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**The Impact of Selective Exposure on Political Polarization and Participation:
An Exploration of Mediating and Moderating Mechanisms**

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**The Impact of Selective Exposure on Political Polarization and Participation:
An Exploration of Mediating and Moderating Mechanisms**

by

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Dedication

To my mother, father, and brother for their endless love and support.

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The Impact of Selective Exposure on Political Polarization and Participation: An Exploration of Mediating and Moderating Mechanisms

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

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This dissertation seeks to improve our understanding of the process by which citizens' selective exposure contributes to attitudinal polarization and engagement in political activities. In this dissertation, I test two models that explicate the relationship between selective exposure and political polarization and participation. The knowledge model suggests that the effects of selective exposure on individuals' attitudinal polarization and political engagement are mediated by knowledge of candidate issue stances. The stereotype model proposes that selective exposure indirectly influences polarized attitudes and political participation via stereotypical perceptions of candidates (i.e., McCain's age and the prospect of a Black presidency). By posing issue knowledge and stereotypical perceptions as potential mediators, this study extends current literature to analyze why and how selective exposure leads to polarization and political participation. The results provide evidence that selective exposure influences individuals' stereotypical perceptions of the candidates' age and race, and these stereotypic perceptions influence attitudinal polarization and participation in campaign activities. There was no support for the knowledge model; selective exposure did not have a

significant relationship with citizens' issue knowledge nor did it play a mediating role in the relationship between selective exposure and political polarization and participation. This dissertation thus challenges the argument that selective exposure is normatively desirable due to its contribution to citizens' greater levels of political participation. The findings of this study call into question such a contention because the results show that individuals who engage in selective exposure are motivated to participate in political activities by forming stereotypic perceptions of candidates rather than by gaining factual issue knowledge, which is in contrast to democratic theories' assumptions of informed citizenship. Turning to the role of exposure to dissonant media outlets, two contrasting roles were found. On one hand, results offer some evidence that dissonant media use contributes to gaining issue knowledge and inspiring citizen participation. On the other hand, some findings suggest that it reinforces, rather than attenuates, citizens' attitudinal polarization and stereotypical perceptions of candidates. Thus the findings from this study offer mixed support for encouraging citizen exposure to dissimilar viewpoints.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Citizens' media use and its democratic consequences have been of scholarly interest for decades. Because information is essential for citizens to understand their environment, form opinions and attitudes, and make decisions (Berelson, 1952), where people turn for news and information is an important issue. Given this importance, communication researchers have been concerned with how individuals consume information and its consequences for the democratic process such as how information affects citizens' attitude formation, political knowledge, and political participation. This dissertation seeks to improve our understanding of the process by which citizens select political information, form attitudes, and engage in political activities.

One phenomenon that characterizes how citizens acquire information is that individuals select information and news sources on the basis of their views and beliefs. In other words, citizens seek out information that is congruent with their preexisting beliefs, a behavior which is called selective exposure (Freedman, 1965; Klapper, 1960; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944; Sears & Freedman, 1967; Zillmann & Bryant, 1985).¹ Drawing from early notions about selective exposure as an explanation of

¹ Although selective exposure technically means individuals' seeking out information that agrees with their perspectives while avoiding challenging viewpoints, this dissertation focuses specifically on the use of likeminded media outlets when using the term "selective exposure." Recent literature, for example, argues that selective exposure to confirmatory information and avoidance of attitude-discrepant information need to be distinguished because the consequences of these two forms of exposure are not equivalent—that is, for instance, affirming one's sense of correctness and producing negative emotional reaction, respectively (see Garrett, Carnahan, & Lynch, in press). Indeed, many studies, particularly including research on the consequences of selective exposure on individuals' attitudes and behaviors, have focused on the selection of likeminded information; and the impact of cross-cutting exposure has been separately investigated in the literature (Dilliplane, 2011; Gil de Zúñiga, Correa, & Valenzuela, 2012; Johnson, Bichard, & Zhang, 2009; Mutz, 2002a; Price, Cappella, & Nir, 2002).

minimal persuasive media effects (Klapper, 1960), communication scholars recently have had heated debates over the democratic consequences of selective exposure (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Dilliplane, 2011; Gil de Zúñiga, et al., 2012; Holbert, Garrett, & Gleason, 2010; Stroud, 2010, 2011). My dissertation aims to contribute to the debate by exploring the mediating and moderating mechanisms through which selective partisan media use influences individuals' attitudinal polarization and political participation. In particular, this dissertation will analyze the mediating roles of political knowledge and stereotypes. I then turn to examining the moderating role of counter-attitudinal exposure. After explaining why it is important to analyze the relationships among selective exposure, political participation, and polarization, I then describe the importance of each of these mediators and moderators.

From a normative perspective, selective exposure may have both positive and negative implications. Selective media use could increase citizens' interest in politics, resulting in greater levels of political participation—a normatively desirable goal for a participatory democracy (Mutz, 2002a; Stroud, 2011). Although exposure to conflicting perspectives, or cross-pressures, may lower citizens' campaign interest and participation in politics, exposure to information that is similar to one's own political views increases political participation by increasing interest in public affairs (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Dilliplane, 2011; Lazarsfeld, et al., 1944; Mutz, 2002a; Stroud, 2011). However, there have been concerns about attitude extremity or polarization among citizens when they seek out perspectives they prefer (Jonas, Diehl, & Bromer, 1997; Kim, 2009; Lavine, Borgida, & Sullivan, 2000; Stroud, 2010; Sunstein, 2001). Political polarization may endanger democracy “by obscuring the substance of policy arguments, unhinging the implementation of long-standing policies, and increasing the resistance to any change” (Kim, Wang, Gotlieb, Gabay, & Edgerly, in press, p. 2). These contrasting

arguments call for further examinations to better understand whether selective media use promotes democratically desirable attitudes and behaviors.

In understanding the benefits and drawbacks of selective exposure, this dissertation asks how selective exposure influences polarization and participation. One may raise important questions about the relationships among selective media use, political polarization, and political participation. Does selective exposure facilitate citizens' engagement in public affairs by leading individuals to develop more polarized political attitudes? Although prior literature has examined the direct influence of selective exposure on attitudinal polarization and political participation separately, little research has examined whether selective exposure may influence political engagement indirectly through the polarizing of attitudes. If this is the case, are these polarized, politically active citizens normatively desirable? The answer is that we don't yet know until we figure out *how* exposure to consonant media leads to attitudinal polarization. If selective media use is positively associated with informing citizens and this leads to attitudinal polarization, which in turn increases individuals' political participation, it could be argued that selective exposure is normatively desirable. However, what if polarized citizens participate with less knowledge about politics? What if they participate based on stereotypes or prejudice, which refers to exaggerated beliefs and unfavorable attitudes associated with a certain social group or individuals in the group (Allport, 1954; Ehrlich, 1973)? If this is the case, the role of selective media use in a participatory democracy would be far less optimistic. Despite its importance, the theoretical story connecting selective exposure, political polarization and participation (i.e., identifying the mediating variables) has yet to unfold.

