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IDENTIFYING FACTORS OF SOURCE CREDIBILITY IN POLITICS

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STEPHANIE G. SCHARTEL DUNN
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A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

BY

Dr. Norman Wong, Chair

Dr. Tyler Johnson

Dr. Glenn Hansen

Dr. Jill Edy

Dr. Patrick Meirick

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Abstract

This paper assesses the role parasocial interaction has on perceptions of credibility, especially in terms of political commentators. Parasocial interaction and the concept of entertainment education create a framework to explore how people react to persuasive messages from political commentators. After assessing the impact of parasocial interrelations, assessments were made concerning viewers' likelihood of elaboration, attitude and behavior change. It was found that higher PSI levels generated more positive message evaluations, higher assessments of source credibility, decreased counter-arguing, and increased likelihood for attitude and behavior change.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"That's a pretty smart analysis; a lot of people don't think you're smart,"

- Bill O'Reilly to Jon Stewart, May 16, 2011

In May of 2011 there was much anticipation surrounding The Daily Show's Jon Stewart's appearance on Bill O'Reilly's The O'Reilly Factor (Bell, 2011; Mirkinson, 2011; Parnes, 2001). Both of these men, though ideologically dissimilar, are headliners of similarly successful cable programs (Pew, 2012). Combined, their programs reach millions of television viewers, even as the American populace has largely "tuned out" from the world of news and politics altogether (Baym, 2009, p.2). Further, clips from these programs are posted online so viewers can watch or re-watch segments at their leisure. Though overall believability and credibility in mainstream news programming is progressively deteriorating (Pew, 2012), viewership for programs such as the O'Reilly Factor and The Daily Show is still strong.

A reason why individuals watch television programs like the O'Reilly Factor and The Daily Show is because they expose them to ideas and experiences they might not otherwise be exposed to (Mutz & Martin, 2001). Though there are local news programs and newspapers, political commentators are able to make sense of issues in an entertaining format. Agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) suggests that the media is able to shape discussions by selecting which topics to cover. However, this dissertation seeks to go a step further and determine if the media personality has an effect on how people process messages and form opinions. In many ways, media and political commentators have more of an ability to shape individuals' attitudes towards politicians and political situations than politicians have the power to. When

individuals watch their favorite political commentator deliver messages within an entertainment context they may be less likely to critically evaluate what the commentator is telling them.

All television viewers are subject to commentators' opinions; however, less informed individuals are particularly likely to gain political knowledge from television sources rather than researching issues on their own (Bos, Parkin, & van Doorn, 2003). Further, less informed individuals are likely to take political cues from "trusted political elites" such as O'Reilly or Stewart (Althaus, 1998, p.546). Therefore, these less informed individuals are more likely to be influenced by pundits and their political messages.

The American populace, both informed and less informed, watch a significant amount of television for a variety of reasons, including the acquisition of political information (Jones, 2005; Ward, 2006). The growing partisanship, particularly evident in 24 hour news channels, allows people to watch what they want to watch, which could decrease the effects of hearing both sides of the argument and ultimately, increases the likelihood for partisan attitude formation (Levendusky, 2013; Stroud, 2010; Sunstein, 2009). Since pundits are, seemingly, everywhere, it is important to know how their audience processes their messages. Understanding how individuals process these ubiquitous messages is the goal of this study. To that end, this chapter serves to introduce a project examining how mediated messages, and the partisan political commentators who deliver these messages are evaluated. Source credibility, parasocial interaction (PSI), and message elaboration in response to partisan political

commentators will be the focus. The theoretical framework, justification, and an explanation of the experiment are discussed.

Experiences with politicians and political ideas, whether mediated or not, shape opinions (Zucker, 1978). Media makes political information more salient. When we hear the President speak once we do not absorb as much of the content as we do when trusted members of the media present similar information during discussions about the President's speech (Popkin, 1994). When issues are covered in the media, people are more likely to know about them. As coverage of information about candidates and policy increases in the media, so does the public's familiarity with the information. Accessibility to mediated political discussion is readily available to most citizens. It is common to 'accidentally' be exposed to informational political programming; televisions are typically set to one of the 24 hour news channels at restaurants, banks, gyms, and public libraries. Eveland (2004) notes, exposure, either from mediated sources or in personal interactions, accounts for much of the political knowledge the public appears to have. Since political commentators are mediated, but still maintain a dialogue with their audience, by talking directly to the camera and soliciting feedback, they play a unique role in the public's acquisition of political information.

Several agencies measure the popularity of news programs and personalities; however, because access to media and political commentators has become so common, the question is no longer, are people watching television, but rather, who are people watching on television. With so much of our political information coming from the programming we watch on television, it is important to determine the level of

influence political commentators have on people's attitudes toward political issues and the process through which political commentators are able to persuade their audiences. This project differentiates itself from other studies by exploring audience perceptions of political commentators' credibility, and how the commentator's credibility affects viewership as well as opinion formation. Are traditional measures of credibility adequate to evaluate commentators in an age of 24 hour news networks? Do parasocial interactions (PSI) between political commentators and their audiences supersede credibility in impacting attitudes toward political issues? These are a few of the questions explored in this dissertation.

Theoretical Framework

Regardless of where political messages come from (i.e., how the information is delivered), an individual must become involved with the messages in order for the persuasive messages to be effective (Zaller, 1997). Salience occurs when an idea is perceived to be important and worthy of consideration. When ideas become salient, people are more likely to explore the idea and continue to gain an understanding about it. How media make issues salient to the public is explored in agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) literature; however, the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) focuses on how messages are processed, and, in turn, change the attitudes of those who are exposed to the messages (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a). When stimuli are presented to a receiver, the receiver reacts by making the decision whether or not to elaborate upon the stimuli and cognitively process the messages (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a, 1986b; Stephenson, Benoit, & Tschida, 2001). An individual needs both high motivation and ability to cognitively process information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b).

Motivation, ability, argument quality, peripheral cues, and the amount of elaboration that occurs can all affect the amount of attitude change that takes place after an individual is exposed to a persuasive message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b).

An important assumption of ELM is persuasion can take place regardless of how much message elaboration occurs in processing the message. Since media conglomerates need to make a profit, there is often a strong focus on making certain that messages are delivered in an entertaining format to ensure high ratings, as exemplified by both Stewart's and O'Reilly's adoption of entertainment-based news formats for their shows. Because informational programming showcasing political commentators is entertaining in addition to being informative, the model used to examine this phenomenon needs to extend beyond the traditional ELM model to account for the entertainment aspect of such programming. Therefore, Moyer-Gusé's (2008) entertainment overcoming resistance model (EORM) will be applied in addition to ELM.

Moyer-Gusé asserted seven propositions as extensions of the ELM, all of which emphasizes the argument that through PSI media creators have the ability to decrease message inspired resistance and increase persuasibility. Previous PSI research has demonstrated that PSI does take place between audiences and commentators on news programs in addition to characters portrayed in other forms of entertainment programing (Levy, 1979). In examining the propositions presented in EORM, we will gain a better understanding of how messages from political commentators are processed. Understanding how messages from political

commentators are processed will aid in understanding why certain commentators are more trusted and more persuasive.

As mentioned above, parasocial interaction plays a vital role in EORM. However, the literature examining PSI is thin. The concept of PSI has existed since the 1950's (Horton and Wohl, 1956); however, few contexts have been used to further our understanding of this phenomenon. Primarily parasocial research has involved television game shows, reality shows, and soap operas (Horton and Wohl, 1956; Levy, 1979; Houlberg, 1984; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985; Giles, 2002). A few studies (e.g., Ballantine and Martin, 2005) have expanded the contexts in which PSI are studied to include online interactions; however, there is an overall lack of literature on PSI.

A primary goal of this research project is to expand the parasocial literature. Specifically, there are two elements missing from the existing parasocial literature explored in this project that will increase our understanding of persuasion. First, the interaction between parasocial interaction and message elaboration needs to be explored so that a better understanding of how such interactions cultivate attitude formation can be established. Does PSI cultivate attitude formation or attitude change via greater message elaboration? If not, are people perceiving arguments made by political commentators as good quality arguments more readily (i.e., they are less resistant to the messages) than from individuals they do not experience as much of a parasocial connection with? The second element missing from the current parasocial literature involves the relationship between PSI and perceptions of credibility. Do perceptions of source credibility affect the likelihood of parasocial interactions taking

place between political commentators on television and their viewers? How do evaluations of both parasocial interaction and credibility affect message processing?

In this dissertation, the primary question regarding credibility is what criteria do people use to determine the credibility of political commentators such as Jon Stewart and Bill O'Reilly, and how do such assessments of credibility impact levels of perceived parasocial interaction felt between the audience and the political commentators and, in turn, affect persuasion in terms of both attitude change and behavioral intent to express support for the positions advocated in the commentators' messages. Specifically, I will evaluate if manipulations of source credibility affect parasocial interactions viewers have with a political commentator, and that such a parasocial connection in turn promotes greater message elaboration resulting in acceptance of the commentator's advocated attitudinal position in his or her message. I will first explore the history of punditry of which political commentators can be thought of as pundits before reviewing literature on source credibility, parasocial interaction, and finally, the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) in conjunction with the entertainment overcoming resistance model (EORM). A study will then be presented in order to assess perceptions of credibility as it influences PSI, which in turn is expected to impact both message elaboration and persuasion.

Chapter 2: Punditry

This chapter serves to develop a more comprehensive idea of what separates a news anchor from a political commentator or pundit. While discussing pundits, I will first look at the idea of opinion leaders and the evolution of the pundit, before discussing their potential to influence their audiences' attitudes and behaviors. In discussing the pundits' potential for influence over their audiences' attitudes and behaviors, it will become necessary to also discuss parasocial relationships (chapter 3) and how the development of a one-sided interpersonal-like relationship between the pundit and the public amplifies the likelihood for persuasion to occur.

Opinion Leaders

Issue publics are groups of individuals who are exposed to information about particular subjects (Popkin, 1994). Individuals become a part of issue publics based on demographic and situational factors. For instance, a student at a large university would be more likely to become part of an issue public regarding policies related to collegiate sports than their non-student counterpart. Because an individual's close social network likely consists of others who are similar and hold congruent attitudes (Mutz & Martin, 2001) individuals' political attitudes are reinforced. Therefore, having a developed understanding of a particular political position, perpetuated by interpersonal political discussions such that the more a political issue is discussed, strengthens the held attitude. Which, in turn, will be reinforced and perpetuated in later political conversations. Moreover, given that members of an individual's social network likely hold varying degrees of political knowledge when they engage in political discussions, those with greater issue-related knowledge or influence are

expected to have a greater impact on the knowledge of the group as a whole (Mutz & Reeves, 2005).

When individuals are afforded the opportunity to participate in political discussion, opinions are both challenged and reinforced. Over time, the more political experiences, including political discussions, an individual accumulates, the stronger their political opinions become (Franklin & Jackson, 1983). There are benefits from discussions held with individuals of differing opinions. The more informed a social network is about a political issue, the greater the potential there is that the discussion will be beneficial for promoting more informed decision-making (McClurg, 2006). When we talk to people with opinions other than our own, we are then exposed to ideas we might otherwise not consider (Mutz, 2002). This stems back to John Stuart Mill's notion of the marketplace of ideas; the thought that the more ideas we are exposed to the more likely we are to make an informed decision (Mill, 1859). However, many people are hesitant to discuss politics in public situations, especially when those discussions have the potential to inspire interpersonal conflict.

There are certain individuals who are not hesitant to discuss political matters and, therefore, have the ability to influence their peers' attitudes and behaviors more than others. These individuals, who provide those around them with information and help reduce uncertainty about issues, have come to be known as opinion leaders (Rogers, 2003; Nair, Manchanda, & Bhaita, 2010). Opinion leaders are individuals whom others turn to for information on a particular issue because of their expertise – traditionally individuals in ones' personal network (Lazarsdeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944). More recently opinion leaders have been discussed in the political domain as

pundits or political commentators (Popkin, 1994; Althaus, 1998; Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson, 2002).

"Opinion elites" are people who are more knowledgeable about politics compared to the general populace. Additionally, opinion elites are more likely to start macro-level political changes/movements (Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson, 2002). People often take cues from opinion elites; these cues mixed with heuristic processing of information about candidates or issues enables them to form opinions largely consistent with their political predispositions (Althaus, 1998). These opinions are often catalysts for individuals' voting choice decisions and enactment of other political behaviors. Elites are generally set and firm on their party alignment (Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson, 2002); therefore, it is likely the information an individual get from such elites is partisan.

Even though we traditionally think of political attitudes as being established through personal experience and political discussions (Jerit, Barabas, & Bolsen, 2006), it is not always the case. When individuals work extended hours they have less time to participate in political activities and political discussions with opinion leaders. A lack of political experience also perpetuates a uniform lack of political knowledge among people in lower socio-economic classes (Jerrit, Barabas, & Bolsen, 2006). Further, because many campaign events are exclusive to certain groups of individuals (i.e., by invitation only) or require a certain level of campaign donations to attend (e.g., a $1000 plate dinner), individuals from lower socio-economic levels are less likely to have direct interactions with politicians than their more affluent counterparts. Beyond these monetary limitations, political opinion elites are generally not a part of our

interpersonal social networks, and because of this many people turn to mediated opinion elites to help them better understand political situations.

Television provides a means for individuals to gain political experiences they would otherwise not be able to gain on their own. Unlike traditional conversation partners, mediated political commentators are not constrained nearly as much in terms of who has access to their political ideas, so their potential for influence is amplified (Morin, Ivory, & Tubbs, 2012). In mediated contexts, political commentators are able to express their opinions without much restraint (Habel, 2012). Further, because political discussion programs are accessible, literally, all of the time due to devices such as digital video recorders (DVRs) and cable services like programs on-demand, viewers are able to hear about political situations from political commentators when it is convenient for them.

In 2012, Habel set out to study the effect of political media elites, noting there is a lack of previous research on the topic (Habel, 2012). In his study, the opinion pages of the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* were analyzed using Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) scores. He found that, though the opinion pages from the two papers were ideologically different, the contributions to the opinion pages seemed to fluctuate similarly in response to political happenings. Further analysis demonstrated the opinion pages had little effect on how the President or members of Congress acted, but demonstrated the papers do influence one another (Habel, 2012). While we cannot expect politicians to change political course based on editorials, there is a much stronger likelihood that readers would be influenced by the content of such editorials. Further, if readers of both publications are considering the

same issues, public discourse overall is likely to be changed based on the content of the editorials.

Evolution of Punditry

The term "pundit" stems from "pandit", a Sanskrit word for those who are highly educated and respected (Bowman, 2010). It is now ironic that some of the more famous political commentators are given this title due to their lack of accuracy and education (Bowman, 2010). In fact, a group of colonial wives first gave their husbands, who were opinion leaders of their time, the nickname "pundit" in jest as a reference to the ancient word (Alterman, 1999). As news media began to evolve, so too did the role of the political commentator.

