CURIOSITY, CLICKBAIT AND THEIR IMPACTS ON POLITICAL MEDIA SELECTION

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ABSTRACT

Clickbait produces billions of clicks every year and is defined as "internet-based advertising material that utilizes linguistic elements and gaps in information to evoke curiosity in consumers". One of the most influential media-use theories, Selective Exposure Theory, argues that we tend to avoid counter-attitudinal information to avoid cognitive dissonance. Since clickbait is intentionally vague, people risk exposure to cognitive dissonance when they choose to consume it, contradicting the expectations of Selective Exposure Theory. This study argued that Information Gap Theory could explain this behavior. Information Gap Theory posits that when presented with only partial information, people are motivated to pursue that missing information to satiate curiosity impulses. Participants were surveyed about these independent variables: political group affiliation, strength of their opinions on specific political issues and a battery of questions regarding levels of curiosity. Participants were then asked to select between conservative, liberal and clickbait political news headlines regarding the same political issues they were surveyed on. Participants selecting clickbait against their political stances, as the dependent variable, would support Information Gap Theory and contradict Selective Exposure Theory. This research found that liberals tended to select liberal headlines and conservatives selected conservative headlines. These findings strongly supported Selective Exposure Theory and did not support Information Gap Theory.

Key Terms: selective exposure, information gap, curiosity, bias, clickbait

INTRODUCTION

Fifty percent of Americans between the ages of 18-49 get their news primarily

from the internet (Mitchell et al, 2016). That number is expected to grow substantially

among future generations (Mitchell et al, 2016). Based on these trends the internet will

become the most popular medium for news consumption. Understanding how this shift in

news consumption will affect people should be a primary concern for media effects

research. Contributing to the existing research on media consumption would strengthen

the field's understanding of the underlying mechanisms that motivate people to make

choices in media and what grabs their attention. Online content producers are constantly

fighting for the attention of users. For example, some news outlets rely on more

traditional methods of gaining the attention of readers with explicit and highly detailed

news headlines. Others have found great success gathering the attention of readers with a

newer kind of headline, clickbait.

Clickbait. This section of the paper will be concerned with operationalizing

clickbait as a variable. The effectiveness of clickbait is an under-researched

communication phenomena. No large scale study has been conducted to examine the

extent to which different types of media use clickbait techniques (Rony, Hassan, and

Yousef 2017). Clickbait has been defined as "a form of web content that employs writing

formulas and linguistic techniques in headlines to trick readers into clicking links, but

does not deliver on promises" (Rony, Hassan, Yousef 2017). Clickbait does not always

produce negative results, however. Consumers may be pleasantly surprised by pursuing

clickbait advertisements. The present research will use a definition of clickbait that allows for positive experiences as well as negative.

In our definition we want to consider where clickbait exists. Some researchers have made the distinction between "popular media" and "quality media" and suggest that clickbait occurs only in popular media (Palau-Sampio, 2014). This distinction may not be useful for this research. The current research focuses on political news, which is considered to be "quality media". A more well-rounded understanding of clickbait indicates that it can be used in any form of headline. This research aims to understand clickbait as a tool that can be used in "quality media" and not just "popular media".

Our definition will also consider the necessary structural elements in clickbait. These include elements such as expressive punctuation, immediacy, quotations, deixis, cataphora and gaps in information. In order to produce clickbait, content creators develop titles or advertisements for their articles and videos that are intentionally ambiguous and leave out critical information. Ambiguity paired with sensationalized language often produces curiosity in the consumer (McNeal, 2015). These clickbait titles suggest that following their links will provide the consumer with the missing information they seek (McNeal, 2015). Clickbait titles appear to motivate consumers to pursue its missing information with curiosity despite how notoriously deceptive clickbait can be.

There are many linguistic strategies that can be used in various combinations to create clickbait (Palau-Sampio, 2014). Expressive punctuation, like question marks, exclamation marks and ellipses as well as verbal intensifiers that create hyperbole are commonly used in digital media clickbait (Palau-Sampio, 2014). For example, adding an exclamation mark to a normal question in the headline "Have you seen these celebrity

photos?" creates additional heightened emotion. These are designed to elicit emotional responses in the consumer with the intent of motivating them to pursue emotional responses and click. Immediacy words like "this" and "now" are also commonly used in clickbait (Palau-Sampio, 2014). These are designed to create a sense of urgency and importance in the consumer. Quotations are also used by content producers when designing clickbait (Palau-Sampio, 2014). Quotations can help lend credibility to a headline, especially if it is used as evidence. Quotations can also plant the headline more firmly in reality. As consumers, we expect further contextualization of the quotation in the actual article.

The most important linguistic elements used in clickbait, however, are cataphoric and deixic elements, also known as forward references (Blom, Hansen, 2014). Cataphoric and deixic elements refer to words that indicate future rewards of information (Blom, Hansen, 2014). They refer to what the consumer could learn or gain from continuing to follow a link for a news article. An example of Cataphora would be seeing the word "he" in a shocking headline that refers to the primary subject in the article. Who this "he" is and why this person matters in the ensuing article is a mystery. It may motivate the consumer to find out what happened. Deixis is similar in that it is vague language that generically indicates future informational rewards. For example the headline "*This* is what happens when you mix Coke and Mentos", "*this*" indicates the information we *could* receive if we read further. Researchers found that content producers designed clickbait that used different combinations of aforementioned linguistic elements. A common theme develops throughout these linguistic elements. These elements work to produce "gaps" in information in headlines. "Gaps" are

intentionally left out information. The rest is meant to lure us in to pursuing those gaps. Our definition of clickbait is "internet-based advertising material that utilizes linguistic elements and gaps in information to evoke curiosity in consumers".

Understanding clickbait is essential because of its proliferation and success across forms of digital media. Research suggests that clickbait may be more effective at garnering attention than traditional news headlines. Clickbait may boost ad revenues temporarily but harm the branding and trust consumers have in their media outlets (Rony, Hassan, and Yousef 2017). According to a study performed by Facebook, 80% of users "preferred headlines that helped them decide if they wanted to read the full article before they had to click through" (Rony, Hassan, Yousef 2017). This finding seems to contradict the success clickbait appears to be having on the internet. Online content producers have reported doubling their monthly unique user interactions (500 million to 1 billion) since adopting clickbait strategies (Rony, Hassan, and Yousef 2017). These two conflicting ideas about what consumers report they want in a headline, versus what they actually click on, is the foundational contradiction in this research.

This paper considers whether the success of clickbait titles are more effectively explained by classic theories in media use like Selective Exposure Theory or more modern theories like Information Gap Theory. Selective Exposure Theory posits that people tend to select and consume media that is sympathetic to their existing values and opinions. In order to avoid cognitive dissonance, people tend to avoid conflicting viewpoints and information that would challenge them (Festinger, 1957). People will tend to avoid potentially risky, harmful information if they perceive it to have low utility. Risk avoidance in Selective Exposure theory suggests that ambiguity is a potential threat

to existing biases (Hart et al, 2009). Selective Exposure Theory would assert that traditional, explicit headlines would garner more attention than ambiguous clickbait. Explicit headlines allow for more bias-driven decision making.

