Others judged the same story to be untrustworthy (Purcell et al., 2010). These results suggest that perceived bias and credibility may not be an objective attribute of news coverage, but associated with individual factors such as partisanship.

Some scholars claim that partisans who perceive news coverage as untrustworthy or biased against their own opinions demonstrate a ‘hostile media effect’ (Gunther et al., 2001; Choi, Yang, & Chang, 2009). This effect posits that either a pro or anti opinion of partisans influences partisans to perceive bias and credibility in the coverage in different ways (Gunther et al., 2009).

To date, the hostile media effect has been investigated using printed news articles or national network broadcasts produced by professional journalists of mainstream media. The effect has not been explored for mainstream versus user-generated content online.

This study responds by testing the framework of hostile media effect in mainstream news and user-generated blog postings. For doing so, the study measures how partisan audiences rate bias and credibility in identical news content supplied by different sources (mainstream media versus citizen blogs)

Commenting and Information Seeking Behavior

The web provides technical tools for users to interact with content. Users frequently express their opinions publicly by commenting on the content read online. This makes it possible for audiences to participate in ongoing discussion about controversial issues (Bruns, 2005). Most web pages also provide hyperlinks to related content, which offer audiences the option to select more content that is interesting to them.

Research has shown that 25% of Internet users have commented on an online news story or blog (Purcell et al., 2010). Many more (75%) believe that links to related content is an important web feature. Although commenting and clicking links to related content are now common activities on the web, users' motivations for - and effects of - these activities have not been empirically explored in the context of controversial issues. This study investigates partisan audiences' commenting and information seeking as behavioral consequences of the hostile media effect.

Goals For This Study

One goal of this study is to extend previous research on the hostile media effect by testing it with controversial issues online and user-generated content (i.e. blogs). The study then explores if a hostile media effect occurs when the same content appears as professionally-produced news (i.e. the *Associated Press*). A second goal of this study is to examine the relationships between partisans' perceptions of a controversial content and their online behaviors, including their commenting on content or selecting related links to content for more information.

The first step to achieve these goals is explications of concepts and the theoretical framework (Table 1).

Concepts	Bias, Credibility, Online behavior
Theory	Hostile Media Effect Relative Hostile Media Effect

Table 1. Concepts and theoretical framework of this study

Dissertation Organization

Beginning with chapter two, the concepts of perceived bias, credibility, and online behavior are explicated. Chapter three summarizes the theory of hostile media effect and discusses audiences' involvement and the perceived reach of information as predictors of hostile media effect. Psychological dimensions underlying the effect, such as different standards, selective categorization, and selective recall are also addressed.

Chapter four details the research method including the partisan participants, stimuli, instruments, and experimental procedures employed in this study. Chapter five presents the results and chapter six discusses the theoretical, practical, and democratic implications of hostile media effect in the digital age. Chapter six also proposes directions for future research.

All of this work is conducted in the context of two controversial issues that includes same sex marriage and guns on campus. Previous studies have tested hostile media effect with the issues of abortion (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken , 1993), genetically

modified foods (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004; Gunter & Liebhart, 2006; Gunther et al., 2009), the use of primates in laboratory research (Gunther & Chia, 2001), the 1997 United Parcel Service strike (Christen, Kannaovakun, & Gunther, 2002), presidential debates (Richardson, Huddy, & Morgan, 2008), global warming (Kim, 2010) and sports news (Arpan & Raney, 2003), but no known study has compared the effects of controversial content about same sex marriage and guns on campus provided by mainstream news sources versus blogs.

The Issue of Same Sex Marriage

Same sex marriage in the United States is not endorsed by the federal government. However, individual states, including: Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont, Washington along with the District of Columbia have succeeded in the legalization of same sex marriage.³

With the signature of Maryland's Governor on a same sex marriage bill on March 1, 2012, Maryland became the eighth state to legalize same sex marriage. Davis (2012) noted that while supporters of the bill erupted into applause after the bill was signed, opponents immediately started to work on overturning it by gathering petition signatures for a referendum. The battle over same sex marriage, at least in Maryland, is likely to come down to the ballot (Duncan, 2012).

As the debate about same sex marriage has grown to a national political issue (Masci, 2009), the U.S. public remains divided. A series of Gallup polls (Figure 2) shows that respondents have aligned on both sides of the issue.

³ Where states stand on same sex marriage, *USA Today*, February 7, 2012

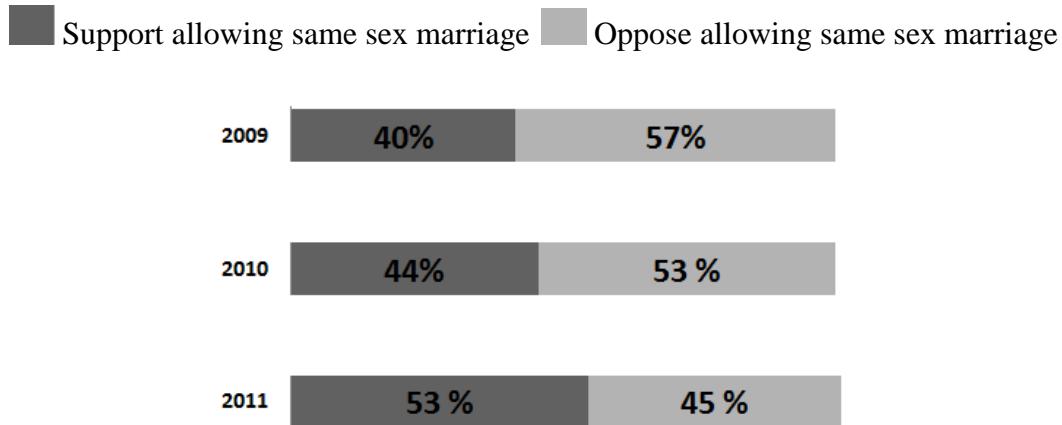


Figure 2. Public opinion about same sex marriage 2009 to 2011
 (Source: Gallup, Credit: NPR (May 25, 2011)⁴)

According to Masci (2009), supporters of same sex marriage argue that gay and lesbian couples should be treated no differently than heterosexual couples. Supporters contend that same sex couples do not have any basic rights and privileges enjoyed by heterosexual couples. These privileges range from the sharing of health and pension benefits to hospital visitation rights (Masci, 2009).

Conversely, opponents maintain that a marriage between a man and a woman is the foundation of a healthy society. Opponents contend that only traditional marriage can lead to stable families in which children grow up to be productive adults (Masci, 2009). Opponents claim that allowing same sex marriage will adversely affect the institution of marriage, which has already been damaged by high divorce rates and a significant number of illegitimate children (Masci, 2009). The second controversial issue tested in this study is guns on campus.

⁴ Gay Marriage Activists: Minn. Vote Offers Opportunity, *NPR*, May 25, 2011

The Issue of Guns on Campus

In March, 2012, a University of Maryland student, Alexander Song, posted an online threat of shooting on campus.⁵ Song wrote that he was going on a rampage to “kill enough people to make it to national news.”⁶ Reports about this online posting triggered campus crime alerts and Song’s arrest.⁷

This scare followed previous attacks involving guns on other campuses. In the aftermath of gun violence on campuses such as Virginia Tech, some states now permit college students and professors to carry weapons on campus. Utah, for example, allows students to carry a concealed gun if students have the proper permit. In Colorado, several colleges now permit licensed handguns on campus.⁸ More recently, Texas approved concealed handgun licenses for weapons in public college buildings and classrooms.⁹ Similar measures have been considered in Arizona, Tennessee, Michigan, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Florida, Nebraska and Mississippi.¹⁰

As the number of states allowing guns on campus increased, the controversy over the issue intensified. Opponents claim that if guns are allowed, “students and faculty would live in fear of classmates and colleagues, not knowing who might pull a gun over a poor grade, broken romance or drunken argument.”¹¹ Gun proponents argue that Virginia Tech’s gun-free ‘safe zone’ policy actually endangered students,

⁵ Umd. student Alexander Song, arrested after threatening ‘shooting rampage’ on College Park campus, *ABC News*, March 11, 2012

⁶ University of Maryland student charged in rampage threat, *USA Today*, March 12, 2012.

⁷ According to *The Washington Times* (March 12, 2012), police did not find any weapons in his dorm room or his family’s home.

⁸ Will guns make college campuses safer?, *Washington Examiner*, February 27, 2011

⁹ Guns on campus gets first approval in Texas, *CBS News*, March 17, 2011

¹⁰ States Consider Allowing Guns on Campus, *Fox Business*, February 23, 2011

¹¹ *CBS News*, March 17, 2011

not made them safer.¹² Proponents contend that allowing guns on campus is “a self-defense measure to prevent violent campus crime.”¹³

As the controversies over marriage and guns continue, professional journalists report the issues while bloggers – often with partisan opinions – post their content online. As a result, audiences on both sides of the issues are exposed to online content with a valence different from their own. Therefore, the coverage of same sex marriage and guns on campus in mainstream news sites versus blogs provide a novel platform for new explorations of the hostile media effect.

To investigate, this study first explicates the concepts of perceived bias and credibility in content. This study also conceptualizes users’ online behaviors including commenting and further information seeking.

¹² MSU sticks to guns on firearms policy, *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, December 5, 2007

¹³ CBS News, March 17, 2011

Chapter 2 Conceptualizations: Perceived Bias, Credibility, and Online behaviors

Bias

Perceived bias in news coverage has incited debates among media scholars, journalists, and audiences alike. These debates have triggered a number of empirical studies about bias in news. The outcome is a variety of definitions for bias. McQuail (1992) wrote that bias refers to a systematic tendency to favor one side or position over another side or position. Entman (2007) defined bias as consistent patterns in the framing of mediated communication that promote the influence of one side in conflicts by supporting the interests of particular holders or seekers of political power. Bias in news coverage was also defined as “any forms of preferential and unbalanced treatment or favoritism, toward a political or social issue (e.g. pro-choice or pro-life) or political party” (Lee, 2005, p.45). Based on these definitions, previous bias studies analyzed news of mainstream news organizations to investigate if the news is biased or not.

Bias in News Coverage

Fico, Freedman, & Love (2006) suggested two types of bias in news as either structural bias or partisan bias. Structural bias results from journalistic news values, work routines, organizational resource, and news organizations' dependencies on other institutions (Fico & Freedman, 2008a). Partisan bias results from journalists' political orientations violating professional norms that mandate impartiality (Fico et al., 2008a).

Fico and colleague (2008a) provided evidence of partisan bias in a content analysis of newspaper stories covering eleven U.S Senate races in 2006. The researchers found that the majority of stories favored Democratic and other liberal candidates. Tan & Weaver (2010) also found fluctuation of liberal and conservative citation bias in the *New York Times* between 1956 and 2004.

In contrast, other studies found little bias in news coverage. Fico, Zeldes, Carpenter, & Diddi (2008b) found little evidence of partisan bias in the daily election segments of CBS News and Fox News during the 2004 presidential election. Generally, CBS News has been considered as a liberal news source, whereas Fox News has been regarded as a conservative news source (Fico et al., 2008b). Therefore, results of the study were contrary to expectations which Fox and CBS news are most likely to show partisan bias (Fico et al., 2008b).

A meta-analysis of 59 quantitative studies reviewed data related to bias in presidential election campaigns since 1948 (D'Alessio & Allen, 2000). Analyses focused on three types of bias including: 1. Gatekeeping bias, which is the preference for selecting stories from one party or the other, 2. Coverage bias for addressing the relative amounts of coverage each party receives, and 3. Statement bias for focusing on the favorability of coverage toward one party or the other. Researchers found no significant bias of any kind in newspaper, news magazines, and television network news (D'Alessio et al., 2000).

Even though previous research has failed to provide consistent results for bias in news coverage, the majority of the U.S public still perceive that most news coverage is biased (Purcell et al., 2010). This suggests no empirical link between true

bias in news coverage and audiences' perceived bias (Ho, Binder, Becker, Moy, Scheufele, Brossard, & Gunther, 2011). If that is true, perceived bias is neither absolute nor objective but subjective depending on audiences' individual factors such as partisanship.

The Non-Absolute Conceptualization of Bias

Gangs (1979) identified bias with 'distortion', meaning news coverage can be perceived as distorted (biased) in relation to a specified standard of non-distortion (non-biased). Different audiences base the standards of non-distortion on different reality and value judgments (Gangs, 1979). According to the researcher, standards for bias cannot be absolute or objective. "When the news lives up to one standard, it may then be distorted in relation to a different one" (Gangs, 1979, p. 305). The implication is that those who have different standards of non-distortion (non-biased) may judge bias in the same news coverage differently.

Therefore, based on previous studies by Gangs (1979), Ho et al. (2011), and Lee (2005), this study conceptualizes bias as an individual's subjective perception that content, a source, or an author provides preferential and unbalanced information for a controversial issue, regardless of any real biases portrayed in the news coverage.

Credibility

Traditionally, credibility in mass media has been defined as an attribute of news coverage or sources. However, using a national survey, Gunther (1992) found that audiences' characteristics were the strongest predictor of perceived credibility in news. When making credibility judgments, audience characteristics, including the

audience's involvement with issues, appeared more important than media attributes. Similar to perceived bias, perceived credibility, can also be considered a response by a given audience to given content (Gunther, 1992). Accordingly, this study conceptualizes perceived credibility as a subjective perception of the online audience, not as an objective property of the content.

A source of given content, its author, and the content itself contribute to the overall perceived credibility of the content (Kiousis, 2001). Based on previous credibility studies (Choi, Watt, & Lynch, 2006; Kiousis, 2001), this study conceptualizes perceived credibility as the three dimensions of: 1. Source credibility, 2. Author credibility, and 3. Content credibility (Figure 3).

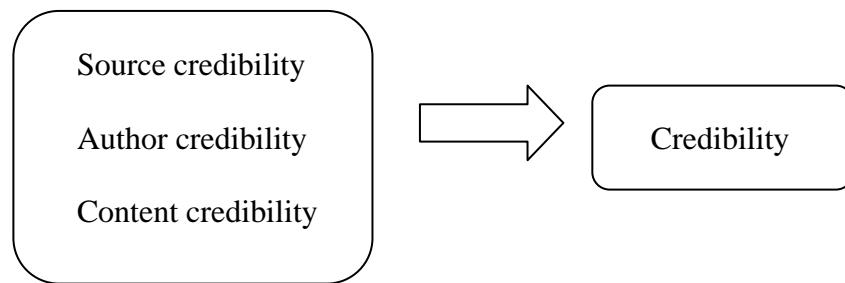


Figure 3. Conceptualizations of this study's credibility

Specifically, source credibility describes the trustworthiness or believability of a mainstream news site versus a blog. Author credibility is the perception about the producers of content (i.e. professional journalist versus citizen blogger), and content credibility relates to evaluations of the controversial information presented (Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, & Maccann, 2003).¹⁴ Each dimension will now be explicated.

¹⁴ Metzger et al (2003) categorized credibility as message credibility, source credibility, and media credibility. Even though this study's credibility categories are based on their study, this study uses different terms such as content credibility, author credibility, and source credibility for more clarifying.

Source Credibility

Fundamentally, source credibility is one's perceived credibility of a media channel through which an author transmits a message (Kiousis, 2001). Source credibility can be defined "as perceptions of a news channel's believability, as distinct from individual author, media organizations, or the content of the news itself" (Bucy, 2003, p.248).

Web audiences can view content from mainstream news organizations and citizen-based blogs at basically the same time. Therefore, the web can be categorized as a media channel with content supplied by either mainstream news organizations or individuals. Accordingly, this study explicates source credibility as an audience's evaluation of believability and trustworthiness of mainstream news sites versus citizen blogs.

Author Credibility

Some have defined author credibility as "how different communicator's characteristics can influence the processing of messages" (Kiousis, 2001, p.382). Expertise and trustworthiness have been included as dimensions of author credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). "Expertise referred to a communicator's qualifications or ability to know the truth about a topic, whereas trustworthiness was conceptualized as perceptions of the communicator's motivation to tell the truth about a topic" (Metzger et al., 2003, p.297).

In this study, author credibility is explicated as judgments made by audiences about the expertise and trustworthiness of professional journalists versus citizen bloggers.

Content Credibility

Scholars have treated content credibility as audiences' perceptions of message characteristics and information quality (Metzger et al., 2003). When audiences do not have enough information about an author, the content becomes a more important factor than the author in assessment of credibility (Eastin, 2001).

Metzger et al. (2003) suggested three factors of content credibility as:

1. Content structure, 2. Message or information in content, and 3. Delivery or presentation style. Audiences evaluate content based on content structure, which is whether the content is organized or unorganized. The trustworthiness or quality of the content, and the way in which the content is presented by an author, can also influence content credibility judgments.

Content structure and presentation style describe a content's format. This study focuses on the information provided in the content rather than the content's format. Therefore, this study explicates content credibility as an audience's evaluation of trustworthiness and quality of *the information* presented in online content produced by either a journalist or citizen blogger.

Table 2 summarizes the concepts of source credibility, author credibility and content credibility in this study.

Source Credibility	Audiences' perceived credibility of mainstream news sites versus citizen blogs
Author Credibility	Audiences' perceived credibility of professional journalists versus citizen bloggers
Content Credibility	Audiences' perceived credibility of information presented in online news stories versus blog postings

Table 2. Explications of source credibility, author credibility and content credibility

Based on the conceptualizations of bias and credibility, this study asks:

RQ1: *How do partisans' opinions influence their evaluation of online news produced by professional journalists in terms of bias and credibility?*

And

RQ2: *How do partisans' opinions influence their evaluation of blog posting produced by non-journalists in terms of bias and credibility?*

This study also examines the roles of source and partisan opinion in the audiences' evaluations of identical content presented by either mainstream news sites or user-generated blogs. This examination seeks to answer the question:

RQ3: *How do sources and partisans' opinions influence the evaluation of identical content from a blog and a mainstream news site in terms of bias and credibility?*

Audiences' Online Behaviors

Citizens no longer just read content on the web. Reading mainstream online news and blog postings could prompt other audiences' activities for interacting with the content and seeking more information (Yaros, 2009). These activities significantly

affect how audiences learn and perceive the content (Yaros, 2011). Based on this assumption, audiences' online behaviors of this study are conceptualized as commenting and further information seeking behavior following exposure to the content (Figure 4).

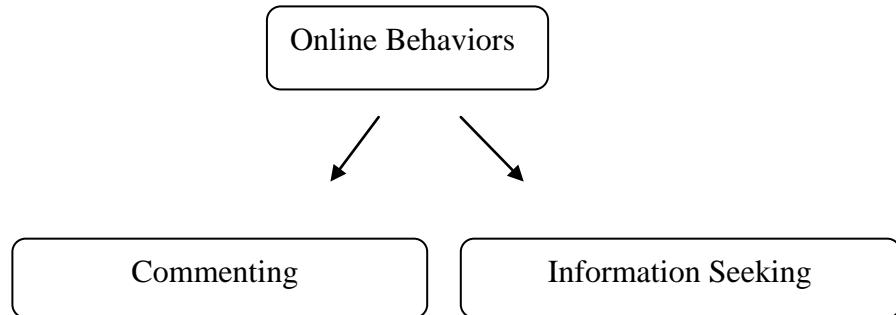


Figure 4. Conceptualizations of this study's online behaviors

Commenting Behavior

Traditional media, such as printed newspapers, 'transmit' content from a source to a reader. Arguably, any 'interactivity' provided by printed newspapers was delayed. For example, to interact with articles on printed newspapers, readers typically mailed their opinions, thoughts, and feelings to the newspaper for printing in subsequent issues. Even then, space limitations often prevented publication of all letters from readers forcing editors to print only selected letters (Rosenthal, 1969).

The advent of the Internet has resulted in two-way communication in which messages flow bilaterally (Schultz, 1999). Interactive features of the Internet make possible a sequence of messages that relate to each other, with later messages recounting earlier messages (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1997). Letters-to-the editor online

can be followed by instant comments from any web user who voluntarily posts them.

Both mainstream news sites and blogs typically allow online audiences to post comments. In many cases, comments are posted without editing.

By posting comments online, audiences, in effect, engage with a ‘conversation’ with original authors of content and other audience members who comment on the content to add other perspectives to the content they read (Bruns, 2005). Schuth et al. (2007) analyzed comments in news by counting the number of sentences per comment. The researchers found that the quality of comments were unexpectedly high, suggesting that some comments could be a valuable source of information on the web.

The opportunity for web audiences to comment on content also facilitates a discussion structure in comments (Schuth et al., 2007). According to Bruns (2005), audiences often gain an understanding of news events through the ongoing conversations or debates posted in comments. Bruns (2005) argued that such a continuing conversation could change the nature of news stories from ‘finished stories’ to ‘unfinished stories’. In this sense, commenting behavior can represent the online news story as a starting point for further discussions between content producers and audience members (Bruns, 2005). Accordingly, this study explicates commenting as an audience’s activity for expressing opinions, thoughts, and feelings about content read on the web.

Based on this explication, this study examines the relationships between audiences’ prior opinions and their commenting behaviors after reading content about

controversial issues from mainstream news sites and citizen blogs. This study seeks answers to a question that asks:

RQ4: *How do partisans' opinions influence their commenting behavior online?*

Information Seeking Behavior

According to Matusiak (2006), information seeking is a fundamental human activity in the process of gathering information and building knowledge. The researcher considered information seeking as “a process in which humans purposefully engage in order to change their state of knowledge” (Marchionini, 1995, p.5). Information seeking includes “activities between the recognition of information need and the acquisition of relevant information.” (Rice, McCreadie, & Chang, 2001, p.2).

The transformation of news from print to the web has obviously influenced audiences’ information seeking behavior. Printed newspapers construct a hierarchy of stories by arranging them in order of importance (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002). In this structure, readers conduct page-by-page searches looking for stories of interest to them. During this search process, readers are exposed to stories that may not be interesting to them. This suggests that, to some extent, print journalists can have some control of audiences’ exposure to content.

The web, however, provides hyperlinks that reference other content that web users can follow nonlinearly. Hyperlinks can help to reshape how audiences seek and select online content and make it easier to search for and select stories that are interesting (Yaros, 2011; Bilal & Kirby, 2002). Web audiences are “particularly likely

to control their own interests, and less likely to follow the cues of news editors and producers" (Tewksbury, 2006, p. 694). In other words, web audiences typically determine their own 'path' when seeking more content. When this occurs, the web facilitates greater individual control over content selection as compared to traditional mainstream media (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002).

Based on this discussion, this study explicates information seeking as an audience's activity for selecting related content after viewing original content to gain more information. The relationship between audiences' opinions and further information seeking behavior is examined by asking:

RQ5: *How do partisans' opinions influence their further information seeking behavior online?*

To explore the roles of audiences' perceptions of content read in subsequent information seeking, this study also asks:

RQ6: *How do partisans' perceptions of content they read influence their further information seeking behavior online?*

To investigate these questions, this study tests the theoretical framework of hostile media effect for content on mainstream news sites versus citizen blogs.

Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework: Hostile Media Effect

Early media effect studies employed a ‘hypodermic needle’ model suggesting media ‘inject’ audiences with content that prompts particular responses (Morley, 1989). This suggested that messages are directly received and wholly accepted by audiences.

Another perspective from the uses and gratification paradigm, focused on the uses of media, and user satisfactions from using media. These were closely related with users’ motives and needs (McQuail, 2005). This school considered the active engagement of audiences with media and developed variability of responses and interpretations (Morley, 1989). The different responses or interpretations were associated with individual differences (i.e. personality, psychology, etc.). From this perspective, there is no longer a given effect of a message on a homogeneous mass audience.

At the same time, Morley (1989) argued that although the uses and gratification approach raised questions about different interpretations, it often failed to provide sufficient sociological and cultural perspectives.

Alternatively, Hall’s encoding/decoding model provided social and cultural explanations for audiences’ differing interpretations of media messages (Morley, 1989). Hall suggested the model of a communication circuit operating in its social context, noting ideological and cultural conditions of different audiences play an important role in their perceptions of media messages (Hall, 1980).

In sum, previous media effects studies have extended beyond the passive

audience model by exploring individual and social factors. An audience is no longer a mass that receives intended media message. Instead, ideological, economic, and cultural backgrounds of audiences have influenced their diverse perceptions of media content (i.e. Morley, 1980; Liebes & Katz, 1990; Ang, 1996), which leads to the contemporary theory of hostile media effect.

Hostile media effect describes a partisan's perceptions of news coverage. The theory addresses factors that influence partisan perceptions of news coverage about a controversial issue and posits that different points of view influence partisans to perceive content in different ways (Gunther et al., 2009). Specifically, hostile media effect describes the tendency for partisans with opinions toward a divisive issue to perceive seemingly 'balanced news' as biased against their own opinion (Gunther et al., 2001; Choi et al., 2009).

