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POLITICAL HUMOR AND THIRD-PERSON PERCEPTION

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Political humor shows like *The Daily Show* and the *Colbert Report* are not only very popular, they are also increasingly becoming a legitimate news source for certain audiences (particularly young people). The purpose of this study was to compare political humor with traditional news. Third-person perception (TPP) was utilized as a theoretical framework. The goal of the project was to examine TPP levels for political humor compared to news to better gauge how audiences interpreted source and message factors.

Results show two major themes to emerge: message evaluation and social identity. In terms of message and source evaluation, there was no significant difference in political humor and news. There were no significant interactions for source credibility, message quality, perceived bias, and perceived negative impact as moderators between condition (political humor or news) and TPP. There was a significant interaction for humorousness of message, but only for the political humor condition.

On the contrary, the second major theme – social identification – resulted in significant differences between political humor and news. Fan of humor, ideology, and social distance were significant moderators of condition on the dependent variable TPP. This suggests that social identification plays a significant part in the processing of political humor content compared to news content. Implications of the results of the study are discussed and further research is suggested.

Chapter One

Introduction

"Stop, stop, stop, stop hurting America."

-- Jon Stewart on *CNN*'s *Crossfire*,
October 2004

Weeks before the 2004 General Election, *The Daily Show* host Jon Stewart made an unusually somber appearance on CNN's *Crossfire.* Under the auspices of promoting his book, *America: A Citizen's Guide to Democracy Inaction*, Stewart took the opportunity to pointedly ask the two hosts (Paul Begala and Tucker Carlson) why they were not living up to their responsibility to aid in civic and political discourse. Stewart says to both hosts: "You know, the interesting thing I have is, you have a responsibility to the public discourse, and you fail miserably" (*CNN*, 2004, October 15). Stewart, who rarely broke from the levity of *The Daily Show*'s satirical format, was making a strong critique of the media's role in society.

Fast forward to 2011, critical commentary from Stewart and other political humorists is commonplace. Not only does Stewart berating financial talk show host Jim Cramer draw in huge ratings, it now makes news (Kurtz, 2009). Despite being staples of popular culture, the importance and influence of *The Daily Show* with Stewart and *The Colbert Report* with Stephen Colbert should not be underestimated.

Nor should the genre as a whole go discounted and unnoticed by political communication researchers. Jones (2007) questions the notion that fake news (e.g., *The*

Colbert Report and *The Daily Show*) is actually leading to greater political disengagement and a lack of political news consumption. He argues that by illuminating and questioning politician's spin and posturing (through satire), *The Daily Show* "informs its viewers in ways that mainstream journalism rarely does" (Jones, 2007, p. 130). Baym (2005) argues entertainment media, like *The Daily Show*, is not subservient to more traditional political news sources. Quite differently, Jon Stewart manages to weave entertainment and political news from a critical perspective, Baym argues, which is important to a deliberative political discourse process.

This project, at its core, explores the very real consequences of fake news. Are Stewart and Colbert considered to be legitimate sources? Do people find them threatening? How do the hosts inspire social identification? Do they have a high level of presumed influence given their celebrity status?

Much as political advertising and political news is subjected to media effects inquiries, this project examines political humor by the same measures. Thus, the impact of political comedy and satire will be examined by looking at source, message effects, and receiver variables. This proves to be an interesting exploration – inspiring a number of useful questions. Are media messages from comedic sources processed differently than messages from more traditional political sources? How much does source evaluation impact overall message reception? Are comedic messages mere entertaining fluff or are they a capable mode for the dissemination of political information?

Some argue television harms political participation (Hart, 1999; Putnam, 1995), but much of the research on political comedy shows is ambivalent about the genre's influence on viewers and the political climate. This study is an empirical examination of

the impact of political comedy shows on the ability to inspire in-group identification, and influence attitudes about the media and subsequent behaviors. Only a limited number of studies have examined the intersection of political humor and media influence (LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009; Nabi, Moyer-Guse, & Byrne, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

This enquiry employs a theoretical framework of third-person perception (TPP). TPP suggests people perceive media to influence others more than themselves (Davison, 1983). Third person research attempts to explain how the media influence our perception of others and how these perceptions affect the self. Stewart and Colbert, while toiling in a rather traditional world of politics, are quite distinct in their influence and bases of power. They are celebrities and pop culture fixtures, almost singularly propelled by their charisma. More traditional measures of political influence (vote choice, elections, or policy changes) do not accurately get at the persuasive power of celebrity. By using a TPP framework, a goal of this project is to better understand pop culture influence on the self and our perceptions of its influence on others.

These perceptions, important in and of themselves, can also influence an individual's behavior. For example, an individual may enjoy Jon Stewart's irony, but be concerned other people will not understand the deeper meaning. This concern may inspire them to post a clip and explanation on their Facebook page. Between understanding perceptions and understanding how these perceptions affect behavior, behavior is the lesser known of this equation.

Political humor and entertainment media have limitedly been looked at in terms of message processing and subsequent impacts on attitudes and behaviors. It is arguably

a recent phenomenon that the lines between traditional news and entertainment have become so blurred in terms of credibility and legitimacy (Bennett, 2007; Peterson, 2008). This study will examine source legitimacy, message seriousness, and presumed influence of humor mediated political content.

Research Overview

In summary, this research includes three goals: to better define the way in which identity is employed in the humor of the two shows, apply the theory of TPP to political humor, and to further develop our understanding of the theory.

Even though there is much discussion about the impact of political humor on viewer attitudes, and subsequently America's participatory democracy, the evaluations of these mediated messages from a social influence perspective are limited. Much of humor research has focused on sender and receiver differences. An interesting subfield of humor is message production and message reception. For instance, politicians are attempting to be more humorous and approachable (Schutz, 1995; Hollander, 1996), but how does this impact their level of credibility? We need a clearer understanding of how humor functions to lower our defenses, lessen message rejection, or manipulate our evaluations of source.

This project will first provide context for the study. Political humor is an important and popular topic for academic research, and chapter two will provide a review of the important findings. Chapter three will review humor from a psychological processing perspective. In particular, the chapter will explore how *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* use affiliative humor to mark in-group/out-group humor distinctions. Chapter four provides the theoretical framework for the study. TPP will be

used to examine how comedic sources are interpreted by individuals, what impact they are perceived to have on society, and what behaviors they may inspire. Chapter five provides the method for the project. The study design, procedure, and measures are explained.

Chapter Two

Political Humor

In recent years, political humor has become an essential component of modern American political culture. Whether hosting a "Rally to Restore Sanity" or running a political ad through the Colbert Super PAC, political humorists have emerged as a legitimate and influential political force. Jon Stewart was even called "a necessary branch of government" by respected *NBC* news anchor Brian Williams (Smith, 2010).

Modern political humorists are certainly not singular in their influence on popular culture – they follow in the tradition of humorous political commentators like Mark Twain and Will Rogers. Nimmo and Combs (1992) call this "bardic punditry" in which humorous and populist commentators "speak of and even with elites, but they certainly do not speak for them; they are more likely to speak ill about them." (p. 50)

Both the news media and the academic community have hailed the rise in stature of political humorists like Stewart and Colbert. Stewart has been on the cover of the January 5, 2004 issue *Newsweek* and Colbert served as the magazine's guest editor for the June 6, 2009 issue. A Pew Research Center poll (2008, May 8) found Stewart was the fourth most admired journalist in the country and both *The Daily Show* and the *Colbert Report* are viewed as often (by 16% of Americans) as primetime cable news shows.

As social phenomena, political humorists are important influences on the political and media environment. Herbst (2003) suggests journalist and media figures can be positioned into a level of pseudo political authority by virtue of their place in the focal point of American media consumption. She argues media figures, even those in

entertainment, “can achieve media-derived authority” and “[p]undits and columnists are often propelled into legitimate public roles, via the apertures provided by their news organizations” (Herbst, 2003, p. 496).

Given the rise in popularity and stature of hosts like Stewart and Colbert, the prolific amount of recent research on the genre is not surprising. Political humor shows have been studied in the contexts of political knowledge (Baum 2002; Prior 2005), political participation (Pasek, Kenski, Romer, & Jamieson, 2006), media impact (Holbert, Kwak, & Shah, 2003), cultural relevance (Baym, 2007), and impact on youth voting (Hollander, 2005).

Political humor and entertainment media are staples in America’s political culture. Much of the research on the genre covers two main areas: the increase of pop culture’s influence on American politics and how the political humor genre compares with more traditional news. This section will first provide an overview of the modern incarnation of the political humor genre, including *The Daily Show*, *Colbert Report*, and *Real Time with Bill Maher*. The impact of political humor on popular and political culture will also be discussed. The chapter will then review relevant research on political humor.

Genre Overview

There are three primary shows that constitute the “fake news” segment of the political humor genre: *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, the *Colbert Report*, and *Real Time with Bill Maher*. Each of these shows focuses on political news, political discourse, and media criticism. Moreover, the hosts of these shows regularly engage in political culture outside the confines of their shows. Texts of these shows (primarily

video clips) often appear on more traditional news and are circulated through online and social media. For example, *MSNBC*'s Chris Matthews often includes political humor clips on his show to highlight how politics is playing in popular culture.

Other important shows in the political humor genre include NBC's classic sketch comedy show *Saturday Night Live,* which maintains a strong tradition of political satire. The show's "Weekend Update" segment is actually an early example of fake news. Political humor also appears in other forms in entertainment media. Late night talk shows (including the *Late Show with David Letterman*, the *Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*, and *Jimmy Kimmel Live*) include elements of political satire, primarily in the form of comedic monologues. Biting political satire has also surfaced in shows like Comedy Central's *South Park*.

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart airs Monday through Thursday at 11 p.m. EST on *Comedy Central*. *The Colbert Report* with Stephen Colbert airs immediately following *The Daily Show*. While not the only shows on television to utilize political satire, Stewart and Colbert are perhaps the most popular.

The running theme of *The Daily Show* is "faux" news usurping "real" news. Stewart uses a behind-the-desk nightly news style for his show, which allows him to at once mimic and mock the news media. He presents his version of the day's news including montages, shoulder graphics, and sound bites from newsmakers.

While the show is generally focused on political issues of the day, the crux of the humor comes from Stewart deconstructing the news media's framing of the day's stories. The first half of the program is a snarky reflection of recent political news coverage. Though politicians are cannon fodder for Stewart's jokes, the media itself is

more often than not the real focus of his ire. For Stewart, the media often fail to adequately cut through political rhetoric and spin. Much of the shows content thus tends to be more critical, examining not only an event but also the media's take on the event.

Even though Colbert is a former contributor to *The Daily Show*, the *Colbert Report* takes a rather different approach. Colbert adopts the posturing of a demagogue, obsessed with his status and power within politics and popular culture. He mimics the bluster of political talking heads, often spouting rancorous and vitriolic rhetoric. Colbert's social commentary is often subtle and inferred – there is an unspoken assumption the audience will understand he is being hyperbolic and purposefully over the top. At other times, his intentions are clearer – as in the often-used segment "The Word" in which text cues let the audience in on the joke. Peterson (2008) eloquently sums up the Colbert experience as thus:

> Colbert is less concerned with telling the truth than with examining how our *ideas* of truth are used to manipulate us. His subject is not some abstract, capital-*T* Truth but *truthiness* – the slippery, manipulative ground of contemporary discourse that cannot be navigated on the two-dimensional axes of "true" and "untrue" (p. 144).

Real Time with Bill Maher airs seasonally on *HBO*. The format of the show includes satirical monologues, political roundtable discussion, and sketch comedy. Like Stewart and Colbert, Maher uses satire as political commentary, though his show tends to be less focused on media criticism. Maher's show differs from Stewart and Colbert by including an extended segment on political discussion. Set up as a political roundtable, Maher veers away from satire to include a greater emphasis on political

discourse. While Real Time airs on the premium channel *HBO*, it still remains rather popular. Clips of the show are often shown on more traditional news channels and often Maher appears as a political commentator on *MSNBC*.

Impact on Political Culture

As political humor shows grow in popularity, the genre's integration into political culture and political discourse also continues to grow. This can be seen in the impact of show content, the rise in the influence of political humor hosts, and in the use of the genre as an essential political publicity platform.

Political humor shows have become particularly relevant during political campaigns (Babcock & Whitehouse, 2005; Payne, Hanlon, & Twomey, 2007). These shows tend to cover presidential campaign events while simultaneously deconstructing the manufactured spin and framing provided by the politicians and the media. This two -sided, in depth approach may actually provide a more well-rounded understanding of the political event (Jones, 2007). This is arguably true for non-campaign political struggles that take place between Congress and the White House as well.

Campaigns are purpose-built to create and foster the image of a candidate, but political humor shows are keen on manipulating this image. For example, this was particularly the case in 2008 when *Saturday Night Live* reworked the image of Sarah Palin through the satirical portrayal by Tina Fey. Palin had a difficult time escaping the constructed satirical image. In the 2010 midterm elections, Delaware Republican senate candidate Christine O'Donnell was derailed when Bill Maher repeatedly showed unflattering interview footage. O'Donnell's claims to an interest in the occult were circulated through traditional news and became a popular culture phenomenon (so much

so that O'Donnell released an ad in response to the Maher clip) (2010, September 28). These are just two examples of the content of political humor shows having a more far-reaching impact than just on their immediate audiences.

Political humor hosts are also becoming more influential for their contributions to political discourse and the political process. In 2004, Jon Stewart publicly scolded the traditional news media on *CNN Crossfire* (Jurkowitz, 2009). Five years later, Stewart again broke from his "funny man" image to berate *CNBC*'s Jim Cramer for his contribution to the financial crisis (Jurkowitz, 2009). In 2010, frustrated with the common man's lack of a political voice and in response to conservative Tea Party political rallies, Stewart hosted the "Rally to Restore Sanity" on the Washington Mall (Smith, 2010).

Stephen Colbert has also become influential in the political process, but in a much different way. Instead of lashing out at the ridiculousness of the political process, Colbert joined the political process in the form his political action committee (PAC). The Colbert Super PAC, which promotes "a better tomorrow tomorrow," plays on Cobert's demagogue image. Colbert uses the PAC to highlight America's broken political system by buying influence in political campaigns.

Political humor is also influential as a publicity platform for politicians and world leaders. A sophisticated politician understands and utilizes these venues in order to reach different audiences than they may find with traditional news (Baum, 2005; Jones, 2005; Van Zoonen, 2005). For instance, *The Daily Show* and the *Colbert Report* have appeal and popularity with younger viewers (Hollihan, 2009). As such, political

humor often hosts a superstar line-up of politicians, world leaders, and intellectual thinkers.

Going on political humor shows and talk shows affords public officials the opportunity to be funny, clever and likeable without really having to talk about issues (though both Stewart and Colbert will often ask questions in an attempt to hold politicians accountable for their views and actions) (Schutz, 1995; Hollander, 2005). Political humor shows and talk shows offer what traditional news cannot – a chance to connect with an audience through humor and personality (Baym, 2007). The more relaxed atmosphere allows candidates and politicians to let loose and show more of their personality and private sides (Just, Crigler, Alger, Cook, Kern & West, 1996; Baum, 2005). Bippus (2007), in an examination of the use of humor in political debates, found politicians with good comic timing and self-deprecating styles of humor are the most effective in wooing voters. In 2008, both Barack Obama and John McCain made multiple appearances on *The Daily Show, The Colbert Report,* and *Real Time with Bill Maher.*

Political Humor Research

Much of the research on the genre focuses on "fake" news (comedy) versus "real" news (traditional news). A perusal of political information available every evening in America blurs the lines between journalism and entertainment (Peterson, 2008). No longer do people learn about politics simply through the evening news – late night monologues and political comedy shows offer their often more approachable versions of the day's news (Baum & Jamison, 2006).

Delli Carpini and Williams (2001) argue entertainment programs may have a greater impact than traditional news as strict definitions of where one can find news become blurred. People use late night talk shows to filter and decipher news information. Bennett (2007) argues:

> As more Americans gain perspective from late-night comedy such as *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and the *Daily Show with Jon Stewart,* there may be reason to think that the news is losing its capacity to focus public attention on the aspects of issues that may be most important. Yet audiences who suspect that news is hardly a natural window on reality, because it is heavily constructed by politicians and journalists, may look to entertainment for help in deconstructing it (p. 12).