This dissertation addresses these questions by investigating mediating variables in the relationships among partisan media use, attitudinal polarization, and political

participation. As potential mediators, I explore individuals' political knowledge and stereotypes about candidates. Given that informed citizens and decision-making based on correct information and rational criteria are essential for the legitimacy of a democracy (e.g., Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996), it is imperative to examine whether and how citizens' political knowledge and stereotypes mediate the effects of partisan media use on both political polarization and participation.

Political knowledge long has been an important outcome of interest among scholars because of its normative democratic implications. As democratic theories assume that a knowledgeable citizenry is able to reach political decisions after careful consideration of available information, well-informed citizens are necessary for a democracy to function well (Dahl, 1989, 1999; Kinder & Palfrey, 1993). Given this democratic importance, political knowledge has been examined widely (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Prior, 2005; Tewksbury & Althaus, 2000). However, what is striking is that scholars have done little to investigate empirically whether and how selective exposure influences citizens' political knowledge, and, further, how it relates to the process of political polarization and political engagement despite concerns that unbalanced information consumption such as selective exposure may lead to a citizenry less informed about public affairs and political issues.

Literature on stereotyping and prejudice has demonstrated that the mass media are primary sources of information for the impressions that people have of other social groups. The way social groups (e.g., African American, women, gays and lesbians, and older people) or individuals are portrayed in the media has consequences for levels of prejudice and stereotyping in the mass public (Dixon, 2008; Mutz & Goldman, 2010; Nelson, 2009; Schemer, 2012). Although research on these topics has focused on how social groups are portrayed in the mass media and how those portrayals influence

citizens' perceptions, much less is known about the causes and consequences of stereotypes in the context of selective exposure and polarization—that is, how partisan media use affects citizens' prejudicial or stereotypical perceptions of candidates. Further, how stereotypic perceptions of candidates influence individuals' attitudinal polarization and political engagement is unclear. In this dissertation, I analyze whether citizens' selective media use will influence their prejudice or stereotypes about candidates (i.e., age and race), and in turn affect attitudinal polarization and political participation.

Media content matching one's beliefs is not the only information source, however. Although people may prefer consonant information, there are still possibilities for individuals to encounter counter-attitudinal or dissonant information, at least to some extent. Indeed, literature has shown that citizens not only expose themselves to information supportive of their beliefs and perspectives, they also acquire counter-attitudinal information (e.g., Frey, 1986; Garrett, 2009b; Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2011). From the perspective of deliberative democracy, citizens are encouraged to be exposed to diverse viewpoints and opinions. While recent studies have focused on the antecedents of individuals' exposure to counter-attitudinal messages (Garrett, 2009a; Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2011), far less is known about the consequences of such exposure on people's attitudinal polarization and political participation.

It seems important to take the role of counter-attitudinal media use into account when it comes to evaluating the democratic role of selective exposure, given that citizens are consuming not only opinion-reinforcing media sources but also opinion-challenging sources. Focusing only on the role of selective exposure in a democratic process might limit our understanding of the relationship between patterns of media use and their consequences. For example, even though we could argue that selective exposure is

helpful in forming political attitudes and mobilizing citizens to get involved in politics, we don't know what those relationships would be like when people avoid opinion-challenging information versus when they consume counter-attitudinal media. An important way to achieve such an understanding is to explicate the role of counter-attitudinal exposure in the relationships among selective media use, attitudinal polarization, and political participation. In addition to exploring the direct effects of counter-attitudinal exposure, this dissertation also analyzes whether counter-attitudinal exposure moderates the relationships among selective exposure, polarization, and participation. Furthermore, given that the effects of exposure to dissonant information may be contingent on political sophistication (Taber & Lodge, 2006), I investigate whether dissonant media use interacts with individuals' political sophistication to influence outcome variables of interest (i.e., issue knowledge, stereotypes, polarization, and political participation).

In sum, there is currently no empirical evidence regarding whether selective exposure affects political polarization and participation through individuals' political knowledge and stereotypes about candidates. Therefore, this dissertation first aims to extend previous literature about the relationships between selective exposure and citizens' political attitudes and engagement by exploring the mediating role of issue knowledge and stereotypes in such relationships. In addition, given the democratic implications of exposure to challenging information, this dissertation explores the role of counter-attitudinal media use in the polarization process and in fostering citizens' political participation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

SELECTIVE EXPOSURE, POLITICAL POLARIZATION, AND PARTICIPATION

Selective exposure is people's selection of messages that match their beliefs and values or the seeking out of complementary information (Frey, 1986; Klapper, 1960; Sears & Freedman, 1967). Explicated in Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory, which posits that individuals try to reduce dissonance to ease an uncomfortable psychological state, selective exposure occurs when individuals actively seek out information that agrees with their perspectives. Earlier studies such as Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) uncovered evidence of selective exposure. There has been controversy concerning the concept of selective exposure, however. For instance, Sears and Freedman (1967), proposing *de facto* selective exposure, argued that exposure to likeminded information may not be motivated by an effort to find support, but may instead be due to other reasons unrelated to one's beliefs or ideology (e.g., a by-product of individuals' personal networks or social context).

The concept of selective exposure has received additional scholarly attention with the revolution in information technology. Selective exposure has become increasingly relevant in a high-choice or abundant media environment where individuals have a great deal of available information (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Holbert, et al., 2010). Given the dramatic increase in the number of available media and information driven by the development of cable television and the explosion of the Internet, it is not surprising that citizens' media selections increasingly may reflect their predispositions (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009).

While selective exposure remains controversial in the contemporary media environment (see Bennett & Iyengar, 2008 ; Holbert, et al., 2010), studies have demonstrated that people prefer to select information supportive of their existing beliefs.

Extensive literature has shown consistently that people exercise selective exposure based on their political ideology and partisanship (Garrett, 2009b; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2011; Lazarsfeld, et al., 1944; Stroud, 2008). For example, Iyengar and Hahn (2009) provided evidence of individuals' ideological selectivity in news media use. They found that Republicans preferred to view Fox News and to avoid news from CNN and NPR, while Democrats exhibited the opposite pattern, suggesting that people tend to expose themselves to information that is consistent with their existing partisan beliefs. Taber and Lodge (2006), in their experimental studies, showed that participants sought out congruent information over incongruent information about two controversial issues, affirmative action and gun control. Morris (2005) showed a trend that the audiences of cable news outlets became more likely to turn to consonant media outlets over time. In his study, analyzing data from the Pew Research Center's 1998 to 2004 Biennial Media Consumption Surveys, findings demonstrated that Republicans increasingly became Fox News watchers while Democrats became more likely than Republicans to watch CNN (Morris, 2005). Recent studies also provide strong evidence of citizens' selective exposure in that conservatives and Republicans are more likely to consume media outlets endorsing a Republican candidate or favoring a conservative ideology (e.g., FOX News) whereas liberals and Democrats are more likely to use media outlets endorsing a Democratic candidate or liberal-slanted media (e.g., CNN and MSNBC) (Gil de Zúñiga, et al., 2012; Stroud, 2010).

