MAKING SENSE OF MESSAGES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CANDIDATE IMAGE AND ISSUE STANCE

By

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Tension exists between scholars attempting to understand the relationship between candidate image and candidate issue. Especially given a lack of theory relating to how these social constructs are perceived by audiences trying to make electoral choices, there is a need for clarification of our understanding of image and issue as they relate to one another.

With this in mind, this thesis seeks to understand how exposure to information about one of these social constructs helps inform our understanding of the other. Does exposure to candidate image information help voters know about a candidate’s policy stances? Does exposure to information about a candidate’s platforms help voters know about candidate persona? Why do we perceive to have comprehensive knowledge about a candidate after only reading a brief story about their family? These central questions guide the research described here. The findings of this research suggest that participants believe they know about a candidate’s image when only exposed to issue information, and that participants believe they know about a candidate’s platforms when only exposed to image information. Furthermore, this study found that when lacking information, participants inferred what they did not know to build a more comprehensive schema for the given candidate.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The process of how voters make sense of the vast array of messages available during political campaigns is where I center this thesis. Specifically, I argue that candidates’ policy stances and personal characteristics are evaluated by voters forming impressions of candidates for public office, but that for a number of reasons, candidate image and policy stance are often grouped together by those assessing a candidate. One factor contributing to this is the media. For example, research shows that character attributes are emphasized more by the media than are policy positions (Cho, 2005; Davis & Owen, 1998). This emphasis might trade off with policy position information, causing voters to put emphasis on personality rather than on politicians’ policy stances. Furthermore, in order for voters to find information about a candidate’s policy positions, they must either seek it out through complex processes (Crowley & Potter, 2008) or infer those positions from what they know of a candidate’s character attributes. However, information about this inference process—how it occurs and the extent to which candidate personality may be used to infer issue information about a candidate—is limited. This thesis is concerned with how those inferences are made and whether they permit reliable impressions of candidates to be formed.

In what follows, I explore how voters may use candidate image messages to infer information about candidate policy positions, and the possibility that voters may use policy position messages to infer information about candidate image. Initially, I draw on candidate image theory to examine the relationship between image-related messages and policy stance-related messages. Specifically, I look to information processing theory to illustrate the complexity of the relationship between image and issue. These theoretical
perspectives help illustrate the proposed relationship between candidate image and candidate policy stance.

Though the field of communication studies is not altogether lacking in evidence that image and issue are related when voters form impressions, this evidence has weaknesses. First, the evidence that exists is scant – few studies posit a relationship, choosing to report issues and images as independent categories and even fewer explore the relationship between image and policy stance. Second, though a great deal of what does exist suggests that image material is often used to make inferences about a candidate’s policy stance, in only a few cases has the opposite relationship been tested, and fewer still indicate that policy stance is used by voters to infer information about a candidate’s personality. Third, most of the literature on this topic has examined the effect of political advertisements on voters’ cognitive processing with only minimal attention for news media. Finally, though communication scholarship has demonstrated that there is some inferential relationship between image and issue stance, it is unclear how this happens. No literature suggests that image information informs policymaking (and vice versa) through an inference-making process. With these limitations in mind, this study is designed to begin filling in some of these gaps in our understanding.

The current research uses a 2 (image information—present, absent) X 2 (issue information—present, absent) experimental design to test the relationship between image and issue messages embedded in a news story on voters’ perceptions. Specifically, voters’ perceived acquired knowledge about candidate issue stance and perceived acquired knowledge about candidate image are examined. If the research hypothesis is supported—that is, if exposure to image-related material makes voters think they
acquired knowledge about candidates’ policy stances or vice versa—then this research can help sort out previous findings which suggest that image and issue are often seen as interchangeable by voters when forming impressions of candidates.
CHAPTER TWO: SURVEY OF LITERATURE

This chapter is organized into three sections: (1) a discussion of candidate image and issue theory, (2) a discussion of political information processing theory, and (3) a statement of the research questions that guide the experiment designed to test the relationship between image and issue.

Theoretical Background

The following section reviews the literature relating to candidate image and candidate issue theories. While this section describes each of these constructs separately, this is not meant to suggest that these constructs are dichotomous. There is debate about whether image and issue are separate or related, and as Grandjean & Proffitt (2001) note, there is a need for clarification between image and issue due to inconsistent understandings that frame these constructs as either diametrically opposed or as one in the same. Demonstrating Grandjean & Proffitt’s (2001) argument, many scholars treat these concepts as separate, whereas others have pointed out no such dichotomy exists (Pinkleton, 1999; Louden & McCauliff, 2004; Kaid, 1991; Louden, 1994; Hacker, Zahaki, Giles, & McQuitty, 2004). Some scholars posit that there is a distinction between image and issue content but not in how they are perceived, whereas others (e.g., Louden & McCauliff, 2004) have argued that a candidate’s image is based, in part, on the policies or initiatives they support. My hypothesis concurs with this viewpoint—while distinguishing between image and issue might be useful, it might also be the case that one type of information informs assessments about the other. The ensuing experiment is meant, in part, to test this hypothesis. While the literature that describes image and issue separately makes sense intuitively, such a description denies an understanding of how
people view one of these constructs in the context of the other. In what follows, I discuss
some of the ways we already understand these concepts to relate to one another (and how
they don’t) to lay the foundation for analyzing the relationship between them.

Candidate Image

Defining Candidate Image. To this point, I have used the term “candidate image”
without defining the term. I define candidate image as the aggregate of utterances
describing the personality characteristics of a candidate, whether “true”¹ or not, during a
campaign for public office. The literature that defines candidate image ties this general
understanding to the notion of candidate image schema, thus providing a lens to
understand image and issue together. According to Benoit & Harthcock (1999), “themes
that address characteristics, traits, abilities, or attributes of […] candidates (or parties)
[are] considered character utterances” (p. 346). Hacker (1995) argues that image refers to
the arrangement of cognitive representations individuals have that serve to organize
thoughts about a candidate, whereas Garramone (1986) describes image as “the sum of
the perceived personal and professional characteristics of the candidate.” In determining
where images come from, Hacker (1995) points out that image can be comprised of any
variety of messages that candidates send about themselves. Hellweg & Spitzberg (1995)
elaborate on this point by adding that image constructs can include representations
established by the receiver of these messages and that image is not constructed solely by
the sender of the image messages. Furthermore, the development of image constructs can
be mediated by a wide variety of sources, including the media that convey image traits

¹ This assessment relies on the notion that image messages inform voters’ impressions of candidates,
whether or not those messages are true. To demonstrate, imagine a candidate that positions himself as the
“average Joe.” Even if the candidate is anything but average, these types of messages seek to associate a
candidate with a specific personality characteristic and have the potential to shape a voter’s impression of
that candidate.
from senders to receivers. These messages can be sent over a wide variety of channels and through many different contexts, amounting to a complex sourcing of candidate image. It should also be noted that there are various types of image constructs. Understanding how these are distinguished is important to further clarify what is meant by candidate image.

**Personal vs. Political Image.** Though more types of image constructs exist than could possibly be explained here, the distinction between personal versus political image can be demonstrated with two examples. The first type of image construct I isolate is personal image. Any assortment of personality characteristics can be applied here; caring, loyal, honest, hard-working, maternal, aggressive, genuine, weak, shrewd, and intelligent are just few examples. As a general rule, personal image constructs are those that could be used not only to describe candidates for public office, but also your family members, friends, or coworkers. On the other hand, political images, the second type of image construct I isolate, are more likely to be used only in terms of candidates and politicians because they suggest characteristics that are uniquely desirable among elected officials. Examples of these include “pioneer of working-class rights,” “maverick,” “agent of change,” “experienced,” and “Washington outsider” (Waterman, Wright, & St. Clair, 1999). To better understand the distinction between personal image versus political image, think about any of the examples given and try applying them to both a family member and your local state Senator. In this regard, it might make sense to describe your Senator and your spouse as “caring,” but it is unlikely that “Washington outsider” is an image that is consistent with your spouse’s persona (unless your spouse is a politician).