A rather diverse set of people supplement traditional news consumption with late-night comedy shows (Young & Tisinger, 2006). Many Americans gather news about politics and foreign policy from venues like late-night talk shows (Baum, 2003). Feldman and Young (2008) argue that exposure to political information via late-night comedy shows is correlated with an increase in information seeking from more traditional news sources. Moreover, Landreville and colleagues (2010), in an analysis of 2004 election data, found watching late-night comedy shows increased the likelihood that young viewers would watch political debates and talk about politics.

In a study of late-night comedy shows, Young (2004) found content tends to be repetitive about the subjects they joke about, building on their audiences' existing knowledge structure. Among those with lower political knowledge, late-night viewing increased the salience of candidate caricatures (Young, 2006). Late-night comedy

shows focus on candidate traits which may not have a huge effect on voter behavior, but do influence evaluations of candidates (Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2005).

Political entertainment shows draw a different type of consumer seeking out a particular presentation of political information. They often present a more approachable take on the political news of the day, especially for people less inclined to consume political information (Baum & Jamison, 2006). Some argue even though attending to entertainment media is considered a diversion from reality, entertainment media can contribute to overall perceptions of the government (Pfau, Moy, & Szabo, 2001) and non-traditional news media can be used in conjunction with more traditional news media to influence confidence in social institutions (Moy, Pfau, & Kahlor, 1999). Political entertainment shows also tend to attract viewers who are decidedly less partisan; partisan people tend to consume rather partisan media (Hollander, 2008).

Young (2008) argues humor can also reduce persuasive argument scrutiny. Not surprisingly, then, viewers acquire less issue information using entertainment sources (Kim et al., 2008). Hollander (2005) argues "late-night television viewing increases what young people think they know about a political campaign but provides at best modest improvements to actual recall of events associated with the campaign"(p. 411).

Entertainment shows trigger different information processing compared to processing of news (Kim & Vishak, 2008). Entertainment viewers rely upon overall impressions (especially impression formations of the political actors) while news viewers recall factual information while processing political information. Entertainment shows predominately produce changes in the way people feel about politicians rather

than how they cognitively consider politicians and issues (Pfau, Houston, & Semmler, 2007).

In some cases, in comparison to political humor, news remains a stronger predictor of issue salience (Holbert et al., 2003). Though, Holbert and colleagues (2005) argue the impact of political humor is often overlooked as an important source of media framing which influences audience understanding of political issues. Indeed, political humor shows tend to deconstruct the prescribed frame of an issue and event, and reinvent the story with a new satirical frame (Jones, 2007). Entertainment media can even be more effective in framing perceptions of reality in the context of government policies and international issues (Graber, 2009).

While comedy and entertainment programs may be approachable forms of news consumption, Bennett (2007) argues the actual content is still drawn from mainstream news and the more banal news items can still only be found in the news media. Relying on entertainment media for news may restrict the consumer to the most sensationalistic and dramatic of news stories. Moreover, political humor shows mimic the news, but do not abide by the same socially constructed journalistic code (Borden & Tew, 2007).

Arguably, political humor shows present political information in a way that is entertaining and engaging. Indeed, young voters do tend to gravitate to entertainment shows like *The Daily Show* for political information (Hollander, 2005). Research is mixed on the impacts these fun-to-watch shows have on political knowledge and political participation. Political humor shows have been shown to have a greater effect on people with less political knowledge compared to those with high political knowledge (Baum, 2005) and may increase political knowledge in younger viewers

(Cao, 2008). Late-night comedy shows tend to lead to greater knowledge of more simple political facts for those who are not political engaged (Baek & Wojcieszak, 2009). Of course, political humor shows are not capable or inclined to cover the breadth of topics a more traditional news source like *CNN* would cover (Jones, 2007).

In terms of political knowledge and political involvement, there appears to be a distinction between what is perceived as news versus what is perceived as entertainment. Prior (2005) found those who consume more entertainment media had lower political knowledge and lower political turnout than those who consumed more news media. Soft news, with its entertainment factors, is a genre that may catch the attention of viewers who would otherwise avoid hard news on subjects like war and politics (Baum, 2002; Prior, 2003). Political humor can arguably be considered a form of entertainment television, but it is unclear if political humor viewers present these knowledge and engagement characteristics.

The structure of political comedy shows may also affect levels of political engagement. The shows tend to use thematic as opposed to episodic framing of political issues and a majority of the jokes are negative toward the target (Nitz, Cypher, Reichert, & Mueller, 2003). Moreover, content tends to focus on personal characteristics instead of issues (Nitz et al., 2003; Niven, Lichter & Amundson, 2003). Late-night talk shows, which gather joke content from politics and the news, tend to be more negative than traditional news about politics and government (Moy & Pfau, 2000). However, in a study by Moy and Pfau (2000), this negativity only had indirect effects on the further evaluations of the president and congress, and actually had positive effects on evaluations of traditional media.

Given that political comedy shows and late night talk shows tend to focus on personalities (in lieu of presenting issue information), this may be leading to a decrease in civic engagement (Pasek et al., 2006). Still other research has found when young people consume entertainment media and news, they are more likely to engage in civic activities and have increased salience of political issues (Hollander, 2005).

Summary

Based on the current research on political humor shows, especially *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report,* it is apparent that this non-traditional venue for political news and discourse is important in American culture. This seems particularly the case for younger people who are not as bound to traditional notions of relevant and credible sources of political information. Indeed, for the relatively politically unengaged, political humor shows provide an important information function. And political players and the news media are starting to take note.

To date, much of the research on the political and social implications of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* is done as a comparison to the current news media culture. This project will build upon this comparison by examining differences in news and political humor in terms of influencing attitudes and behaviors. This project will next explore the type of humor employed by Stewart and Colbert and how they approach their viewers.

Chapter 3

Psychology of Humor

Humor is at the heart of the American political system. Dudden (1985) argues in American political humor, the "components of alienated and self-detached humor were always present. These included the skeptical, the sardonic, the mocking, even the deliberately cruel. … Its political effects were anarchistic, its style tough and enduring" (p. 9)

Approaching the topic of humor is surprisingly difficult. For starters, what is perceived as funny to one person may be completely irrelevant to another. Why do some people prefer slapstick to satire, Will Ferrell to Jon Stewart? Moreover, is it also possible to find something funny one day (and in one frame of mind) and not funny the next. And why do some people get a joke and others do not get the punchline or play on words?

In politics, people from different ideological perspectives have been shown to respond differently to humor. Wilson (1990) examined the relationship between ideology and perceptions of humor. He argues conservatives prefer resolution of incongruities more than liberals. Moreover, conservatives tend to dislike humor that is aggressive and anti-social.

This complexity is illustrated by a recent study of *The Colbert Report* which found when people were processing the show's content, they tended to decode the political information according to their ideological beliefs (LaMarre et al., 2009). Conservative viewers believe Colbert is only just pretending to use satire, and really holds the right-wing attitudes he espouses on the show. Liberals, on the other hand,

believe Colbert deftly uses deadpan humor and satire as commentary on conservative viewpoints. Satire is often misunderstood due to ignorance, bias, or an unwillingness to understand the true meaning of a message (Gruner, 1978; LaFollette & Shanks, 1993).

Baumgartner and Morris (2008) found Colbert's posturing as a conservative ideologue resulted in young viewers having more positive evaluations of Republican politicians and their policies. Both these studies show just how difficult pinning down the concept of humor is when examining it in a mediated framework. Depending on group identification, Colbert may be interpreted quite differently by different people.

In addition to understanding the rise in popularity and influence of Stewart and Colbert, it is important to understand how their distinct forms of humor are categorized. This chapter will provide an overview of the psychology of humor and situate the humor styles of Stewart and Colbert within that research. It is argued *The Daily Show* and *Colbert Report* use an affiliative/disparagement form of humor.

Humor research informs this project on the social implications of why Stewart and Colbert are seen as funny by some and not funny by others; this has implications on our own perceptions of the comedians and how we perceived others will be influenced by the shows. This chapter will provide context for employing the theoretical construct of TPP in chapter four.

Defining Humor

Humor has been classified into three areas: social interaction and "spontaneous conversational humor", unintentional humor, and intentional or joke humor (Martin, 2007, p. 11). Theoretical research in humor falls into three major areas: cognitive/incongruity theory, physiological/relief theory, and superiority/disparagement

theory (Martin, 2007). Given this diversity, it is not surprising humor has been a popular subject of research in many areas, including cultural anthropology (Apte, 1985), social interaction (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray & Weir, 2003), social influence (Nabi et al., 2007), and intercultural communication (Miczo & Welter, 2006).

Cognitive

Apte (1985) suggests humor is a sequential process that consists of stimuli, cognitive processing of stimuli, and a response to the stimuli (like a smile). Cognitive approaches (e.g., incongruity theory) to humor have been limited (Uekermann, Daurn, & Channon, 2007). There is still much that is not understood about the cognitive processing of humor and how it relates to different aspects of humor research. Perhaps this is because a purely cognitive processing approach to humor is limiting. The problem with this approach is humor is not merely a function of the emotion mirth (in fact it may not be associated with positive emotion at all) nor is it a simple cognitive function. One of the initial and most widely studied cognitive approaches to humor utilized incongruity theory. Maase and colleagues (1984) argue, "[c]ognitively oriented theories view humor as a result of cognitions that are perceived to be incongruous. The incongruity creates a cognitive imbalance; the presentation of the incongruity is surprising or unexpected, and the imbalance is rapidly resolved" (p. 81).

Suls (1983) created a "two-step model for the appreciation of jokes and cartoons" (p. 42). His study used comics that either contained or did not contain an incongruous element; if incongruity is detected, it is considered funny. Suls (1983) suggested humor works by discovering the intended outcome of the message. If humor is predicted by the receiver, no humor is created. If the receiver does not predict the

message intention, they encounter a surprise in which they must negotiate. The receiver then looks for the appropriate rule. If the rule is discovered, the receiver understands the message to be humorous. If the rule is not discovered, the receiver does not understand the message to be humorous. Essentially, the model explains the act of either getting a joke or not getting a joke.

Satire contains incongruous elements. Both Stewart and Colbert use non-verbals and text-based cues to create an incongruity between what they are saying and what they are really intending to say. Stewart often uses extreme facial gesture and pop-up text boxes with a play on words. For instance, the textual title "mess-o'potamia" was used when he talked about the Iraq war. Colbert uses a segment called "The Word" in which his nonsensical banter is punctuated by incongruous text.

The model of incongruity theory has some drawbacks. As a definition, it is a limited description of a humor process and does not distinguish between the types of humor. Moreover, the theory does not consider the emotional state at the time the incongruity happened – just because something is incongruous, does not mean it is funny. Uekermann and colleagues (2007) argue incongruity research remains inconclusive. An incongruity and resolution humorous scenario relies on many assumptions which may or may not exist. First, an incongruity must be detected; even if an incongruity exists, the receiver needs the ability to recognize how the humorous message or incident is different from the usual. In a two-step process, the statement is only funny if the receiver recognizes the resolution to the incongruity is meant to be funny.

A prime example is satire which relies not only on some level of ability to detect the incongruity and resolution, but also knowledge about the cultural context in which the satire is referring. For that reason, Stewart and Colbert may not be seen as funny or clever at all – some people may find them downright offensive. Moreover, resolutions offered may be logical, predictable or completely irrelevant. Some things are plainly not funny and are not meant to be funny and attempts at humor may be incorrectly encoded or decoded. Again, the mere existence of an incongruity and resolution does not predict a humorous event. The incongruity theory of humor also does not take into consideration intention and emotional input and responses. Further research takes into consideration emotion, intention, and ability to decode and encode humor.

Physiology

The second area of humor research is in physiological and relief theory. Humor is intuitively placed in conjunction with positive emotions. The use of humor is often associated with the presence of the emotion mirth (Martin, 2007). Humor is also associated with psychological well-being (Martin et al., 2003) and communication security in conjunction with humor ability (Miczo, 2004). Young and Bippus (2001) examined the impact of humorous and non-humorous hurtful messages in an interpersonal setting. They found humorous messages were seen as less intense and less hurtful. In other words, using humor seemed to lessen the severity of hurtful messages. Satire is often biting commentary cloaked in a humorous message, so understanding the impact of satire (and if it can generate third-person perception) is a goal of this project.

The link of positive emotion and humor seems tenuous, however. Simply arguing humor produces a positive emotion like mirth fails to recognize sub-areas in

humor like satire and aggressive humor. For example, one may think it is humorous to ridicule someone else, but others may find it insensitive and cruel. Moreover, behavioral responses like smiling and laughing are not necessarily signs of mirth and positive emotion. People may produce nervous laughter or may smile because of a non-verbal attempt at politeness or appeasement.

To link humor solely with positive emotion is limiting; humor may also be a response to arousal. Shurcliff (1968) suggested the relief theory of humor which links humor to an affective relief response to an anxiety arousal. In other words, there is the view that the affective responses of smiling and laughter are a physiological relief mechanism to deal with arousal (with arousal having a valence of positive, negative, or neutral).

In a clever study of affective behavior, Soussignan (2002) looked at the effect of smiling on message reception. Participants were asked to hold pens in their mouths to manipulate a forced smile or a forced frown. The results show smiling resulted in more positive affect when viewing a cartoon. This suggests the physiological act has an impact on affective responses regardless of our previous moods or intentions. However, the relief response theory seems too limiting as well because it is only one part of what we consider humorous.

Disparagement &Affiliative

The third research focus is known as superiority and disparagement theory, which takes into consideration social interaction and context. Ferguson and Ford (2008) explain “disparagement humor refers to remarks that (are intended to) elicit amusement

through the denigration, derogation, or belittlement of a given target (e.g., individuals, social groups, political ideologies, material possessions)" (p. 284).

Disparagement and superiority humor is often seen as hostile, affiliative or aggressive (Martin, 2007). Examples of this include teasing, derision, and mockery; it can incorporate elements of satire and sarcasm. Research in this area focuses on aggressive and affiliative humor in social contexts. For instance, Miczo and Welter (2006) found aggressive and affiliative humor styles were linked with intercultural communication apprehension and ethnocentrism. In other words, we make fun of people we do not like or understand.

Disparagement humor is pervasive in our culture – it is the staple of water cooler discussions and late-night comedy shows. There may be instances of incongruity in aggressive types of humor, but the overriding theme relies of social structures – us versus them. Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert often use hostile mockery and derision; fans of Stewart and Colbert are affiliative in this brand of aggressive satire.

In hostile forms, the judgment of humor is related to the affiliation with the aggressor and the approved disparagement of the victim (Martin, 2007). The *Daily Show* and the *Colbert Report* are built on disparagement and affiliative humor. Lefcourt (2001) argues hostile humor can be damaging to the target of the humor even while those in on the joke may increase positive emotions for the joker and the group. Aggressive humor can also be seen as an attempt to gain a sense of superiority, however imagined or fleeting, from which one feels enjoyment or amusement (Ziv, 1984). Thus, aggressive humor is often directed at the powers that be. LaFollette and Shanks (1993)

argue using political satire attempts to make light of political players and political situations, which in turn may influence how people perceive political events.

Stewart tends to counterbalance hostile humor with self-deprecating humor; Lefcourt (2001) argues "[g]enuinely funny humor, as opposed to hostile humor, is largely self-directed and defensive" (p. 72). One of Stewart's main themes is claiming his show is not real news and he pokes fun at his show's hyperbolic tendencies. Ziv (1984) suggests "a person's ability to laugh at himself is thought of as a desirable trait and wins appreciation." (p. 61) because it exudes self-awareness of strengths and frailties and makes us seem stronger; it also makes people bond and appreciate that everyone has weaknesses. Bippus (2007) found, in a study of the use of humor in a 2004 congressional debate, self-deprecating humor was most effective with debate viewers. Stewart, for instance, uses self-deprecating humor when he says he is not a real journalist and maximizes that his show runs on the entertainment network *Comedy Central*.

Group identification, where one identifies with either a disparaging or disparaged group, is an important variable in aggressive humor research. In a review of aggressive humor research, Zillman (1983) argues research has moved from more simplistic views of in-group and out-group to a more complex system of evaluation. He argues the disposition theory of humor goes beyond thinking of humor in terms reference groups, suggesting that magnitude, valence, and intensity of humor is dependent on the disposition toward the disparaged group. Arguably, Stewart and Colbert use humor that invites the audience to be a part of an in-group while the hosts

attack a targeted out-group (usually politicians or the news media). Humor is dependent on the audience's disposition to the targeted out-group.