Baym notes that there have been three eras of television news: the network age, the multichannel era, and the post-network age (2009). Though methods of news dissemination have evolved over those three time periods, the editorial page has long been the designated opinion space in a news publication (Habel, 2012) with other commentary being a more recent iteration of news presentation. Beginning in the multichannel era, television journalists have begun to provide their interpretation of events for the public and served to provide narrative of stories, rather than straight fact reporting of the previous era (Baym, 2009). Though scholars have noted the difficulty in separating news presentation and entertainment programming (Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001), I argue that expression of personal opinions (i.e., either absent or present) distinguishes news anchors from commentators, while specialized commentators can be called pundits. News anchors are individuals that engage in objective fact reporting without interjecting their own personal opinions in delivering

the story. On the other hand, political commentators are individuals that also discuss news stories but often interject their own personal opinions to frame the story in a particular way. Political commentators, particularly those that work within an entertainment context, are not expected to engage in objective fact reporting because their main goal is to entertain audiences and not be an unbiased news source.

Even though the history of punditry is relatively long, the basic idea that a pundit serves the public as a disseminator of political information remains relatively constant (Alterman, 1999). As political commentary has evolved, pundits are still able to spin a select amount of information and present their own interpretation to their audiences. The interpretation presented, in turn, helps the audience members develop an understanding of the issues presented. As noted above, news commentators create narratives for their audiences, and depending on how emotionally involved viewers become with the narratives presented to them, these narratives can have a significant impact on audiences' understanding and attitudes toward the issues discussed in the narratives because the feelings generated by an event (which can certainly be manipulated by a pundit) are the most memorable aspect of an issue (Lippmann, 1922, p. 475). In this way, trusted pundits have the power to shape both an audience's understanding of and attitudes toward an issue by the tone, spin, and amount of elaboration they use to describe the issue. When such discussions are embedded within entertainment programming, viewers may become less skeptical of the accuracy of the information presented by pundits.

Modern political pundits have no uniform political experience level (i.e., some have been actively involved in politics in the past while others had no such

involvement), nor do they necessarily have a strong understanding of various government policies or political situations, many of which are highly complex involving an interaction of multiple factors. Unfortunately, some political pundits may oversimplify their discussion of political situations in presenting the information to their audiences. However, lack of political experience and understanding of complex political situations does not seem to deter citizens from taking cues from political commentators; in fact, studies have shown such news broadcasts are the most relied upon source for political information and experiences (Graber, 1997; Althaus, Nardulli, & Shaw, 2002). Despite the fact that some political commentators have a seemingly low amount of credibility based on their level of experience and expertise, many people still have strong positive reactions to the messages these pundits send. It is plausible that how political commentators portray themselves contributes to how the public evaluates them. As Lippmann observed, "great men, even during their lifetime, are usually known to the public only through a fictitious personality" (1922, p.471).

Potential for Influence

In the twenty first century, the national media has provided the public with information from a select group of political "elites" offering their opinions to audiences within the confines of entertainment programming and we recognize these individuals to be political commentators or political pundits (Page & Shapiro, 1992). Individuals listen to political pundits for entertainment, and, subsequently, are exposed to commentators' opinions concerning politics and world events. Viewership is evidenced by the consistently high ratings O'Reilly, Stewart, and other pundits receive (Pew, 2012). Viewers watch to be entertained, because of this, the accuracy of the

commentator is less important to audience members than their ability to entertain is. In contrast, a traditional news anchor in the "network age" was expected to report news and information revealing as little emotion or personal involvement as possible (Baym, 2009).

The role of the news media, which is the "principal source for much of what citizens know about the world (Habel, 2012, p.257), and in particular, the role of the political pundit, is important to our understanding of political persuasion. Voters depend on the traditional news media to help them determine which issues are important, how to evaluate political candidates, and ultimately to help determine their overall political beliefs and how to act in accordance with those beliefs (Kiousis & McCombs, 2004; Hansen & Benoit, 2005; Ancu & Cozma, 2009; Cho et al, 2009). Because so much of the public's political information comes to them through television and print sources, it is reasonable to believe these pundits can play a substantial role in opinion forming (Hansen & Benoit, 2005; Ancu & Cozma, 2009; Cho et al, 2009). Further, less informed people are particularly likely to take cues from "trusted political elites" (Althaus, 1998, p.546).

On the 24 hour news networks we do see news broadcasts, but many of the programs incorporate commentary and opinion from the host or hosts of the informational program. Opinions are biased; therefore, it should not be surprising to suggest the ideas viewers are exposed to via these mediated political elites are increasingly partisan (Prior, 2013). As political elites gain more power using the 24-hour news networks, and political discourse in general becomes increasingly partisan in nature, large segments of the populace are often exposed to skewed political

messages (Mutz & Martin, 2001). Taken individually, the programs may not inspire opinion change in all viewers. However, over time viewers become more familiar with individual pundits and begin to depend on them to make sense of news events (Levy, 1979). In a sense, political pundits cultivate specific attitudes in the minds of their audiences via repeated exposure to their biased opinions. In the case of audiences with predisposed political ideologies, viewing political pundits that share similar political ideologies may further reinforce their own opinions through resonance effects.

> Hypothesis #1: Respondents in the (a) high (vs. low) similarity group, and (b) those who report stronger (vs. weaker) levels of shared political ideologies with the commentator will be more likely to report higher levels of perceived attitude homophily toward the commentator, controlling for respondent-commentator sex similarity.

One way pundits are able to make sense of news is through narrative. "Political actors use narrative story lines and symbolic devices to manipulate so-called issue characteristics, all the while making it seem as though they are simply describing facts," (Stone, 1989, p.282). Even in news-like programming, most of the information is provided in the form of a narrative (Appel & Maleckar, 2012). Through the use of narrative, programs featuring pundits provide entertainment in addition to information. Political commentators are generally expected to be dynamic; therefore, it is easy to get wrapped up in their prose. As will be discussed to a greater extent in later chapters, narrative involvement is known to decrease counter-arguing, which provides further justification to the argument that audiences are less interested in accuracy of the commentator as they are interested in the commentators' ability to entertain.

As an individual becomes absorbed in the narrative, they may be less likely to pick up on spin and more likely to believe the story developed by the commentator to be true, almost as though they had experienced the event themselves (Lippmann, 1922). Studies have demonstrated that even if an individual is told a fictional story, if they like the commentator and are involved in the narrative, there is no statistically significant difference in how fictional stories are perceived to be true when compared to nonfictional stories (Appel &Maleckar, 2012).

It is particularly important to investigate how individuals process political messages from political commentators. Now that an understanding of what an opinion leader is has been discussed along with the evolution of punditry and the potential for influence commentators have; it is appropriate now to further explore the perceptions of source credibility as it pertains to political message processing.

Chapter 3: Source Credibility

Source credibility, the evaluation of honesty, goodwill, and competence of a source made by receivers, has long been understood to affect persuasion. Positive evaluations of source credibility increase the persuasive impact of a message (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Kelman & Hovland, 1953; McCroskey, 1961). As will be discussed later on in this dissertation, many source credibility scales and measures have been established. Some researchers think the possibilities for studying source credibility have been exhausted (Sternthal, Phillips, & Dholakia, 1978). However, it is clear from the vast number of models and scales that source credibility may still be evolving. This chapter will begin with a history of source credibility, followed by an analysis of the factors contributing to source credibility, before discussing the effects of source credibility.

Most introductory communication classes credit Aristotle for the invention of ethos (i.e., credibility). Although Aristotle was the first scholar to formally identify the construct of source credibility, several other philosophers' works alluded to ethos before him. One of the more notable philosophers to discuss ethos was Plato; specifically in his works Gorgias and Phadraus (McCroskey, 1981). In Plato's work Gorgias, he noted wise men are held in higher esteem than those who do not appear to be wise. These sentiments are quite similar to Aristotle's later description of intelligence (which, along with character and goodwill make up ethos).

A second major similarity is found in Phadraus (McCroskey, 1981). In this work, Plato made a second ethos related sentiment by acknowledging that when a speaker takes his audience into consideration when forming arguments, he is better

received. Once again, Aristotle mirrors this idea. To consider one's audience and present messages that seem to be concerned with their audiences' well-being tells a lot about the speaker's character and the goodwill a speaker has for his audience. This idea was also mentioned in the lesser known rhetoric based work entitled Rhetorica ad Alexandria, released around the same time Aristotle famously published the Rhetoric (McCroskey, 1981). For the above noted similarities, it is said that the works of Plato heavily influenced Aristotle's understanding of ethos.

In 1948 source credibility research experienced two notable advancements. Haiman (1948) published a study that re-energized explorations of source credibility's role in persuasion, around the same time an article by Walter (1948) contained one of the first scales intended to measure character of a source as a component of source credibility. Further, because there were new tools with which to analyze and gather data, along with a renewed desire in understanding to what extent and how source credibility plays a significant role in persuasion, an interest in measuring source credibility emerged and became a hot topic of communication research (McCroskey, 1981).

Along with the popularity in source credibility research came a great number of measurements assessing various aspects of source credibility. Through research based on earlier scales and findings, researchers were able to deduce factors that changed how the discipline understood source credibility. A notable advancement was made by Hovland et al. (1953) in which he was one of the first to begin exploring how the audience reacted to a speaker's perceived source credibility rather than on a speaker's inherent credibility that previous researchers had been assessing. Before this

study, focus was placed on literal characteristics of the speaker (e.g., vocal characteristics, education level). In 1957 Osgood et al. extended Hovland's observation concerning the importance of receivers a step further, and found audience's perceptions, not the speaker's actual qualifications, were contributing factors of source credibility evaluation. From then on, development of scales focused on identifying what aspects of the speaker receivers used as their criteria to determine source credibility.

The importance of focusing on receivers rather than the traits of speakers when studying source credibility provides groundwork for factors of credibility to be extended beyond the Aristotelian standards of character, goodwill, and intelligence. Anderson (1961) introduced dynamism to this list of credibility factors. Dynamism is defined an individual's ability to get others to like them. If Hovland and Osgood had not shifted the focus from analyzing speakers to the perceptions made by receivers, dynamism would simply not make sense as a factor of source credibility.

Perhaps the most notable advancements in the development of source credibility factors came in the 1960's when Berlo and Lemert (1961; 1969) were in dialogue at the time with McCroskey (1961; 1966). Together, they created scales that addressed all previously discovered source credibility factors, resulting in the well-known McCroskey Source Credibility Scale. Though they seemed to have exhausted all possible combinations of factors, many studies were published throughout the 1970's suggesting new factors be added to the scale.

In 1981, McCroskey published a study introducing height as the latest source credibility factor. This study demonstrated, though significant results were obtained,

that not all source credibility factors realistically could be added to the scale, nor should they logically be added to the scale. A major argument of McCroskey was that because the reliability of the 1966 scale have been extensively tested to become widely accepted as a measure of source credibility, the energy scholars were using to develop new source credibility factors could be better spent testing new theories.

As evidenced by the 1966 McCroskey scale, the two primary factors of source credibility are perceived competence and perceived honesty. Source credibility relies heavily on how much trust (gained through perceived accuracy and reliability) an audience member feels comfortable giving a speaker (Eagly, Wood, Chaiken, 1978; Petty & Wegener, 1998; Sparks & Rapp, 2011). Trust indicates a source is perceived likely to report accurate, unbiased information (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989). Lupia (2000) suggests there are two requirements for credibility. First, the audience must perceive the speaker has relevant knowledge. Second, the audience must believe the speaker is going to be honest and share their knowledge with the audience. This assertion is a somewhat simplified interpretation of the role of source credibility as it pertains within the study of political communication. Using Lupia's logic, when political commentators are perceived to be credible, individuals trust those speakers more, and, in turn, are more likely to believe their messages.

Because persuasion often plays such a large role in political discourse, it is also important for researchers to consider persuasion strategies alongside the abovementioned standards for evaluating credibility. An important factor in determining credibility is based on how well audience members relate to the speaker (political or otherwise), as "source-audience similarity tends to increase persuasive

impact" (Pfau & Parrott, 1993, p.25). In political communication, perceived similarity to a politician positively relates to an individual's judgment of the speaker's credibility (Teven, 2008). In recent years politicians have made attempts to seem more like every-day citizens, for example when President Obama had a beer with a Medal of Honor recipient (Nakamura, 2011). One famous example came in 1976 when President Gerald Ford, on a visit to the Alamo, picked up a plate of tamales. Acts like these are attempts by politicians to suggest to their constituents that the candidate is similar to the constituent, and that they enjoy the activities they partake in. The goal is to elicit feelings of trustworthiness in audience members toward the political candidate. However, unfortunately for Ford, picking up a plate of tamales did not elicit the desired effect. From news accounts, the crowd of onlookers gasped when Ford bit into one of the tamales with the cornhusk still intact (Danini, 2006).

If a message receiver perceives the sender to be similar, it is more likely the speakers' message will have a stronger persuasive appeal than if the source was perceived dissimilar (Bryne, 1971; Hovland, Janis, & Kelly, 1953; Simons, Berkowitz, & Moyer, 1970). This phenomenon is partially because people tend to evaluate those they perceive to be similar to them as having similar beliefs and political ideologies (Mutz & Martin, 2001). However, these are not always accurate assumptions. A prime example of this is Stephen Colbert from *The Colbert Report*. The persona Mr. Colbert portrays in this show is clearly an over-the-top conservative political commentator. However, individuals have a tendency to perceive the actual comedian as being more liberal or conservative based on their own political beliefs (LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009). When perceptions of similarity are evaluated in

accordance with perceptions of competence we can expect to see increased overall perceptions of source credibility. Further discussion of the effects of source credibility will demonstrate the importance of continued understanding of credibility, particularly in political contexts.

Effects of Credibility

Perceptions of source credibility are of particular importance when studying political communication (Teven, 2008). Speakers, including politicians and political pundits, rely upon their audiences' perceptions of credibility in order to gain their trust, and to gain the ability to effectively persuade those audiences. Increased levels of perceived source credibility are linked with a higher likelihood of influence (Priester & Petty, 1995; Sparks & Rapp, 2011). However, a persuasive source needs to have relatively high levels of perceived credibility in order for other individuals to trust and listen to their messages (Lupia, 2000). Subsequently, a source needs people to listen to those messages in order to be successful at inspiring attitude and behavior changes in their audience.

Aristotle was among the first philosophers to recognize source credibility has a direct impact on the interpretation of messages and, subsequently, the actions taken in response to those messages. Aristotle's notion of ethos, the audiences' perception of a speaker's character, is still understood as a fundamental aspect of public speaking within the communication discipline. Since this initial observation, many studies have tested and supported Aristotles' notions concerning credibility (McCroskey, 1966b; Teven, 2008). These investigations have demonstrated the necessity of power, attractiveness, and credibility in order for audience members to perceive a speaker to

be trustworthy (and therefore worth listening to). However, these elements are all interpretive perceptions and are not necessarily based in actuality (Lupia, 2000).