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2 Other mediators in the development of image constructs include interpersonal discussions between family members and peers, party affiliation, level of education, and others. For a more complete list, see Hacker, K.L. (ed.) (2004). *Presidential candidate images*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
Distinguishing between personal versus political image is not meant to suggest that certain constructs cannot fall into both categories, yet understanding them is a critical element in establishing a common ground to talk about candidate image.

I point out this distinction because it is one potential reason why *image* is sometimes described as distinct from issue stance, whereas other literature defines these constructs as related. Personal image utterances, or those which define the personality traits of a candidate, do little to inform us about how a candidate might enact specific policies. Political image utterances, on the other hand, might have policy-related undertones, thereby providing a warrant for the argument that image and issue are not entirely separate. For example, the statement that Presidential Candidate Jones is a “Washington Outsider” might suggest that Jones doesn’t support “typical” policies, which indeed says something about Jones’ policymaking. However, such a description might not accurately fall under the umbrella of an issue-related statement because it alone does not permit a voter to know what precise policies Jones would enact. Given the complex nature of these constructs, the debate about whether image and issue are separate or related makes sense.

Of course, there are other justifications for describing image and issue as dichotomous. At the most basic level, treating image and issue as independent constructs is convenient. Specifically, because how image and issue relate to one another has not yet been fully explored, referring to them as unrelated permits more coherent analyses of their independent effects. More importantly, image and issue may be described as separate constructs because of idealized notions of what types of information ought to be preferred for rational political decision-making. A great deal of the research guiding
studies about image and issue implicates these concepts’ impact on the electoral process. As such, making arguments about why one type of material should be privileged over the other within media messages is more effective when image and issue can be compared. In order to do so, these constructs are often described as fundamentally different. This appears to be the case with a great deal of literature relating to political advertisements (Louden, 1990). However, understanding what the distinction between image and issue is proves far more difficult and as Hart (1982) notes, this distinction is “one of the hardest […] to be found in the literature.” As I argue later, this thesis aims to unpack some of these issues and alleviate the tension between scholars who view these concepts separately and those who do not.

Candidate Image Effects. In this section, I discuss the variety of individuals and groups that find information about candidate image important. First, research suggests that television news prefers candidate image material instead of candidate issue material. This may be true because the visual nature of the media lends itself to image coverage (Altheide & Snow, 1991; Davis & Owen, 1998; Sabato, 2000), or because of the media’s preference to cover political news by describing elections as “horse races” (Jamieson, 1991), or a variety of other factors. While a variety of other factors may influence the media’s preference for image-related material, noting that preference is nonetheless important. Because of this preference, voters are more likely to be exposed to more image information than issue-related information, providing one possible explanation for why voters defer to image information even when recounting candidate’s issue postures.

There is no shortage of literature arguing that candidate image information is valued not just by the media, but by voters as well. Some scholars conclude that a
candidate’s image is the single most important predictor of voting behavior (Boyd, 1969; Nimmo & Savage, 1976) and there seems to be no disagreement that candidate image is at least one factor that determines the outcome of elections (Hellweg, 2004). According to Benoit & McHale (2004), “political candidates’ personal qualities are a basic building block in the public’s construction of candidate images” (p. 49). This makes sense intuitively; just as we use personal qualities to make assessments about those we interact with interpersonally, so too do we use personal qualities to make assessments about candidates. These personal characteristics appear to be even more important during primary cycles when the public has little familiarity with certain candidates (Benoit & McHale, 2004). Toward these ends, candidates place heavy emphasis on developing their personas to the voting public and as such, candidates believe conveying a desirable image is important. For example, in his 1982 Idaho gubernatorial campaign, Phil Batt spent massive amounts of financial resources on television ads about balancing the budget specifically so he could portray himself as a caring and competent leader (Rudd, 1986). In 1988, the image of being responsive and caring gave George Bush the edge over Michael Dukakis, despite Dukakis’s lead in the polls for a substantial portion of the campaign (Domash & Offerman-Zuckerberg, 1991). And in 2008, millions of ad dollars were spent by both the Obama and McCain campaigns to construct the images of being “agents of change,” “mavericks,” and “experienced leaders.” As this research suggests, the effort spent on shaping candidate image indicates that image is an important component of the overall impression an individual has of a candidate. Indeed, as Stuckey & Antczak (1995) note, “most campaign communication is designed with the goal of building positive images of the candidates” (p. 117).
There is a great deal of other literature suggesting that candidates spend resources on image development with good reason. Benoit & McHale (2004) found that 44% of the utterances in party nomination acceptance speeches between 1960 and 1996 dealt explicitly with the candidate’s character or with the character of their opponents. Kinder (1978) found that because voters prefer candidates with attributes they perceive themselves as having, image is a factor voters use to make electoral decisions. This preference to associate with candidates whose views are similar to our own is described by Jamieson & Birdsell (1989) as “homophily.” Other research supports this claim and finds that voters often know little about their chosen candidate’s policy positions but give image-related reasons for supporting that candidate (Lodge, Steenbergen, & Brau, 1995). Furthermore, even in instances where voters are well-informed about a candidate’s issue stances, they are likely to use that information to inform their opinion about that candidate’s image (Louden, 1994). Additionally, Kjeldahl, Carmichael, & Mertz (1971) found that most personality characteristic descriptions tend to cluster around two to three broader image constructs that are almost universally evaluated by voters. For example, “truthfulness,” “trustworthiness,” and “straightforwardness” were all indicators of an overall perception of “genuineness,” which was found to be highly important to voters when assessing candidates and forming opinions. These image clusters support Benoit & McHale’s (2004) finding that four primary dimensions – morality, sincerity, empathy, and drive – comprise the factors most relevant to voters making assessments about a candidate’s image. In short, these findings all suggest that candidate image is important to voters assessing candidates as well as to the candidates seeking their support.
Though an overwhelming majority of voters (90%) self-report that information about a candidate’s image is important in their assessment of that candidate (Johnston, 1989), additional research suggests that candidate image is specifically important to certain types of voters. Johnston (1989) found that younger voters and voters in lower socioeconomic brackets tend to place a higher value on image-related information when assessing a candidate for public office. Other literature proposes that the value placed on image-related information has largely to do with certain predispositions and that how a message is cognitively processed by audience members might not even have to do with the content of the message. These studies find that certain individuals prefer certain types of information, meaning that voters who prefer image information have a tendency to evaluate image statements contained within a message while giving less preference to issue-related content. Additionally, individuals without previously-formulated opinions of a candidate are more likely to be influenced both by image and issue information precisely because they do not need to seek consistency between these messages and their already-established impressions. In short, though image information varies in importance, literature from the field of communication concurs that image information is, on the whole, important to voters.

Given that the media, candidates, and individuals all have reasons to give preference to image information, there is reason to believe voters give less preference to issue information and thus use image to draw conclusions about candidates’ issue stances, especially given that voters disclose that image is important to how they evaluate candidates. To better understand whether voters draw these conclusions, the following research hypothesis was developed based on the notion that issue-related information
about a candidate might be perceived based on image-related message content, even
when voters lack issue-related information:

H1: Subjects exposed to print news that only includes information about a
candidate’s personality characteristics will be likely to state that they
acquired information about that candidate’s stance on particular issues in
addition to information about that candidate’s personality characteristics.

Prior to testing this hypothesis, however, we must develop a greater understanding of
candidate issue stance.