Social cohesion is another important concept in aggressive and affiliative humor research. Humor is often at the heart of social cohesion, used to counterbalance the stress, violence, and isolation present in everyday life (Lefcourt, 2001). Research has shown humor builds bonds of social cohesion in interpersonal groups like police officers (Terrion & Ashforth, 2002) and chefs (Lynch, 2010). Put-down humor can often lead to greater social cohesion because the humor relies upon culturally acceptable targets for the humor. For instance, Stewart and Colbert target politicians who are seen as acceptable targets for criticism in a democratic system.

Political humor, particularly anti-establishment jokes, can help people cope with political situations they cannot change (Pi-Sunyer, 1977). Pi-Sunyer (1977) examined the exchange of jokes in Franco-controlled Spain and found humor not only helped people deal with the hopelessness of tight political regimes, it also allowed them an avenue for social protest. While the U.S. is not under a dictatorial regime, those in the political minority may feel a sense of helplessness in terms of changing political leaders and policies. Arguably, the humor of Stewart and Colbert has evolved beyond just late-night television. On October 30, 2010, Stewart and Colbert held a political rally in Washington, D.C. People attended to voice their opinions and concerns about the current political climate. Stewart, in particular, voiced his concern for both the political system and the responsibilities of traditional news media. This project examines the use of humor by *The Daily Show* and the *Colbert Report* in to define the group and form

social cohesion. A goal of this project is to further explore how references to groups are used to create an affiliative style of humor.

Chapter Four

Third-Person Perception

On any given week night, political information is available in all sorts of forms. *CNN* may have a panel of commentators, while *MSNBC* and *FOX* may be featuring opinionated talking heads. Flip to *Comedy Central* and you will likely see Jon Stewart's non-verbal laden commentary of the day's news followed by Stephen Colbert's iconoclastic mockery of the American political system.

Using a theoretical framework of third-person perception theory (Davison, 1983), this project examines the impact on viewer's perceptions and the potential influence on behaviors. Of primary interest in this project is to understand how the increasing legitimacy and importance of shows like *The Daily Show* and the *Colbert Report* are impacting audience evaluations. Moreover, the impact of fan identity is also explored. TPP is reviewed and applied to the political humor context.

Overview Third-Person Perception

Third-person perception (TPP) research is concerned with how people interpret the media affecting other people. Influenced by a strong tradition of media effects research, TPP is concerned not only with the perceptions of media influence on others but also the subsequent behavior modifications in response to these perceptions. Davison (1983), who dubbed the tendency as the third-person effect, argued:

> …this hypothesis predicts that people will tend to overestimate the influence that mass communications have on the attitudes and behavior of others. More specifically, individuals who are members of an audience that is exposed to a persuasive communication (whether or not this communication is intended to be

> persuasive) will expect the communication to have a greater effect on others than on themselves. (Davison, 1983, p. 3)

For example, in terms of political humor, people may think because Colbert and Stewart are so popular, this will affect the political attitudes of their viewers. Or, people may think they know that Colbert and Stewart are using satire, but may think other viewers will be duped into believing the satire is literal.

Davison (1983) also argued these perceived effects are not only important in and of themselves, but are also linked to a behavior change in the individual in response to perceived effects. He wrote:

> …whether or not these individuals are among the *ostensible* audience for the message, the impact that they expect this communication to have on others may lead them to take some action. Any effect that the communication achieves may thus be due not to reaction of the ostensible audience but rather to the behavior of those who anticipate, or think they perceive, some reaction on the part of others (Davison, 1983, p. 3).

Though Davison lacked substantial data to back up his observations, the third-person effect hypothesis proved to be a heuristic instigator of future research on both the perceptual and behavioral components of TPP. This review will first address the perceptual research of TPP and then examine the behavioral research.

Research on the perception component of TPP tends to focus on either motivational explanations (interpretations based on a motive for self enhancement) or cognitive explanations (attempts to understand societal impacts of media effects) (Tal-Or, Tsfati, & Gunther, 2009). In a review of third-person research, Tal-Or and

colleagues (2009) suggest both motivation and cognitive considerations are intertwined in an individual's perception of media effects. They argue: "motivational mechanisms play a more substantial role in people's estimation, or underestimation, of media influences on the self, whereas cognitive mechanisms are more heavily related to perceptions of impact on others, especially differing types of others (Tal-Or et al., 2009). The following explains the motivational and cognitive explanations of TPP and applies these concepts to political humor.

Motivational Explanation

Shah and Gardner (2008) argue motivation is driven by relativity, regulation, and reactivity, whereby we negotiate everyday life through an evaluative and reflexive process. An individual will take into consideration personal needs and desires in relation to the needs and desires of other people, act upon these needs and desires, and interact with others who have their own interests (Shah et al., 2008). Approaching TPP from a motivational perspective focuses on the constant monitoring people do of themselves and the people around them in an attempt to control oneself and the world around.

The most pervasive motivational explanation of TPP is self-enhancement, which suggests people always think of themselves more positively when comparing themselves to other people (Meirick, 2008; Tal-Or & Tsfati, 2007; Tal-Or et al., 2009). Be it self-esteem bolstering or existential maintenance, people tend to view themselves as smarter, luckier, more clever, more aware, and less easily duped (Cohen, Mutz, Price, & Gunther, 1988; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Salwen & Dupane, 2003). Gunther and

colleagues (2006) call this the "negative influence corollary, the tendency to see others as more vulnerable to negative outcomes" (p. 63).

When confronted with a persuasive message or media message, as Davison originally suggested, an individual feels much more adept at negotiating the message's intentions and true meaning when compared to other people. They, unlike other people, are in control of their own thoughts and behaviors (Perloff, 2002).

For example, Stephen Colbert is notorious for bombastic rhetoric that is purposefully over the top – it is his form of social commentary. An individual may feel they are well equipped to understand Colbert's humor and they are in on the joke, but may feel others will not understand the humor and not understand Colbert is being sarcastic. A few studies seem to at least allude to this notion, having found young people were less adept in negotiating Colbert's humor (Baumgartner et al., 2008) and more conservative people tend to view Colbert as conservative (LaMarre et al., 2009).

Looking at self-enhancement as an explanation for TPP, Cohen and colleagues (1988) examined the impact of defamatory persuasive messages on participants. They found a third-person effect in that participants perceived others would be more affected by the messages. Moreover, the more distant and abstract the "others" became, the more TPP increased (Cohen, Mutz, Price, & Gunther, 1988). The more negatively biased the message source was perceived, the more TPP increased. Cohen and colleagues (1988) argued participants felt more capable of negotiating the messages than other people.

In their study of different media message valences, Gunther and Mundy (1993) also found more negative or harmful messages have higher third-person perceptions because people, using self-enhancement, feel more capable of defending against

harmful messages. When messages were deemed beneficial, third-person decreased and, in some cases, first-person perception (greater perceived effects on the self than others) increased.

Similarly, Duck and colleagues (1995) argue self-enhancement plays a role in the perceptions of AIDS public service messages. They found those with greater issue involvement (who felt the messages were important) tended to have higher first-person perception.

White and Dillon (2000) looked at self persuasion and third-person perception when viewing public service announcements about organ donation. They argue self enhancement (perceiving one's self positively) explains their finding of first-person perception in terms of positive public service messages. This means that given the message was positive, participants felt it affected themselves more than other people (i.e., they were more persuaded by the organ donor message). Participants' first-person perceptions were lessened when they knew they were being compared to other people. This was because when they knew they being compared to others, they became more critical of the message, and thus FPP decreased.

Research in TPP found repeated support for a self-enhancement explanation for the phenomenon. Gunther and Mundy (1993) argued in terms of approaching messages, an optimistic bias makes one feel "more resistant to persuasion and, therefore, smarter than others" and "less susceptible to negative outcomes and, therefore, better off than others" (p. 60). Salwen and Dupane (2003) argued the two concepts are rather similar, with people feeling less susceptible to media influence (TPP) and people feeling luckier

than others (optimistic bias). However, the study found no connection between the two concepts and TPP was not mediated by optimistic bias (Salwen et al., 2003).

The self-enhancement explanation of TPP is fairly consistent. However, as Paul and colleagues (2000) meta-analysis explained, college students show higher signs of TPP than non-college students in TPP research. They argue this may be due to college students perceiving themselves to be smarter than other people. That being said, a diverse range of research contexts and participants shows strong support of TPP and self-enhancement is considered a parsimonious explanation (Perloff, 1999). The validity of TPP measures are also quite consistent (Price & Tewksbury, 1996).

Message Quality, Source, & Valence

The motivational approach to TPP research generally tracks the increase and decrease of third-person perceptions given variables such as valence of message, quality of message, and credibility of the source (Tal-Or et al., 2009).

Message source and message quality affect the amount of TPP. If the message is seen as harmful or negative, TPP tends to increase (Gunther & Mundy, 1993). If the source is seen as negatively biased, TPP increases (Cohen et al., 1988). Good quality messages and credible sources can decrease TPP (Gunther, 1991; White, 1997) and at times increase perceived influence on self; otherwise known as first-person perception (Duck, Terry, & Hogg, 1995).

In an experiment combining the elaboration likelihood model with TPP, White (1997) examined the impact of issue involvement and argument strength. Results suggest people think other people are less able to distinguish between high quality and low quality persuasive messages. This employs the self-enhancement argument again,

suggesting people consider themselves more capable at understanding persuasive messages.

Gunther (1991) examined TPP in conjunction with argument quality. He found people tend to accurately estimate media influence on themselves but overestimated the influence of media messages on other people. Moreover, it is argued other people are seen as being unable to discern a credible source from a non-credible source. Gunther also looked at the trustworthiness of the message source and suggests attribution theory explains people perceive other people do not take into account the intentions of the message source. This was found to be the case even when the others were fairly similar to the individual respondent.

Using AIDS public service messages as a context, Duck and colleagues (1995) examined TPP in conjunction with message quality They found low quality messages resulted in greater TPP while high-quality messages were seen as being more persuasive for the respondents (i.e. higher first-person perception).

The impact of different types of media has also been studied in conjunction with TPP. Banning and Sweetser (2007) looked at differences between traditional media and online blog media in terms of media influence. The study found source of the media produced no discernable differences in TPP levels.

A principal concern for the interpretation of political humor is the perceived quality of the source. Stewart and Colbert are often referred to as fake news (Jones, 2005), so how does this influence TPP in terms of source credibility? As the popularity and influence of hosts like Stewart and Colbert continue to rise, it is not unheard of for them to be considered highly credible sources. Moreover, both Stewart and Colbert

have won numerous awards for quality, including the Peabody Awards for journalism (Stewart in 2004, Colbert in 2007) (www.peabody.uga.edu). A number of trends can be considered. First, sources deemed more credible tend to generate less TPP (Gunther, 1991). Second, messages deemed to be high quality and include strong arguments tend to generate less TPP (Banning & Sweetser, 2007; Duck et al., 1995; White, 1997).

This project compares political humor shows to more traditional news sources. For both political comedy and news, when the source is perceived as more credible, TPP will be lower compared to when the source is perceived as less credible. However, the difference should be greater for political comedy. It is argued when a person perceives a political humor source to be highly credible, there should be a higher first-person effect.

This is a function of the nature of the humor – some people understand the humor and some people do not. A person who understands the humor and finds it funny will perceive the host to have high credibility and will experience greater first-person perception. Quality of message functions in the same manner, with political humor producing more TPP than news for low-quality messages and less TPP for high-quality messages. Given this, it is predicted:

H1: Source credibility will moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as credibility increases TPP will decrease, but the decrease will be greater for political humor than news.

H2: Quality of message will moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as the quality of message

increases TPP will decrease, but the decrease will be greater for political humor than news.

Message valence (the positive or negative tone) is another important component in TPP research. Gunther and Mundy (1993) examined optimistic bias in conjunction with message valence. They found prohibitive and negative messages (i.e., avoid bad things) increased TPP while promotional and positive messages (i.e., approach good things) either decreased TPP or even resulted in greater individual influence known as first-person perception (Gunther et al., 1993).

Duck and Mullin (1995) conducted multiple studies using three valences of media messages (negative, positive, and public service) in conjunction with TPP toward either vague others or distant others. They found similar findings, with negative messages creating more TPP than positive messages. It was also found public service ads (promoting pro-social and beneficial messages) tended to increase first-person perception because people felt it was good to be influenced by these messages (Duck et al., 1995; Duck et al., 1995).

In terms of political humor, message valence is not always clear. If an individual laughs and feels a part of the affiliative humor (positive affect), then humorous messages will potentially lower TPP. However, if an individual finds the humor crass, unfunny, and divisive (negative affect), then the humorous messages will potentially increase TPP. Past research suggests the humor of shows like the *Colbert Report* is not always decoded by an audience the same way (Baumgartner et al., 2008; LaMarre et al., 2009). Hoorens and Ruiter (1996) argue that desirable messages will have greater effects on the self (FPP) rather than perceived effects on others (TPP). However, as

shown in Meirick (2004), the amount of TPP and FPP from perceived desirable messages is contingent upon the perceiver. Thus, the amount of TPP is likely dependent on whether or not the message is considered humorous and dependent on affiliation with the source (in this case, the political humor host).

Messages seen as humorous are likely to generate TPP, but the direction is unclear. Given that political humor is affiliative, TPP will arguably increase as humorousness increases because people will feel like the joke is insider information that "other" people will not understand. Furthermore, humorousness for political humor is fitting and appropriate while humorousness in news is less appropriate. So there should be a distinct difference between political humor and news in terms of humorousness and TPP. So it is predicted:

H3: Humorousness of message will moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as perceived humorousness increases TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news.

From past research, the interplay of credibility and humor is not clear. It is possible humor may work to diffuse the ill-effects of low credibility. Moreover, political comedy shows may be seen as fairly credible sources even for those who do not find them funny. So the followed research question is posed:

RQ1: Is TPP generated when a comedic source is seen as a) a less credible news source but humorous, or b) not humorous but a credible news source?

Social Distance

Defining "other people" is an important variable in TPP research. The social distance corollary suggests the further removed other people are from an individual, the greater the perceived impact of the media (Cohen et al., 1988; Duck et al., 1995; Eveland, Nathanson, Detenber, & McLeod, 1999). For example, an individual may not think a media message impacts themselves or their immediate friends, but they do perceive the message impacting more abstract groups of people (e.g., the general public).

Social distance may be an important variable in the magnitude of TPP generated by political humor shows. *The Daily Show* and the *Colbert Report* have a target demographic of young and liberal-leaning viewers. Given this study will employ young participants, social distance may be a considerable factor in TPP levels. This may be especially true when asked to speculate on older viewers.

When social distance increases, TPP increases – so those most immediate to us are not perceived to be as susceptible as those who are more abstract and removed from us (Cohen et al., 1988; Duck/Mullin et al., 1995). Consequently, when an individual is asked to compare themselves to the general public, TPP tends to be higher (Eveland, Nathanson, Detenber, & McLeod, 1999). This phenomenon has been found in a number of studies (Gibbon & Durkin, 1995; McLeod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997).

Moreover, as White (1997) found, the more distant the "other" is, the more people feel these others are incapable of discerning between good quality and poor quality persuasive messages. They placed distance others on a spectrum from fellow students to other university students to non-student residents.

Duck and Mullin (1995), in two studies on message reception, found support for increased TPP as social distance increases. This was particularly true for those who were defined rather abstractly, as in the general public. The social distance phenomenon was also supported in terms of TPP and violent media (Hoffner et al., 2001).

Eveland and colleagues (1999) examined social distance in conjunction with perceived likelihood of exposure. They argued people make inferences about whether or not a group will actually be exposed to a certain type of media (violent rap songs and violent movies). The findings suggest likelihood of actually being exposed to the media (in this case whether other students would be exposed) was a better predictor of TPP than mere distance.

Likelihood of exposure is an important variable in TPP research. People take into account the likelihood the media will be consumed by certain segments of the population. McLeod and colleagues (1997) found a link between TPP and support for censorship in a study of explicit rap lyrics. Interestingly, they found support for likelihood of exposure to influence TPP – there was a distinction between likely targets for rap music consumption and the population in general.

To further understand the mechanism at work in the target corollary, Meirick (2005) examined social distance, perceived exposure, and perceived predisposition. While social distance was at least partially supported as in previous studies, perceived exposure affecting TPP levels was only a factor in negative messages (there was no relationship between perceived exposure and perceived effects for pro-social messages). Instead, an argument was made for perceived predisposition to a message relating to perceived effects for both anti-social and pro-social messages.

Social distance and likelihood of exposure may play a role in how individuals perceive political humor to affect various audiences. The participants for this study are generally young, college-aged people who are one of the main consumers of this genre (Feldman, 2007).

