

Easing Political Digestion: The Effects of News Curation on Citizens' Behavior

Emily Sydnor, Ph.D¹

Southwestern University

Danielle Psimas, B.A.

University of Virginia

Keywords: new media, political learning, experiment, online journalism, curation

The contemporary media environment is rife with choices, especially format and delivery system. We focus on “curated news:” a collection of links delivered to one’s inbox, phone, or RSS feed. These digests vary in the extent to which they contextualize the information they present. Some offer headlines with links to the full article, while others summarize and interpret the story for the reader. Using a survey experiment, we vary the amount of contextualization present in a set of curated links to test the effects of curation on citizens’ recall of information, their interest in politics, and their search for information.

We thank the Political Psychology Working Group at the University of Virginia for their funding of and feedback on this project. We would especially like to recognize Arthur Beckman, Paul Freedman, Nicole Pankiewicz, Emily Pears, and Ariadne Vromen for their feedback and suggestions. A previous version of this paper was presented at the 2015 Political Communication pre-conference to the American Political Science Association’s Annual Meeting and the 2016 Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting.

¹ Corresponding author. Mail: 1001 E. University Ave. SU Box 7387 Georgetown, TX 78626.
Email: sydnore@southwestern.edu

Introduction

In 2010, 41 percent of Americans reported that their primary source of political information is the Internet; this percentage has continued to climb. But where on the Internet are these citizens getting their news? Many studies of online news consumption have focused on the role of social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook, as a portal to online news sites (Barthel, 2015; Mitchell, 2013; Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, & Verba, 2012). More recently, the Pew Research Center and others have begun to focus on whether online news outlets are getting more of their Internet traffic from consumers on mobile devices or their desktop computers. This research is a step towards unpacking the black box that is consumption of Internet news.

In this paper, we explore another way in which Internet news consumers might receive information online: through a curated aggregation of news stories. While curation describes a broad swath of internet product—anything from a Twitter user’s compilation and recommendation of multiple articles from multiple sources to his followers to an email digest of the 10 “most important” *New York Times* stories on politics—it can be summarized as the “production, selection, filtering, annotation or framing of content” (Thorson & Wells, 2015).

This focus on paring the news down to just a few major stories is in some ways reminiscent of the heyday of the nightly network news, when trusted anchors took thirty minutes to present the most important stories of the day. However, our focus also highlights one of the greatest concerns of the modern media environment: with so many sources to choose from, citizens can select sources that reinforce their views, limiting their exposure to alternative viewpoints. Using an online survey experiment, we ascertain the extent to which our participants use curated media products, then examine how annotation and framing choices within the curated product—specifically the tone and

presence of editorial content—influence individuals' interest in what they are reading, their desire for more information, and their behavior within the curated environment.

We find that while the level of curation has no effect on participants' positive feelings towards the issues or presentation style, it does play a role in two major components of the news consumption experience. First, as we move from a treatment that is simply an aggregation of links to one that contains extensive editorial content, including a summary of the issues and analysis explaining the issues' context and importance, we reveal that participants are less likely to click on the links to the original news sources. However, while participants in the fully curated condition are not reading the original news source, they are recalling more factual knowledge about the issues than those who were only provided links to the original articles. These findings raise concerns about the agenda-setting powers of curated news, as well as the economics of page-view and click-through advertising.

What is curation?

Around 2010, news media professionals reflecting on the evolution of their industry began applying and popularizing the term “curation” within the context of journalism (Guerrini, 2013; Rosenbaum, 2013; Sternberg, 2011; West & Stone, 2014). Broadly, the term was used to refer to the careful selection and distribution of news from around the Web in an easily accessible format – such as a Twitter feed, a morning email newsletter, or a list featured on a news outlet's website – for an audience interested in specific topics.

Such curation was – and continues to be – conceived by news media professionals as an opportunity to add value by simplifying news consumption. News media professionals recognized that the decline of traditional news packages – such as the newspaper – had forced consumers to more actively search for news that is relevant and useful to them and had caused them to experience increased stress. For instance, Steven Rosenbaum, the author of two books on content curation and the

founder of a video curation platform, asserts that “the sheer volume of undifferentiated content has made it nearly impossible for mere mortals to find useful, thoughtful, contextual content on the Web” (Rosenbaum, 2013).

Given this situation, news media professionals argue that curation – by filtering and re-packaging the news – could make it easier for consumers to find information. Just as Iyengar once characterized television news as “essentially a twenty-one minute ‘headline service,’” curated products offer content deemed relevant or interesting by a particular actor (Iyengar, 1991: 14). Curators direct consumers to the content they want and need. Josh Sternberg, a freelance writer and the content strategist for the *Washington Post*, argues that curation could be a crucial service to the overloaded citizen. He writes that “having a trusted human editor to help sort out all this information has become as necessary as those who file the initial report” (Sternberg, 2011) Darrell West, the Founding Director of the Center for Technology Innovation at the Brookings Institute, lends credence to this claim, arguing that the media could create curated products that direct citizens’ attention to the information that social scientists think they need: “more insightful, well-reported, and diverse news stories” (West & Stone, 2014). As Thorson and Wells explain, curation “focuses on the way content is *promoted*—highlighting and drawing out what is most valuable from an otherwise unmanageable flood of messages” (2015: 6).

Although curation has been an important topic of discussion among journalists for several years, the literature on curation and its effects is still quite fluid. This fluidity extends to definitions of the term: news media professionals use it to refer to a range of distinctive yet fundamentally related actions. Thorson and Wells offer one of the clearest articulations of the concept, arguing that curation is “the production, selection, filtering, annotation, or framing of content” (2015: 2). They identify five sets of curating actors: journalists, strategic actors like campaign coordinators, algorithms, social networks, and individual citizens. In many ways, these actors produce different curated products, using different

guidelines for selecting content, strategies for filtering content, and perspectives as the central framing devices. However, there are also many areas of overlap across actors. Our experiment focuses on the presence of supplementary editorial content in curated products, an element that can be present in curated products from any actor.

The extent of editorial content integrated into curated products can vary widely both across and within actor typologies. Some scholars argue that a curated product need not contain editorial commentary; an actor can simply create a list of links to news stories (Guallar, 2014). Others, however, argue that without editorial content or context, an amalgamation of links cannot be considered a curated product (McAdams, 2008). These authors insist that curation, by definition, “provides context and analysis” and that it “nearly always adds value through context, relationships, background or impact” (Buttry, 2012; Guerrini, 2013). From this perspective, curation requires more than selecting and organizing a collection of information. It also requires offering one’s own perspective or context.

We disagree that curation, by definition, requires editorial content. Social and algorithmic actors frequently offer a selection of political news without adding context. A friend shares a link on Facebook without commenting about whether they like the content or not. Google News offers a list of links to the latest news on an issue without additional information. Even though neither of these actors is incorporating their own supplementary content, they should still be seen as curating information, filtering an abundant swath of information into a manageable set for the reader to peruse. That being said, editorial content offers context and perspective to the links being shared. We argue that while aggregated sets of links are a form of curation, they offer less information and encourage less interest in political news than curated products replete with editorial analysis. To test this claim, we experimentally manipulate the editorial content provided in a curated product to explore the effects of content on individuals’ preferences, factual recall, and information search behavior.