Hostile media effect provides the theoretical foundation for this investigation of how audiences' positions on same sex marriage and guns on campus influence their perceptions of content presented by either mainstream news sites or citizen blogs. The effect is further tested to see if partisans' opinions and perceptions also affect their online behaviors, such as commenting and subsequent information seeking.

Earlier research by Vallone et al. (1985) produced evidences that opposing partisans might agree that news coverage is biased, but disagree on the direction of such bias. Results of a survey before the 1980 presidential election showed that partisan Republicans and Democrats perceived news coverage as being against their favored candidate.

Inspired by these results, Vallone and his colleagues exposed pro-Israeli and pro-Arab students to television news programs about the 1982 Beirut massacre. Results suggested that both sides regarded the programs as biased in favor of the opposite side, and that the views of the program's editors were unfavorable to those of the partisans. The researchers concluded that "rather than perceiving confirmation and support, partisans frequently claim to perceive hostile bias, even in news coverage that most nonpartisans find even-handed and objective" (Vallone et al., 1985, p.578).

Predictors of Hostile Media Effect

Perceived Reach

The counterpart to hostile media effect is 'biased assimilation' (Vallone et al., 1985). Biased assimilation describes an individual's tendency to perceive reported information as supportive, rather than opposed, to the individual's opinion (Lord & Lepper, 1979). Several studies have demonstrated biased assimilation when exposing partisans to research reports (see, Lord et al, 1979; Boysen & Vogel; 2007; Munro & Ditto, 1997; Plous, 1991; Mchoskey, 1995).

Gunther et al. (2004) explained the contradiction of biased assimilation and hostile media effect by the notion of 'perceived reach'. The researchers argued that biased assimilation studies used research reports with low levels of audience exposure or reach. In other words, participants in biased assimilation studies assumed that the relatively small audience for the research was the participants themselves. Conversely, hostile media effect studies used national network broadcasts or newspaper articles assumed to reach larger and broader audiences.

Based on the differentiation of perceived reach, participants of biased assimilation and hostile media effect studies may have significantly different perceptions about the influence of media. A participant exposed to media with low levels of reach generally considers the influence to be directed to him or herself, which results in biased assimilation. A participant exposed to media with high levels of reach assumes the content influences broader audiences. Partisans could assume that news coverage reaching a larger audience could more easily influence the opinions of others. This is why some scholars argue that mass media's broader reach and potential influence are more likely to generate the hostile media effect (Gunther et al., 2004; Gunther et al., 2006; Gunther et al., 2009). If that is true, the hostile media effect is also related to the so-called 'third person effect.'

Third Person Effect

The third person effect posits that individuals exposed to mass media messages believe the messages influence other audience members more than themselves (Davison, 1983). This predicts that people overestimate the influence of mass media on others (Davison, 1983).

Some scholars consider the third person effect to be "a human tendency to see the world through an optimistic or self-serving lens" (Gunther & Mundy, 1993, p.58). This means the third person effect is based on the tendency for people to think they may be smarter or more informed than others. When this occurs, people consider others to be more vulnerable to the media's influence.

Not all information, however, produces a third person effect. Gunther et al. (1993) tested whether harmful or beneficial information produced the same effect and

found that information with harmful outcomes was more closely related with the third person effect. Participants perceived the beneficial information to have the same effect on others as on themselves.

Perloff (1989) replicated the Vallone et al. (1985)'s study to examine relationships between the third person and hostile media effects. Pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, and non-partisan control groups viewed the same news video about the 1982 war in Lebanon and perceived that other 'neutral' viewers would describe their side as an aggressor and the other side as a victim. Participants also predicted that the news would influence the opinions of 'neutral' viewers to become more unfavorable toward their side, but more favorable toward the opposite side.

Hostile media effect has also been found to reverse third person effects (Gunther et al., 2004). Although people who view undesirable messages in mass media think the messages have a greater influence on others, partisans who perceive information to be reaching a mass audience often judge that information to be undesirable. Gunther et al. (2004) noted that even with the reversed process, the logic of hostile media effect is similar to the third person effect because partisans consider others to be more vulnerable to undesirable influences of media than themselves. This, Gunther argued, can depend on the reach of a media source or information.

High Reach versus Low Reach Media

For investigating the role of perceived reach of information in hostile media effects, Gunther et al. (2004) hypothesized that "if partisans consider information only in terms of their own opinion, they will see it as neutral or favorable. But if

partisans are prompted to consider influences on others, they will see the same information as biased in a hostile direction” (Gunther et al., 2004, p.58).

To test this hypothesis, partisans of genetically modified foods were presented with identical information from either a news organization or a student essay. Participants who read the news story perceived that content as biased against their opinion. Participants who read the student essay considered the identical content as supportive of their opinion (Gunther et al., 2004). In sum, media perceived with a high reach produced a hostile media effect and the student essay with low reach produced biased assimilation. Gunther and his colleagues concluded that this showed that hostile media effect can be influenced significantly by perceived reach of source and information.

Gunther and his colleagues extended this work by comparing perceived reach of a source with different authors (a student versus a journalist). They found that the perceived reach of source and author both independently contributed to hostile media effect (Gunther et al., 2006). In the student-as-author condition, opposing groups perceived the valence of the content similarly. In the journalist-as-author condition, however, participants evaluated identical content as hostile toward their position. This outcome reinforced the role of perceived reach in generating a hostile media effect.

Gunther et al. (2009) further explored the role of perceived reach in generating both assimilation and hostile bias.

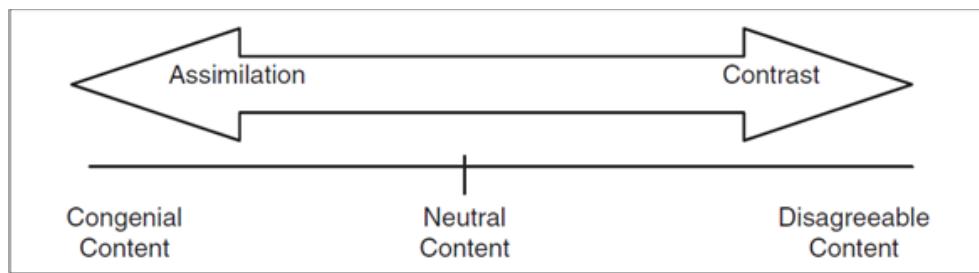


Figure 5. The assimilation-contrast continuum
 (Source: Gunther et al., 2009, p.748, Reprinted with permission)

Scholars noted that depending on audiences' perceived reach of content, their perceptions of the content can "fall anywhere on a continuum from the assimilation - contrast (hostile) continuum" (Gunther et al., 2009, p.748, Figure 5). According to Gunther et al. (2009), partisans focus on congenial content in the low reach condition of a student essay, which generates the assimilation. However, in high reach condition of mass media, partisans consider the potential influence of the content on others, which makes the disagreeable content more salient than the supportive content. This produces the hostile media effect (Gunther et al., 2009).

Perceived reach isn't the only predictor of hostile media effect. Audience involvement must also be considered and social judgment theory helps to explain why.

Audience Involvement

An experimental study by Giner-Sorolla et al. (1993) investigated effects of news about the Israel-Palestinian conflict and abortion. They found a hostile media effect from news about the Israel-Palestinian conflict but did not find the effect from news about abortion. Pro-life and pro-choice partisans showed only a weak hostile media effect, which the scholars associated with less audience involvement. If this

was so, the study demonstrated that participants' involvement with an issue could be another significant predictor of hostile media effect.

The relationship of involvement with an issue and a partisan's perception of content about a controversial issue might also be explained by social judgment theory.

Social Judgment Theory

Social judgment theory posits that different levels of involvement with a given issue can be related to different levels of acceptance, rejection or non-commitment for news coverage about an issue. Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall (1981) states that latitude of acceptance refers to "the position on an issue (or toward an object) that is most acceptable, plus other acceptable positions" (p.24). Latitude of rejection is defined as "the most objectionable position on the same issue, plus other objectionable positions" (p.24). Latitude of non-commitment is "those positions not categorized as either acceptable or objectionable in some degree" (p.24).

Sherif and his colleagues (1981) provided empirical support of the social judgment theory in a study of the 1960 presidential election. The researchers exposed both Republicans and Democrats to nine statements ranging from an extreme conservative to an extreme liberal position. Participants indicated their levels of involvement with the election issue as most extreme, extreme, moderate and mild. Results indicated that participants with high involvement with an issue tended to have wider latitudes of rejection of statements about the issue. Less involved participants had relatively narrow latitudes of rejection but wider latitudes of acceptance or non-commitment (Sherif et al., 1981).

According to Sherif et al. (1981), the latitude differences stemmed from one's own perception of what is acceptable or objectionable. The researchers noted that individuals had their own evaluative categories for what is acceptable or objectionable and that the number of categories varied with levels of involvement. The more highly involved people are, the fewer the categories for what is acceptable and the more for what is objectionable (Sherif et al., 1981).

Sherif and his colleagues concluded that the more the audience is involved with an issue, the more their position anchors their judgment of coverage about the issue. In other words, one's position serves as a yardstick for evaluating coverage. When a coverage is opposite from an audience's position, the coverage is perceived as "unreasonable, propagandistic, false, and even obnoxious" (Sherif et al., 1981, p.227). But when a coverage is congenial with an audience's position, the coverage is evaluated as "more truthful, more factual, less biased and tolerable" (Sherif et al., 1981, p.227).

Gunther (1992) tested social judgment theory by exploring the influence of issue involvement on perceptions of news coverage. Gunther found that highly involved individuals tended to have more fixed positions for an issue and considered their position to be correct even when they encounter dissonant opinions. Highly involved people process information by: "1. Taking consonant information (that which falls in a narrow range of acceptance) as veridical, and embracing it, and 2. Judging counter-attitudinal information to be the product of a biased, misguided or ill-informed source and rejecting it" (Gunther, 1992, p.151).

In sum, social judgment theory suggests that for those highly involved with an issue, news coverage about the issue tends to fall into the latitude of rejection, which increases the possibility for hostile media effect (Choi et al., 2009).

Although involvement appears to be a significant factor for hostile media effect, there is little agreement on how to operationalize the concept of involvement. Some studies used group membership while other studies used opinion extremity as indicators of audiences' involvement with an issue (Gunther et al., 2009).

For example, data from a study commissioned by the American Society of Newspapers Editors (ASNE) showed that group membership was associated with public perception of media coverage. A person who identified with a particular group was more likely to evaluate the coverage as biased against his or her group (Gunther, 1992). "To the extent that it captures a person's personal identity and deeper forms of commitment, identification with a group can define a fundamental sense of involvement" (Gunther, 1992, p.152).

Others used opinion extremity as an indicator of involvement, focusing on partisans who express strong or extreme opinion toward an issue as highly involved individuals (i.e. Schmitt, Gunther, & Liebhart, 2004; Vallone et al, 1985). Based on the previous work, this study uses both group membership and opinion extremity as indicators of involvement with the issues of same sex marriage and guns on campus.

Besides the predictors of perceived reach and audience involvement for hostile media effect, we must also understand the mechanisms producing the effect. The next section explores the factors underlying the effect.

Psychological Mechanisms Underlying Hostile Media Effect

A 1985 study by Vallone and his colleagues postulated that two mechanisms explain hostile media effect. The first is audiences' selective evaluation and the second is their selective perception.

To illustrate, pro-Arab and pro-Israeli subjects 'saw' different content within the same news program. Pro-Arab and pro-Israeli subjects reported different percentages of the program's references to Israel as either favorable or unfavorable. Both groups also evaluated differently the perceived fairness and objectivity of the program. Based on these findings, researchers concluded that both selective evaluation and perception appear to contribute to the hostile media effect.

Studies by Giner-Sorolla et al. (1993) and Schmitt et al.(2004) expanded Vallone et al.'s approach by proposing the three mechanisms of: 1. Different standards, 2. Selective categorization, and 3. Selective recall (Figure 6).

In terms of different standards, partisans may agree that balanced news has an equal number of content to support each side, but partisans may have other standards for evaluating the news. For example, partisans perceive specific content that supports their position to be more accurate than it is for the other side. Partisans also perceive content opposing their position to be invalid and irrelevant. Therefore, since balanced news often includes statements opposing one position, partisans often judge that news to be in favor of the other side (Giner-Sorolla et al.1993; Schmitt et al., 2004).

Selective recall suggests that partisans pay more attention to unfavorable content more than to favorable content. So, for them, unfavorable content is more

salient. It leads them to perceive that the news is biased against their position (Giner-Sorolla et al.1993; Schmitt et al., 2004).

In addition, although partisans may recall the same content from news, partisans categorize the content differently. Consequently, partisans categorize more news as unfavorable and tend to judge even neutral content to be unfavorable. This describes the notion of selective categorization (Giner-Sorolla et al.1993; Schmitt et al., 2004).

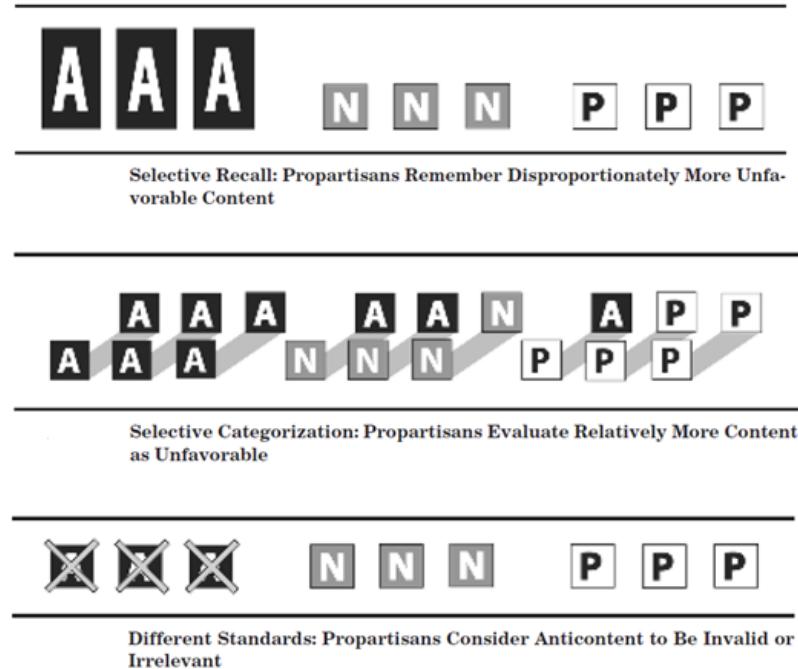


Figure 6. Three mechanisms explaining the hostile media effect

*anti (A), neutral (N), pro (P) content.

(Source: Schmitt et al, 2004, p.625, 626, Reprinted with permission)

Giner-Sorolla et al. (1993) proposed the causal model incorporating these three mechanisms and found that only the different standards mechanism explained hostile media effect. Selective recall and categorization was not observed among subjects of their experiment. The subjects (college students) remembered more

content that supported their position and categorized more content as supporting their position.

Schmitt et al. (2004) examined the three mechanisms with the two conditions of a newspaper article versus a student essay. As expected, hostile media effect was generated only for the newspaper article. The selective recall mechanism was not supported for either condition, but the different standards mechanism was found in both. Selective categorization appeared in only the newspaper article. In sum, whether partisans categorize statements in content as either favorable or unfavorable depended on the format in which the content was presented (in this case, a newspaper article versus a student essay). This result associated only selective categorization with hostile media effect. But there is an evidence for another form of hostile media effect, called ‘relative hostile media effect.’

Relative Hostile Media Effect

Previous hostile media effect studies exposed partisans to ‘neutral’ news about controversial issues and asked partisans to evaluate the news. The three required conditions for hostile media effect studies were: 1. A controversial issue, 2. Highly involved individuals, and 3. Neutral news (Choi et al., 2006)

Gunther et al. (2001) questioned the requirement of ‘neutral’ news, arguing that in reality, news is never completely neutral. The researchers argued that even disinterested observers can evaluate news as favorable toward a particular position. “Most of the journalists presumably believe they cleave to a professional standard of objectivity or balance, but most people in the media audience may not see it that way” (Gunther et al., 2001, p. 298). In 1996, the Society of Professional Journalists

removed the term ‘objectivity’ from its ethics code (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004). This reflects that even professional journalists may perceive the concept of objectivity to be unrealistic.

Based on this argument, some researchers coined the term ‘relative hostile media effect’ using content with a particular position (i.e. pro or anti) rather than ‘neutral’ news. In this case, when a partisan group sees other individuals evaluating news as favorable to the group, group members do not judge the news to be hostile to their points of view. But when most agree that news is unfavorable to the group, members evaluate the news as unfavorable relative to the other group (Gunther et al., 2001). This describes a ‘relative hostile media effect.’

The effect has been investigated with the controversial issue of using primates in scientific research. Partisan groups, one supporting animal rights and the other supporting the benefits of primate research, read stories that either supported primate research or animal rights. Those on both sides of the issue agreed that the pro-animal news story was biased toward animal right, but the pro-research members evaluated the news as more biased than pro-animal members. When both groups were exposed to news favoring primate research, animal right proponents perceived the content as more biased than supporters of primate research (Gunther et al., 2001).

A relative hostile media effect was also found in a national survey of the primate issue. Members from both sides agreed that coverage was generally unfavorable toward the use of primates in research. However, pro-primate research members perceived the coverage as significantly more unfavorable than pro-animal members.

In another national survey, Gunther & Christen (2002) tested the four issues of: radon gas, genetically altered foods, extraterrestrial visits, and physician-assisted suicide. Researchers found relative hostile effect in some but not all the issues, but noted that both sides of an issue have divergent perceptions of bias in a hostile direction. “Each will see media coverage differently, each in an unfavorable direction relative to the other” (Gunther et al., 2002, p.190).

Theoretically, the relative hostile media effect is identical to the original hostile media effect. By eliminating ‘neutral’ news, however, the relative hostile media effect is recognized to widen the scope of hostile media effect (Gunther et al., 2001).

Unlike journalists with ethical and professional standards, web users (i.e. bloggers) do not have such standards or norms for posting content on the web (Jenkins 2009). User-generated content such as blog posting do not generally exhibit professional gatekeeping or editing processes (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). Therefore, web users can openly or freely express their strong or extreme viewpoints of specific interest (Johnson, Kaye, Bichard, & Wong, 2008). Web users disclose their biases by publishing their own content (Johnson et al., 2004).

Given the increasing number of online content with a clear valence, this study tests the relative hostile media effect online using content with particular positions on two issues of same sex marriage and guns on campus.

Hostile Media Effect of Online Content

Previous studies have investigated traditional formats for content such as printed articles and national network broadcasts. Since a growing number of people¹⁵ have access to mainstream news online from news organizations' sites, such as *New York Times.com* and *CNN.com*, this study extends the previous literature by testing the relative hostile media effect for content online.

Synthesizing the previous studies, hypotheses in this study predict that partisan audiences will evaluate mainstream news differently in terms of bias, source credibility, author credibility, and content credibility. Specifically:

H1a: *Partisans with opinions opposite from mainstream news will perceive the news as more biased than partisans with opinions congenial with the news.*

H1b: *Partisans with opinions opposite from mainstream news will perceive a mainstream source as less credible than partisans with opinions congenial with the news.*

H1c: *Partisans with opinions opposite from mainstream news will perceive the author of the news as less credible than partisans with opinions congenial with the news.*

H1d: *Partisans with opinions opposite from mainstream news will perceive the content of the news as less credible than partisans with opinions congenial with the news.*

Prior to the web, news was produced by professional journalists at traditional news organizations and consumed by audiences. There was a distinction between the role of journalists and audiences. With emergence of the web, however, the roles have become blurred (Shirky, 2008). The declining prices of communication

¹⁵ Six in ten American adults (61%) get their news online on a typical day, and 71% of Americans get their news online at least occasionally. The Internet is now the third most-popular news platform behind local and national television news (Purcell et al., 2010).

tools such as computers and Internet networks helped – in part – ‘ordinary’ people to produce their own content (Benkler, 2006). Since every user can set up his or her own media outlet online, they can play the role traditionally assigned to journalists by reporting and analyzing events from their own perspectives (Benkler, 2006). Web users have become both producers and consumers of content online (Bowman & Willis, 2003), which contributed, in part, to the growth of news outlets online (Shirky, 2008).

The emergence of the web also provides a novel environment for testing the perceived reach of information, an important predictor of hostile media effect. If user-generated content, such as a student essay, is posted on the web, it may reach a large audience beyond the classroom.

The blog was one of the first platforms to make it possible for individuals to publish online (Gillmor, 2006). Gillmor defines a blog as “an online journal comprised of links and postings in reverse chronological order” (p.29). The ease and appeal of blogging have inspired individuals to create their own content and then disseminate it online. A Pew survey showed the blog population has grown to about 12% of all Internet users, and blog readers have jumped to 42% of the U.S. online population (Smith, 2008). These data indicate that blogs have grown as a medium with potentially high reach, an important predictor of hostile media effect.

Related to the perceived reach of blogs, Banning & Sweetser (2007) found evidence for the influence of blogs on large scale audience. They measured how audiences perceived the influence of blogs by comparing: personal blogs, media blogs, mainstream news sites, and printed newspapers. Interestingly, blogs were

found to have the same perceived influence on audiences as traditional media. This suggests that blog audiences may perceive a blog as a source reaching large and broad audiences with large-scale influences on them. If this is so, blog postings would also be susceptible to hostile media effect. This study hypothesizes that user generated blog content will produce a relative hostile media effect in terms of perceived bias, and source, author, and content credibility in the same way that mainstream news does. Specifically:

H2a: *Partisans with opinions opposite from blog posting will perceive the posting as more biased than partisans with opinions congenial with the posting.*

H2b: *Partisans with opinions opposite from blog posting will perceive the blog as a less credible source than partisans with opinions congenial with the posting.*

H2c: *Partisans with opinions opposite from blog posting will perceive the author of the posting as less credible than partisans with opinions congenial with the posting.*

H2d: *Partisans with opinions opposite from blog posting will perceive the content of the blog posting as less credible than partisans with opinions congenial with the posting.*

There have been debates about how to evaluate blogs as a news source. Some argue that since blogs are not constrained by the ethical and professional standards of trained journalists, blogs are generally less credible and more biased than mainstream media with its checks and balances to ensure credibility (Mackay & Lowrey, 2007). Others argue that because blogs are independent from corporate interests, blogs are more credible and less biased than mainstream media (Mackay et al., 2007).

In response, media scholars have started to compare audiences' evaluations of blogs with those of mainstream media (i.e. Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Kiousis, 2001; Johnson et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 2008; Kim & Johnson, 2009).

For example, Johnson et al. (2004) surveyed blog users and found that they evaluated blogs as more credible and less biased than traditional media. Blog readers argued that blogs provided more depth and thoughtful content than mainstream media. Subsequently, Johnson et al. (2008) examined perceptions of blogs by politically interested web users in the U.S. They found that the users also viewed blogs as more credible and less biased than mainstream media.

Geer (2003) tested the effects of a source by showing participants a news story from either a mainstream site or a personal home page. The participants rated the content equally across the two conditions. Mackey et al. (2007) replicated this finding with content displayed as online news, a journalist's blog, or a citizen blog. No significant differences in participants' evaluations were found suggesting no effect of news sources on evaluations of content.

So, while blog users and politically interested web users perceive blogs as a less biased and more credible source than mainstream media, general population showed no differences in their perceptions of blogs versus mainstream media. In the eyes of some, blogs have apparently achieved a status equal or close to that of mainstream media as a news source (Banning et al., 2007). However, previous studies did not consider individual factors in evaluations of identical content from different sources. This study fills that gap by applying audiences' prior position to evaluations of identical content on either a user-generated blog or mainstream news site.

Based on the previous discussions of relative hostile media effect, this study hypothesizes that partisans' evaluations of identical content will be influenced by the level of agreement between a partisan's opinion and the content's valence (i.e. opinions either agreeing or disagreeing with the content's valence). Specifically, whether a partisan's opinion is congenial or opposite from a content's valence will play a significant role compared to the content's source in evaluations of bias, and source, author, and content credibility. Specifically:

H3a: *Evaluations of bias will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence than by source.*

H3b: *Evaluations of source credibility will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence than by source.*

H3c: *Evaluations of author credibility will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence than by source.*

H3d: *Evaluations of content credibility will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence than by source.*

Hostile Media Effect and Online Behaviors

Commenting Behavior

A national survey by Hernando (2007) found that the hostile media effect positively related to behaviors for expressing opinions in the public sphere, such as commenting on news. Those who perceived news as biased against their points of view were more likely to post comments on the news to correct the perceived bias (Hernando, 2007).