Elevated levels of perceived source credibility have been shown to foster more positive attitudes towards the message content along with enhancing the promotion of the attitude advocated by the sender (Sternthal, Dholakia, & Leavitt, 1978). Source credibility can directly impact the nature of the attitudes audiences hold toward a particular subject and inspiring behavior change in response to the persuasive messages they are presented with. Highly credible sources inspire significantly more behavioral change than low credibility sources (Sternthal, Phillips, & Dholakia, 1978). Behavior or attitude change is the ultimate goal in persuasive speaking; therefore establishing source credibility should be a priority of speakers with persuasive messages.

These positive attitudes extend also to the individual speaking as positive attitudes increase likability. This favorability further benefits the speaker, as likability has been shown to have more weight than argument strength in certain campaign appearances (Teven, 2008). Once a speaker has gained likability it will be easier for them to establish credibility with their audience members in later persuasive situations. Politicians especially should be aware that early impressions of candidate credibility have been shown to affect candidates' poll performance throughout the election (Miller & Reese, 1982). Many studies have upheld this idea and indicate that credibility is positively related to the persuasive effect of the speaker (Sternthal, Dholakia, & Leavitt, 1978).

Studies have provided answers to most concerns raised based on the ELM about the power of source credibility in influencing message acceptance and attitude change. For instance, one study indicated that holding strong opinions on a topic carries more weight in influencing a receivers' negative or non-response to the speaker than perceptions of source credibility when a speaker's messages are contrary to the receivers' beliefs on a topic (Sternthal, Dholakia, & Leavitt, 1978). These findings are not surprising, as it is commonly understood that attitude change is easier to achieve when your target audience does not have pre-existing attitudes and/or holds beliefs about the issue congruent to those the speaker is attempting to persuade them about. However, as will be discussed in the next chapter, likeability and connection with the message source can go a long way in persuasion (Tevin, 2008). So while pre-existing attitudes are important, a speaker looking to persuade previously un-swayed audiences should be mainly concerned with fostering positive perceptions of their own source credibility and likability within their target audiences.

Chapter 4: Parasocial Interactions/Relationships

When an audience member develops a pseudo interpersonal relationship with a character or media personality, he or she forms a parasocial relationship (Pfau & Parrott, 1993). In other words, a "seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer" (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p.215) is formed. Prolonged exposure to a particular media personality may make the audience member feel as though he or she "knows" the media personality (Semmler, 2007; Schram & Wirth, 2010). Parasocial relationships (PSR's) are considered an important element of individuals' relational development (Eyal & Cohen, 2006) and allow researchers to assess interpersonal theories in mass media contexts (Turner, 1993).

Within the context of entertainment–based political programming, the more experience an individual has with a political commentator, the more likely he or she is to build a parasocial relationship with that commentator (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). Prolonged experience with a particular commentator increases the likelihood of an audience member believing the media figure shares their values and ideologies, even if this is not the case (Mutz & Martin, 2001). Despite non-television mediated channels (i.e. radio, internet) also having the potential for development of parasocial relationships, such relationships are most often formed through a series of "interactions" with television personalities (Schramm & Wirth, 2010). Understanding the history of the study of parasocial relationships will provide for an informed discussion of how parasocial relationships, parasocial interactions and narrative involvement affect message processing.

The history of parasocial interaction research began with observations made by Merton in 1946 while exploring the influence of radio singer and war bonds peddler Kate Smith. Kate Smith, an otherwise un-extraordinary radio singer, had success advertising war bonds. Despite never having identified the audience's interpersonal attraction to Kate Smith as a parasocial interaction, his research did inspire two other sociologists, Horton and Wohl (1956), to theorize about such mediated interactions. A year after making their initial hypotheses, Horton and Wohl (1957) published a study highlighting a game show host's seemingly private dialogue with his television audience. The researchers concluded that after observing a host's interactions with individuals on the game show and then experiencing the host talking "directly" to his home audience, individuals began to feel as though they had a real relationship with that media personality.

In 1972 Rosengren and Windahl became the first scholars to try to measure media interactions with a scale they developed through interviews and ethnographic techniques. Rosengren and Windahl re-worked their scale and re-released it in 1976. Others, including Norlund (1972) and Levy (1979), created scales measuring elements of PSI around this time, with Levy's scale expanding understanding of PSI to include television news viewing. Several years later, Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) published the most well-known parasocial interaction scale to date.

Auter and Palmgreen (2000) created an audience participation index (API). This index is quite similar to Rubin et al.'s (1985) measure for evaluating parasocial interactions (PSI). However, because Auter and Palmgreen's scale, API, contains questions pertaining to similarity and goodwill of a more general character, the API

measures could be used in contexts broader than serial television programs. In an attempt to test their API, Auter and Palmgreen introduced respondents to episodes of *Murphy Brown*, a television show that was not currently on the air, and had them answer a series of questions related to their desires for and perceptions of the major characters. The findings of the 2000 study reaffirm the notion that an individual does not need to have long-term exposure to a character, as would be needed to develop a PSR, in order to experience PSI and feelings for a character. Further, the study presented in this dissertation is inspired greatly by the notion that competence and similarity, both elements mentioned above while discussing source credibility, are likely predictors of PSI. Levy studied reactions to, and parasocial relationship development of, those consuming news programming in 1979, and it is evident that the content of news programming then is different from current news programming. The advent of the 24- hour news networks has produced a shift in the way Americans watch news. These differences (e.g., extended exposure, selective exposure, etc.) necessitate such news based studies be updated. One study that should be updated, Horton and Wohl (1956), suggested that intimate delivery might provide for stronger parasocial interactions to occur between the message source and the audience. This concept has not been extensively tested within the context of entertainment-based news programming and with media news personalities (i.e., mediated political commentators) since early parasocial interaction research looked at PSIs with mainly with television characters portrayed on various television shows rather than with individuals speaking directly to their audiences.

Research has demonstrated media figures potentially serve as role models and guide the behavior and attitudes of their viewers (Fisherkeller, 1997). Along with the ability to impose media frames, elites also have social capital. An individual with social capital has the potential ability to encourage others to participate politically (Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998). Individuals can get so involved in these relationships they eventually see the commentator to be similar to a friend (Semmler, 2007), which could potentially strengthen the idea that the commentator shares your belief system. The potential for influence is greater if we consider political commentators our "friends" (i.e., part of our interpersonal social network). Therefore, parasocial relationships present a unique circumstance for persuasion.

As noted in previous chapters, when individuals do pay attention to political events, they may turn to entertainment sources in addition to or as a substitute for more traditional news sources (e.g., network news anchors) and listen to political commentators to gain information about political and world events. This is important because as discussed earlier, people may be incidentally exposed to information about politics and world events that may not be accurate (i.e., biased) because the focus of political pundits are to entertain their audiences rather than to engage in fact reporting, and making sure that their information is accurate. Especially in terms of political communication, it could be very beneficial to know how strength of PSI varies based on perceptions of certain source characteristics such as perceived credibility. Knowing how PSI and source credibility are related would help determine the degree to which audiences trust and, ultimately, form attitudes based on what the commentators say and how the level of personal connection developed between the audience and

commentator is linked to viewers' perceptions of source characteristics. The relationship between PSI and credibility form a feedback loop in that each influences the extent to which the other is perceived.

Further, the expansion of 24-hour news networks beyond regular news networks to niche news networks has led to greater diversity of political viewpoints being represented on television, covering the spectrum from ultra-conservative to ultra-liberal ideologies. Such a growth in diversity of news channels available allow individuals to view news programming that aligns closely with their pre-existing political and social attitudes. It would also be beneficial to understand how perceived similarities between the audience and the commentators impact the likelihood of parasocial interactions and, in turn, how PSI impacts audiences' perceptions of attitude homophily with the commentator and willingness to perceive the arguments presented by these commentator as trustworthy. Given that there are different ways the audience and the commentators may share similarities with one another (e.g., in terms of sex, or political ideology) and that such similarity could impact perceptions on variables of interest (i.e., attitude homophily, trustworthiness), it may be useful to control for any possible effects of respondent-commentator sex similarity in the study. Male audiences may feel a stronger connection to male commentators than female commentators whereas the converse is true for female audiences. To guard against this possible confound, it was decided that respondent-commentator sex similarity be included as a covariate in all hypotheses and analyses related to similarity. Taken together, the following research question is posed and hypotheses posited:

Research Question #1: Will increased perceptions of source credibility be positively correlated with higher levels of PSI?

Hypothesis #2: Respondents in the (a) high (vs. low) similarity group, and (b) those who report stronger (vs. weaker) levels of shared political ideologies with the commentator will be more likely to report higher levels of PSI with the commentator, controlling for respondent-commentator sex similarity.

Hypothesis #3: Respondents who report greater levels of PSI will be more likely to report higher levels of perceived attitude homophily toward the commentator compared to those who report low levels of PSI.

Hypothesis #4: Respondents who report high PSI towards the political commentator they viewed will be more likely to perceive his or her argument to be trustworthy than those who report low PSI towards the political commentator they viewed.

The possibility for deceit and manipulation is far greater in circumstances in which the audience blindly accepts a message without being aware of the true credibility of the source or the accuracy of the message (Pfau, Haigh, Sims, & Wigley, 2007). Therefore, this study and the insight it will provide into how political commentators and their messages are evaluated is particularly important.

Chapter 5: ELM/EORM

Unless an individual has a strong motivation and the ability to understand information presented to them, they are not likely to put much effort into fully understanding a message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a; Johnson & Eagly, 1989; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993); however, individuals also have an inherent desire to hold what they perceive to be correct attitudes (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a). Therefore, individuals will seek out varying levels of information needed to maintain correctness as they perceive correctness to be. A primary role of a pundit, as discussed above, is to help individuals understand and form attitudes about issues. In terms of political communication, though not all individuals may have the ability to understand political messages, scholars find the public's lack of concern about politics to be more concerning than the lack of ability (Althaus, 1998). The lack of concern with politics begs the question, how necessary is motivation in the formation of political opinions? Are individuals able to process messages (and form opinions) without being especially motivated? According to the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), attitude change may still occur without the enactment of motivated message processing because of the influence of peripheral cues processing. Attitude and behavior change are increased when the audience feels a connection with the commentator. When individuals experience narrative involvement and PSI they are caught up in the entertainment elements and are less concerned with assessing argument quality. Therefore, in this study I will use the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a) to explain current understanding of how individuals process messages from political commentators and then suggest how EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008) may further our understanding of political message

processing. In this chapter, I will first discuss the elaboration likelihood model before discussing the expansion of ELM into EORM, and setting forth hypotheses based on the model.

Elaboration Likelihood Model

ELM posits two ways in which individuals process information, centrally and peripherally (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b). Central routes of processing require detailed analysis of information presented such as assessments of argument quality and argument strength, while peripheral routes rely more on evaluations of the message source (e.g., attractiveness, perceived credibility) and other decision-making shortcuts such as the number of arguments presented within a given message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a; 1986b; Petty & Wegener, 1999). High levels of motivation and ability to analyze the message presented are essential for central processing (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). In contrast, peripheral processing is more likely to occur when individuals have less ability or less motivation (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a, 1986b; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Without motivation or ability to cognitively process messages, individuals are more likely to draw upon their prior knowledge and peripheral cues in order to evaluate messages. Also, when individuals are uncertain of their ability to process messages they are more likely to rely on peripheral processing (Stephenson, Benoit, & Tschida, 2001).

In discussing ELM, it is important to acknowledge the major assumptions of the model, the propositions explaining behavioral outcomes based on the assumptions, and how elaboration affects attitude change. The first assumption of ELM recognizes individuals vary in the degree of message elaboration (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a).

Individuals will employ differing levels of message elaboration based on their own level of motivation to become highly engaged with the issues presented within a persuasive message (i.e., issue involvement) as well as their personal inclinations towards engaging in effortful cognitive activities, often measured by evaluating a respondents' need for cognition (Appel & Maleckar, 2012). This idea of individuals varying in their degree of message elaboration stems from Festinger's (1950) determination that, though individuals desire to have accurate information, there are particular issues that inspire deeper understanding than other issues. When individuals are highly involved in a message, individuals are more interested in thorough understanding and will employ higher levels of message elaboration. If an individual does not particularly care about an issue, they are less likely to spend as much energy processing and elaborating on the message. It would be impossible for an individual to scrutinize every message they receive (Miller, Maruyama, Beaber, & Valone, 1976); therefore, a certain amount of peripheral processing is to be expected. Rather than always centrally process messages, there are times when it is easier for individuals to use shallow processing when determining message validity.

ELM does not assume all people will be motivated to elaborate on all issues in all situations. In fact, even prior to positing ELM, Petty and Cacioppo (1981) suggested there was a continuum between peripheral processing and central processing. There is not an assumption that everyone will process all messages centrally. ELM does however, assume that when an issue is of interest or importance to an individual they will be increasingly likely to elaborate on the issue. Over time, the issues we initially choose to elaborate on become more important to us, because as

individuals gather more information and become more involved in processing they become better informed, which, in turn, increases their motivation level inspiring continued message involvement (Johnson & Eagly, 1989).

The second assumption of ELM notes elaboration of persuasive messages generally entails detailed analysis of the message and extensive issue-related thinking. In such instances, message elaboration is measured by the total amount of thoughts, both positive and negative, generated by an individual relevant to the message or issue in question during the decision making process (Petty & Wegener, 1999).

> This means that people are likely to attend to the appeal; attempt to access relevant associations, images, and experiences from memory; scrutinize and elaborate upon the externally provided message arguments in light of the associations available from memory; draw inferences about the merit of the arguments for a recommendation based upon their analyses; and consequently derive an overall evaluation of, or attitude toward, the recommendation (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a, p.128).

In the message elaboration process, highly motivated individuals will seek out more issue related information and take this information into consideration before arriving at a conclusion. As motivation or interest increases, so too does the likelihood an individual will seek out more issue relevant information. For instance, repeated exposure to campaign messages has been positively associated with elaboration, specifically with seeking further information about a particular topic (Shah et al, 2007; Cho et al, 2009). As an issue becomes more salient, either by being presented more

often or by extended processing, individuals increasingly seek out issue relevant information.

A third assumption of ELM recognizes persuasion can take place at any point within the elaboration process**.** Issues perceived by an individual to be important may require a great deal of elaboration before a conclusion is arrived upon, while other, less important, issues may not require any more than seeing an image of the message source. Similarly, as a motivated individual gathers information about the issue, their issue related attitudes develop at varying rates. Since individuals value certain issues more than others the amount of information needed to inspire attitude change is difficult to pinpoint for every situation (Katz, 1960).