Whether citizens exert selective exposure is an important question because of its democratic implications. If citizens are increasingly exposed to information that only reinforces their preconceived attitudes and beliefs, such a trend may lead to further polarization of the public (Morris, 2005; Sunstein, 2001). Political polarization, "the middle losing people to both extremes" by "the simultaneous presence of opposing or

conflicting principles, tendencies, or points of view” (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008, p. 566; 574), has been prominent in debates over the role of media in a democracy. While some argue that there is little or no indication of increased political polarization in the mass public (e.g., Fiorina & Abrams, 2008), others have shown that ideological and partisan polarization of American politics among elites and the public has occurred (McCright & Dunlap, 2011; Shapiro & Bloch-Elkon, 2008). Jacobson (2010), for instance, demonstrated American citizens’ opinions polarized on the Iraq war, as did partisans’ attitudes toward the U.S. President George W. Bush. Results of Jacobson’s (2010) study showed that the gaps between Republicans and Democrats in support for military action in Iraq and for approval of Bush’s performance grew steadily wider after the Iraq war began. In particular, scholars have been concerned that congenial media use may facilitate a fragmented and polarized society (Evans, 2003; Sunstein, 2001). The idea is that people’s tendency to seek information sharing their political beliefs by filtering what they want and bypassing challenging viewpoints could lead to the fragmentation of public opinion and the polarization of politics, much to the detriment of democracy (Sunstein, 2001, 2007).

While citizens’ selective exposure has been demonstrated by many studies, the consequences of selective exposure had not been well documented (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2011; Mutz, 2006b). Acknowledging this gap in literature, several studies have examined the consequences of selective exposure and have provided evidence that like-minded media consumption affects political polarization. Recent research has shown that exposure to like-minded information is associated with more polarized attitudes (Gil de Zúñiga, et al., 2012; Lavine, et al., 2000; Stroud, 2010).

A body of small group research offers explanations for group polarization. In Isenberg’s (1986) meta-analysis study of group polarization, he reviewed two

explanations for group polarization. The first explanation for polarization is persuasive arguments theory (Burnstein & Vinokur, 1975; Burnstein & Vinokur, 1977; Isenberg, 1986). If people are exposed to arguments that are in favor of their preexisting views, such arguments may be seen as persuasive because those arguments easily can be linked to positions that they already have in their memories when processing and recalling information (Isenberg, 1986). With this process, selective exposure provides individuals with persuasive information supporting their existing beliefs and views, thereby leading them to form more polarized attitudes. Another explanation is social comparison processes, suggesting that group members tend to develop or adjust their attitudes toward a valued direction in order to be seen better in comparison with other group members on the basis of group norms (Fromkin, 1970; Isenberg, 1986). When group members have group discussion, they are “exposed more nearly to the true group norm, and thus a discrepancy between how much better an individual is and would like to be becomes apparent” and because of that, individuals develop their attitudes in the direction of the group norm or “shift closer to their ideal positions” (Isenberg, 1986, p. 1142).

Based on these explanations, Stroud (2010) examined whether people’s selective partisan media use, which included newspaper, radio, cable news, and websites, led to polarized political attitudes. She found that that the more people consumed congenial media outlets, the more they held polarized attitudes toward political candidates, supporting the notion that partisan selective exposure is related to higher levels of polarization. Stroud (2010), by using panel analysis and time series analysis, also provided evidence of a causal relationship between selective partisan media use and polarization—that is, selective exposure leads to attitudinal polarization rather than the other way around, even though some evidence indicated that polarization leads to selective exposure as well. Other studies have documented a relationship between slanted

media exposure and polarization (Druckman & Parkin, 2005; Jones, 2002). In addition, experimental studies have demonstrated that seeking out confirming information leads to attitude polarization about controversial issues (Taber & Lodge, 2006). In sum, there are enough empirical projects and theoretical rationales to predict a link between likeminded media consumption and attitudinal polarization.

Another consequence of selective exposure on which recent literature has focused is its influence on citizens' participation in politics and public affairs. Although studies on the relationship between news media use and participation have focused mainly on general media consumption (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Jung, Kim, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2011; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005), how the slant of news sources (i.e., whether it is conservative or liberal) influences citizens' political participation has received little attention in previous research (Dilliplane, 2011). Acknowledging this limited scholarly attention, recent studies on the influence of selective partisan media use on political engagement have started to accumulate. Political talk radio had a positive influence on political participation among politically likeminded listeners (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). Stroud (2011) provides evidence that individuals' likeminded selective media use (as an index with four types of media—TV news, talk radio, newspapers, and websites) increases individuals' participation in politics by providing explicit instructions and mobilizing information. Another recent study also documents that selective exposure to ideologically-consonant media is associated with increased levels of political participation (Dilliplane, 2011).

As such, recent literature has started to examine the consequences of selective exposure in a democratic process and has demonstrated that selective exposure may lead to increased levels of political participation and political polarization. Based on the literature reviewed, three hypotheses are proposed. Although previous research has

examined whether people engage in selective exposure and how selective exposure relates to polarization and political engagement, I present these hypotheses as necessary prefatory relationships prior to considering the mediating mechanisms proposed in this research, as well as to add evidence to the current literature. As described above, the first hypothesis, which predicts citizens' selective partisan media use, has been supported by many studies (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga, et al., 2012; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2007). The second and third are derived from recent literature showing that selective exposure to congenial information leads to attitudinal polarization and greater levels of political participation (Dilliplane, 2011; Stroud, 2011).

Hypothesis 1: Partisan media outlets will be consumed more by those sharing the outlets' views than those not sharing the outlets' views.

Hypothesis 2: Selective exposure to politically-likeminded media will be positively related to individuals' attitudinal polarization.

Hypothesis 3: Selective exposure to politically-likeminded media will be positively related to individuals' political participation.

What do these findings mean for citizenship in a democracy? In other words, is the role of selective exposure desirable? With the results showing a positive influence of like-minded media use on political participation, from the point of participatory democracy, it can be argued that selective exposure is normatively desirable because those who are actively engaging in political activities are considered good citizens. Yet there are competing arguments in the normative debate over polarization. If people expose themselves mainly to information that supports their views, they could become less likely to tolerate challenging opinions and would form polarized attitudes. The

question then would be: Do citizens' polarized attitudes lead to a more participatory public? While existing evidence has demonstrated separate direct effects of partisan selective exposure on political polarization and political engagement, it is very likely that there would be a significant association between political polarization and participation.

Existing literature has demonstrated a significant link between attitudes and behaviors such that attitude strength has a strong impact on behavior (Krosnick, Boninger, Chuang, Berent, & Carnot, 1993; Petty & Krosnick, 1995). Strengthened attitudes or higher levels of attitude certainty can enhance an attitude's influence on an individuals' behavior by strengthening the object-evaluation link in memory, serving as a basis for behavioral decision making (Fazio, 1989; Fazio, Chen, McDonel, & Sherman, 1982). The literature on the attitude-behavior connection offers abundant evidence of a link between individuals' attitudes and political behaviors such as participation (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Moy & Pfau, 2000; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). More extreme attitudes may fuel greater levels of political participation because strong attitudes are more accessible and act as greater cues for individuals' behavior (Lavine, et al., 2000). Indeed, studies have demonstrated that individuals' attitudes tend to drive their behavior in various contexts such as civic activities and participation in campaigns and elections. For example, citizens' community-oriented attitudes (e.g., civic pride and civic faith) are positively related to political involvement (Gastil & Xenos, 2010). Studies in the areas of political behavior and agenda setting also have shown that attitude strength, as a consequence of information processing and agenda-setting effects, predicts citizens' political behaviors including voting behaviors and various forms of political participation (Kioussis & McDevitt, 2008; Lavine, 2001; Moon, 2011). Moon (2011) showed that individuals' impressions of candidates' traits,

operationalized as second-level agenda-setting effects, positively influence their political participation.