While the editorial content can vary within types of curation actors, it also looks different across actors. Each actor brings a particular set of norms and agendas to content. Journalistic curators are more likely to base their practices and selection of content on traditional news values—objectivity, newsworthiness, concern for informed democracy—while strategic curation is driven by commercial incentives—maximizing profits or electability (Landerer, 2013; Thorson & Wells, 2015). These different approaches to curation can manifest in the selection of different content or the presence of diverse content (Bakshy, 2012; Bennett, 1998). However, we are particularly interested in how editorial content might change in tone to market the curated product to a particular audience. For example, theSkimm, a email newsletter, argues that it has “redefined the morning routine for female millennials by delivering news and information with a distinctive voice and format...becoming the first company to turn news into a lifestyle brand” (“Jobs — theSkimm,” 2016). What is their “distinctive voice and format?” A snarky, conversational tone combined with plenty of editorial content that provides context and analysis of major news stories. Incivility and outrage in political media increase the entertainment value of communication, but also decrease trust in government and perceptions of government legitimacy. Could different tones of curated content, driven by the norms associated with certain actors, impact readers’ behavior? To test this argument, we vary the tone of the curated product in addition to the presence of editorial content.

Our theoretical argument and contribution hinges on the claim that through the addition of editorial content—humorous or neutral in tone—curated products perform the same agenda-setting and framing functions found in traditional media. Inherent in the definition of curation is the selection and promotion of content, thereby increasing the salience of certain issues for the audience and the ease with which these issues can be retrieved from memory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Scheufele, 2000). Moreover, editorial content serves as a succinct version of a media frame, “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning...[and] suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the

issue” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987: 143). The addition of editorial content not only increases the salience of a particular political issue but also tells them what to think about a particular issue—who the important actors are, why the issue should be on the political agenda, etc. These effects are even more important in the digital age of information overload (Neuman, Guggenheim, Jang, & Bae, 2014; Vargo, Guo, McCombs, & Shaw, 2014). With so much information out there and so many different actors vying for control of the agenda, the ability to articulate political information in a succinct, interesting way carries substantial political capital and has consequences for citizens’ understanding of and engagement with political information.

In summary, curation entails the selection, choice, and filtering of information and can be done by a variety of actors, each with their own set of norms. Curating actors can annotate and frame political information through the addition of editorial content and through the tone in which that content is presented. We experimentally vary each of these two components of the curated product in order to understand the effects of different types of curation on consumers.

Expectations

In exploring the effects of curation, we focus on three different behavioral outcomes: the search for information, recall of facts available in the linked article and curated product, and enjoyment of or interest in future curated news consumption. There are two ways that citizens could look for additional information within our study. They could click on the link to a news story in its original format within the treatment or they could report an interest in learning more about the issues or receiving more curated products after being exposed to the treatment.

In the first case, we expect that when participants are exposed to greater levels of editorial content, they will be less likely to click the links to the original stories. Information-seeking is a costly endeavor; therefore, citizens satisfice in their question for political information (Downs, 1957; Hamilton,

2004). Furthermore, uses and gratification theory suggests that citizens select certain media over others to fulfill certain needs or wants (Downs, 1957; Lasswell, 1948; Papacharissi, 2008). Motivations to use the web include guidance (i.e. help deciding how to vote), entertainment, social utility, and for surveillance—because information is easy to obtain, or to keep up with the main issues of the day (Kaye & Johnson, Thomas J., 2002). The most extensive editorial content offers both a factual summary of the event and editorial analysis, substantially reducing information-seeking costs for the consumer. There is little need for citizens to spend valuable time reading both the curated product and the linked article unless one is particularly interested in the subject matter. Curated products are therefore likely to appeal to those who want to keep up with political news but exert minimal effort to find the best source or glean the most important points from an article.

Click-through Hypothesis: When participants are exposed to greater levels of editorial content, they will be less likely to click the links to the original stories.

However, the reverse should be true for people's interest in consuming more curated news:² if they receive the fully curated treatment, which contains more information and analysis, participants should be more likely to want to see similar presentations in the future. Here, again, the relationship is a utilitarian one; the product with the most editorial content provides the most relevant information with the least effort on the part of the consumer. Increasingly, citizens report that they graze for news, only checking it from time to time, and that they don't particularly like following news (Pew Research Center, 2010). To the extent that curated products delivered to one's inbox or seen through social media or an RSS feed play into these two preferences, they will be more positively received. As editorial content increases in the curated product, individuals have to seek out information across fewer platforms and can check in on news and headlines at their own convenience.

² In future research, we would like to compare those who receive a fully curated product to those who are given the original article and those who must click on the article in order to get all of the relevant information in order to better determine whether curation can provide the same level of issue knowledge as reading an article.

Curation-seeking hypothesis: When participants are exposed to greater levels of editorial content, they will be more interested in receiving similar curated products in the future.

Not only were we interested in whether curation drew people in and encouraged them to seek more information, we also wanted to know whether a curated set of information could educate individuals about political issues just as if they had read the original article. Previous research has focused on the consequences of online news consumption for political knowledge, with some scholars arguing that increased availability of information increases political knowledge (Bimber, 1998; Neuman, 2001; Weber, Loumakis, & Bergman, 2003). Others assert that this “theoretically limitless news hole of up-to-date, mostly raw information” primarily facilitates knowledge acquisition for those who are already interested in politics (Graber, 1996; Johnson & Kaye, 2003: 12; Poindexter & McCombs, 2001). From this perspective, exposure to a set of political links like those found in the control would presumably lead to greater political knowledge among those who are already politically interested, but not those with low interest or attention to politics. Furthermore, Althaus and Tewksbury (2000) find that participants exposed to online news recognize and recall fewer public affairs stories than others who were exposed to print news. They suggest that this difference stems from decreased salience cues in online news. By providing summaries and highlighting the most important elements of certain news stories, curation could counteract this tendency for online news to have fewer salience cues and send clearer signals about what about a particular political issue is important. Therefore, we expected that those who read a curated product with an in-depth summary and analysis would be more informed than those who received only an aggregation of links, even though consumers of the aggregated news could learn the same information by clicking the links provided. The desire for quick, easily accessible news should lead curation to increase participants’ knowledge of an issue.

Recall hypothesis: When participants are exposed to greater levels of editorial content, they will be able to answer more questions about the issues discussed in the original article.

Finally, we draw on research on political humor and soft news to explore the impact of curation tone on behavioral outcomes. While there is some debate over the benefits of satire for political engagement (Becker, 2013; Bennett, 2007; Hart & Hartelius, 2007; Young, 2008), viewers of humorous programs like *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show* reported that they watched the shows primarily for entertainment (Pew Research Center, 2010). Therefore, we expect that participants who are exposed to curated products, particularly those written in a humorous or sarcastic tone, will enjoy consuming this information more than those who receive the more neutral editorial content. Beyond simple entertainment, research by Amy Becker suggests that political humor and satire can increase feelings of efficacy, factual recall and political interest (2011, 2013, 2016). Based on her research, we expect that participants exposed to humorous curation will report a similar increase in their understanding of the information, willingness to share information with their peers, and overall interest in the news they read.

Humorous tone hypothesis: Participants who are exposed to humorous curation will report greater enjoyment of the product, interest in the news, and willingness to share information with their peers.

Sample

The survey experiment was conducted March 23-26, 2015 through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). We restricted our task to people over the age of 18 in the United States who had already had at least 1000 HITs approved by other MTurk requesters. Using these qualifications, we recruited 842 participants and paid fifty cents to each individual who completed the questionnaire. Participants who did not get to the experimental treatment, found about halfway through the survey, were removed from our analysis. Ultimately, the sample of 732³ people presented many of the demographic

³ We lost slightly over 100 participants by removing individuals who were never exposed to the treatment. Because we asked about demographic characteristics at the end of the survey, we cannot pinpoint ways in which these 110 people might look systematically different from those we kept in the analysis. It's possible that they dropped because we were paying comparatively little money for the length of the survey.

characteristics typical of those using Mechanical Turk. It dramatically oversamples Democrats in comparison to Republicans (48 and 14 percent, respectively) and college-educated individuals at the expense of those without a high school diploma or some college experience, while minorities and women are underrepresented in comparison to the national population. Table 1 compares our sample's demographic characteristics to those of the national population as derived from the U.S. Census.

