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“And That’s a Fact!”: The Roles of Political Ideology, PSRs, and Perceived Source Credibility in Estimating Factual Content in Partisan News

Kristen D. Landreville and Cassie Niles

Cable news schedule today is programed with a transition between objective reporting and subjective commentary. With this in mind, we address the question: to what extent does political ideology impact one’s estimation of factual content in the monologue of a partisan news host? Going beyond direct effects, we analyze two moderated mediation models, using news host as moderator and using parasocial relationship and source credibility as parallel mediators. Results show like-minded partisanship with a news host led to higher estimates of factual content, and this effect worked indirectly through credibility perceptions. Additionally, this process occurred more intensely for conservatives.

The distinction between news content and opinion content in mass media has become more and more blurred, especially since the rise of cable news. Cable news hosts, such as Chris Matthews, Rachel Maddow, Tucker Carlson, and Sean Hannity, often switch from providing news summaries to offering partisan commentary. Scholars, among others, assert that the increase in partisan news and reliance on cable news hosts for information is problematic for democracy because, in part, it encourages outlet-favored misperceptions, despite knowing the evidence (Garrett, Weeks, & Neo, 2016). Partisan news viewers are encouraged to disparage and scorn experts, facts, and evidence by way of questioning their credibility and legitimacy (Garrett et al., 2016). This suggests that if a viewer is aware of the existing evidence and that the existing evidence contradicts their own beliefs, the influence of partisan news supersedes the influence of facts and evidence in the viewer beliefs (Garrett et al., 2016). Again, this is challenging for democracy because basic facts and evidence, as well as the trustworthiness and dependability of experts, are being debated.

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Furthermore, the frequent and fluid transitions from fact to opinion by cable news hosts may encourage obfuscation of facts and opinions among viewers, especially among partisans. Political partisans tend to engage in biased information processing such that the likelihood of derogating an opinionated news source (e.g., Feldman, 2011), neutral news sources (e.g., Gunther, Edgerly, Akin, & Broesch, 2012), and even fact-checking news sources (e.g., Nyhan & Reifler, 2010) increases with partisanship. Partisanship shapes the processing and interpretation of a myriad of messages beyond traditional and opinionated news as well, from political satire (e.g., LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009) to educational science communication (e.g., Nisbet, Cooper, & Garrett, 2015). Explanations such as motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990) and the belief gap hypothesis (Hindman, 2009) help researchers understand the media reactions and behaviors of partisan audiences. Essentially, these explanations attempt to provide insight into how highly-partisan audience members can interpret news and information so differently from those who are less partisan.

In our study, we are interested in this same phenomenon, with the criterion variable being one's estimation of the amount of factual content in the monologue of a partisan news host. In brief, we seek to understand if political ideology impacts estimation of factual content in a partisan news host's monologue. Using a moderated mediation approach, we test two parallel indirect paths through which this connection may occur: parasocial relationships and perceived source credibility.

Partisanship and Biased Information Processing

A fact is a verifiable piece of evidence in objective reality (Merriam-Webster, 2018a) that is not distorted by personal feelings, prejudices, and interpretations; an opinion is a view, judgment, appraisal, or subjective evaluation formed in the mind (Merriam-Webster, 2018b). Even though the definitions of a fact and an opinion appear to be simple, there are scholarly divisions about objectivity, subjectivity, and what is know-able (ontology) and how we come to know the world (epistemology) (McQueen & McQueen, 2010). For example, Berger (2016) noted that key philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche believed that we cannot establish any fact in itself, rather we can only know perspectives. Alternatively, positivism and post-positivism assumes that an objective reality exists, facts exist independent of social actors, and that we can study this objective reality and facts using the scientific method (Wench, Thomas-Maddox, Peck Richmond, & McCroskey, 2016).

While we maintain there are merits to all academic approaches, the current study takes a positivist/post-positivist, social-scientific approach. Even so, there are still disputes about basic facts, especially in politics and along partisan lines (Hindman, 2009). In fact, the belief gap hypothesis proposes that partisanship is a better predictor of politically disputed beliefs and knowledge than education level (Hindman, 2009, 2012). For example, climate change (Hindman, 2009), the safety

of vaccinations (Veenstra, Hossain, & Lyons, 2014), and the failures of abstinence-only sex education (Hindman & Yan, 2015) may yield consensus in the respective scientific communities but yield belief gaps among partisans. Furthermore, partisanship and partisan news use can serve as indirect predictors of the belief gaps among the news audience as well (Diercks & Landreville, 2017).