As such, the literature on political communication offers evidence of the tendency to participate in politics to a greater extent if individuals have strong and extreme attitudes. Based on this literature, it is reasonable to expect that if selective exposure increases individuals' attitudinal polarization, then those who have more extreme attitudes toward candidates should be more likely to participate in politics. Therefore, this research hypothesizes the mediating effect of attitudinal polarization in the relationship between selective partisan media use and political participation as follows:

Hypothesis 4: Individuals' attitudinal polarization will mediate the influence of politically likeminded media use on political participation.

Extant evidence is somewhat limited when it comes to understanding the role of selective exposure in the democratic process—that is, whether or not we should worry about likeminded information consumption. Examinations of the direct relationships between selective exposure and political polarization and between selective exposure and participation fail to provide a full picture of the normative role of selective media use. Results showing that selective partisan media use leads to political participation could indicate that selective exposure can contribute to democratic society by engaging citizens in activities about public affairs (Dilliplane, 2011; Stroud, 2011). However, it is too early to reach this conclusion because we don't know how and why selective media use facilitates citizens' political participation. Does selective media use help citizens to learn about candidates' issue stances and the policies, thereby leading to attitude polarization and political participation? If so, consuming selective partisan media could be considered

democratically desirable. However, what if citizens have polarized attitudes and participate in politics based on lower knowledge about politics (e.g., candidate issue stances), and/or based on stereotypical perceptions about candidates, which could be caused by selective exposure to opinion-reinforcing information?

These questions remain open until we explore why selective exposure affects political polarization and participation. Little is known about the underlying mechanisms of this process—that is, what mediates the relationships between selective exposure and political polarization and between selective exposure and political participation? Identifying mediators of the relationships among partisan media use, political polarization, and participation is important to better understand the underlying process by which individuals' partisan media use develops their attitudinal polarization and engages citizens in political activities. In this way, this dissertation will contribute to the debate over the normative role of partisan media use. The current research will focus on the mediating roles of political knowledge and stereotypes.

MEDIATING MECHANISMS: O-S-O-R MODEL AS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

From a normative perspective, citizens should be cognitively capable of employing rational criteria when forming attitudes and reaching political decisions, the requirement of rational behavior in a democratic society (Dahl, 1989, 1999; Luskin, 1987; Luskin, 1990; Taber & Lodge, 2006). However, there have been concerns that average citizens appear to be incapable of fulfilling this requirement of rational behavior—for instance, individuals often lack the practical knowledge of the issues or political systems and rely on prejudices or prior beliefs when they behave and form attitudes (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 2000; Taber & Lodge,

2006). Understanding the role of political knowledge and stereotypes or prejudice in attitude formation and the enactment of political behaviors is important, particularly in the context of attitudinal polarization and political participation. This is because people's lack of information and/or their information processing based on stereotypes or prejudice may lead to incorrect decision making. In other words, a lack of factual information can lead to "collective preferences that differ significantly from those that would exist if people were adequately informed" (Kuklinski, Quirk, Jerit, Schwieder, & Rich, 2000, p. 792).

Very little research has attempted to explore the role of political knowledge and stereotypes in the context of selective exposure, political polarization, and participation. Recognizing the importance of political knowledge and stereotypes in influencing individuals' attitudes and behaviors, this dissertation proposes and tests two models, which suggests that citizens' selective exposure to congenial media influences either (a) political knowledge or (b) stereotypic perceptions of candidates, which in turn lead to attitudinal polarization and participation.

The O-S-O-R (Orientation-Stimuli-Orientation-Response) model serves as the baseline framework for the current research (Marcus & Zajonc, 1985). The O-S-O-R model has been a useful framework for studying the direct and indirect relationships between communication variables including media use, cognitive processes (e.g., knowledge gain), and participation. Therefore, this model is a useful conceptual framework for investigating the potential mediating role of cognitive variables (i.e., issue knowledge and stereotypes) in the relationship between media use and individuals' attitudes (i.e., polarization) and behaviors (i.e., political participation).

Communication scholars often draw from an indirect effects paradigm, which posits that media effects on behavior are significant, but largely indirect or mediated by

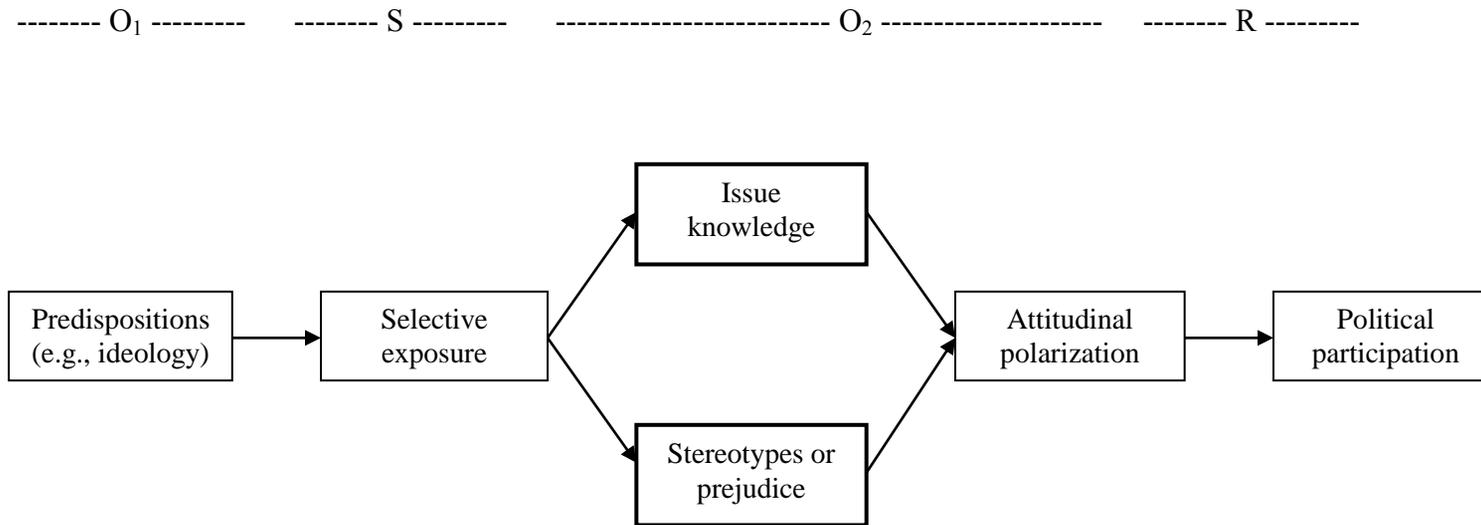
other variables such as individuals' information processes (see, e.g., Cho et al., 2009; Eveland, 2001; Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002; McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 1994). This trend has emphasized individuals' cognitive system in which one processes information to form certain perceptions or appraisals of objects such as social groups or political candidates (Mondak, 1993). This line of research suggests that individuals' cognitive process is an important step in determining whether or not new information will influence individuals' attitudes and behaviors. In the case of political participation, for instance, it has been demonstrated that the relationship between media use and participating in politics and public affairs is mediated by citizens' cognitive processes such as understanding and perceiving what's going on in the political world (e.g., Shah, et al., 2005; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001).