[Table 1 about here]

Like with any non-probabilistic convenience sample, we have concerns about the generalizability of findings from this sample to Americans nationwide. Other research suggests that MTurk samples have limitations similar to those found in other frequently used convenience samples, like college students (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; see Druckman & Kam, 2011; Sears, 1986 for concerns about student samples). That being said, respondents recruited through Mechanical Turk tend to be more representative of the U.S. population than similar in-person samples, suggesting that findings drawn from samples of MTurk workers are also likely to occur in other groups (Berinsky et al., 2012). Even in the context of Mechanical Turk's limitations, therefore, the demographic diversity of the participants allows us to examine greater variation across groups of people than we could get from a student sample in a laboratory. Beyond this, it also offers a more computer- and internet-savvy sample, giving us a better sense of how curation works among people who are already familiar with getting news content online.

Experimenting with Variation in Curation

Each participant began by answering several questions about their frequency and type of media usage, political participation, and interest in politics. They then saw the following introductory text: "On the following screen, you'll be presented with a series of news stories. Please read the information on the screen. You are then welcome to click on as many or as few of the links as you wish. You will then

be asked to provide some feedback.” After these instructions, participants were randomly assigned to one of five experimental treatments representing different levels and styles of curation. If they were assigned the control, they saw links to two articles—one on net neutrality and one on President Obama’s veto of the Keystone XL pipeline—with no additional information. The other four treatments varied along two dimensions: tone and summary depth. Two treatments provided a basic summary of the issues discussed in the linked articles, while the other two went into more detail about the background and significance of the issues. The information could either be conveyed in a neutral or humorous tone. In other words, participants could receive a set of links with no additional information (control), a neutral summary, a humorous summary, a neutral in-depth summary or a humorous in-depth summary. The full set of treatments can be found in Appendix 1.

The treatments were designed to reflect the types of curation typically seen in, for example, a curated email digest in order to maximize the ecological validity of the treatments. The humorous treatments used a style similar to that of theSkimm, a daily email newsletter (www.theskimm.com), while the neutral treatments mimic the *Washington Post*’s “Read In” or the Daily Beast’s “Cheat Sheet” (www.thedailybeast.com/cheats). Similarly, the variation in length reflects variation across actual curated products. The *New York Times*’ “First Draft on Politics” email newsletter offers a multi-paragraph summary of the political news of the day, replete with relevant links, while individuals who curate political information using Twitter are limited to a brief summary by the platform’s 140-character limit. The tone and depth of editorial content vary across curated products, regardless of who is doing the curation. Each of our treatments mimics the length and style of real curated news products.

When selecting the topics for the experiment, we searched for issues that were timely and relevant during the period in which the experiment was conducted, but that individuals were less likely to be following closely. We wanted participants to feel as if the treatment were mirroring current news products in order to increase the experiment’s realism. However, given our interest in knowledge

acquisition, we were also worried about ceiling effects; if citizens had already learned about the issues outside of the experimental treatment, it would bias our results and make it difficult to detect differences stemming from the treatment (for a discussion of pretreatment effects in political communication, see Druckman & Leeper, 2012). While there are no clear data available about the extent of coverage of the net neutrality and Keystone veto during the month before the experiment, there is evidence that the two issues were covered at similar rates⁴ and that the majority of our participants had not been following either issue very closely. One quarter of the participants reported closely following net neutrality, while only 15 percent stated that they had been closely following the Keystone XL debate. A paired t-test of attention to the two issues does suggest that participants paid slightly more attention to net neutrality than they did to the Keystone XL veto ($\bar{x}_{key} = 1.94, \bar{x}_{net} = 2.11$, two-tailed $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, attention to the two topics is only moderately correlated with reported political interest ($r = 0.55$ and $r = 0.40$ for net neutrality and Keystone veto, respectively). Both of these relationships are statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. Focusing on only the most interested participants, we find no statistically significant difference in attention across the two issues ($\bar{x}_{key} = 2.31, \bar{x}_{net} = 2.30$, two-tailed $p = 0.86$). In other words, people who have a lot of interest in (and therefore motivation to learn about) political events were just as likely to pay attention to the issues surrounding the Keystone XL veto as they were to the FCC's net neutrality decision.

Given that curated media products seek to highlight the major stories of the day, it is possible that the stories featured in our treatments were less well known to the readers than the average curated story. This concern would bias both the control and the treatments in the same directions, but shouldn't affect the differences between the control and treatments. For example, if participants are less interested in net neutrality than they would be in the average curated news story, they might be

⁴ Searches for "net neutrality" and "Keystone XL" in the LexisNexis Academic newspaper database between February 20, 2015 and March 23, 2015 produce approximately 774 and 748 results, respectively.

less likely to click through to the original story, regardless of whether they only see a link to that story or the full curated product. This relationship suggests that it would be useful to replicate this experiment with other issues, but also that there is no cause for concern that these treatments might produce results that are systematically different from those produced by other issues.

Evaluating the Impact of Curation

While participants were experiencing the treatments, we collected information about whether they clicked on either of the two links available in all five conditions. After they clicked through the treatment page, participants were then asked several sets of questions designed to assess their factual recall of the issues discussed in the treatments and the extent to which they liked or disliked the curated product. From these three sets of data we could assess our expectations for curation's effects on information search, factual recall, and news interest.

Specifically, we coded for the number of links each participant clicked in the process of reading the treatments. This data was transformed into three variables—whether they clicked on the link for the net neutrality article or on the link for the Keystone XL veto article (two separate dummy variables) and a measure of whether they clicked on any links, where a one indicated that they had clicked on either the Keystone XL or net neutrality link. These variables allow us to determine the extent to which participants wanted more information about the issues after reading the curated treatment.

To measure factual recall, we asked participants a series of questions about both the FCC's net neutrality decision and the Keystone XL pipeline veto. The answers to all the questions were available in the original articles linked in the treatments, as well as in the in-depth analyses (the full editorial content). The shorter summaries contained the answers to one recall question about each issue. In other words, the questions included a mix of information from the short summaries, the long analyses

and the full articles. We created a knowledge score for each participant from the total number of questions answered correctly out of six, as well as subtotals for each issue (a possible three points each).

Finally, we wanted to assess whether a particular summary length or tone engaged readers more than others. We asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with six different statements about their feelings toward the curated material they had just read. These statements included:

- I would like to receive more collections of news reports like this.
- I enjoyed reading this collection of news reports.
- I think that this collection of news reports was easy to understand.
- I think that I have a better understanding of these issues after reading this collection of news reports.
- I feel more interested in these issues after reading this collection of news reports.
- I would share this collection news reports with a friend via email or social media.

Participants' responses to the first statement were considered as an alternative measure of information search; if an individual wants more curated news it is likely they want it so they can get more information, whether about these issues or politics broadly. We also combined responses to all six statements into a single index to measure the extent to which curation encourages individuals to have a more positive association with political news, whether that association is greater enjoyment, interest, or perceived understanding. Like the original measures, the index ranges from -2 to 2, with the negative numbers indicating less engagement or positive associations with the curated product. Cronbach's alpha for the six items is 0.86, suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency and therefore can be considered as an index.

Each relationship was explored using the multiple regression technique most appropriate for each dependent variable. We tested the link between editorial content and information search (the *Click-through* and *Curation-seeking* hypotheses) using both logistic and OLS regressions. As we explain above, click-throughs are a binary outcome—participants either clicked a link or they did not. We ran a logistic regression of treatment condition on participants' decision to click each link. Logistic regression results are not easily interpretable, so we supplement our discussion of these relationships with predicted probabilities of clicking each link, across treatment groups. Because the desire to see more curated news was measured on a Likert scale, the relationship between it and the treatments could be analyzed using OLS regression. For both of these analyses, we controlled for relevant moderators of the relationship between the treatments and outcomes, including participants' prior attention to net neutrality and the Keystone XL pipeline, the frequency with which they consume political information, political interest, and demographic variables like income and education.