Hwang, Pan, & Sun (2008) also examined how hostile media effect

influenced users' behavioral willingness to engage in discursive activities. The researchers investigated 'media indignation', which refers to "a set of negative emotional reactions to media coverage perceived to have partisan bias" (p.76). The researchers found that hostile media effect leads to media indignation, which "motivates individuals to engage in discursive activities, such as expressing criticism of the media, voicing one's own views, and/or discussing one's opinions with others that are seen as necessary to right the wrongs and make their own views heard in the public sphere" (Hwang et al., 2008, p.80).

This study extends the previous research by measuring users' commenting behavior following exposure to a mainstream news or blog posting with a valence either congenial with or opposite from partisans' opinions. This investigation predicts:

H4a: *Partisans exposed to mainstream news opposite from their opinion will comment more than partisans exposed to news congenial with their opinion.*

H4b: *Partisans exposed to blog posting opposite from their opinion will comment more than partisans exposed to blog posting congenial with their opinion.*

Information Seeking Behavior

Information seeking on the web can be explained using the concept of selective exposure, and a possible behavioral consequence of hostile media effect (Kim, 2010). Selective exposure is the tendency for individuals to select information supporting their own opinion (Fisher, Jonas, Frey, & Schulz-Hardt, 2004). Specifically, individuals generally prefer to seek information congenial with their opinion and avoid information opposite from their opinion.

Selective exposure to news source was found to be triggered by audiences' partisanship. Lyengar & Hahn (2009) found ideological selectivity in media use, with conservative Republicans preferring news from a conservative news source (Fox News) and avoiding what they perceive to be more liberal sources (CNN or National Public Radio). Liberals and Democrats preferred the opposite sources. Researchers found selective exposure based on ideology not only in political news, but also in sports and travel information. These results demonstrate "the pervasiveness of the ideological divides in news selection" (Lyengar et al., 2009, p. 32).

Stroud (2007) analyzed data from the 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey and reported that political beliefs motivate media exposure. The researcher discovered that 64 percent of conservative Republicans visited at least one conservative media outlet compared to 26 percent of liberal Democrats. In contrast, 76 percent of liberal Democrats visited at least one liberal media outlet compared to 43 percent of conservative Republicans. These data also revealed partisan selective exposure across other media including newspapers, political talk radio, cable news, and the Internet.

To confirm partisans' selective exposure to related content on the web after reading mainstream news or blog posting, this study hypothesizes:

H5a: *Partisans will be more likely to select related mainstream news that supports their opinion as compared to news opposite from their opinion.*

H5b: *Partisans will be more likely to select related blog postings that support their opinion as compared to blog postings opposite from their opinion.*

Regarding the relationship between hostile media effect and selective exposure to content, Kim (2011) found that hostile media perception positively correlated with individuals' selective exposure to news about global warming. "Partisans, who experience hostile media perception, are much more likely to seek out stories regarding global warming that are consistent with their views on the topic" (Kim, 2011, p. 695). This suggests that hostile media effect will enhance the tendency of selective exposure to web content.

Based on the previous research, this study hypothesizes that perceived hostile bias of mainstream news and blog postings will motivate partisans to seek more content consistent with their views. Although partisans do not judge congenial content to be hostile to their points of view, they exhibit hostile bias when they read disagreeable content (Gunther et al., 2001; Gunther et al., 2009). Accordingly, this study predicts:

H6a: *Partisans exposed to mainstream news opposite from their opinion are more likely to seek more information supporting their position than partisans reading mainstream news congenial with their opinions.*

H6b: *Partisans exposed to blog posting opposite from their opinion are more likely to seek more information supporting their position than partisans reading blog posting congenial with their opinions.*

Chapter 4 Method

Study Design

To test this study's hypotheses, a 2 (partisan opinion) x 2 (news source) x 2 (content valence) factorial experiment was conducted (Table 3). The two levels of partisan opinion were either extreme support or extreme opposition to the issues of same sex marriage and guns on campus. The two levels of news sources included either a professional mainstream news site (the *Associated Press*) or a citizen-produced blog. The two levels of content valence were either supporting (pro) or opposing (anti) content about the controversial issues

Factor 1	Partisan Opinion	
Levels	1. Extreme support (pro) for same sex marriage or guns on campus	2. Extreme opposition (anti) for same sex marriage or guns on campus
Factor 2	News Source	
Levels	1. Mainstream news site (the <i>Associated Press</i>)	2. User-generated blog
Factor 3	Content Valence	
Levels	1. Content supporting (pro) same sex marriage or guns on campus	2. Content opposing (anti) same sex marriage or guns on campus

Table 3. Study Design

Participants

Previous studies found that an individual's involvement with a controversial issue is an important predictor of hostile media effect (Gunther, 1992; Gunther et al., 2009). This study operationalizes 'involved individuals' as individuals with extreme

levels of opinion (pro or anti) and those with group membership related to the issue of same sex marriage or guns on campus. The partisanship character of group members was confirmed by measuring their extreme opinions on the two issues.

Partisans of same sex marriage were recruited from supporting or opposing groups. Pro-participants were drawn from: Marriage Equality, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Equity Center on University of Maryland. Anti-participants were recruited from: Maryland Family Alliance, Maryland Catholic Conference, and the university's Catholic Student Association.

Partisans of guns on campus were recruited from the two groups. Pro-guns participants were recruited from Students for Concealed Carry on Campus. Anti-guns participants were recruited from the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence.

Leaders of these participating groups distributed the sign-up link to this experiment (Appendix A) to their membership using their organization's newsletter or Facebook page. Only those participants who expressed an extreme opinion on same sex marriage or guns on campus were selected for this study.

Partisans were also recruited from the student population at the University of Maryland. An invitation was posted on the university's 'FYI' Listserv, which shares campus information via email with faculty, staff, and students of the university. Students of selected journalism classes, such as JOUR 150 (open to all majors) and 479 (open to only journalism majors) were also invited. Similar to those participants with group membership, only those campus participants who expressed extreme opinions on same sex marriage or guns on campus were selected for this study.

To determine the appropriate sample size, an acceptable level of power and effect size should be established before starting an experiment (Hinkle, Wiersma & Jurs, 2003). Therefore, a power analysis was conducted to estimate the number of participants required to measure possible effects and power predicted.

This analysis referred to the effect size and desirable power estimated in Cohen (1962), which analyzed studies published in the 1960 volume of the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*. Cohen reported standardized small, medium, large effect size for various statistical tests. Based on Cohen's conventions, .25 for a medium effect size and *F* test was selected (Cohen, 1962). Cohen (1965) also provided .80 as a convention for a desirable power. Following his recommendation, power was set at .80. Therefore, this factorial design could obtain a power of .80 with a minimum combined sample size of 128 participants (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang & Buchner, 2007). The goal was to recruit more than 128 participants for each of the two controversial issues tested.

Participants for the Same Sex Marriage Issue

Of the 919 participants who completed the pre survey, 405 completed the post survey. Of those, participants indicating only an extreme pro or anti position about same sex marriage issue were selected ($N = 314$). The initial sample was unequal with 252 'very strongly or strongly' supporting same sex marriage and 66 participants 'very strongly or strongly' opposing same sex marriage. To produce equal sample sizes of 66 participants from each group (for valid statistical analyses), SPSS was used to randomly select 66 participants from the sample of 252 supporting participants. This resulted in a total sample of 132 participants with 66 'pro' and 66

'anti' participants.

Mean age of the 132 participants was 31.30 years ($SD = 13.68$) with 62.1% female and 37.1% male (Table 4). A little more than half of the participants (53.8%) reported that they had either an undergraduate or graduate degree. 41.7% were college students. In terms of racial demographics, 67.4% indicated Caucasian, 10.6% Asian, 8.3% African American, and 6.8% Hispanic.

Gender	Education	Ethnicity
Female (62.1%)	Attending a college /university now (41.7 %)	Caucasian (67.4 %)
Male (37.1%)	Undergraduate degree (28.0%)	Asian (10.6%)
	Graduate degree (25.8%)	African American (8.3%)
	High school diploma (4.5%)	Hispanic/Latino (6.8%)
		Multiracial (5.3%)
		Other (1.5%)

Table 4. Demographics of participants for the same sex marriage issue

Participants for Guns on Campus Issue

Similar to the unequal sample size for same sex marriage, 65 participants said they 'very strongly or strongly' supported guns on campus while 281 participants said they 'very strongly or strongly' opposed guns on campus. Again, SPSS software was used to randomly select 65 participants from the 281 gun opposing participants, producing a sample of 130 gun partisans, 65 'pro' and 65 'anti' participants.

Mean age of the gun participants was 29.2 years ($SD = 11.82$) with 45.4% female and 53.1% male (Table 5). The half (50%) reported that they were college students. 46.2% of the sample indicated that they had either an undergraduate or

graduate degree. 73.1% self-reported that they were Caucasian, 10% Asian, 7.7% African American, and 4.6 % Hispanic.

Gender	Education	Ethnicity
Male (53.1%)	Attending a college /university now (50 %)	Caucasian (73.1 %)
Female (45.4%)	Undergraduate degree (23.1%)	Asian (10%)
	Graduate degree (23.1%)	African American (7.7%)
	High school diploma (2.3%)	Hispanic/Latino (4.6%)
		Other (3.8%)
		Multiracial (0.8%)

Table 5. Demographics of participants for the guns on campus issue

Stimuli

Two texts for each controversial issue, representing two levels of content valence (pro or anti), were produced as either an online mainstream news story (Associated Press.com) or a user-generated blog posting. Four stimuli were manipulated, each with the identical length of 380 words.

All four texts were pre-tested before the experiment to check if the valence of each was manipulated as intended. On a survey for this pretest, eleven journalism students read all four texts and then evaluated the valence of each text. All participants ‘very strongly or strongly’ agreed with the valence of each stimulus.¹⁶ Results indicated that all stimuli were successfully manipulated either supporting or opposing the two issues.

¹⁶ They were asked "to what extent do you agree with following statement about the story you just read?" The statements included "the story supports same sex marriage or guns on campus." This was measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1=very strongly disagree, 7=very strongly agree).

The identical textual content for each issue was matched with either an Associated Press logo on a web page with a byline and publishing date or with a fictitious blogger's name and publishing date (see Appendix D). All content was presented as black text on a white background. Participants exposed to the *Associated Press* news were told a professional journalist wrote the content. Those exposed to the blog posting were told that the content was written by a citizen who was not a professional journalist.

All of texts were followed by the option for user comments. For ecological validity, participants were free to post their comments similar to actual online news sites and blogs.

Instrument

Participants' opinions on same sex marriage and guns on campus were assessed in a pre-survey with the single item asking the extent to which the participant supports same sex marriage and guns on campus (Appendix C). Opinions were measured using a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree) and 4 as a neutral midpoint. In addition to opinions, participants were asked about their familiarity, relevance, prior knowledge, following of media coverage, and feeling toward the issues.

To reduce any priming effects, the pre-testing of opinions for same sex marriage and guns on campus was embedded with five other controversial issues including opinions about the death penalty, abortion, medical testing using animals, taxing the wealthy and doctor-assisted suicide. The pre-test was administered exactly

one week before exposing each participant to the experimental stimuli to reduce their memory of the intended target topics.

The post-survey (Appendix E) assessed participants' perceived bias of content using three questions adapted from previous studies (Giner-Sorolla et al., 1994; Gunther et al., 2004; Gunther et al., 2006; Gunther et al., 2009). On a seven-point Likert scale, participants indicated whether they believed 'the content read is biased', 'the source of the content is biased', and 'the author of the content is biased.' The three items were combined to create a 'bias' index with high reliability ($\alpha=.82$ for same sex marriage, $\alpha=.84$ for guns on campus).

Participants rated the believability and trustworthiness of the source (the *Associated Press* or a blog). Two items were combined as an index of 'source credibility' ($\alpha=.90$ for same sex marriage, $\alpha=.91$ for guns on campus).

Participants were also asked about the author's believability, trustworthiness and knowledge about the issue. These three items formed an 'author credibility' index ($\alpha=.89$ for same sex marriage, $\alpha=.89$ for guns on campus).

Content credibility on the post-survey was measured using items from prior credibility studies by Flanagin & Metzger (2000) and Park (2005). Participants were asked about their perceived trustworthiness, believability, accuracy and depth of the information read plus their willingness to recommend the content to others. These items combined to form an index of 'content credibility' and provided high reliability ($\alpha=.94$ for same sex marriage, $\alpha=.94$ for guns on campus).

The behavior of user commenting was measured by examining whether participants made comments. Participants were instructed, “Post an optional comment if you would like.”

Participants’ information seeking behavior was measured based on the previous studies by Arpan & Nabi (2011) and Kim (2010), which exposed participants to a list of eight news stories or blog postings. The list in this study was composed of headlines of news stories or blog postings. The headlines were manipulated for disclosing the content’s valence (supporting or opposing the issues tested). Four news stories or blog postings supported same sex marriage or guns on campus. Another four news stories or blog postings opposed same sex marriage or guns on campus. Participants were asked to indicate their willingness to read the news story or blog posting using a scale from 1 (not likely) to 7 (very likely).

As a manipulation check, all participants indicated whether they perceived the online news story or blog posting as supporting same sex marriage or guns on campus. Finally, participants indicated their age, gender, education, and race.

Procedure

First, participants volunteering to complete this online experiment received an email from the researcher, which contained a Survey Monkey URL to an informed consent form (Appendix B) approved by Institutional Review Board of University of Maryland. The form was followed by the pre survey. After completing the pre survey, participants were told that they would receive a URL to the experimental site via email one week later.

For the experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions displayed on Survey Monkey.com. Each condition included content related to the two target issues (same sex marriage and guns on campus). Actual stimuli included the Associated Press story that either supported or opposed same sex marriage or guns on campus and a blog posting with either supporting or opposing the issues. After reading the assigned content, participants were asked to click a link to the post survey. Participants were prohibited from clicking back to previously read content. Each user IP address could access the content and post-survey only one time.

Chapter 5 Results

This experimental study tested hypotheses related to partisan audiences' perceived bias, credibility, and online behaviors using two controversial issues, same sex marriage and guns on campus.

Summary of Findings

The results from the two issues are summarized Table 6a through 6e. Table 6a shows results about the relative hostile media effect of mainstream news on partisans' perceived bias, and source, author and content credibility. Table 6b shows results on the relative hostile media effect in blog posting. Table 6c reveals how partisans' opinion and source influence evaluations of identical content from different sources. Table 6d summarizes results on partisans' commenting behavior. Table 6e provides the results on partisans' further information seeking behavior.

Hypothesis	Prediction	SSM Support	GUN Support
H1a	Relative hostile media effect on perceived bias	YES	YES
H1b	Relative hostile media effect on perceived source credibility	NO	YES
H1c	Relative hostile media effect on perceived author credibility	YES	YES
H1d	Relative hostile media effect on perceived content credibility	YES	YES

Table 6a. Summary of results on relative hostile media effect in mainstream news

(NOTE. SSM stands for same sex marriage and GUN stands for Guns on campus)

Hypothesis	Prediction	SSM Support	GUN Support
H2a	Relative hostile media effect on perceived bias	YES	YES
H2b	Relative hostile media effect on perceived source credibility	YES	YES
H2c	Relative hostile media effect on perceived author credibility	YES	YES
H2d	Relative hostile media effect on perceived content credibility	YES	YES

Table 6b. Summary of results on relative hostile media effect in blog posting

Hypothesis	Prediction	SSM Support	GUN Support
H3a	Evaluations of bias will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence than by source	YES	YES
H3b	Evaluations of source credibility will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence than by source	NO	NO
H3c	Evaluations of author credibility will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence than by source	YES	NO
H3d	Evaluations of content credibility will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence than by source	YES	YES

Table 6c. Summary of results on evaluations of identical content from either mainstream media or blogs

Hypothesis	Prediction	SSM Support	GUN Support
H4a	Hostile media effect will influence commenting on mainstream news	YES	YES
H4b	Hostile media effect will influence commenting on blog posting	YES	YES

Table 6d. Summary of results on commenting behavior

Hypothesis	Prediction	SSM Support	GUN Support
H5a	Selective exposure to related mainstream news	YES	YES
H5b	Selective exposure to related blog postings	YES	YES
H6a	Hostile media effect will influence selective exposure to related mainstream news	NO	NO
H6b	Hostile media effect will influence selective exposure to related blog postings	NO	Partially YES

Table 6e. Summary of results on further information seeking behavior

The results of the same sex marriage issue will be presented first followed by the results of the guns on campus issue.

The Same Sex Marriage Issue

Manipulation Check

A general linear model univariate analysis of variance was employed using perceived valence of content as a dependent variable and manipulated content valence and participants' opinion as independent variables. There was a significant main effect of manipulated content valences on participants' perceived content valence ($F(1,123) = 199.91, p < .001, \eta^2 = .62$). There was no significant main effect of participants' opinions ($F(1,123) = .00, p > .05$) and no significant interaction of

manipulated content valences and participants' opinions ($F(1,123) = .00, p > .05$). Regardless of participants' opinion, those who read content manipulated for supporting same sex marriage agreed that 'the content supports same sex marriage' ($M=5.91, SD=.22$). Conversely, those who read content manipulated for opposing same sex marriage disagreed with the same statement ($M=1.71, SD=.20$) (See Figure 7). There was no significant difference between supporters and opponents of same sex marriage in terms of the perceived content valence. Significant differences in participants' perceptions depended on the manipulated valence of pro or anti same sex marriage. This suggests that participants' opinions did not influence perceived content valence. Participants perceived content valence as manipulated. Therefore, we can conclude stimuli about same sex marriage were successfully manipulated.

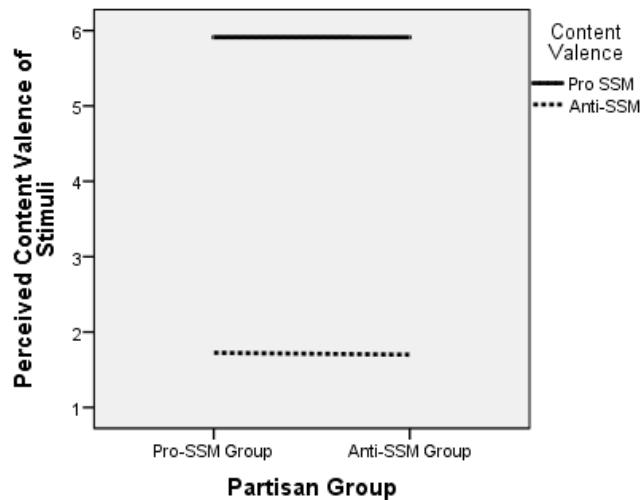


Figure 7. Same sex marriage partisans' perceived content valence of stimuli as a function of manipulated content valence and partisan group
 (NOTE. SSM stands for Same Sex Marriage)

Relative Hostile Media Effect in Mainstream News

H1a: *Partisans with opinions opposite from mainstream news will perceive the news as more biased than partisans with opinions congenial with the news.*

One-way ANOVA produced a significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence on perceived bias ($F(1, 63) = 12.05, p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$). Specifically, partisans with opinions that differed from mainstream news ($M = 5.44, SD = .20$) perceived that news as more biased than partisans with congenial opinions with the news ($M = 4.28, SD = .27$). Figure 8a shows that while pro-same sex marriage partisans evaluated anti-news to be more biased than anti-partisans, anti-partisans perceived pro-news to be more biased than pro-partisans. H1a was supported.

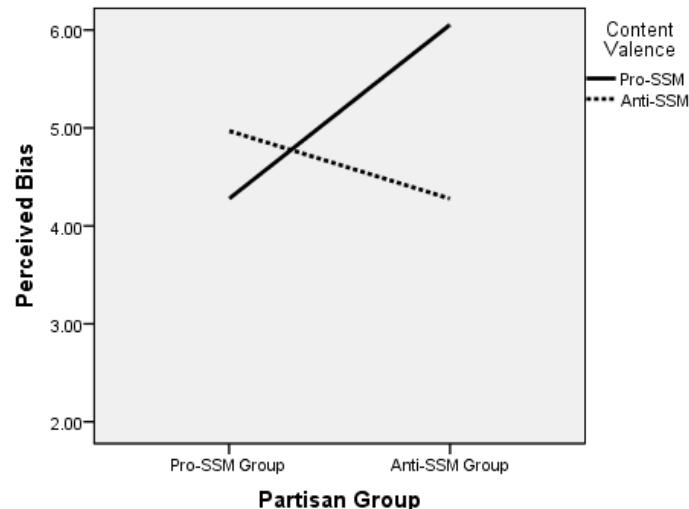


Figure 8a. Same sex marriage partisans' perceived bias of mainstream news as a function of content valence and partisan group

H1b: *Partisans with opinions opposite from mainstream news will perceive a mainstream source as less credible than partisans with opinions congenial with the news.*

There was no statistically significant difference ($F(1, 65) = .04, p > .05$) in perceived source credibility between partisans with opinions different from the news ($M = 4.42, SD = .23$) and partisans with congenial opinions with the news ($M = 4.50, SD = .31$). Figure 8b shows that regardless of valence of content read, both supporters and opponents of same sex marriage evaluated source credibility of AP news similarly. H1b was not supported.

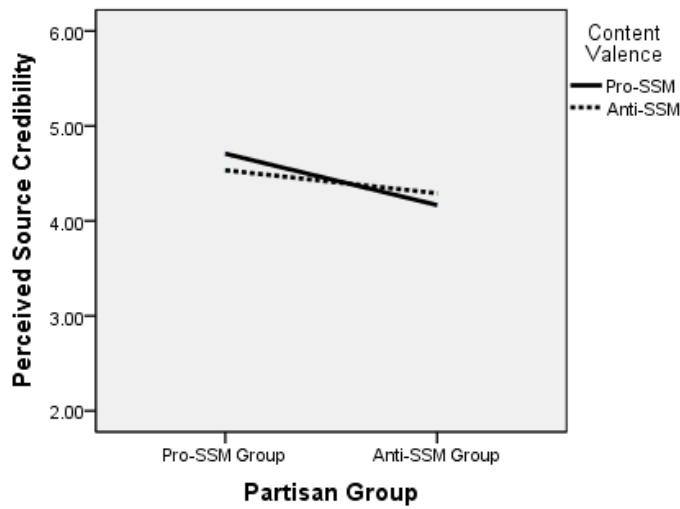


Figure 8b. Same sex marriage partisans' perceived source credibility of mainstream news as a function of content valence and partisan group

H1c: *Partisans with opinions opposite from mainstream news will perceive the author of the news as less credible than partisans with opinions congenial with the news.*

In support of H1c, one-way ANOVA confirmed a statistically significant difference ($F(1, 64) = 21.94, p < .001, \eta^2 = .26$) suggesting that partisans with opinions different from news ($M = 3.27, SD = .22$) perceived the author of the news, a professional journalist, as less credible than partisans with congenial opinions ($M = 4.97, SD = .29$). Figure 8c shows that whereas pro-partisans evaluated the author of

anti-content to be less credible than anti-partisans, anti-partisans perceived the author of pro-content to be less credible than pro-partisans.

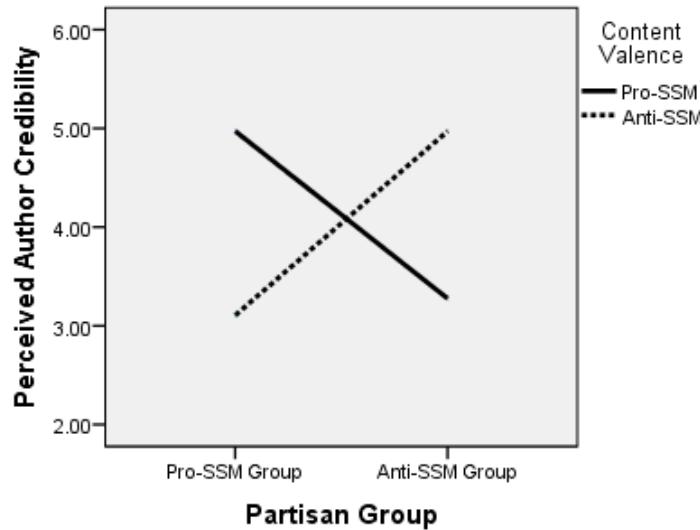


Figure 8c. Same sex marriage partisans' perceived author credibility of mainstream news as a function of content valence and partisan group

H1d: *Partisans with opinions opposite from mainstream news will perceive the content of the news as less credible than partisans with opinions congenial with the news.*

One-way ANOVA confirmed a statistically significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence on perceived content credibility ($F(1, 62) = 31.48, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$). Partisans with opinions opposite from content's valence ($M = 2.54, S = .22$) rated that content as less credible compared to partisans with opinions congenial with the content's valence ($M = 4.54, SD = .28$). Figure 8d shows that while supporters of same sex marriage evaluated anti-same sex marriage content to be less credible than opponents, opponents perceived pro-same sex marriage content as less credible than supporters. H1d was supported.