Applying Markus and Zajonc's (1985) O-S-O-R (Orientation-Stimuli-Oriented-Response) model to political communication, McLeod, Kosicki, and McLeod explained that the first O (O_1) represents "the set of structural, cultural, cognitive, and motivational characteristics the audience brings to the reception situation that affect the impact of the message (S)"; and the second O (O_2) denotes "what is likely to happen between the reception of the message (S) and the response of the audience member (R)" (McLeod, et al., 1994, pp. 146-147). This model emphasizes the importance of individuals' cognitive processing as a mediator in the relationship between media use and individuals' behavioral outcomes. A promising trend in communication research is the development of more complex models of communication processes—for example, "recent work no longer looks for direct media effects" and instead sees political engagement as "a complex behavior influenced indirectly through the various cognitive influences" (McLeod, et al., 1994, pp. 143-144). Given the indirect media effects paradigm, which suggests that the media's effects on citizens' behaviors (e.g., political participation) are

indirect and mediated by psychological outcomes (Holbert & Stephenson, 2003), the O-S-O-R model stands out as a useful framework for examining a process of media effects that begins with how individuals' predispositions relate to their media consumption and the cognitive and psychological outcomes from media use, which in turn lead to individuals' behaviors.

Figure 2.1 presents a conceptual framework for how the O-S-O-R model provides a theoretical basis for this current research exploring two potential mediators, political knowledge and stereotypes. Political knowledge has been used as part of the model in many previous studies (Cho, et al., 2009; Jung, et al., 2011). However, knowledge has not yet been tested in the context of selective exposure and political polarization and participation, despite the model's applicability. As research on stereotypes suggests that descriptions of social groups or individuals in mass media influence individuals' stereotyping and prejudice, which in turn affect peoples' attitudes toward such social groups or individuals (Mutz & Goldman, 2010; Rahn, 1993; Schemer, 2012), it also can be argued that stereotypes fit in the O-S-O-R model as the second O.

Figure 2.1 Application of the O-S-O-R Model to the Current Study



As shown in Figure 2.1, this research focuses on knowledge and stereotypes as potential mediators. The *Knowledge Model* states that selective media use indirectly affects political participation by increasing knowledge about candidate issue stances and polarized attitudes toward candidates. In the *Stereotype Model*, selective media use is hypothesized to indirectly affect political participation by increasing stereotypic perceptions of candidates and polarized attitudes toward candidates. The following sections discuss these two ideas.

THE KNOWLEDGE MODEL

Democratic citizens are informed citizens. They are supposed to know what the issues are, what's going on in a society, and what the relevant facts are (Berelson, et al., 1954). Citizens should know the facts because this information facilitates citizens' evaluations of public policies and debates about public affairs. People use political information to inform their attitudes and political preferences (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). With knowledge, citizens can make better decisions that represent their preferences and can act as a check on whether the government acts for the public good (Bartels, 1996; Lau & Redlawsk, 1997; Luskin, 1990). Some scholars have argued that citizens' levels of political knowledge are low and that the public lacks crystallized attitudes about politics (Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Although others argue that citizens can successfully make decisions by using information shortcuts, or heuristics, as a substitute for factual knowledge about politics (Popkin, 1991), the concept of informed citizenship has been an important democratic norm and is assumed to be central in creating an effective, deliberative, and representative democracy. In fact, political knowledge plays an important role even when people use cognitive heuristics.

Lau and Redlawsk (2001) demonstrated that less-knowledgeable individuals had a lower probability of voting correctly. This is because knowledgeable individuals know how to use heuristic cues better than the less knowledgeable (Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991).

Exploring how likeminded media use is associated with citizens' political knowledge is important to understanding how selective exposure influences attitudinal polarization and participation (e.g., Dvir-Gvirsman, 2012)—that is, investigating the relationship between selective exposure and issue knowledge allows us to understand whether individuals who engage in selective exposure form more polarized attitudes by gaining knowledge about candidates issue stances. The concerns that selective exposure may produce less informed citizens (e.g., Johnson, et al., 2009), nonetheless, have yet to be fully tested and demonstrated. If this is the case, it would be problematic because the scenario indicates that people who exert selective exposure will be less informed about public issues, and they are more likely to form polarized attitudes and to participate in campaign events without sufficient knowledge about public affairs, which is in contrast to democratic theory's assumptions about a properly functioning citizenry.

Only recently have scholars started to examine the extent to which selective exposure is linked to knowledge gain and, in turn, whether knowledge mediates the effect of selective exposure on polarization. In a promising first attempt at examining this relationship, Dvir-Gvirsman (2012) found that knowledge of reinforcing arguments mediated the relationship between selective exposure and attitude polarization. Individuals who engaged in selective exposure formed more extreme and cohesive attitudes by increasing their knowledge of consonant arguments. Rather than measuring factual political knowledge, however, Dvir-Gvirsman measured participants' familiarity with reinforcing and challenging arguments regarding Israeli policy in the West Bank and

Gaza Strip. Although Dvir-Gvirsman's (2012) study sheds light on the mechanisms of attitude polarization by looking at the mediating role of knowledge, because the measure of knowledge in that study was the degree of familiarity of related arguments, instead of factual knowledge, this study cannot tell us whether selective exposure is related to factual issue knowledge and in turn whether issue knowledge influences attitudinal polarization. Further, it only focused on attitudinal polarization (i.e., attitude extremity and attitudinal cohesiveness), rather than also looking at political participation, which limits the understanding of whether and how selective exposure relates to citizens' behavior. Given that democratic theories require that citizens are informed about public issues and a wide range of perspectives before making decisions (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996), it is necessary to examine the role of factual political knowledge in the relationships among selective exposure, polarization, and participation.

News media can have a significant impact, both directly and indirectly, on citizens' political knowledge and participation. For example, newspaper and television hard news use were positively associated with individuals' knowledge of local politics (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999). In addition, Norris (2000) found that media use was positively related to political learning and political participation. Chaffee et al. (Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994) showed that news coverage during a campaign period increased citizens' candidate issue knowledge and personal knowledge about the candidates (i.e., personal facts about candidates such as which one was head of the CIA?). It has been documented in other studies that news media facilitate participatory behaviors (e.g., Kim & Han, 2005; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). In sum, a number of studies support the positive influence of the news media in informing citizens and enhancing their engagement in public affairs (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & Gil

de Zúñiga, 2010; Moy, Manosevitch, Stamm, & Dunsmore, 2005; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001).