Other research indicates that the success of clickbait can be effectively explained by Information Gap Theory. Information gap theory suggests that how people feel about missing information will determine how they deal with pursuing potentially risky information (Loewenstein, 1994). Perceived greater utility of missing information can lead to greater levels of curiosity and subsequent pursuits of risky information (Loewenstein, 2016). Curiosity is a primary motivator for learning and the pursuit of new information (Kang et al, 2009). Small bits of information prime people to continue pursuing more information. This is especially true when people are familiar with the topic and think they might know what the missing information is, regardless if it might prove them wrong (Kidd and Hayden, 2015). The effects of curiosity and Information Gap Theory suggest that clickbait could be more effective at garnering attention than more explicit titles.

This study has two primary research goals. First, this study aims to see which kinds of headlines are more effective: explicit or vague headlines. Explicit headlines are detailed and usually indicate the perspective of the author. Vague headlines are not as focused and do not reveal the author's position. Second, this research will provide further support or challenges to Selective Exposure models and Information Gap Theory. Additionally the current research will provide evidence more broadly for the role that rationality, irrationality and curiosity play in media selection. In order to achieve these research goals, this research will use a survey design, manipulating participant's choice

between clickbait and traditional headlines to measure their tendencies to pursue curiosity

over bias.

RATIONALE

The primary concern of this paper is to increase the field's understanding of how and why people choose between media. What motivates people to make choices in the media they consume? What kinds of information do people look for when choosing between different content? Can a lack of information motivate people to pursue potentially risky information? Consulting the extant literature will help frame the research and answer the questions that make up this study. In order to do so, this section will consider the findings in the literature reviewing both the empirical research and the theory related to media selection and clickbait. Specifically, I consider Selective Exposure Theory, the construct of curiosity and Information Gap Theory.

Selective Exposure Theory. For decades Selective Exposure Theories have formed much of the foundation of the field's understanding of media effects, specifically how people select media. Selective Exposure Theory argues that a person tends to select and consume media that is sympathetic to their values, biases and personal experiences (Hart et al, 2009). People select bias-confirming media in order to avoid feeling uncomfortable, or as will be discussed presently, to avoid cognitive dissonance. Instead people tend to choose media that align with their personal beliefs more and more as it becomes habitual (Hart et al, 2009).

A major assumption within selective Exposure Theory is the concept of Cognitive Dissonance. Cognitive Dissonance is the stress or unease we feel when exposed to information that contradicts the values and beliefs we hold (Festinger, 1957). For example, we may avoid media that supports a candidate we do not like during an election. People attempt to maintain a homeostatic relationship between their beliefs and

behavior. We often avoid conflicting beliefs. When we attempt to adopt new beliefs, we cope with stressful and inconsistent behavior by adjusting our cognition (Festinger, 1957). The same dual strategy exists for consumers dealing with counter-attitudinal media. For example, if we were to come in contact with political ads we would either reject its messages or go through the process of adopting that new belief as our own. It is often simpler to avoid pursuing the dissenting information or just ignore its existence entirely (Festinger, 1957).

Political biases are strong indicators of patterned media consumption and the more strongly people feel about their political stances the more likely they will follow the media consumption patterns prescribed by Selective Exposure Theory (Knoblock-Westerwick, 2014). Knoblock-Westerwick's research surveyed participants on 12 political topics to see where their preferences were. Four of those 12 topics were represented in magazines that the participants were asked to read through. Each of those 4 topics were discussed by 2 opposing viewpoints in the magazines. Which articles the participants read, the time it took for participants to choose the article they wanted to read and the time they spent on reading each article were recorded. The research's findings supported Selective Exposure Theory. The more often attitude-consistent content was clicked on, the faster participants responded to politically relevant self-descriptions (Knoblock-Westerwick, 2014). This research further supports the concept that the more defined a person's self-perception is, the stronger their attempts will be to consume media that supports that image. This research also echoes similar findings in selective exposure research that suggests that respondents prefer attitude-consistent messages or channels

and avoid counter attitudinal material (e.g., Garrett, 2006; Graf & Aday, 2008; Stroud, 2008).

In regards to the research goals for this experiment, will explicit traditional headlines or vague clickbait headlines be more effective at garnering attention? Selective Exposure Theory would predict that people with strong political bias will more likely choose low ambiguity titles to confirm biases and avoid risking cognitive dissonance.

H1a: There will be a positive relationship between participants who Identify as Moderate vs. Not Moderate and selecting Clickbait Headlines vs. Traditional Headlines about Hillary Clinton.

H1b: There will be a positive relationship between participants who Identify as Moderate vs. Not Moderate and selecting Clickbait Headlines vs. Traditional Headlines about Donald Trump.

Because we have a categorical independent variable (*Political Group Alignment*) and a dichotomously coded dependent variable (*Clickbait Headline Selection*), we will use a chi square analysis to test *H1a* and *H1b*.

H2a: There will be a positive relationship between Liberal attitudes towards Support for Universal Healthcare and selecting Liberal traditional headlines vs either of the other two headlines (i.e., conservative traditional or clickbait).

H2b: There will be a positive relationship between Conservative attitudes towards Support for Universal Healthcare and selecting Conservative traditional

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headlines vs either of the other two headlines (i.e., liberal traditional or clickbait).

H3a: There will be a positive relationship between Liberal attitudes for Support of Stricter Gun Control and likelihood of choosing Liberal traditional headlines vs either of the other two headlines (i.e., conservative traditional or clickbait).

H3b: There will be a positive relationship between Conservative attitudes for Support of Stricter Gun Control and likelihood of choosing Conservative traditional headlines vs either of the other two headlines (i.e., liberal traditional or clickbait).

H4a: There will be a positive relationship between Liberal attitudes for Being Pro-Choice and likelihood of choosing Liberal traditional headlines vs either of the other two headlines (i.e., conservative traditional or clickbait).

H4b: There will be a positive relationship between Conservative attitudes for Being Pro-Choice and likelihood of choosing Conservative traditional headlines vs either of the other two headlines (i.e., liberal traditional or clickbait).

H5a: There will be a positive relationship between Liberal attitudes for Raising

    Minimum Wage and likelihood of choosing Liberal tradition headlines vs either of

    the other two headlines (i.e., conservative traditional or clickbait).

H5b: There will be a positive relationship between Conservative attitudes for

    Raising Minimum Wage and likelihood of choosing Conservative tradition

    headlines vs either of the other two headlines (i.e., liberal traditional or

    clickbait).

H6a: There will be a positive relationship between Liberal attitudes on Stricter

    Immigration Policy and likelihood of choosing Liberal traditional

    headlines vs either of the other two headlines (i.e., conservative traditional or

    clickbait).

H6b: There will be a positive relationship between Conservative attitudes on

    Stricter Immigration Policy and likelihood of choosing Conservative

    traditional headlines vs either of the other two headlines (i.e., liberal traditional

    or clickbait).

Because we have a continuous independent variable (*Political Issue Attitude*) and a dichotomously coded dependent variable (*Headline Selection*), we will use biserial correlations to analyze hypotheses *H2a-H6b*.