Motivated reasoning, or the tendency for partisans to interpret information in a biased manner that reinforces their predispositions (Kunda, 1990), is also a contributing factor when processing politicized topics that range from the credibility of public opinion polls (Kuru, Pasek, & Traugott, 2017) to emergent technologies (Druckman & Bolsen, 2011) and climate change (Hart & Nisbet, 2012). In short, partisan identity cues and motivated reasoning influence how we evaluate facts. Recent Pew (2018) data show that both Republicans and Democrats were more likely to label both factual and opinion statements as factual, when they appealed more to their respective political beliefs. Here, we are particularly interested in the extent to which partisan identity influences the *estimation* of the amount of factual content in a partisan news host's monologue.

H₁: Like-minded partisanship with a partisan news host will encourage individuals to estimate more factual content in the news host's monologue.

Cable News Networks and Partisanship

It is not a secret that cable news networks tend to identify with a particular political ideology (Perloff, 2014). About two decades ago, when more cable news networks began to appear, the competition between them also started to intensify. Adding more news platforms to the media environment provided people with more news coverage than ever before, giving them the opportunity to seek out the type of programming with which their preexisting beliefs are aligned the most (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012; Stroud, 2011). Specifically forced competition between news networks allowed these networks to find a target viewership that they could call their own, which meant defining the news organization within a particular partisan framework (Hmielowski, Beam, & Hutchens, 2015). In addition, as cable news became more partisan and polarized, heavy TV viewers also became more partisan and polarized (Hmielowski et al., 2015).

Parasocial Relationships with Partisans News Hosts

One way that a news network can convey its partisan preference is through its news hosts. News hosts play a pivotal role in the branding and marketing of the network, all in the effort to attract viewers; cable news networks have been more

successful in using news hosts for “production” differentiation purposes (Chan-Olmsted & Cha, 2008). Some viewers may even form a parasocial relationship (PSR) with a news host. PSRs are a one-sided relationship, or interpersonal involvement, that media consumers voluntarily establish with media characters (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). PSRs comprise cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral reaction processes toward the media character (Klimmt, Hartmann, & Schramm, 2006). Social attraction (e.g., attraction as social or work partners) encourages PSRs, which then leads to increased perceptions of PSR importance (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Interpersonal involvement with a media character can include seeking guidance from the media character, seeing the media character as a friend, and even predicting accurately the feelings and attitudes of the media character (Perse & Rubin, 1989; Rubin et al., 1985). This PSR development process follows a similar process to non-mediated relationship development (Rubin & McHugh, 1987).

It is important to differentiate a PSR from a parasocial interaction (PSI), for early literature on parasocial research in diverse fields did not always distinguish the two concepts. A PSI represents the “one-sided process of media person perception during the media exposure,” (Klimmt et al., 2006, p. 292); it has also been conceptualized as a “viewer’s sense of mutual awareness, attention, and adjustment to a media performer that occurs during viewing” (Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, 2016, p. 41). A PSR is the “cross-situational relationship that a viewer or user holds to a media person” (Klimmt et al., 2006, p. 292). Essentially, the difference is one of situational. While PSI describes an immediate psychological interaction during media exposure, PSR reflects a long-term, stable relationship with a media character that develops from repeated exposure and when individuals are engaging with the media character outside of the media exposure (Schmid & Klimmt, 2011). PSRs are a significant factor in media users’ decision-making about selective media exposure; users are attracted to media characters who provide a positive emotional atmosphere (Klimmt et al., 2006).

For the current study, we focus on PSRs. We argue that viewers who share a political ideology with a partisan news host will be more likely to develop a PSR with the host. To help explain, we turn to research in political discussion. Specifically, individuals prefer to talk with like-minded others, are generally well-equipped at identifying who agrees with them, and control their political discussion environment through selective exposure (Huckfeldt, Johnson, & Sprague, 2002; Huckfeldt, Mendez, & Osborn, 2004). Thus, a like-minded viewer may feel social attraction to a partisan news host who, not only shares a political ideology, but is also an authority and opinion leader in that respective political ideology (i.e., a task, or competency, attraction).

Viewers may learn that selectively exposing themselves to like-minded news hosts reinforces their preexisting beliefs and affirms their political ideology. Likewise, as viewers gain confidence in predicting the news host’s attitudes, feelings, and behavior (i.e., attributional confidence), the likelihood of a PSR may increase (Perse & Rubin, 1989).