While many past studies have examined citizens' political knowledge as a consequence of media use, a body of research suggests that political knowledge is a mediating variable between media use and political participation. Knowing political facts helps individuals to orient themselves in the political world and to evaluate public issues and candidates, thereby helping them to formulate their political preferences (Popkin, 1991; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001; Zaller, 1992). Verba et al. (1995) demonstrated that individuals' political knowledge had a positive impact on citizens' political activities such as working as a volunteer for a candidate. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) also found that more informed citizens are more likely to participate in politics. As demonstrated by Sotirovic and McLeod (2001), the acquisition of public affairs knowledge (i.e., current events knowledge and civic knowledge) mediated the effects of media consumption on political participation such as attending a city council meeting and contributing money to a political or public interest campaign. Based on this body of research, political knowledge is considered an important mediator of the relationship between media use and political activities.

Studies using the O-S-O-R model have provided a clear understanding of the role of individuals' cognitive processing such as political knowledge in the relationship between media use and political activities. Within the O-S-O-R model of framework, McLeod, Scheufele, and Moy (1999) examined how community integration and communication (i.e., mass media and interpersonal communication) influenced citizens' local political participation via political knowledge and efficacy. In their study, the first set of orientations (O_1) include "structural variables, interpersonal networks in the community, and interest in local politics as potential influences on the way people use

media or engage in interpersonal discussion with other people (S).” (1999, p. 317). As the second set of orientations (O₂), they investigated the mediating role of political knowledge and efficacy in the relationship between communication and political participation. They found that media use had a significant influence on participation either directly or indirectly through political knowledge and efficacy. A recent study by Jung, Kim, and Gil de Zúñiga (2011) explored the relationship between news media use, political knowledge, and online and offline participation. Their study provided additional evidence that news media use had a positive effect on online and offline political participation via increased political knowledge. As one’s political knowledge plays an important role in prevalent models of political participation (Jung, et al., 2011; McLeod, et al., 1999; Verba, et al., 1995), it is possible that candidate issue knowledge mediates the relationship between selective media use and political polarization and participation.

Different relationships between political knowledge and selective exposure are possible. Through selective media use, one could learn candidates’ issue stances, and by doing so, become prepared to evaluate the candidates, form attitudes about the candidates, and choose a candidate. This may be because when individuals gain knowledge about candidates’ issue stances, the information may be persuasive and, as demonstrated by Isenberg (1986), may then lead to polarized attitudes. Greater issue knowledge and higher levels of attitudinal polarization, in turn, should lead to political participation. Politically slanted media, in the same way as any news media use, could be an important source of information about politics and public affairs as they cover both the endorsing candidate’s and the other candidates’ issues and policies (Niven, 2001). Thus, it is possible that citizens’ selective media use could lead to improved candidate issue knowledge. If likeminded media outlets provide citizens with information about candidates’ issue policies and citizens gain knowledge about those facts, political

knowledge could mediate the influence of selective media use on political polarization and participation.

Yet it also is possible that selective exposure may reduce political knowledge. If people disproportionately consume politically likeminded news media, they may *not* reap the benefits of exposure to more diverse views (e.g., more informed and tolerant attitudes) (Dilliplane, 2011; Mutz, 2002b; Sunstein, 2001). If citizens mainly rely on likeminded media outlets while avoiding dissonant media, they may have fewer chances of learning about diverse issues and challenging viewpoints. Thus one concern may be that selective partisan media use would have a negative influence on individuals' political knowledge by insufficiently covering different viewpoints.

Despite these concerns, little empirical analyses addressed the connection between selective exposure and political knowledge. While a recent study by Dvir-Gvirsman (2012) showed a positive relationship between likeminded media use and knowledge about reinforcing arguments, her study measured knowledge with participants' familiarity with arguments, rather than looking at factual political knowledge. Therefore, despite the significant relationship with selective exposure and knowledge provided by Dvir-Gvirsman (2012), it is unclear whether one can expect a positive influence on factual issue knowledge. In addition, although Stroud (2011) found no evidence that like-minded media consumption reduced political knowledge, there was only limited evidence that selective media use increased factual knowledge about politics. These considerations make the relationship between selective exposure to congenial media and candidate issue knowledge unclear.

In sum, based on the literature reviewed above, it is unclear whether selective media use increases citizens' knowledge about candidate issue stances, and whether issue knowledge mediates the effect of selective media use on political polarization and

participation. Therefore, this research first proposes a research question regarding the relationship between selective exposure and political knowledge and then proposes questions regarding the potential mediating role of political knowledge, if the influence of selective exposure on issue knowledge is significant:

Research Question 1: Is selective exposure positively related to issue knowledge?

In order to test the mediating role of issue knowledge, two path models will be tested: one for conservatives (see Figure 2.2) and one for liberals (see Figure 2.2). Selective exposure for each model will be conservative media use and liberal media use (see more in detail such as the operationalization of selective exposure and analytic strategy in the Method and Results sections below).

Figure 2.2 Path Model of Mediating Role of Issue Knowledge (Conservatives)

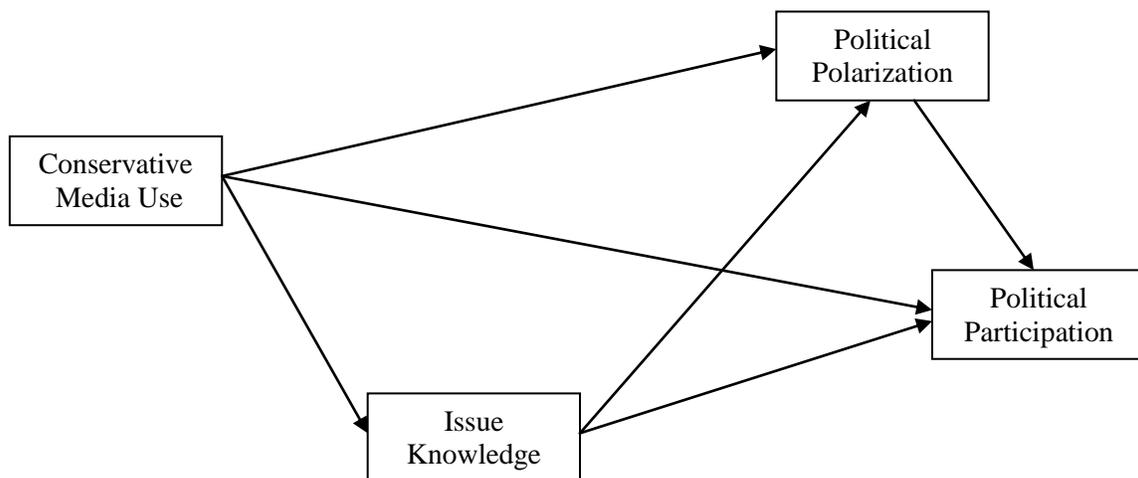
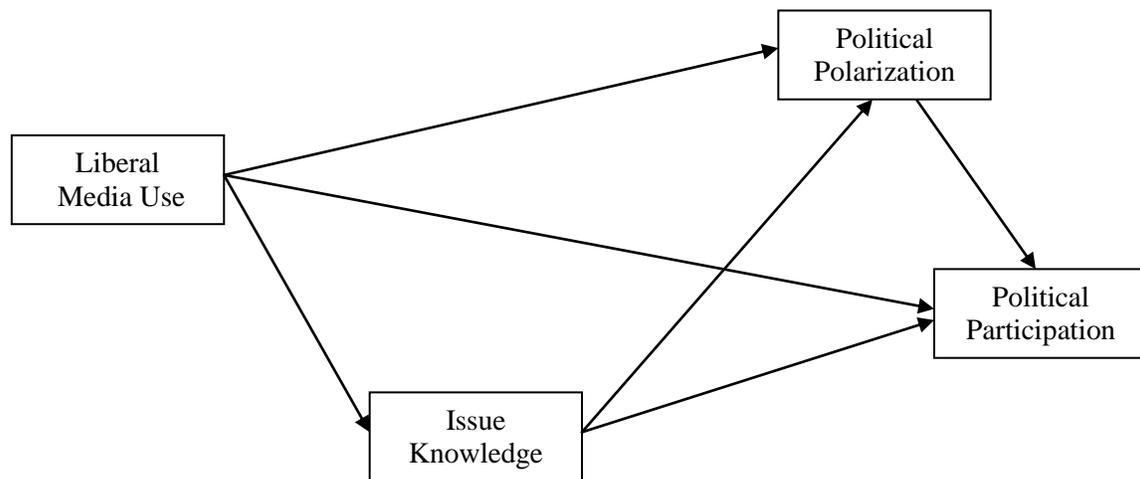