Taking into account the abovementioned variance in decision-making time, the ELM has propositions that suggest what behaviors can be expected based on varying levels of elaboration. The first proposition suggests persuasion is achieved through extensive issue-related thinking (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a). As an issue becomes more salient, individuals will develop stronger attitudes towards the issue. For instance, news consumption is linked to political participation. That is, when individuals watch news programing they are exposed to political attitudes. As exposure increases, those individuals become more likely to exhibit attitudes congruent with those they were exposed to (Cho et al, 2009). In other words, as people become more involved in an issue, they expose themselves to more issue-related messages that are consistent with their own attitudes about the issue and, in turn, their attitudes are strengthened.

Another proposition suggests persuasion is achieved via central processing when information is carefully examined by the receiver (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a).

The more effort an individual puts into understanding a message, the more likely they will be to develop an attitude position. On the other hand, the less issue-related thinking an individual uses to arrive at an attitude, the more likely it is they have used peripheral processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a; 1986b; Petty & Wegener, 1999). There are a number of reasons individuals would not centrally process a message. For example, perceptual filters, distractions, and, especially in the case of political information, lack of motivation are a few of the reasons why messages may not be centrally processed. Persuasion through the peripheral route is achieved via use of simple decision rules to evaluate the advocated position. In these instances, an individual is more likely to use prior knowledge or rely on evaluating attributes of the message source (e.g., source credibility, source attractiveness) to determine the validity of the message arguments (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b).

In addition to the assumptions previously discussed, Petty and Cacioppo suggest there are specific instances in which attitude change occurs (1986a; 1986b). Initially, the greater the number of arguments presented, the greater the likelihood the overall argument will be perceived as strong. Further, moderate message repetition increases the likelihood of elaboration (Pfau & Parrott, 1993; Shah et al, 2007). Just as prolonged exposure to a message increases salience, the more arguments presented also provide for more opportunities for elaboration. For instance, if an audience were provided with a single reason to vote for a candidate, the argument would have to be especially powerful. In contrast, if multiple arguments were given against the same candidate, none would need to be particularly powerful in order to override the single argument given in favor of the candidate.

From the above example, it is also apparent that argument strength is also important to facilitate persuasion. Quality of the information is assessed through argument completeness, source credibility, and accuracy (Nelson et al., 2005). Strong arguments are especially important when issue relevance is high; however, in situations where individuals are using peripheral processing, argument strength is less important (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b). When using peripheral processing, rather than judging message validity based on argument strength, individuals rely on previous experience, attitudes, or other peripheral cues to make decisions about whether to accept or reject the message presented to them. In this study source credibility and perceptions of message strength will both be evaluated to indicate likelihood of both elaboration and persuasion.

In their 1986(a) article, Petty and Cacioppo used political instances to illustrate various aspects of the model (e.g., providing political contributions to a candidate could be based on the music in a campaign ad [peripheral processing] or because they agreed with their positions on issues [central processing]). However, since then the literature applying ELM to political situations has been minimal. As mentioned in the introduction, political commentators are able to provide their audiences conversation about political topics in an entertainment environment. Studies have explored likelihood of elaboration after political conversation (Eveland, 2004), how ELM predicts perceptions of political sources (Benoit & Kennedy, 1999) and elaboration in entertainment contexts (Nabi, 2007; Polk, Young, & Holbert, 2009). However, there are no studies that bridge entertainment and conversation. Looking more closely at these previous studies will provide perspective for the current study.

Eveland's (2004) study focused on political discussions as a motivator for elaboration. He hypothesized motivation would be higher if an individual knew they would be participating in political discussions in a subsequent interaction and, therefore, the individual would be more likely to elaborate on the message. Support for their hypothesis was found by evaluating interviews collected as part of the American National Election Study. The analysis focused on connections between frequency of political conversations and political knowledge – a finding suggested by Robinson and Levy (1986). Although the hypothesis was not directly linked to the ELM, the positive connection found between conversation and political knowledge could be attributed to central processing and greater message elaboration after prolonged message exposure. In other words, the more an individual hears about a particular topic, and expects to discuss the topic with others in the future, the more likely they will be to seek out further information on the topic and pay closer attention to the arguments presented within the message. Since individuals take cues from trusted political elites about which issues are more important, it is expected that the greater an individual perceives the source credibility of a commentator to be (in this study manipulated by a statement about the competence of the message source), the greater the message elaboration. Therefore, I posit:

> Hypothesis # 5: Respondent's level of message elaboration will be greater among those in the high competence condition than those in the low competence condition.

The studies conducted using ELM to explore entertainment contexts, including political entertainment, generally assessed political humor (e.g., Polk, Young, &

Holbert, 2009). The study proposed in this dissertation is not directly dealing with humor, but the entertainment element of both contexts suggests similar responses to entertaining political messages both humorous and non-humorous. Studies involving ELM in entertainment contexts suggest a need to go beyond traditional ELM measurements in order to understand message elaboration from such heavily opinionated entertainment sources. Since I contend political information infused with opinion is a form of entertainment-based political commentary (chapter 2 – punditry), it is appropriate to discuss extensions of ELM; first by discussing Slater and Rouner's E-ELM (2002) and, the primary extension of ELM to be used in my analysis, Moyer-Gusé's EORM (2008).

As educational and political information is increasingly dispersed in entertainment contexts (Singhal & Rogers, 1999), it is vital that theories be revised in order for evaluations to be made. Slater and Rouner (2002) proposed the extended elaboration likelihood model (E-ELM) as an extension of traditional ELM to apply to entertainment media sources. In addition to the traditional elements of ELM, E-ELM also evaluates the degree of identification and transportation an individual experiences while viewing a medium. According to E-ELM, identification with characters is similar to feelings of connectedness and enhances parasocial interaction, making parasocial relationships more likely to develop between message sources and their audiences. Identification can also be thought of as being similar to the perception that an entertainment-newscaster who seems to share our political attitudes is also ideologically similar to us. Transportation refers to the extent an audience member is involved with the narrative of the programming. This can be experienced if, while

watching an entertainment-based show, an individual is drawn into the story line and perceive a high level of involvement with the characters portrayed in the show. Transportation and identification are more fully considered in models that extend ELM, such as the entertainment overcoming resistance model.

Entertainment Overcoming Resistance Model

Combining elements from the E-ELM, parasocial interactions (PSI) literature, and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT; 1986), the entertainment overcoming resistance model (EORM) was developed (Moyer-Gusé, 2008) in order to guide our understanding of how entertainment-education messages are processed and how audience transportation and parasocial interactions with media figures helps to reduce resistance to persuasion, and in turn lead to greater message acceptance. As an extension of the abovementioned theories, Moyer-Gusé focuses on how involvement with the narrative as well as with the featured characters portrayed in the narrative affects the level of message processing.

Moyer-Gusé identified several major elements when introducing EORM (2008). The three primary concepts - entertainment-education, transportation, and identification - require definition. The first definition is that of entertainment-education, which refers to "prosocial messages that are embedded into popular entertainment media content," (p. 408). Television programming is fundamentally entertainment media. When political commentators interject what they believe to be pro-social messages into their television programs, they satisfy the definition of entertainment-education. Therefore, entertainment-education theories are appropriate

means with which to evaluate the influence and impact of televised political commentators.

In terms of the EORM, transportation is defined as "a convergent process, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative," (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701; Moyer-Gusé, 2008, p.409). Moyer-Gusé recognizes that involvement with the narrative is called different things by different authors (e.g., identification, involvement), but transportation is the term chosen for EORM (2008).

"Identification refers to an emotional and cognitive process whereby a viewer takes on the role of a character in a narrative," (Moyer-Gusé, 2008, p.410). Identification is considered in conjunction with parasocial interactions (PSI) and perceived similarity (homophily) to gauge what Moyer-Gusé (2008) refers to as involvement. When an audience member becomes involved, or engaged in, the narrative, audience members are more likely to have higher self-efficacy and increased likelihood to engage in interpersonal discussions pertaining to what they have watched with others in their social networks (Sood, 2002).

Moyer-Gusé extended eight propositions from the abovementioned theories (ELM, E-ELM, and SCT) in order to form EORM (2008). The first proposition of EORM states "the narrative structure of entertainment-education messages will overcome reactance by diminishing the viewer's perception that the message is intended to persuade" (Moyer-Gusé, 2008, p. 415). In other words the more an individual becomes caught up in the narrative, the less intentional they are expected to perceive persuasive messages to be, leading to less resistance or counter-arguing.

Hypothesis #6: As narrative involvement with the message increases, level of counter-arguing will decrease.

Previous research has demonstrated that when issue relevant messages are incorporated into narrative individuals are more willing to accept both implicit and explicit persuasive messages (Jensen, Bernat, Wilson, & Goonewardene, 2011; Moyer-Gusé, Jain, & Chung, 2012). Moyer-Gusé and colleagues (2012) examined audience responses to such explicit and implicit messages. In their study they showed respondents a single episode of *Law & Order: SVU* dealing either with binge-drinking or with an unrelated issue. Then respondents either viewed a 15 second epilogue, depicting one of the show's characters making an appeal for audience members to not partake in binge drinking behaviors, or were not shown an epilogue. Their findings indicate persuasion was not increased by an extended appeal (i.e., the inclusion of the epilogue had little impact on persuasion). Further, the findings suggest the narrative combined with the direct appeal was more persuasive than either appeal individually (Moyer-Gusé, Jain, Chung, 2012). In this dissertation, narrative and direct appeals by political commentators are examined for their impact on both respondents' level of PSI experienced with the commentator and attitude change.

Political commentators create narrative and direct appeals simultaneously when they express their opinions to the audience. They are using direct appeals because their statements often present a specific viewpoint or frame for understanding a political issue or situation while at the same time, they primarily rely on a narrative presentation style in talking to their audiences as entertainers. So, in addition to leading discussions and conversations about political topics on their television

programs and via social media, commentators also paint pictures of political situations and frame understanding of such situations for their audience members.

Moyer-Gusé's elaboration overcoming resistance model (EORM) suggests that identification with a message source will increase message absorption and reduce counterarguing (2008) further, EORM suggests individuals will selectively avoid messages that are contradictory towards their beliefs (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). Taken together, these propositions suggest people will be more accepting of messages in general so long as the message is not contradictory to the respondents' existing beliefs, there is no necessary impact on issue elaboration likelihood. Based on previous PSI research (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010), it is expected that the more an individual become transported into the narratives presented by a political commentator, the more susceptible she or he will be to experiencing high levels of PSI with the commentator. In turn, it is likely that as PSI increases between political commentators and their viewers, individuals may become more involved with the storyline and/or topic and, potentially, more motivated to learn about and discuss with others the opinions expressed by the commentators. Greater PSI should, ultimately, produce greater issue elaboration, defined in this study as stronger motivation to seek out information on issues presented by political commentators and to discuss the commentators' opinions with others. Thus, PSI is expected to mediate the relationship between narrative involvement and issue elaboration.

> Hypothesis #7: As narrative involvement with the commentator's message increases, PSI with the commentator will increase, which in turn will elicit greater issue elaboration likelihood.

This conceptualization of issue elaboration, focusing on information seeking and discussions about the issues with one's interpersonal networks, contrasts with the concept of message elaboration, typically defined within the ELM framework, as cognitive scrutiny of the quality and strength of message arguments (i.e., central processing). This is an important distinction because, while it is expected that greater PSI will motivate higher levels of issue elaboration, individuals will not necessarily engage in greater levels of message elaboration (i.e., cognitive message processing). In fact, based on propositions put forth in the EORM, individuals who report high levels of PSI toward the commentator they view are expected to engage in less message elaboration as reflected in less counterarguing.

Focusing on people's likelihood of seeking out additional information about issues they hear about from listening to political commentators and discussing this information with their interpersonal networks may inform politicians and commentators about how individuals interact with a topic once the initial processing has occurred. If attitude change occurs due to initial message processing, this may inspire further information seeking among individuals to further learn about the issue.

Hypothesis #8: Level of attitude change in the direction of the advocated position will be positively associated with level of issue elaboration likelihood.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, narrative involvement is expected to increase the level of PSI felt toward the commentator. If indeed high PSI toward a political commentator directly leads to attitude change in the direction of position advocated by the commentator, then it can be argued that PSI mediates the relationship between narrative involvement and attitude change.

Hypothesis # 9: As narrative involvement toward the commentator's message increases, PSI with the commentator will increase, which in turn will elicit greater attitude change in the direction of the advocated position.

Extending this further, it is expected that because individuals with high PSI toward commentators may bypass any type of elaboration and directly accept the advocated position, this should also be reflected in terms of behavioral intentions in support of the advocated issue position or of the political commentator.

Hypothesis # 10: As narrative involvement toward the commentator's message increases, PSI with the commentator will increase, which in turn will promote greater behavioral intent to enact supportive behaviors toward the issue/political commentator.

PSI is a key element in several of Moyer-Gusé's propositions (2008). Proposition two states, "PSI with a central character can enhance the persuasive effects of entertainment-education content by reducing reactance" (Moyer-Gusé, 2008, p. 416). Proposition 2b lessens the degree to which an audience member needs to identify with the character, stating "liking a central character" will also reduce reactance (p. 416). Finally, proposition three notes, in addition to reduced resistance, PSI also reduces counter-arguing. Overall, across all three propositions, the main argument seems to be that with increased levels of PSI, whether through stronger identification with a central character or greater liking of a central character, it is expected that message reactance will decline, as reflected in a reduced tendency to counterargue with messages delivered by the central character. In this study, the central character is the political commentator viewed by the audience.

Hypothesis #11: As PSI with the commentator increases, level of reported counter-arguing will decrease.

Igartua & Barrios (2012) tested these propositions by measuring respondents' association with a controversial topic (in this case the Opus Dei religion) and then showing them a movie, *Camino*, which depicts a religious ritual after a young girl dies. Findings in this study suggest individuals who reported identifying with the main character had the greatest amount of attitude change, even among those who reported having the most divergent ideologies compared to those expressed in the movie (Igartua & Barrios, 2012). As the aforementioned study suggests, even when controversial topics are discussed, the narrative created in entertainment programming has the ability to persuade, and, likely, reduce counter-arguing.

EORM propositions four and five relate to selective message avoidance, such that strong identification with a central character and/or overall narrative enjoyment is argued to reduce an individual's motivation to enact selective message avoidance due to dissonance avoidance (i.e., a desire for inertia) or fear. Neither of these propositions will be tested in this study as the focus was not on whether high levels of PSI with a political commentator would motivate individuals to selectively avoid messages or opinions counter to the position advocated by the commentator.