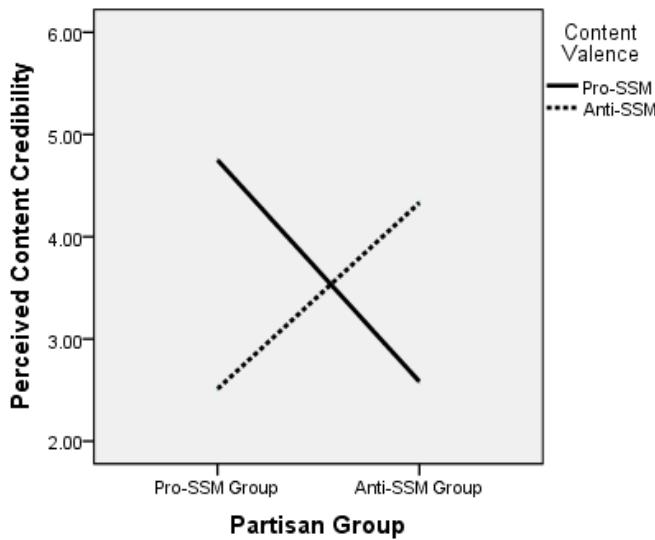


Figure 8d. Same sex marriage partisans' perceived content credibility of mainstream news as a function of content valence and partisan group

There were significant differences between supporters and opponents of same sex marriage in their perceptions of mainstream news online in terms of bias, author credibility, and content credibility. However, there was no significant difference between both partisans in perceptions of the mainstream news in terms of source credibility.

Relative Hostile Media Effect in Blog Posting

H2a: *Partisans with opinions opposite from blog posting will perceive the posting as more biased than partisans with opinions congenial with the posting.*

One-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence on perceived bias ($F(1, 54) = 11.08, p < .01, \eta^2 = .17$). Partisans with opposite opinions from blog posting ($M = 5.74, SD = .25$) rated that blog posting as more biased than partisans with congenial opinions with the

posting ($M = 4.53$, $SD = .27$). Figure 9a shows that while pro-partisans evaluated anti-same sex marriage posting as more biased than anti-partisans, anti-partisans perceived pro-same sex marriage posting as more biased than pro-partisans. H2a was supported.

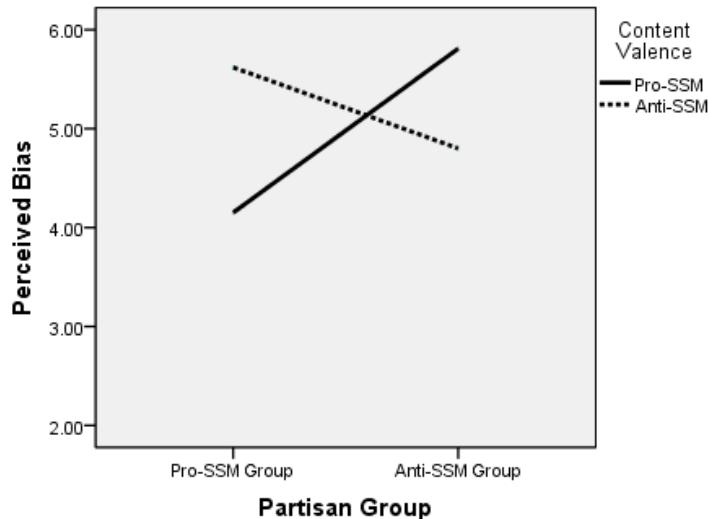


Figure 9a. Same sex marriage partisans' perceived bias of blog posting as a function of content valence and partisan group

H2b: *Partisans with opinions opposite from blog posting will perceive the blog as a less credible source than partisans with opinions congenial with the posting.*

Partisans with opposite opinions from a blog posting ($M = 2.70$, $SD = .22$) rated the blog as a less credible source than those with opinions congenial with the posting ($M = 4.14$, $SD = .24$). This difference was statistically significant ($F (1, 54) = 19.58, p < .001, \eta^2 = .27$). Figure 9b shows that proponents evaluated a blog presenting anti-same sex marriage posting as a less credible source than opponents. It also shows that opponents rated a blog with pro-same sex marriage posting as a less credible source than supporters. H2b was supported.

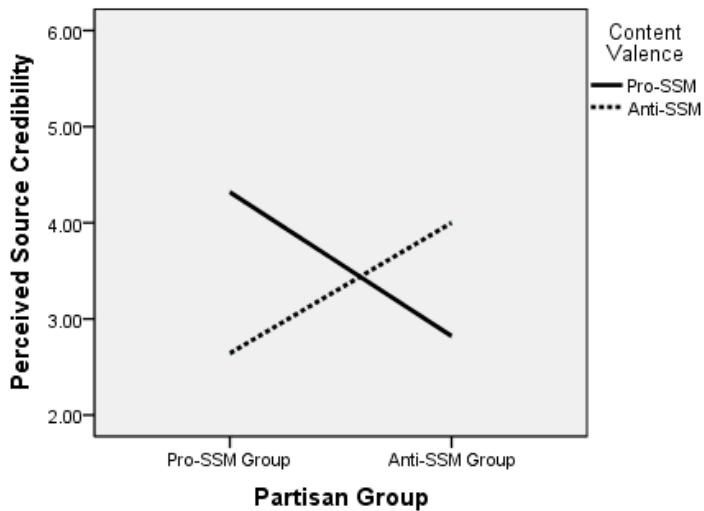


Figure 9b. Same sex marriage partisans' perceived source credibility of blog posting as a function of content valence and partisan group

H2c: *Partisans with opinions opposite from blog posting will perceive the author of the posting as less credible than partisans with opinions congenial with the posting.*

One-way ANOVA confirmed a statistically significant difference ($F(1, 53) = 26.16$, $p < .001$. $\eta^2 = .27$) with opposing partisans from a blog posting ($M = 3.26$, $SD = .21$) rating the posting's author, a citizen blogger, as less credible than congenial partisans with the posting ($M = 4.85$, $SD = .23$). Figure 9c indicates that supporters perceived the author of an anti-posting as less credible than opponents. The figure also shows that opponents rated the author of a pro posting as less credible than supporters. H2c was supported.

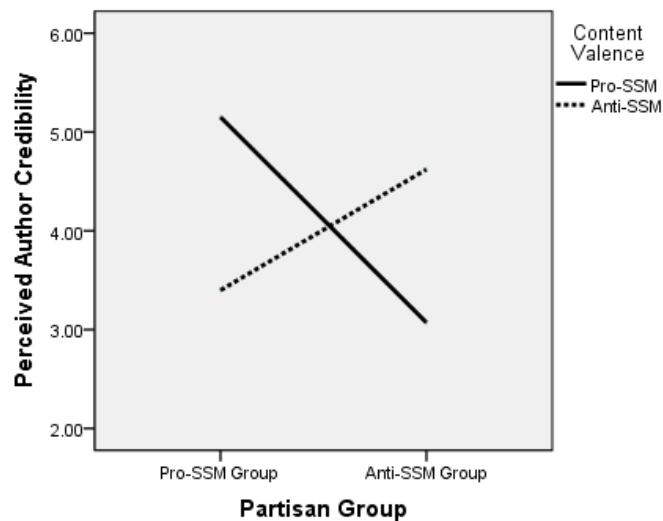


Figure 9c. Same sex marriage partisans' perceived author credibility of blog posting as a function of content valence and partisan group

H2d: *Partisans with opinions opposite from blog posting will perceive the content of the blog posting as less credible than partisans with opinions congenial with the posting.*

In support of H2d, there was a significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence on perceived content credibility ($F(1, 53) = 34.38, p < .001, \eta^2 = .39$). Partisans with opinions opposite from a blog posting ($M = 2.55, SD = .24$) rated the content of the posting as less credible than partisans with opinion congenial with the posting ($M = 4.57, SD = .24$). While supporters of the issue evaluated the anti-content of the posting as less credible than opponents, opponents rated the pro content as less credible than supporters (Figure 9d).

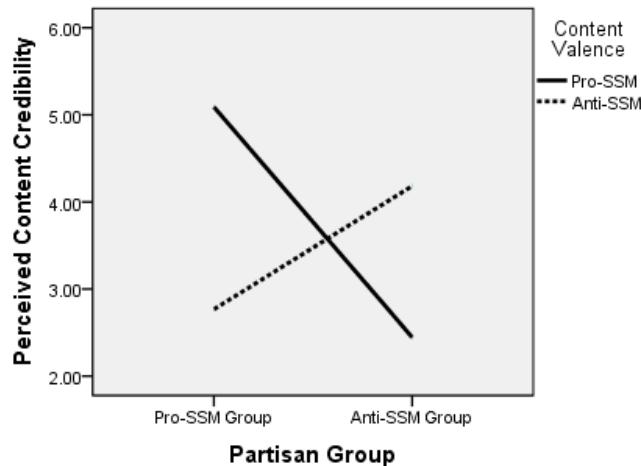


Figure 9d. Same sex marriage partisans' perceived content credibility of blog posting as a function of content valence and partisan group

In sum, there were significant differences in perceived bias, source credibility, author credibility, and content credibility of blog posting between supporters and opponents of the same sex marriage issue.

News Source versus Partisan Opinion

H3a: *Evaluations of bias will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence than by source.*

Results of a two-way ANOVA produced a significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence on perceived bias ($F(1,117) = 30.03, p < .001, \eta^2 = .20$), but the effect of the source was not significant ($F(1,117) = .63, p > .05$). There was also no significant interaction between source, and level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence ($F(1,117) = .021, p > .05$). Whereas the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence significantly influenced perceived bias, the source did not. Although there was no significant difference between mainstream source and blog in perceived bias of

content, there was a significant difference between partisan groups with opinions that agree and disagree with content's valence (Figure 10a). Hypothesis 3a was supported.

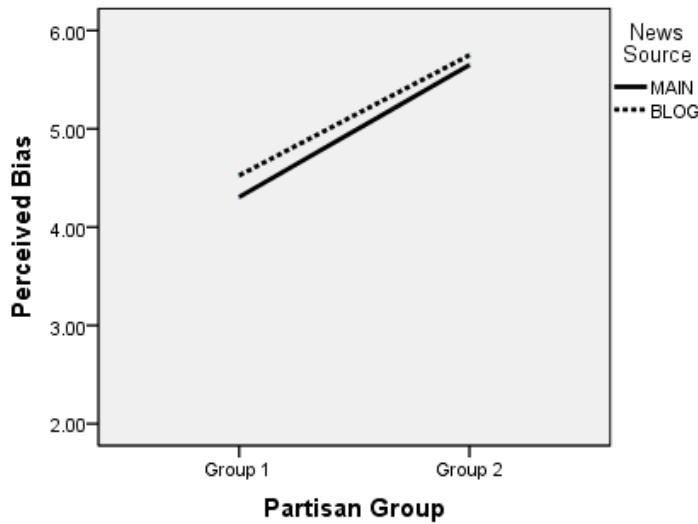


Figure 10a. Same sex marriage partisans' perceived bias as a function of source and the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence

(NOTE. Group 1 is partisans who agree with content valence.

Group 2 is partisans who disagree with content valence)

H3b: *Evaluations of source credibility will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence than by source.*

There was a significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence on source credibility ($F(1,119) = 6.76, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$). The main effect of source was also significant ($F(1,119) = 18.11, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$) and there was a significant interaction between source, and level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence ($F(1,119) = 7.54, p < .05, \eta^2 = .06$). Both factors produced effects that depended on each other. Figure 10b shows that both supporters and opponents evaluated the mainstream source ($M = 4.54, SD = .18$) as more credible than the blog ($M = 3.45, SD = .19$). However, for partisans congenial

with the content valence, there was no significant difference ($F(1, 48) = .91, p > .05$) in evaluations of the mainstream source ($M = 4.52, SD = .28$) and blog ($M = 4.14, SD = .27$). Conversely, partisans with different opinions from content valence evaluated the mainstream source ($M = 4.56, SD = .21$) as more credible than the blog ($M = 2.77, SD = .25$). This difference was significant ($F(1, 71) = 26.63, p < .001, \eta^2 = .27$). Therefore, we cannot say that the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence more than source will influence evaluations of source credibility. H3b was not supported.

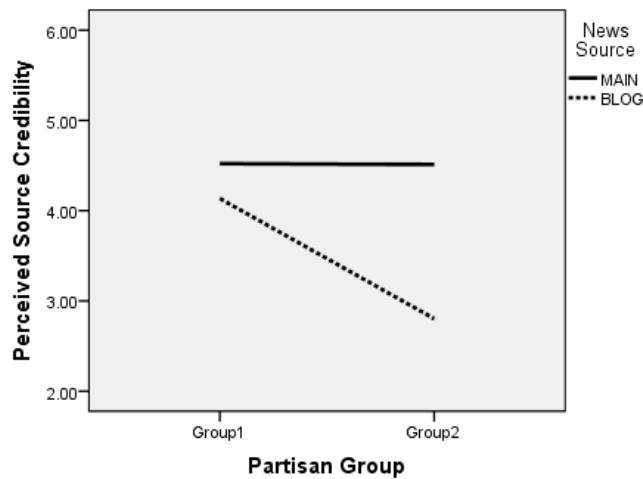


Figure 10b. Same sex marriage partisans' perceived source credibility as a function of source and the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence

(NOTE. Group 1 is partisans who agree with content valence.
Group 2 is partisans who disagree with the content valence)

H3c: *Evaluations of author credibility will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence than by source.*

There was a significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion with content valence on author credibility ($F(1,117) = 58.61, p < .001, \eta^2 = .33$) but the effect of source was not significant ($F(1,117) = .04, p > .05$). There was also no significant interaction between source, and level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence ($F(1,117) = 1.02, p > .05$). Figure 10c shows that all partisans rated the credibility of journalists and bloggers in a similar way. However, it also indicates that the evaluations of an author depended on the partisans' opinions and content valence. Partisans evaluated author credibility based on whether their opinion was congenial with the content valence, not by the source. Therefore, H3c was supported.

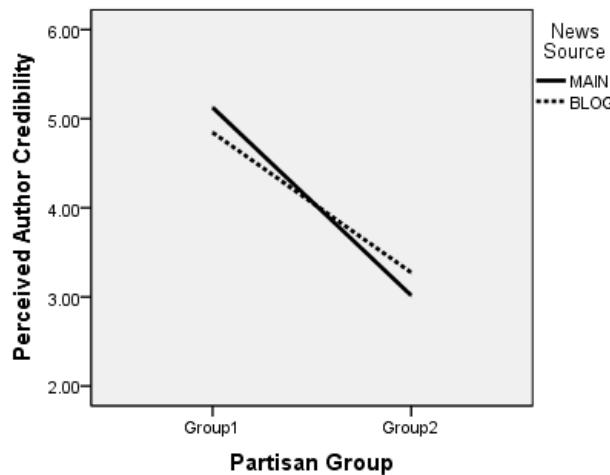


Figure 10c. Same sex marriage partisans' perceived author credibility as a function of source and the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence

(NOTE. Group 1 is partisans who agree with content valence.
Group 2 is partisans who disagree with the content valence)

H3d: *Evaluations of content credibility will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence than by source.*

There was a significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion with content valence on content credibility ($F(1,115) = 82.64, p < .001, \eta^2 = .42$) but the effect of source was not significant ($F(1,115) = .02, p > .05$). There was also no significant interaction between source, and level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence ($F(1,115) = .47, p > .05$). Figure 10d shows that all partisans similarly perceived credibility of identical content from mainstream media and a blog. However, partisans evaluated identical content differently depending on their opinions and content valence. Whether the content came from mainstream media or a blog did not appear to influence evaluation of content credibility. Only whether content valence was congenial with partisans' opinion appeared to be a significant factor in evaluations of content credibility. H3d was supported.

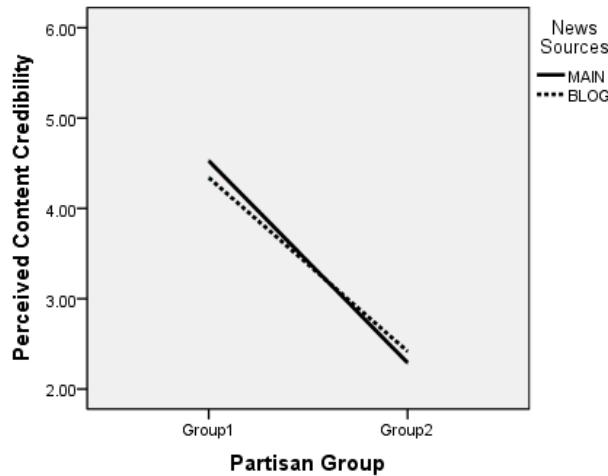


Figure 10d. Same sex marriage partisans' perceived content credibility as a function of source and the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence

(NOTE. Group 1 is partisans who agree with content valence.
Group 2 is partisans who disagree with the content valence)

To summarize, the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence - rather than source - produced significant differences in perceived bias, author credibility, and content credibility of content from both mainstream source and blog. However, the source (mainstream or blog) played an important role in producing a significant difference in perceived source credibility of the content.

Partisans' Commenting Behavior

H4a: *Partisans exposed to mainstream news opposite from their opinion will comment more than partisans exposed to news congenial with their opinion.*

A Chi-square test was conducted to examine the association between the level of agreement between partisan opinion with content valence, and their commenting behavior. The level of agreement between partisan opinion with content valence were coded as two categorical variables, partisan opinions congenial with and different from content valence. Commenting behavior was coded as two categorical variables of ‘comment’ or ‘no comment.’ Results indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence, and their commenting behavior in mainstream news ($\chi^2=5.68$, df = 1, $p < .05$). To test for statistically significance differences, residual analysis was conducted. As illustrated in Table 7, adjusted residuals¹⁷ for each cell were either 2.4 or -2.4, which had an absolute value greater than critical value.¹⁸ Thus, all cells were statistically significant. Given the pattern of positive and negative residuals, there were more partisans who disagreed with content valence and fewer partisans who

¹⁷ “ Adjusted residual has been standardized and can be interpreted like a Z score. These adjusted residuals can be used to determine whether the difference between observed and expected frequencies for any given group is significant” (Aspelmeier & Pierce,2009, p.200)

¹⁸ Critical Z value for the .05 level of significance is 1.96.

agreed with the content valence than we expected in those who commented. Figure 11a also shows that partisans reading mainstream news different from their opinion commented more than partisans reading news congenial with their opinion. Therefore, H4a was supported.

Level of agreement between partisan opinion and content	Agree(same) Disagree (different)		COMMENT		Total
			NO COMMENT	COMMENT	
			Count	21	5
		Expected Count	16.3	9.7	26.0
		% within COMMENT	47.7%	19.2%	37.1%
		Adjusted Residual ¹⁹	2.4	-2.4	
		Count	23	21	44
		Expected Count	27.7	16.3	44.0
		% within COMMENT	52.3%	80.8%	62.9%
		Adjusted Residual	-2.4	2.4	
		Count	44	26	70
Total		Expected Count	44.0	26.0	70.0
		% within COMMENT	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 7. The level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence x Comment Cross-Tabulation after same sex marriage partisans read mainstream news

¹⁹ “If the crosstab table is a 2x2 table, then all of the adjusted residuals will have the same absolute value, but exactly 2 of them will be negative.”

See <http://www-01.ibm.com/support/docview.wss?uid=swg21479605>

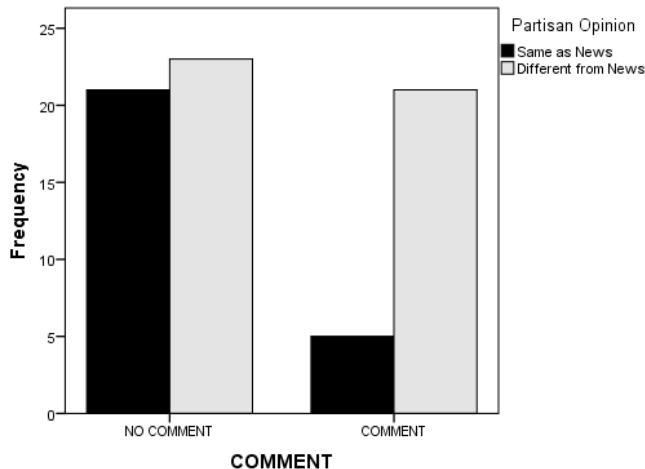


Figure11a. Amount of comment as a function of the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence of mainstream news in the issue of same sex marriage

H4b: *Partisans exposed to blog posting opposite from their opinion will comment more than partisans exposed to posting congenial with their opinion.*

Results of a Chi-square test indicated that there was a significant relationship between level of agreement between partisan opinion with content valence, and their commenting behavior on a blog ($\chi^2=5.34$, df =1, $p < .05$). Table 8 shows that adjusted residuals²⁰ for each cell were either 2.3 or -2.3, which produced an absolute value greater than critical value.²¹ Thus, all cells were statistically significant. Given the pattern of positive and negative residuals, there were more partisans who disagreed with content valence and fewer partisans who agreed with the content valence than we expected in those who commented. Figure 11b shows that those who read blog posting with a valence different from their opinion commented more than partisans reading posting supporting their opinions. H4b was supported.

²⁰ “Adjusted residuals has been standardized and can be interpreted like a Z score. These adjusted residuals can be used to determine whether the difference between observed and expected frequencies for any given group is significant” (Aspelmeier & Pierce ,2009, p.200)

²¹ Critical Z value for the .05 level of significance is 1.96.

			COMMENT		Total
			NO COMMENT	COMMENT	
Level of agreement between partisan opinion and content	Agree(same)	Count	25	5	30
		Expected Count	20.8	9.2	30.0
		% within COMMENT	58.1%	26.3%	48.4%
	Disagree (different)	Adjusted Residual ²²	2.3	-2.3	
		Count	18	14	32
		Expected Count	22.2	9.8	32.0
		% within COMMENT	41.9%	73.7%	51.6%
		Adjusted Residual	-2.3	2.3	
	Total	Count	43	19	62
		Expected Count	43.0	19.0	62.0
		% within COMMENT	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 8. The level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence x Comment Cross-Tabulation after same sex marriage partisans read blog posting

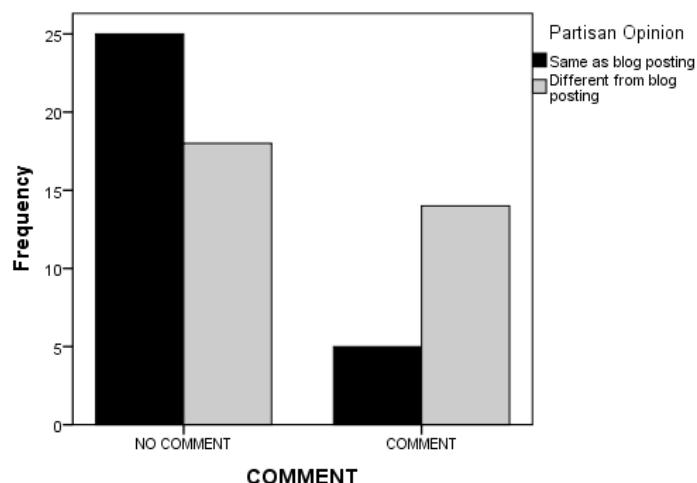


Figure 11b. Amount of comment as a function of the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence of blog posting in the issue of same sex marriage

²² “If the crosstab table is a 2x2 table, then all of the adjusted residuals will have the same absolute value, but exactly 2 of them will be negative.”

See <http://www-01.ibm.com/support/docview.wss?uid=swg21479605>

Partisans' Information Seeking Behavior

Selective Exposure to Related Content

H5a: *Partisans will be more likely to select related mainstream news that supports their opinion as compared to news opposite from their opinion.*

Mixed analyses of between and within subjects ANOVA were conducted to test H5a. Between-subjects factor was partisan opinion either supporting or opposing the issue and within-subject factor was related news either supporting or opposing the issue. There was no significant main effect of partisan opinion on their willingness to read related news ($F(1, 62) = .28, p > .05$). There was also no significant main effect of related news's valence ($F(1, 62) = .53, p > .05$). However, interaction between partisans' opinion and valence of related news was significant ($F(1, 62) = 15.07, p < .001, \eta^2 = .38$). Pro-partisans rated 'willingness to read pro-related news' higher ($M = 4.95, SD = .29$) than anti-related news ($M = 3.36, SD = .30$). This difference was statistically significant ($F(1, 33) = 15.07, p < .001, \eta^2 = .31$). Anti-partisans were also more willing to read anti-related news ($M = 5.00, SD = .31$) than pro-related news ($M = 2.98, SD = .31$) and the difference was also significant ($F(1, 29) = 22.90, p < .001, \eta^2 = .44$). Figure 12a illustrates the differences. H5a was supported.