Figure 2.3 Path Model of Mediating Role of Issue Knowledge (Liberals)



Research Question 2: Does issue knowledge mediate the relationship between selective exposure and political polarization and participation, as shown in Figures 2.2 and 2.3?

THE STEREOTYPE MODEL

The second mediator on which this dissertation focuses is stereotypes, or prejudicial attitudes, toward candidates. Research on stereotyping and prejudice and their political consequences provides a basis for examining the potential mediating role of stereotypical perceptions of candidates in the relationships among selective exposure, political polarization, and participation.

Stereotypes are exaggerated or inaccurate beliefs about social groups or individuals in a group (Allport, 1954; Milner, 1983) and cognitive structures that serve as a mental “picture” of the groups in question (Lippman, 1922). Social stereotypes are often accompanied by prejudice, “a more affectively laden facet of individuals’ thinking

about groups” (Bigler & Liben, 2006, p. 42). Prejudice refers to “feelings or emotions associated with other groups” and “beliefs about the attributes of another group” (Maio, Haddock, Manstead, & Spears, 2010, p. 264). As prejudice is defined as a negative or unfavorable attitude toward a group or members of the group (Ehrlich, 1973), prejudice involves one’s affective responses to groups or individuals while stereotypes involve the characteristics that are associated with social groups (Stangor, 2009). A distinction between stereotypes and prejudices does exist because, for instance, people sometimes have prejudice toward a social group while simultaneously endorsing some positive stereotypes regarding the group (Bigler & Liben, 2006). Stereotyping and prejudice, however, are often tightly interwoven—for example, certain groups or individuals associated with negative attributes (e.g., lazy, not qualified) are likely to be regarded with prejudice (Bigler & Liben, 2006; Stangor, 2009). Indeed, stereotypes and prejudice have been interchangeably used in many previous studies (see e.g., Allport, 1954; Dixon, 2008; Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010; Mutz & Goldman, 2010; Schemer, 2012) as the cognitive component of prejudice includes “stereotypes, which are beliefs about the personality traits of group members” (Maio, et al., 2010, p. 256). Therefore, stereotypes and prejudice will be interchangeably used throughout this research, particularly because specific perceptions of candidates examined in the current dissertation (i.e., McCain’s age and the prospect of a Black president in the U.S.; see more detail below) are associated both with certain attributes (e.g., elderly people are dependent or rigid, etc.) and with negative or unfavorable attitudes.

Stereotypes have been accorded an important role in the social sciences and social psychology because of their influence on individuals’ attitude and opinion formation and social and political behavior (Allport, 1954). Many studies have investigated how certain groups (e.g., African Americans and immigrants) are portrayed in the mass media and

how exposure to such media influences individuals' perceptual stereotypes and prejudice (e.g., Dixon & Linz, 2000; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Mutz & Goldman, 2010; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000). The United States, as a nation comprised of diverse ethnicities, races, and immigrants, has confronted issues surrounding ethnic diversity and racial stereotypes (Benedict, 1940; Wolsko, et al., 2000). For example, with regard to racial stereotypes, African Americans often are described in relation to criminality in the mass media and exposure to such media outlets can activate prejudice or stereotypes among media users (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Entman, 1992; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000).

Stereotypes and prejudice can be activated through a categorization process in which individuals positively perceive themselves as members of an ingroup while having a negative perception of outgroup members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social categorization, the psychological classification of people into ingroups and outgroups provides a theoretical mechanism for how people differently perceive ingroup and outgroup members (Campbell, 1958). People process information and perceive others' behaviors in different ways depending on, for example, whether socially desirable or undesirable behaviors are performed by ingroup or outgroup members (Maass, Salvi, Arcuri, & Semin, 1989). People tend to have more positive affect toward ingroup members than outgroup members, and people are more trusting of ingroup members than members of other groups (Foddy, Platow, & Yamagishi, 2009; Otten & Moskowitz, 2000). Foddy et al. (2009), for instance, examined whether people trust strangers differently based on ingroup versus outgroup categorization. In their study, they offered participants a choice of accepting an unknown amount of money provided by one of two different allocators: one allocator was identified as an ingroup member, and the other allocator was identified as an outgroup member. Results showed that participants preferred to accept the unknown amount of money provided by the ingroup allocator

more than the outgroup allocator (Foddy, et al., 2009). Studies indicate that distinctions between ingroups and outgroups, through the process of social categorization, significantly shape individuals' perception, affect, cognition, and behavior (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

Drawing on this line of research, it may be the case that selective exposure can influence stereotypical perceptions of candidates through a categorization process by which individuals perceive their favored candidate as a member of an ingroup and the opposing candidate as an outgroup member. According to the literature, labeling of social groups plays a causal role in creating stereotypes (Bigler & Liben, 2006; Mutz & Goldman, 2010). Given the characteristics of the 2008 U.S. presidential election, where McCain's age and Obama's race were prominent issues during the campaign (Kenski, Hardy, & Jamieson, 2010), it is likely that citizens' media use—particularly, exposure to likeminded media outlets—may produce stereotypes with regard to the candidates.