Similarly, proposition six, which notes "perceived similarity and identification with a vulnerable character will enhance the persuasive effects of entertainment-education content by increasing a viewer's perceived vulnerability" (Moyer-Gusé, 2008, p. 419) will not be tested in this study. Past studies, many concerning health messages, have demonstrated that mediated depictions of vulnerability increases

perceptions of one's own vulnerability. When tested in relation to teen pregnancy, Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) demonstrated that as viewers became attached to cast members on the television reality-show *Teen Mom*, their feelings of empathy and vulnerability to similar situations increased. Recently, a study has demonstrated similar effects within the news context. Oliver, Dillard, Bae, and Tamul (2012) presented narrative and non-narrative versions of a news story involving stigmatized groups to be evaluated by respondents. After reading and evaluating the news story, respondents were asked about their attitudes about the groups depicted. Findings indicate exposure of respondents to narrative news stories elicited higher levels of transportation, compassion, favorable attitude, and behavioral intent toward the stigmatized group compared to exposure to non-narrative news stories (Oliver et al., 2012). Thus, due to greater narrative involvement, individuals' level of understanding and acceptance for stigmatized individuals increased because of greater perceived vulnerability for the stigmatized condition.

The final proposition in EORM states "PSI with a character displaying counter-normative behavior will enhance the persuasive effects of entertainment-education content by changing viewers' perceived norms" (Moyer-Gusé, 2008, p. 420). Specifically, this proposition describes how entertainment-education has to potential to alter perceived norms. For instance, if a risky health behavior is perceived to be normative (e.g., everybody drinks and drives, no one uses a condom all the time), individuals may engage in a false consensus (i.e., normalizing a risky behavior by claiming that everyone does it) and resist persuasive messages aimed at curbing risky health behaviors. Entertainment education programs are argued to be useful for

helping to change these negative health norms. When liked characters are depicted making counter-normative behavior choices (e.g., adolescents choosing not to drink and drive after a party or using condom each time they have sex), the EORM argues that so too does perceptions of that those counter-normative behaviors as appropriate decisions. Thus, this will result in a change of the viewers' perceived norms to be consistent with the behavioral norm depicted by the viewers' liked characters. Moyer-Gusé noted that behavioral decisions made outside of the entertainment-based narrative context, such as in an actor or commentator's real life could also be judged more favorably and as appropriate (i.e., the right choice) by those who identify strongly with the actor or commentator (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). Based on this notion, it can be expected that, so long as PSI is established between the political commentator and his or her audience, the behaviors and viewpoints of the commentator will be more persuasive than they would be if PSI were absent. In terms of political behaviors, if an audience member views one of the commentators they have formed a parasocial relationship with cast a vote for a particular candidate or mock another candidate, endorse or reject a specific position on an issue; it is likely the audience member will perceive the action as being a behavior to emulate or an issue position to accept or reject. Similarly, this same phenomenon could also occur with regards to attitudes toward political issues held and expressed by political commentators. When strong political beliefs are held by a viewer prior to observing a political commentator perceived to share those same political beliefs it may be that individual's tendency to more readily emulate behavior or adopt attitudes the commentator expresses compared to viewers who hold more moderate political beliefs. Specifically, when exposed to

commentators perceived to share their political ideology, viewers with stronger feelings of affiliation towards either end of the political ideology spectrum may report greater attitude change toward the position advocated by the commentator and/or behavioral intent consistent with the commentators' viewpoints than viewers with moderate feelings of affiliation towards either conservative or liberal political ideologies. Therefore:

Research Question #2: Do levels of attitude change toward the commentator's advocated position and behavioral intent vary as a function of the viewers' strength of political affiliation?

Previously, scholars have remarked about the lack of interest in politics, some going so far as to say the abundance of media sources had further stifled citizen's interest in political behaviors (Hart, 1996; Prior, 2013). However infotainment along with PSI seem to negate the public disinterest. Relatively recently there have been instances of increased political participation (campaign donations and reported voting intentions) by viewing audiences as a direct response to political satirists' commentary (Baym, 2009). Stephen Colbert's establishment of his own super political action committee (PAC) in 2011 is one specific instance of political behavior inspired by a political commentator. This super PAC, recognized by Colbert as a means of educating audiences about the Citizens United court ruling, raised over a million dollars (Associated Press, 2012).

Chapter 6: Method

Now that the literature on punditry, source credibility, PSI, and ELM has been reviewed and a set of hypotheses have been established, it is necessary to discuss how these hypotheses were examined. There were two major themes examined in the above hypotheses. Initially, the first theme focused on increasing our understanding of how perceptions of source credibility contributes to the level of PSI developed between political commentators and their audiences as well as level of message elaboration (research question one and hypotheses one through three). The other theme focused on examining how PSI with political commentators impact persuasion (hypotheses four through six). In order to address the research question and test these hypotheses, an experiment was conducted.

Often, to test source credibility, respondents are given a message that is attributed to a high or low credibility source (Sternthal, Phillips, & Dholakia, 1978). Since this study was interested in examining how specific factors of credibility (i.e., competence and similarity) impacted overall perceived source credibility, respondents received two manipulation messages prior to viewing the randomly assigned video stimulus. The first of these manipulation messages served to manipulate perceptions of competence. For this manipulation, a high competence and a low competence message was used to distinguish conditions. The second manipulation message also divided into low and high message conditions manipulated level of similarity between the political commentator and the respondent. The manipulation messages did not vary based on which commentator the respondent viewed in the experiment.

In order to examine the above research question and test the posited hypotheses, an experimental design was employed in a 2 (high or low credibility) x 2 (high or low similarity) x 2 (liberal or conservative political commentator) x 2 (sex of commentator) single-phase study. Initially, respondents were asked about their level of political party identification (i.e., from very liberal to very conservative) as well as their media consumption habits to determine familiarity with the commentators in the video. A short pre-test survey was also presented asking respondents about their need for cognition and existing thoughts on two hot political issues, gun control and the situation in Benghazi (the subject of the video messages).The two messages were used rather than solely asking about the video message subject (Benghazi) in an attempt to avoid priming the respondent. Following these initial questions, respondents were presented with either a high or low similarity message, followed by either a high or low credibility message. The similarity manipulation used consisted of a single paragraph based on the Similarity Cognitive Response Set Induction (Shaver, 1970; Thornton, 1984) suggesting that judgment is more accurate if the respondents "try to understand the person they are judging" and either, evaluate their personal characteristics as being "very much like your own" (high similarity condition) or are "not at all like your own" (low similarity condition).

The competence message manipulations concerned the content of the commentators' message. The high competence message read, "The information you will hear in the following video has been found to be correct by fact checkers. This commentator is known for their accuracy and taking time to check facts prior to discussing events." The low competence message read, "The information you will

hear in the following video has been found to be incorrect and was later retracted. This commentator often has this issue as they fail to check facts prior to discussing events." After the credibility and similarity manipulation messages (see Appendix) were presented to the respondents, they were randomly assigned to view one of four video conditions.

Two videos of conservative commentators (Jeanine Pirro and Bill O'Reilly) and two videos of liberal commentators (Lawrence O'Donnell and Rachel Maddow) were used in the study.



Figure 1. Jeanine Pirro – May 11, 2013



Figure 3. Bill O'Reilly – May 8, 2013



Figure 3. Lawrence O'Donnell - May 8, 2013



Figure 4. Rachel Maddow – May 15, 2013

Of the four commentators, two (one liberal and one conservative) were female and two (one liberal and one conservative) were male. The female conservative political commentator used in the conservative commentator stimulus video is Jeanine Pirro. Jeanine Pirro hosts "Justice with Judge Jeanine," a weekend prime-time program on the Fox News Channel. She joined the network in 2006 and also serves as a legal correspondent for the network (foxnews.com). Pirro was a district attorney for twelve years and was the republican candidate for New York State Attorney General in 2006 (Finn, 2009). The male conservative political commentator used is Bill O'Reilly. Bill O'Reilly is the host of FOX News' "The O'Reilly Factor", has been

referred to as the King of Cable News (Wemple, 2014). He joined the FOX network in 1996 and has authored several books, many elaborating on his concept of "The No Spin Zone." (foxnews.com).

The female liberal political commentator showcased in the stimulus video is Rachel Maddow. Rachel Maddow hosts "The Rachel Maddow Show" on MSNBC. "The Rachel Maddow Show" debuted in September 2008, and remains one of the strongest competitors of the "O'Reilly Factor" (Easley, 2014). The male liberal political commentator used in the stimulus video is Lawrence O'Donnell. Lawrence O'Donnell is the host of "The Last Word with Lawrence O'Donnell" on MSNBC. O'Donnell has been an MSNBC political analyst since the network's launch in 1996. Along with Maddow, O'Donnell's prime time program is highly competitive with Fox News, especially among viewers 25-54 (Easley, 2014).

The four commentators were selected because they are all white, have established prime time self-named news programs (on-air for two or more years), and spoke for approximately seven to eight minutes exclusively about the attack on the American consulate in Benghazi, a topic heavily discussed by both liberal and conservative media. Further, these four commentators traditionally spend a majority of their air time speaking directly to the camera. In all of the videos, the commentator spoke directly to the audience and also shown clips from the Benghazi hearings. These four videos all aired on one of the two major partisan news networks (FOX News and MSNBC) during prime-time between May 8, 2013 and May 15, 2013 – the week that congressional hearings on the situation in Benghazi occurred. The clips selected were all from the beginning of the show and consist primarily of commentary rather than

straight reporting of information. All four videos included informational graphics and images of the hearings. In order to ensure comparability between the video conditions, an ANOVA assessing amount of PSI based on video condition was run. The results of this ANOVA were insignificant, F (3, 199) = 1.326, p=.267.

The subject of these videos, Benghazi, was selected because American citizens do not have first-hand experience with the topic and, therefore, rely on news outlets to provide them with their understanding. On September 11, 2012 (just over a year prior to data collection) militants in Libya attacked American compounds in Benghazi. Four Americans were killed in the attacks, including the U.S. Ambassador to Libya. Following the attacks, the U.S. State Department was criticized for failure to increase security at the Libyan compounds. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was a primary focus of this criticism.

Though overall the conservative media focused more on Benghazi than liberal media outlets, at the time the commentary initially aired both the liberal and conservative media were discussing the events – especially due to the congressional hearings. Similarly, though conversations on Benghazi had become less frequent in the national media at the time of this data collection, politicians and political commentators still frequently discussed the situation. Moreover, Benghazi was selected as an appropriate topic because even though people may be familiar with the topic (i.e., heard about the Benghazi incident and hearings on the news), it was expected that most people would not have a strong preexisting positive or negative attitude toward this topic. This was desirable to allow for the influence of the commentator's opinions to shift people's attitude toward feeling more positive or more

negative about the Benghazi situation. Moreover, this would allow for greater variance in scores to occur between preexisting and posttest attitudes on the issue and there should not be any concerns about restriction of variance on attitudes toward Benghazi.

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the two commentators matching their reported political beliefs (i.e., self-identified liberals viewed a video message from a liberal commentator while self-identified conservatives viewed a video message from a conservative commentator). Respondents were shown videos of ideologically similar commentators in order to focus on elements of similarity and responses to manipulation messages. In addition to using the simple similarity manipulation message (i.e., to perceive the commentator's personal characteristics as very much like their own for the high similarity condition) it was felt that matching the respondents' political affiliation with the commentator's political viewpoint would help enhance the similarity manipulation. This may have limited the amount of measurable attitude change found from pretest to posttest. However, responses to the manipulation messages and effects of similarity were the primary focus of this experiment. Further, as analysis demonstrated, there were still measurable amounts of attitude change. Given that participants were only exposed to commentators who shared their political ideology, it is important to explain that attitude change refers more to the extent to which participants' initial attitudes toward the Benghazi issue was strengthened at posttest measurement (i.e., shifted more towards the position advocated by the commentator) rather than a change in valence on attitudes toward the Benghazi issue (i.e., from positive to negative attitudes or vice versa).

Following the video, respondents were presented with a post-test survey. Once data was collected, respondents who provided gibberish answers to specific questions aimed at monitoring participants' attention to the video (e.g. What was the name of the commentator speaking?) and those who failed to correctly respond to embedded questions designed to detect response set bias (e.g. Select strongly agree) were removed from the data set.

This research design was selected in order to paint a more complete picture of how individuals assess credibility of political commentators and how those assessments impact message elaboration. Because all subjects in this sample are of voting age it is a viable subject pool. Further, determining how potential voters perceives source credibility is an important element of this research project that will certainly benefit future research and political campaigns.

Prior to collecting data used in the final analysis, a pilot study was conducted to test reliabilities of each of the measures used, the survey flow, and how conditions were filled using the data collection software. Through this pilot study (n=320; drawn from a large southwestern university's communication classes), a minor change to how counterarguments were counted (from a string variable to counted individual response items). Once measures were determined to be reliable, data collection was initiated.

Participants

After abovementioned exclusions, the majority of participants (n=184) were recruited by a third-party data collection company via Qualtrics Panels, with a smaller number (n=34) drawn from a large southwestern university's communication classes

where they were recruited by flyers and offered class credit for their participation. Ages of respondents were between 18 and 62 years old (M = 37.3, SD = 12.95). Participants included 6.1% reporting that they were very liberal, 15.7% liberal, 21.8% moderately liberal, 31.0% moderately conservative, 17.6% conservative and 6.9% very conservative. Of the respondents, 58.3% self-identified as female, 39.3% self-identified as male, and 2.4% elected not to respond.

Measures

Source credibility. In this study, source credibility was used as both an independent and dependent variable (i.e., manipulation check). It was measured using the modified McCroskey (1966) source credibility scale. For this measurement, a 7-point Likert type scale was used. The fourteen items measured the extent to which respondents perceived the political commentator they were viewing possessed specific source attributes: intelligent, honest, trustworthy, expert, honorable, informed, moral, competent, ethical, sensitive, right, positive, wise, and bad. Overall, this scale was found to be highly reliable $\alpha = .976$. This measure (M = 5.24, SD = 1.21) also served as a manipulation check for the competence manipulation. In order to examine trustworthiness in hypothesis three, a single item asking respondents to report how trustworthy they believe the commentator's arguments to be was used. As with the other items in the source credibility scale, 7-point Likert type scale was used. The two anchor terms used were "untrustworthy" (the low end anchor) and "untrustworthy" (the high end anchor).

Parasocial interaction. The extent to which respondents perceived having a parasocial interaction with the political commentator they viewed was evaluated using

Rubin & Perse's (1987) 10-item parasocial interaction scale with responses being recorded utilizing a 7-point Likert type scale. Items included questions such as, "The commentator makes me feel comfortable, like we are friends." (see Appendix) Overall, this scale (M = 4.49, SD = 1.27) was found to be highly reliable α = .946.

Perceived similarity/attitude homophily. The extent to which respondents perceived the political commentator as being similar to them or hold similar attitudes as they do was assessed utilizing McCroskey et al.'s (1975) Measure of Perceived Homophily Scale. This measure assesses perceptions of attitude homophily utilizing 14 items (e.g. This person thinks like me and This person shares my values; complete survey in Appendix) were assessed on a seven point Likert type scale. Overall, this measure (M = 2.22, SD = .649) was determined to be highly reliable α = .945.