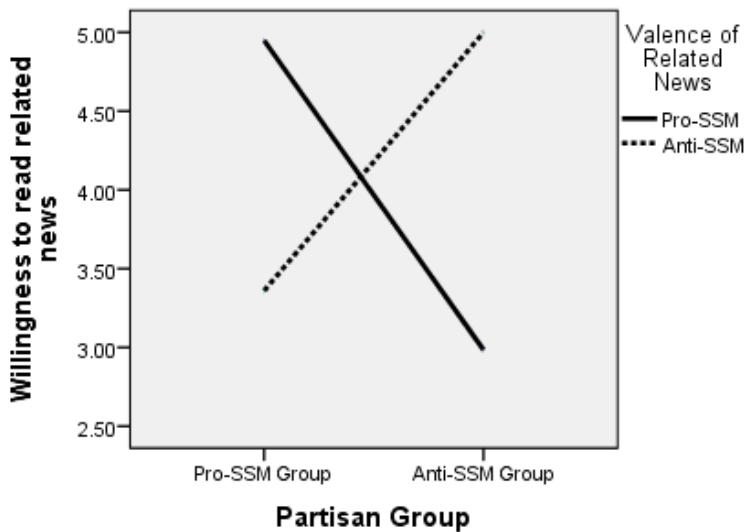


Figure 12a. Same sex marriage partisans' willingness to read related mainstream news as a function of partisan group and valence of related news

H5b: *Partisans will be more likely to select related blog postings that support their opinion as compared to blog postings opposite from their opinion.*

Mixed analyses of between and within subjects ANOVA showed no significant main effect of partisan opinion ($F(1, 52) = .02, p > .05$) and valence of related blog posting ($F(1, 52) = .02, p > .05$) on their willingness to read further information. However, there was a significant interaction between partisan opinion and valence of related blog postings ($F(1, 52) = 27.02, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$). Pro-partisans rated the willingness to read pro-related blog postings ($M = 4.74, SD = .30$) higher than anti-related blog postings ($M = 3.27, SD = .35$). This difference was statistically significant ($F(1, 24) = 11.13, p < .01, \eta^2 = .32$). Anti-partisans showed higher willingness to read anti-related blog postings ($M = 5.00, SD = .32$) than pro-related blog postings ($M = 3.10, SD = .28$). The difference was also significant ($F(1, 28) = 16.57, p < .001, \eta^2 = .37$). Figure 12b illustrates the differences. H5b was supported.

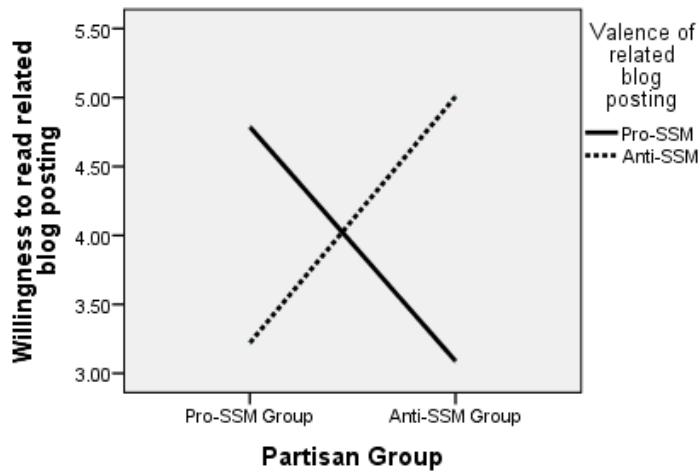


Figure 12b. Same sex marriage partisans' willingness to read related blog posting as a function of partisan group and valence of related blog posting

Hostile media effect and selective exposure

H6a: *Partisans exposed to mainstream news opposite from their opinion are more likely to seek more information supporting their position than partisans reading mainstream news congenial with their opinions.*

In the measure of willingness to read pro-related news, there was no significant difference ($F(1, 32) = .01, p > .05$) between supporters reading pro-news ($M = 4.91, SD = .51$) and anti-news ($M = 4.97, SD = .35$). Opponents reading pro-news ($M = 4.90, SD = .41$) and anti-news ($M = 5.15, SD = .50$) also reported almost the same level of willingness to read anti-related news ($F(1, 28) = .17, p > .05$). H6a was not supported.

H6b: *Partisans exposed to blog posting opposite from their opinion are more likely to seek more information supporting their position than partisans reading blog posting congenial with their opinions.*

In terms of their willingness to read pro-related postings, there was no significant difference ($F(1, 23) = 2.74, p > .05$) between supporters reading a pro-blog posting ($M = 5.19, SD = .36$) and anti-blog posting ($M = 4.40, SD = .32$). Opponents reading a

pro-blog posting ($M = 5.23, SD = .52$) and anti-blog posting ($M = 4.79, SD = .50$) self-reported almost the same level of willingness to read anti-blog posting ($F(1, 27) = .38, p > .05$). Consequently, H6b was not supported.

The Guns on Campus Issue

Manipulation Check

A general linear model univariate analysis of variance was employed using perceived valence of content as a dependent variable and manipulated content valence and participants' opinion as independent variables. There was a significant main effect of manipulated content valences on participants' perceive content valence ($F(1, 115) = 490.14, p < .001, \eta^2 = .81$). There was also a significant main effect of participants' opinion ($F(1, 115) = 5.86, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$) but no significant interaction of manipulated content valence and participants' opinion ($F(1, 115) = 1.75, p > .05$). When reading manipulated content supporting guns, there was no significant difference between pro and anti gun partisans in perceived valence of the content ($F(1, 57) = .61, p > .05$). When reading manipulated content opposing guns, the difference was significant ($F(1, 58) = 7.05, p < .05, \eta^2 = .11$). However, whereas manipulated content valence accounted for 81% of the variance in perceived content valence, participants' opinion explained just 5% of the variance. Those who read content manipulated for supporting guns on campus, agreed that 'the content supports guns on campus' ($M=6.42, SD=.15$). Conversely, those who read content manipulated for opposing guns on campus disagreed with the same statement ($M=1.70, SD=.15$). Figure 13 shows differences in perceived content valence. In

short, participants perceived content valence as manipulated. Therefore, we can claim that the stimuli about guns on campus used in this experiment were successfully manipulated.

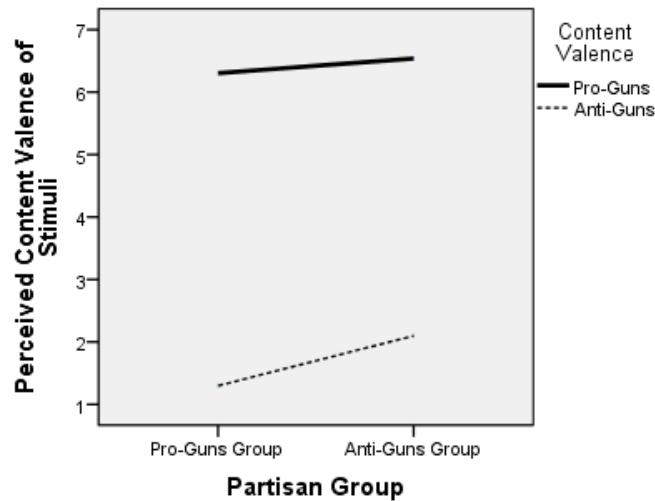


Figure 13. Gun partisans' perceived content valence of stimuli as a function of manipulated content valence and partisan group

Relative Hostile Media Effect in Mainstream news

H1a: *Partisans with opinions opposite from mainstream news will perceive the news as more biased than partisans with opinions congenial with the news.*

One-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence on perceived bias ($F(1, 58) = 11.63, p < .01, \eta^2 = .17$). Partisans with opinions that differed from mainstream news ($M = 5.53, SD = .25$) perceived that news as more biased than congenial partisans with the news ($M = 4.43, SD = .20$) Figure 14a shows that while pro-gun partisans evaluated anti-gun news to be more biased than anti-gun partisans, anti-gun partisans perceived pro-gun news to be more biased than pro-partisans. H1a was supported.

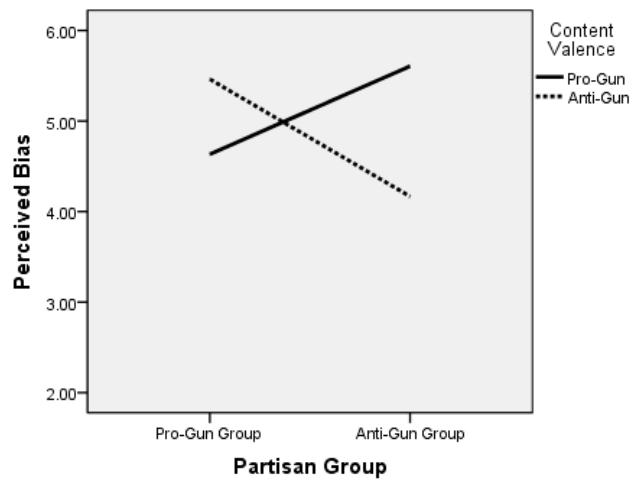


Figure 14a. Gun partisans' perceived bias of mainstream news as a function of content valence and partisan group

H1b: *Partisans with opinions opposite from mainstream news will perceive a mainstream source as less credible than partisans with opinions congenial with the news.*

There was a statistically significant difference ($F(1, 58) = 7.29, p < .01, \eta^2 = .11$) in perceived source credibility between partisans who agree and disagree with content valence. Those with opinions different from content valence ($M = 3.75, SD = .30$) evaluated mainstream source as less credible than congenial partisans with content valence ($M = 4.81, SD = .25$). Figure 14b shows that while pro-gun partisans who read pro-gun news evaluated mainstream source as more credible than anti-gun partisans reading the same news, anti partisans reading anti-gun news rated the source as more credible than pro partisans reading the same news. H1b was supported.

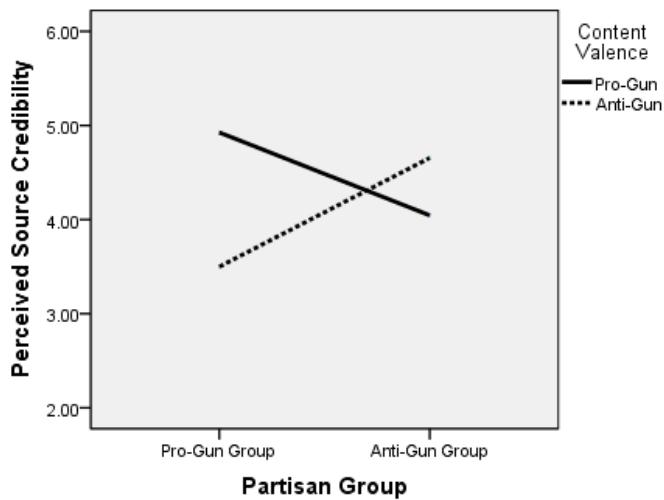


Figure 14b. Gun partisans' perceived source credibility of mainstream news as a function of content valence and partisan group

H1c: *Partisans with opinions opposite from mainstream news will perceive the author of the news as less credible than partisans with opinions congenial with the news.*

In support of H1c, one-way ANOVA confirmed a statistically significant difference ($F(1, 58) = 32.22, p < .001, \eta^2 = .36$) suggesting that partisans with opinions different from the news ($M = 3.29, SD = .23$) perceived the author of the news, a professional journalist, as less credible than partisans with opinions same as the news ($M = 4.99, SD = .19$). As illustrated in Figure 14c, although pro-gun partisans evaluated the author of anti-content to be less credible than anti-gun partisans, anti-gun partisans perceived the author of pro-content to be less credible than pro-gun partisans.

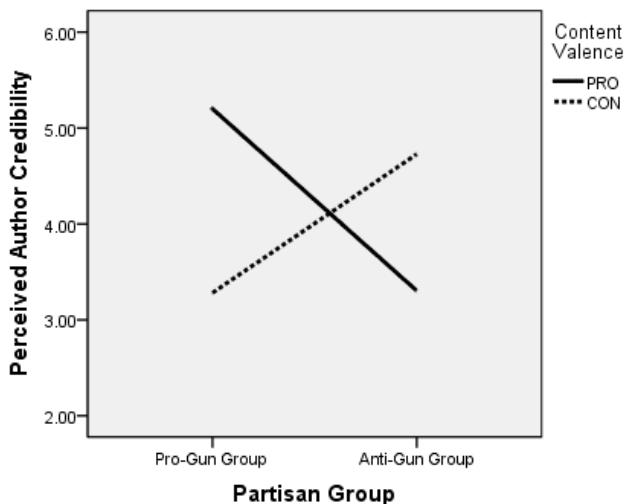


Figure 14c. Gun partisans' perceived author credibility of mainstream news as a function of content valence and partisan group

H1d: *Partisans with opinions opposite from mainstream news will perceive the content of the news as less credible than partisans with opinions congenial with the news.*

One way ANOVA confirmed a statistically significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence on perceived content credibility ($F(1, 58) = 79.56, p < .001, \eta^2 = .59$). Partisans with opposite opinions from content valence ($M = 2.38, S = .21$) rated that content as less credible compared to partisans with opinions congenial with the content valence ($M = 4.81, SD = .17$).

Figure 14d shows that while supporters of guns on campus evaluated anti-gun content to be less credible than opponents, opponents perceived pro-gun content as less credible than supporters. H1d was supported.

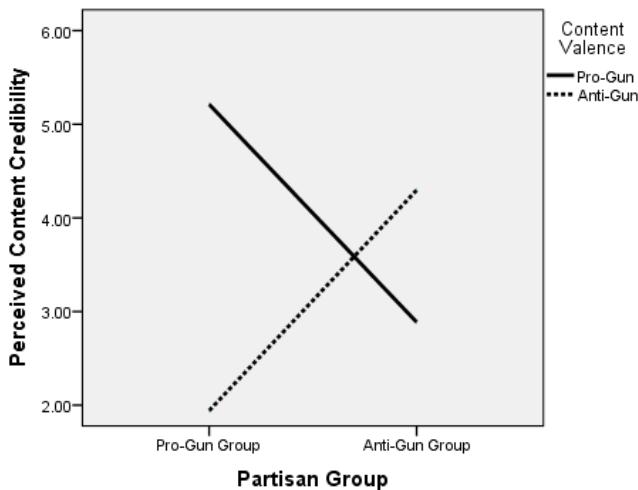


Figure 14d. Gun partisans' perceived content credibility of mainstream news as a function of content valence and partisan group

To summarize, there were significant differences in perceived bias, source credibility, author credibility, and content credibility of mainstream news between supporters and opponents of the guns on campus issue.

Relative Hostile Media Effect in Blog Posting

H2a: *Partisans with opinions opposite from blog posting will perceive the posting as more biased than partisans with opinions congenial with the posting.*

One-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence on perceived bias ($F(1, 56) = 17.51, p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .24$). Partisans with opposite opinions from blog posting ($M = 6.04, SD = .24$) rated that posting as more biased than partisans with opinions same as the posting ($M = 4.55, SD = .27$). Figure 15a shows that pro-gun partisans rated anti-gun posting as more biased than anti-partisans, and anti-gun partisans perceived pro-gun posting to be more biased than pro-partisans. H2a was supported.

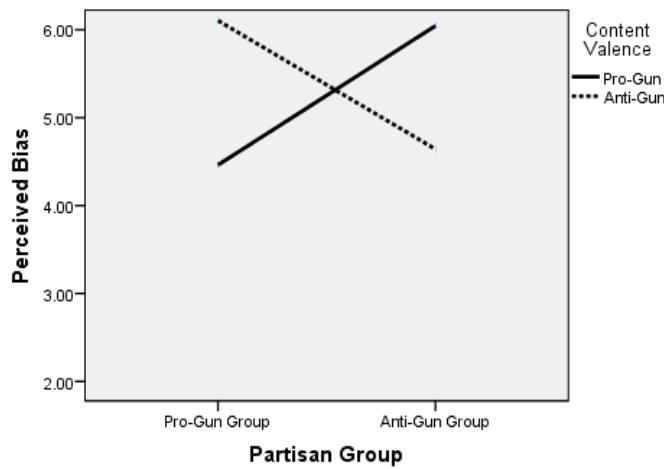


Figure 15a. Gun partisans' perceived bias of blog posting as a function of content valence and partisan group

H2b: *Partisans with opinions opposite from blog posting will perceive the blog as a less credible source than partisans with opinions congenial with the posting.*

Partisans with opposite opinions from blog posting ($M = 2.66$, $SD = .26$) rated the blog as a less credible source than partisans with opinions congenial with the posting ($M = 3.85$, $SD = .28$). This difference was statistically significant ($F(1, 57) = 9.65$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .15$). Figure 15b shows that gun proponents evaluated the blog presenting anti-gun posting as a less credible source than gun opponents. It also shows that opponents rated the blog with pro-gun posting as a less credible source than supporters. H2b was supported.

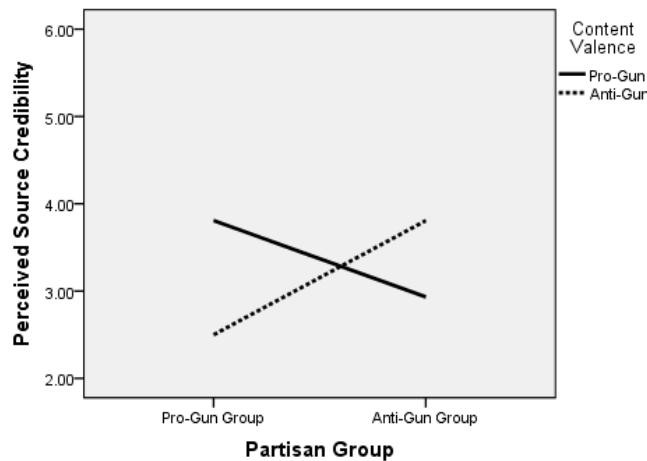


Figure 15b. Gun partisans' perceived source credibility of blog posting as a function of content valence and partisan group

H2c: *Partisans with opinions opposite from blog posting will perceive the author of the posting as less credible than partisans with opinions congenial with the posting.*

One-way ANOVA confirmed a statistically significant difference ($F(1, 56) = 14.94$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .21$) with opposing partisans from blog posting ($M = 2.82$, $SD = .25$) rating the posting's author, a citizen blogger, as less credible than congenial partisans with the posting ($M = 4.27$, $SD = .28$). Figure 15c indicates that pro-gun supporters perceived the author of anti-gun posting as less credible than opponents. Opponents rated the author of pro-gun posting as less credible than supporters. H2c was supported.

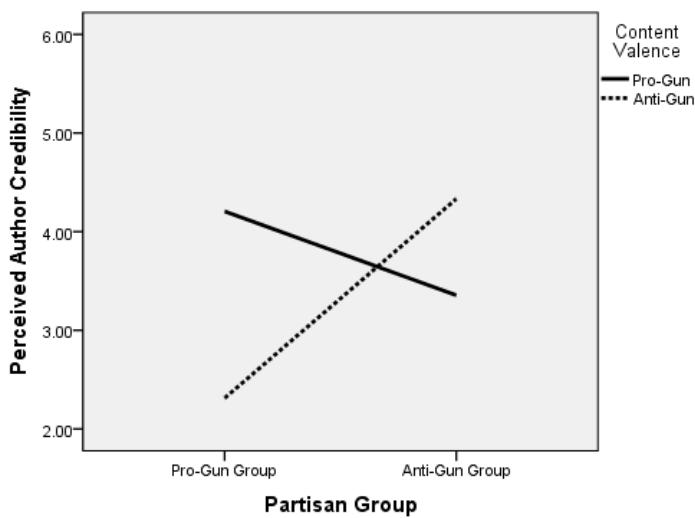


Figure 15c. Gun partisans' perceived author credibility of blog posting as a function of content valence and partisan group

H2d: *Partisans with opinions opposite from blog posting will perceive the content of the blog posting as less credible than partisans with opinions congenial with the posting.*

In support of H2d, there was a significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence on perceived content credibility ($F(1, 56) = 34.32, p < .001, \eta^2 = .38$). Opposing partisans from content valence ($M = 2.33, SD = .23$) rated blog content as less credible than partisans with congenial opinions with content valence ($M = 4.27, SD = .24$). As shown in Figure 15d, although gun supporters evaluated anti-gun blog content to be less credible than opponents, opponents rated the pro-gun blog content to be less credible than supporters.

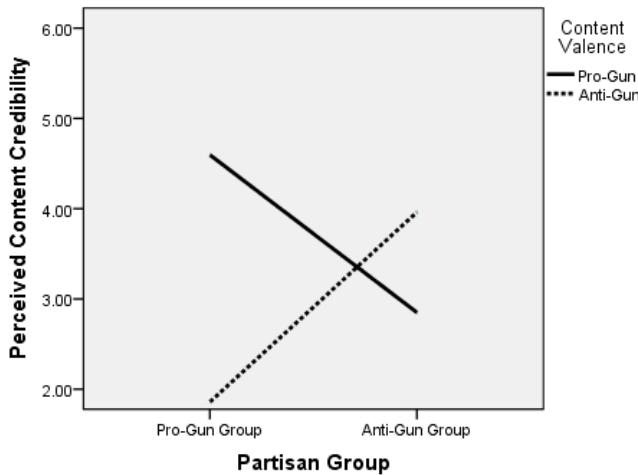


Figure 15d. Gun partisans' perceived content credibility of blog posting as a function of content valence and partisan group

In sum, there were significant differences in the evaluations of blog posting in terms of bias, source credibility, author credibility, and content credibility between supporters and opponents of the guns on campus issue.

News Source versus Partisan Opinion

H3a: *Evaluations of bias will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence than by source.*

Results of a two-way ANOVA produced a significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence on perceived bias ($F(1,114) = 29.10, p < .001, \eta^2 = .20$), but the effect of source was not significant ($F(1,114) = 1.77, p > .05$). Also, there was no significant interaction between source, and the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence ($F(1,114) = .65, p > .05$). Whereas the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence significantly influenced perceived biased, source did not. As illustrated in Figure

16a, there was no significant difference between mainstream and blog content in partisans' perceptions of bias, but a significant difference between partisans who agree and disagree with content valence. H3a, therefore, was supported.

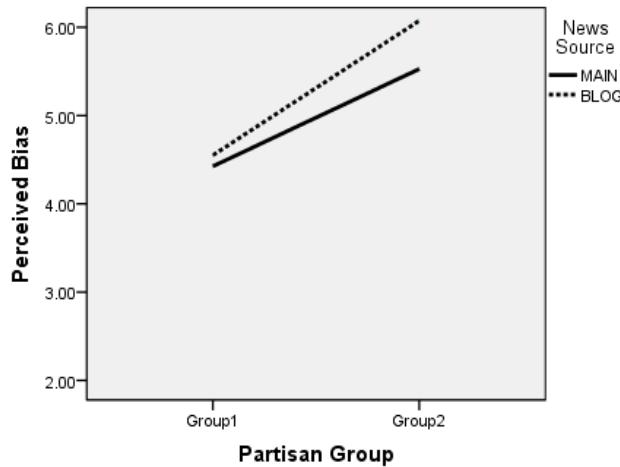


Figure 16a. Gun partisans' perceived bias as a function of source and the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence

(NOTE: Group 1 is partisans who agree with the content valence and group 2 is partisans who disagree with the content valence)

H3b: *Evaluations of source credibility will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence than by source.*

There was a significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence on source credibility ($F(1,115) = 16.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$). The main effect of source was also significant ($F(1,115) = 13.93, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11$) but the interaction between source, and level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence was not significant ($F(1,115) = .07, p > .05$). Source and the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence independently influenced participants' evaluations of source credibility. Even though all partisans read identical content, mainstream source was consistently rated ($M = 4.28, SD = .20$) as more

credible than the blog source ($M = 3.25$, $SD = .19$) (Figure 16b). Partisans with opinions congenial with content valence rated the source of that content as more credible ($M = 4.30$, $SD = .19$) than partisans with opinions different from content valence ($M = 3.20$, $SD = .20$). Therefore, we cannot say that the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence more than source will influence evaluations of source credibility. H3b was not supported.