The literature surrounding selective exposure theory is less effective at explaining how gaps in information and curiosity play a role in a person's media selection process. Next this paper will consider how curiosity has been measured and tested in media selection research.

Curiosity. Behavioral psychologists and economists have based many of their models on the assumption that people make rational decisions (Mlodinow, 2012). More recently they are being challenged to rethink their rational thought models by psychologists and neurologists who have found evidence that people's subconscious might play a more prominent role in the decision making process (Mlodinow, 2012). This shift challenges the ideas of selective exposure theory by suggesting that consumers do not necessarily weigh the outcomes of their decision in a logical manner. In fact, many researchers believe that curiosity has a profound effect on our motivations to pursue information (Loewenstein, 1994).

Curiosity is a significant function of cognition, but its mechanisms and biological function are still under-researched (Kidd and Hayden, 2015). Curiosity is the "cognitively induced deprivation that arises from the perception of a gap in knowledge and understanding" (Loewenstein, 1994). Kang et al, 2009 found that curiosity is essential to acquiring new information and further suggests that the primary function of curiosity is to facilitate learning. Loewenstein claims that small amounts of information act as a priming agent that can strongly increase curiosity (Loewenstein, 1994). Consuming missing information is rewarding. Eventually, the person consuming the information may reach a satiated state and halt consumption (Kidd and Hayden, 2015). The mystery that motivates curiosity dissipates over time.

When faced with a question, studies show that people who had *some* idea of the answer, but lacked confidence, were in fact the most curious to find the answer (Kang et al, 2009). However, in order for the lack of confidence to motivate information seeking behavior, the individual has to have a certain level of familiarity with the topic (Kang et al, 2009). For example, in a game of trivia, participants would likely be more curious about the answer to a question they think they have the answer to. In summary, the motivation to learn new information appears to be positively affected by the amount of curiosity felt by the individual. Familiarity with the topic, a gap in information and a certain level of a lack of confidence have been shown to positively affect curiosity, which then positively affects the motivation to learn and pursue new information.

Researchers have also identified the parts of the brain that are responsible for recognizing gaps in information and stimulating appropriate responses. Neuroimaging indicates that the frontal and parietal cortexes receive signals when participants were induced with curiosity (Lieshout et al, 2018). When missing information was updated and curiosity needs were satiated, signals were sent to the insular cortex of the brain (Lieshout et al, 2018). The sense of satiation reduces our urge to pursue further. These findings further indicate that our relationship with curiosity is at least partially a less than conscious one. Consumers may not be aware of how curiosity is playing a role in their media selection.

Many studies provide evidence to support the influential power of curiosity in decision making. Behavioral psychologists have completed studies that demonstrated that the urge to satiate curiosity could overcome regret-aversion (van Dejk and Zeelenberg, 2007). As mentioned earlier, regret-aversion is a major motivational in Selective

Exposure Theory. Van Dejk and Zeelenberg's research demonstrates that curiosity can counteract our aversion to regret. Their example involved a man selling items in a market that were wrapped completely in cloth. He simply told the audience how great the product was and how much the audience would enjoy it. The buyers, feeling the urge to know exactly what the product was and how it would improve their lives, were motivated to buy it and find out. They were willing to risk being disappointed by the product. Curiosity has the power to beat risk aversion. Van Djek and Zeelenberg's research was primarily based on the principles of Loewenstein's Information Gap Theory.

Information Gap Theory. Information Gap Theory claims that when people are faced with missing information, they quickly form judgements about how correct they are about what the missing information is (Loewenstein, 1994). And as the literature suggests, high levels of curiosity have been shown to directly affect how people judge missing information. High levels of curiosity have been shown to counteract perceived utility of information and regret/risk-aversion. Information Gap Theory suggests that the stimulus of curiosity is motivating enough to circumvent more logical decision making (Golman & Lowenstein, 2016). Curiosity can also be explained by the motivation to know if an opposing opinion (for example) even exists. The mystery of not knowing if unfavorable information exists can actually be more discomforting than the unfavorable information itself (Golman & Loewenstein, 2016). For example, it may be useful for people to know what the other side of the political aisle are thinking. Risking exposure to their ideas may help strengthen their own positions.

Information gap theory can help the field better understand clickbait. The ambiguity of clickbait is essentially a gamble where there is a known potential risk.

Curiosity is enough to motivate a person to attempt to alleviate gaps in information and risk the gamble associated with consuming clickbait (Golman & Loewenstein, 2016). Loewenstein's Information Gap Theory argues that considering personally held beliefs and measuring risks vs. rewards for rational decision-making, do not explain all motivations for decision-making (Golman & Loewenstein, 2016). Loewenstein refers to consuming clickbait, specifically, as an example of a behavioral phenomenon that can't be explained by these more traditional methods (Golman & Loewenstein, 2016).

Information Gap Theory's explanation of the role that curiosity plays in the pursuit of missing information is often used to explain the effectiveness of the communication phenomena known as clickbait (McNeal, 2015). Clickbait is colloquially defined as something (such as a headline) designed to make readers want to click a hyperlink, especially when the link leads to content of dubious value or interest (McNeal, 2015). Clickbait is designed to be intentionally vague in an attempt to reach the widest audience possible and imbue them with curiosity. It hints at what knowledge could be gained by clicking the headline. The consumer does not know the quality of the information following a clickbait headline until further investigation (McNeal, 2015). Clickbait is designed to grab the attention of consumers up front. Advertising strategies across markets that evoked curiosity were more effective than strategies that simply listed specifications or details of a product (Menon and Soman, 2002). If consumers were relatively sure they could satiate their curiosity about the product, they would purchase it (Menon and Soman, 2002). We can think of headlines as advertising strategies that list out *some* details and product information. The "product" they are interested in is the ensuing article. Headlines that leave out "product information" are clickbait.

Advertisers and content producers intentionally leave out crucial bits of information in their advertising materials and this has also been termed the "teasing effect". Research indicates that imbuing advertising materials with uncertainty-creation and uncertainty-resolution can often improve the consumer's attitude and willingness to consume the product (Ruwan, Hsee and Lu, 2018). This teasing effect is hedonically beneficial because the uncertainty engenders curiosity, which has potential for creating additional positive experiences (Ruwan, Hsee and Lu, 2018). Consumers could not only gain access to the product they are looking for, but also satiate needs for more information.

There are many existing methods for surveying an individual's level of curiosity. This research will use the Curiosity and Exploration Inventory-II from Kashden, Todd B. et al, 2009. Their research indicates that curiosity is primarily expressed in two forms. The first is Stretching Curiosity, which is the motivation to seek out knowledge and new experiences. The second is Embracing Curiosity, which is the willingness to embrace the novel, uncertain, and unpredictable nature of everyday life. Researchers survey participant's tendencies for Stretching and Embracing Curiosity and then calculate their overall curiosity levels known as General Curiosity. Consumers who report higher levels of curiosity might be more motivated to pursue missing information.