While PSRs can have a positive or negative valence (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008), we are interested in the potential of a positive PSR developing when an individual shares the partisanship of a partisan news host. Going further, we suspect that a PSR with a like-minded news host may mediate the relationship between partisanship and estimation of factual content in a news host's monologue.

H₂: Like-minded partisanship associated with a partisan news host will encourage individuals to possess stronger PSRs with the partisan news host.

H₃: PSRs with a like-minded partisan news host will mediate the relationship between individuals' political ideology and estimation of factual content in a partisan news host's monologue.

Perceived Source Credibility

An additional parallel mediator in the relationship between partisanship and estimation of factual content may be perceived source credibility of the partisan news host. The concept of source credibility is a mediator of interest because it is important to evaluate the specific news host who is presenting the cable news monologue. Source credibility is conceptualized as audience perceptions of the speaker's competence (or expertise), trustworthiness, and goodwill (McCrosky & Teven, 1999). Competence is defined as someone with qualification, expertness, intelligence, and authoritativeness. Trustworthiness is the perception of someone who has character, safety, and honesty. Finally, goodwill is one's level of caring for another and the perception of general concern for another person's best interests (McCrosky & Teven, 1999). All three of these concepts are important when assessing news host credibility.

Credible news sources typically have a reputation for providing accurate and truthful reporting, according to Fragale and Heath, (2004). Their research also show that people assume their own beliefs are true and those true beliefs come from credible sources. In other words, individuals assume that statements they believe to be true and factual come from credible sources. Therefore, we expect that individuals who assign higher credibility ratings to a partisan news host will estimate the host's monologue to be more factually accurate because it is more likely they perceive more truth and resonated beliefs in the monologue. Relatedly, when individuals judge a source to possess more credibility, individuals afford the source higher evaluations of trust and competency (Perloff, 2018). Also relevant to the appeal of partisan news hosts is the style of delivery, for there is evidence that sources who exude more confidence in their judgments can be more persuasive, even when the source's comments are factually incorrect (Perloff, 2018; Zarnoth & Sniezek, 1997). Take together, this literature suggests that individuals who perceive higher perceived source

credibility in the news host will estimate more factual information delivered by that news host.

Cable news hosts play a pivotal role in the branding and marketing of the network, and there is evidence that regular viewers of cable news hosts have different perceptions about news media credibility. For example, nine-in-ten regular Hannity (Fox News) viewers reported they see a lot of bias in news coverage in general, while close to seven-in-ten (69%) regular viewers of Chris Matthews' MSNBC show offered the same evaluation as well (Pew, 2011). Thus, if these regular viewers are skeptical about general news media bias, then they are potentially watching the shows anchored by these partisan news hosts because they anticipate acquiring factually accurate information from these news hosts. We argue that higher levels of perceived source credibility will arise with like-minded news hosts and positively influence the amount of factual content that an individual estimates the statements provided by that source (i.e., a monologue by the partisan news host).

H₄: Like-minded partisanship associated with a partisan news host will encourage individuals to possess stronger source credibility perceptions with the news host.

H₅: Stronger source credibility perceptions with a like-minded partisan news host will mediate the relationship between individuals' political ideology and estimation of factual content in a partisan news host's monologue.

Putting together the various relationships outlined above, we examine a moderated-mediation model with two parallel mediators. Figure 1 shows the proposed process.

Method

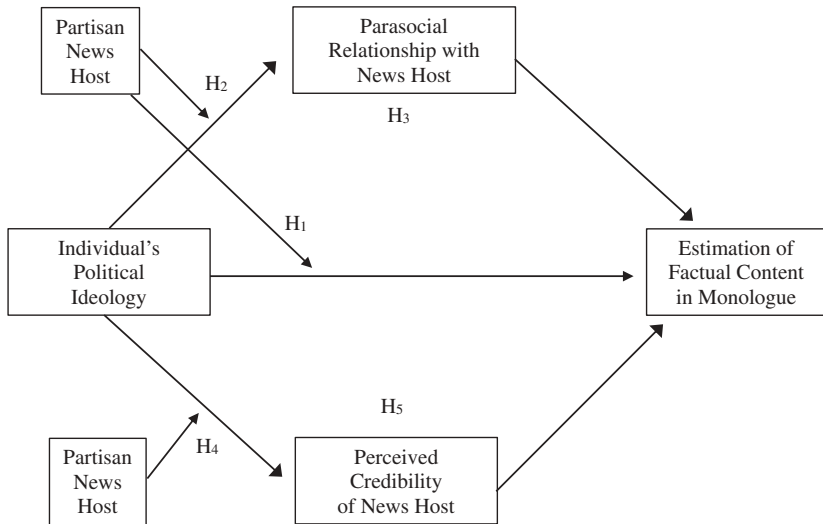
To test the hypotheses of the study, an online experiment was conducted using a 2 (partisan news host political ideology: conservative or liberal) x 2 (monologue topic: insider trading or national debt) experimental design. Two control groups were also included in the study design.