Candidate Issue Stance

Defining Candidate Issue Stance. For the purposes of this thesis, I employ a
definition of candidate issue offered by Benoit & Harthcock (1999). They maintain that
“themes that concern governmental action (past, current, or future) and problems
amenable to governmental action [are to be] considered policy utterances” (p. 346). To
clarify, candidate issue stance can refer any policy position taken by a candidate for
public office, but can also relate to past, present, or future actions that might indicate such
a position. Candidate issue stance can be learned through a variety of mechanisms;
political discussions among peers, media coverage of candidate voting records, and
official statements from the candidates or their campaign staffers are just a few examples.
It is also important to note here that issue information must be explicitly stated to be
considered as such. Messages that merely imply a candidate’s stance on a policy, on the
other hand, are excluded from this category of information.

Candidate Issue Stance Effects. Whether issue stance information is important to
voters is a topic that has been heavily debated. For many years, the scholarly community
argued that issue coverage was of little importance to voters (Brasher, 2003). However, that attitude has shifted as communication, psychology, and political science literature have examined the interplay between candidate issue stance and voter behavior. This literature suggests that candidate issue stance coverage is important because this coverage is a major factor in determining voting behavior, because this coverage can determine which media formats help candidates make resonating arguments, and because this coverage influences which factors contribute to the impressions voters have about candidates’ personalities (Hyeon & Becker, 1987; Budesheim & DePaola, 1994; Hacker, Zahaki, Giles, & McQuitty, 2000; Peterson, 2004).

Like candidate image, issue stance may also be more relevant to certain types of voters. McGraw & Steenbergen (1995) found that voters with less information about a candidate are more likely to seek issue-related information to make a judgment about a candidate. In contrast, Converse (1964) and Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock (1991) found that more informed voters rely more on issue information when assessing how likely they would be to vote for a candidate. Despite their differences in conclusions, these studies both posit that issue stance information is important and that often, it gets categorized similarly with image information as voters attempt to make sense of a multitude of messages at once. In summation, this research supposes that information about policy positions is viewed as important by individual voters.

In addition to voters feeling that knowing a candidate’s stances on certain issues is important in their assessment of the candidate, so too do candidates feel issue information is important when seeking constituent support. For example, Brasher (2003) found that issue-related messages were highly emphasized among candidates for
Congressional seats. Other studies find that issue messages are important and that they can be highly effective if intentionally vague, as was the case in Phil Batt’s 1982 Idaho Gubernatorial campaign (Rudd, 1986). In Batt’s campaign, even though issue messages were left ambiguous to convey a specific image construct, they were still central to his overall campaign strategy, suggesting that Batt (and presumably other candidates) found issue coverage to be an important component in his overall campaign strategy. The findings explained here show that candidates believe their policy stances are important because issue information can muster support and because it can be a useful tool in making arguments related to their image.

Some literature exists explaining how issue stances are evaluated by voters. As with candidate image, selective perception plays a role in how voters make sense of issue-related messages (Rouner & Perloff, 1988). Additionally, evidence suggests that liking a candidate generally precedes adopting that candidate’s policy platforms. Likewise, many of the same factors that contribute to positive evaluations of candidate image also contribute to positive evaluations of candidate issue stances. For example, the perception of morality or sincerity (Benoit & McHale, 2004), the feeling that a candidate is trustworthy and genuine (Kjeldahl, Carmichael, & Mertz, 1971), and positive evaluations of a candidate’s facial and nonverbal communication (Lanzetta, Sullivan, Masters, & McHugo, 1985) all contribute to positive evaluations of a candidate’s policy platforms. Though this literature is useful in explaining how people make sense of issue-related messages, more research needs to be done to examine how issue-based evaluations influence voters’ perceptions of a candidate’s image.
I argue that another way individuals make sense of candidate image is through making inferences based on a candidate’s policy platforms. Intuitively, making these inferences makes sense because voters lack access to highly specialized information about the details of a candidate’s policy stances. Furthermore, because the literature surveyed above suggests that issue information is important to voters, voters likely go to great lengths to deduce such information. Deducing this information in some instances might be the only means individuals have to feel comfortable with their assessment of a candidate’s issue positions since straightforward policy stance information is not always available. Given this analysis, the following research hypothesis was developed to test this relationship based on the notion that image-related information about a candidate might be perceived based on issue-related message content, even when voters lack image-related information:

H2: Subjects exposed to print news that only includes information about a candidate’s stance on particular issues will state that they acquired information about that candidate’s stance on those issues as well as about that candidate’s personality characteristics.

Prior to testing this hypothesis, it is important to survey what we already know about how image and issue relate to one another.

The Intersect Between Image and Issue

The previous section discussed image and issue theory separately but is not meant to imply that there is no overlap between image and issue. In this section, I discuss some of the ways we know these two constructs to be related. First, and perhaps most obviously, some media coverage is neither image coverage nor issue coverage. A brief
news story about how Representative Smith was in a car accident, though certainly a form of political coverage, does not inform audiences about her policy positions or about her personal character, assuming the story only covers the accident itself. Second, some media coverage is both image coverage and issue coverage. This type of coverage can fall into both categories if the coverage speaks about both policy positions and character traits. To demonstrate, imagine the 1982 Idaho gubernatorial election where Phil Batt ran ads talking about his stance on balancing the budget to argue that he possessed strong leadership skills. This series of ads incorporated both types of coverage implicitly. Though these ads did not constitute media coverage, it is not hard to imagine how these ads would be talked about by political pundits were they to air today. Likely, pundits would attempt to unwrap the dual messages being sent and, if deemed important enough, how those messages relate to one another. Of course, what we know about political information processing indicates that the media wouldn’t need to make that connection for its audience. Instead, the way people perceive information about candidates lends itself to an almost automatic association between Batt’s stance on the budget and his image as a leader. As this analysis purports, even though the media have a preference for image-related material, a specific media message can be categorized as both image-related and issue-related if it describes both of these components.

Whereas this literature demonstrates that some messages might be both image-related and issue-related, the research hypotheses state that even messages with content that is overtly either image or issue but not both might permit voters to perceive the content to relate to both a candidate’s issue stances and their personal characteristics. If the research hypotheses are supported, then (a) how we understand the distinction
between content and how it is perceived might be clearer, and (b) how messages might be
categorized as issue-related or image-related might be better understood so that we can
better address the debate surrounding whether image and issue are dichotomous or not.

Political Information Processing

As discussed earlier, issue information and image information are not processed
as separate entities that never overlap. Instead, this information is processed cognitively
in ways that may allow for an integration of image and issue. The research design for
this thesis includes a thought-listing procedure to test how this happens. In this section,
an overview of political information processing is included. A survey of literature
suggests that there are three main components to political information processing: source
selection, message processing, and knowledge recall. This section explains each of these
components to understand how the content of media messages about political campaigns
is processed cognitively by voters when making decisions during elections.

Source Selection. A brief understanding of source selection is useful in painting
the overall picture of political information processing, which itself is important to
understand how political information is assessed. To understand the process of source
selection, it is useful to go back to the 1950’s and examine Downs’ (1957) pivotal work
on information selection. Downs argues that in order to process information, voters must
have information to process. Though this seems obvious, Downs’ simple explanation is
critical to recognizing that selecting sources is as important to information processing as
internalizing and recalling that information. Recall that earlier I mentioned that the
media tend to prefer image information. If this is the case, and media messages
overwhelmingly feature image information but not issue information, then issue
information cannot be processed and must be acquired by some other mechanism. Downs proposes that because of the abundance of information that is both available and necessary when choosing which candidate to vote for (even in 1957!), voters cannot sort through all of the information on their own and in turn outsource the sorting process to the media. However, because there are so many media outlets that sort on our behalf, we also have to choose which sources we will rely on to give that information to us. Ultimately, a great deal of these sources might focus primarily on image information, meaning that how we select sources influences what information we have access to.