Together, Information Gap Theory and the extant research surrounding the role that curiosity plays in cognitive decision making offer explanations for why clickbait is effective at garnering clicks and consumer attention on digital media platforms. In regards to this study's research question, will explicit traditional headlines or vague clickbait headlines be more effective at garnering attention? The literature regarding

curiosity and Information Gap Theory appears to suggest that high ambiguity titles about familiar political topics will produce curiosity in the participants and motivate them to pursue the missing information. The participants would likely choose the more ambiguous titles if they can be successfully imbued with a sense of curiosity.

> *H7a: There will be a positive relationship between Embracing Curiosity and Clickbait Headline Selection vs a Traditional Liberal/Conservative Headline on the same political issue.*
> *H7b: There will be a positive relationship between Stretching Curiosity and Clickbait Headline Selection vs a Traditional Liberal/Conservative Headline on the same political issue.*

Because we have a continuous independent variable (Stretching and Embracing Curiosity) and a dichotomously coded dependent variable (Headline Selection), we will use a biserial test to analyze hypotheses *7a-7b*.

> *RQ1: Will there be a correlation between Age and Clickbait Headline Selection?*

> *RQ2: Will there be a relationship between Sex and Clickbait Headline Selection?*

Because we have a continuous independent variable (*Age*) and a categorical dependent variable (*Headline Selection*), we will use a biserial test to analyze *RQ1*.

Because we have a categorical independent variable (*Sex*) and a categorical dependent

variable (*Headline Selection*) we will use a chi-square analysis to analyze *RQ2*.

METHOD (PILOT STUDY)

Design

In order to choose the most valid headlines to be used in the main study, the pilot study was conducted to determine which headlines best represented politically charged and clickbait headlines. There were 21 liberal, 21 conservative and 21 clickbait news headline examples written for this pilot study. Each group of 21 headlines were split into 7 groups of 3 for each of the 7 political issues. The 7 political issue categories came from a modified version of the categories designed by Knobloch-Westerwick, S., & Johnson, B. K. (2014). The 7 categories of headlines were: minimum wage, immigration, pro-life/pro-choice, gun control, universal healthcare, Donald Trump, and Hillary Clinton. The author designed 3 examples in each category with the intent of choosing the most realistic headlines.

Participants

The participants were college students at Wake Forest University. 80 students started the survey but only 73 completed it entirely. All 73 of the students were at least 18 years old and all of them had consumed online news within the previous week of taking the survey.

Procedure

Participants began the survey by reading and responding to the consent form and verified that they were at least 18 years old to continue the survey. They also were asked if they had consumed digital news within the past 7 days of taking the survey. The next major portion of the survey had participants choose between which headlines they thought were the most "accurate" representations of various political news headlines.

Example: "Choose the headline that is most politically conservative". Then participants chose from a selection of 3 headlines. Example: (A) "Minimum wage increase may hurt worker families, research says," (B) "People working minimum wage don't deserve $15 an hour," and (C) "Minimum wage increases only provide momentary financial freedom, expert shows." In total, participants responded to 21 of these prompts. After this participants were asked how accurate on average they felt the headlines were. Finally, they were presented with a thank you statement.

Stimuli

The headlines were written to represent different headline styles (i.e., traditional liberal leaning [e.g., Americans can't live full lives on $7.25 an hour], traditional conservative leaning, [e.g., People working minimum wage jobs don't deserve $15 an hour] and clickbait [e.g. How much will Universal Healthcare ACTUALLY cost you. You won't believe the results!]). The clickbait headlines were written using the linguistic strategies researched by Palau-Sampio, 2014. Three examples of headlines were written in each style (traditional liberal, traditional conservative and clickbait) in order to offer different examples and allow the 'best' example to be chosen during the pilot phase and these 3 examples represented each of 5 political issues (e.g., health care, gun control). These best examples were then selected from the pilot data results and used in the main study. In total there were 63 headlines written and used as stimulus materials in the pilot survey. The 21 most-selected headlines were used in the final survey.

RESULTS (PILOT STUDY)

The following headlines received the most votes from participants from among 3 potential headlines. Each of the 3 potential headlines were similar in topic and political leaning. They are organized into groups based on the political issue they refer to, and only the top example of conservative, liberal and clickbait are presented. The two 'rejected' headlines are not presented. Recall that there were 3 choices offered for each political leaning/topic grouping; therefore 33% would be the percentage a given headline was chosen by chance alone. All top chosen headlines fell above this cutoff.

Minimum Wage
(Conservative)People working minimum wage jobs don't deserve $15 an hour (votes: 55%)
(Liberal)Americans can't live full lives on $7.25 an hour. (votes: 53%)
(Click Bait)You won't believe which states raised minimum wage. (votes: 47%)

Universal Healthcare
(Conservative)Private medical practices could go out of business under universal healthcare. (votes: 49%)
(Liberal)Universal Healthcare could help insure millions of new Americans. (votes: 71%)
(Clickbait)How much will Universal Health Care actually cost you? You won't believe the results! (votes: 70%)

Pro-life/Pro-choice
(Conservative)Planned Parenthood could be receiving more unnecessary funding with new laws. (votes: 47%)
(Liberal)Trump administration looks to continue its assault on Planned Parenthood. (votes: 38%)
(Clickbait)Most people don't know this surprising fact about Roe V. Wade. (votes: 42%)

Gun Control
(Conservative)Gun bans would do more harm to law abiding citizens than good. (votes: 53%)
(Liberal)Research shows that countries without firearm bans have more mass shootings. (votes: 66%)

(Clickbait)The NRA has THIS to say about assault rifle ownership… (votes: 42%)

Stricter Immigration Policy
(Conservative) Spike in crime linked to illegal immigration, study finds. (votes: 68%)
(Liberal)Migrant workers are not trying to take the jobs of hard-working Americans so stop complaining. (votes: 42%)
(Clickbait)This is what the term "open borders" ACTUALLY means. (votes: 48%)

Hillary Clinton
(Conservative)Hillary Clinton, choosing to not visit rust belt states, lead to her downfall, polls show. (votes: 38%)
(Liberal)Here's why the Clinton email leak doesn't matter. (votes: 54%)
(Clickbait)Hillary Clinton had THIS to say about her debate with Donald Trump. (votes: 44%)

Donald Trump
(Conservative)The left continues its witch-hunt for Trump and Russian collusion with new reports. (votes: 47%)
(Liberal)Trump should be impeached for not revealing his tax returns. (votes: 64%)
(Clickbait)Donald Trump has THIS to say about the 2020 Presidential Election. (votes: 34%)

There were a few patterns amongst the most-selected headlines. Some of the patterns were unique to one political issue. For example, the two most popular traditional headlines regarding minimum wage both contained specific numbers/figures like "$7.25". Four of the seven most-selected clickbait headlines contained words in all capitalized letters like "THIS" and "ACTUALLY" while the other two remaining most-selected clickbait headlines both contained the phrase "you won't believe". In fact, the only time a clickbait headline with a word in all capitalized letters lost was when it was paired up against another headline with words in all capitalized letters. It is possible that when people are looking for more traditional headlines they look for numbers and statistics to help shape their opinion on the issue. When it comes to clickbait, however,

just as the literature suggests, people seem to be attracted to the excitement, intensity and mystery surrounding an explosive and curiosity-inducing headline.