We tested the *Recall* and *Humorous tone* hypotheses, which focused on factual recall and interest in the news, using a series of OLS regressions. Each of the outcome variables in these tests was measured using a Likert scale, making OLS an appropriate analytical choice. Like with the information search hypotheses, we controlled for other factors that could potentially explain an individual's knowledge or interest: prior attention, news consumption, political interest and demographics. When testing the relationship between knowledge recall and editorial content, we also controlled for whether an individual had clicked on each of the links available in the news product. This control is particularly important, as individuals who clicked each link had access to the same information as those individuals in the in-depth curation condition. If clicking the links also increased knowledge about the two issues, we would be less persuaded that curation specifically increases factual recall.

Who Uses Curated Products?

Before getting into the effects of curation on political behavior, we were first interested in the extent to which in our sample was already regularly using some form of curated product and which ones they were using. This data provides us with additional ecological validity of our treatments. We were able to determine to what extent individuals reported using the type of news product we were mimicking in our experiment and to what extent the products they reported using varied in their editorial content. Before participants were assigned to an experimental condition, they were asked how frequently they consumed political information, what media they used to get that information, and, if they used a curated product, which form(s) they used.⁵

In 2010, 12 percent of respondents to a Pew Research Center poll reported receiving news through email, while 10 percent regularly used a customized homepage or RSS reader (Pew Research Center, 2010). We imagine that this number has only increased over the past six years. Participants who seek out aggregated and curated news tend to be younger and more educated than the average American, but do not otherwise differ substantially from other internet users (Pew Research Center, 2014). We expect to see similar distributions of preferences and consumption among the participants in our study.

Overall, members of our sample were relatively engaged with politics, with 45 percent reporting that they consumed political news at least once a day. Unsurprisingly, given that we used an internet convenience sample, two-thirds of respondents reported using the internet regularly to get news⁶, while only eight percent reported that they regularly got political news from a print newspaper. These results

⁵ Specific question wording is available in Appendix 2.

⁶ We acknowledge that the distinction should no longer be measured only as the difference between internet and print/television usage, but the usage of internet-only web sources and legacy media sources' web sites. However, for consistency and comparability with other surveys of media use, we wanted to maintain similar question wording.

track with national reports about audience trends, in which social media, internet sources, and television news shows continue to gain a greater share of the audience while newspapers and radio experience a decline (Mitchell, 2015). Focusing on curated products, 31 percent of participants reported regular news aggregator use, while an additional 25 percent said they sometimes read curated news and 27 percent said they did so rarely. As Figure 1 shows, in comparison to other forms of news media, curated products are less popular than every format except radio. In other words, while our sample reports using curated products more frequently than those surveyed by Pew in 2010, they show similar overall patterns of media consumption.

[Figure 1 here]

Overall, 83 percent of participants report using curated products in some capacity. In almost all respects, users of curation look like the sample as a whole; a similar proportion identifies as white, as Republican, as female and the median age of both users and the sample as a whole is 31. People who receive curated news are not significantly more interested in politics than the sample as a whole. However, they are substantially more educated. Only two people who did not receive a high school diploma or equivalent also reported using curated news, while 62 percent of users had a college degree or higher. In comparison, only 51 percent of the sample and 29 percent of the national population has earned at least a college degree.

Participants turn to a range of acquisition methods and sources for their curated political news. When asked how frequently they used different sources of curated information, participants reported the most frequent use of RSS feeds like Feedly or Google News (mean = 1.7, or between “rarely” and “sometimes”), followed by local newspapers or newsmagazines (mean = 1.3). Subscription services like theSkimm or BitofNews were used the least (mean = 0.93, or just below “rarely”). Although they did not use any product very frequently, there is evidence that people use curated products with a variety of

editorial content. These data make us more confident that our experimental treatments are measuring a difference in curated products that participants in our sample likely experienced in their news consumption outside of the study.

Curation's Effects on Information Search

We have argued that curation has specific effects on political behavior in the realms of factual recall, information search, and interest in news. First, we will summarize how presentation of the news material influenced participants' decisions to click the links provided and their reports of whether they would like to receive more curated news reports similar to the one they saw. As the *Click-through hypothesis* states, we expected that when the curated product contained more information, participants would be less likely to click on the links to the original article.

Our experimental results support this hypothesis. As participants received more information through the curated product, they were systematically less likely to click on the links provided as part of that product. No other variable included in the model, including general political interest or prior attention to the issues, reached statistical significance (see Table 2). Furthermore, it is clear from Figure 2 that the primary drop in the likelihood of clicking through to the original article happens in the transition from basic aggregation to summary editorial content. While there is a 52 percent probability that the participants in the control group click at least one link, this probability decreases to 23 percent for members of the summary treatment group and 9 percent for the group receiving the fully curated presentation. From these predicted probabilities, we can conclude that when much of the information about a particular issue is presented as part of the curated product, it becomes far less likely that readers will seek out the initial source of that information.

[Table 2, Figure 3 about here]

While we find support for the *Click-through hypothesis*, the *curation-seeking hypothesis* is not supported. The level of curation affects participants' likelihood of clicking links provided as part of the product, but it does not influence participants' self-reported interest in receiving similar news reports. In fact, the only variable in the model that made an individual more likely to want to receive curated news is the frequency with which they already consumed news about politics (see Table 3). This relationship is perhaps unsurprising, but it is also a relatively small effect; those individuals who consume political news multiple times a day are only one point more likely to report an interest in receiving more curated news than are those who report never looking at political news.

[Table 3 about here]

Curation's Effects on Factual Recall

We have established that curation decreases individuals' likelihood of clicking through to the original news source, so the question then becomes: can curation provide knowledge similar to that gained from reading the original news source? We measured knowledge acquisition through the recall of factual information about the two policy issues included in the treatment, and we hypothesized that a greater level of curation would lead to greater knowledge (the *Recall hypothesis*). The information necessary to answer each of the factual questions used in this analysis was available in the original articles, which were linked in each of the treatments. However, most of the information was also available in the summary treatment and all of it was available in the fully curated product that contained both an in-depth summary and analysis. Because we recorded whether or not individuals clicked on any of the links to the original articles, it is possible to determine the extent to which they learned the information from the treatment or from the original, linked article.

As can be seen in Table 4, clicking the link to either the Keystone XL or net neutrality article did not appear to have an effect on participants' ability to recall factual information about either issue. In

the control condition, where there was no editorial content offered, participants could gain all the answers to the recall questions by clicking on the link. However, people in the control group who clicked either link to the original articles was no better at recalling the factual information than those who didn't click a link. A two-sample t-test of control group members' knowledge scores, using the dummy variable for clicking any of the links, finds no statistical difference between the groups ($p=0.86$, see Figure 3). However, participants steadily improve in their knowledge of the issues when provided with more editorial content.

[Figure 3 about here]

Holding constant other variables that could influence participants' ability to answer questions about net neutrality and the pipeline, exposure to the curated summaries increases participants' scores on the knowledge quizzes by somewhere between a third and two-thirds of a point over those participants who just received a set of aggregated links (the control). When we compare the recipients of fully curated news to the control group, the scores differ by an even greater amount. Receiving the in-depth summary and analysis improves participants' scores by between half a point and over one full point, depending on if we focus on the individual issues or the collective total (see Figure 4). Beyond curation, only participants' education level has a consistent effect on knowledge, and that effect is much smaller than that of curation, ranging from a tenth to a fifth of a point. Hence, the *Recall hypothesis* is supported.

[Table 4, Figure 4 about here]

Curation's Effects on News Interest

We have now established that, compared to a collection of links to news stories, editorial content decreases the likelihood of clicking through to original sources but increases recall of factual

information related to those issues. We also argued that the extent and tone of editorial content would increase individuals' interest in and engagement with curation. In short, the answer is no.