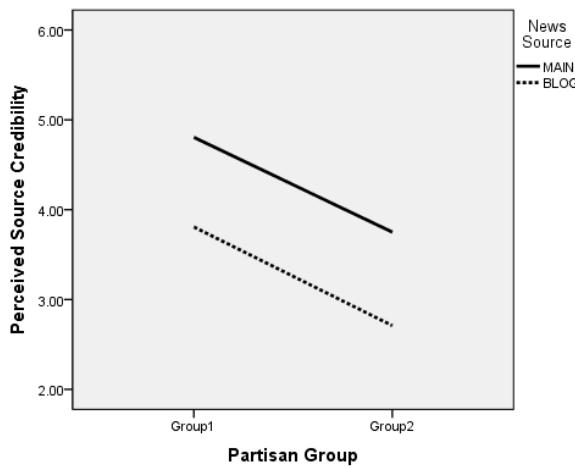


Figure 16b. Gun partisans' perceived source credibility as a function of source and the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence

(NOTE: Group1 is partisans who agree with the content valence and group2 is partisans who disagree with the content valence.)

H3c: *Evaluations of author credibility will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence than by source.*

There was a significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion with content valence on author credibility ($F(1,114) = 43.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .28$) and source ($F(1,114) = 4.14$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .28$). There was no significant interaction between source, and level of agreement between partisan opinion with content valence ($F(1,114) = .28$, $p > .05$). Source and the level of agreement between

partisan opinion with content valence independently influenced evaluations of author credibility. Even though all partisans read identical content, they evaluated the author of mainstream news ($M = 4.14$, $SD = .17$) as more credible than the author of blog posting ($M = 3.55$, $SD = .17$) (Figure 16c). Partisans with opinions congenial with content rated the author of the content as more credible ($M = 4.63$, $SD = .17$) than those with opinions different from the content ($M = 3.06$, $SD = .17$). Since we cannot say that the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence more than source will influence evaluations of author credibility, H3c was not supported.

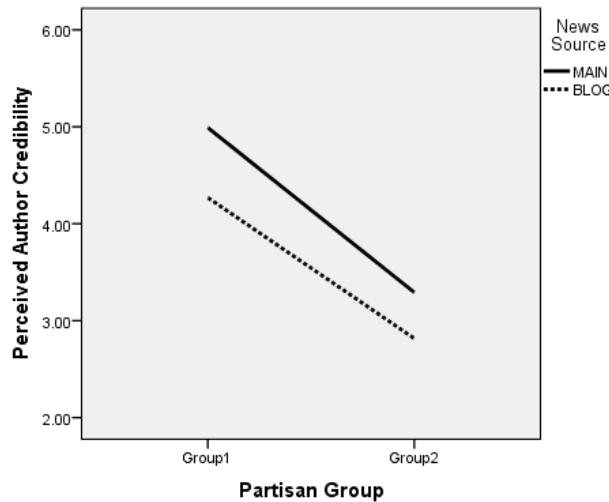


Figure 16c. Gun partisans' perceived author credibility as a function of source and the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence

(NOTE: Group1 is partisans who agree with the content valence
And group 2 is partisans who disagree with the content valence.)

H3d: *Evaluations of content credibility will be influenced more by the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content's valence than by source.*

There was a significant main effect of level of agreement between partisan opinion with content valence on content credibility ($F(1,114) = 104.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 =$

.48) but the effect of source was not significant ($F(1,114) = 1.80, p > .05$). There was also no significant interaction between source, and level of agreement between partisan opinion with content valence on content credibility ($F(1,114) = 1.38, p > .05$). Figure 16d shows that all partisans similarly perceived the credibility of identical content from a mainstream source and a blog. However, all partisans evaluated identical content differently depending on their opinions. Whether the content came from mainstream media or a blog did not appear to influence evaluation of content credibility. Only whether content valence was congenial with partisans' opinion appeared to be a significant factor in evaluations of content credibility. H3d was supported.

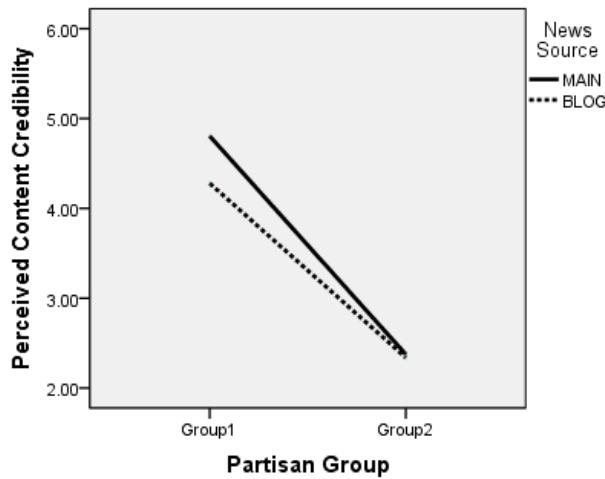


Figure 16d. Gun partisans' perceived content credibility as a function of source and level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence

(NOTE: Group 1 is partisans who agree with the content valence and group 2 is partisans who disagree with the content valence.)

To summarize, the level of agreement between partisan opinion with content valence- rather than source - produced significant differences in perceived

bias and credibility of content from both mainstream source and blog. However, source (mainstream or blog) played an important role in producing a significant difference in perceived source and author credibility of the content.

Partisans' Commenting Behavior

H4a: *Partisans exposed to mainstream news opposite from their opinion will comment more than partisans exposed to news congenial with their opinion.*

A Chi-square test was conducted to examine the association between the level of agreement between partisan opinion with content valence, and their commenting behavior. Results indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between the level of agreement between partisan opinion with content valence, and their commenting behavior on mainstream news ($\chi^2=6.78$, df =1, $p < .05$). As illustrated in Table 9, adjusted residuals²³ for each cell were either 2.6 or -2.6, which had an absolute value greater than the critical value²⁴. Thus, all cells were statistically significant. Given the pattern of positive and negative residuals, there were more partisans who disagree with content valence and fewer partisans who agree with content valence than we expected in those who commented. Figure 17a shows that partisans reading mainstream news different from their opinion commented more than partisans reading news congenial with their opinion. H4a was supported.

²³“Adjusted residual has been standardized and can be interpreted like a Z score. These adjusted residuals can be used to determine whether the difference between observed and expected frequencies for any given group is significant” (Aspelmeier & Pierce, 2009, p.200)

²⁴ Critical Z value for the .05 level of significance is 1.96.

Level of agreement between partisan opinion and content		COMMENT		Total
		NO COMMENT	COMMENT	
		Count	11	
Agree (same)	Expected Count	24.0	16.0	40.0
	% within COMMENT	74.4%	42.3%	61.5%
	Adjusted Residual ²⁵	2.6	-2.6	
Disagree (different)	Expected Count	15.0	10.0	25.0
	% within COMMENT	25.6%	57.7%	38.5%
	Adjusted Residual	-2.6	2.6	
Total	Count	39	26	65
	Expected Count	39.0	26.0	65.0
	% within COMMENT	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 9. The level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence x Comment Cross-Tabulation after gun partisans read mainstream news

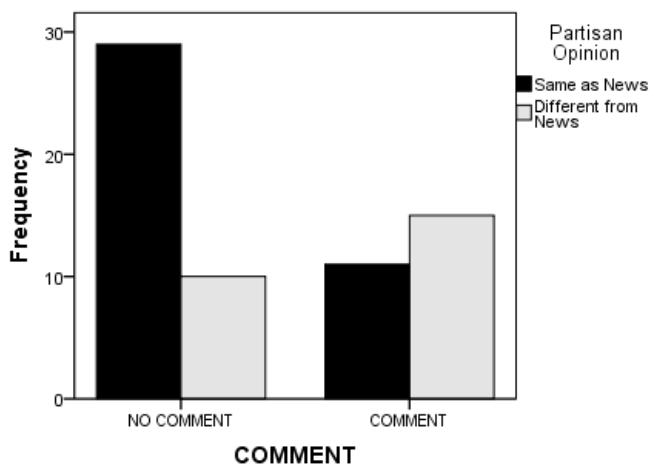


Figure17a. Amount of comments as a function of the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence of mainstream news in the issue of guns on campus

H4b: *Partisans exposed to blog posting opposite from their opinion will comment more than partisans exposed to posting congenial with their opinion.*

²⁵ “If the crosstab table is a 2x2 table, then all of the adjusted residuals will have the same absolute value, but exactly 2 of them will be negative.”

See <http://www-01.ibm.com/support/docview.wss?uid=swg21479605>

Results of a Chi square test indicated a statistically significant relationship between the level of agreement between partisan opinion with content valence, and their commenting behavior on blog posting ($\chi^2=6.52$, df =1, $p < .05$). Table 10 shows that adjusted residuals²⁶ for each cell were either 2.4 or -2.4, which had an absolute value greater than the critical value.²⁷ Thus, all cells were statistically significant. Given the pattern of positive and negative residuals, there were more partisans who disagree with content valence and fewer partisans who agree with content valence than we expected in those who commented. Figure 17b shows that those who read blog posting with a valence different from their opinion commented more than partisans reading blog posting supporting their opinions. H4b was supported.

		COMMENT		Total
		NO COMMENT	COMMENT	
	Count	23	5	28
Agree	Expected Count	18.5	9.5	28.0
Level of agreement (same) between partisan opinion and content	% within COMMENT	53.5%	22.7%	43.1%
	Adjusted Residual ²⁸	2.4	-2.4	
	Count	20	17	37
Disagree	Expected Count	24.5	12.5	37.0
(different)	% within COMMENT	46.5%	77.3%	56.9%
	Adjusted Residual	-2.4	2.4	
	Count	43	22	65
Total	Expected Count	43.0	22.0	65.0
	% within COMMENT	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 10. The level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence x Comment Cross-Tabulation after gun partisans read blog posting

²⁶ “Adjusted residuals has been standardized and can be interpreted like a Z score. These adjusted residuals can be used to determine whether the difference between observed and expected frequencies for any given group is significant” (Aspelmeier & Pierce ,2009, p.200)

²⁷ Critical Z value for the .05 level of significance is 1.96.

²⁸ “If the crosstab table is a 2x2 table, then all of the adjusted residuals will have the same absolute value, but exactly 2 of them will be negative.”

See <http://www-01.ibm.com/support/docview.wss?uid=swg21479605>

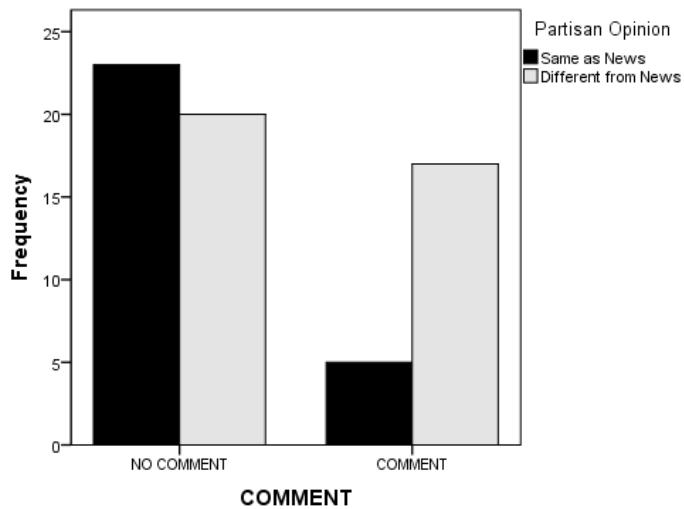


Figure 17b. Amount of comments as a function of the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence of blog posting in the issue of guns on campus

Partisans' Information Seeking Behavior

Selective Exposure to Related Content

H5a: *Partisans will be more likely to select related mainstream news that supports their opinion as compared to news opposite from their opinion.*

Mixed analyses of between and within subjects ANOVA were conducted to test H5a.

Between-subjects factor was partisan opinion either supporting or opposing the issue and within-subject factor was related news either supporting or opposing the issue.

There was a significant main effect of partisan opinion on their willingness to read related news ($F(1, 58) = 15.89, p < .001, \eta^2 = .22$), but there was no significant main effect of related news' valence on the willingness ($F(1, 58) = 3.14, p > .05$).

Interaction between partisans' opinion and valence of related news was significant ($F(1, 58) = 36.60, p < .001, \eta^2 = .39$). Pro partisans rated a higher willingness to read pro-related news ($M = 6.26, SD = .14$) than anti-related news ($M = 4.38, SD = .39$).

This difference was statistically significant ($F(1, 32) = 23.48, p < .001, \eta^2 = .42$). Anti partisans showed a higher willingness to read anti-related news ($M = 4.58, SD = .27$) than pro-related news ($M = 3.56, SD = .24$). The difference was also significant ($F(1, 26) = 18.47, p < .001, \eta^2 = .42$). Figure 18a shows the differences. So, H5a was supported.

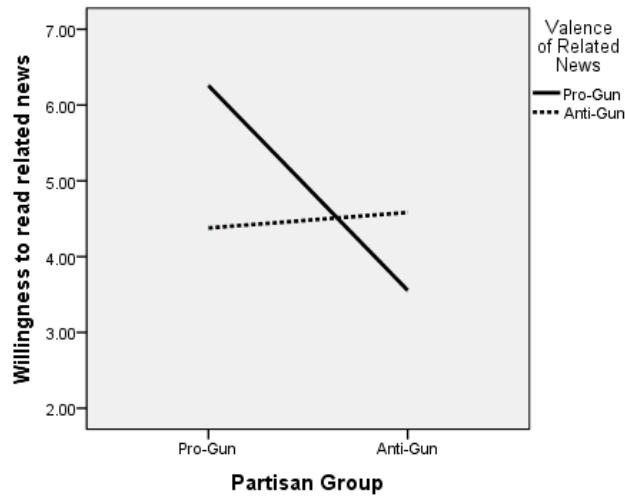


Figure 18a. Gun partisans' willingness to read related mainstream news as a function of partisan group and valence of related news.

H5b: *Partisans will be more likely to select related blog postings that support their opinion as compared to blog postings opposite from their opinion.*

Mixed analyses of between and within subjects ANOVA showed a significant main effect of partisan opinion ($F(1, 58) = 11.90, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$) and valence of related blog posting ($F(1, 58) = 6.07, p < .05, \eta^2 = .10$) on their willingness to read further information. Interaction between partisan opinion and valence of related blog posting was also significant ($F(1, 58) = 25.32, p < .001, \eta^2 = .30$). Pro partisans rated a higher willingness to read pro-related posting ($M = 5.71, SD = .25$) than anti-related news ($M = 3.91, SD = .35$). This difference was statistically significant ($F(1, 29) =$

$20.16, p < .001, \eta^2 = .41$). Anti partisans showed a higher willingness to read anti-related posting ($M = 3.94, SD = .30$) than pro-related news ($M = 3.33, SD = .28$). The difference was also significant ($F(1, 29) = 5.44, p < .05, \eta^2 = .16$). Figure 18b shows the differences. So, H5b was supported.

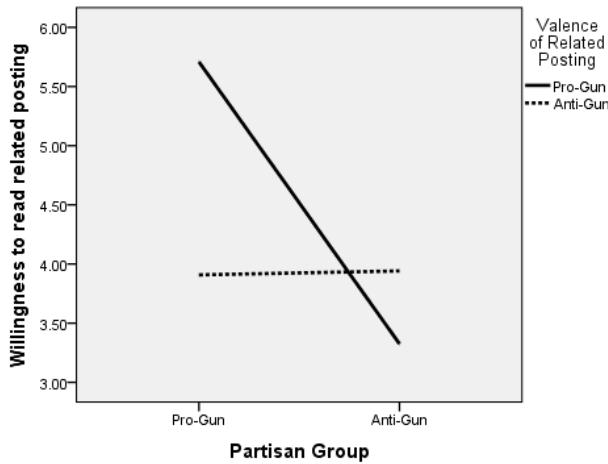


Figure 18b. Gun partisans' willingness to read related blog posting as a function of partisan group and valence of related blog posting

Hostile Media Effect and Selective Exposure

H6a: *Partisans exposed to mainstream news opposite from their opinion are more likely to seek more information supporting their position than partisans reading mainstream news congenial with their opinions.*

Two of one-way ANOVA were conducted to test this hypothesis. Results produced no significant difference between supporters reading pro-news ($M = 6.25, SD = .19$) and anti-news ($M = 6.27, SD = .23$) in their willingness to read pro-related news ($F(1, 31) = 2.08, p > .05$). However, opponents reading anti-news ($M = 4.97, SD = .30$) showed a higher willingness to read anti-related news than opponent reading pro-news ($M = 3.84, SD = .38$). The difference was significant ($F(1, 27) = 5.61, p < .05$,

$\eta^2 = .38$), which indicated that partisans exposed to news congenial with their opinion may be more likely to seek more news supporting their position than partisans reading news different from their opinion. Therefore, H6b was not supported.

H6b: *Partisans exposed to blog posting opposite from their opinion are more likely to seek more information supporting their position than partisans reading blog posting congenial with their opinions.*

Results of a one way ANOVA indicated a significant difference between gun supporters reading pro-posting ($M = 5.12, SD = .35$) and anti-posting ($M = 6.16, SD = .30$) in their willingness to read pro-related postings ($F(1, 28) = 5.13, p < .05, \eta^2 = .16$). Supporters reading anti-posting showed a higher willingness to read pro-related postings than supporters reading pro-news. However, opponents reading pro-posting ($M = 3.84, SD = .41$) and anti-posting ($M = 4.05, SD = .44$) demonstrated a generally same level of willingness to read anti-related postings ($F(1, 28) = .12, p > .05$). H6d was only partially supported.

Chapter 6 Discussion

Summary of Results

Based on the theory of hostile media effect, which posits that partisans perceive seemingly ‘balanced news’ as biased against their own opinion (Gunther et al., 2001; Choi et al., 2009), this study investigated whether partisanship influenced perceptions of two types of online content (mainstream online news versus blog posting) about two controversial issues (same sex marriage and guns on campus). More specifically, this study explored online content’s relative hostile media effect through which the two sides of an issue have divergent perceptions of content in a hostile direction (Gunther et al., 2002). The effect was explicated in terms of perceived bias, source credibility, author credibility, and content credibility. This study also examined the relationships between hostile media effect and partisans’ online behaviors including user commenting and subsequent information seeking.

The first research question examined how partisans’ opinions influence their evaluation of online news produced by professional journalists in terms of bias and credibility. In the case of same sex marriage, this study found strong evidence of a relative hostile media effect of mainstream news in partisans’ perceived bias, author credibility and content credibility. Overall, partisans with opinions congenial with mainstream news evaluated it as less biased but higher in author credibility and content credibility than partisans with opposing opinions. However, the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence did not appear to influence evaluations of source credibility.

For mainstream news about same sex marriage, supporters and opponents indicated the same level of source credibility regardless of content valence read. The mainstream source was rated as believable and trustworthy by all partisans.

In the case of guns on campus, mainstream news also produced a relative hostile media effect in perceived bias, source credibility, author credibility and content credibility. Unlike same sex marriage partisans, however, gun partisans' evaluation of source credibility of mainstream news appeared to correlate with the level of agreement between their opinion and content valence. Gun partisans with opinions congenial with the content's valence evaluated the mainstream source as more credible than partisans with opinions opposite of the content.

This study's second research question was how partisans' opinions influence their evaluation of blog posting produced by non-journalists in terms of bias and credibility. Results suggest that the blog postings also produced relative hostile media effects in perceived bias, source credibility, author credibility, and content credibility for both same sex marriage and gun partisan groups. Specifically, partisans with opinions congenial with blog posting rated the posting as less biased but higher in source credibility, author credibility, and content credibility than partisans with opinions opposite from the posting. It is noteworthy that, unlike the mainstream news that produced no relative hostile media effect in source credibility among same sex marriage partisans, blog posting generated the effect in source credibility for both partisan groups of same sex marriage and guns on campus. In other words, the level of agreement between partisan opinion and content valence of blog posting appeared to influence the perceptions of whether a blog is a believable and trustworthy source.

Partisans with opinions congenial with blog posting evaluated the blog as a more credible source as compared to partisans with opinions opposite from the posting.

The third research question asked how sources and partisans' opinions influence their evaluation of identical content from a blog and a mainstream news source in terms of bias and credibility. In the case of same sex marriage, source (mainstream media versus blog) did not appear to influence partisans' evaluations of bias, author credibility, or content credibility. Instead, the level of agreement between partisan opinions and content valence significantly influenced the evaluations. Therefore, regardless of source, partisans with opinions congenial with the content perceived the content as less biased, and ranked it significantly higher in both author and content credibility than partisans with opinions opposite from the content. For example, supporters of same sex marriage evaluated pro-same sex marriage content from mainstream media as less biased and higher in author credibility and content credibility than opponents who read identical blog content. Conversely, opponents of same sex marriage evaluated anti-same sex marriage blog content as less biased and higher in author credibility and content credibility than supporters who read the same content on mainstream media.

At the same time, same sex marriage partisans' evaluation of source credibility produced a different picture. Source appeared to influence partisans' perceptions of source credibility. Specifically, even though same sex marriage partisans read identical content on both mainstream media and blog, partisans evaluated the mainstream source as more believable and trustworthy than the blog.

Similar to the case of same sex marriage, source did not appear to influence gun partisans' evaluations of bias and content credibility. Regardless of source, partisans with opinion congenial with the gun content perceived the content as less biased and ranked it significantly higher in content credibility than opposing partisans. In other words, supporters of guns on campus evaluated pro-gun content from mainstream media as less biased and ranked it higher in content credibility than opponents who read identical content on a blog. Conversely, opponents evaluated anti-gun content on a blog as less biased and ranked it higher in content credibility than supporters who read the same content on mainstream media.

However, a source appeared to influence gun partisans' evaluations of both author and source of content. Even though gun partisans read identical content, they evaluated the mainstream media as a more credible source than the blog. In addition, for identical content from journalists and bloggers, gun partisans perceived professional journalists to be more credible than bloggers.

The fourth research question asked how partisan opinions influence users' commenting behavior. For both issues in content from both sources, there was a significant relationship between the levels of agreement between partisan opinions and content valence, and commenting behavior. Sixty-five percent of partisans for two issues did not comment on the content read, but 35% of the partisans did. The majority of partisans who did comment had opinions opposite from the content's valence. The minority of partisans had opinions congenial with the content's valence. In sum, regardless of source (mainstream media versus blog), partisans with opinions opposite of the content's valence commented more than partisans who read content

supporting their opinion, which suggests hostile media effects motivate partisans to comment on content read.

The fifth research question explored the influence of partisans' opinion on their further information seeking behavior. After reading mainstream news and blog postings about both issues, partisans were more likely to select content supporting their position than content opposite from their opinion. These results confirm partisans' selective exposure to related content after reading mainstream news or blog posting.

The sixth and final research question investigated how partisans' perceptions of content influence their information seeking behavior. Partisans reading same sex marriage news with a valence opposite from their opinion did not show a higher willingness to seek related news supporting their opinion than partisans who read news supporting their opinion. In the same vein, there was no significant difference between partisans who read pro- and anti-same sex marriage blog posting in their willingness to seek related blog postings supporting their own opinion.

In the case of guns on campus, partisans reading pro or anti information on a mainstream source showed the same level of willingness to read related news supporting their opinions. However, gun supporters reading an anti-gun blog posting showed a higher willingness to seek pro-gun information than gun supporters reading a pro-gun blog posting. Opponents reading pro-posting and anti-posting indicated almost same level of willingness to seek anti-issue information. Given that the previous evidence that partisans reading disagreeable content are more likely to experience hostile media effects (Gunther et al., 2001; Gunther et al., 2009), results of

this study suggests that hostile media effects do not enhance partisans' selective exposure to related content on the web.

Theoretical Implications

This study produced several theoretical implications for the hostile media effect. No known study has investigated hostile media effect in the context of blog versus mainstream media. Results from this study suggest that similar to the relative hostile media effect of mainstream news, user generated blog content can also produce the effect. To date, previous studies only compared content produced by a professional journalist versus non-journalist, such as a student essay (Gunther et al., 2006; Gunther et al., 2009; Schmitt et al., 2004). These researches did not find a significant hostile media effect for identical content presented as a composition produced by a student. The effect was found only when the author was a journalist or the content was professionally produced news. The researchers concluded that "the hostile media effect is peculiar to the mass media context" (Gunther et al., 2006, p.463). This study extends the literature by finding the effect in the context of user-generated blog content.