In the final section of the survey, the participants were asked to rate the overall accuracy of the survey headlines to ones in actual media. Overall the headlines were accurate. 59% of the participants voted that the liberal headlines were either realistic or very realistic. 61% of the participants voted that the conservative headlines were either realistic or very realistic. Finally, 70% of the participants voted that the clickbait headlines were either realistic or very realistic. Clickbait was reported to be the most realistic group of headlines overall and it is exemplified in how relatively close the vote count was for certain groups of clickbait headlines. For example, the selection totals for the clickbait headline group regarding Donald Trump were very close. The most-selected headline in this group won by a margin of one vote over the second highest-selected headline and only received two more votes than the third highest-selected headline.

METHOD (PRIMARY STUDY)

Design

The survey design used for this study measured demographics, political bias, curiosity and political media selection.

Participants

Participants ($n = 166$) who were 18-years old and older participated in this study. The average age of the participant was older than expected because much of the convenience sampling occurred around a major university ($M = 31.87$, $SD = 15.45$). Some participants chose to not include their age ($n = 15$). All participants were required to have basic reading and literacy skills in order to participate in the survey. 3.6% ($n = 6$) of participants self-identified as socialist, 33.3% ($n = 55$) of participants self-identified as liberal, 37% ($n = 61$) of participants self-identified as moderate, 22.4% ($n = 37$) of participants self-identified as conservative, 3.6% ($n = 6$) of participants self-identified as libertarian and .6% ($n = 1$) of participants did not self-identify their political group. Participants also self-identified sex as male ($n = 51$) and female ($n = 115$). The results of participants who completed the study in under 3 minutes were eliminated from the data ($n = 38$) due to likely inattention. Participation in this study was on a voluntary basis and no additional compensation was provided to those who participated in the study. Participants were gathered primarily through convenience sampling through Wake Forest University and Linfield College. Additional convenience sampling occurred on Facebook. Attention-check questions were incorporated in the study. No participant failed to answer these questions correctly. All data were collected anonymously.

Stimulus Materials

Political news headlines were chosen from the pilot test in order to offer headline choice options that would test several of the main hypotheses. Each grouping of headlines contained one liberal, one conservative and one clickbait headline regarding the political issues included in the *Political Issue Attitude* (e.g., I support Universal Health Care) section of the survey. Participants had to choose from among headlines by asking them: "Please select the headline that you would most likely click as part of your normal online news consumption."

Procedure

Participants were invited via email and social media to complete a Qualtrics survey. These advertisements noted that participants would be contributing to an online research study on personal opinions and behavior on the internet.

Following approval of informed consent, participants answered a battery of questions regarding *Political Group Alignment*, *Political Issue Attitudes* and *The Curiosity and Exploration Inventory-II*. After this, participants moved on to the Headline Selection portion of the survey. Participants were asked to select a headline that they would most likely click as part of their normal online news consumption. Finally, participants answered questions about how realistic they felt the headlines were. Following the completion of the survey, participants were thanked and debriefed about the goals and measurements of the survey.

Measures

Political Group Alignment. This item asked participants to select the political group that most aligned with their beliefs (e.g. Please indicate where you most identify on the political spectrum.) Participants chose from five nominal political groups: Socialist (3.6%), Liberal (33.3%), Moderate (37%), Conservative (22.4%) and (3.6%) Libertarian.

Political Issue Attitude. This is a modified form of the measure used by Knobloch-Westerwick, S., & Johnson, B. K. (2014). Five political issues were explored in this variable including, *Stricter Gun Control, Support for Universal Healthcare, Support for Raising the Minimum Wage, being Pro-Choice* and *Support for Stricter Immigration*. Each participant chose how strongly they agreed with political attitudes on these issues on a 5 point Likert scale. On average, participant's scores were Stricter Gun Control (M = 3.85, SD = 1.32), Support for Universal Healthcare (M = 3.76, SD = 1.34), Support for Raising the Minimum Wage (M = 3.50, SD = 1.35), (M = 4.17, SD = 1.28) and Support for Stricter Immigration (M = 3.08, SD = 1.25). Higher numbers indicated greater liberal bias. Responses were reverse coded to indicate stronger Conservative attitudes towards these issues during this study's statistical analyses in order to make the supported hypotheses more intuitively interpretable.

The Curiosity and Exploration Inventory-II. The 10-item Curiosity and Exploration Inventory-II (CEI-II) from Kashdan, Todd B et al. 2009 was used in this study to measure whether the degree of curiosity impacts headline selection. The CEI-II typically measures 2 factors with 5 items each. One factor measures Stretching Curiosity (5-item) (i.e., the motivation to seek out knowledge and new experiences) and the other

measures Embracing Curiosity (5-items) (i.e., the willingness to embrace the novel, uncertain, and unpredictable nature of everyday life).

Stretching Curiosity Scale contained 5 items (e.g., "I actively seek as much information as I can in new situations") that required a Likert type response (0-5 with higher numbers indicating more agreement). This scale was reliable ($a = .740$) with participants indicating a moderate amount of stretching curiosity (M = 4.046, SD = .7125).

Embracing Curiosity Scale contained 5 items (e.g., "I am the type of person who really enjoys the uncertainty of everyday life"). This scale was reliable ($a = .671$) with participants indicating a moderately lower amount of embracing curiosity (M = 3.107 and SD = .654).

Headline Selection. After participants completed the survey questions regarding P*olitical Group Alignment, Political Issue Attitudes* and *Curiosity*, they selected between headlines. The headlines were presented in groups of three. Each grouping of headlines contained one traditional conservative headline, one traditional liberal headline and one clickbait headline about the same political issue. The styles of headlines were rotated randomly in every question to prevent ordering effects. Each of the 7 grouping of headlines corresponded to a political issue from the *Political Issue Attitudes* scales. Example: "Gun bans would do more harm to law abiding citizens than good."

<center>Stimulus</center>

The stimulus for this research study was the selection of headlines. If there is a significant relationship between curiosity and clickbait headline selection, then information gap theory hypotheses would be supported. If participants selected traditional

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headlines consistent with their political alignment, selective exposure theory would be supported. If headlines were selected at random with neither political alignment nor curiosity showing a significant relationship with headline choice, then neither theoretical approach would be supported.

RESULTS

Headline selection ratios were varied between all 7 categories. Traditional liberal headlines were selected the most in all 7 categories except for headlines about stricter immigration, where traditional conservative headlines were selected the most (see table 1 on pg. 45). This is indicative of the sample, since the largest portion of participants identified as either liberal or moderate. The sample is liberal leaning in political group identity and in headline selection preference.

Participants were asked to report how realistic they felt the headlines were in this study compared to headlines they have seen in the real world. On average, participants felt that the headlines were somewhat realistic ($M = 3.78$). Only one participant did not answer this question ($n = 1$).

We tested to see if there was a relationship between participants whose *Political Group Identity* was Moderate and selecting *Clickbait Headlines* about Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. In order to analyze *H1a-H1b* we coded the dependent variable *Political Group Alignment* as 1 = "Moderate" and 0 = "Not Moderate" and we also coded *Headline Selection* as 1 = "Hillary Clinton or Trump Clickbait Headline Selected" and 0 = "Other Headline" in order to make the supported hypotheses more intuitively interpretable. Since the independent variable (*Political Group Alignment)* was categorical and the dependent variable (*Headline Selection*) was also categorical, a chi square analysis was run to test this research question.