Message elaboration. The extent to which respondents were likely to engage in message elaboration was evaluated through a traditional self-report measure. Respondents were initially asked to list their thoughts about the subject (Benghazi); these thoughts were then counted to assess message elaboration. The greater the number of thoughts listed, the greater the level of message elaboration. This measurement was used to assess respondents' actual elaboration in hypothesis five.

Issue elaboration. Respondents were asked to respond to ten items anticipating their level of current and future issue elaboration. These items included, "Realistically, do you plan on researching the topic that the commentator was discussing" – is this research likely/existent/probable/possible/certain and "Realistically, what is the likelihood that you will begin a discussion about the topic the commentator was discussing within the next week?" – is this discussion

likely/existent/probable/possible/certain. Responses were recorded on a seven point Likert type scale with (1) indicating unlikely and (7) indicating very likely. This scale (M = 3.97, SD = 1.61) was determined to be highly reliable α = .962. This measure was used to evaluate hypotheses assessing likelihood of future elaboration (hypotheses seven, eight, and nine).

Counter-arguing. A traditional counter-arguing measure was also used. For this measure, respondents were asked to list as many refutational arguments as they could in response to the points raised by the political commentators about the Benghazi situation. The greater the number of refutational arguments reported by respondents, the higher the level of counter-arguing.

Attitude change. The extent to which participants' attitudes regarding the issue discussed by the commentators changed from pretest to posttest was assessed based on participants' response to a 7-item attitude measure from Dillard & Shen's (2005) study. Respondents were asked to evaluate the statement, "How the situation in Benghazi was handled by the Obama administration was…" bad/good, foolish/wise, unfavorable/favorable, negative/positive, undesirable/desirable, unnecessary/necessary, and detrimental/beneficial, with (1) indicating strongly disagree and (7) indicating strongly agree. The attitudinal measure was administered before viewing the treatment video and after. A similar scale asking, "Increasing restrictions for gun owners is…" was also presented in the pre-test in an effort to avoid priming. This evaluation measure (M = .691, SD = 1.01) was determined to be highly reliable α = .983. Scores from the pre-test questions concerning Benghazi (M = 3.31, SD = 1.63) were subtracted from the post-test questions concerning Benghazi (M =

3.05, *SD* = 1.71) and the absolute values were computed to determine the overall amount of attitude change that occurred from pretest to posttest. Pretest (M= 3.32, SD=1.63) and posttest (M= 43.05, SD=1.71) scores were highly correlated (R^2 = .735, $p < .001$. In this study, the difference between average pretest scores and average posttest scores are fairly similar. Because the scores are so similar, the subsequent difference score is likely reliable (Chiou & Spreng, 1996).

Narrative involvement. The extent to which respondents felt involved with the narrative presented by political commentators was measured utilizing six items identified by Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) to measure narrative involvement and seven items identified by Green and Brock (2000) to evaluate transportation. Items in this measure included: I was never really pulled into the story, While viewing I was completely immersed in the story, and I wanted to learn how the story ended. Responses were recorded using a 7-point Likert type scale. When combined, this measure (*M* = 42.68, *SD* = 11.66) was determined to be reliable, α = .891.

Behavioral intent. The extent to which respondents reported intentions to enact behaviors in support of the political commentator's advocated attitudinal position was assessed using a 7-item measure created for this study. Questions inquired about the respondents' likelihood of donating to the cause, liking the political commentator on Facebook, attending a political meeting, influencing others, putting a bumper sticker on a car, and wearing a political button. Overall, this scale (*M* = 3.07, *SD* = 1.47) was found to be reliable α = .931.

Need for cognition. Respondents' level of need of cognition was assessed using Cacioppo, Petty, and Kao's (1984) Need for Cognition Scale (NCS).This 18

item measure includes questions such as, “I feel relief rather than satisfaction after completing a task that requires a lot of mental effort” (see Appendix); responses were recorded using a 7-point Likert type scale. Overall, this scale (M = 3.63, SD = .877) was found to be reliable α = .867.

Chapter 7: Results

Manipulation Check

Initially, manipulation checks were conducted to test the effectiveness of the similarity manipulation and the competence manipulation. To assess the similarity manipulation, an ANOVA was run comparing respondents in the high and low similarity manipulation conditions with attitude homophily as the manipulation check. This analysis determined that the similarity manipulation condition did not have a significant effect on perceived attitude homophily $F(1, 212) = .381$, ns. As a result of the failed similarity manipulation, further analysis considered respondent-commentator sex similarity as a substitute for the similarity message manipulation where individuals were asked to assume that the personality characteristics of the message source were either similar to their own (i.e., high similarity manipulation) or not similar to their own (i.e., low similarity manipulation). This additional analysis was considered in hypothesis one.

To evaluate the competence manipulation, an ANOVA assessed how respondents who received high or low competence messages later evaluated the commentator's source credibility. This analysis indicated that perceptions of source credibility varied significantly as a function of the credibility manipulation, F (1, 224) = 14.102, $p<.001$, $\eta^2 = .059$. Perceptions of source credibility among respondents in the low competence message condition (M= 4.96, SD=1.35) were lower than the reported perceptions of source credibility among respondents in the high competence message condition (M=5.56, SD=1.07).

Research Questions and Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis one suggested respondents in the (a) high (vs. low) similarity group, and (b) those who report stronger (vs. weaker) levels of shared political ideologies with the commentator, will be more likely to report higher levels of perceived attitude homophily toward the commentator, controlling for respondent-commentator sex similarity. In order to test this hypothesis, two ANCOVAs were run. The first ANCOVA indicated that the relationship between similarity condition and attitude homophily is not significant F (1, 192) = .381, p = .538, *ns*, even when controlling for respondent-commentator sex similarity F (1, 192) = 1.706, p = .193, *ns*. These results suggest that amount of attitude homophily did not significantly vary as a result of respondents' condition (i.e., high or low similarity) in this study. In testing the second half of this research question, an ANCOVA was run assessing strength of shared political ideology on attitude homophily, controlling for respondent-commentator sex similarity. This analysis indicated that the relationship between strength of political affiliation and attitude homophily is significant F (1, 192) = 4.751, p =.031, η^2 = .025. These results suggest a positive link between higher strength of political affiliation and higher perceived attitude homophily (M= 2.29, SD= .668) than those who reported weaker political affiliation (M= 2.08, SD= .664). Similar to the first half of this hypothesis, respondent-commentator sex similarity did not have a significant effect on attitude homophily when assessed as a covariate F (1, 192) = 1.595, p =.208.

The first research question asked if increased perceptions of source credibility will be positively correlated with levels of PSI. Responses to the self-reported measure

of PSI were regressed onto the self-reported measure of source credibility. This analysis, controlling for respondent-commentator sex similarity, indicated that the relationship between perceptions of source credibility and PSI were significant β = .765, t= 17.958, $p < .001$. These results suggest that increased perceptions of source credibility was a positive predictor of respondents' level of PSI experienced with the political commentator, $R^2 = .585$, F (1, 229) = 161.496, $p < .001$.

In testing the next set of hypotheses, both respondent-commentator sex similarity and level of strength of political ideology shared with the commentator were treated as covariates as they are both related to similarity and, therefore, may alter respondents' perception of the commentator. The possible confound would come from respondents identifying more with an individual they perceive to be more like themselves – particularly in terms of ideology strength and sex similarity. To control for possible similarity effects due to respondent-commentator sex similarity of shared level of strength in political ideology, these two variables were treated as covariates in some of the later analyses (depending on the specific hypothesis tested), as similarity is one of the primary elements to be examined in this experiment.

Hypothesis two suggested respondents in the (a) high (vs. low) similarity group, and (b) those who report stronger (vs. weaker) levels of shared political ideologies with the commentator, will be more likely to report higher levels of PSI with the commentator, controlling for respondent-commentator sex similarity. In order to test this hypothesis, two ANCOVAs were run. The first ANCOVA indicated that the relationship between similarity condition and PSI is not significant F (1, 200) = 1.074, p = .301, *ns*, even in when controlling for respondent-commentator sex

similarity F (1, 200) = .403, p = .526, *ns*. These results suggest that amount of PSI did not significantly vary as a result of respondents' condition (i.e., high or low similarity) in this study. In testing the second half of this hypothesis, an ANCOVA was run assessing strength of shared political ideology on PSI, controlling for respondent-commentator sex similarity. This analysis indicated that the relationship between strength of political affiliation and PSI is significant F (1, 200) = 4.6.086, p =.014, η^2 = .03. These results suggest a positive link between higher strength of political affiliation and higher PSI (M= 4.755, SD= 1.285) than those who reported weaker political affiliation (M= 4.30, SD= 1.348). Similar to the first half of this hypothesis, respondent-commentator sex similarity did not have a significant effect on attitude homophily F (1, 200) = .377, p =.540.

The third hypothesis suggested respondents who report high levels of PSI with the political commentator will be more likely to report higher levels of perceived attitude homophily than their counterparts (i.e., those reporting low levels of PSI with the political commentator). For this hypothesis, reported PSI was coded into high PSI and low PSI according to a median split. An ANCOVA was run comparing the two groups (i.e., high and low PSI) with attitude homophily as the dependent variable, with respondent-commentator sex similarity and respondent's strength of political affiliation serving as covariates. This analysis indicated that there was a significant relationship F(1, 188) = 88.871, p< .01, η^2 = .321 such that perceptions of attitude homophily were stronger among respondents reporting higher levels of PSI (M= 2.613, SD= .059) compared to those reporting lower levels of PSI with the political commentator (M= 1.859, SD= .055). In this analysis neither respondent-commentator

sex similarity ($F(1, 188) = 3.758$, ns) nor strength of political affiliation ($F(1, 188) = 2.896$, ns) were significant covariates.

Table 1. Adjusted means and standard errors of perceived attitude homophily assessed by level of PSI

	M	SE	n
A. High PSI	2.613	.059	103
B. Low PSI	1.859	.055	89

The fourth hypothesis suggested respondents who report high PSI with the political commentator will be more likely to perceive an argument from this individual to be trustworthy than those who report low PSI with the political commentator. An ANCOVA was run comparing perceptions of trustworthiness, based on responses to a single question asking respondents to report how trustworthy they believed the commentator's arguments to be (i.e., from not at all trustworthy to very trustworthy), between individuals in the high PSI group and those in the low PSI group. Because it was hypothesized that high levels of PSI would be linked to trustworthiness, rather than suggesting a positive correlation, PSI was divided into high and low PSI groups based on a median split. This analysis indicated the relationship between perceptions of trustworthiness and PSI were significant F (1, 199) = 113.795, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .364$. Examining of the estimated marginal means suggest that perceptions of trustworthiness were found to be stronger among individuals reporting high PSI (M= 5.994, SD= .122) than among individuals reporting low PSI (M= 4.083, SD= .133). Neither respondent-commentator sex similarity ($F(1, 199) = 1.275$, ns) nor strength of political affiliation ($F(1, 199) = 1.443$, ns) were significant covariates.

Hypothesis five suggested that respondents' level of message elaboration will be higher when an attributed source is perceived to have high competence than when an attributed source is perceived to have low competence. This hypothesis was initially analyzed with an ANCOVA assessing level of message elaboration between respondents in the high and low competence manipulation conditions, controlling for respondent-commentator sex similarity and respondents' strength of political affiliation; and this analysis was found to be not significant $F(1, 230) = .36$, ns. Thus, this hypothesis was not supported based on the comparing the two manipulated credibility conditions.

Table 2. Adjusted means and standard errors of level of message elaboration assessed by competence condition

	M	SE	n
A. High Competence	4.148	.163	101
B. Low Competence	3.985	.164	110

When examined, respondent-commentator sex similarity was not a significant covariate, $F(1, 191) = 2.393$, ns but respondent's strength of political identification was shown to be a significant covariate, $F\ (1, 191) = 3.920$, $p = .049$, $\eta^2 = .021$. Although message elaboration did not vary as a function of the manipulated credibility conditions, a follow up analysis utilizing issue elaboration likelihood regressed onto self-reported perceived source credibility did demonstrate a significant positive relationship $\beta = .375$, $t = 5.578$, $p < .001$. These results suggest that high perceptions of source credibility are associated with increased message elaboration, $R^2 = .141$, $F\ (1, 191) = 31.116$, $p < .001$. Neither respondent-commentator sex similarity ($\beta = 0.023$, $t = -0.348$, $p = .728$) nor strength of political affiliation ($\beta = 0.124$, $t = 1.836$, $p = .068$) were significant covariates.

Hypothesis six suggested that as narrative involvement increases, counter-arguing will decrease. To assess this hypothesis, a multiple regression examining the relationship between narrative involvement and counter-arguing was run, with respondent-commentator sex similarity and respondent's strength of political affiliation entered as covariates in the regression model. This regression model indicated a negative relationship between narrative involvement and counter-arguing, β = -.161, SE = .040, p = .023, R^2 = .258, F (1, 200) = 4.756, p =.030. Specifically, the more involved respondents reported feeling regarding the commentator's narrative, the less they engaged in refuting the commentator's arguments presented in the message. Once again, neither respondent-commentator sex similarity (β = 0.02, t = -0.279, p =.781) nor strength of political affiliation (β = 0.086, t = 1.226, p =.222) were significant covariates.

Table 3. Regression Analysis for Narrative Involvement

Variable	B	SE	β
Model 1			
Sex Similarity	-.036	.129	-.020
Strength of Political ID	.156	.127	.086
Model 2			
Counter Arguing	.086	.040	.153*

Note. Dependent variable is Narrative Involvement. * = p = .30

The seventh hypothesis suggested that as perceived PSI with the political commentator increases so too will likelihood of issue elaboration. In order to assess this hypothesis a multiple regression was run examining the relationship between PSI and likelihood of issue elaboration, controlling for respondent-commentator sex similarity and respondents' strength of political affiliation. This relationship was determined to be significant, β = 0.518, t = 8.761, p <.001, suggesting that perceptions

of PSI have a direct relationship with likelihood for later issue elaboration, R^2 = .258, F (3, 190) = 21.623, p <.001. Specifically, as respondents perceived stronger PSI with commentators, their likelihood of issue elaboration increased. In this analysis neither respondent-commentator sex similarity (β = 0.08, t = -1.257, p =.210) nor strength of political affiliation (β = 0.081, t = 1.266, p =.207) were significant covariates.

Table 4. Regression Analysis for PSI

Variable	B	SE	β
Model 1			
Sex Similarity	-.219	.174	-.080
Strength of Political ID	.216	.171	.081
Model 2			
Likelihood of Elaboration	.430	.055	.495**

Note. Dependent variable is PSI. ** = p <.001

Extending the investigation of issue elaboration likelihood, hypothesis eight suggested as reported attitude change increases, reported likelihood of issue elaboration also increases. In order to assess this hypothesis a multiple regression was run examining the relationship between issue elaboration and attitude change, controlling for respondent-commentator sex similarity and respondents' strength of political affiliation. This relationship was determined to be significant, β = 0.459, t = 7.115, p <.001, suggesting that as issue elaboration increases so too did attitude change in the direction advocated by the commentator, R^2 = .211, F (1, 190) = 50.659, p <.001. Specifically, as attitude change increases, reported likelihood of issue elaboration also increases. In this analysis neither respondent-commentator sex similarity (β = 0.027, t = .409, p =.683) nor strength of political affiliation (β = 0.027, t = .416, p =.675) were significant covariates.