Participants

This study included 162 total participants recruited through Mechanical Turk (MTurk), who took the survey on the Qualtrics survey platform. Prior research shows that MTurk provides data that is similar to a sample of college students and is often more generalizable (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Each

Figure 1

This Figure Shows the Proposed Moderated Mediation Process Using Model 8 with an Additional Parallel Mediator in the SPSS Process Macro (Hayes, 2013). H_3 and H_5 Represent the Hypotheses Relevant to the Moderated Mediation Predictions



participant received 75 cents for their participation. The average time that participants took to complete the study was 9 minutes and 45 seconds.

Of the 162 participants, eighty-one (50%) were female, and eighty-one (50%) were male. The mean age was 38.7 years ($SD = 12.1$ years). One hundred and thirty-two (81.5%) reported their race as white or Caucasian, fifteen (9.3%) as black or African American, eight (4.9%) as Asian, one (.6%) as American Indian, 5 (3.1%) reported multiple races, and one did not respond. In terms of political party affiliation, sixty-three (38.9%) participants reported that they affiliate with the Democratic Party, forty-six (28.4%) mentioned Republican, forty-seven indicated (29%) as Independent, five (3.1%) identified as Other, and one did not respond. The average annual income was between the categories of "\$25,000 to \$49,999" and "\$50,000 to \$74,999."

Analyses of variance were used to determine if random assignment among conditions in Qualtrics functioned properly. Indeed, there were no significant differences among any of the conditions on age, gender, income, race, political party affiliation, frequency of consuming cable news content, and perceptions of credibility of cable news content (i.e., Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC).

Procedures

Once participants checked a box on the online survey that acknowledges their informed consent, the participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. Condition 1 contains an insider trading monologue attributed to Chris Matthews, the liberal host from MSNBC ($n = 40$). Condition 2 includes an insider trading monologue attributed to Sean Hannity, the conservative host from Fox News ($n = 41$). Condition 3 presents a national debt monologue also attributed to Matthews ($n = 44$). Condition 4 shows a national debt monologue attributed to Hannity ($n = 37$).

Once participants read the given monologue transcript, they were instructed to complete several manipulation check questions. Next, participants were asked to estimate the percentage that the news host's message was fact vs. opinion. Following that, the participants responded to PSR questions about the respective news host and source credibility questions. Lastly, participants answered basic demographic questions.

Stimuli

Two monologue transcripts from former Fox News host Bill O'Reilly were adapted for the study to ensure that any significant findings are not merely due to the story topic used in the experiment. The first monologue shared concerns about insider trading by U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi (D) and former U.S. Rep John Boehner (R), and the second monologue shared concerns about the national debt and attributed the problem to the failures of both Republican and Democratic administrations. Both monologues were between about 400 and 500 words. These monologues were chosen because they include negative opinions about both the Democratic and Republican parties.

The two news hosts—MSNBC's Chris Matthews and Fox News' Sean Hannity—were chosen because they hold similar formats for their respective shows, both news hosts' programs are aired at approximately the same time each weekday evening; both hosts are older white males and have opposing political views on competing networks. In the survey itself, participants were shown a text-only transcript of the monologue with a photo of their condition's partisan news host (which included the cable news network logo and host's name superimposed on the news host's photo) at the top.

Measures

Political Ideology. Respondents separately reported their social political ideology and their economic political ideology as (1) very conservative to (7) very liberal. The two items were averaged to create an overall score of political ideology, $M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.99$, Spearman's $\rho = .865$, p (two-tailed) $< .01$.