Perceived reach has been regarded as an important predictor of hostile media effect. According to Gunther et al. (2009), content perceived to have limited reach produced biased assimilation which an individual's tendency to find reported information supportive, rather than opposed, to an individual's position (Lord et al., 1979), whereas content perceived to have high reach (i.e. mass media) generated a hostile media effect. The researchers found "a linear trend in the direction of

relatively unfavorable bias with increasing levels of reach” (Gunther et al., 2009, p.755).

Arguably, the Internet places user-generated content in a different context, making it available to a potentially large audience. Therefore, if a student essay is posted on a blog online, it could be perceived to reach a large audience beyond a classroom. Results of this study suggest that even though the blog posting was not presented as content produced by a professional journalist or mainstream news source, the perceived reach of the blog – at least by the partisans tested in this experiment – appeared to generate a relative hostile media effect in the same way as previously tested mainstream news.

Previous hostile media effect studies focused on just partisans’ perceived bias. This study extends the literature by explicating relative hostile media effect in terms of source credibility, author credibility, content credibility as well as perceived bias. Blog postings about same sex marriage and guns on campus generated a relative hostile media effect in perceived bias, and the credibility of source, author, and content. Mainstream news about guns on campus produced the same effect. For mainstream news about same sex marriage, a relative hostile media effect was generated for perceived bias, author credibility and content credibility, but it was not generated for source credibility. Regardless of content valence read by same sex marriage partisans, a mainstream source was rated as a believable and trustworthy source by both supporters and opponents.

These results suggest that a relative hostile media effect of mainstream news on source credibility may vary depending on the characteristics of controversial

issues. Same sex marriage partisans may be influenced, in part, by the long-time reputation of - or familiarity with - a professional news organization (i.e. AP News) when evaluating the credibility of the source. Conversely, gun partisans may base the credibility of a mainstream source on whether partisans agree or disagree with content valence not on the established reputation of the mainstream source.

This difference may relate to the relevance of the issue to partisans. To explain, when measuring partisans' involvement with the two controversial issues tested, there were no significant differences in terms of familiarity with, prior knowledge of, or engagement with media coverage, or feelings toward the issues. There was, however, a statistically significant differences in the issue relevance to the partisans ($F(1,131) = 4.113, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$). Gun partisans indicated the issue more relevant to them ($M=5.92, SD = .22$) than same sex marriage partisans ($M=5.29, SD = .22$).

Relatively high issue relevance of guns on campus for partisans may result from partisans' perception that guns on campus could have a direct effect on their personal lives, especially their safety, threatening anyone's life. Such high relevance may make partisan opinions more important than the reputation of mainstream media. This suggests that the characteristics of an issue and its consequent relevance to partisans may influence the relative hostile media effect of mainstream news, especially in terms of source credibility.

Even though a few mixed results were found in this study, results suggest that mainstream news about some controversial issues may not generate a relative hostile media effect for source credibility. Given that source, author, and content factors

constitute the overall perceived credibility of news content (Choi et al., 2006; Kiousis, 2001), a preexisting reputation of mainstream source such as the AP News may obstruct the relative hostile media effect in perceived credibility of mainstream source.

Unlike the mainstream news, however, a blog posting about both controversial issues tested produced a relative hostile media effect even in source credibility, providing some evidences that blog posting can produce a stronger relative hostile media effect than mainstream news. There are countless individual sources on the web without any preexisting reputation. Therefore, partisans may base their evaluations of individual sources (i.e. blog) on whether they agree or disagree with content valence not on the reputation of sources. If so, this means that mainstream news sources may mitigate a relative hostile media effect, whereas individual sources (i.e. blog) may enhance it.

This study also explored behavioral consequences of hostile media effect, including the commenting on information and further information seeking. One previous study on commenting behavior (Hernando, 2007) employed self-reported survey data about the frequency of commenting, but this study enhanced ecological validity by measuring actual commenting by partisans on specific content. By doing so, this study provided empirical evidence of which partisans' hostile perceptions predict commenting behavior. Partisans who experience hostile media effect are more likely to comment on mainstream news and blog postings than partisans who do not experience the effect.

By commenting, partisans express their perceived bias or disclose their ‘disagreement’ with the content’s position. This was demonstrated by comments such as, “The bias in this article makes me think it is a joke. The reporter generalized many facts and some of the statements he made are false” and “The article is very one-sided against guns and provides no supporting arguments on either side” or “I disagree that same sex marriage is a biblical issue and should not be considered in the lawmaking arena.”

Partisans also tended to post additional information and personal experiences that amplify their opinions about the issue of same sex marriage or guns on campus. Sample comments include: “This article is lacking any real concrete data. Statistics from across the country consistently show crime rates to be lower in areas where rates of firearm ownership are higher” and “Although I am not gay, a great number of my friends are. I believe that love is love, and that it is ridiculous for society to say that a couple that is truly in love cannot be married because of their sex” or “It is written: Leviticus 18:22 . You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.”

Additionally, the finding that partisans reading content opposing their position commented more than partisans reading supporting content challenges traditional communication theory of the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). This theory posits that people are less likely to voice their opinion if they feel theirs is different from the dominant opinion for fear of reprisal or isolation from the majority (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Noelle-Neumann (1974) asserted that mass media play a large part in determining what the dominant opinion is and implies that all audiences gauge the

dominant opinion when reading mass media coverage. Results from this study may be the first to suggest that partisans who read online content with a valence opposite from their opinion were not always silent. Instead, users disclosed their ‘disagreement’ with online content that expressed an opposite view. This might be explained by the new media environment, which provides an easy method for users to post comments anonymously.

Moreover, online users can more easily find and connect to like-minded individuals (Benkler, 2006). This may change the fundamental characteristics of ‘disagreement,’ which were previously regarded as a minority’s opinion in mainstream media. Therefore, although the results of this study are limited to two controversial issues, they provide new reasons to revisit the spiral of silence in the online environment.

This study confirms partisans’ selective exposure by finding the tendency for partisans to select related content supporting their opinion after reading mainstream news or blog postings. This study also provides insights into the relationships between hostile media effect and the selective exposure. Previous studies (Arpan et al., 2011; Kim, 2010) produced mixed results for the same measures. Research by Kim (2010) showed that when exposing ‘neutral’ news to partisans, the hostile media effect was positively associated with selective exposure. Arpan et al. (2011) presented identity-threatening content or ‘neutral’ content to undergraduate students but did not find an association between perceived bias and selective exposure. Both studies seem to provide competing evidence about the influence of partisans’ hostile perception of content on selective exposure. This might

be because Kim's study failed to provide a condition in which hostile media effect is not produced, and Arpan et al.'s study tested college students instead of partisans who have varying levels of opinions on controversial issues.

The results of this study provide new evidence of no significant relationship between hostile media effect and selecting information supporting one's opinion. In other words, a hostile media effect generated by content with a valence opposite from partisans' opinion did not increase the willingness to seek more content supporting their opinion. Partisan opinions itself played a more important role in information seeking than the hostile media effect.

Practical Implications

Previous studies suggest little or no differences in participants' evaluation of identical content on mainstream media versus blogs (Banning et al., 2007; Geer, 2003; Mackey et al., 2007). This study extends the literature by suggesting if content about a controversial issue has a pro or anti valence, and partisans have a strong opinion on the issue, the evaluation of identical content displayed on different sources will vary depending on whether the partisans' opinion is congenial with the content's valence.

Even though partisans in this study were exposed to identical content on two different sources, they evaluated content supporting their position as less biased and more credible. Some partisans evaluated the content of the mainstream source as less biased and more credible than content on the blog. However, others evaluated blog content as less biased and more credible than the mainstream content. In other words,

on the web, while source did not influence partisans' evaluation of bias and content credibility, whether partisans agree with the content's valence did.

At the same time, the source appeared to influence partisans' evaluation of source credibility in content about the two issues. Source also influenced evaluations of author credibility in the guns on campus content. Regardless of whether partisans' opinion was congenial with content read, all partisans perceived the mainstream source as more credible than the blog. Moreover, gun partisans rated professional journalists as more credible than bloggers. This suggests that even though the content from mainstream source and blog generated a relative hostile media effect, partisans - regardless of their opinions - perceived a mainstream source as more credible than a blog and professional journalists as more credible than citizen bloggers. These measured perceptions of content, sources, and authors suggest new functions for and/or evaluations of the status of traditional mainstream media and journalists.

As noted, audiences are now capable of producing and distributing content on the web (Bruns, 2005; Benkler. 2006; Jenkins, 2009; Bowman et al., 2003; Gillmore, 2006). In many cases, audiences have reported stories not yet covered by journalists of mainstream news organizations (Bruns, 2005; Benkler, 2006). As a result, journalistic privilege previously enjoyed by mainstream media and its journalists are being threatened (Shirky, 2008). However, others argue that, despite obvious setbacks of mainstream media, new media do not yet displace the mainstream media (Jenkins, 2006). This study's evidence for the coexistence of mainstream media with emerging media included the audiences' high level of source and author credibility for mainstream news. Even though mainstream sources and journalists produced content

with a valence opposite from partisans' opinions, the mainstream source and journalists were still rated higher in credibility than the blog and citizen bloggers. Audiences' high levels of perceived credibility of mainstream sources and journalists may reinforce their roles in the age of user-generated content. After all, atomized user-generated content from various social media (i.e. Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, blogs) can be collected by professional journalists (Papacharissi, 2010). Journalists can incorporate user-generated content as "a cohesive and complete news story" and then redistribute it using mainstream media networks (Papacharissi, 2010, p.157). This study's finding of high credibility for mainstream source, professional journalists, and user-generated content, provides new opportunities for a collaborative media environment with "synergistic power of journalism" between journalists and users (Papacharissi, 2010, p.156).

Democratic Implications

The results suggest that user-generated content may produce a stronger relative hostile media effect than mainstream news because it is posted on individual blogs, which typically do not have the same reputation as news organizations. Since the enhanced hostile media effect of user-generated content can influence audiences to dismiss unfavorable (but potentially informing content) as biased or non-credible, the effect may arguably prevent audiences from giving reasonable consideration to any content unfavorable to their position (Gunther et al., 2001). This may reinforce partisans' prior positions on controversial issues such as same sex marriage or guns on campus.

Interactive online features, such as user comments, are expected to promote public deliberation for reaching consensus on controversial issues. However, this study found that partisans of controversial issues posted comments on content with a valence opposite from their positions rather than content congenial with their positions. Many comments intended to correct perceived bias by amplifying one's views. This implies that discursive activities motivated by hostile media perceptions may reinforce partisan opinions of controversial issues. If so, audiences' discursive participations may result in more opinion polarization rather than consensus (Hernando, 2007).

Additionally, partisan audiences' selective exposure to related content supporting their position may enhance their opinions. Refusing to be informed of different opinions or arguments increases the chances for a so-called 'echo chamber effect' of online content, which enhances opinion polarization online (Lyengar & Hahn, 2009).

In terms of the role of the application of these results to a democracy, we already know that the common place for deliberation is the public sphere (Habermas, 1989). Habermas' concept of public sphere refers to a state of deliberation and not any actual 'place' (Papacharissi, 2010) and the Internet has been recognized as a networked public sphere (Benkler, 2006). Whatever one sees and thinks can be discussed on the networked public sphere (Benkler, 2006). However, according to Papacharissi (2010), the networked public sphere is not the same as the traditional public sphere conceptualized by Habermas. Papacharissi (2010) argued that the

traditional public sphere model does not apply to the online environment, which is a network of “liquid and reflexive” individuals (p.162).

In Habermas’ public sphere model, rational consensus-driven deliberation was regarded as the ideal for communication and democracy (Karppinen et al., 2008). Instead of the traditional public sphere model, Papacharissi (2010) explained the democratizing effect of the Internet using Mouffe’s concept of ‘agonistic pluralism’ which is based on antagonism which is “the tendency to classify ourselves and others in terms of them and us” (Karppinen et al., 2008, p.7). Mouffe (2000) asserts that rational consensus cannot be reached in a pluralist democracy in that consensus brings about some kinds of exclusion. For Mouffe, rational consensus is the kind of illusion. Mouffe (2000) proposed the concept of agonistic pluralism as an alternative to the public sphere by revealing “the impossibility of establishing a consensus without exclusion” (p.105). Mouffe claimed that consensus aimed at reconciling tensions and conflicts neglects “the inherently conflictual nature of modern pluralism” (Mouffe, 2000. p.105). According to Mouffe (2000), the multiplicity of voices of pluralist societies can be manifested in agonistic pluralism rather than public sphere model.

Even though the Internet provides diverse information and networks for deliberation, results from this study suggest that partisan audiences tend to perceive information or opinions different from their position as biased and non-credible, and will select more content supporting their position. Moreover, partisans seem to participate in deliberation for amplifying their opinions. Partisans seem to be less concerned with consensus, but more interested in expressing disagreement. Therefore,

partisans' hostile perception of user-generated content (i.e. blog postings, videos of YouTube), and discursive participations motivated by the hostile perceptions (i.e. online discussion boards), may lay the foundation for agonistic pluralism rather than the traditional public sphere. If this is true, agonistic pluralism on the web may reinforce the democratizing effect of the Internet in that it contributes to "enhance democracy by decentralizing public sphere's core and opening it up to disagreement, rather than agreement" (Papacharissi, 2010, p.161).

Limitations

Like any experimental study, this one is not without limitations. Unlike a controlled lab experiment, an online environment cannot confirm each participant's identity. Since participants had unlimited time to complete the session, there is no way to confirm that every participant completed the experiment without assistance from others or that participants did not engage in concurrent (i.e. potentially distracting) activities. Also, since nearly half of the sample was college-aged participants, results of this study cannot be generalized to the general public.

In this study, the *Associated Press* represented one mainstream media source and one citizen-produced blog represented a user-generated source on the web. Therefore, the results from this study cannot be generalized to all mainstream media and user-generated sources.

This study tested only two controversial issues. The sample for same sex marriage contained more female than male participants. Conversely, the sample for guns on campus contained more male than female participants. The unequal gender samples for two issues may have produced gender bias for one or both issues.

Samples in this study included mixed partisans with or without membership in groups with known positions on the controversial issues. Even though all partisans reported an extreme opinion on the issues, participants with group membership could have had different perceptions of the content than participants who were not group members. Analyses did not differentiate participants in terms of group membership, which could have been a limitation of this study.

Since participants were randomly assigned to one of two content, supporting or opposing their own position, participants read only one content with a valence (pro or anti). According to Reeves & Geiger (1994), a single message may influence particular factors that could provoke participants' responses. The scholars recommended use of 'more than one message' in most mass communication experiments. Therefore, this study's use of one stimulus of each valence is a possible limitation. Future study could employ multiple stimuli with supporting or opposing views to further investigate hostile media effect in the context of diverse online content.

Moreover, participants of this experiment were asked to read specific and manipulated content without any other choices. In reality, online audiences are free to select content on the web. Future study could enhance ecological validity by providing participants with the freedom to choose content (Mende, 2008).

Two levels of content stimuli, supporting or opposing each issue, were manipulated, but no claims can be made about whether the variances of stimuli about two issues were homogeneous. In other words, even though two stimuli regarding same sex marriage and guns on campus were manipulated for the same valence

(supporting or opposing), the two stimuli may still contain different variance in their levels of support or opposition for the issue, which would limit the comparison of issues.

In terms of the measures of user comments, only 35% of participants commented on the content read. This sampling may be too small to provide sufficient statistical power for reliable inferences about commenting behaviors (Hinkle et al., 2003).

Also, this study measured participants' willingness to read more related content after reading previous content. In the online environment, related content is typically provided as hyperlinks. Measuring an actual 'click stream' of hyperlinks to related content may have provided a more valid measure of information seeking.

Directions for future research

There are several directions for future research. Studies could replicate the findings in this study by testing other controversial issues using user-generated content of other social media.

Content produced by journalists and web users is easily shared through social media networks such as friends of Facebook or followers of Twitter. Future research could focus on the relationships between audiences' prior opinions toward controversial issues, hostile media effect, and content distribution by analyzing the sharing of varying content on social media networks.

This study investigated commenting behavior in an experimental setting. Future research could extend this study by analyzing actual comments at news sites,

such as a site of the *New York Times*. This would provide more valid data about the relationship between hostile media effect and commenting behavior.

In addition, there are many kinds of discursive activities online including discussions on Facebook, Twitter, and political discussion boards. Future study could analyze specific arguments and counter-arguments to examine whether discussions contribute to reach consensus or reinforce partisanship. This would provide a clearer picture of the democratizing effect of new media.

Finally, future research could explore the roles of hostile media effect in social movements. For example, the hostile media perception, consequent commenting, and selective exposure to content may trigger the formation of networks for those with the same opinion about controversial issues. According to Mutz (2006), the heightened exposure to information reinforcing audiences' positions and the connection with those who have similar opinion encourage higher level of participation in social movement. Like-minded networks on the web may "lower the costs of bringing people into corrective action, induce confidence that they are not alone, and give broader meaning to their claims" (Tarrow, 1998, p.23).

Conversely, heterogeneous networks discourage the participation (Mutz, 2006). The researcher stated that when people have opposing views within a network, they tend not to politically participate for the fear of alienation. Heterogeneous networks help its members to "avoid taking potentially controversial positions and pressure from those who might attempt to change their minds" (Mutz, 2006, p.101). Future study could investigate how the hostile media effect of online

content encourages the formation of like-minded networks and how the networks can play a distinct role in partisans' involvement with social movement.

Conclusions

The emergence of web has provided virtually anyone with the opportunity for publishing their own content (Shirky, 2008). Therefore, it is true that an unimaginable amount of content with diverse perspectives are created and disseminated globally. At the same time, audiences have ample chances to access an overwhelming amount of content with various perspectives about issues, which may have not been extensively covered by traditional mainstream media.

This study explored how partisan audiences perceive online content with different perspectives from different sources using the theoretical framework of relative hostile media effect (Gunther et al., 2001).

The first research question of this study was to investigate a possible relative hostile media effect of mainstream news online. Indeed, a mainstream news online generated a relative hostile media effect similar to the effect measured from traditional printed news articles and national network broadcasts.

The second research question explored a possible relative hostile media effect of a user-generated blog posting. Again, a blog posting produced by a non-journalist appeared to generate a relative hostile media effect similar to the mainstream online news. In fact, user-generated blog content seemed to produce a stronger relative hostile media effect than the mainstream online news. Arguably, this enhanced relative hostile effect of user generated content could contribute to additional opinion polarization on the web.

These findings suggest that even though partisan audiences can access various content online, it does not appear that the partisans give equal consideration to all content. Instead, partisans perceived content in the context of whether they agreed or disagreed with the content's valence. Partisan audiences evaluated content opposite from their points of views as biased and less credible, which could further reinforce their partisanship.

The third research question investigated partisans' evaluations of identical content from different sources. Even though both the mainstream news and user-generated blog posting produced a relative hostile media effect, partisans perceived the mainstream source and professional journalist as more credible than a blog and a blogger. These results could pave the way for a more collaborative media environment in which user-generated content is reproduced by journalists and redistributed by mainstream sources (Papacharissi, 2010).

In addition to partisans' perceptions of content, this study also investigated behavioral consequences of hostile media effects, such as users' commenting and further information seeking following exposure to controversial content online.

A fourth research question examined the relationship between a hostile media effect and the commenting behavior of partisans. To some extent, hostile perceptions of content from both mainstream news source and blog appeared to influence audiences' commenting behaviors. Some partisans were motivated to comment on content opposing their position to correct a perceived bias and/or amplify their own positions.

The study's fifth research question was to confirm selective exposure to related content after reading mainstream news or a blog posting. The results revealed that most partisans selected related content supporting their own position, confirming the behavior of selective exposure.

The sixth and final research question tested the relationship between a hostile media effect and selective exposure to related content. Hostile media effects did not appear to enhance the tendency for selective exposure to related content. Regardless of their perceptions of mainstream news or blog postings (hostile or not), partisans selected additional content supporting their positions.

In their totality, the results from tests of a possible relative hostile media effect of online content, commenting and more information seeking behaviors following exposure to the content seemed to reinforce partisanship rather than encourage consensus between supporters and opponents of controversial issues.

Appendices

Appendix A: Study Registration

Study Registration

[Exit this survey](#)

I am Mihee Kim, a doctoral student at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland. I am conducting an online news experiment, which will award \$25 cash to five randomly-selected participants who complete the 15 minute experiment online next week.

Here's how it works. First, you must be 18 years of age or older. After I receive the information you provide below, you will receive an email with a link to the experiment within seven days. (This delay is a part of the study.) After you receive the emailed link, you will be able to complete the experiment online at a time of your convenience.

To participate, please enter your information below then proceed to the consent form with more details and survey questions about issues in the news. I would sincerely appreciate your help with my study. Thank you.

***1. To participate, please provide your name and email.**

Name

Email

[Next](#)

Appendix B: Online Consent Form

THIS IS THE CONSENT FORM REQUIRED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND Exit this survey

1. Project Title
What is the effect of audiences' current position on their perceptions of online news content?

2. Purpose of the Study
This research is being conducted by Ph.D. student Mi Hee Kim and at the University of Maryland - College Park. The purpose of this project is to investigate the effect of audiences' current position on their perceptions of online news content

3. Procedures
This experiment will be conducted online. You will receive an email confirming their voluntary participation containing a URL address with a consent form. After reading and approving the consent form, you will be instructed to click to proceed to move on to presurvey. You will be asked about your perceptions about controversial issues. A week after completing the pre- survey, you will receive an email with a URL to news content. You will be asked to read news content. After reading the content, you will be asked to answer another survey to measure your perceptions of the content read.

4. Potential Risks and Discomforts
There are no known risks or discomforts.

5. Potential Benefits
We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of online news content.

6. Confidentiality
Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing data in_ password protected computer.

If I write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

7. Right to Withdraw and Questions
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the principle investigator, Dr. Ronald A. Yaros at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742 (email) ryaros@umd.edu, (office) 301.405.2425 or me, the student investigator, Mihee Kim at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism, University of Maryland ,College Park,MD 20742 (email) mhkim2008@gmail.com, (phone) 240.678.3508.

8. Participant Rights
If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:

University of Maryland College Park
Institutional Review Board Office
1204 Marie Mount Hall
College Park, Maryland, 20742
E-mail: irb@umd.edu
Telephone: 301-405-0678

This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

9. Statement of Consent
Your entering your name below indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

***2. Are you at least 18 years old?**

- Yes
- No

***3. To confirm your agreement to the consent form above, please enter your name one more time as an electronic signature**

Next

Appendix C: Pre Survey Questionnaire

Pre Survey

[Exit this survey](#)

4. Using the scale below ranging from "very strongly agree" to "very strongly disagree," please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the statements and issues.

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
Death penalty should be allowed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Same sex marriage should be legalized nationwide	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Abortion should be banned	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Medical testing on animals should be allowed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Taxes should be increased on the wealthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guns on campus should be allowed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Doctor-assisted suicide should be allowed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

[Exit this survey](#)

5. Using the same scale, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
I am familiar with the issue of Death Penalty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am familiar with the issue of Same Sex Marriage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am familiar with the issue of Abortion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am familiar with the issue of Medical Testing On Animals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am familiar with the issue of Taxing On the Wealthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am familiar with the issue of Guns on Campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am familiar with the issue of Doctor-Assisted Suicide	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

[Exit this survey](#)**6. Using the same scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?**

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
The issue of Death Penalty is relevant to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The issue of Same Sex Marriage is relevant to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The issue of Abortion is relevant to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The issue of Medical Testing on Animals is relevant to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The issue of Taxing on the Wealthy is relevant to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The issue of Guns on campus is relevant to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The issue of Doctor-Assisted Suicide is relevant to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)[Exit this survey](#)**7. Using the same scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?**

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
I have a thorough understanding of Death Penalty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a thorough understanding of Same Sex Marriage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a thorough understanding of Abortion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a thorough understanding of Medical Testing on Animals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a thorough understanding of Taxing on the Wealthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a thorough understanding of Guns on campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a thorough understanding of Doctor-Assisted Suicide	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

[Exit this survey](#)**8. Using the scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?**

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
I closely follow media coverage concerning Death Penalty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I closely follow media coverage concerning Same Sex Marriage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I closely follow media coverage concerning Abortion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I closely follow media coverage concerning Medical Testing on Animals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I closely follow media coverage concerning Taxing on the Wealthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I closely follow media coverage concerning Guns on campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I closely follow media coverage concerning Doctor-Assisted Suicide	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)[Exit this survey](#)**9. Using the scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?**

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
I feel stirred up when I think about Death Penalty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel stirred up when I think about Same Sex Marriage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel stirred up when I think about Abortion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel stirred up when I think about Medical Testing on Animals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel stirred up when I think about Taxing on the Wealthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel stirred up when I think about Guns on campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel stirred up when I think about Doctor-Assisted Suicide	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

10. Please enter your age**11. Please indicate your gender.**

- Female
- Male
- Other

12. My highest level of education is :

- High school diploma
- Attending a college/university now
- Undergraduate degree
- Graduate degree

[Next](#)**13. If you attend (or completed) college, what is (or was) your major field of study?**

- Arts / Humanities
- Engineering
- Business
- Science/Math
- Medicine
- Law
- Social Sciences
- Major Not Listed
- Did not attend or finish college

14. Finally, what is your ethnicity?

- Caucasian
- African American
- Asian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Multiracial
- Other

[Next](#)

Thank You For Signing-Up And Providing This Preliminary Information

[Exit this survey](#)

Again, you will be receiving an email from me in about a week with a link to the experiment. You will be free to complete the experiment any time thereafter.