Taking into account both group identification and social distance, it is predicted college students may think the general public will be less able to decode the comedic messages. This should particularly be the case for political humor compared with the effects of political news consumption. Moreover, young viewers may perceive distant others to be less likely to be exposed to political comedy (i.e, the general public may be perceived to watch traditional news more than political comedy shows). Therefore, the following hypotheses are predicted:

H4: Social distance will moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as social distance increases TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news.

H5: Perceived likelihood of exposure will moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as perceived likelihood of exposure increases TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news.

Cognitive Explanation

Davison (1996), in a review of TPP research, argued "the third-person effect was not a manifestation of a single psychological tendency, but was a complex reaction that varied with the type of communication, the characteristics of the individual, and the

situation" (p. 114). As such, the cognitive explanation of TPP suggests people constantly evaluate how the media is affecting society.

Eveland and colleagues (1999) argue people tend to make inferences about the perceived impact of the media, suggesting people create explanations about "media effects in which exposure is strongly and directly related to media impacts" (Eveland et al., 1999, p. 290). The cognitive mechanism of TPP works as such that people project how the media are influencing other people and they modify their attitudes based on those projections.

In a review of TPP research, Perloff (1993) finds the overestimation of the media's effect on others is often greater than the underestimation of the media's effect on the self. It is as if the individual cannot conceive of the impact the socially-constructed world of the media has on them. People assume others are more influenced by what they see as a very powerful and manipulative media (Price, Huang & Tewksbury, 1997).

For instance, Price and Stroud (2005) found increased levels of TPP increased desires to prohibit election night projections. The study found people perceive media polls have a greater effect on other people and thus adds to the negativity toward the use of political polls.

Perceptions of the self are not necessarily mutually exclusive from cognitive evaluations. The components of self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) suggest we are constantly monitoring our own behavior (and future behaviors) in relation to how others perceive us and how we perceive their behavior. The cognitive mechanism of TPP and subsequent behavior modifications function similarly.

Salwen and Dupagne (2001) take into consideration self-perceived knowledge as a predictor of TPP. They found self-perceived knowledge was not only a better predictor of TPP than demographic variables, but it also works to explain the relationship between TPP and demographic variables. More specifically, they argue people are more likely to use self-perceived knowledge (the belief by an individual of their superior understanding of television violence) rather than demographic information when comparing themselves to other people.

This project is interested in two areas in particular – the effect of group identification and perceptions of media bias. It is argued group identification is manifested in a number of ways for *The Daily Show* and *Colbert Report.* People watching these shows may identify as fans, they may assume young people are the primary consumers of the show, and they may interpret the political information of the show through traditional conservative-liberal lenses. Perceptions of media bias may be influenced by the perceived intention and ideology of the Stewart and Colbert.

Social Identity

It is arguable because *The Daily Show* and *Colbert Report* are built around charismatic hosts, this creates a community brought together by fandom. It is celebrity and entertainment that draws them to the show, not necessarily a desire for news or civic engagement. Research of the shows has shown many of the viewers, especially in the early years of the show, tended to be younger and have less political knowledge (Prior, 2005; Feldman, 2007).

Tsfati and Cohen (2003) argue "communication processes that provide us with social information about how others judge us, our group status, or achievements will

potentially cause a behavioral adjustment" (p. 712). As such, personal and group characteristics come into play in determining how and if the media message will have an effect. This includes relevance of the message to a group - the more relevant a message is to a group, the greater the impact on the group (Matera & Salwen, 1999). Identification with a social group also influences perceived effects of in-group and out-group messages (Duck et al., 1995; Elder, Douglas, & Sutton, 2006).

There are a number of contexts in which groups have been analyzed in TPP research. One area is the comparison of in-groups and out-groups. Elder and colleagues (2006) found group identification impacted TPP levels. The study examined social distance and group identity, finding messages favoring an out-group resulted in higher TPP with social distance. As might be expected, messages favoring an in-group resulted in higher levels of TPP for in-group members compared to more distant others.

Lambe and McLeod (2006) examined in-group and out-group perceptions of media exposure. Across contexts, young people perceived media exposure for other young people (in-group) would be similar to their own. As might be suspected, young people perceptions of middle-aged adults (out-group) led to greater TPP levels.

Magnitude of TPP is also influenced by socially-held beliefs about what social groups are most impacted by the media. For instance, children are often seen as vulnerable to violent media. Research on TPP and media violence is an example of how social identity works in terms of perceptions. For example, if children are perceived to be more susceptible to media violence, the TPP will be higher for people concerned about children viewing violent media (Scharrer, 2002). Even young people think other

young people (especially kids younger than themselves) are more susceptible to the violence in video games (Scharrer & Leone, 2006; 2008).

Race and ethnicity as reference groups has been shown to influence the magnitude of TPP. Matera and Salwen (1999) looked at the influence of issue salience (about illegal immigration) on levels of TPP, finding issue salience increased TPP. They also took into consideration ethnic identity and TPP, noting while there was no difference between Hispanic and non-Hispanic respondents in the direction of the TPP effect, there were differences in salience and magnitude of TPP. Hispanic respondents perceived less TPP effect on others and less media effects on themselves when compared to non-Hispanics.

Price and colleagues (1998) found a link between group identification (Jewish students) and higher levels of TPP when confronted with a pro-Nazi advertisement. The findings suggest those with a large involvement in an issue felt they faced greater consequences from the media artifact. The study found this was more a media effect on the self rather than a perceived effect on others (i.e., desire to ban the advertisements was not a strategic act to ban others from viewing them).

In a similar study, Perloff (1989) examined the impact of identity and affiliation when examining the TPP impact of news coverage. The study asked pro-Israel, pro-Palestinian, and neutral participants about their perceptions of news coverage of an Israeli/Palestinian conflict. As is to be expected, those with an affiliation (both pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian participants) expected the news would sway neutral others to the other side and only negative information would be recalled by neutral others.

In the political context, Price and colleagues (1997) found conservatives and liberals exhibit different levels of TPP, but it may have more to do with group bias than personal characteristics. Their study explored the variations in magnitude of TPP related to political ideology, media use, and media schemas. When compared to liberals, conservatives under-estimate the media's effect on themselves and exhibited higher levels of TPP. However, it is argued the mechanism at work is in-group bias – a form of self-serving interest that underestimates the impact of good news for the in-group (preferred political party) and over-estimates the impact of bad news for the in-group. So people take group identification into account when considering the influence of the media.

Group identification is also present in the perceived impact of political ads. Using Bush and Dukakis presidential ads, Cohen and Davis (1991) examined TPP for negative ads. They found when a supported candidate was attacked, participants reported higher levels of TPP. When an opposing candidate was attacked, participants reported higher levels of first person perception. In other words, for ads attacking a supported candidate, people feel others will be more influenced; ads attacking an opposing candidate make people feel as though they personally are more influenced. This is an early study in TPP but it shows group identification (in this case Democrat and Republican) is an important variable influencing levels of perception.

The *Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show* contain elements of group identification. First, both use affiliative humor that either includes audience members who understand and are in on the joke, or excludes those who do not understand the joke. Secondly, both shows are helmed by popular celebrities that people are either fans

of (in-group) or not fans of (out-group). Those considered fans of each show should have higher levels of TPP when asked to consider non-fan viewers. The affiliative nature of political humor can arguably create a stronger bond between humor host and audience compared to news and audience. News, too, has its fans. But news (as a genre) is not driven by singular host. Rather news incorporates a revolving cast of anchors, reporters, and pundits. It is arguable that when comparing political comedy to political news, political comedy should produce higher levels of TPP. Moreover, people may fall back on other reference groups such as political ideology when making judgments about media influence.

H6: Fan identification moderates the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as political humor appreciation decreases, TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news.

H7: Political ideology moderates the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as conservativeness increases, TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news.

Perceptions of Bias

Perception of bias is also an important factor in audience negotiations of political humor. Davison (1983) wrote we assume the arguments against our side will have an undue amount of influence on other people and those arguments will be much more salient for them. There is a link between perceptions of bias and TPP. Source motivations (what they are trying to accomplish with the message) are often taken into

account (Gunther, 1991). If a person perceives a source to be negatively biased, this tends to increase TPP (Cohen et al., 1988). When comparing neutral and biased material, people tend to have higher TPP levels when they perceive a message to be biased (Gibbon & Durkin, 1995).

Perceptions of media bias may be particularly important in the political context. Banning (2006) found Republicans tend to have larger TPP compared to Democrats. His study examined the connection between past voting behavior and TPP. Banning argues Republicans having a larger TPP supports the view that Republicans are more skeptical of the media and think other people are more easily persuaded by media sources. The study also found support for the prediction that given negative messages are more likely to elicit TPP, then perceiving bias (thus perceiving negative) also increases TPP.

Given that Stewart and Colbert focus on political material, it is likely that some people will see them as biased. Moreover, they make no claims of objectivity and frequently have a liberal bias to their arguments. Given that news media is often seen as biased, political comedy should be seen as even more biased. Political comedy should produce higher levels of TPP when the source (Stewart or Colbert) is seen as more biased than a generic political news story. It is predicted:

H8: Perceptions of source bias moderates the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as perception of bias increases, TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news.

TPP & Behavior

Though not as widely researched as the perceptual component of TPP, the behavioral component of TPP potentially elucidates how people might act on their perceptions. Gunther and Storey (2003) have dubbed this behavioral component the influence of presumed influence of the media. Behaviors associated with TPP include motivation to censor harmful media (Davison, 1983), but also include adjusting behavior in response to perceptions of others behaviors (Gunther et al., 2003; Tal-Or et al., 2009). Though behaviors may not be overt actions, but simply changes in attitudes or perceptions (Tal-Or et al., 2009). Innovative research on the behavioral component of TPP is attempting to expand contexts and actions associated with media influence (Golan, 2008).

Censorship

Censorship behavior is concerned with preventing the impact of harmful media on others (Davison, 1983). For instance, media content may be deemed subversive inspiring a person to prevent the consumption of that media by others. In terms of viewers watching Stewart and Colbert, a censorship behavior of TPP may prevent a person from forwarding a clip of the show or posting warning message on the show's webpage comment section.

Davison (1983) argues censorship is driven by the need to prevent harmful media from corrupting or ruining society, motivated by the attitude that "[i]t is the general public that must be protected" (p. 14). The link between censorship and TPP has been studied in a number of context including violence (Rojas, Shah, & Faber, 1996; McLeod et al., 1997; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2002), sexually-explicit media (Gunther,

1995; Chia, Lu, & McLeod, 2004), and controversial advertising (Price, Tewksbury, & Huang, 1998; Youn, Faber, & Shah, 1999).

Research on media violence is an example of combining TPP and censorship behavior. Hoffner and colleagues (1999) examined the proclivity of people to want to censor violent content on television. In a survey of community residents, they found desire to censor violence was linked with perceptions of increased aggression. They argue people have a desire to protect their communities and thus support censorship when they feel television is unduly impacting other people. They also looked at mean-world perceptions (an internal feeling about the dangerousness of the world) and found a first-person effect for mean world was linked to greater support of censorship.

Research on pornography and sexually-explicit media also links TPP and support of censorship. McLeod and colleagues (1997) found a connection between TPP and support for censorship in a study of explicit rap lyrics. Chia and colleagues (2004) found TPP of sexually-explicit material propagated by the media was linked to a desire for punitive censorship (to punish the media for harm caused by showing the material). Similarly, Youn and colleagues (2000) found a link between perceived effects of gambling advertising on other people and support for advertising restrictions.

The support for censorship is likely issue- and context-dependent, which is what Salwen and Dupagne (1999) found in their analysis of issue type and TPP behavioral level. They measured for TPP on three different issues: media violence, televised trials, and negative political advertising. They found media violence, and perceptions of immorality) was a strong link to TPP influenced support of censorship. A feeling of the media's general influence was linked to restrictions on trials and political advertising.

In the context of entertainment media, Paek and colleagues (2008) looked at different content (entertainment, propaganda, and informative) in conjunction with support for restrictions. Using both student and non-student participants, the study found greater support for restrictions of propaganda (or harmful news media in a political context) compared to entertainment media. The authors argue when the media is perceived to be a watchdog for the public, harmful information media use was regarded more severely than media that was considered simply entertainment. Interestingly, non-students tended to support higher restrictions for entertainment media while students tended to support higher restrictions for information and propaganda media. The authors argue students regard entertainment media (like *The Daily Show*) to be legitimate sources of information while an older generation may not.

In the political context, Salwen (1998), in a study conducted during the 1996 presidential election, found TPP was linked to greater message restrictions. Using a nationwide poll, the study found a link between campaign messages and TPP, with a subsequent support for message restrictions. The author argues this was likely due to paternalistic tendency of the audience – they did not feel impacted but were worried about protecting other people (Salwen, 1998).

Other research supports paternalism as at least a partial explanation for media restrictions (Rojas et al., 1996). Rojas and colleagues (1996) used general media, violent television, and pornography as a context for examining TPP and support for media censorship. The study found support for censorship increased as TPP levels increased. The authors argue as TPP increases for media perceived as deviant, people are compelled to prevent harmful media from affecting audiences.

A paternalism explanation is not always supported, however. Salwen and Driscoll (1997) found legitimacy of the issues covered in the media resulted in less desire for media restriction. They explain some issues are considered too legitimate (and have high normative importance) to be restricted.

Golan and Banning (2008) argue for a reasoned action explanation instead of a paternalism explanation for some instances of TPP behavior modification. Looking of public service announcements (PSA), they found as TPP increases, the perception people would act charitably also increased. Moreover, as TPP increased for others being affected by charitable PSA's, people also believed their own behavior would also be more charitable.

Research on censorship and content restrictions has primarily looked at media that may be considered harmful (like pornography and violence). Media that is funny and entertaining and not immediately threatening on the surface may confound the TPP-censorship connection. At least one study suggests perceived harm of entertainment media appears to be generational, with younger people perceiving less harm than older people (Paek, et al., 2008). Arguably the show's context as entertainment and humor may override the perceived harm, thereby minimizing TPP and subsequent content restrictions.

Comparing news and political humor, news seen as more harmful should have a greater effect than political humor. This is because news is generally viewed as more serious and should produce greater levels of alarm at the presence of harmful effects. It is predicted:

H9: Perceptions of negative impact moderates the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as negative impact increases, TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for news than for political humor.

Presumed Influence

Though highlighted in Davison's (1983) original study, behavioral research has moved away from censorship toward other behaviors influenced by the media's presumed influence (Gunther et al., 2003). Gunther and Storey (2003) coined the phrase presumed influence in a study that found people presume the media will impact other people and adjust their behavior to address that perception. Research on presumed influence has been examined in many contexts, including health news (Wei, Lo, & Lu, 2008), drug advertising (Huh & Langteau, 2007a; 2007b), smoking behavior (Gunther, Bolt, Borzekowski, Liebhart, & Dillard, 2006), body image (Park, 2005), and political elections (Banning, 2006; Golan, Banning & Lundy, 2008).

Different than censorship behavior, coordination behavior is concerned with modifying one's actions in response to predicted actions of others who have already been effected by a media message (Tal-Or et al., 2009). For example, Tewksbury and colleagues (2004) found, in response to Y2K stories, respondents took into consideration how other people may be over-preparing for potential anarchy. In a 1999 public survey about the threat level and anxiety caused by the Y2K computer bug, the study asked about intentions to prepare for the threat. The study links TPP (the belief others were over-preparing for Y2K) at least partially to respondents' behavioral intentions.

At times, behavior may be simply changing their attitude in response to perceptions of others attitudes about a media message. White and Dillon (2000) found people tend to moderate their behaviors in response to media coverage of other people moderating their behaviors. When viewing positive public service messages and taking into account the reactions of other people (as reported by the media), they found an increase in first-person perception and self persuasion.

An important context area for presumed media influence research is in health communication. In their seminal article, Gunther and Storey (2003) present the influence of presumed influence model. Using data from a health campaign in Nepal, the authors found evidence for an indirect media effect on the general population even though they were not the intended audience. The information campaigns were targeted at improving health care workers conduct toward patients, but the indirect effect resulted in more positive perceptions of health care workers from the general public.

In Taiwan, Wei and colleagues (2008) examined the presumed influence of avian flu news on the likelihood participants would act to avoid the flu or seek out medication. Interestingly, the study found TPP actually lessened the likelihood participants would act because they perceived their chances of contracting the avian flu as more unlikely than other people. It was only when the media was perceived as having a higher first-person effect that participants were more likely to adopt preventative measures.