Table 5 demonstrates that the level of curation had no effect on our index of positive engagement with curation. Overall political interest has the strongest effect; each increase in interest produces a little over a tenth of a point in positivity towards the curated product. Similarly, frequency of general political news consumption has a small effect on the extent to which participants report enjoying the curated news stories. Interestingly, the more education participants report having completed, the less positively they view the product.

[Table 5 about here]

While the level of curation had no effect on participants' reported enjoyment, interest, understanding, or willingness to share, these responses might also be affected by the tone of the curated product. We proposed the *Humorous Tone hypothesis*, expecting that presenting editorial content in a humorous manner would improve their enjoyment, interest or willingness to share curated news. As Model 2 in Table 5 shows, we see an almost-statistically significant effect of tone on participants' reported enjoyment ($p < 0.061$), such that curation that is reported in a humorous manner leads to reports of greater enjoyment. However, like the tests of the effects of the level of curation, we see much stronger effects caused by political interest and by self-reported frequency of news consumption. Ultimately, humor seems to play little role in making people feel more positively towards the curated product we offered them.

Discussion

Ultimately, we find support for two out of our three hypotheses. Increased curation decreases the likelihood that individuals will seek out the original source of political information, but it does lead people to recall more information about the issues being discussed. Not only does this raise some

interesting avenues for future research, but it also opens up questions for those interested in the future of journalism, media effects and political behavior.

First, it is important to note that this experiment examines effects on just two political issues. We tried to select political events that were important and interesting but not so well-covered that study participants would have read extensively about them. Most curated products offer summaries of many more than two stories, and we think that, if anything, the inclusion of more stories would make people even less likely to click through to the original stories and more dependent on the curator's summary and analysis to understand what is going on. We have focused on curated summaries that are designed to inform, rather than draw people in. Comparing knowledge acquisition and click-through generated by these informational summaries and the "teaser" summaries that accompany "click-bait" articles could yield different results.

Curation has the potential to exacerbate the media's ability to set the political agenda. Our results suggest that Americans learn or recall a substantial amount of information from curated products. This knowledge is specific to the issues presented in the curated product; if we had selected two different articles, we would expect knowledge about those two issues to increase while recall of the Keystone XL and net neutrality would fade away. Many of these products highlight for readers which stories are most important by using numbering systems, rhetorical questions, and brief analyses to encourage readers to understand why particular issues are important. In other words, selecting an issue for full editorial treatment in a curated product is a signal that the actor doing the curating finds this issue to be more important than others currently circulating in political discourse. Iyengar and Kinder (1988) find that a greater number of television news stories about an issue elevates that issue's importance in the minds of viewers and we expect that the inclusion of issues in a curated product would produce similar results. Further research should explore the extent to which consumers of

curated media are susceptible to agenda-setting and whether curated media tend to focus on a smaller set of “important problems” than those found on other platforms.

Curation is yet another path to news that citizens find agreeable and that news organizations can use to build readership. From this perspective, curation is another venue for partisan selective exposure, which has been shown to lead citizens towards different national priorities and government preferences (Stroud, 2011). Perhaps even more concerning, curation facilitates citizens’ ability to tune out politics all together (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013). For example, individuals who subscribe to *The New York Times* digital news digests can choose whether their daily headlines contain any or all of 12 subjects, one of which is politics. Or they can avoid the news headlines all together by choosing an email update on wellness, science, theater or cooking. We did not give our participants the chance to choose what type of curated information they wanted to receive, but still found strong recall effects. We imagine that offering people the choice of consuming this information or another set of information curated to more accurately represent their interests would only further exacerbate differences in political knowledge and engagement.

Beyond concerns about selective exposure, news consumers’ and producers’ ability to micro-target content reflects what Bennett and Manheim call the “one-step flow” of communication (2006). On the one hand, as they point out, curation and similarly direct messaging can create coherent social groups, enabling people to explore linked topics and build online and face-to-face communities. On the other hand, these new technologies can isolate citizens from the social influence that was once central to their reception and interpretation of media messages. We found that editorial content and tone played a minimal role in shaping citizens’ interest in and engagement with our curated product and political news more generally. But what elements of the product *could* influence interest and engagement? As scholars explore the relationship between central components of curation and individual interest, curated products could be designed in ways that encourage engagement and

community-building. Much of this sort of interconnectedness is already happening through social curation (Rainie et al., 2012) but could be explored and improved by other actors.

Our study offers a ray of hope for those who worry about the decline of citizens' engagement in political activity. These findings also indicate that curation could be a way to get typically-uninterested groups of people engaged with political news. While the level of curation has little effect on factual recall or a participant's likelihood of clicking on links, education does influence respondents' reported willingness to share the curated product with others; those with less education report a more positive overall experience with curated information. When comparing political interest and media consumption across levels of educational attainment, we frequently see that those who are the least educated are also the least interested and engaged. This reported willingness to read and share curated news suggests that this media format may be a way to draw in marginalized groups. Increased targeting of the curated product to groups' interests could lead to the same effect across other demographic characteristics like race, age, and gender.

While curation has the potential to affect political behavior, it also raises concerns about the economic survival of online journalism. Some curated products are created by news agencies that also write the articles being presented; for example, the *New York Times'* First Draft on Politics links to articles written by *New York Times* staffers. Others, however, are collections of stories from around the Internet, providing one link to the *New York Times* and another to *Huffington Post*. If, as our results suggest, providing a summary in the curated product reduces readers' likelihood of ever going to the original, linked story, curation is reducing page views and clicks that drive internet advertising.

Beyond financial implications, these findings suggest an increasingly important role for the editorial curator as a media professional. The rise of blogs, aggregators, and social media have opened up a debate about journalistic professionalism: specifically, who can call themselves a journalist, how

reporting is different from aggregation, and what characterizes newsroom expertise (Anderson, 2013; Singer, 2003). One strand of research into journalistic professionalism focuses on the skills deployed by journalists. From this perspective, journalistic expertise requires “a special skill in the manipulation of symbols” (Carey, 1997: 132) and a “professional logic of control over content” (Lewis, 2012:26). As newsrooms continue to make cuts to their workforce and streamline production, the ability of journalists to synthesize content in an interesting and entertaining way becomes an invaluable skill that aligns nicely with this skills-based understanding of journalistic expertise. It also lends journalists and their employers increasing power. The editorial component of curated news introduces a range of directions in which news professionals could steer content. It can be one-dimensional, partisan and uncritical of those in power, or it can offer nuanced analysis or alternative perspectives that engage groups traditionally uninterested in political news. We can already see some of the ways in which news organizations are presenting curated products across media platforms in an attempt to engage different demographics. For example, CNN offers video clips and news summaries to Snapchat users, the majority of whom are in their teens and early twenties.

It is no longer enough to ask respondents whether they get their news from the internet, as this can mean so many different things: audio, visual or written word, traditional journalistic style or opinionated analysis, short blog posts or long form magazine-style articles. Curated media products capture many of the advantages of digital political communication. In the ideal, they are easily accessible, short pieces that link to stories selected by professionals because of their strong reporting or particular relevance to the audience. These information “bites” have the potential to improve citizen political awareness and competence. Unpacking each of these components, exploring how they function across curating actors, and understanding their effects on political behavior are important for the future of political communication research.