Estimation of Factual Content. After exposure to the stimulus, respondents estimated the percentage of the news host's monologue as fact and opinion, respectively. A participant's estimation was required to total to 100% (e.g., a participant could report 65% fact and 35% opinion, or 50% fact and 50% opinion). Using an ANOVA procedure, the estimation of fact in the news monologue did not significantly differ among the conditions, $F(2, 158) = 1.765$, $p = .156$. The average amount of factual content reported by participants in the insider trading monologue was 50.15% ($SD = 29.38$) and in the national debt monologue was 48.22% ($SD = 23.60$). These estimation results are similar to those estimations of factual content vs. opinion content provided by the researchers above.

Parasocial Relationship. Rubin et al. (1985) developed a 20-item PSI scale that measured the strength of a relationship between a television viewer and a newscaster. Later, Rubin and Perse (1987) adapted the scale into 10 items. Although, recent research has argued that the 20-item and 10-item scales do not accurately measure a PSI; rather, they measure something longer-term than an interaction, such as feelings of social involvement, liking of media characters, and thinking of media characters as a person they would like to meet (Dibble et al., 2016). Despite the name of Rubin et al.'s (1985) PSI scale, we regard the PSI scale as measuring more closely a long-term PSR rather than an episodic interaction (Dibble et al., 2016). Therefore, we slightly adapted the phrasing of the 10-item PSI scale (Rubin & Perse, 1987) to measure PSRs with a partisan news host rather than with a soap opera character, which are the types of media characters measured by the PSI scale from Rubin and Perse (1987). Respondents were asked to answer each of the 10 questions ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree with each of the statements. The scale was reliable, $\alpha = .98$, $M = 2.53$, $SD = .99$.

Source Credibility. McCroskey and Teven' (1999) developed a credibility measurement containing 18 total items that were further split up into three groups on a bipolar scale. The measurement items were anchored by an adjective and its antonym (e.g., honest/dishonest) via a semantic differential scale. Respondents were asked to note their impression of their condition's identified news host after reading the stimulus. The 18-item credibility measure was used to create a single source credibility variable, $\alpha = .97$, $M = 4.22$, $SD = 1.40$.

Manipulation Checks. After reading the monologue, participants immediately answered questions about the monologue content to ensure the manipulations functioned as planned. For the manipulation check question about story topic, 91% of participants in the insider trading topic and 95% of participants in the national debt topic correctly identified the story topic. Additionally, all participants were asked to identify the political ideology of the news host in their condition as (1) conservative, (2) moderate, or (3) liberal. In this case, there should

be significant differences among conditions because Matthews and Hannity do have different political ideologies. Indeed, there were significant differences among conditions about perceptions of the news host's political ideology, $F(3, 158) = 17.634$, $p < .001$. Hannity was perceived as conservative in both conditions (insider trading $M = 1.16$, national debt $M = 1.35$), and Matthews was perceived as moderate (both conditions $M = 2.00$).

Finally, participants were asked if this news host would typically speak this way in a monologue. Across these conditions, about 80% of the sample perceived the monologue as something typical the host would say. There were no differences by condition, $F(3, 158) = .332$, $p = .80$, nor did political ideology significantly predict perceived typicality in a simple OLS regression, $b = .018$, $SE = .017$, $p = .283$.

Results

First, a three-way interaction was run to ensure that there was no interaction of story topic (i.e., insider trading and national debt), political ideology, and host. Results show that there was no significant three-way interaction, $b = 4.37$, $SE = 3.94$, $p = .270$ ($n = 159$, $R^2 = .187$).

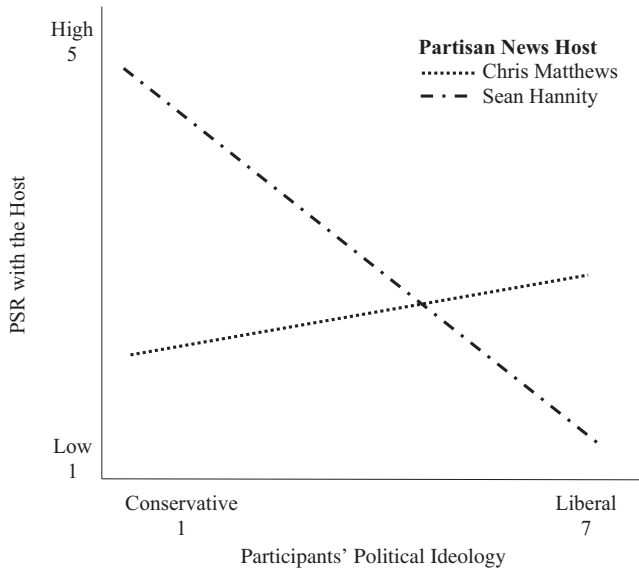
To analyze all hypotheses, model 8 in the SPSS PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) was run. The criterion outcome variable was estimation of factual content in the partisan news host's monologue. The independent variable was individual political ideology. The two parallel mediators were PSR with the news host and perceived source credibility of the news host. The moderating variable was partisan news host. Story topic served as a control variable. See Figure 1 for the proposed model.