*Message Processing.* Though source selection is relatively simple, a variety of factors complicate the other steps in the information processing model. The overabundance of news and news sources (Graber, 1988), the fragmentary and incomplete nature of the news (Graber, 1988), and coverage of stories in ways that require additional work on the part of the audience member (Graber, 1988; Kosicki & McLeod, 1990) all contribute to a complicated political communication environment in which processing messages can be difficult. Though it is impossible for voters to process every message they are exposed to, Neuman (1986) argues that doing so is unnecessary. Rather, we take the information we can process and organize the bits and pieces to form a composite impression of an issue, idea, or person. Of course, this means that certain information is deflected, either unintentionally because not all of it can be processed (Neuman, 1986), or intentionally through “selective misperception.” This occurs when some information is inconsistent with the already-existing impressions we have (Sherrod, 1971). The literature reviewed here points out that a variety of factors, such as the high volume of available information and the segmented nature of the news, complicate source
selection. Combined with the literature reviewed about source selection, it makes sense that individuals may deduce information they lack based on the information they have as a means of making sense of messages because even through rigorous attention to source selection, the messages individuals are exposed to can still be complex and conflicting.

Speaking to the process alluded to above by which voters make composite impressions of ideas, people, or issues, Srull & Wyer (1989) understand the process as “clustering.” Here, instead of evaluating every piece of learned information individually, we lump them together according to their similarities and evaluate the resulting clusters. Fiske & Taylor (1991) understand these clusters as schema, defined as “cognitive structures that represent organized knowledge about a given concept or type of stimulus.” They argue that schema development serves several essential functions, including aiding in the interpretive process and minimizing the cognitive effort required to encode, store, and recall information. Garramone (1986) adds that “schemata are defined as cognitive representations of generic concepts.” Domke, Shah, & Wackman (1998) summarize the importance of cognitive schema by stating that “once activated, schema facilitate and shape the processing of information, thereby providing the raw materials upon which individuals form evaluations and come to understand their social milieu.” Although schema development depends on the individual, certain commonalities seem to exist for coping with political information overload and in general, schemata guide this process (Garramone, 1986).

Because how individuals cope with information overload is a popular subset of information processing literature, there is a variety of information regarding this topic. For example, Kosicki & McLeod (1990) isolate three strategies that voters use to
internalize mass quantities of information. The first strategy they isolate is selective scanning, the process by which voters internalize information by glossing over those news stories already determined as relevant. An example of this strategy is the process taken when reading certain articles in a newspaper based on their headlines and ignoring the other articles altogether, similar to the selective misperception explained in the previous section. The second strategy articulated by Kosicki & McLeod is active processing, the process in which voters go beyond the information within a given news story to understand how it relates to other bits of learned information. In this strategy, voters develop schema that direct inferences in somewhat systematic ways. An example of this strategy is the active processing that takes place in a voters’ mind about a presidential candidate’s ability to appoint cabinet members after reading a story about their choice of vice presidential running mate. The third strategy Kosicki & McLeod offer is reflective integration, the process in which voters evaluate information after they’ve been exposed to it in an attempt to organize it with other information that has been learned. This often involves interpersonal conversations whereby voters look to their peers to help generate meaning from a message.

Of course, another strategy exists, which I term as deferral. In this strategy, voters defer to existing schema either because other strategies generate incongruent schema or because voters desire to maintain previously-developed impressions of a candidate. In other words, deferral is the process by which voters circumvent the processing of information about a candidate altogether. Deferral is useful when there is a disparity between what a candidate does and what we might expect of them as people like their impressions of others to be consistent. This theory, known as Implicit Personality
Theory\textsuperscript{3} suggests that it is difficult for individuals to think about a friendly, caring candidate who supports terrible initiatives. Likewise, it is difficult for individuals to think about an angry, arrogant candidate who supports excellent policies. As a result, individuals make inferences about candidates based on what they expect of the candidates while ignoring certain types of information that might support such disparities. In the above example, an individual might ignore policy information about a candidate provided by the media and defer to their assumed policy information so as to maintain a coherent assessment of a candidate. Therefore, with the thought-listing procedure that I describe later, I argue that participants will automatically make inferences about issue stance based on the image information they are exposed to.

In the preceding section, I isolate a number of reasons why individuals might make inferences about image or issue. A lack of information about a candidate’s issue stances due to the media’s preference for image-related material, the complex nature of source selection and cognitive schema building, and the desire to defer information processing altogether in an attempt to avoid dissonance regarding a candidate are all reasons why making inferences about one type of information based upon exposure only to another type of information make sense. I hypothesize that subjects will attempt to assume a coherent candidate assessment by linking information about image that they do receive with inferences about policy stance that they lack. Therefore:

H3a: When exposed only to image-related message content, subjects will list information about the candidate’s policy stances, even in instances when the subject was not exposed to issue-related information.

H3b: When exposed to issue-related message content, subjects will list
information about the candidate’s image, even in instances when the
subject was not exposed to image-related information.

The first two hypotheses (H1 & H2) will be tested using close-ended, likert-type
questions, whereas a thought-listing procedure is employed to test these two hypotheses.

Knowledge Recall. So far, we have discussed source selection and message
processing, the first two components of information processing. The last part of this
section addresses knowledge recall, the final and crucial element since internalized
information can only be relevant if that information is able to be remembered and applied.
A variety of factors affect recall. In an analysis of political ads, Christ, Thorson, &
Caywood (1994) found that audiences are most likely to recall information that they
assigned positive affect to—i.e., information they liked. Wyer, Budesheim, Shavitt,
Ruggie, Melton, & Kuklinski (1991) found that messages heard closely together were
more likely to be recalled. Srull & Wyer (1989) found that information that is heard
frequently is more likely to be recalled, as is information that is heard recently.
Schoenbach & Baran (1990) found that information with higher complexity was less
likely to be remembered. Subjects in their study were asked to recall details from a news
piece. Most subjects could recall simple elements of the news story (the date of the
election), but very few could recall complex elements (knowledge about a political
party’s involvement in a local city council). All of this evidence suggests that a variety
of factors, such as message frequency, complexity, and affect, shape the likelihood that
information will be recalled once acquired and internalized. Whereas the nature of this
study does not permit some of these knowledge recall factors to be tested (e.g., message
frequency), the thought-listing item included within the research instrument will gauge whether subjects recall more image-related information or more issue-related information. If more of the information given within the thought-listing procedure that is also explicitly-stated in the corresponding research group stimulus relates to either image or issue, then such information is clearly being recalled. Furthermore, if this information is not being recalled, but participants still write thoughts in the given space, then such a finding would further support the claim that individuals make inferences when learning about a candidate.

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter has addressed several relevant issues. First, it defined image and issue theory to demonstrate what we know about how these constructs interact. Second, it determined that candidate issue stance and candidate image information are important when evaluating candidates during elections. Finally, it discussed information processing theory to demonstrate how individuals make sense of the messages in the news media. These components are critical to our understanding of the relationship between image and issue messages, which test the aforementioned hypotheses per the guidelines listed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Pilot Research

In order to develop scales for the main study and to create stimulus articles that varied on the two dimensions (image and issue content), a smaller pilot study was conducted to ensure reliability and to test the manipulation. First, three newspaper articles were written about fictional Colorado State Senate candidate John Murray. These articles were identical in content except for the number of statements relating to issue and the number of statements relating to image (See Appendix A). The control group article, which contained both issue and image statements which were unrelated to the images and issues in the other three articles, was not tested in the pilot study. These articles were read by undergraduate and graduate students (N=35). After reading the article that corresponded with their assigned research group, subjects responded to an eight-item questionnaire using seven-point, likert-type scales. Four of the questionnaire items required subjects to disclose how much they learned about Murray’s image (e.g., “I learned a lot about John Murray’s family values.”), while four of the questionnaire items required subjects to disclose how much they learned about Murray’s policy stances (e.g., “I learned a lot about John Murray’s stance on education reform.”). The image-related items comprised a scale that was reliable (Cronbach’s α = .84). The issue-related items also comprised a scale that was reliable (Cronbach’s α = .85). The pilot instrument can be found in Appendix B.
Research Study

Overview and Sample

Newspaper articles created for this study, which focused on the image and/or issues of a fictional candidate, were read by a total of 134 undergraduates at a small liberal arts university in the southeastern United States during February 2009. 44.8% of participants (N=60) were males and 55.2% of participants (N=74) were females. 77.6% of participants (N=104) self-identified as white while 22.4% (N=30) self-identified as other races/ethnicities. The sample participants represented the 18-22 age group. Participants were largely from the eastern United States. Participation in the study was voluntary and incentives were not provided for participation.