In the U.S., Gunther and colleagues (2006) studied the relationship between adolescent smoking adoption and presumed media influence. Data collected from middle school students suggests pro-smoking messages create a presumed media

influence on adolescent peers and increased perceptions that these peers were smoking. The authors argue the presumed influence of pro-smoking messages influences perceptions of peer norms (i.e., everyone else is smoking) which can lead to behavioral adoption of smoking. Moreover, the study found pro-smoking ads were seen as more influential than anti-smoking ads.

To further apply the model to health communication, Huh and Langteau (2007a, 2007b) examined the presumed influence of direct-to-consumer drug advertising. The first study distinguished between expert (doctors) and non-expert (patients) viewers; this was further parsed into expert consumers and non-expert consumers (Huh & Langteau, 2007a). They found expert consumers exhibited the highest levels of TPP. Expert consumers presumed the general public would be greatly influenced by the advertising, while novice consumers and expert doctors did not exhibit the same perceptions. The second study examined the relationship between presumed influence of drug advertising and support for regulation of the ads (Huh & Langteau, 2007b). They found presumed influence was linked with greater support of ad regulation and a negative view of patients requesting the advertised drugs.

In politics, people may presume the media have influenced other voters and choose to vote strategically to counter-balance others behaviors (Golan, Banning & Lundy, 2008). Golan and colleagues (2008) examined TPP and behavioral effects of political ads from the 2004 presidential campaign (Kerry and Bush). In addition to finding support for TPP, they also found people are inclined to modify their behavior based on the perceived effect of political ads on other people. This was particular true if a person perceives other people to be politically ignorant. For instance, a Kerry

supporter may feel people are duped by a Bush ad and subsequently take action (in this case by voting) to counteract the persuasiveness of Bush advertising.

Cohen and colleagues (2008) argue presumed influence is a reason why politicians modify their behavior based on predictions and perceptions of the media's impact on public opinion. Politicians have presumed influence on the media and are thus "likely to compete for media coverage because they believe that media coverage influences the public and that it is a prerequisite for reelection" (Cohen et al., 2008, p. 333).

Cohen and Tsfati (2009) examined the potential of presumed media influence to inspire people to vote strategically. Though the act of strategic voting (i.e. estimating the actions of other voters and acting in strategic response) is still rare, there is evidence presumed media influence can impact voting behavior.

Party and ideological identification also impact TPP behavior. In a study on voting behavior, Banning (2006) found support for a link between TPP and voting, but it was not in the direction predicted - as likelihood to vote increased, TPP decreased. Republicans had larger TPP compared to Democrats and found media perceived as biased increased TPP.

Presumed influence has also been studied outside of the U.S. In a study of biased media and TPP, Tsfati (2007) found when minorities believe people in the majority are influenced by a biased media, it increases minority alienation. Moreover, Tsfati and Cohen (2005) found in a study of Gaza settlers, the presumed influence of a biased media can lead people to violent protest and feelings of political inefficacy.

There are elements of presumed influence in political humor. Gunther and Storey (2003) argue not only do the media influence how we perceive things, but we take into account how these influences impact others behavior and subsequently adjust our own behavior. It is arguable people will perceive the popularity and celebrity of Stewart and Colbert to have a presumed influence, thus creating a bandwagon effect with their shows. For this reason, political humor should create a stronger presumed influence when compared to news.

H10: TPP level moderates the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and behavior such that as TPP increases, behavior will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news.

Chapter Five

Method

This project compared political humor and television political news. The political humor condition was composed of three clips edited together from *The Daily Show, Real Time with Bill Maher,* and *The Colbert Report.* The news condition was composed of three clips edited together from *Hardball with Chris Matthews, Final Word with Lawrence O'Donnell,* and *Chuck Todd* all from *MSNBC.*

The clips were chosen from *MSNBC* for a number of reasons. First, Stewart, Colbert, and Maher all have a slight liberal leaning in their viewpoints and the tone of their programs. *MSNBC* was chosen to match this tone. Second, three male news anchors were chosen to correspond with three male hosts in the political humor condition. Third, three of the more popular male anchors from *MSNBC* were chosen in order to prevent a celebrity (political humor) versus non-celebrity (news) imbalance. Fourth, *MSNBC* builds news hours around a particular host with a particular personality (like Matthews, O'Donnell, and Todd). These shows tend to include editorial commentary from the hosts and regular segments. This format corresponds with the editorial commentary and segments shown in the political humor shows.

Participants

Study participants (n = 342) were drawn from students enrolled in communication courses at a university in the central United States. Participants were offered extra credit for participation. Overall, participants were 46% male and 54% female with the median age being 21 years. In terms of ethnic or racial background,

77% were white, 6 % Hispanic, 4.7% African American, 4.7 % American Indian, 4.7% Asian, and 2.9 % other.

Materials and Procedure

Two videos were created – one for the political humor condition and one for the news condition. Three separate shows (*The Daily Show, Real Time with Bill Maher,* and *The Colbert Report*) were chosen in order to eliminate the effect of a particular host. This project is interested in political humor, not just the "Jon Stewart" effect. Therefore, clips drawn from the monologue sections of the shows (aired in March 2011) were edited together for a total length of eleven minutes. All three segments focused on the 2012 election (both Republican and Democratic campaigns). In order to control for political perspective (the political humor shows all having a liberal slant), *MSNBC* was chosen as the news source. To be equivalent with the political humor condition, three hosts were chosen (Chris Matthews, Lawrence O'Donnell, and Chuck Todd). Time length (eleven minutes) and subject matter (the 2012 election) were equivalent.

The study was advertised to recruit participants. The survey was single phased and computer-based utilizing the online survey program Qualtrics (see Appendix A for survey items). Participants were first asked to complete an informed consent page in which they agree to the terms of the study. A set of preliminary questions obtained information about political identification and fan identification. Participants were then randomly assigned to a condition (news or political humor). After the preliminary questions, participants were asked to view the clip; the video was embedded into the online survey. After viewing the video, respondents were asked quiz questions about the clip to ensure that they viewed the entire clip. They were then asked to answer questions

about the videos and the sources (including credibility, message quality, bias, social distance, likelihood of exposure, negative impact, and TPP). The survey concluded with demographic questions.

Measures

Third-person perception. To measure TPP, this study used a variation on the basic 2-question set used by Cohen and colleagues (1997). A 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = very little and 7 = very much) was used to evaluate perceptions of self and perceptions of others. The two questions included "this video will impact my attitudes" (M = 2.00, SD = .997) and "this video will impact attitudes of others" (M = 3.20, SD = .953). The TPP dependent variable was created subtracting self from others. In order to evaluate interaction hypotheses, TPP was split into low, medium and high. The mean for TPP was established as medium, low was one standard deviation below the mean, and high was one standard deviation above the mean.

Social distance TPP. Measures of differing TPP levels (based on social distance) were used for hypothesis three. The measure was adapted from previous TPP research (Cohen, et al, 1997). Participants were asked TPP perceptions for their friends (M = 3.74, SD = 1.41), other students at their university (M = 4.41, SD = 1.31), and general population of young people age 20 to 30 (M = 4.60, SD = 1.387). Repeated-measures dependent variables were created using the various others minus self.

Source credibility. A source evaluation scale, modified from McCroskey's (1966) source credibility scale, was used to evaluate credibility in hypothesis one (M = 4.28, SD = 1.02). Participants were asked to evaluate the credibility of the sources in the video. Questions consisting of 7-point semantic differential scales included items:

right/wrong, negative/positive, unfavorable/favorable, unacceptable/acceptable, foolish/wise, bad/good, not intelligent/intelligent, unreliable/reliable, untrustworthy/trustworthy, unqualified/qualified, not credible/credible, immoral/moral, self-centered/not self-centered, incompetent/competent, unethical/ethical, unfair/fair, and biased/unbiased. The scale was reliable ($\alpha = 0.955$).

Message quality. A measure for quality of message was developed to address hypothesis two. The measure ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.16$) was adapted from message evaluation measures used in previous TPP studies (Banning & Sweetser, 2007; White, 1997). Using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly agree and 7 = strongly disagree), participants were asked to rate the quality of the message based on the following criteria: logical, clear, easy to understand, present information factually, and overall quality. The scale reliability was $\alpha = 0.884$.

Humorousness. Participants were asked to evaluate how humorous they found the video. This was used for research question one. Participants were asked how they feel about the clip ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.69$). Using a semantic differential scale, participants gauged whether the clip was funny/unfunny, silly/not silly, hilarious/not hilarious, and amusing/not amusing. The scale reliability had $\alpha = 0.894$.

Perceived likelihood of exposure. In order to address hypothesis four, participants were asked to gauge the perceived likelihood that other groups of people would be exposed to the video content. These groups include friends ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.62$), other students at their university ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.47$), general public aged 20-30 ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.43$), and general public aged 40-50 ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.48$). A 7-

point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree) was used to gauge the likelihood that these groups would be exposed to the video content.

Fan of humor. To address hypothesis five, a measure of appreciation for political humor ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.25$) using a modified version of the Hmielowski and colleagues (2011) affinity for political humor scale was used. Using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree), the measure asks various reasons for being a fan of political humor. The scale was reliable ($\alpha = 0.953$).

Political identification. To address hypothesis six, participants were asked to identify where they fall on a spectrum, which included very conservative (5.8 %), conservative (26.6 %), lean conservative (17.8 %), neutral (18.1 %), lean liberal (15.2 %), liberal (13.2 %), and very liberal (3.2 %). The overall participant group leaned conservative ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.61$).

Source bias. To address hypothesis seven, participants were asked about their perceptions of source bias for the video ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.23$). A source bias scale was adapted from hostile media effect research (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). Using 7-point Likert-type scale, participants were asked to judge their perceptions of the bias of the media source (see survey in appendix). Alpha reliability was .725.

Negative impact. To address hypothesis eight, participants were asked about their perceptions of negative impact of the video ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.06$). Negative impact was asked for multiple reference groups (friends, other students, general public 20-30, and general public 40-50). The scale reliability had $\alpha = 0.872$.

Behavioral intent. Past presumed influence research measured intention to proceed (with a behavior) based on the belief other people had been influenced by the

media (Golan, et al, 2008). Adapted from this research, a behavioral intention measure was developed to address hypothesis nine ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.19$). Questions were asked concerning the likelihood that participants would engage (based on watching the video) in the following behaviors: watch clips like the one you saw, recommend this video to a friend, forward a clip from this show, post a clip of this show on Facebook, post a comment to the shows website, watch other episodes of this show online, post a comment about this show on Twitter, watch others news programs like CNN, read other news content online, engage in a discussion about the topics on the show, and become active in politics. The scale reliability had $\alpha = .904$.

Chapter Six

Results

In sum, results were mixed, but interesting trends did emerge. Many traditional moderators of TPP (source and message evaluation) produced main effects but not interaction effects. Ideology, fandom, humorousness, and social distance did produce interesting differences between the news condition and the political humor condition.

Adopting a strategy recommended by Aiken and West (1991), the primary strategy for analysis was to examine moderating variables and interactions utilizing linear regression. To execute this analysis properly, all the variables were centered to minimize collinearity (however, they were not standardized) (Aiken & West, 1991). Regressions were run using the independent variables and the interaction variable (a product of the two independent variables).

When the interaction was significant, unstandardized regression coefficients were plotted, as suggested by Aiken and West (1991), using the unstandardized regression equation (plotted in figures 1, 3, and 4). These interactions were used to draw conclusions about the hypotheses. For humorousness (H3) and fandom (H6), a strategy suggested by Aiken and West (1991) was used to set low, medium, and high values for the moderating variable. The centered mean ($M = 0$) was set as medium; the low and high values were set as one standard deviation below the mean (low) and above the mean (high). A similar strategy was used to establish liberal to conservative values for ideology (H5).

This analysis strategy was used to examine source credibility (H1), message quality (H2), humorousness (H3), likelihood of exposure (H5), fandom (H6), ideology

(H7), bias (H8), and negative impact (H9). For the remaining research questions (RQ1) and hypotheses (H4, H9), the analysis strategy is explained below**.**

Participant data was removed from the final data set if the duration of the time it took to complete the survey was too short or too long. The average time to complete the survey was 27 minutes. People who did not take at least 17 minutes to complete the survey suggests they did not fully watch the eleven-minute stimulus video. Respondents who took more than three times the average time (81 minutes) to complete the survey were removed because it suggests they started the survey, paused, and returned to later.

A two-question measure was also added to the survey to gauge whether the respondent viewed the entire video. The measure was in the form of a quiz about the video. The two questions asked the number of different hosts involved and the subject matter of the video (see survey in appendix). Participants who answered incorrectly were removed from the data because it suggests they did not view the video. Incomplete surveys (i.e. the survey questionnaire was never fully completed) were also removed. The data set was then checked for normality and missing data was defined.

A manipulation check was performed on the stimulus materials (the humor and news videos). An independent-samples t-test found a significant difference between humor ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 1.19$) and news ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.11$) in terms of humorousness, $t\ (340) = -19.86$, $d = 2.15$, $p < .001$. As planned, the humor condition was considered more humorous than the news condition.

Hypothesis one predicted that source credibility will moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as credibility increases TPP will decrease, but the decrease will be greater for political humor than

news.

The overall equation was significant, $R^2 = .077$, $F\ (3, 338) = 9.41$, $p \leq .001$ (see Table 1). There is a significant main effect ($B = -.299$, $\beta = -.264$) for source credibility on TPP ($p \leq .001$). The main effect for condition ($B = .006$, $\beta = .002$) was not significant ($p = .963$). However, in this case, there is no support for the interaction ($B = -.026$, $\beta = -.017$) between source credibility and condition ($p = .83$).

The main effect of source credibility influencing TPP is supported by past research. In this study, as source credibility decreased, TPP increased (consistent with previous studies). However, the predicted interaction between source credibility and condition (political humor or news) was not significant. So hypothesis one is not supported.

Table 1

Regression Analysis for Source Credibility as Moderator

Variable	B	SE	β
Constant	1.19	.06	
Condition	.006	.12	.002
Source Credibility	-.299	.09	-.264**
Interaction	-.026	.12	-.017

Note. Dependent variable is TPP. $R^2 = .077$, $F\ (3, 338) = 9.41$, $p \leq .001$. ** = $p \leq .001$

Hypothesis two predicted quality of message will moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as the quality of message increases TPP will decrease, but the decrease will be greater for political humor than news.

The overall equation was significant, $R^2 = .059$, $F\ (3, 337) = 7.06$, $p \leq .001$ (see Table 2). There is a significant main effect ($B = -.241$, $\beta = -.242$) for message quality on TPP ($p \leq .001$). The main effect for condition ($B = .067$, $\beta = .029$) was not significant

(p = .553). However, in this case, there is no support for the interaction (B = -.018, β = -.009) between message quality and condition (p = .86).

The main effect of message quality influencing TPP is supported by past research. In this study, as message quality decreased, TPP increased (which is consistent with previous studies). However, the predicted interaction between message quality and condition was not significant. So hypothesis two is not supported.

Table 2

Regression Analysis for Message Quality as Moderator

Variable	B	SE	β
Constant	1.19	.061	
Condition	.067	.121	.029
Message Quality	-.241	.053	-.242**
Interaction	-.018	.105	-.009

Note. Dependent variable is TPP. R^2 = .059, F (3, 337) = 7.06, $p \leq .001$. ** = $p \leq .001$

Hypothesis three predicted that humorousness of message will moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as perceived humorousness increases TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news.

The overall equation was significant, R^2 = .030, F (3, 338) = 3.498, p = .016 (see Table 3). There is a significant main effect (B = -.103, β = .151) for humorousness on TPP ($p < .05$). The main effect for condition (B = .298, β = .130) was not significant (p = .11). The predicted interaction (B = -.265, β = .132) between humorousness and condition was significant (p = .015). The interaction is graphed (see figure 1).

As predicted, there is a significant difference between news and political humor TPP levels. However, the direction of TPP levels was opposite of that predicted, thus hypothesis three is not supported.

Table 3

Regression Analysis for Humorousness as Moderator

Variable	B	SE	*β*
Constant	1.36	.091	
Condition	.298	.181	.130
Humorous	-.103	.054	-.151*
Interaction	-.265	.108	-.132*

Note. Dependent variable is TPP. $R^2 = .030$, $F\ (3, 338) = 3.498$, $p = .016$. * = $p < .05$

The TPP levels for news as humorousness goes from to low to high remain relatively flat (though they do slope up slightly). For political humor, as humorousness increases, TPP decreases.