Results of the chi-square test indicated there was no relationship between *Moderate Political Group Alignment* and selecting *Clickbait Headlines about Hillary*

Clinton or *Donald Trump* (See Table 2 on pg. 45). These Selective Exposure Theory hypotheses were not supported.

We tested to see if there were correlations between *Political Issue Attitudes* and *Traditional Headline Selection.* In order to analyze *H2a-H6b* we coded the dependent variable *Headline Selection* as traditional conservative headline = 1 and both of the other headlines as 0 when we were testing hypotheses regarding conservative participants. We coded the traditional liberal headline as 1 and both of the other headlines as 0 when we were testing hypotheses regarding liberal participants. We did this in order to make the hypotheses more intuitively interpretable. Since the independent variable (*Political Issue Attitude*) was continuous and the dependent variable (*Headline Selection*) was coded dichotomously, Biserial Correlations were run with a significant correlation indicating that greater agreement with liberal positions chose more liberal headlines.

Results of the Biserial Correlations indicated that there were significant positive associations between Liberal Attitudes towards Support for a given political issue and selecting a headline that was liberal leaning. There were also significant positive associations between conservative attitudes towards Support for a given political issue and selecting conservative traditional headlines, although there were 2 exceptions to this pattern of results. Specifically, results suggested that Selecting Headlines about Stricter Immigration did not correlate with its corresponding Liberal or Conservative Attitude (See Table 3 on pg. 46). Therefore, these hypotheses predicting Selective exposure were almost unanimously supported.

We tested to see if there were correlations between levels of *Stretching* and *Embracing Curiosity* and *Clickbait Headline Selection*. In order to analyze *H7a-H7b* we

coded the dependent variable *Headline Selection* as 1 = "Clickbait Headline Selected"

and 0 = "Other Headline Selected". Since the independent variable (*Stretching* and

Embracing Curiosity) were continuous and the dependent variable (*Headline Selection*)

was categorical, Point Biserial Correlations were run to test these hypotheses with

significant correlations indicating higher levels of curiosity would associate to more

Clickbait selection.

Results of the Point Biserial Correlations indicated that there were only 2

significant relationships between these two variables. There was a significant positive

correlation between high levels of *Embracing Curiosity* and *Clickbait* regarding Raising

Minimum Wage. There was also a significant negative correlation between high levels of

Stretching Curiosity and selecting *Clickbait* about Abortion (See Table 4 on pg. 47).

Despite these two significant results, the data do not generally show a relationship

between these variables. These hypotheses for Information Gap Theory were not

supported.

We tested to see if there was a relationship between *Age* and *Clickbait Headline

Selection*. In order to analyze *RQ1* we coded the dependent variable *Headline Selection*

as 1 = "Clickbait Headline Selected" and 0 = "Other Headline Selected" to make the

supported analyses more intuitively interpretable. Since the independent variable (*Age*)

was continuous and the dependent variable (*Headline Selection*) was categorical, Point

Biserial Correlations were run to test this research question.

Results of the point biserial correlation indicated that there was a significant

positive association between Age and Selecting Clickbait Headlines about Minimum

Wage (See Table 5 on pg. 47). The remaining six point biserial analyses revealed no significant relationships between these variables.

We tested to see if there was a relationship between *Sex* and *Clickbait Headline Selection*. In order to analyze *RQ2* we coded the dependent variable *Headline Selection* as 1 = "Clickbait Headline Selected" and 0 = "Other Headline Selected" to make the supported analyses more intuitively interpretable. Since the independent variable (*Sex)* was categorical and the dependent variable (*Headline Selection*) was also categorical, a chi square analysis was run to test this research question.

A chi-square test was performed to examine the relation between *Sex* and *Selecting Clickbait Headlines about Supporting Universal Healthcare*. The relationship between these variables was significant (See Table 6 on pg. 48). Females were more likely to select clickbait headlines about support for Universal Healthcare than were males. The remaining six chi-square analyses showed no significant relationship between *Sex* and *Clickbait Headline Selection*.

Finally, we wanted to test to see if eliminating certain headline selections would alter the correlations we ran for *H2a-H6b*. Given that Selective Exposure Theory predicts that participants will click headlines that are attitude consistent, participants should never select a headline that directly conflicts with their biases. For example, H4b tested to see if strong conservative political bias about abortion correlated with conservative traditional headlines about abortion. We coded "conservative headline selected" as 1 and the other two headlines (liberal traditional headlines and clickbait) as 0. In order to more explicitly test Selective Exposure, we decided to remove the "traditional liberal headline selected" from the data completely, to see if it gave clickbait a better chance at disrupting the

correlation between conservative bias and conservative headline. That is, we pitted the

Selective Exposure prediction solely and directly against Information Gap (i.e., selecting

clickbait). The retested *H4b* without the "liberal headlines selected" resulted in a

significant correlation of $r(91) = .35$, $p = .01$. Note that this is identical to the results from

the original *H4b* results even with the adjusted sample size (see table 2). Removing the

most counter-intuitive headline selections from the data doesn't appear to alter the

statistical relationships between *Political Issue Attitudes* and *Traditional Headline*

Selection. Thus, we did not investigate this relationship among the remaining topics.

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to challenge Selective Exposure Theory by giving politically biased individuals a chance to contradict their views and pursue curiosity impulses by selecting clickbait. These contradictions would have supported Lowerstein's Information Gap Theory. But based on the results of this study, we see no evidence that supports Information Gap Theory in this manner, at least in the area of political leanings and politically charged clickbait titles. Instead, we see strong correlations that support biased-inform media selection. In line with what we might expect with Selective Exposure Theory, participants who held stronger liberal beliefs tended to select traditional liberal headlines and participants who held stronger conservative beliefs tended to select traditional conservative headlines. All but two of the correlations calculated between *Political Issue Attitudes* and liberal/conservative *Headline Selection* were significant. The remaining two were not significant, but they did fit the overall correlational trend of the data. From these results, we do not see any significant evidence that supports curiosity over-powering biases.

We also wanted to test if people who were more naturally curious would be more likely to select clickbait, thus providing support for Information Gap Theory. Both scales for measuring *Stretching Curiosity* and *Embracing Curiosity* were found to be reliable. Despite this, there were no correlations between curiosity levels, in both *Stretching* and *Embracing Curiosity* and *Clickbait Selection* that would have supported Information Gap Theory. In fact, the only significant relationship was between *Stretching Curiosity* and *Selecting Clickbait Headlines* regarding *Being Pro-Choice*, and this correlation was

negative. It is possible that abortion is such a contentious issue, that no amount of curiosity can overpower biased opinions about it. However, since it doesn't fit the trend of the other correlations in this hypothesis, it might be type 1 error to accept it as significant. There was also a significant positive correlation between *Embracing Curiosity* and *Clickbait Headline Selection* regarding Raising Minimum Wage but it was also not consistent with the other results. Overall, it appears that Information Gap Theory was not supported.