Works Cited

- Althaus, S. L., & Tewksbury, D. (2000). Patterns of Internet and Traditional News Media Use in a Networked Community. *Political Communication*, 17(1), 21–45.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/105846000198495>
- Anderson, C. (2013). What aggregators do: Towards a networked concept of journalistic expertise in the digital age. *Journalism*, 14(8), 1008–1023.
- Arceneaux, K., & Johnson, M. (2013). *Changing Minds or Changing Channels?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Retrieved from
<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/C/bo15731464.html>
- Bakshy, E. (2012, November 16). The 2012 Election Day Through the Facebook Lens. Retrieved April 1, 2016, from <https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook-data-science/the-2012-election-day-through-the-facebook-lens/10151181043778859/>
- Barthel, M. (2015, August 19). How do Americans use Twitter for news? Retrieved from
<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/08/19/how-do-americans-use-twitter-for-news/>
- Becker, A. B. (2011). Political Humor as Democratic Relief? The Effects of Exposure to Comedy and Straight News on Trust and Efficacy. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 19(5), 235–250.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/15456870.2011.622191>
- Becker, A. B. (2013). What About Those Interviews? The Impact of Exposure to Political Comedy and Cable News on Factual Recall and Anticipated Political Expression. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 25(3), 344–356. <http://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edt014>
- Becker, A. B. (2016, February). *Using Comedy to Increase Public Interest and Understanding of Political and Science Issues*. Presentation presented at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from https://amybreebecker.com/Becker_AAAS.pptx.pdf

Bennett, W. L. (1998). The UnCivic Culture: Communication, Identity, and the Rise of Lifestyle Politics.

PS: Political Science & Politics, 31(04), 741–761. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096500053270>

Bennett, W. L. (2007). Relief in Hard Times: A Defense of Jon Stewart’s Comedy in an Age of Cynicism -

Critical Studies in Media Communication - Volume 24, Issue 3. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 24(3), 278–283.

Bennett, W. L., & Manheim, J. B. (2006). The One-Step Flow of Communication. *The ANNALS of the*

American Academy of Political and Social Science, 608(1), 213–232.

<http://doi.org/10.1177/0002716206292266>

Berinsky, A. J., Huber, G. A., & Lenz, G. S. (2012). Evaluating Online Labor Markets for Experimental

Research: Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk. *Political Analysis*, 20(3), 351–368.

<http://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpr057>

Bimber, B. (1998). The Internet and Political Transformation: Populism, Community, and Accelerated

Pluralism. *Polity*, 31(1), 133–160. <http://doi.org/10.2307/3235370>

Buttry, S. (2012, May 16). Aggregation guidelines: Link, attribute, add value [blog]. Retrieved from

<https://stevebuttry.wordpress.com/2012/05/16/aggregation-guidelines-link-attribute-add-value/>

Carey, J. (1997). The Communications Revolution and the Rise of the Professional Communicator. In E.

Munson & C. Warren (Eds.), *James Carey: A Critical Reader* (pp. 128–142). Minneapolis:

University of Minnesota Press.

Downs, A. (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper.

Druckman, J. N., & Kam, C. D. (2011). Students as Experimental Participants: A Defense of the “Narrow

Database.” In J. N. Druckman, D. P. Green, J. H. Kuklinski, & A. Lupia (Eds.), *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Druckman, J. N., & Leeper, T. J. (2012). Learning More from Political Communication Experiments: Pretreatment and Its Effects. *American Journal of Political Science*, 56(4), 875–896.
<http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2012.00582.x>
- Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani, A. (1987). The Changing Culture of Affirmative Action. In R. Braumgart (Ed.), *Research in Political Sociology* (Vol. 3, pp. 137–177). 1987: JAI Press Inc.
- Graber, D. A. (1996). The “New” Media and Politics: What Does the Future Hold? *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 29(1), 33–36. <http://doi.org/10.2307/420188>
- Guallar, J. (2014). Content curation in journalism (and journalistic documentation) [blog]. Retrieved August 28, 2015, from <http://raco.cat/index.php/Hipertext/article/view/275781/364536>
- Guerrini, F. (2013). *Newsroom Curators and Independent Storytellers: Content Curation as a New Form of Journalism*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Retrieved from <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Newsroom%20Curators%20%26%20Independent%20Storytellers%20Content%20Curation%20as%20a%20New%20Form%20Of%20Journalism.pdf>
- Hamilton, J. T. (2004). *All the News That’s Fit to Sell: How the Market Transforms Information into News*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Retrieved from <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/7604.html>
- Hart, R. P., & Hartelius, E. J. (2007). The Political Sins of Jon Stewart. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 24(3), 263–272. <http://doi.org/10.1080/07393180701520991>
- Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is Anyone Responsible?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Retrieved from <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/l/bo3684515.html>
- Iyengar, S., & Kinder, D. R. (1988). *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion*. University of Chicago Press.
- Jobs — theSkimm. (2016, March). Retrieved April 1, 2016, from <http://www.theskimm.com/jobs>

- Johnson, T. J., & Kaye, B. K. (2003). A Boost or Bust for Democracy? How the Web Influenced Political Attitudes and Behaviors in the 1996 and 2000 Presidential Elections. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 8(3), 9–34. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1081180X03008003002>
- Kaye, B. K., & Johnson, Thomas J. (2002). Online and in the Know: Uses and Gratifications of the Web for Political Information. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 46(1), 54–71.
- Landerer, N. (2013). Rethinking the Logics: A Conceptual Framework for the Mediatization of Politics: Rethinking the Logics. *Communication Theory*, 23(3), 239–258. <http://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12013>
- Lasswell, H. (1948). The structure and function of communications in society. In L. Bryson (Ed.), *The Communication of Ideas* (pp. 37–51). New York: Harper and Row.
- Lewis, S. C. (2012). The Tension Between Professional Control and Open Participation. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(6), 836–866. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.674150>
- McAdams, M. (2008, December 3). “Curation,” and journalists as curators. Retrieved from <http://mindymcadams.com/tojou/2008/curation-and-journalists-as-curators/>
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176–187. <http://doi.org/10.1086/267990>
- Mitchell, A. (2013, November 14). News Use Across Social Media Platforms. Retrieved from <http://www.journalism.org/2013/11/14/news-use-across-social-media-platforms/>
- Mitchell, A. (2015). *State of the News Media 2015*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.journalism.org/2015/04/29/state-of-the-news-media-2015/>
- Neuman, W. R. (2001). The Impact of the New Media. In W. L. Bennett & R. M. Entman (Eds.), *Mediated Politics* (pp. 299–320). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Neuman, W. R., Guggenheim, L., Jang, S. M., & Bae, S. Y. (2014). The Dynamics of Public Attention: Agenda-Setting Theory Meets Big Data - Russell Neuman - 2014 - Journal of Communication - Wiley Online Library. *Journal of Communication*, 64(2), 193–214.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2008). Uses and Gratifications. In D. W. Stacks & M. B. Salwen (Eds.), *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research* (pp. 137–152). New York: Routledge.
- Pew Research Center. (2010, September 12). Americans Spending More Time Following the News. Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/2010/09/12/americans-spending-more-time-following-the-news/>
- Pew Research Center. (2014). Internet User Demographics. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/data-trend/internet-use/latest-stats/>
- Poindexter, P. M., & McCombs, M. E. (2001). Revisiting the Civic Duty to Keep Informed in the New Media Environment. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78(1), 113–126. <http://doi.org/10.1177/107769900107800108>
- Rainie, L., Smith, A., Schlozman, K. L., Brady, H., & Verba, S. (2012, October 19). Social Media and Political Engagement. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2012/10/19/social-media-and-political-engagement/>
- Riker, W. H., & Ordeshook, P. C. (1968). A Theory of the Calculus of Voting. *The American Political Science Review*, 62(1), 25–42. <http://doi.org/10.2307/1953324>
- Rosenbaum, S. (2013, January 23). Stop knocking curation. Retrieved March 11, 2015, from http://www.cjr.org/the_kicker/leave_curation_alone.php
- Scheufele, D. A. (2000). Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political... *Mass Communication & Society*, 3(2/3), 297.