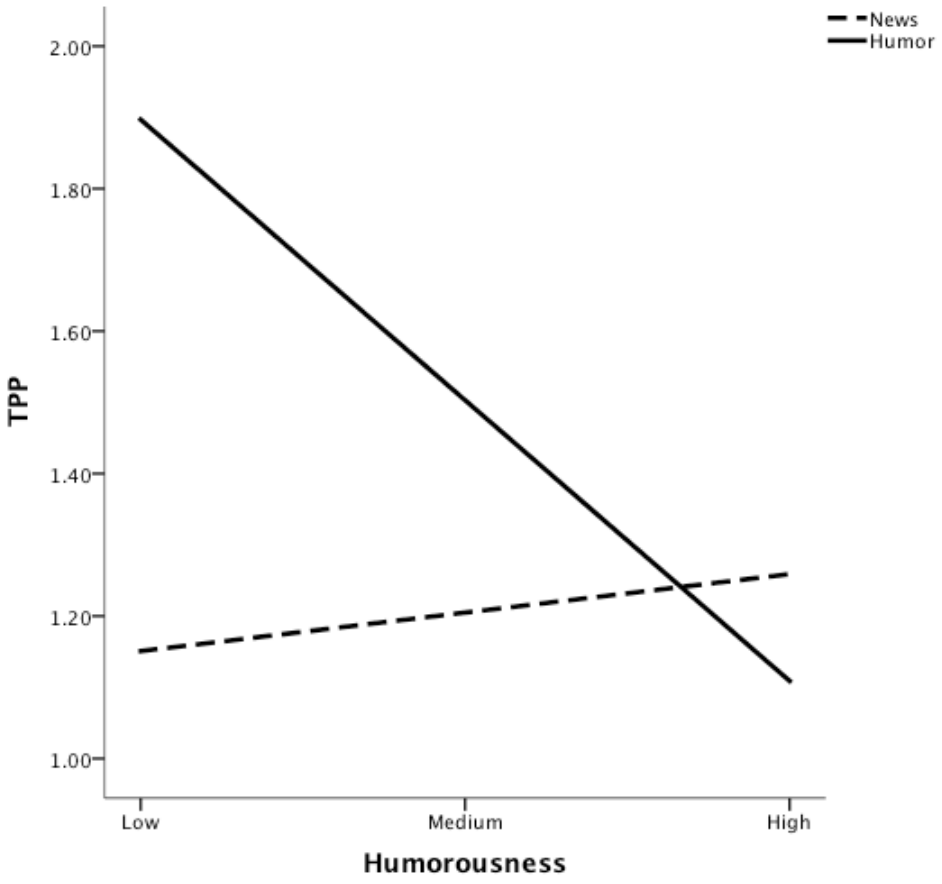


Figure 1. Interaction between humorousness and condition

To further understand the interaction, a simple effects analysis was done using procedures outlined by Preacher and colleagues (2006). When humorousness ($M = 0$, $SD = 1.69$) was slightly below the mean (humorousness = -.22 and below), the difference between news and humor was significant at $p < .05$. When humorousness reached -.22 and below, the humor condition produced significantly more TPP compared to the news condition. On the other hand, news would not produce significantly greater levels of TPP until humorousness reached 6.87and above (more than four standard deviations above the mean).

Research question one first asked if TPP is generated when a source is seen as less credible but humorous. It then asked if TPP is generated when a source is seen as not humorous but credible. The analysis was first run on the entire data set (including both humor and news conditions). An independent samples t-test was run to compare those in group 1 (who found the source less credible but humorous) and group 2 (everyone else). Group one membership was determined by finding the mean for credibility and the mean for humorousness. Group one consists of people who fell just below the mean for credibility and above the mean for humorousness. There was a significant difference between group 1 ($M = 1.55$, $SD = 1.15$) and group 2 ($M = 1.09$, $SD = 1.13$), t (340) = -3.09, $d = .41$, $p = .002$. To understand this better, a follow-up independent samples t-test was run to determine whether news and political humor were significantly different for this group. For those who found the source less credible but humorous, there was a significant difference between news ($M = .047$, $SD = .22$) and political humor ($M = .399$, $SD = .49$), t (340) = -8.55, $d = .99$, $p \leq .001$.

A second independent samples t-test was run to compare those in group 1 (who found the source less funny but more credible) and group 2 (everyone else). Group one membership was determined by finding the mean for credibility and the mean for humorousness. Group one consists of people who fell above the mean for credibility and below the mean for humorousness. There was a significant difference between group 1 (M = .98, SD = 1.13) and group 2 (M = 1.26, SD = 1.15), t (340) = 1.91, d = -.25, $p < .05$. To understand this better, a follow-up independent samples t-test was run to determine whether news and political humor were significantly different for this group. For those who found the source less funny but more credible, there was a significant difference between news (M = .47, SD = .51) and political humor (M = .03, SD = .18), t (340) = 10.81, d = -1.28, $p \leq .001$.

To further examine this question, only humor condition cases were analyzed. An independent samples t-test was run to compare those in group 1 (who found the source less credible but humorous) and group 2 (everyone else). There was a significant difference between group 1 (M = 1.54, SD = 1.13) and group 2 (M = 1.01, SD = 1.06), t (171) = -3.119, d = .49, p = .002. A second independent samples t-test was run to compare those in group 1 (who found the source less funny but more credible) and group 2 (everyone else). There was not a significant difference between group 1 (M = 1.00, SD = .89) and group 2 (M = 1.23, SD = 1.12), t (171) = .490, d = -.21, p = .63. This suggests, in the humor condition, those who found the source less credible but humorous were significantly different than everyone else.

Next, only news condition cases were analyzed. An independent samples t-test was run to compare those in group 1 (who found the source less credible but humorous)

and group 2 (everyone else). There was not a significant difference between group 1 (M = 1.63, SD = 1.41) and group 2 (M = 1.14, SD = 1.18), t (167) = -1.121, d = .41, p = .26. A second independent samples t-test was run to compare those in group 1 (who found the source less funny but more credible) and group 2 (everyone else). The difference between group 1 (M = .99, SD = 1.15) and group 2 (M = 1.33, SD = 1.21) approached significance, t (167) = 1.861, d = -.29, p = .06. This suggests, in the news condition, that those found the source less funny but more credible had marginally significant differences compared to everyone else.

Hypothesis four predicts that social distance will moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as social distance increases TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news. A repeated-measures ANOVA was run comparing TPP perceived for the following groups: friends, other students at the university, and the more abstract other people aged 20 to 30 years of age for both conditions (political humor and news). This group of variables was chosen because it represents the average participants peer group at varying distances removed.

The Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was significant ($p \leq .001$), so sphericity cannot be assumed. Using Greenhouse-Geisser correction, the repeated-measures ANOVA was significant, F (3, 866) = 554.28, $p \leq .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .621$. A post-hoc test (with Bonferroni adjustment) shows that the means are significant for each distance measured ($p \leq .001$). The means for political humor and news are plotted in Figure 2.

Using Greenhouse-Geisser correction, the repeated-measures ANOVA for the interaction between condition and distance was significant, F (3, 866) = 4.819, p

= .004, partial η^2 = .014. The plot suggests that as groups become more distant from the individual, the greater the level of TPP. In the news condition, individual level of TPP (*M* = 2.07, *SD* = 1.04) was significantly different from others. As the others became more distant, TPP levels increased: TPP friends (*M* = 3.64, *SD* = 1.31), TPP other students (*M* = 4.29, *SD* = 1.32), and general public aged 20-30 (*M* = 4.39, *SD* = 1.39). It was similar in the political humor condition. Individual level of TPP (*M* = 1.94, *SD* = .96) was significantly different from others. As the others became more distant, TPP levels increased: TPP friends (*M* = 3.84, *SD* = 1.49), TPP other students (*M* = 4.53, *SD* = 1.29), and general public aged 20-30 (*M* = 4.81, *SD* = 1.35).

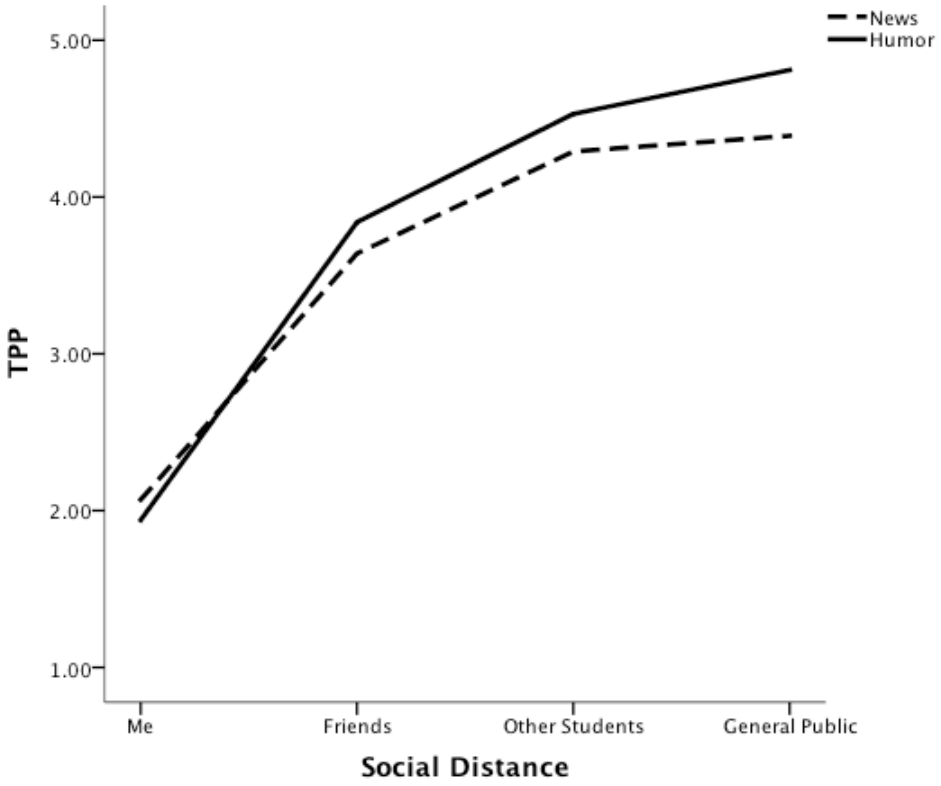


Figure 2. Repeated Measures of Social Distance and TPP

An independent-samples t-test was run to evaluate whether the difference between humor and news was significant. There was a significant difference between news (M = 4.39, SD = 1.398) and political humor (M = 4.81, SD = 1.348) in the most distant group (an abstract general public aged 20 to 30), t (339) = -2.809, p = .005. The difference between news (M = 4.29, SD = 1.32) and political humor (M = 4.53, SD = 1.291) was approaching significance for the "other students" distance, t (339) = -1.733, p = .08. The difference between news and political humor was not significant for self, t (340) = 1.14, p = .25, and friends, t (340) = -1.352, p = .17. Overall, the results suggest that as social distance increases, TPP increases. Moreover, as social distance increases to the most distant group, there is significantly more TPP for political humor compared to news. Hypothesis four is partially supported.

Hypothesis five predicted that perceived likelihood of exposure will moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as perceived likelihood of exposure increases TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news.

Regression analysis was used to examine the moderating effects of perceived likelihood of exposure on the relationship between condition (political humor and news) and TPP. Perceived likelihood of exposure was measured for friends, other students at the university, general public aged 20-30, and general public.

The most distant group - the "general public" – was the only significant equation, R^2 = .029, F (3, 338) = 3.35, p = .019 (see Table 4). There was a significant main effect (B = .133, β = .152) for likelihood of exposure on TPP (p = .006). There was not a significant main effect (B = -.017, β = -.008) for condition on TPP (p = .89).

The predicted interaction (B = -.123, β = -.069) was not significant (p = .21). This suggests that the more likely they perceive someone in the general public to watch either media source, the higher the TPP level. However, the interaction was not significant, so there appears to be no significant difference between political humor and news.

For the likelihood that "other student at the university" would be exposed, the overall equation approached significance with R^2 = .022, F (3, 338) = 2.49, p = .06. There was a significant main effect (B = .104, β = .133) for likelihood of exposure on TPP (p = .023). Therefore, as likelihood of exposure increased, TPP increased. However, the interaction (B = -.09, β = -.054) was not significant (p = .32), so there appears to be no significant difference between the two genres. The main effect for condition (B = -.049, β = -.022) was also not significant (p = .71)

Table 4

Regression Analysis for Likelihood of Exposure (General Public) as Moderator

Variable	B	SE	β
Constant	1.21	.063	
Condition	-.017	.126	-.008
Likelihood Exposure	.133	.048	.152*
Interaction	-.123	.096	-.069

Note. Dependent variable is TPP. R^2 = .029, F (3, 338) = 3.35, p = .019. * = $p \leq .05$

For the likelihood that "friends" would be exposed to the video, the overall equation was not significant, R^2 = .003, F (3, 338) = .299, p = .83. For the likelihood that "general public aged 20-30" would be exposed to the video, the overall equation was not significant, R^2 = .018, F (3, 337) = 2.06, p = .11. Overall, this hypothesis is not supported.

Hypothesis six predicted fan identification moderates the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as political humor appreciation decreases, TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news.

The overall equation was significant, $R^2 = .035$, $F\ (3, 338) = 4.03$, $p = .008$ (see Table 5). There is a significant main effect ($B = -.098$, $\beta = -.106$) for fan of humor on TPP ($p < .05$). The main effect for condition ($B = .067$, $\beta = .029$) was not significant ($p = .59$). The predicted interaction ($B = -.264$, $\beta = -.142$) between fan of humor and condition was significant ($p = .008$). See Figure 3 for the interaction graph.

As predicted, less fandom of political humor coincided with higher TPP levels. As fandom increased, TPP levels decreased in the political humor condition. In the news condition, the line stayed fairly level; though there appears to be slight link between higher fandom coinciding with higher TPP levels in the news condition. However, the fluctuation in TPP levels is greater in the political humor condition, thus this hypothesis is supported.

Table 5

Regression Analysis for Fan of Humor as Moderator

Variable	B	SE	β
Constant	1.21	.06	
Condition	.067	.123	.029
Fan of Humor	-.098	.05	-.106*
Interaction	-.264	.099	-.142*

Note. Dependent variable is TPP. $R^2 = .035$, $F\ (3, 338) = 4.03$, $p = .008$. * = $p < .05$

To further understand the interaction between fandom and condition, a simple effects analysis was done using procedures outlined by Preacher and colleagues (2006). The humor condition produced significantly more TPP compared to news ($p < .05$)

when fan of humor reached -0.86 below the mean and lower ($M = 0$, $SD = 1.25$). News produced significantly greater levels of TPP compared humor ($p < .05$) when fan of humor reached 2.01 above the mean (i.e., 1.6 *SD* above the mean) and higher.

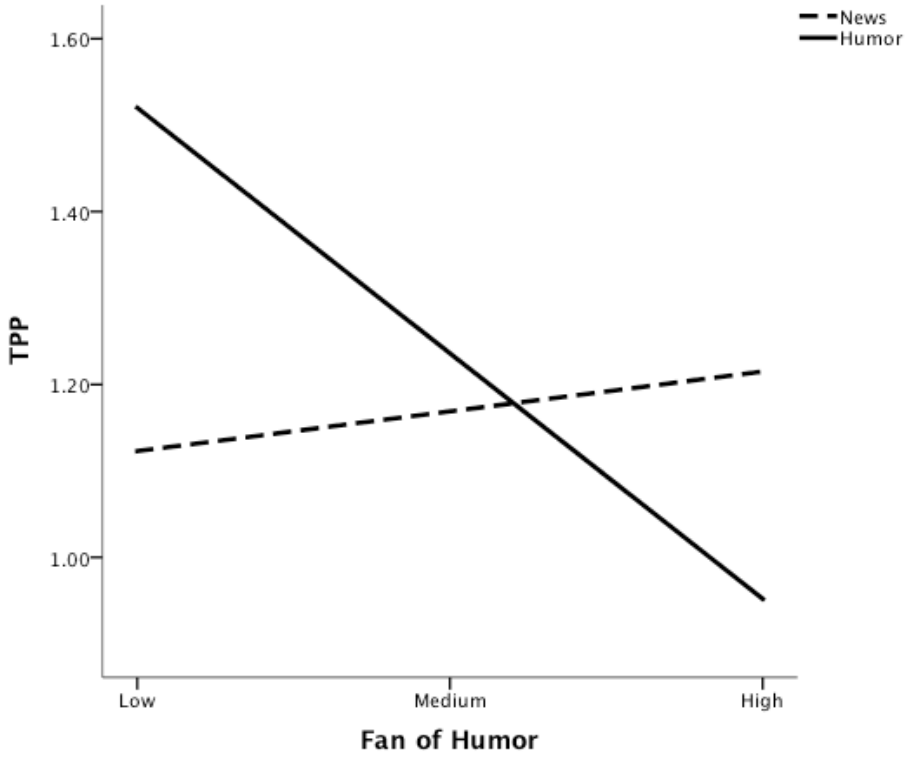


Figure 3. Interaction of fan of humor and condition.