Design

The 2 (issue coverage) X 2 (image coverage) model employed in this study required four research groups. The first experimental group was the image and issue group. This group read a newspaper article that had equally as many image-related statements as issue-related statements. The second experimental group was the image only group. This group read a newspaper article that contained only information about candidate image. The third experimental group was the issue only group; this group read a newspaper article that contained only information about candidate policy positions.

The control group in this study read a newspaper article that featured the same candidate in the articles read by the experimental groups and also focused on issues and candidate image; however, this article was not the same as any of the ones shown to the experimental groups. This article featured issues other than those shown to experimental group participants so that participants’ responses could provide a baseline of participants’
attitudes. The dependent variables for all 4 conditions included participants’ perceptions of the candidate’s image (related to those image items presented in the three versions of the stimuli) and perceptions of the candidate’s issue stance (related to those image items presented in the three versions of the stimuli).

Procedure

Participants in each of the research groups signed a consent form informing them that they would be exposed to information regarding a candidate for public office and that they would complete two short questionnaires. Participants were informed that the first of these questionnaires was to be completed before reading the article and that the second of these questionnaires was to be completed afterwards. After signing the consent form, research participants completed part one of the questionnaire which gauged their level of political involvement, the sources of news they use to obtain political information, and their general demographic information. Demographic information collected included age, gender, race, and state of residence.

Participants then read their respective newspaper article. Experimental group participants read variations of the article featuring the same candidate and were asked to complete part two of the questionnaire, which they were given up to twenty minutes to complete. Control group participants read an article that featured the same candidate as the one featured in the articles read by each experimental group, but featured different image and issue messages. Part two of the questionnaire first employed a thought-listing technique, asking participants to write down any words or phrases they remembered thinking when reading the article (Bower, Black, & Turner, 1979; Cacioppo, von Hippel, & Ernst, 1997; Helms, 1987). Part two of the questionnaire then gauged perceived
candidate image information and perceived candidate issue stance information. After completion of the instrument, all participants were debriefed.

Coding of Thoughts

In order to analyze the data collected via the thought-listing procedure, each of the thoughts listed were coded as either image-related or issue-related (or neither) and as either inferred from the content of the article or explicitly stated by the article. The thought-listing data went through a three-step process to ensure reliability. First, the first author and primary coder identified which responses had multiple thoughts embedded within and broke down those statements so each contained only one thought. Second, the first author and primary coder coded 10% of the thoughts and indicated whether they were image-related or issue-related (or neither) and whether they were inferred from the content of the article or if they were explicitly stated within the article. From this process, intercoder reliability was established for each of the four variables (Scott’s $\Pi$ image = .79, Scott’s $\Pi$ issue = .73, Scott’s $\Pi$ inferred = .85, Scott’s $\Pi$ explicit = .85). Finally, the primary coder coded each of the thoughts into the categories listed above. A few examples of thoughts that were listed, along with how they were coded, can be found in Appendix D.

Dependent Variables

*Perceived candidate image information.* Participants were asked to respond to 5 statements about the candidate’s image. Participants were required to do so by answering close-ended questions using a seven-point (1-7), likert-type scale. Participants also had the option of indicating they did not know the answer to the question (coded as “0”). Examples of these items included “John Murray is a pioneer of education reform” and
“John Murray has strong family values.” At the end of this section, participants were asked how much information they were exposed to about candidate image. Participants responded to this item using a seven-point (1-7) likert-type scale and also had the option of indicating they did not know the answer to this question (coded as “0”). This item was used as a manipulation check to ensure the validity of the stimulus material.

*Perceived candidate issue stance information.* Participants were asked to respond to 5 statements about the candidate’s issue stances. Participants were required to do so by answering close-ended questions using a seven-point (1-7), likert-type scale. Participants also had the option of indicating that they did not know the answer to the question (coded as “0”). Examples of these questions included “How likely is John Murray to support legislation that guarantees top-performing high school seniors access to state universities?” and “How likely is John Murray to support vouchers for top-performing students to attend out-of-district schools?” At the end of this section, participants were asked how much information they were exposed to about candidate issue stance. Participants responded to this item using a seven-point (1-7) likert-type scale and also had the option of indicating they did not know the answer to this question (coded as “0”). This item was used as a manipulation check to ensure the validity of the stimulus material.

**Independent Variables**

*Level of political engagement.* Participants were asked to indicate their level of political involvement by using a seven-point, likert-type scale. On this scale, a higher score indicated a higher level of political involvement. Participants were also allowed to indicate that they did not know how politically involved they are (coded as “0”).
Sources of news used to obtain political information. Participants were asked to indicate which types of sources of news they use to obtain political information. The data collected here did not require respondents to indicate which news organizations they read, view, or subscribe to. Rather, this item allowed respondents to choose as many types of sources as necessary from the following choices: newspaper, magazine, local televised news, 24-hour cable network news, online print news, online video news, online blogs, and/or other. Participants who indicated “other” were asked to specify which additional sources they use.

Demographic information. Participants were asked to disclose their demographic information. Such data collected included age, gender, race/ethnicity, academic major, and state or country of residence.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Pilot Study Results

To assess if the manipulation developed for the experiment would work as intended, researchers piloted three versions of an article about a fictional political candidate, systematically varying the amount of image-related information and policy stance-related information included within the article. After participants read the article, they were asked to disclose how much information they believed they learned about the candidate’s personality characteristics (i.e. image) and about the candidate’s policy stances.

*Exposure to Candidate Image.* To test the effect of exposure to image information on participants’ perception of having learned about the candidate’s personality, a one-way ANOVA was conducted with image manipulation as the independent variable and the image mean and issue mean as the dependent variables. As expected, the ANOVA yielded an effect of exposure to image-related information on perception of having learned about Murray’s image, $F(1,34)=3.34, p=.08$. Also as expected, the ANOVA yielded an effect of exposure to image-related information on perception of having learned about Murray’s issue stances, $F(1,34)=6.54, p<.05$.

*Exposure to Candidate Issue Stance.* To test the effect of exposure to issue stance information on participants’ perception of having learned about the candidate’s personality, a one-way ANOVA was conducted with issue manipulation as the independent variable and the image mean and issue mean as the dependent variables. As expected, an ANOVA yielded a significant effect of exposure to issue-related information on perception of having learned about Murray’s issue stances, $F(1,29)=26.78, p<.001$. 
Also as expected, an ANOVA yielded no effect of exposure to issue-related information on perception of having learned about Murray’s image, $F(1,29)=.43, p=ns$.

Hypothesis Testing

After reading the newspaper article that corresponded with their assigned research group, subjects responded to a ten-item questionnaire using seven-point, likert-type scales. Five of the questionnaire items required subjects to disclose how much they learned about Murray’s image, while five of the questionnaire items required subjects to disclose how much they learned about Murray’s policy stances. The image-related items comprised a scale that was reliable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .83$). The issue-related items also comprised a scale that was reliable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .81$). The research instrument can be found in Appendix C.