If you are one of the lucky randomly-selected participants to receive \$25 cash after the study is closed, we will contact you regarding arrangements for payment.

Thank you!
MiHee Kim
Doctoral Student
University of Maryland

[Done](#)

Appendix D: Stimuli

Blog posting

INSTRUCTIONS

[Exit this survey](#)

You will see a blog posting written by an individual blogger, non-professional journalist.

Please read it (and post an optional comment if you'd like) before proceeding to questions about the story.

[Next](#)

Blog posting with a valence supporting same sex marriage

The screenshot shows a blog header with the title "Micheal Roberts' Blog" and a small bird icon. Below the header, the main title of the post is "Same Sex Marriage, Yes or No?". The post is dated "Oct 10, 12:01 PM EDT" and is attributed to "POSTED BY MICHEAL ROBERTS". The content of the post discusses the fight for same-sex marriage, mentioning Al Koski's story and the practical reasons behind it. It also addresses common arguments against same-sex marriage, such as STD concerns and family values.

Oct 10, 12:01 PM EDT

POSTED BY MICHEAL ROBERTS

The most immediate fight ahead for gay rights activists is the legalization of same-sex marriage across the country.

Gay and lesbian couples should be treated no differently than their heterosexual counterparts and they should be able to marry like anyone else. Denying same sex marriage is a form of minority discrimination. America was founded on the concept that the majority should rule, but the rights of minorities should be protected.

"Denying same sex marriage is no different than denying marriage to Hispanic or black couples" said Al Koski, 69, a retired Social Security claims representative from Bourne, Mass., who married his partner Jim Fitzgerald in 2007 after they were together for more than 30 years.

Beyond wanting to uphold the legal principles of nondiscrimination and equal treatment, advocates of same sex marriage say there are very practical reasons behind the fight for marriage equity.

Marriage is more than a legal status. It affects many things in life.

"Homosexual couples who have been together for years often find themselves without the basic rights and privileges that are currently enjoyed by heterosexual couples who legally marry - from the sharing of health and pension benefits to hospital visitation rights" Koski said. "Marriage benefits should be available to all couples"

Same sex marriage doesn't hurt society or anyone in particular.

"A marriage is a relationship between two people. How does it hurt society or people not involved in the marriage? It is a personal commitment that really is no one else's business. Society shouldn't be dictating what two people can or can't do when no one else is hurt in the process" said Brian Moulton, chief legislative counsel at the Human Rights Campaign.

One of the main arguments against same sex marriage is that it would further erode family values. However, the opposite is true.

"The problems related to sexuality in our society such as STD's stem from carefree, frivolous lifestyles; in other words, having frequent, unprotected sex with many partners. Marriage encourages people to settle down and to give up that type of lifestyle. Married people commit themselves to one partner and work to build a life together", Evan Wolfson, president of Freedom to Marry, said

"Like any heterosexual couples relationship, a same-sex marriage may fuel the desire for a family", he said.

Enter an optional comment on this blog posting.

Next



Blog posting with a valence opposing same sex marriage

Exit this survey

Micheal Roberts' Blog



Same Sex Marriage, Yes or No?

Oct 10, 12:01 PM EDT

POSTED BY MICHEAL ROBERTS

Legalizing "same sex marriage" is having major repercussions for religious freedom, according to observers of the latest developments.

God and natural law had established marriage as between a man and a woman, and the state should not try to change that.

The Rev. Duane R. Motley, a Baptist minister said "God has defined what marriage is, and the government doesn't have the right to redefine it."

"Even ultra-liberal senators should understand that the government should have no right to impose a counter-biblical definition of marriage, family and gender," he said.

According to New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan, the defense of marriage was not simply a religious issue, but an American issue.

He defined marriage as a "natural law" created by God for the purpose of procreating children.

Marriage is the most sacred institution in this country, and every society considers it the joining of a man and a woman. It makes biological sense since only a man and woman can pro-create. For thousands of years, a man and woman headed household has carried generations of people through life.

"Anything that tampers with this natural law places the human race in peril," Dolan said.

Marriage between a man and a woman is the bedrock of a healthy society because it leads to stable families and, ultimately, to children who grow up to be productive adults.

Children learn about expectations and gender roles from society. It's difficult to teach the importance and traditions of the family when such confusion is thrust upon them.

"Allowing same sex marriage will radically redefine marriage and further weaken it at a time when the institution is already in serious trouble due to high divorce rates and a significant number of out-of-wedlock births". Rabbi Noson S. Leiter, executive director of Torah Jews for Decency, said. "It will also increase the number of joke or non-serious marriages, such as a couple of friends who want to save on taxes"

Moreover, many predict that legalizing same sex marriage will ultimately lead to granting people in polygamous and other nontraditional relationships the right to marry as well.

"The movement to prevent legalizing same sex marriage is not anti-gay but aimed at opposing a range of threats to the institution of marriage, including polygamy and adultery", Dolan said

Enter an optional comment on this blog posting.

Next

Blog posting with a valence supporting guns on campus

Exit this survey

Micheal Roberts' Blog



Guns on Campus, Hurt or Help?

Oct 10, 12:01 PM EDT

POSTED BY MICHEAL ROBERTS.

Officials in Texas, Arizona, Tennessee, Michigan, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Florida, Nebraska and Mississippi have proposed allowing guns on campus. Other states should consider allowing guns on campus.

Allowing guns on campus is necessary for enhancing students' safety.

College campuses play host to every type of violence found in the rest of society, from murder to assault to rape.

Allowing students to carry concealed weapons on campus would enable them to defend themselves and others in the case of an attack.

"The issue is about safety, and as a student it is important to be able to protect yourself against the possibility of violence or crimes", said David Burnett, activist for gun rights on campus. "Gun violence on campuses, such as the mass shootings at Virginia Tech in 2007 show that the best defense against a gunman is students who can shoot back".

"The only way to stop a person with a gun is another person with a gun," said University of Cincinnati sophomore Michael Flitcraft. "I felt defenseless, and it started to bug me, especially with all the school shootings".

"For someone who carry a firearm, they need to do more than just 'play dead' to protect themselves in the case of a mass shooting", Burnett said. "I believe a Virginia Tech-type shooting could be prevented or the damage dramatically reduced if students were armed".

Anti- gun advocates claim that students should leave the preserving of their safety to campus police. However, campus police cannot guarantee the safety of all students because police are often thinly-spread across vast campus grounds.

"Having armed students, professors and other campus employees would save lives since they would be able to respond to an attack immediately instead of waiting for law enforcement", Tony Smith , advocate of guns on campus, said.

Anti-gun advocates also argue that guns on campus would lead to an escalation in violent crime. However, this fear is groundless.

"Allowing guns on campus reduces the number of attempted crimes because criminals are uncertain which potential victims can defend themselves ", John Lott, advocate of guns on campus, said.

"None of twelve schools allowing concealed carry on campus has seen a single resulting incident of gun violence (including threats and suicides), a single gun accident, or a single gun theft", Lott said.

Enter an optional comment on this blog posting.

Next



Blog posting with a valence opposing guns on campus

Exit this survey

Micheal Roberts' Blog



Guns on Campus, Hurt or Help?

Oct 10, 12:01 PM EDT

POSTED BY MICHEAL ROBERTS

Legislators in several states are considering legislation that would allow students to carry licensed firearms on campus.

Having weapons legally allowed on campus will negatively alter the atmosphere for students.

"I think it has the potential to kill academic debate, if somebody has a gun in the classroom," said Andy Pelosi, activist for gun control on campus.

Instead of allowing licensed guns on campus, Pelosi said he would much rather see a university concentrate its efforts on heightening campus security to make students feel more secure.

"Campus carry" advocates argue that allowing students with licenses to carry concealed weapons on campus would deter campus shootings. This argument is not strong enough to justify allowing concealed weapons on campus.

"We don't think arming students is going to deter the rare campus shootings. We're not convinced that that deterrent factor is going to come into play," Pelosi said. "There is no real way to tell if the decision could potentially prevent tragedies on campus like the Virginia Tech massacre in 2007"

"You could say that a Virginia Tech type of shooting could have been avoided, but those types of incidents are extremely rare, and happened on college campuses that are extremely safe," he said. "So, I wonder why we are introducing guns into that type of a campus."

According to Washington University Chief of Police Don Strom, college campuses are safer than most other settings. Strom thinks that allowing concealed weapons on college campuses is an added risk to students.

"There are studies that show that bringing guns into a campus environment can actually increase the danger for people on the campus," Strom said. "I don't think it complements the culture of a college campus, and I think that frankly, a lot of people on our campus would be particularly furious being in an environment daily where they were wondering if the person next to them was carrying a firearm or not."

The risk of gun accident is one of reasons for gun control on campus. High-risk behaviors on college campuses such as binge drinking and drug use would contribute to the increase of gun accident.

Other factors that might increase risk of gun accidents among college students include high stress, elevated suicide risk and more opportunities for gun theft in a dormitory setting.

Enter an optional comment on this blog posting.

Next



Mainstream news

INSTRUCTIONS

[Exit this survey](#)

Now, you will see an online news story written by a professional journalist from the Associated Press.

Please read it (and post an optional comment if you'd like) before proceeding to questions about the story.

[Next](#)

Mainstream news with a valence supporting same sex marriage

[Exit this survey](#)



Same Sex Marriage, Yes or No?

Oct 10, 12:01 PM EDT

By PETER SVENSSON
AP Writer

The most immediate fight ahead for gay rights activists is the legalization of same-sex marriage across the country.

Gay and lesbian couples should be treated no differently than their heterosexual counterparts and they should be able to marry like anyone else. Denying same sex marriage is a form of minority discrimination.

America was founded on the concept that the majority should rule, but the rights of minorities should be protected.

"Denying same sex marriage is no different than denying marriage to Hispanic or black couples" said Al Koski, 69, a retired Social Security claims representative from Bourne, Mass., who married his partner Jim Fitzgerald in 2007 after they were together for more than 30 years.

Beyond wanting to uphold the legal principles of nondiscrimination and equal treatment, advocates of same sex marriage say there are very practical reasons behind the fight for marriage equity.

Marriage is more than a legal status. It affects many things in life.

"Homosexual couples who have been together for years often find themselves without the basic rights and privileges that are currently enjoyed by heterosexual couples who legally marry - from the sharing of health and pension benefits to hospital visitation rights" Koski said. "Marriage benefits should be available to all couples"

Same sex marriage doesn't hurt society or anyone in particular.

"A marriage is a relationship between two people. How does it hurt society or people not involved in the marriage? It is a personal commitment that really is no one else's business. Society shouldn't be dictating what two people can or can't do when no one else is hurt in the process" said Brian Moulton, chief legislative counsel at the Human Rights Campaign.

One of the main arguments against same sex marriage is that it would further erode family values. However, the opposite is true.

"The problems related to sexuality in our society such as STD's stem from carefree, frivolous lifestyles; in other words, having frequent, unprotected sex with many partners. Marriage encourages people to settle down and to give up that type of lifestyle. Married people commit themselves to one partner and work to build a life together", Evan Wolfson, president of Freedom to Marry, said

"Like any heterosexual couples relationship, a same-sex marriage may fuel the desire for a family", he said.

Enter an optional comment on this news story .

Next

Mainstream news with a valence opposing same sex marriage

[Exit this survey](#)



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Oct 10, 12:01 PM EDT

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AP Writer

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God and natural law had established marriage as between a man and a woman, and the state should not try to change that.

The Rev. Duane R. Motley, a Baptist minister said "God has defined what marriage is, and the government doesn't have the right to redefine it."

"Even ultra-liberal senators should understand that the government should have no right to impose a counter-biblical definition of marriage, family and gender," he said.

According to New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan, the defense of marriage was not simply a religious issue, but an American issue.

He defined marriage as a "natural law" created by God for the purpose of procreating children.

Marriage is the most sacred institution in this country, and every society considers it the joining of a man and a woman. It makes biological sense since only a man and woman can pro-create. For thousands of years, a man and woman headed household has carried generations of people through life.

"Anything that tampers with this natural law places the human race in peril," Dolan said.

Marriage between a man and a woman is the bedrock of a healthy society because it leads to stable families and, ultimately, to children who grow up to be productive adults. Children learn about expectations and gender roles from society. It's difficult to teach the importance and traditions of the family when such confusion is thrust upon them.

"Allowing same sex marriage will radically redefine marriage and further weaken it at a time when the institution is already in serious trouble due to high divorce rates and a significant number of out-of-wedlock births". Rabbi Noson S. Leiter, executive director of Torah Jews for Decency, said. "It will also increase the number of joke or non-serious marriages, such as a couple of friends who want to save on taxes"

Moreover, many predict that legalizing same sex marriage will ultimately lead to granting people in polygamous and other nontraditional relationships the right to marry as well.

"The movement to prevent legalizing same sex marriage is not anti-gay but aimed at opposing a range of threats to the institution of marriage, including polygamy and adultery", Dolan said

Enter an optional comment on this news story .

Next

100%

Mainstream news with a valence supporting guns on campus

[Exit this survey](#)

AP Associated Press

Guns on Campus, Hurt or Help?

Oct 10, 12:01 PM EDT

By PETER SVENSSON
AP Writer

Officials in Texas, Arizona, Tennessee, Michigan, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Florida, Nebraska and Mississippi have proposed allowing guns on campus. Other states should consider allowing guns on campus.

Allowing guns on campus is necessary for enhancing students' safety. College campuses play host to every type of violence found in the rest of society, from murder to assault to rape. Allowing students to carry concealed weapons on campus would enable them to defend themselves and others in the case of an attack.

"The issue is about safety, and as a student it is important to be able to protect yourself against the possibility of violence or crimes", said David Burnett, activist for gun rights on campus. "Gun violence on campuses, such as the mass shootings at Virginia Tech in 2007 show that the best defense against a gunman is students who can shoot back".

"The only way to stop a person with a gun is another person with a gun," said University of Cincinnati sophomore Michael Flitcraft. "I felt defenseless, and it started to bug me, especially with all the school shootings".

"For someone who carry a firearm, they need to do more than just 'play dead' to protect themselves in the case of a mass shooting", Burnett said. "I believe a Virginia Tech-type shooting could be prevented or the damage dramatically reduced if students were armed".

Anti-gun advocates claim that students should leave the preserving of their safety to campus police. However, campus police cannot guarantee the safety of all students because police are often thinly-spread across vast campus grounds.

"Having armed students, professors and other campus employees would save lives since they would be able to respond to an attack immediately instead of waiting for law enforcement", Tony Smith , advocate of guns on campus, said.

Anti-gun advocates also argue that guns on campus would lead to an escalation in violent crime. However, this fear is groundless.

"Allowing guns on campus reduces the number of attempted crimes because criminals are uncertain which potential victims can defend themselves ", John Lott, advocate of guns on campus, said.

"None of twelve schools allowing concealed carry on campus has seen a single resulting incident of gun violence (including threats and suicides), a single gun accident, or a single gun theft", Lott said.

Enter an optional comment on this news story

[Next](#)

100%

Mainstream news with a valence opposing guns on campus

[Exit this survey](#)



Guns on Campus, Hurt or Help?

Oct 10, 12:01 PM EDT

By PETER SVENSSON
AP Writer

Legislators in several states are considering legislation that would allow students to carry licensed firearms on campus.

Having weapons legally allowed on campus will negatively alter the atmosphere for students.

"I think it has the potential to kill academic debate, if somebody has a gun in the classroom," said Andy Pelosi, activist for gun control on campus.

Instead of allowing licensed guns on campus, Pelosi said he would much rather see a university concentrate its efforts on heightening campus security to make students feel more secure.

"Campus carry" advocates argue that allowing students with licenses to carry concealed weapons on campus would deter campus shootings. This argument is not strong enough to justify allowing concealed weapons on campus.

"We don't think arming students is going to deter the rare campus shootings. We're not convinced that that deterrent factor is going to come into play," Pelosi said. "There is no real way to tell if the decision could potentially prevent tragedies on campus like the Virginia Tech massacre in 2007"

"You could say that a Virginia Tech type of shooting could have been avoided, but those types of incidents are extremely rare, and happened on college campuses that are extremely safe," he said. "So, I wonder why we are introducing guns into that type of a campus."

According to Washington University Chief of Police Don Strom, college campuses are safer than most other settings. Strom thinks that allowing concealed weapons on college campuses is an added risk to students.

"There are studies that show that bringing guns into a campus environment can actually increase the danger for people on the campus," Strom said. "I don't think it complements the culture of a college campus, and I think that frankly, a lot of people on our campus would be particularly furious being in an environment daily where they were wondering if the person next to them was carrying a firearm or not."

The risk of gun accident is one of reasons for gun control on campus. High-risk behaviors on college campuses such as binge drinking and drug use would contribute to the increase of gun accident.

Other factors that might increase risk of gun accidents among college students include high stress, elevated suicide risk and more opportunities for gun theft in a dormitory setting.

Enter an optional comment on this news story

Next

100%

Appendix E:Post Survey Questionnaire

For participants reading blog posting on same sex marriage

Study Survey Exit this survey

We would now like to ask the likelihood for you to read an entire blog posting written by an individual blogger with the following TITLES. Please indicate your likelihood of reading the posting for each title.

	NOT likely I would read the post	Very likely I would read the post
Denying same sex marriage is a form of minority discrimination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Marriage benefits should be available to gay or lesbian couples.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is no threat from legalizing same sex marriage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Same sex marriage is an accepted lifestyle nowadays	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Same sex marriage would weaken traditional family values.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Same sex marriage confuses children about gender roles.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Same sex marriage is ungodly and morally unacceptable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pope calls for unity against same sex marriage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

Study Survey Exit this survey

On a 7-point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the blog posting just read?

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
The blog posting SUPPORTS Same Sex Marriage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The individual blog is a biased news channel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The individual blog is a believable news channel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The individual blog is a trustworthy news channel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

Study Survey

[Exit this survey](#)

On a 7-point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the AUTHOR of the blog posting just read?

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
The author of the blog posting is biased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The author of the blog posting is believable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The author of the blog posting is trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The author of the blog posting is knowledgeable about Same Sex Marriage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

Study Survey

[Exit this survey](#)

On a 7-point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the blog posting's PORTRAYAL of the same sex marriage issue?

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very Strongly agree
The portrayal of Same Sex Marriage in blog posting is biased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Same Sex Marriage in blog posting is trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Same Sex Marriage in blog posting is believable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Same Sex Marriage in blog posting is accurate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Same Sex Marriage in blog posting provides a great depth of information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After reading the blog posting, I have a better understanding of Same Sex Marriage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to recommend the blog posting to others (friends or family members).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

For participants reading mainstream news on same sex marriage

Study Survey

[Exit this survey](#)

We would now like to ask the likelihood for you to read an entire news story written by a professional journalist with the following TITLES. Please indicate your likelihood of reading the story for each title.

	NOT likely I would read the news story						VERY likely I would read the news story
Denying same sex marriage is a form of minority discrimination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Marriage benefits should be available to gay or lesbian couples.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is no threat from legalizing same sex marriage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Same sex marriage is an accepted lifestyle nowadays	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Same sex marriage would weaken traditional family values.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Same sex marriage confuses children about gender roles.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Same sex marriage is ungodly and morally unacceptable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pope calls for unity against same sex marriage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

Study Survey

[Exit this survey](#)

On a 7-point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the news story just read?

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
The news story SUPPORTS Same Sex Marriage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The online news site of the Associated Press is a biased news channel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The online news site of the Associated Press is a believable news channel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The online news site of the Associated Press is a trustworthy news channel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

Study Survey

[Exit this survey](#)

On a 7-point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the AUTHOR of the news story just read?

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
The author of the news story is biased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The author of the news story is believable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The author of the news story is trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The author of the news story is knowledgeable about Same Sex Marriage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

Study Survey

[Exit this survey](#)

On a 7-point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the news story's PORTRAYAL of the same sex marriage issue?

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very Strongly agree
The portrayal of Same Sex Marriage in news story is biased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Same Sex Marriage in news story is trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Same Sex Marriage in news story is believable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Same Sex Marriage in news story is accurate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Same Sex Marriage in news story provides a great depth of information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After reading the news story, I have a better understanding of Same Sex Marriage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to recommend the news story to others (friends or family members).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

For participants reading blog posting on guns on campus

Study Survey

Exit this survey

We would now like to ask the likelihood for you to read an entire blog posting written by an individual blogger with the following TITLES. Please indicate your likelihood of reading the posting for each title.

	NOT likely I would read the post						VERY likely I would read the post
A person with a gun could 'snap' and go on a killing spree on campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The answer to school violence is prevention, not guns on campus.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guns on campus would lead to an increased number of suicides by students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Allowing guns on campus will turn classroom debates into crime scenes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Campus crimes are prevented by the deterrent effect of victim gun possession.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The 2nd Amendment to the Constitution protects students' right to gun ownership.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Allowing guns would enhance students' ability for self-defense on campus.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Allow gun on campus, police cannot guarantee the safety of all students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Next

Study Survey

[Exit this survey](#)

On a 7-point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the blog posting just read?

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
The blog posting SUPPORTS Allowing Guns on Campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The individual blog is a biased news channel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The individual blog is a believable news channel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The individual blog is a trustworthy news channel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

Study Survey

[Exit this survey](#)

On a 7-point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the AUTHOR of the blog posting just read?

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
The author of the blog posting is biased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The author of the blog posting is believable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The author of the blog posting is trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The author of the blog posting is knowledgeable about Guns on Campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

On a 7-point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the blog posting's PORTRAYAL of Guns on Campus?

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very Strongly agree
The portrayal of Guns on Campus in blog posting is biased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Guns on Campus in blog posting is trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Guns on Campus in blog posting is believable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Guns on Campus in blog posting is accurate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Guns on Campus in blog posting provides a great depth of information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After reading the blog posting, I have a better understanding of Guns on Campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to recommend the blog posting to others (friends or family members).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

For participants reading mainstream news on guns on campus

Study Survey

[Exit this survey](#)

We would now like to ask the likelihood that you would read an entire news story written by a professional journalist with the following TITLES. Please indicate your likelihood of reading the news story for each title.

	NOT likely I would read the news story						VERY likely I would read the news story
A person with a gun could 'snap' and go on a killing spree on campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The answer to school violence is prevention, not guns on campus.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guns on campus would lead to an increased number of suicides by students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Allowing guns on campus will turn classroom debates into crime scenes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Campus crimes are prevented by the deterrent effect of victim gun possession.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The 2nd Amendment to the Constitution protects students' right to gun ownership.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Allowing guns would enhance students' ability for self-defense on campus.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Allow gun on campus, police cannot guarantee the safety of all students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

Study Survey

[Exit this survey](#)

On a 7-point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the news story just read?

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
The news story SUPPORTS Allowing Guns on Campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The online news site of the Associated Press is a biased news channel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The online news site of the Associated Press is a believable news channel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The online news site of the Associated Press is a trustworthy news channel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

Study Survey

[Exit this survey](#)

On a 7-point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the AUTHOR of the news story just read?

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
The author of the news story is biased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The author of the news story is believable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The author of the news story is trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The author of the news story is knowledgeable about Guns on Campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

Study Survey

[Exit this survey](#)

On a 7-point scale, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the news story's PORTRAYAL of the guns on campus issue?

	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
The portrayal of Guns on Campus in the news story is biased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Guns on Campus in the news story is trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Guns on Campus in the news story is believable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Guns on Campus in the news story is accurate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The portrayal of Guns on Campus in the news story provides a great depth of information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After reading the news story, I have a better understanding of Guns on Campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to recommend the news story to others (friends or family members)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Next](#)

Thank you for your participation.

[Exit this survey](#)

The news story and blog posting you read were manipulated by the researcher to investigate how audiences evaluate online news content.

The experiment is now complete.

[Done](#)

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