The ninth hypothesis suggested that as narrative involvement with the commentator's message increases, PSI with the commentator will increase, which in turn will elicit greater attitude change in the direction of the advocated position. Multiple regression was used to test the impact narrative involvement has on attitude change, controlling for respondent-commentator sex similarity and respondents' strength of political affiliation. The results of this regression test was significant, β = 0.140, t = 2.021, p =.045. These results suggest that increased narrative involvement is associated with increased attitude change. Further analysis was conducted assessing the mediating role PSI had between narrative involvement and attitude change. Though the relationship between narrative involvement and PSI was significant β = .654, t = 13.093, p < 0.001, the relationship between PSI and attitude change was not β = 0.59, t = .850, p = .396, and a Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) did not suggest an indirect effect of narrative involvement on attitude change via PSI with the commentator (z = .585, p = .559).

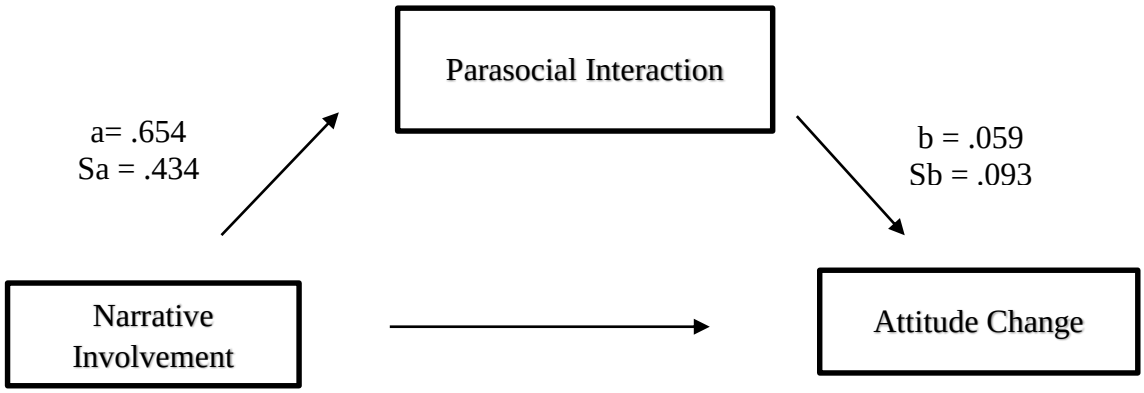

Figure 5. Sobel test representation depicting mediation effects of PSI between narrative involvement and attitude change.

Hypothesis ten suggested that as narrative involvement toward the commentator's message increases, feelings of PSI will increase, leading to greater

behavioral intent. Behavioral intent was regressed onto narrative involvement in a multiple regression model, with respondent-commentator sex similarity and respondents' strength of political affiliation entered as covariates. The model yielded a significant result for narrative involvement, $\beta = 0.62$, $t = 7.503$, $p < 0.001$. Increased narrative involvement is associated with increased behavioral intent.

Further analysis was conducted assessing the mediating role PSI had between narrative involvement and behavioral intent. Based on simple linear regressions, the relationship between narrative involvement and PSI was significant $\beta = .654$, $t = 13.093$, $p < 0.001$, as was the relationship between PSI and behavior change $\beta = 0.417$, $t = 8.137$, $p < 0.001$. A Sobel test suggested no mediating effect of PSI ($z = 1.482$, $p = 0.13$) on the relationship between narrative involvement and behavioral intentions. Controlling for PSI, the relationship between narrative involvement and behavior change remained significant $\beta = 0.033$, $t = 3.161$, $p = 0.002$, indicating that PSI is not a partial mediator.

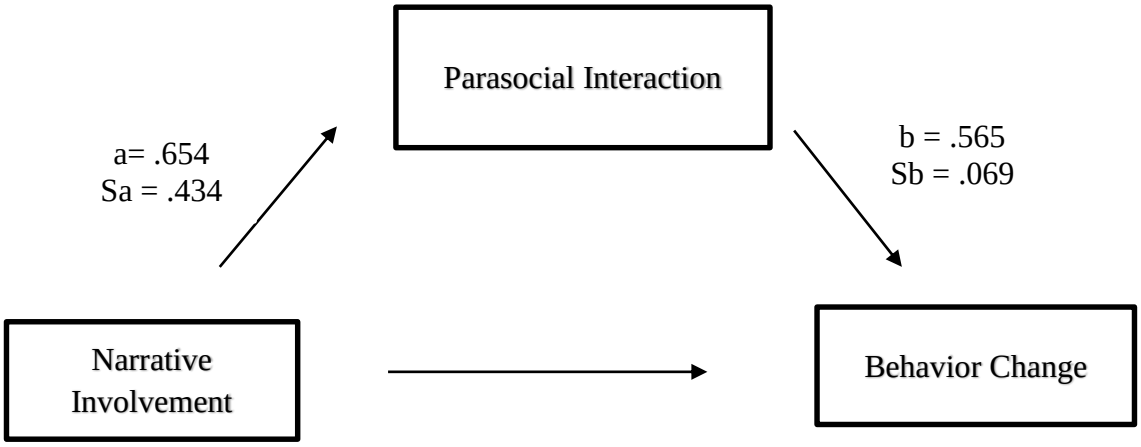

Figure 6. Sobel test representation depicting mediation effects of PSI between narrative involvement and behavior change.

The eleventh hypothesis suggested as PSI with the commentator increases, level of counter-arguing will decrease. To assess this relationship, a regression was run; this analysis rendered non-significant findings, $\beta = 0.031$, $t = .439$, $p = .661$, suggesting that perceptions of PSI do not have a direct relationship with counter arguing. In this analysis neither respondent-commentator sex similarity ($\beta = 0.010$, $t = .137$, $p = .892$) nor strength of political affiliation ($\beta = 0.079$, $t = .079$, $p = .270$) were significant covariates.

Table 5. Regression Analysis for Counter Arguing

Variable	B	SE	β
Model 1			
Constant	.614	.124	
Sex Similarity	.010	.072	.010
Strength of Political ID	.079	.071	.079
Model 2			
PSI	.007	.027	.018

Note. Dependent variable is Counter Arguing. ** = $p < .001$

Research question two asked about what effect respondents' reported strength of political affiliation would have on (a) attitude change and (b) behavioral intent. To test the first part of this research question an ANCOVA was run comparing strong and moderate political affiliation with attitude change, controlling for respondent-commentator sex similarity. This analysis indicated that the relationship between strength of political affiliation and attitude change is not significant F (1, 185) = .168, $p = .682$, ns, even in instances when the respondent and commentator are of the same sex F (1, 185) = 2.003, $p = .159$, *ns*. These results suggest that amount of attitude change did not significantly vary as a function of respondents' strength of political affiliation (i.e., strong or moderate) in this study. In testing the second half of this research question, an ANCOVA was run comparing strong and moderate political

affiliation on behavioral intent, controlling for respondent-commentator sex similarity. This analysis indicated that the relationship between strength of political affiliation and attitude change is significant F (1, 188) = 3.935, p =.049, η^2 = .02. These results suggest that the behavioral intentions of respondents in this study did vary according to the strength of their political affiliation, controlling for respondent-commentator sex similarity. Specifically, the estimated marginal means suggest that stronger political affiliation led to stronger behavioral intent (M= 3.336, SD= .161) than those who reported weaker political affiliation (M= 2.897, SD= .156). Similar to the first half of this hypothesis, respondent-commentator sex similarity did not have a significant effect on behavioral intent F (1, 188) = 2.40, p =.123.

Chapter 8: Discussion

In this study, two principal ideas were examined. Initially, source credibility as it relates to PSI and trustworthiness was examined. Research question one explored the extent to which perceptions of source credibility impacted the likelihood of PSI occurring between a media personality figure (in this case, a television political commentator) and his or her audience. Parasocial interactions (PSI) occur when audience members develop pseudo interpersonal relationships with characters or media personalities (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Pfau & Parrott, 1993). Such interactions are an important element of individuals' relational development (Eyal & Cohen, 2006) and allow researchers to assess interpersonal theories in mass media contexts (Turner, 1993). Studies have shown that individuals do not need prolonged exposure to a media figure in order to experience PSI (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000). Early PSI studies examined individuals' responses to characters rather than media figures talking directly with their audiences (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The study presented in this paper sought to update such studies and explore which particular interpersonal factors were indicators of increased PSI. Research question one inquired about how perceptions of source credibility would be correlated with PSI. Analysis indicated that as perceptions of source credibility increased, so too did likelihood of PSI. From this finding, we understand that if a media figure is evaluated to be credible, their viewers are able to trust them and, ultimately, become comfortable with them enough that feelings of PSI emerge.

The first two hypotheses assessed the role similarity, traditionally considered a factor in source credibility, plays in fostering perceptions of attitude homophily and

PSI. Though the similarity manipulation utilized in this study did not produce increased perceptions of similarity, personal characteristics of the respondent (specifically strength of similar political affiliation) did seem to influence perceptions of similarity as evidenced by increased feelings of attitude homophily and perception of PSI. Related to these initial hypotheses, research question two asked if levels of attitude change and behavioral intent varied as a function of viewers' strength of political affiliation. Though the findings for this research question suggest attitude change and behavioral intent were more likely, when evaluated as a covariate in assessing later hypotheses, it is clear that even those who do not have strong preexisting political affiliations are influenced greatly by political commentators. Further factors of source credibility were examined in hypotheses three and four, which examined the role parasocial interactions with a mediated political commentator play in influencing respondents' perceptions of the mediated political commentator in terms of other source characteristics (e.g., attitude homophily and trustworthiness). The third hypothesis suggested that perceived attitude homophily would be linked positively with PSI; similarly, the fourth hypothesis predicted that reporting more PSI would be linked with higher perceptions of trustworthiness. All three of these proposed links were found to be statistically significant, which suggests PSI can be fostered by media figures that are perceived as credible, similar, and trustworthy. From these first four hypotheses, a strong argument is made suggesting perceptions of similarity between commentators and their audience increases likelihood of PSI and willingness on the part of audience members to accept arguments presented by commentators.

When similarity was manipulated along with respondent-commentator sex similarity was combined with the high similarity and strength of political affiliation, there is an impact on attitude homophily. The combination of similarity factors has a stronger impact on perceptions of similarity to the commentator. As similarity is a known predictor of source credibility (McCroskey, 1981) and PSI (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000). Though credibility has been a trait desired by broadcasters for many decades, these findings suggest that if interpersonal-type interactions can be generated between the mediated political commentators and their audiences (through perceptions of similarity as suggested above), this can increase the potential for influence of commentators over their audiences via increased attitude homophily and trustworthiness leading toward greater political participation (Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998). Increasing audience perceptions of PSI can be used strategically to not only increase ratings and sell products, but also help increase the influence of political commentators.

Findings from these early hypotheses also help us to classify news programming as "entertainment education" as it pertains to the entertainment overcoming resistance model (EORM; Moyer-Gusé, 2008). EORM highlights the role of narrative involvement in message processing; narrative involvement was demonstrated to play a significant role in political message processing in this study. Historically we have used elaboration likelihood model (ELM) to explain message processing. ELM suggests that individuals evaluate messages they are presented with either peripherally or centrally (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a, 1986b; Stephenson, Benoit, & Tschida, 2001). In order to cognitively process messages (as opposed to

peripherally processing messages), individuals need both motivation and ability (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b). In addition to individuals' motivation and ability, messages must be perceived to have strong argument quality in order for long term attitude change to occur (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b).

In terms of political message elaboration, favorable and unfavorable thoughts of the message and of the message source have been shown to play a role in message processing and persuasion (Benoit & Kennedy, 1999). The credibility manipulation message did not appear to impact message elaboration, however, measurement of perceived credibility was shown to be positively correlated with message elaboration. This suggests that a third party providing credentials (or pointing out a lack thereof) does not necessarily impact how credible we perceive a commentator to be – ultimately suggesting that our own experience with a commentator plays a greater role in our perceptions of credibility than what we hear about a commentator's credentials. Specifically, hypothesis five, which suggested that increased perceptions of competence and credibility would increase respondents' level of message elaboration, was found to be statistically significant.

Most of the remaining hypotheses in this research project explored a second principle, the outcome responses individuals have to PSI and narrative involvement. As noted above, EORM's first proposition suggests that as people become involved in the narrative and build a stronger connection with the media figure, they will not be as quick to recognize persuasive intent. The sixth hypothesis suggested that as narrative involvement increases, counter-arguing would decrease; this hypothesis was found to be statistically significant. Similar findings were suggested after analyzing hypothesis

eleven, which posited that increased PSI would be linked to decreased levels of counter-arguing. The understanding that individuals who are heavily involved in the narrative of entertainment based news programs are more susceptible to persuasion could be a valuable strategy for disseminating political messages. Through the use of political commentators with whom audiences have high levels of PSI, and, potentially, by building an audiences' PSI directly with a politician, political campaigns can spread their persuasive messages in a manner that reduces reactance.

PSI was found to be positively associated with issue elaboration likelihood based on the result for hypothesis seven. When the public needs to pay attention to an idea, having a trusted, well-liked commentator that people likely perceive as their friend discuss that issue can help make the issue salient. Since all four conditions used in this study involved fairly well-known political commentators who are employed by news networks that are also well-known for being politically partisan, the arguments made in the video are not entirely factual, but rather, are opinions supported by selected facts. EORM would seem to suggest that when respondents experience higher levels of PSI they would be more open to persuasive message content. Hypothesis seven provided evidence to support this claim in that as perceived PSI with the political commentator increases so too did reported likelihood of issue elaboration.

As hypothesis nine suggests, narrative involvement and perceptions of PSI are positively linked. Therefore, as an individual develops greater feelings of PSI toward mediated political commentator, he or she becomes more involved in the narrative, and their likelihood of counter-arguing decreases (as is supported in hypothesis 11). As political commentators have, often, entire programs dedicated to particular issues,

they are able to construct narratives that engage their viewers. When a commentator is perceived to be similar and credible, the likelihood of PSI increases. PSI and narrative involvement together decrease the likelihood of counter-arguing and allow for individuals to process persuasive messages as they would other entertainment programing. While enjoying their entertainment program, the viewers are exposed to persuasive messages that they are more likely to believe. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that persuasive messages woven into narratives are far more likely to be accepted by viewers compared to stand-alone persuasive messages presented in a non-narrative format (Jensen, Bernat, Wilson, & Goonewardene, 2011; Moyer-Gusé, Jain, Chung, 2012).