Hypotheses 1 & 2

*Exposure to Candidate Image.* The first hypothesis predicted that subjects exposed only to image-related information about John Murray would state that they learned information both about Murray’s image and his issue stances. To test the hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was conducted with the image manipulation as the independent variable and the image mean and issue mean as the dependent variables. As expected, the ANOVA yielded a significant effect of exposure to image-related information on the perception of having learned about Murray’s image, $M=3.76$, $SD=1.71$, $F(1, 132)=25.34, p<.001$. Supporting the hypothesis, the ANOVA yielded a significant effect of exposure to image-related information on the perception of having learned about Murray’s issue stances, $F(1, 131)=25.98, p<.001$. Comparisons by method of estimated marginal means confirmed that participants exposed to image-related
information differed significantly from those participants exposed to issue-related information (M=4.77, SD=.17).

**Exposure to Candidate Issue Stance.** The second hypothesis predicted that subjects exposed only to issue-related information about John Murray would state that they learned information both about Murray’s issue stances and his issue. To test the hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was conducted with the issue manipulation as the independent variable and the image mean and the issue mean as the dependent variables. As expected, the ANOVA yielded a significant effect of exposure to issue-related information on the perception of having learned about Murray’s issue stances, M=4.04, SD=1.74, F(1, 131)=10.97, p<.01. Supporting the hypothesis, the ANOVA yielded a significant effect of exposure to issue-related information on the perception of having learned about Murray’s image, F(1, 132)=5.94, p<.05. Comparisons by method of estimated marginal means confirmed that participants exposed to issue-related information differed significantly from those participants exposed to image-related information (M=4.52, SD=.17).

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3a argued that even in the absence of any issue-related information, participants would make inferences about the candidate’s policy stances. Hypothesis 3b argued that even in the absence of any image-related information, participants would make inferences about the candidate’s personality characteristics. To test these hypotheses, thought-listing data was analyzed because it was with this data that participants provided spontaneous thoughts and inferences.
A one-sample t-test indicated that there were significantly more image-related thoughts listed than there were issue-related thoughts listed ($t=11.85, p<.001$). A one-sample t-test also indicated that there were significantly more thoughts listed that were inferred from the content of the article than there were thoughts explicitly stated within the article ($t=11.89, p<.001$). Overall, 394 of the 676 thoughts listed (58.3%) were related to Murray’s image, while only 43 of the 676 thoughts listed (6.4%) were related to Murray’s policy stances. Additionally, 507 of the thoughts listed (75%) were inferred from the content of the article, while only 169 of the 676 thoughts listed (25%) were explicitly stated within the article.

*Exposure to Candidate Image.* A one-way ANOVA was conducted with exposure to image material as the independent variable and total number of thoughts listed that were both image-related and inferred as the dependent variable. As expected, the ANOVA yielded no effect of exposure to image information on inferences about Murray’s image, $F(1,133)=1.89, p=ns$. A one-way ANOVA was conducted with exposure to image material as the independent variable and total number of thoughts listed that were both issue-related and inferred as the dependent variable. The ANOVA yielded no effect of exposure to image information on inferences about Murray’s policy stances, $F(1,133)=.15, p=ns$.

While the effect of exposure to image information on making inferences related to Murray’s issue stances was not significant, there were still many participants who listed thoughts relating to Murray’s issue stances. Of the 70 participants exposed to information about John Murray’s personality characteristics, 48 of them (68.6%) listed more image-related thoughts than issue-related thoughts. This means that the remaining
31.4% of the participants exposed to information about Murray’s image listed more thoughts relating to his policy stances, consistent with the prediction of H3a. Also out of these 70 participants, 56 of them (80%) listed more thoughts that were inferred from the content of the article rather than thoughts that were explicitly stated within the article, indicating that a substantial portion of the participants exposed to information about Murray’s personality characteristics made inferences about Murray.

*Exposure to Candidate Issue Stance.* A one-way ANOVA was conducted with exposure to issue material as the independent variable and total number of thoughts listed that were both issue-related and inferred as the dependent variable. As expected, the ANOVA yielded a significant effect of exposure to issue information on inferences about Murray’s issue stances, $F(1,133)=15.42, p<.001$. A one-way ANOVA was conducted with exposure to issue material as the independent variable and total number of thoughts listed that were both image-related and inferred as the dependent variable. The ANOVA yielded no effect of exposure to issue information on inferences about Murray’s personality characteristics, $F(1,133)=.62, p=ns$. The mean (2.34) was in the predicted direction, indicating that while not significant, participants exposed to issue stance information did make inferences about Murray’s image.

While the effect of exposure to issue information on making inferences related to Murray’s image was not significant, there were still many participants who listed thoughts relating to Murray’s image. Of the 64 participants exposed to information about John Murray’s policy stances, 56 of them (87.5%) listed more image-related thoughts than issue-related thoughts. This finding is consistent with what H3b predicted, which was that participants exposed to information about Murray’s policy stances would list
thoughts relating to Murray's personality characteristics. Also out of these 64 participants, 51 of them (79.7%) listed more thoughts that were inferred from the content of the article rather than thoughts that were explicitly stated within the article, indicating that a substantial portion of the participants exposed to information about Murray's policy stances made inferences about Murray.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

The central findings of this research were that exposure to certain types of information influenced the perception of having learned other types of information. First, participants indicated having learned about a candidate’s personal characteristics, even when exposed only to information about that candidate’s policy stances. Second, participants indicated having learned about a candidate’s policy stances, even when exposed only to information about that candidate’s personal characteristics. Furthermore, this research found one reason these relationships exist is due to participants making inferences. The thought-listing procedure indicated that once exposed to material containing information about a candidate for public office, participants made inferences about the information which they lacked. This meant that participants made inferences about image when that information was missing from the article they read or about candidate issue when that information was unavailable. Furthermore, these inferences were made both directly and indirectly from the content of the article. It does not appear these inferences were made in any systematic pattern. They included thoughts that were inferred both directly and indirectly from the article, inferences that related to image and issue as well as other types of information, and inferences with varying levels of detail.

Implications

This research has several practical implications. First and foremost, it speaks directly to the debate among scholars over the relationship between image and issue information. As discussed in Chapter Two, many scholars treat image and issue as dichotomous terms, while others recognize that there is a great deal of overlap between
them. These findings support both claims. Responses to the manipulation checks asking how much image material or how much issue material participants learned from the article suggest that participants do indeed distinguish between the two. These manipulation checks showed that individuals know what type of information they have been exposed to. When exposed only to image-related information, participants were aware that they had not been exposed to information about the candidate’s policy platforms. Likewise, when exposed only to issue-related information, participants were aware that they had not been exposed to information about the candidate’s image. This awareness indicates that scholars who treat image and issue as separate constructs are right to point out the distinction. Certainly, the ability to distinguish between image and issue indicates that there are fundamental differences between them.

However, when thinking about image and issue as social constructs, the fact that voters tend to integrate the two and sometimes choose not to apply their ability to distinguish between one another indicate that image and issue are not entirely dichotomous. As Louden & McCauliff (2004) suggest, image and issue are constructs that help inform one another. The evidence provided here relating to the inference-making process supports that claim. These findings reinforce what the literature in Chapter Two describes, which is that assessments about a candidate’s policymaking contribute to the overall image assessment we make about candidates. When exposed only to information about John Murray’s personality, for example, participants used that information to understand the policies Murray might support. Likewise, when exposed only to information about John Murray’s policy stances, participants used that information to understand the type of person Murray is. These relationships existed,
despite evidence that participants could identify image and issue as distinct types of information, indicating that scholars arguing that image and issue are not dichotomous are also correct in their assessments.

The second implication of these findings speaks to the nature of the messages we receive. When I began this project, I suspected that exposure to only one type of information about a candidate for public office meant that audience members and voters would be unable to make an accurate assessment (and thus an adequate choice) about the candidate. To the contrary, these findings suggest is that what is relevant is whether individuals report integrated, more fully-nuanced judgments than the external information alone would suggest and that they are able to make accurate voting decisions and that such a perception might exist regardless of the content of media messages. This research suggests that regardless of what information exists within a set of messages about a candidate, the audience members who choose to process that information will make an assessment of a candidate, indicating some level of message integration.. Those participants exposed only to image-related content or only to issue-related content made the same number and types of inferences as those participants exposed to a mixture of image and issue-related content, suggesting that voters don’t necessarily need to be exposed to a variety of types of information in order to make political decisions.