- Sears, D. O. (1986). College sophomores in the laboratory: Influences of a narrow data base on social psychology's view of human nature. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *51*(3), 515–530. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.51.3.515>
- Singer, J. B. (2003). Who are these Guys? The Online Challenge to the Notion of Journalistic Professionalism. *Journalism*, *4*(2), 139–163. <http://doi.org/10.1177/146488490342001>
- Sternberg, J. (2011, March 10). Why Curation Is Important to the Future of Journalism. Retrieved March 11, 2015, from <http://mashable.com/2011/03/10/curation-journalism/>
- Stroud, N. J. (2011). *Niche News: The Politics of News Choice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Thorson, K., & Wells, C. (2015). Curated Flows: A Framework for Mapping Media Exposure in the Digital Age. *Communication Theory*, 1–20.
- Vargo, C. J., Guo, L., McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. L. (2014). Network Issue Agendas on Twitter During the 2012 U.S. Presidential Election. *Journal of Communication*, *64*(2), 296–316. <http://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12089>
- Weber, L. M., Loumakis, A., & Bergman, J. (2003). Who Participates and Why? An Analysis of Citizens on the Internet and the Mass Public. *Social Science Computer Review*, *21*(1), 26–42. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0894439302238969>
- West, D., & Stone, B. (2014). *News Curation vs. Aggregation: Emergence of Editor's Choices Features* (Governance Studies at Brookings). Washington, D.C.: Brookings. Retrieved from http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2014/10/24-news-curation-aggregation-editors-choice-stone-west/stone-and-west_editors-choices_v04.pdf
- Young, D. G. (2008). The Privileged Role of the Late-Night Joke: Exploring Humor's Role in Disrupting Argument Scrutiny. *Media Psychology*, *11*(1), 119–142. <http://doi.org/10.1080/15213260701837073>

Appendix 1: Survey Instrument

INSTRUCTIONS

On the following screen, you'll be presented with a series of news stories. Please read the information on the screen. You are then welcome to click on as many or as few of the links as you wish. You will then be asked to provide some feedback.

CONTROL

[FCC Approves New Net Neutrality Rules](#)

[Obama Vetoes Bill Pushing Pipeline Approval](#)

TREATMENT #1 (neutral summary)

[FCC Approves New Net Neutrality Rules](#). The Federal Communications Commission recently voted to implement new net neutrality rules. The rules are designed to make sure Internet service providers deliver all content equally. That means service providers can't charge to deliver the content of popular content providers more quickly than the content of smaller content providers.

[Obama Vetoes Bill Pushing Pipeline Approval](#). President Obama recently vetoed legislation that would have authorized the construction of Keystone XL, an oil pipeline that would connect the oil sands of Alberta, Canada to ports and refineries on the Gulf Coast.

TREATMENT #2 (neutral in-depth summary)

[FCC Approves New Net Neutrality Rules](#). The Federal Communications Commission recently voted to implement new net neutrality rules. The rules are designed to make sure Internet service providers deliver all content equally. That means service providers can't charge to deliver the content of popular content providers more quickly than the content of smaller content providers.

- **Background.** This isn't the end of the net neutrality debate, but it is a step forward. The debate began in January 2014 when a federal appeals court in D.C. overturned the existing rules that ensured equal access to all content on the Internet. Many, including most Democratic politicians, technology companies, and consumer groups advocated for the new rules. However, others, including pro-business advocates and Internet services providers, opposed them.
- **Impact.** For now, the new rules prevent changes that could make it more difficult for consumers' to access some content on the Internet.
- **Coming Next.** Opponents of the new rules are preparing for a lawsuit.

[Obama Vetoes Bill Pushing Pipeline Approval](#). President Obama recently vetoed legislation that would have authorized the construction of Keystone XL, an oil pipeline that would connect the oil sands of Alberta, Canada to ports and refineries on the Gulf Coast.

- **Background.** The pipeline has become a symbol in the broader partisan struggle over energy, climate change, and the economy. Environmentalists and landowners oppose the pipeline, arguing that it will cause ecological damage, increase American dependence on fossil fuels, and contribute to climate change. Conservatives, oil companies, and some

unions support the pipeline, arguing that it will create construction jobs, support oil producers in North Dakota and Montana, and support oil refineries in the Gulf.

- **Impact.** The Republican Congress – which wants action on the pipeline – used the legislation to force the President to act. By vetoing the legislation, President Obama asserted his right to make the final decision on the oil pipeline and symbolically signaled his commitment to environmental protections.
- **Coming Next.** The President is not committed to any timetable. That means he could delay his final decision – and extend the pipeline debate – indefinitely.

TREATMENT #3 (humorous summary)

[FCC Approves New Net Neutrality Rules](#). What do you say the next time your video – gasp – doesn't buffer? Thank you, FCC. The Federal Communications Commission recently voted to implement new net neutrality rules. The new rules mean that Internet service providers must deliver all of the content that you want – hello, Netflix – equally quickly, regardless of the size or popularity of the content provider.

[Obama Vetoes Bill Pushing Pipeline Approval](#). What do you say when your smart friends are talking about oil? Ask if they've heard the latest on Keystone XL. President Obama recently vetoed legislation that would have authorized the construction of Keystone XL, an oil pipeline that would connect the oil sands of Alberta, Canada to ports and refineries on the Gulf Coast.

TREATMENT #5 (humorous in-depth summary)

[FCC Approves New Net Neutrality Rules](#). What do you say the next time your video – gasp – doesn't buffer? Thank you, FCC. The Federal Communications Commission recently voted to implement new net neutrality rules. The new rules mean that Internet service providers must deliver all of the content that you want – hello, Netflix – equally quickly, regardless of the size or popularity of the content provider.

- Haven't we talked about this before? This is one big step forward in the net neutrality debate. You've been hearing about this since January of last year, when a D.C. federal appeals court said, "Internet service providers just deserve better." The appeals court told the FCC that their existing rules didn't give them the authority to treat Internet service providers as public utilities. Since then, Democrats, tech companies, and consumer groups have been fighting against pro-business groups and Internet service providers to establish new net neutrality rules.
- Not to be rude, but ... who cares? You do. Nobody likes slow internet – especially when service providers are slowing it down intentionally. These rules will make sure – whether you're binge watching House of Cards or checking out your favorite cat photo blog – that your service provider transmits your content at equal speeds.
- Phew, so it's over? Not quite. Pro-business groups and Internet service providers are getting ready for a lawsuit. So enjoy the peace and quiet while it lasts.

[Obama Vetoes Bill Pushing Pipeline Approval](#). What do you say when your smart friends are talking about oil? Ask if they've heard the latest on Keystone XL. President Obama recently vetoed

legislation that would have authorized the construction of Keystone XL, an oil pipeline that would connect the oil sands of Alberta, Canada to ports and refineries on the Gulf Coast.

- Again? Yep. This pipeline has become a symbol in the partisan boxing match over energy, climate change, and the economy. Environmentalists and landowners are on one side of the ring, claiming that the pipeline will cause ecological damage, increase American dependence on fossil fuels, and contribute to climate change. Conservatives, oil companies, and some unions are on the other side, claiming that the pipeline will create construction jobs, support oil producers in North Dakota and Montana, and support oil refineries in the Gulf. They've both been throwing punches for years, with no knockout in sight.
- So does this vote even matter? The short answer is yes. The Republican Congress – which wants action on the pipeline – threw this latest punch to force the President to act. By vetoing the legislation, President Obama hit back by asserting his right to make the final decision on the oil pipeline and symbolically signaling his commitment to environmental protections.
- Hasn't the clock run out? Nope. There's unlimited time in this match. The President is not committed to any timetable, so he could delay the final decision – and extend the debate that you've been hearing – indefinitely.

Appendix 2

PRE-TREATMENT QUESTIONS

Some people seem to follow politics most of the time, while others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in politics most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all? Please choose only one of the following:

- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Only now and then
- Hardly at all

Please check the box next to each location in which you *voted in the most recent election*. Please choose all that apply:

- I voted in the most recent presidential election.
- I voted in the most recent state election.
- I voted in the most recent local election.