Hypothesis seven predicted political ideology moderates the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as conservatism increases, TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news.

The overall equation was significant, $R^2 = .047$, $F\ (3, 338) = 5.534$, $p \leq .001$ (see Table 6). There was not a significant main effect ($B = .054$, $\beta = .075$) for political ideology on TPP ($p = .158$). The main effect for condition ($B = .056$, $\beta = .024$) was not

significant ($p = .646$). The predicted interaction ($B = .281$, $\beta = .197$) between political ideology and condition was significant ($p \leq .001$).

Table 6

Regression Analysis for Political Ideology as Moderator

Variable	B	SE	β
Constant	1.19	.061	
Condition	.056	.122	.024
Political Ideology	.054	.038	.075
Interaction	.281	.076	.197**

Note. Dependent variable is TPP. $R^2 = .047$, F (3, 338) = 5.534, $p \leq .001$. ** = $p \leq .001$

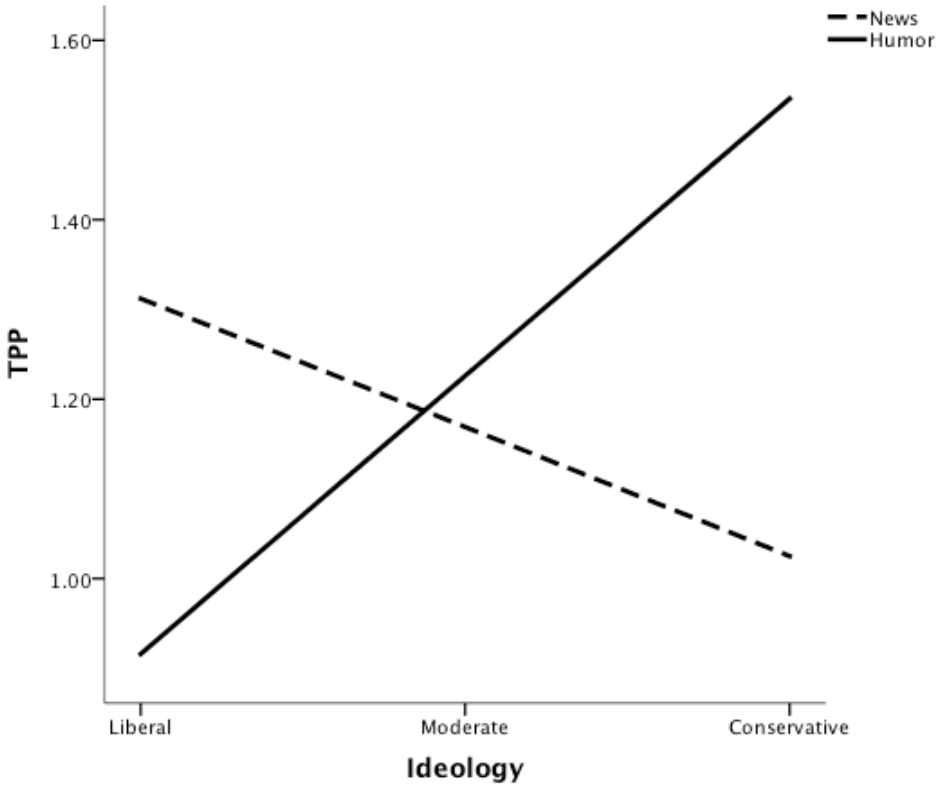


Figure 4. Interaction of ideology and condition

The interaction (see figure 4) shows conservative participants had higher levels of TPP compared to liberal participants in the humor condition. For the news condition,

liberals had a higher level of TPP compared to conservatives. This hypothesis was partially supported.

To further understand the interaction between ideology and condition, a simple effects analysis was done using procedures outlined by Preacher and colleagues (2006). The news condition produced significantly more TPP compared to humor ($p < .05$) when ideology reached -1.30 below the mean and lower ($M = 0$, $SD = 1.61$). Political humor produced significantly greater levels of TPP compared news ($p < .05$) when ideology reached 0.74 above the mean and higher.

Hypothesis eight predicted source bias moderates the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as perception of bias increases, TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news.

The overall equation was significant, $R^2 = .037$, $F\ (3, 338) = 4.36$, $p = .005$ (see Table 7). There is a significant main effect ($B = .216$, $\beta = .185$) for perceived bias on TPP ($p \leq .001$). The main effect for condition ($B = -.046$, $\beta = -.02$) was not significant ($p = .715$). However, in this case, there is no support for the interaction ($B = -.094$, $\beta = -.039$) between perceived bias and condition ($p = .47$).

The main effect of perceived bias influencing TPP is supported by past research. In this study, as perceived bias increased, TPP. However, the predicted interaction between perceived bias and condition was not significant. So hypothesis seven is not supported.

Table 7

Regression Analysis for Perceived Bias as Moderator

Variable	B	SE	β
Constant	1.204	.063	
Condition	-.046	.126	-.02
Perceived Bias	.216	.065	.185**
Interaction	-.094	.130	-.039

Note. Dependent variable is TPP. $R^2 = .037$, $F\ (3, 338) = 4.36$, $p = .005$. ** = $p \leq .001$

Hypothesis nine predicted perceived negative impact moderates the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as perceived negative impact increases, TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for news than for political humor.

The overall equation was significant, $R^2 = .050$, $F\ (3, 338) = 5.97$, $p \leq .001$ (see Table 8). There is a significant main effect ($B = .242$, $\beta = .224$) for negative impact on TPP ($p \leq .001$). The main effect for condition ($B = .105$, $\beta = .046$) was not significant ($p = .393$). However, in this case, there is no support for the interaction between negative impact and condition ($p = .586$).

In this study, as the main effect for perceived negative impact increased, TPP increased. However, the predicted interaction between perceived negative impact and condition was not significant. So hypothesis eight is not supported.

Table 8

Regression Analysis for Negative Impact as Moderator

Variable	B	SE	*β*
Constant	1.19	.061	
Condition	.105	.122	.046
Negative Impact	.242	.058	.224**
Interaction	-.063	.116	-.029

Note. Dependent variable is TPP. $R^2 = .050$, F (3, 338) = 5.97, $p \leq .001$. ** = $p \leq .001$

Hypothesis ten predicted TPP levels would moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and behavior such that as TPP increases, behavior will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news.

The overall equation was significant, $R^2 = .047$, $F\ (3, 338) = 5.49$, $p \leq .001$ (see Table 9). There is a significant main effect ($B = -.201$, $\beta = -.195$) for TPP level on behavior ($p \leq .001$). The main effect for condition ($B = .227$, $\beta = .096$) approached significance ($p = .07$). However, in this case, there is no support for the interaction ($B = -.065$, $\beta = -.031$) between TPP and condition ($p = .56$).

The main effect of TPP influencing behavior is supported by past research suggesting that presumed influence of the media can lead to behavioral adjustment. In this study, as TPP increased, behavior decreased. However, the predicted interaction between TPP and condition (political humor or news) was not significant. So hypothesis ten is not supported.

Table 9

Regression Analysis for Condition as moderator

Variable	B	SE	β
Constant	3.58	.063	
Condition	.227	.126	.096
TPP	-.201	.055	-.195**
Interaction	-.065	.110	-.031

Note. Dependent variable is Behavior. $R^2 = .047$, $F\ (3, 338) = 5.49$, $p \leq .001$. ** = $p \leq .001$

Chapter Seven

Discussion

The goal of this project was to further examine political humor shows as a form of political news. The results suggest the comparison between political humor and news is complex and not always clear cut. Results suggest TPP persist regardless of the media consumed. The differences between news and political humor are not as parsimonious.

In summary, the moderating effects of source credibility (H1), message quality (H2), likelihood of exposure (H5), bias (H8), and negative impact (H9) were not significantly different for the two conditions (humor and news). Research question one, which inquired about the balance of credibility and humor, produced mixed results. On the contrary, the moderating effects of humorousness (H3), social distance (H4), fan of humor (H6), and ideology (H7) did result in significant differences between the conditions. TPP's influence on behavior (H10) resulted in a main effect only.

Multiple themes emerged in this study. First, there was little distinction between political humor and news for traditional TPP predictors like source credibility, message quality, negative impact of message, perceived bias, and likelihood of exposure. These factors resulted in significant main effects, suggesting the experiment was valid in its design because these main effects replicate past research. However, the predicted interactions were not significant, suggesting in terms of factors like message quality and source credibility, there was not significant difference between political humor and news.

A second theme to emerge was the factor of social identity. When group identification was examined (specifically ideology, social distance, and fandom), there

were differences in TPP levels for political humor and news. Therefore, when group segmentation was considered (liberal and conservative, fan and non-fan), levels of TPP were significantly different for news and political humor, and predicted interactions were supported.

A third theme focuses on the behavioral component of TPP. Results were mixed when presumed influence was factored into behavior modification. Arguably, this is the area for further exploration and research.

Each of these themes is discussed in this chapter. Results for each hypothesis and research question are considered in relation to the overall themes and in relation to each other. Overall, contributions to theory are discussed for the project as a whole. Limitations of the project will also be discussed, along with suggestions for future research in TPP and political humor.

Message & Source

The first theme to emerge from the analysis was a persistent support for the motivational explanation of TPP without a marked difference between political humor and news. Very traditional predictors of TPP (from past research), including source credibility, message quality, and message valence, were found to influence TPP levels for both political news and humor. However, there was not a significant difference between news and political humor for these moderators. (The one exception to this was perceived humorousness, which did result in a significant difference between news and political humor.) This suggests while TPP exists for both political humor and news, there appears to be little distinction between those media genres when considering source and message. This discussion focuses on these two aspects: source

characteristics (in terms of credibility and bias) and message characteristics (in terms of quality and valence).

Source characteristics were a sub-theme in the study. Source characteristics were examined in terms of source credibility (H1, RQ1) and source bias (H8). Hypothesis one predicted that source credibility would moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as credibility increases TPP will decrease, but the decrease will be greater for political humor than for news. The rationale for hypothesis one argued that for both political humor and news, when the source was perceived as more credible, TPP would be lower compared to when the source is perceived as less credible. The logic for this rationale is high source credibility correlates with higher first-person perception (Duck, Terry, & Hogg, 1995). This trend did persist with both political humor and news, with a significant main effect for source credibility on the level of TPP. Results show, for the main effect, as source credibility increased, TPP decreased.

Arguably, the influence of source credibility should be magnified for political humor given its overall perceived lack of traditional news credibility (compared to traditional news). Therefore, when political humor is considered credible, it should be considered more credible than news because of the humor affiliation (fandom) factor. When political humor is considered non-credible, it should be a greater level of non-credibility compared to traditional news given its "fake" news status. Given this logic, these fluctuations should have been reflected in significantly different TPP levels. However, hypothesis one is not supported in this project because the interaction between source credibility and condition was not significant.

Even though both media types (political humor and news) created TPP when source credibility was low, there was not a significant difference between the two media genres. This is at once surprising and not surprising at all. The rationale for predicting that third person and first person levels for political humor would fluctuate on a wider spectrum than first and third person levels for news was based on the nature of humor. Political humor is highly affiliative, so some people understand the humor (and are in on the joke) and some people do not. It was argued that a person who understands the humor would also perceive the source to have high credibility. The results, however, show that there were no differences in the conditions in terms of evaluating source credibility.

To further examine humorousness and credibility, research question one first asked if TPP is generated when a source is seen as less credible but humorous. Research question one then asked if TPP is generated when a source is seen as less humorous but more credible. The motivation for this question was to illuminate the interplay of humor and credibility. Much of the research on political humor argues that while the shows are funny and popular, they are still "fake" news and are separate and distinct from traditional news sources **(**Baum & Jamison, 2006; Bennett, 2007; Peterson, 2008**)**. The goal of research question one was to further examine the dynamic of credibility and humor.

In terms of TPP research and political humor, the impact of humor and credibility on TPP levels is unclear. On the one hand, arguably, messages seen as funny could possibly lower TPP level; however, messages intended to be funny but seen as

rude or offensive could elevate TPP levels. Moreover, it is arguable high credibility can override humor or diffuse an unfunny message.

The results of this study suggest the mix of credibility and humor remains unclear. There were significant differences between people who found the source to be highly credible but less funny compared to everyone else in terms of TPP level. However, upon further investigation it appears participants in the news condition were driving this result. This group produced nearly significant differences for the news condition, but non-significant results for the humor condition.

On the contrary, those who perceived the source to be less credible and more humorous produced significantly different levels of TPP compared to everyone else. Upon further investigation, this group was significant for the humor condition, but not significant for the news condition. Overall, the results of research question one arguably reflect the results of hypothesis one (source credibility) and hypothesis three (humorousness). Source credibility was non-significant as moderator between condition and TPP in hypothesis one. Humorousness was a significant moderator for hypothesis three, but the TPP fluctuations are primarily for the humor condition.

Hypothesis eight predicted source bias moderates the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as perception of bias increases, TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news. Even though bias is often studied in terms of ideological identification, source bias in this study was operationalized as an evaluation of the source. The rationale for this hypothesis argued that a message perceived as biased would generate greater levels

of TPP. This trend was true for this study as well. There was significant main effect for bias on TPP, whereby as bias increases, TPP increased as well.

The hypothesis predicted that this trend would be greater for political humor compared to news. Given the over-the-top nature of political humor and its affiliative nature, it was argued the spectrum of TPP levels would be greater for political humor than for news. The hypothesis predicting an interaction between bias and condition was not supported. The results showed no significant difference in the way participants interpreted bias levels in the news condition and bias levels in political humor condition.

This may partially be a function of the research design, which used liberal leaning news and liberal leaning political humor stimuli. However, these results are similar to other trends in message and source evaluation. In terms of source bias, there were no differences in news and political humor. They were seen as comparable in terms of TPP levels. It is intriguing that political news and humor does not produce significant TPP differences in the conditions for perceptions of bias even though there is a significant difference in the conditions (i.e., interaction) when considering ideological identification (H7). This is interesting because even though there were no significant differences in the conditions in terms of message evaluation (perceptions of bias), there were significant differences in terms of group identification (ideological identification). Social identification is further explored in the next section of this chapter.

Message characteristics were also a sub-theme in the study. Message characteristics were examined in terms of message quality (H2) and message valence (H3 and H9). Quality of message functioned in a similar fashion as source credibility.

Hypothesis two predicted quality of message would moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as the quality of message increases TPP will decrease, but the decrease will be greater for political humor than news. The rationale for this prediction was similar to hypothesis one. It was argued, because of the affiliative nature of political humor, those who found the humor to be funny would also find it to be a high quality. Therefore, like hypothesis one, it was predicted the TPP and FPP spectrum would be wider for political humor than for news. For humor, it was predicted a high-quality message would produce greater FPP levels (compared to news); conversely, a low quality message was predicted to generate higher TPP levels (compared to news).

Like source credibility, message quality did impact level of TPP and FPP for both genres. There was a significant main effect for message quality in the regression equation. As message quality decreased, TPP levels increased; as message quality increased, TPP levels decreased (and FPP levels increased). However, the interaction between message quality and condition was not significant. Again, for both media types, poorer message quality generated greater TPP levels, but there was not a significant difference between the genres. This is contrary to the notion that people perceive political humor and news to be rather different. Perhaps this adds further evidence to the argument, at least in terms of message quality, there is little distinction between political humor and news in terms of producing TPP.

This project also examined message valence (humorousness and negative impact) and TPP levels. Hypothesis three predicted that humorousness of message would moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and

TPP such that as perceived humorousness increases TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news. Though contrary to the assumption that things that are funny are positively valenced, it has been argued throughout this study political humor is classified as an aggressive and disparaging form of humor. Disparaging humor often has a negative valence even if it is considered funny. Negative messages correlate with higher TPP levels. Moreover, political humor is also affiliative – us versus them – so it is naturally set up for an individual to make a TPP appraisal of the "others".