H_1 predicted that like-minded partisanship associated with a partisan news host would encourage individuals to estimate more factual content in the news host's monologue. The interaction term of individual political ideology and news host was not statistically significant, $b = -2.548$, $se = 2.177$, $p = .25$. Thus, H_1 was not supported.

H_2 predicted that like-minded partisanship associated with a partisan news host would encourage individuals to possess stronger PSRs with the news host. This was supported; the interaction term for individual political ideology and partisan news host was a significant predictor of PSRs with the partisan news host, $b = -.436$, $se = .070$, $p < .001$. The interaction manifests as a transverse interaction (see Figure 2).

H_3 tests the indirect process of influence from individual political ideology to estimation of factual content, as mediated by PSR with the partisan news host and conditioned by partisan news host. Table 1 reports an index of moderated mediation; the bootstrapped confidence interval of the index estimate for PSR does not include zero (point estimate = -2.677 ; 95% CI: $-5.780, -.009$). Also, because the moderator is dichotomous (Matthews or Hannity condition), the index of moderated mediation is also test of equality of the conditional indirect effects in the two groups. This implies that the Hannity and Matthews groups are significantly different

Figure 2
The Graph Depicts the Interaction of Individuals' Political Ideology and Partisan News Host Condition on Individuals' PSRs with the Host, Controlling for the Story Topic



in their slopes (shown by the significant index of moderated mediation). However, when probing the conditional indirect effect through PSR, the indirect effects are shown to be nonsignificant for both the Matthews and Hannity conditions because both CIs include zero (see Table 1). In short, PSRs does not have a significant effect on the estimation of factual content, but there is a significant difference for the Hannity and Matthews groups. Thus, H3 is partially supported. Significant moderated mediation is not occurring through PSRs, but there are significant differences between the two groups.

H₄ predicted that like-minded partisanship associated with a partisan news host would encourage individuals to possess stronger source credibility perceptions of the news host. This hypothesis was supported; the interaction term for individual political ideology and partisan news host ($b = -.631, se = .096, p < .001$), was a significant predictor of perceived source credibility of the news host. The transverse interaction is shown in Figure 3.

H₅ tests the indirect process of influence from individual political ideology to estimation of factual content, as mediated by perceived source credibility of the partisan news host and conditioned by partisan news host. According to Table 1, there is a significant

Table 1
Model Coefficients for Individual's Political Ideology Conditional Indirect Effect on the Estimation of Factual Content in the Partisan News Host's Monologue, as Mediated by PSR and Perceived Source Credibility and Moderated by Partisan News Host

IV: Individual's Political Ideology

DV: Estimation of Factual Content in Partisan News Host Monologue

Mediators	Moderator: Partisan News Host		Index of Moderated Mediation
	Chris Matthews	Sean Hannity	
PSR	0.461 (.437) CI: -.083, 1.781	-2.215 (1.186) CI: -4.667, .017	-2.678 (1.447) CI: -5.780, -.009
Source Credibility	0.724 (.536) CI: .003, 2.246	-2.478 (1.205) CI: -5.008, -.259	-3.202 (1.559) CI: -6.617, -.399

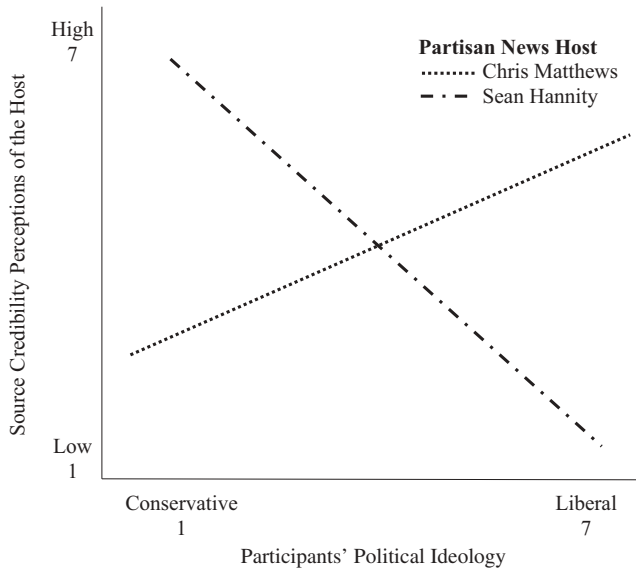
Note: Point estimates of indirect effects reported above with bootstrap standard errors in parentheses; 95% bootstrap confidence intervals (CI) are reported directly beneath the estimates. All CIs reported in bold are significant at a 95% CI.