Please check the box next to each activity you have completed *in the past year*. Please choose all that apply:

- I contacted my representatives by phone or letter to express an opinion or concern.

- I contacted my representatives by email or social media (ex: Facebook, Twitter) to express an opinion or concern.
- I attended a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs.
- I expressed my opinion on a political issue by calling in to a TV or radio show, by commenting on a news story or blog post, and/or by sending a letter to the editor to a newspaper or newsmagazine.
- I expressed my opinion on a political issue by publishing a blog post or by posting on social media (ex: Facebook, Twitter).
- I volunteered for a candidate or political party.
- I attended a political rally or speech.
- I attended an organized political protest.
- I signed a paper petition.
- I signed an online petition.
- I donated money to a political campaign or candidate.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. Please choose the appropriate response for each item: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Strongly Disagree.

- People like me don't have any say about what the government does.
- I don't think public officials care much about what people like me think.
- Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. Please choose the appropriate response for each item: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Strongly Disagree.

- I enjoy challenging the opinions of others.
- I find conflicts exciting.
- I hate arguments.
- Arguments don't bother me.
- I feel upset after an argument.

Some people seem to consume news about politics frequently, while others seem to consume news about politics only every now and then. Please check the box that describes how often you consume news about politics. Please choose only one of the following:

- Several times a day
- Once a day
- Several times a week
- Once a week
- Several times a month
- Fewer than several times a month
- Never

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. Please choose the appropriate response for each item: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Strongly Disagree.

- I enjoy reading news about politics.
- I think that news about politics is easy to understand.
- I think that I have a better understanding of political issues after reading the news.
- I feel more interested in political issues after reading the news.
- I usually share news about politics with friends via email or social media.

How often do you get information about politics from each of the sources listed below: regularly, sometimes, rarely, or never? Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

- TV
- Radio
- Print
- Online
- Social Media
- News Aggregators
 - Note: A news aggregator is any service that collects a portion of the daily news from various sources and presents it to you in a single location, such as an RSS feed or a morning newsletter.

Participants who indicated that they used a news aggregator regularly, sometimes, or rarely were asked to answer the following questions.

Many different news organizations offer news aggregators. For each of the news organizations listed below, would you say that you consume news from about politics their news aggregators regularly, sometimes, rarely, never, or unknown?

- A local newspaper or newsmagazine.
- A national newspaper or newsmagazine. (ex: Politico Huddle, Foreign Policy's Morning Brief)
- A news group that publishes exclusively online. (ex: The Quartz Brief)

- A news subscription service that does not publish their own content. (ex: TheSkimm, BitofNews, Circa)
- An RSS Feed Reader. (ex: Feedly, Google News)

News aggregators deliver their content in different forms. How often would you say you consume news about politics that was delivered by a news aggregator in each of the following formats: regularly, sometimes, rarely, or never?

- Your email
- An application on your mobile device
- An application on your computer
- Other

All participants were asked to answer the following question.

Please indicate the extent to which you have been following developments on the following issues. Please choose the appropriate response for each item: Closely, Somewhat, or Hardly at All.

- Regulation on Net Neutrality
- Construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline

POST-TREATMENT QUESTIONS

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Please choose the appropriate response for each item: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree.

- I enjoyed reading this collection of news reports.
- I think that this collection of news reports was easy to understand.
- I think that I have a better understanding of these issues after reading this collection of news reports.
- I feel more interested in these issues after reading this collection of news reports.
- I would share this collection news reports with a friend via email or social media.
- I would like to receive more collections of news reports like this.

INFORMATION RECALL QUIZ

Correct answers are underlined.

The new net neutrality rules say that ...

- The FCC does not have the power to regulate Internet service providers.
- The FCC does have the power to regulate Internet service providers, but will not.
- The FCC will allow Internet service providers to ask some content providers to pay more to have their content delivered more quickly.
- The FCC will ensure that Internet service providers deliver all content at the same speeds.
- I do not know the answer to this question.

The new net neutrality rules were drafted by the FCC because ...

- A federal appeals court ruled against the older framework for net neutrality rules.
- The older framework for net neutrality rules was too heavily influenced by the Obama administration.
- Congress called the older framework for net neutrality rules unconstitutional.
- The older framework for net neutrality rules was created without consulting the Internet service providers.
- I do not know the answer to this question.

The new net neutrality rules will ...

- Immediately make it more difficult for you to access some content on the Internet.
- Immediately make it easier for you to access some content on the Internet.

- Prevent future changes that would make it more difficult for you to access some content on the Internet.
- Prevent future changes that would make it easier for you to access all content on the Internet.
- I do not know the answer to this question.

President Obama recently ...

- Encouraged Congress to draft legislation to approve the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline.
- Signed a bill that authorizes the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline.
- Vetoed a bill that would have authorized the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline.
- Encouraged Congress to draft legislation that would permanently ban the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline.
- I do not know the answer to this question.

The Keystone XL Pipeline is controversial because ...

- It has become a symbol in the struggle over energy, climate change, and the economy.
- It has become a symbol of government waste of taxpayer dollars.
- It has become symbol of government overreach.
- It is not controversial.
- I do not know the answer to this question.

The construction of the Keystone XL pipeline could ...

- Support American oil production.
- Increase oil prices.
- Set a precedent of providing federal funding to construct pipelines.
- Decrease American reliance on fossil fuels.
- I do not know the answer to this question.

PARTY IDENTIFICATION

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what? Please choose only one of the following:

- Republican
- Democrat
- Independent
- Other

If participants reported that they think of themselves as Republican, they were asked the following question:

Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican? Please choose only one of the following:

- Strong Republican
- Not very strong Republican

If participants reported that they think of themselves as Democrat, they were asked the following question:

Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat? Please choose only one of the following:

- Strong Democrat
- Not very strong Democrat

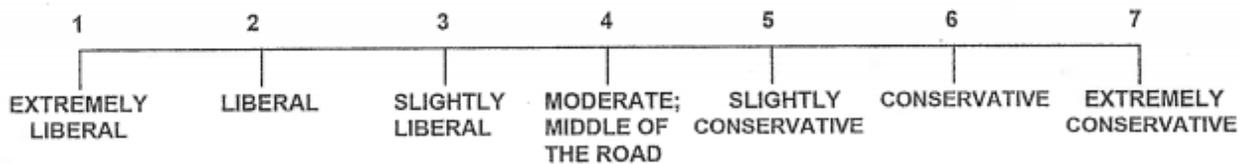
If participants reported that they think of themselves as Independent, they were asked the following question:

Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic party? Please choose only one of the following:

- Republican Party
- Democratic Party
- Neither Party

IDEOLOGY

Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from



extremely liberal to extremely conservative.

Where would you put yourself on this scale? Please choose only one of the following:

- Extremely Liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly Liberal
- Moderate: Middle of the Road
- Slightly Conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely Conservative

DEMOGRAPHICS

Please enter your current age.

- Please write your answer here: _____

Are you male or female? Please choose only one of the following:

- Male

- Female

What is the highest level of school you have completed? Please choose only one of the following:

- No high school diploma
- High school diploma or equivalent (GED)
- Some college, no degree
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional or doctoral degree

Which of the income groups listed below includes the total income (before taxes) of all the family members living in your household for the year 2014? Please choose only one of the following:

- Under \$25,000
- \$25,000-\$49,999
- \$50,000-\$74,999
- \$75,000-\$99,999
- \$100,000-\$149,999
- \$150,000-\$249,999
- \$250,000 or more

Please check one or more categories to indicate what race(s) you consider yourself to be. Please choose all that apply:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Black or African-American
- South Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- East Asian
- Other

Are you of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino descent? Please choose only one of the following:

- No, I am not.
- Yes, I am of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino descent.