In addition, we tested to see if there was a relationship between *Age* and *Clickbait Selection.* Older people were more likely to select clickbait about minimum wage, but the remaining six analyses showed no correlation between these two variables. Ultimately, there was no relationship between *Age* and *Clickbait Selection*. Finally we tested to see if there was a relationship between *Sex* and *Clickbait Selection*. Overall there was no relationship between these two variables. 6 of the 7 chi-square calculations between *Sex* and *Clickbait Headline Selection* showed no relationship. The seventh relationship showed that women selected clickbait headlines about Universal Healthcare significantly more than males, but this does not reflect the lack of a general relationship between these variables. Overall, there was no significant relationship between *Sex* and *Clickbait Headline Selection.*

Finally, we thought that eliminating the most unlikely of headline selections from the hypotheses *H2a-H6b* could change the relationship between *Political Issue Attitudes* and *Traditional Headline Selection*. It may have given clickbait selection a better chance at altering the significant correlation between these specific variables. However, our results were identical to the original results from hypothesis *H4b*. We expected this to be

the case for the rest of these hypotheses if adjusted in the same manner. It is possible that, for example, not a single person who had a conservative attitude toward being pro-life selected a liberal headline and vice versa. It is also possible that the correlation was so strong that it simply wasn't changed by the shrinking sample size.

<div align="center">Theoretical Implications</div>

The results of this research showed strong support for Selective Exposure Theory within the specific context of political media selection. Selective Exposure Theory has been strongly supported for decades since its inception and this research does not contradict these findings. Perhaps because politics is a very contentious subject for many people, and because of the current political climate, we tend to be set in our ways and look for media that reinforces our beliefs—especially regarding politics. When we do come into contact with media that we disagree with, we often reject it. We tend to visit the same media sources that we are comfortable with and ignore other sources. This study supports the findings in the literature that liberals tend to select liberal media and conservatives tend to select conservative media (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014). Even if we feel curiosity, when coming into contact with clickbait or media with contradictory views, bias can override those impulses and lead us to select media we are familiar with. As the echo-chambers of the internet become larger and a greater part of people's lives and the less time we spend coming into contact with opposing views, our biases may become even stronger. The polarization of the political discourse in the U.S (for example) continues to grow in 2019. It is possible that moving into the future, the bias-serving media selection described in Selective Exposure Theory could be magnified even further.

The results of this research showed no support for Information Gap Theory. Within the context of this research in political media, it appears that more often than not, curiosity impulses stimulated by clickbait are not enough to persuade consumers to select media that might counter their political biases. The results suggested that there weren't even significant statistical relationships between higher levels of Stretching and Embracing Curiosity and selecting clickbait. This contradiction might suggest that clickbait might not actually be a good stimulant for curiosity. However, it is more likely the case that clickbait fairs much better in entertainment news and performs much more poorly in political news. In 2016, about 25% of article titles in "broadcast" (political) news were clickbait and about 60% of article titles in "unreliable" (entertainment) news were clickbait (Rony et al, 2017).

Additionally, there is a significant body of research that indicates people are less rational in their decision-making than we initially thought. However, risk aversion still plays an important role in decision making. It makes sense that the decision to pursue gaps in information is easier when there appears to be little or no risk. When people select clickbait articles from entertainment news, there is almost no risk. The news may be inconsequential, exaggerated or even just unreliable gossip, but ultimately no harm to the consumer. In contrast, selecting clickbait about political news may lead to the consumer being exposed to conflicting ideas and information that may be offensive. The double-edged nature of pursuing curiosity could also explain why highly curious people didn't tend to select clickbait. On the one hand, intellectual and experiential curiosity and flexibility are generally personality traits we celebrate. But on the other hand, pursuing curiosity impulses on things like clickbait might be seen as foolish or a

waste of time. No one wants to feel like they have been tricked or their time wasted. With enough negative experiences with clickbait consumers may start to shy away from clicking on them. Curiosity will always play a role in human learning, taking risks and trying new experiences. It is likely that in the future, Information Gap Theory will work hand in hand with Selective Exposure Theory. It could be used to explain human decision making when bias isn't the motivator.

<div align="center">Limitations/Future Research</div>

This research shows strong support for Selective Exposure Theory and virtually no support for Information Gap Theory. There are many reasons for why this design might not have been the best way to study the phenomena of clickbait in online political news selection. There are many limitations and ways to improve this type of research in the future.

The primary limitations stem from the use of Qualtrics to survey participants. The review of the literature suggests that clickbait and other internet born communication phenomena are known to be especially effective, because of how they utilize and interact on the medium. Simply put, the survey format may not be a sufficiently natural or realistic representation of clickbait or internet news. Stacking clickbait headlines directly up against explicit, traditional news headlines, addressing the same political topic, may have been too unnatural. People may be able to see more clearly, the risks involved in selecting potential clickbait, when *better* more traditional alternatives are immediately available. In natural on-line situations, clickbait appears alone, not typically contrasted with other headlines. Thus, clickbait may be appealing as a stand-alone choice. It may appear less-so, or less socially desirable, when paired with "serious" headlines. Future

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studies should embed clickbait in other internet searches and track clicks in order to truly and more naturally test its appeal.

Clickbait also comes in many forms. Social media, Google search results and sites like YouTube all have unique formats of clickbait. Future versions of this study will need to find ways to allow participants to interact more naturally with a greater variety of internet headlines. Instead of using surveys, future research may use actual web pages with pop-ups, images and thumbnails to assist in advertising clickbait in a more real-world setting, and pair that with survey research to assess likely predictors or both selective exposure and of information gap theories.

We also did not use images or thumbnails to accompany the headlines which are very common online. Thumbnails are images that accompany a link to an article or video. Thumbnails are often the first thing people see when they encounter an article or video and can often make or break their decision to click (North, 2017). In the future, including thumbnails could enhance the attention grabbing, curiosity stimulating potential of regular clickbait headlines.

This research may have also suffered from response bias, specifically social desirability bias. Social desirability bias is the tendency of participants to answer survey questions in ways that might seem more socially acceptable at the expense of answering honestly (Nederhof, 1985). Participants who have been disappointed by clickbait in the past or who were aware of its dubious nature may have avoided selecting it despite their interest in it. If the participants sensed there was any kind of social stigmatization around clickbait, they might have avoided it. The average age of the participants was 31. Since the literature confirms that younger people consume more of their news online and have

probably experienced clickbait more than any other age demographic, it is likely that they could be the least susceptible group to selecting clickbait. Perhaps clickbait will become even more normalized and ubiquitous in the future and people will become less sensitive to it. The sample for this study came from volunteers only. Since participants were volunteering they may have cared more and thought more critically about their responses to the survey. More casual participation from participants could have yielded different results, especially amongst clickbait selection.

Additionally, the internet news market doesn't operate as a zero sum game. This survey was designed to allow participants to choose one headline over another, but did not allow them to click more than one headline on the same topic. Often times, when we are looking for information on the internet, we have the freedom to sift through dozens of articles with ease, looking for the article that suits us best. Getting the first click might be important for content developers, but consumers always have the option to back out and search for an alternative source of information. When the decision is less "severe" they can peruse online news more casually, which could ultimately lead to more consumption of clickbait. Future versions of this research may include options for selecting multiple headlines at once.