Hypothesis three was not supported. Although the interaction of humorousness and condition was significant, it was not in the predicted direction. Though not predicted, there was also a significant main effect for humorousness. As humorousness increases, TPP levels decrease in the humor condition. The results show TPP levels remain fairly flat in the news condition with a minor slope down; as humorousness increases, TPP decreases. The news condition did not produce significant differences between low and high humorousness.

Interestingly, the TPP fluctuations appear to be mainly in the humor condition. It appears those who found the humor video funny also perceived lower levels of TPP. A simple effects analysis shows TPP levels become significantly different between humor and news just below the mean (i.e., more TPP in the humor condition), but only become significant for news (i.e., more TPP for the news group than the humor) more than four standard deviations above the mean. This suggests humorousness of message is more important in the humor condition (which makes sense for a humor-based show).

That humorousness is primarily a factor in the humor condition is not necessarily surprising. News is not intended to be funny and likely would not be perceived as such. What is interesting is humorousness did not result in higher TPP levels, as was predicted in highly affiliative and disparaging humor. In this study, the opposite was the case. Message desirability is a possible explanation, suggesting for the humor condition, a higher level of perceived humor would equate to a higher level of message quality. As message quality increases, TPP levels tend to decrease.

Hypothesis nine predicted perceived negative impact moderates the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as perceived negative impact increases, TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for news than for political humor. Despite being examined in the context of TPP and censorship, negative impact appears to be more aligned with message evaluation than behavioral action (in terms of the operationalization of this study). The rationale for the prediction is negativity of a message should correlate with higher TPP levels. The affiliative and disparagement nature of political humor should create a greater fluctuation in perceptions of negativity and thus a wider spectrum of TPP levels. What is interesting is perceived impact of the message does not have the same effect as humorousness. Results show that despite a main effect for perceived negativity, the interaction between negativity and condition was not significant.

Social Identity

The second major theme to emerge in this study was the influence of social identity as a significant moderator in the perceptions of political news and humor. This was the case for group identification, with significant results for fan identification and

ideological identification. It was also present in distinguishing group identity (in terms of social distance). Likelihood of exposure (whether other groups would watch the program) had mixed results.

Hypothesis six predicted fan identification would moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as political humor appreciation decreases, TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news. The rationale for this prediction is fans of political humor should judge other people more incapable of judging the humor compared than themselves. This argument is again based on the affiliative nature of political humor. The result should be a spectrum of TPP levels that fluctuate more than TPP levels for news. Moreover, news would likely not be affected by this same type of fandom, so news TPP levels should fluctuate less.

Results from this study show, indeed, fandom is a significant moderator of TPP with clear difference in the political humor and news conditions. However, the direction of the results were opposite of what was predicted. There was a significant main effect – as fan levels increased, TPP levels decreased. The interaction also revealed, in the political humor condition, as fan appreciation of the genre increased, TPP actually decreased. This suggests as fan appreciation of the shows increased, there was likely an increase in FPP.

A simple-effects analysis shows TPP levels become significant for humor a half a standard deviation below the mean, suggesting medium to low levels of humor appreciation correlate to significant TPP levels. The analysis shows TPP levels become significant in the news condition at one and half times the standard deviation above the

mean. This suggests only to most high-level fans of humor had significant levels of TPP for the news condition.

Participants in the news condition who were identified as fan of political humor had a significantly different TPP level than counterparts in the political humor condition. As fan appreciation of political humor increased, TPP increased (though at a very slight level). It is not clear why the news condition produced TPP levels in the predicted direction while the political humor condition produced TPP levels opposite of the predicted direction. Perhaps fans of political humor consider other people to be less savvy about political news (thus producing higher TPP levels), but are themselves such strong fans of political humor shows that they had greater levels of perceived self-influence.

Ideology is another group identification that produced a significant difference between political humor and news. Hypothesis seven predicted political ideology moderates the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as conservativeness increases, TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news. The rationale for this prediction was based on past research that shows conservatives tend to have higher TPP levels compared to liberals. This is particularly true when they trying to defend their position and are afraid others will be persuaded.

Results for this study showed neither condition nor ideology produced a significant main effect. However, there was a significant interaction between ideology and condition. In the political humor condition, as predicted, more liberal participants had lower TPP levels. As participants progressed on the spectrum toward conservative,

TPP levels increased. Interestingly, TPP levels were opposite in the news condition. For those in the news condition, higher conservatism correlated with lower TPP levels compared to higher liberalism.

A simple-effects analysis shows that moderately conservative people (one half standard deviation above the mean) had significantly higher TPP levels for the humor. For the news condition, TPP levels became significant nearly one standard deviation below the mean. This suggests even moderately conservative had higher TPP levels for political humor, while only the most liberal people had significant TPP levels for news.

Given that both the news and political humor conditions were made up of programming with a more liberal slant (*MSNBC, The Daily Show, Colbert Report, Real Time with Bill Maher*), the results suggest it is a difference in the genre more than the content that is producing the significant differences. Perhaps conservatives find political humor to be more persuasive (thus producing higher TPP levels) than the news.

Comparison of self to other reference groups also produced interesting results. Hypothesis four predicted that social distance would moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as social distance increases TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news. Past research supports the trend that as social distance increases TPP also increases. This trend was also present for the reference groups of friends, other student at the university, and general public (aged 20-30). The purpose of the analysis was to examine how young people view other people in their immediate reference groups. As predicted, as social distance increased, TPP increased.

The hypothesis predicted a significant difference in political humor and news. For the most immediate reference groups (Friends and other student at the university), the difference between the two conditions was not significant. However, perceptions of the most vague and distant group (general public aged 20-30) were significantly different for the two conditions. So, the more distant and vague the "other" became, there was significantly greater levels of TPP for the political humor condition compared to the news condition. Again, pinpointing the reason for this difference is unclear, but perhaps there is a difference in perceived persuasiveness between the genres.

In addition to social distance, this study also looked at perceived likelihood of exposure as a moderator of TPP levels. Hypothesis five predicted that perceived likelihood of exposure would moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and TPP such that as perceived likelihood of exposure increases TPP will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news. The rationale for this prediction is based in TPP research suggests TPP levels are linked with perceived likelihood of exposure. If people perceive others to be likely to watch the program, TPP levels should increase. Levels between political humor and news should be different because different target audiences are known to watch each genre.

This hypothesis, overall, was not supported. Only likelihood that "general public" would watch either of the genres had a significant main effect. However, the interaction between "general public" and condition was not significant. There was non-significance for the other groups as well. This suggests participants were not distinguishing who was or was not likely to view political humor or news.

Behavior

The potential for TPP to influence behavior change is the area for the most potential future research. The results for this project's foray into the influence of presumed influence are mixed.

Hypothesis ten predicted TPP levels would moderate the relationship between message type (political humor vs. news) and behavior such that as TPP increases, behavior will increase, but the increase will be greater for political humor than news. The rationale for this prediction is based on literature supporting a link between perceived influence (TPP) and behavior modification (Gunther & Storey, 2003). It was also based on the perceived bandwagon effect of popular hosts, like Jon Stewart, that may inspire people to act based on the presumed influence of that host. The results, to the contrary, demonstrate the link between TPP and behavior is still unclear. This is not completely surprising, given the research on presumed influence is still rather inconclusive, particular in terms of media predicting political behavior. Banning (2006) found evidence of presumed influence, but it was opposite of the predicted direction.

For this study, the behaviors of interest pertained to further consumption of political humor and news, as well as the continued circulation of political humor or news texts. Participants were asked about their likelihood to post the video clip to their Facebook page, forward the clip to a friend, tweet about the content on Twitter, and consume more of the shows (either on television or online). Interestingly, there was a main effect for TPP on the dependent variable behavior. Results show as TPP decreases, behavior increases, which suggests a possible link between FPP and increased behavior. In other words, as self-influence increases (either by thinking the

content was funny or persuasive for the self), behavior appears to increase in terms of viewing more of the content and circulating the content further.

It was predicted this behavior would be greater for humor than for news. The rationale for this prediction is humor would be seen as more likely to have a popular following and greater presumed influence. However, this interaction hypothesis was not supported. There is no significant difference between the humor and news conditions in terms of TPP influencing behavior. It appears the source of the media (be it humor or news) is not a major factor in presumed influence and behavior modification.

Theoretical Contribution

There were a number of theoretical contributions to both the literature on TPP and the literature on political humor. First, in terms of TPP, this study points to a difference in message attributes and social identity. This project shows trends for a distinct difference in social identity driven reactions to media and message evaluation reactions to media. The results of this study suggest group identification (be it ideological, fandom, or social network) dictates TPP levels more than message evaluation (credibility, quality, bias, exposure, and negative impact). Understanding the influence of social identity on TPP could potentially make research on the influence of presumed influence clearer by illuminating how and why people are judging other reference groups.

Second, this study adds important empirical data to the literature on political humor (especially in comparison to news). The results of this study suggest social identity is a bigger driving factor than message characteristics in terms of TPP (and arguably in terms of the perceived impact of the media as a whole). Perhaps it is not so

much the message or source attributions that are important. Arguably, the humorousness or the so-called lack of credibility on the part of Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, or Bill Maher are not the most important factors in audience appraisal of the overall effect of this genre. Results of this study suggest political humor is taken quite seriously and is as credible as traditional news in terms of perceived effects on others. This study should help future research on the political humor by focusing attention on the groups who use political humor (social identity) as opposed to why political humor is "fake news" (message evaluation).

Limitations & Future Research

Trying to replicate a media artifact outside of its natural environment is always difficult. Steps were taken to control for host popularity (by including three different shows) and ideological focus (*MSNBC* was chosen to match the liberal leaning of the political humor clips). At some point, a research design must balance the desire for internal validity and external validity. Therefore, the design of this project was deemed to be the most viable option given the time and resources available. (Indeed, numerous main effect significant results indicate the design was replicating past research and was therefore a viable design). There are limitations in any design, however, and those limitations should be taken into consideration. Future research should continue with empirical examinations of political humor in a multitude of research designs and settings.

Some of the operationalizations for this study, particularly in terms of presumed influence, need refinement. Judging behavior modification is always challenging and this study did a fair job of a preliminary evaluation of behavior modification. Future

research should evaluate different types of behavior more clearly and integrate the influence of both TPP and social identity on behavior modification.

Conclusion

From the outset, it was argued political humor should not be discounted as a legitimate and influential news source. The existing evidence to support this claim is inconclusive and, arguably, in fluctuation. The goal of this project, then, was to examine political humor from a media effects perspective to provide further understanding of political humor as a form of news.

It was asked at the beginning: Are Stewart and Colbert considered legitimate sources? Do people find them threatening? How do the hosts inspire social identification? Do they have a high level of presumed influence given their celebrity status?

The results of this study suggest a number of trends. First, this study suggests political humor shows are indeed seen as legitimate news sources. In terms of multiple factors (including source credibility, message quality, and bias), there were no significant differences between humor and news. Second, political humor shows were not necessarily seen as threatening (in terms of negative impact) and were actually found to inspire higher perceived effects on the self (in terms of fan appreciation).

Third, social identity is key to the differences in political humor and news. Significant differences between the two conditions were moderated by fandom, ideology, and social distance. This suggests political humor is an important news source for certain groups within society (a trend that is supported by past research). Those with lower TPP levels in the humor condition tend to be more liberal and highly appreciate

political humor. Those same people arguably evaluate other people as distant out-groups or those that do not understand the humor. Fourth, the presumed influence of political humor is unclear as it was not significantly different from news. Results suggest higher FPP levels lead to greater behavioral modification, but this is not distinguished between the two conditions.

This project also adds to the TPP literature. Results suggest social identity and evaluating the media's influence on reference groups is important in terms of distinguishing between different genres. This project also adds evidence in support of TPP influencing behavior modification.

In sum, this project finds support for continued research in both political humor and TPP. Political humor is seen as a legitimate and influential news source worthy of continued investigation.

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Appendix: Survey

Ideological Identification

On the following spectrum, where do you fall?
Very Conservative
Conservative
Somewhat Conservative
Neutral
Somewhat Liberal
Liberal
Very Liberal

Post-Video Quiz

What was the video talking about?

Republican Candidates
Federal Budget
Libya

How many show segments were edited together in the video?

One show
Two different shows
Three different shows

Humorousness

After viewing this clip, what emotions do you feel about the clip?

Funny	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unfunny
Offensive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not Offensive
Boring	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not Boring
Confusing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not Confusing
Biased	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unbiased
Hilarious	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not hilarious
Amusing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Un-amusing
Positive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Negative

Source Evaluation

After viewing this clip, what do you think about the source of the clip?

Wrong	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Right
Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Positive
Unfavorable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Favorable
Unacceptable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Acceptable
Foolish	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Wise
Bad	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Good
Not intelligent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Intelligent
Unreliable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Reliability
Untrustworthiness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trustworthiness
Unqualified	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Qualified
Not credible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Credible
Immoral	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Moral
Not self-centered	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Self-centered
Incompetent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Competent
Unethical	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Ethical
Unfair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Fair
Biased	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unbiased

Source Bias

Please rate how you perceive the intentions of the clip source.
1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neutral, 7 = strongly agree

Does this clip make the subject of the story more likeable?

Do you think the source of the clip is biased?

Do you think the source of this clip tends to be more politically conservative?

Do you think the source of this clip tends to be more politically liberal?

Do you think the source of this clip is trying to change your mind?

Do you think the source of the clip is opposed to the attitude of the subject of the story?

Message Quality

Please rate the clip you just watched.
1 = strongly agree, 4 = neutral, 7 = strongly disagree.

It was logical.

It made sense to me.

The content was clear.

The content was factual

The content cannot be trusted.

Third-Person Perception

Please rate the clip you just viewed.
1 = very little, 4 = neutral, 7 = very much.

This video will impact my attitudes.

This video will impact attitudes of others.

Social Distance

Please rate how the clip you just watched will affect other people.
1 = not very much, 4 = neutral, 7 = a great deal

This clip will impact attitudes of my friends.

This clip will impact attitudes of other students.

This clip will impact attitudes of young people (age 20-30)

Likelihood of Exposure

Please rate the likelihood that other groups of people will view this show/news source.
1 = not very likely, 4 = neutral, 7 = very likely

What is the likelihood that your friends will be exposed to this show?

What is the likelihood that other students at this university will be exposed to this show?

What is the likelihood that other people aged 20-30 will be exposed to this show?

What is the likelihood that the general public will be exposed to this show?

Negative Impact

Please rate how negative you rate the clip you just watched.
1 = not much at all, 4 = neutral, 7 = a great deal

The content presented will negatively impact my own attitudes.

The content presented will negatively impact the attitudes of other students.

The content presented will negatively impact the attitudes of other people my age.

The content presented will negatively impact the attitudes of the general public.

Fan of Humor

Think about political humor shows you may view (like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* or *The Colbert Report*).
Based on those shows, please answer the following questions.
1= strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree.

I appreciate political humor because it reveals the weaknesses of our political leaders & institutions.

I appreciate political humor because it can make me feel more knowledgeable about politics.

I appreciate political humor because it can aid me in reinforcing my political beliefs.

I appreciate political humor when it makes me aware that our political system is dysfunctional.

I appreciate political humor because it can help me express my political opinions.

I appreciate political humor because it can reduce the anxiety I feel toward politics.

I appreciate political humor when it helps me make better sense of why our political system is dysfunctional.

I appreciate political humor because I feel like I understand the jokes, but other people don't understand the jokes.

I appreciate political humor because it can help me effectively criticize politics and politicians.

I appreciate political humor because it allows me to be friendly with people who hold political views that are different than my own.

I appreciate political humor because it allows me to form stronger bonds with people who hold similar political views as my own.

I appreciate political humor because it critiques traditional news media.

I appreciate political humor because it shows that traditional news media is dysfunctional.

I appreciate political humor because it makes fun of traditional news media.

I appreciate political humor because I like making fun of people.

I appreciate political humor because I feel like I'm in on the joke.

Behavioral Intent

Based on watching this video clip, how likely are you to:
(1 = not very likely, 4 = neutral, 7 = very likely)

Watch clips like the one you saw.

Recommend this video to a friend

Forward a clip from this show

Post a clip of this show on Facebook

Post a comment to the shows website

Watch other episodes of this show online

Post a comment about this show on Twitter

Watch others news programs like *CNN*

Read other news content online

Engage in a discussion about the topics on the show

Become active in politics

Demographics

What best describes your racial or ethnic background?
African American
Asian American
White
Hispanic
Native American
Other _____

Your Gender_____

Your Age_____