Examples of the inferences found within the thought-listing data illustrate this point. Many of the participants indicated that they thought Murray was a “family man,” likely because the article talked about how Murray was unsure about his decision to run for reelection at first because of his desire to spend more time with his children and grandchildren. Many of the same participants who noted Murray’s “family man” persona
indicated that he would be likely to support certain education reforms, even though those education reforms were not mentioned in the article. Though such inferences made sense given the context of the article, others seemed less obvious. For example, one participant noted that Murray “likes skiing” (despite there being no reference to skiing or other outdoor activities in the article) while several others stated he likely held one party affiliation or another (despite the issues featured in the article being bipartisan issues). These examples demonstrate the findings of this research; that having a small amount of information about a candidate is enough to allow voters to feel they can make an adequate assessment of that candidate, even though they lack detailed information. Likely, this feeling is guided somewhat by individual bias and previously-determined associations that get integrated with external information in the inference-making process.

I do not mean to suggest here that the content of media messages does not matter—certainly their language and style might influence the way information is perceived. Indeed, in an ideal world, media messages would contain image information and issue information and a variety of other types of information and voters would then take each of those messages, process them in a systematic way, and make the most informed voting decision possible. However, given that our political culture is anything but a utopia, I do mean to suggest that good is good enough. That is, as long as individuals are exposed to a reasonable amount of information about a candidate, they are likely to infer what they do not know, and therefore perceive having enough information to make an informed assessment of the candidate.

Though scholars who believe that image and issue are distinct concepts might offer that it would be better for audience members not to make inferences and stick to the
content of media messages, the findings suggest that such a world is virtually impossible. Even participants exposed to image and issue information equally made inferences about that information not contained within the article and nearly every participant made inferences about subjects not discussed within the article they read. That is, even when exposed to all seemingly-relevant information, people still infer things (whether relevant or not) about information they were not exposed to. In short, these findings suggest that the content of media messages do not matter as much as we might have thought and ultimately, people will think what they want to think when reading about a candidate. This finding is coherent with the literature reviewed about information processing. Due to the overall inability to process every message put forth by the media, individuals engage techniques to make understanding messages easier and to minimize inconsistencies between messages. These techniques are illustrated by the inference-making currently found; that is, inferring what we do not know in order to assess candidates helps to make sense of the vast array of sometimes inconsistent messages.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation that existed with this study was the sample. While a sample from the general public was desired, time and budget constraints made this impossible. Therefore, the sample was taken from university undergraduates. This sample represented mainly one socioeconomic bracket, one geographic area, and one age group, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future research would be well-focused if it were to replicate this study but with a random sample from the general public.

A second limitation was the type of media used. It was the goal of the researcher to use televised news media messages as the stimulus material. However, video clips
with a good variety of image and issue material that met the desired criteria for research stimuli were unavailable and the constraints of the thesis process meant that fabricating video clips would not have been possible given the equipment and editing needs. These findings as they relate to print news media are certainly important, but a logical next step would be to see if these findings can be applied to exposure to other types of media. For example, does exposure to a 60-second news clip about John Murray’s personality allow viewers to perceive to have learned about Murray’s policy stances in the same way that reading a newspaper article about his personality does? Relating the findings here to other forms of media can help us to know whether there are differences in how people perceive information whether it is print, visual, or audio. Future research endeavors should seek to understand that relationship.

A final area of future research deals with the nature of the current findings. While knowing that individuals make inferences from image to issue and from issue to image is useful, it is not entirely clear if one of these moves is more legitimate or if one of these moves lends itself to better impression formation. These questions are not explored here because it was found that the relationship works in both directions and that individuals make inferences about image and issue in both the presence and absence of these types of information. Furthermore, future research should seek to understand how these inferences are made. This study sought to understand how assessments about one type of information were made, despite a lack of exposure to that type of information. While the answer to that question is clearly demonstrated by the inference analysis, more evidence is needed to understand how these inferences are made. What information is used to make these inferences and what information is ignored? How much do previously-
formulated associations about candidates and issues play into these inferences? What guides individuals to make inferences about certain types of information but not others? These questions should guide future research in this area.
References


APPENDIX A – Research Stimuli

Murray announces re-election bid (Image and Issue Material)
*Diana Schraeder, Associated Press*

John Murray, state Senator for Colorado’s 11th district, announced Monday that he would run for re-election, despite rumors to the contrary circulating on the Internet.

Murray, 72, stated at a press conference in Denver that while spending more time with his wife, children, and grandchildren is important to him, his work as a public servant “isn’t complete yet.” That statement was likely made in reference to his recently-thwarted efforts to pass an education reform bill through the state Senate. The bill, which would guarantee Colorado high school seniors acceptance to at least one of the state’s nine public universities if they meet certain requirements, failed in the state legislature last month by a vote of 59-40.

“I’m a family man at heart,” Murray said, “and I certainly look forward to spending more time at home when I retire. But for now, I owe Coloradans a great deal, and I am committed to following through on the promises I made in 2007.”

Murray’s decision to run for re-election in 2009 brought a positive reaction from supporters. Mary Lynn Davis of Boulder praised Murray’s character. “John is a caring, compassionate man and we need more of that in the state capitol,” Davis said.

In addition to pushing his education reform bill, the 72-year-old Chair of the Colorado Senate Education Committee indicated Monday that he hoped to use his experience as an education reformer to pass a bill requiring stricter background checks for public school teachers across the state.
Murray announces re-election bid (Only Image Material)

Diana Schraeder, Associated Press

John Murray, state Senator for Colorado’s 11th district, announced Monday that he would run for re-election, despite rumors to the contrary circulating on the Internet.

Murray, 72, stated at a press conference in Denver that while spending more time with his wife, children, and grandchildren is important to him, his work as a public servant “isn’t complete yet.” That statement was likely made in reference to his recent appointment as the Chair of the Colorado Senate Education Committee. Murray, who helped propel Colorado’s public school system to the top in the country, has a strong track record in education reform.

“I’m a family man at heart,” Murray said, “and I certainly look forward to spending more time at home when I retire. But for now, I owe Coloradans a great deal, and I am committed to following through on the promises I made in 2007.”

Murray’s decision to run for re-election in 2009 brought a positive reaction from supporters. Mary Lynn Davis of Boulder praised Murray’s character. “John is a caring, compassionate man and we need more of that in the state capitol,” Davis said.

In addition to pushing his education reform bill, the 72-year-old Chair of the Colorado Senate Education Committee indicated Monday that he hoped to use his experience as an education reformer pass other legislation helping Colorado’s young people.
Murray announces re-election bid (Only Issue Material)

*Diana Schraeder, Associated Press*

John Murray, state Senator for Colorado’s 11th district, announced Monday that he would run for re-election, despite rumors to the contrary circulating on the Internet.

Murray, stating at a press conference in Denver that his work as a public servant “isn’t complete yet.” That statement was likely made in reference to his recently-thwarted efforts to pass an education reform bill through the state Senate. The bill, which would guarantee Colorado high school seniors acceptance to at least one of the state’s nine public universities if they meet certain requirements, failed in the state legislature last month by a vote of 59-40.

“I’m not sure what’s been floating around out there in cyberspace,” Murray said, “but I owe Coloradans a great deal, and I am committed to following through on the promises I made in 2007.”

Murray’s decision to run for re-election in 2009 brought a positive reaction from supporters. Mary Lynn Davis of Boulder praised Murray’s track record as Chair of the Colorado Senate Education Committee. “John is has been effective in passing legislation eliminating barriers to education and I’m excited to see him return,” Davis said.