Political commentators have the unique ability, through the format of their programs, to foster PSI and create engaging narratives while also spreading political information. As many political commentators develop strong viewing populations (i.e., a strong base of dedicated viewers), they are able to branch out to social media where they are able to continue spreading political messages and fostering political awareness. As discussed earlier, direct results have been seen in persuasive messages embedded in narratives (Moyer-Gusé, Jain, Chung, 2012). Hypothesis nine in this study sought to expand that understanding by incorporating PSI into the reasoning for attitude change. Hypothesis nine suggested narrative involvement would have a positive effect on attitude change. This hypothesis was found to be statistically significant and indicates that as viewers become more engaged in the narrative, they are more susceptible to attitude change. However, though past research would seem to predict that PSI would mediate narrative involvement and attitude change, findings in

this study did not suggest such mediation. One possible explanation for this lack of mediation is that the variables, PSI and narrative involvement, are so closely related. Entertainment-education programing capitalizes on the narrative involvement, which likely also fosters PSI. Since the effect of narrative involvement before accounting for PSI was so great, it is likely that those experiencing narrative involvement were also those experiencing greater amounts of PSI. Without distinct groups, one experiencing only narrative involvement and the other experiencing both narrative involvement and PSI, it is difficult to determine if PSI was actually a mediating variable.

Attitude change on its own is an interesting outcome of watching a political commentator. However, attitude change coupled with behavior change is, realistically, more interesting. Behavior change indicates increased likelihood of political participation, involvement in political discussion, and, ultimately, votes for a particular candidate or issue. As scholars have noted in previous studies, information-entertainment (infotainment) programing has inspired political action in the past (Baym, 2009). Hypothesis ten, which suggested PSI and narrative involvement would inspire greater levels of attitude change and increased levels of political behavioral intent, was found to be statistically significant. Though PSI was not shown to mediate narrative involvement and attitude change, there is an individual interaction between PSI and attitude change. The impact of this finding is significant as many political scholars are interested in finding ways to increase political interest and involvement amongst the American populous (Hart, 1996; Prior, 2013). These findings could also be beneficial to campaign directors looking to inspire political action within certain

demographics who tend to relate to a particular political commentator or other cast of characters in an entertainment program.

Future Directions

This dissertation furthers the discussion of PSI and extends application of this concept to political commentary. Initially, this research can be extended by exploring the factors that, in addition to perceived similarity and credibility, lead to PSI with political commentators. One of the limitations of this study is, in order to foster PSI, all respondents were shown commentators with attitudes congruent with the respondents' self-reported political lineation. Beyond similarity and credibility, there are many factors with the potential to predict PSI. Incorporating uses and gratifications theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974) into future analysis would provide an interesting lens and take into consideration an individuals' need for orientation as a predictor of media processing goals for media use and how, depending on those goals, audiences process the mediated messages of commentators. For instance, if an individual watches a political commentator because they are bored they may be more inclined to utilize peripheral processing. Unlike the individual who is bored and is seeking mood management, some individuals may elect to watch a political commentator who expresses views divergent from the individual's as a form of sensation seeking. Perhaps this latter individual is more likely to critically assess the commentators' positions and generate substantial counter-arguing messages (which he may or may not keep to himself depending on the level of emotional arousal experienced). Boredom and sensation seeking are both likely contributors of political commentators' large audience bases, knowing how such audience members process and utilize

information from the commentators would help better determine the outcomes of such entertainment-education programs.

A second direction for future research would further examine the extent to which attitude and behavior change occurred. In this study respondents were asked to predict their likelihood of political behaviors inspired by the stimulus video assigned to be congruent with the respondents' reported political affiliation. Future research might include randomizing similar and dissimilar politically affiliated stimulus videos, which would allow researchers to see if attitude change across party lines might occur depending on narrative involvement. Further, follow up studies to provide insight on actual elaboration and political behavior participation could test the long-term the effects of a political stimulus on attitude change. In this study, attitude change was tested a short time after the video was watched, but it would certainly be interesting to understand the lasting impacts of persuasive messages when PSI is high.

Isolating narrative involvement and comparing the effects of narrative involvement with those of PSI and narrative involvement would further our scholarly understanding of both concepts. One limit of this study is that individuals who experienced PSI were, not surprisingly, also those who experienced greater amounts of narrative involvement. Perhaps a study comparing a written narrative to a condition where a narrative is performed would allow for narrative involvement to be isolated and compared to the effects of PSI. Similarly, a causal relationship was not determined in this study – stronger manipulations in future studies could determine the direction of the relationship between PSI and source credibility. Further, managing argument quality would provide more control overall. As the four videos used in this study were

taken from actual entertainment/news program, the specific content of each video is unique to the particular commentator. Streamlining the message content may demonstrate processing and outcome differences not found in this study.

Finally, an exploration into PSR with political commentators would provide insight into opinion formation. Though this study dealt with short-term effects of PSI, there are likely individuals who have formed PSRs with political commentators and form opinions on political situations by watching their programs and listening to their commentary. Following respondents over time and assessing their television news consumption, in addition to social media interaction, could construct a more complete picture of the influence political commentators have on the publics' opinion formation and political behaviors.

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Appendix A: Survey

INFORMATION SHEET FOR CONSENT

TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

My name is Stephanie Schartel Dunn and I am a graduate student in Communication at the University of the Oklahoma. I, along with my faculty sponsor Dr. Norman Wong am requesting that you volunteer to participate in a research study titled Online Candidate Evaluations. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a student at the University of Oklahoma. Please read this information sheet and contact me to ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

Purpose of the Research Study: The purpose of this study is to measure reactions to political commentators in a variety of situations.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to answer a series of questions, watch a video of a commentator, and read a short essay written by a political commentator.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study: The study has the following risks: None. The benefits to participation are: None

Compensation: There is a possibility that your communication professor will provide you with extra class credit (no more than 1% per hour of research participation). Beyond this you will not be compensated for your time and participation in this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not result in penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Length of Participation: Participation in this study should take no more than 60 minutes.

Confidentiality: In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you without your permission. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers will have access to the records.

The OU Institutional Review Board may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis.

Contacts and Questions

If you have concerns or complaints about the research, the researcher(s) conducting this study can be contacted at sgschartel@ou.edu (for Mrs. Schartel Dunn) or nwong@ou.edu (for Dr. Wong).

Contact the researcher(s) if you have questions or if you have experienced a research-related injury.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than individuals on the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Need for Cognition

1-7 scale – 1 - extremely uncharacteristic of me 7- extremely characteristic of me

1. I prefer complex to simple problems.

2. I like to have the responsibility of handling a situation that requires a lot of thinking.

3. Thinking is not my idea of fun.**

4. I would rather do something that requires little thought than something that is sure to challenge my thinking abilities.**

5. I try to anticipate and avoid situations where there is a likely chance I will have to think in depth about something.**

6. I find satisfaction in deliberating hard and for long hours.

7. I only think as hard as I have to.**

8. I prefer to think about small daily projects to long term ones.**

9. I like tasks that require little thought once I've learned them.**

10. The idea of relying on thought to make my way to the top appeals to me.

11. I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems.

12. Learning new ways to think doesn't excite me very much.**

13. I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles I must solve.

14. The notion of thinking abstractly is appealing to me.

15. I would prefer a task that is intellectual, difficult, and important to one that is somewhat important but does not require much thought.

16. I feel relief rather than satisfaction after completing a task that requires a lot of mental effort.**

17. It's enough for me that something gets the job done; I don't care how or why it works.**

18. I usually end up deliberating about issues even when they do not affect me personally.

Political Ideology

Which of the following political ideologies do you identify with most?

Very Conservative
Conservative
Moderately Conservative
Moderately Liberal
Liberal
Very Liberal

Media Consumption
How many hours a week do you watch television?
How many hours a week do you watch news based television programming?
How many hours a week do you watch a partisan news network?

How familiar are you with:
Bill O'Reilly
Rachel Maddow
Jeanine Pirro
Lawrence O'Donnell

How many hours a week do you watch the following individuals' shows?
Bill O'Reilly
Rachel Maddow
Jeanine Pirro
Lawrence O'Donnell

Do you follow these individuals on Twitter or Facebook?

	Twitter	Facebook	Neither
Bill O'Reilly			
Rachel Maddow			
Jeanine Pirro			
Lawrence O'Donnell			

Persuasion
Increasing restrictions for gun owners is…

Bad/Good
Foolish/Wise
Unfavorable/Favorable
Negative/Positive
Undesirable/Desirable
Unnecessary/Necessary
Detrimental/Beneficial

How the situation in Benghazi was handled by the Obama administration was...

Bad/Good

Foolish/Wise
Unfavorable/Favorable
Negative/Positive
Undesirable/Desirable
Unnecessary/Necessary
Detrimental/Beneficial

Manipulation Messages
Similarity Cognitive Response Set Induction (Adapted from Shaver, 1970 and Thornton, 1984)

Instructions: For this study, you will be reviewing selected segments of popular political commentators' television programs. You will be evaluating the content of their message.

For the similar condition:

> *To make your judgment as accurate as possible, you must try to understand the person you are judging. Research has shown that one of the best ways to do this is to assume that their personal characteristics—their attitudes, their values, their feelings and beliefs about the world—are very much like your own. In this way the subjective accuracy of your judgment will be increased. So, as you proceed, try to imagine that the person's characteristics are very similar to your own.*

For the dissimilar condition:

> *To make your judgment as accurate as possible, you must try to understand the person you are judging. Research has shown that one of the best ways to do this is to assume that their personal characteristics—their attitudes, their values, their feelings and beliefs about the world—are not at all like your own. In this way the objective accuracy of your judgment will be increased. So, as you proceed, try to imagine that the person's characteristics are not at all similar to your own.*

Competence Manipulation Message
Low Competence:
"The information you will hear in the following video has been found to be incorrect and was later retracted. This commentator often has this issue as they fail to check facts prior to discussing events."

High Competence:
"The information you will hear in the following video has been found to be correct by fact checkers. This commentator is known for their accuracy and taking time to check facts prior to discussing events."

VIDEO CONDITIONS

Condition Checks

What was the primary topic discussed in the video you just watched?
Who was the speaker?
For approximately how many minutes was the video?

Parasocial Interaction Scale

Assessed on a 7-point Strongly Agree/Strongly Disagree continuum

1. The clip shows me what this commentator is really like.
2. When I viewed the commentator I felt like part of a group.
3. I would compare my ideas with what this commentator says.
4. I could be friends with this commentator.
5. I see this commentator as a natural, down to earth person.
6. If this commentator were speaking on television I would watch.
7. I would like to meet this commentator in person.
8. I prefer this commentator to others.
9. This commentator understands what I need.
10. This commentator understands what I want.

Narrative involvement

I was mentally involved in the story while viewing.

I was never really pulled into the story.

While viewing I was completely immersed in the story.

Overall, the viewing experience was intense for me.

I wanted to learn how the story ended.

While viewing I wanted to know how the events would unfold.

Transportation

While I was watching the video, I could easily picture the events in it taking place.

I could picture myself in the scene of the events shown in the video.

After finishing the video, I found it easy to put it out of my mind.

I found myself thinking of ways the events could have turned out differently.

The events in the video are relevant to my everyday life.

The events in the video have changed my life.

While I was watching the video, activity going on in the room around me was on my mind.

Source Credibility

The commentator in the video is…

1. Intelligent
2. Honest
3. Trustworthy
4. Expert
5. Honorable
6. Informed
7. Moral
8. Competent
9. Ethical
10. Sensitive
11. Right
12. Positive
13. Wise
14. Bad

Perceived Competence

Response Options:

A. Strongly Agree
B. Agree
C. Undecided
D. Disagree
E. Strongly Disagree

1. I respect the message source's opinion on the topic.
2. The message source is not of very high intelligence.
3. The message source is a reliable source of information on the topic.
4. I have confidence in the message source.
5. The message source lacks information on the subject.
6. The message source has high status in our society.
7. I would consider the message source to be an expert on the topic.
8. The message source's opinion on the topic is of little value.
9. I believe that the message source is quite intelligent.
10. The message source is an unreliable source of information on the topic.
11. I have little confidence in the message source.
12. The message source is well-informed on this subject.
13. The message source has low status in our society.
14. I would not consider the message source to be an expert on this topic.
15. The message source is an authority on the topic.
16. The message source has had very little experience with this subject.
17. The message source has considerable knowledge of the factors involved with this subject.
18. Few people are as qualified to speak on this topic as the message source.
19. The message source is not an authority on the topic.

20. The message source has very little knowledge of the factors involved with the subject.
21. The message source has had substantial experience with this subject.
22. Many people are much more qualified to speak on this topic than the message source.

Background Homophily

1. This person is from a social class similar to mine
2. This person's status is different from mine
3. This person is from an economic situation different from mine
4. This person's background is similar to mine
5. This person's status is like mine
6. This person is from a social class different from mine
7. This person is from an economic situation like mine
8. This person's background is different from mine

Attitude Homophily

1. This person thinks like me
2. This person doesn't behave like me
3. This person is different from me
4. This person shares my values
5. This person is like me
6. This person treats people like I do
7. This person doesn't think like me
8. This person is similar to me
9. This person behaves like me
10. This person is unlike me
11. This person doesn't treat people like I do
12. This person has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine
13. This person expresses attitudes different from mine
14. This person has a lot in common with me

Persuasion

* Measured using a 7 point likert-type scale

Increasing restrictions for gun owners is…

Bad/Good
Foolish/Wise
Unfavorable/Favorable
Negative/Positive
Undesirable/Desirable
Unnecessary/Necessary
Detrimental/Beneficial

How the situation in Benghazi was handled by the Obama administration was...

Bad/Good
Foolish/Wise
Unfavorable/Favorable
Negative/Positive
Undesirable/Desirable
Unnecessary/Necessary
Detrimental/Beneficial

Issue elaboration
* Measured using a 7 point likert-type scale
Realistically, do you plan on researching the topic that the commentator was discussing?
Is this discussion: Likely – Unlikely

Realistically, what is likelihood that you will begin a discussion about the topic that the commentator was discussing within the next week?
Is this discussion: Likely – Unlikely

Message elaboration

Please use the following spaces to list your thoughts on the topic of the video that you just watched. You may enter as many or as few responses as you care to.

Behavioral Intent
* Measured using a 7 point likert-type scale
In relation to this commentator and the message that they wrote, how likely are you to:

1. Try to influence how others think about this issue?
2. Attend a political meeting?
3. Work for a political party or candidate?
4. Wear a button supporting the position advocated?
5. Put a bumper sticker on your car advocating the subject?
6. Give money to help this cause?
7. Friend this commentator on facebook?

Political Efficacy
* Measured using a 7 point likert-type scale

I don't think public officials care much what people like me think
The way people vote is the main thing that decides how things are run in this country.
Voting is the only way that people like me can have any say about how the government runs thing.