index of moderated mediation; the bootstrapped confidence interval of the index estimate for perceived source credibility does *not* include zero (point estimate = - 3.202; 95% CI: -6.617, -.399). When probing the conditional indirect effect through perceived source credibility, the indirect effects are significant for both the Matthews and Hannity conditions because both CIs do *not* include zero (see Table 1). This indicates that perceived source credibility's mediating role is meaningful for both the Matthews and Hannity conditions. Thus significant differences exit between the Matthews and Hannity conditions, such that the conservatives in the Hannity conditions experience a stronger process of influence (see the larger effect—i.e., slope—for the Hannity condition in Table 1 for perceived source credibility). In other words, conservatives who read Hannity's monologues were more likely to rate him as credible, which then served as a mediator to increased estimations of factual content in Hannity's monologues. This process occurred for liberals who read Matthews' monologues as well, as indicated by the significant CI range that does not include zero, but the process of influence was not as pronounced.

Discussion

First, it is important to note that individual political ideology did *not* exhibit a conditional *direct* effect on estimation of factual content of a partisan news host's monologue (i.e., H_1 was not supported). In other words, merely sharing partisanship

Figure 3
The Graph Depicts the Interaction of Individuals’ Political Ideology and Partisan News Host Condition on Individuals’ Perceived Source Credibility of the Host, Controlling for the Story Topic



with a host does not generate higher estimations of factual content in a host’s monologue. This finding highlights the importance of examining potential mediators – such as PSRs with the news host and perceived source credibility of the news host – for elucidating how an individual’s political ideology can influence an individual’s estimation of factual content in a news host’s monologue.

While PSRs did not emerge as a mediator, perceived source credibility did emerge as mediator. Table 1 shows that PSRs did not emerge as a significant mediator, although the confidence intervals for both Hannity and Matthews conditions are very close to *not* including zero in the range and thus revealing a mediation process. This suggests that PSRs with like-minded partisan news hosts did not facilitate the relationship to increased estimates of factual content. By implication, PSRs (an entertainment-oriented concept) were not a key concept in understanding how much fact individuals estimate in partisan news. Rather, source credibility (a persuasion-oriented concept) emerged as a key mediator.

Specifically, like-minded partisanship with a partisan news host led to higher estimates of factual content in the host’s monologue; this higher estimation works indirectly through higher evaluations of the host’s credibility. Additionally,

this process occurs more intensely for conservatives who read the Hannity monologues, compared to the liberals who read the Matthews monologues. Perhaps, among conservatives, Hannity is more of a beloved news figure or seen as a more authoritative and legitimate voice of conservative values than Matthews is such a news figure to the liberals. Hannity's show is the top-rated on Fox News, but Matthews' show is rated fourth on MSNBC, behind Rachel Maddow, Lawrence O'Donnell, and Chris Hayes (Katz, 2017). If one thinks about the media landscape, Fox News dominates where conservatives go for political news, while no news source is as pronounced for liberals (Pew, 2017). In other words, conservatives appear to have a stronger loyalty to those partisan news hosts and networks that are considered more conservative.

Next, we consider the perceived *moderate* (rather than liberal) political ideology of Matthews among participants (see Manipulation Checks above) as a potential explanation for the stronger effect for conservatives. It was somewhat surprising that Matthews was not seen as more liberal because Matthews has been a cable news host of *Hardball*, now on MSNBC, a liberal-leaning political news channel, since 1997 (MSNBC.com, n.d.). However, participants answered this partisanship perception question *after* they had read the monologues, so it is possible that the monologue content may have impacted participants' perceptions of Matthews' partisanship. Nevertheless, this helps explain why the mediation model with source credibility did not work as strongly for the liberals.