One final limitation of this research was that it was difficult to define and differentiate "Traditional News" and "Casual News". The Center of Media Literacy describes how the relationship between news media and entertainment media has slowly become intertwined since the 1970s and 1980s (Hallin, 1990). The gradual rolling back of regulations and standards has allowed media outlets to alter their business models to widen their reach of consumers (Hallin, 1990). The internet has allowed media outlets

who advertise and use entertainment to boost revenues and get a leg up on other more traditional news outlets on television and in print by sensationalizing their headlines. Consumers may prioritize certain kinds of news over others. For instance, media surrounding highly contentious issues like politics may lead consumers to select news with greater conscientiousness and bias, while entertainment news may be consumed more casually. For example, headlines about abortion policy might generate more contentious opinions and more scrutinized headline selection than the average story about Kim Kardashian. Clickbait most likely fairs better when it is used to advertise entertainment (casual) news over political news. Further research about the differences between entertainment news and political news, as the lines between them become blurred, could lead to better headlines and advertising materials.

In conclusion, improved versions of this research could have greater implications on media selection theories in the future. Learning more about how curiosity impacts decision-making behaviors and about how consumers interact with advertising materials like clickbait, could lead to an increase of mainstream influence of theories like Information Gap Theory. Further research could also lead to adjustments of Selective Exposure Theory. Adjustments to this theory could lead to a more nuanced understanding of the decision making process when consumers choose against their biases.

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Table 1

Headline Selection Totals & Percentages

Headline	Traditional Conservative	Traditional Liberal	Clickbait
Stricter Gun Control	28 (16.9%)	95 (57.2%)	43 (25.9%)
Universal Healthcare	55 (33.1%)	58 (34.9%)	53 (31.9%)
Raise Minimum Wage	26 (15.7%)	75 (45.2%)	65 (39.2%)
Pro-Choice	54 (32.5%)	79 (47.6%)	33 (19.9%)
Stricter Immigration	47 (28.3%)	40 (24.1%)	78 (47%)
Hillary Clinton	59 (35.5%)	67 (40.4%)	39 (23.5%)
Donald Trump	40 (24.1%)	58 (34.9%)	67 (40.4%)

Table 2

Clickbait Headline Selection and Moderate Political Group Alignment Chi Squares

Clickbait Headline	Pearson Coefficient	P Value	Total % Moderate/Not Moderate
Hillary Clinton	$\chi 2(1, N = 165) = .33$	$p = .57$	Not Mod(15.9%)/Mod(7.9%)
Donald Trump	$\chi 2(1, N = 165) = 1.32$	$p = .25$	Not Mod(23.8%)/Mod(17.1%)

Table 3

Traditional Headline Selection and *Political Issue Attitude* Correlations

Political Issue Attitude	Pearson Coefficient	P Value
Liberal Headline Selection		
Stricter Gun Control	$r(164) = .13$	$p = .08$
Universal Healthcare	$r(164) = .30$	$p = .01*$
Raise Minimum Wage	$r(164) = .18$	$p = .05*$
Pro-Choice	$r(164) = .26$	$p = .01*$
Stricter Immigration	$r(164) = .12$	$p = .120$
Conservative Headline Selection		
Stricter Gun Control	$r(164) = .19$	$p = .05*$
Universal Healthcare	$r(164) = .21$	$p = .01*$
Raise Minimum Wage	$r(164) = .17$	$p = .05*$
Pro-Choice	$r(164) = .35$	$p = .01*$
Stricter Immigration	$r(164) = .14$	$p = .115$

** Political issue attitudes were coded so that higher numbers equaled greater support for typically liberal/ conservative positions on each topic for their respective hypotheses**

Table 4

Clickbait Headline Selection and Stretching and Embracing Curiosity Correlations

Clickbait Headline	Pearson Coefficient	P Value
Stretching Curiosity		
Stricter Gun Control	r(164) = .01	p = .946
Universal Healthcare	r(164)= -.12	p = .141
Raise Minimum Wage	r(164)= -.06	p = .470
Pro-Choice	r(164)= -.21	p = .01*
Stricter Immigration	r(164)= .03	p = .727
Hillary Clinton	r(164) = .12	p = .118
Donald Trump	r(164) = .04	p = .613
Embracing Curiosity		
Stricter Gun Control	r(164) = .08	p = .318
Universal Healthcare	r(164) = .06	p = .472
Raise Minimum Wage	r(164) = .19	p = .014*
Pro-Choice	r(164) = .05	p = .523
Stricter Immigration	r(164) = -.02	p = .783
Hillary Clinton	r(164) = .06	p = .400
Donald Trump	r(164) = -.05	p = .512

Table 5

Clickbait Headline Selection and Age

Clickbait Headline	Pearson Coefficient	P Value
Stretching Curiosity		
Stricter Gun Control	r(149) = .08	p = .307
Universal Healthcare	r(149)= -.03	p = .675
Raise Minimum Wage	r(149)= .31	p = .01*
Pro-Choice	r(149)= -.07	p = .364
Stricter Immigration	r(149)= -.03	p = .720
Hillary Clinton	r(149) = -.07	p = .404
Donald Trump	r(149) = -.16	p = .059

Table 6

Clickbait Headline Selection and Sex Chi Square

Clickbait Headline	Pearson Coefficient	P Value	Total % Male/Female
Stricter Gun Control	$\chi2(1, N = 165) = 1.52$	$p = .210$	M(6.0%)/F(19.9%)
Universal Healthcare	$\chi2(1, N = 165) = 3.64$	$p = .05^*$	M(6.6%)/F(25.3%)
Raise Minimum Wage	$\chi2(1, N = 165) = .46$	$p = .496$	M(10.8%)/F(28.3%)
Pro-Choice	$\chi2(1, N = 165) = .62$	$p = .438$	M(7.2%)/F(12.7%)
Stricter Immigration	$\chi2(1, N = 165) = 1.10$	$p = .293$	M(12.7%)/F(34.5%)
Hillary Clinton	$\chi2(1, N = 165) = .66$	$p = .410$	M(6.1%)/F(17.6%)
Donald Trump	$\chi2(1, N = 165) = .01$	$p = .921$	M(12.7%)/F(21.9%)

CURRICULUM VITAE

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EDUCATION
Wake Forest University   May 2019
Master of Arts in Communication | 3.85 GPA

Linfield College   May 2017
Bachelor's Degree in Communication Arts, Minor in Spanish | 3.4 GPA
Study Abroad Program – Costa Rica (August 2015-December 2015)

COMMUNITY SERVICE
- Homeless Gear Supply Store Volunteer, Fort Collins, Colorado   2014-2017
- Karate Dojo Assistant, San Ramon, Costa Rica
        September 2015 - December 2015
- Community Pride Day Volunteer, City of Surprise, Arizona   2008 - 2013

AWARDS
Linfield College: 3x Dean's List Recipient; 2x Division III Track and Field National Champion; 3x All American, and 6x Northwest Conference Champion; Willow Canyon High School: Cesar Chavez Leadership Award