In addition to pushing his education reform bill, Murray indicated Monday that he hoped to use his position on the Education Committee to pass other “important pieces of legislation.” Among them are a bill to require stricter background checks for teachers hired by public schools in Colorado and a bill to increase enrollment of racial minorities in the state’s public universities.
Murray stumps for rural votes in Longview (Control Group Stimulus)
Jason Jarvis, Associated Press

Colorado Senate candidate John Murray urged supporters in Longview to get out the vote Saturday, hoping a strong rural turnout will propel him to victory in his match with Denver Mayor Janet Brantman.

He was traveling with former U.S. Sen. Slade Gorton and Public Lands Commissioner Doug Sutherland, who is facing a tough re-election fight of his own against Peter Goldmark. Murray is in the middle of an eight-city tour through Western Colorado before Tuesday’s election.

Polls show the two candidates in a near statistical dead heat, setting the table for a potential seesaw battle that neither candidate wants to prepare for. The two sides are battling for votes in Cowlitz County. Saturday was Murray’s second appearance here in a week, and Brantman campaigned at the longshoremen’s union hall in Longview on Wednesday. "Mrs. Brantman is well-intended, but she’s just plain afraid to make decisions," Murray said.

On the street outside the Murray rally Saturday, a band of about 10 Brantman supporters waved signs during Murray’s hour-long visit. They included some members of the Woodworkers/International Association of Machinists union local 536 in Longview. Joining them on the sidewalk were three or four Murray supporters.
APPENDIX B – Pilot Instrument

Using the scales provided, please respond to each of the following items.

1. I know a lot about John Murray’s stance on education reform.

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<thead>
<tr>
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2. I know a lot about John Murray’s personality.

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3. I learned about how John Murray might vote to make higher education more accessible in Colorado.

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4. I learned about how John Murray might vote to require background checks for public school teachers.

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5. I learned a lot about John Murray’s family values.

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6. I learned a lot about the type of man John Murray is.

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7. I learned a lot about John Murray’s personal character.

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8. I learned a lot about John Murray’s political agenda.

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APPENDIX C – Research Instrument

Experiment Pretest

The following items are designed to collect information about you and your background with political elections. Some of the questions use a seven-point scale with “1” indicating a low level and “7” indicating a high level of background. Please circle the response that best represents your feeling about the corresponding item. For any items you do not know the answer to, please circle “0” to indicate that you do not know.

1. How would you describe your level of knowledge about political elections?

0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
Don’t Very
Know Minimal

2. How would you describe your level of involvement in political elections?

0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
Don’t Very
Know Minimal

3. Which of the following media sources do you use to obtain information about political elections?

☐ Newspapers (print) ☐ Local television news ☐ Online print news
☐ Newspapers (online) ☐ Cable television news ☐ Online blogs
☐ Magazines (print) ☐ Radio ☐ Other (specify)
☐ Magazines (online) ☐ Online video news

4. Please indicate your age. _____ years

5. Please indicate your gender. _____ Male _____ Female

6. Please indicate your race/ethnicity.

7. Please indicate your academic major.

8. Please indicate the two-letter postal abbreviation of your official state of residence.
   _____
Instructions
The two sections that follow should be completed after reading the newspaper article provided to you by the research. Please complete the first section before moving onto the second section. You may take as long as you need to complete each portion of the questionnaire.

Section One
In the spaces provided below, please list all the thoughts you have about John Murray based on the newspaper article you just read. If you need additional space, please continue on the back of this page.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.
Section Two
The following items are designed to gauge your acquired knowledge about the candidate featured in the article you just read. Most of these questions use a seven-point scale with “1” indicating a low level of likelihood or certainty and “7” indicating a high level of likelihood or certainty. Please circle the response the best represents your feeling about the corresponding item. For any items you do not know the answer to, please circle “0” to indicate that you do not know.

1a. How likely is John Murray to support legislation that guarantees top-performing high school seniors access to state universities?

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1b. How sure are you of your response to Item 1a?

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2a. How likely is John Murray to reject funding requests for legislation that would guarantee access to public universities for top-performing high school seniors??

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2b. How sure are you of your response to Item 2a?

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3a. John Murray is a pioneer of education reform.

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3b. How sure are you of your response to Item 3a?

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4a. How likely is John Murray to vote to increase spending for education reform?

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4b. How sure are you of your response to Item 4a?

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5a. Public education reform is one of John Murray’s top priorities.

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5b. How sure are you of your response to Item 5a?

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6a. John Murray is a maverick when it comes to changing education policy.

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6b. How sure are you of your response to Item 6a?

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7a. How likely is John Murray to support vouchers for top-performing students to attend out-of-district schools?

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7b. How sure are you of your response to Item 7a?

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</table>
8a. John Murray is a champion of the rights of students and educators in Colorado.

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8b. How sure are you of your response to Item 8a?

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9a. John Murray has strong family values.

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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Don’t Know</em></td>
<td><em>Strongly Agree</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

9b. How sure are you of your response to Item 9a?

<table>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Don’t Know</em></td>
<td><em>Very Unsure</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

10a. How likely is John Murray to reach across party lines to reform public education at the K-12 level?

<table>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Don’t Know</em></td>
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10b. How sure are you of your response to Item 10a?

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<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Don’t Know</em></td>
<td><em>Very Unsure</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. This article was informative about John Murray’s stance on education reform.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Don’t Know</em></td>
<td><em>Strongly Agree</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. This article helped inform me about what type of person John Murray is.

<table>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Don’t Know</em></td>
<td><em>Strongly Agree</em></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D – Coding Scheme

The table below lists examples of comments made within the thought-listing portion of the data collected. For each item, the primary coder determined if the thought related to Murray’s image and if it related to Murray’s policy platform. Items could be considered both image and issue, neither image nor issue, or could fall into one or the other category. The primary coder also determined if the thought listed was explicitly stated within the article or if it was inferred from the content of the article. Because these categories were mutually exclusive, all thoughts not explicitly stated within the article were coded as inferred.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Inferred</th>
<th>Explicit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Man</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants to finish what he started</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will try to pass an education reform bill</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates higher education</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character is questionable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not successful at passing education reform legislation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably Republican</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is pushing for education to be more accessible</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes skiing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CURRICULUM VITAE — SEAN LUECHTEFELD

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY
306 CARSWELL HALL  WINSTON-SALEM, NC 27109
336/758-5621  LUECSD7@WFU.EDU

EDUCATION

- **University of Maryland at College Park** (Ph.D., 2013); Rhetoric & Political Culture
- **Wake Forest University** (M.A., 2009); Communication
- **Florida State University** (B.A., 2007); Communication Studies & Political Science

EMPLOYMENT

- **Wake Forest University**, Graduate Assistant Debate Coach, 2007-present.
- **New Winston Museum**, Executive Assistant to the Chief of Operations, Assistant Director of multi-million dollar fundraising campaign, 2008-present.
- **Northwestern University**, Assistant Director of Student Life, National High School Institute in Debate, 2005-present.
- **Wilson Resources, Inc.**, Director of Communications and Event Planner, 2005-2007.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND PARTICIPATION

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND PARTICIPATION (CONTINUED)


TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- COM670: Political Communication, Assistant, with Dr. Allan Louden, Fall 2008

AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

- Alumni Student Travel Award. Wake Forest University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Winston-Salem, NC. November 2008.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIPS

- Eastern Communication Association, 2008-present
- Southern States Communication Association, 2007-2008
- Cross Examination Debate Association, 2004-present.
- National Debate Tournament, 2004-present

COMMUNITY AND ACADEMIC PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

- Student Mentor, JuicyEthics, a symposium on the ethical and communicative considerations of the JuicyCampus website. Winston-Salem, NC. February 2009.
- Organizer, Campus Community Connection Forum: Bridging the Gap Between Winston-Salem's Campus Communities, a panel on community relations between Wake Forest University and Winston-Salem, NC. December 2007.