This broaches a limitation about and challenge for our study: it was exceedingly difficult to find and adapt cable news host monologues that could be perceived as originating from *both* a liberal and conservative cable news host. Each monologue, for both hosts, was adapted from a transcript that was originally featured on the Fox News show "The O'Reilly Factor" by Bill O'Reilly. While the monologues were not an exact transcript and were in fact adapted to "pass" as originating from a potentially liberal *or* conservative news host, it is still possible that the original conservative undertones of the monologues came through, making participants perceive Matthews as more moderate as opposed to liberal. Likewise, it is possible that when a liberal host is perceived as stating a mildly conservative to moderate political opinion, then perhaps that host is perceived as moderate (or even more balanced), but not conservative. But, when a truly conservative host is perceived as stating a mildly conservative to moderate political opinion, then that host is labeled as conservative.

Also, we cannot rule out the potential that conservatives are processing a partisan news host's monologues differently than moderates and liberals when they are exposed to a like-minded host. For example, Republicans, compared to Democrats, experience heightened selective approach and selective avoidance patterns such that fear and anger significantly increase Republicans' pro-attitudinal news exposure (Song, 2017). Additionally, there is evidence that conservatives have more aversion to uncertainty, threat, and ambiguity (Jost & Amodio, 2012). Rather than attributing the partisan nature of our findings to solely the experimental design

(i.e., using Matthews rather than another liberal cable news host), this recent research discourages us from ruling out the possibility that partisans may experience partisan news host monologues differently.

Next, we deliberate the ramifications of these results. We must consider that there are consequences to these findings, and that the results say something about our politics and how our news is presented. When a person who identifies as conservative strictly watches a conservative news host and believes they are presented with facts – when some (or most) of what is presented is opinion – they may only receive the information and opinion that the conservative news host wanted to share. It can be hard for viewers to make informed decisions on topics, when fact and opinions are indistinguishable for the viewers. When some viewers believe partisan news hosts to be credible, they may never seek out more information on the topic in order to make more informed decisions. This tendency should give pause to news consumers who desire to make more informed and cognizant political decisions. While news consumers should consider the source of the information and news, they should also be careful to consider how sources may be impacting their estimation of fact and opinion.

We also must consider those participants who did not have a partisanship match with the partisan news host. For example, conservatives exposed to Matthews estimated less factual content in the monologue than when Hannity's name was attributed to the same exact monologues. We argue that partisan identity cues and motivated political reasoning influenced how partisans evaluated the news host monologues. Like-minded partisanship associated with partisan news hosts encouraged greater perceived source credibility of the news hosts, as these like-minded participants gave more leeway to a like-minded host when it comes to estimating the facts stated by the host. Moreover, in the real world, selective exposure to politically like-minded news hosts likely compounds these problems of partisanship and credibility perceptions to interfere with the estimation of factual content. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult for political partisans to agree on basic facts. Finally, while like-minded partisanship with partisan news hosts also encouraged more PSRs, PSRs did not serve as a significant link to higher estimation of factual content. This implies that PSRs are not playing as important a role as source credibility in estimates of factual content.

Limitations and Future Research

As stated previously, a limitation to the study is that the monologues were adapted from Bill O'Reilly monologues that aired in 2011 (insider trading monologue) and 2015 (national debt monologue). There is a small chance that participants could have been exposed to these transcripts previously; we did not ask participants if they had encountered the monologue before. Further, Bill O'Reilly was the original conservative news host intended for this study; he was not used in our experiment because he had been dismissed from Fox News just before the start of data collection.

Future research in this area that links partisan media, entertainment concepts (e.g., PSRs), persuasion concepts (e.g., source credibility), and political ideology should use more political topics beyond the economy. This experiment incorporated less sensationalized and politicized issues in the news (i.e., national debt and insider trading). Researchers in the future might also consider including a more diverse group of hosts. Matthews might not have been the most appropriate liberal news host to include in this study. Choosing another liberal news host such as MSNBC's Rachel Maddow or even choosing a liberal entertainment program host (e.g., Stephen Colbert or John Oliver) could strengthen the explanations of the results for liberals.

In conclusion, this study adds to the literature on partisan news consumption such that it examines a process of influence and uncovers an indirect link (via source credibility) between how our partisanship impacts our estimation of factual content in political messages. Studying indirect relationships is very important to uncovering potential processes of influence, especially because direct effects (in this case, political ideology) do not always manifest. This study helps shed light on the question of why like-minded cable news viewers might overestimate fact when consuming information from a partisan news host.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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