Stereotypes play an important role in affecting citizens' attitude formation and social and political behaviors because they serve as a reference cue for individuals when they process information. Some individuals make decisions by using heuristics as a substitute for factual political knowledge (e.g., Conover, 1981; Popkin, 1991). In the modern information era, citizens with an enormous amount of information to process from various media sources can use cognitive heuristics as efficient mental shortcuts for organizing information (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004; Simon, 1985). When citizens make judgments associated with participation in politics, such as evaluating candidates, casting a ballot, talking about their opinions, or engaging in campaigns, many use intuitive "shortcuts" that are salient in their mind rather than paying too much attention to information when arriving at a decision (Downs, 1957; Zaller, 1992). Popkin (1991) argues that citizens reason about parties, candidates, and issues with low-information

rationality—known as “gut” reasoning; “this reasoning draws on various information shortcuts and rules of thumb that voters use to obtain and evaluate information and to simplify the process of choosing between candidates” (p. 7).

Citizens use many kinds of heuristics to help make sense of their environments such as politics or public affairs (e.g., Brady & Sniderman, 1985; Sniderman, et al., 1991). Lau and Redlawsk (2001) explain that common cognitive heuristics include party affiliation, ideology, and candidate appearance. Party identification and political ideology play perhaps the most central role in citizens’ evaluations of candidates (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). Many individuals rely on a candidate’s party affiliation, which is one of the most important cues available in partisan elections, to help them make a voting decision (Conover & Feldman, 1982). Rahn (1993), from an experiment, found evidence of the significant role of stereotypes in political decision making. In the study, participants relied on partisan stereotypes in evaluating political candidates. While in the absence of party labels, participants used policy positions in making evaluations of the candidates, participants preferred to rely on the party labels rather than policy attributes when they had both policy information and the candidates’ party labels available (Rahn, 1993). Rahn argued that political party stereotypes can function heuristically for individuals when they are processing political information. These cues (e.g., political affiliation or ideology) may function as triggers of stereotypes in the context of selective exposure and polarization because politically likeminded media use can activate individuals’ stereotypic perceptions of candidates and facilitate a process of categorizing themselves - and candidates - as ideologically ingroup or outgroup members.

In addition, literature has shown that stereotypes related to candidates’ demographic characteristics or appearance (e.g., race, gender, and age) influence

individuals' electoral attitudes and behaviors. According to Riggle et al. (Riggle, Ottati, Wyer, Kuklinski, & Schwarz, 1992), for example, candidate appearances provide a great amount of information (e.g., gender, race, and age), which brings social stereotypes into play. They further found stereotypes affected judgments of political candidates, showing that candidates' appearances had a substantial influence on participants' evaluations of and inferences about candidates (Riggle, et al., 1992). McDermott (1998) found that candidates' demographics, specifically race and gender, activate stereotypes (e.g., black candidates are stereotyped as more liberal and more concerned with minority rights than whites) and those stereotypes are consequently used in evaluating candidates. Overall, literature demonstrates that candidates' physical appearances can activate social stereotypes and that stereotypic beliefs can be used to evaluate candidates. During the 2008 U.S. presidential election campaign, in which McCain's age and Obama's race were prominent campaign themes, it seems reasonable to suppose that people would form stereotypic perceptions about the candidates and then use these impressions to evaluate the candidates.

While research has documented relationships between media use and stereotypes, it lacks a thorough explanation of whether selective exposure may influence citizens' candidates-related stereotypical perceptions. In particular, far less is known about whether and how prejudice derived from selective media use relate to citizens' attitudinal polarization and participation. The current dissertation addresses these issues.

Different patterns of media use could lead people to develop different beliefs about the world of politics. For example, viewers of Fox News, compared to audiences for NPR and PBS, were more likely to believe that WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) had been found in Iraq and that evidence of links between Iraq and al Qaeda had been found (Kull, Ramsay, & Lewis, 2003). In addition, watching FOX News was

associated with negative perceptions of Mexican immigrants and higher support for restrictive immigration policies while watching CNN had no significant influence on attitudes toward Mexican immigrants and immigration (Gil de Zúñiga, et al., 2012). In a similar way, selective media use may lead citizens to hold stereotypical perceptions of candidates (e.g., candidates' race and age).

The current research not only proposes that selective exposure influences individuals' stereotypical perceptions of candidates (i.e., age and race), but it also argues that stereotypes of candidates consequently influence individuals' attitudinal polarization and political participation. For example, based on the literature reviewed above, individuals may be likely to accept negative stereotypical perceptions of the opposing candidate because people tend to have more negative affect toward outgroup members than ingroup members. Therefore, people should tend to accept and use the stereotypical cues (e.g., candidates' age and race) that they receive from the media, evaluate the candidates by using those cues, and then consequently form more polarized attitudes toward the candidates, and participate in politics.

The 2008 U.S. presidential election provided an opportunity to study the role of prejudice in political polarization and participation given that McCain's age and Obama's race were prominent issues throughout the 2008 election campaign (Dwyer, Stevens, Sullivan, & Allen, 2009; Kenski, et al., 2010). Campaign media mentioned McCain's age and Obama's race in a variety of ways. Kenski et al. (2010), in their book, "The Obama victory: How media, money, and message shaped the 2008 election," describe how stereotypes about Obama's race and McCain's age were addressed during the 2008 presidential election. For example, they show how Democratic messages characterized the 72-year-old Republican candidate, McCain, as out of touch while also asserting that he was erratic and implying that he was too old to serve as president. On the other hand,

the Republican campaign tried to make an argument that “Obama was unready to lead, a claim tied to fears—including some that were race based—that Obama was unpatriotic, angry, and a poseur” (p. 4). Given these different campaign themes, it is possible that McCain’s age and Obama’s race were represented differently in conservative and liberal media.

Conservative media such as Fox News lean toward conservative and Republican beliefs while liberal media such as CNN and MSNBC show a pro-liberal and Democratic tilt (Aday, Livingston, & Hebert, 2005; Boyd, 2009). Indeed, MSNBC and Fox were opposed to each other politically in that the former favored Barack Obama and the latter supported John McCain (Boyd, 2009; Wenger & MacManus, 2009). Given that media are divided along ideological lines, it is expected that conservative media might tend to mention Obama’s race in negative way while liberal media might negatively emphasize McCain’s age.

Furthermore, in the context of the 2008 election, research demonstrated that racial stereotypes and prejudice can influence citizens’ attitudes and behaviors. Using three surveys of representative samples of Americans, Payne et al. (2010) provided evidence that citizens higher in racial prejudice were less likely to vote for Barack Obama and they were also more likely to vote for John McCain or a third-party candidate rather than Barack Obama. Research by Knowles, Lowery, and Schaumberg (2010), which explored how individuals’ anti-Black prejudice was related to their voting behavior, attitudes toward Obama, and attitudes toward Obama’s health care reform plan, also supported the notion that racial prejudice is one factor that drove opposition to Obama and his policies. They found that individuals high in anti-Black prejudice were reluctant to vote for Obama and tended to oppose Obama and his health care reform plan (Knowles, et al., 2010). These studies suggest that, beyond the significant relationship between selective

exposure and stereotypical perceptions of candidates, stereotypes, in turn, could influence attitudinal polarization and political participation. Note that unlike the knowledge model in which the relationship between selective exposure and issue knowledge are proposed as research questions, the research reviewed here leads to clearer expectations about the relationship between selective media use and stereotypical perceptions of candidates, which makes it appropriate to propose hypotheses. Based on the research reported above, the following hypotheses are proposed.

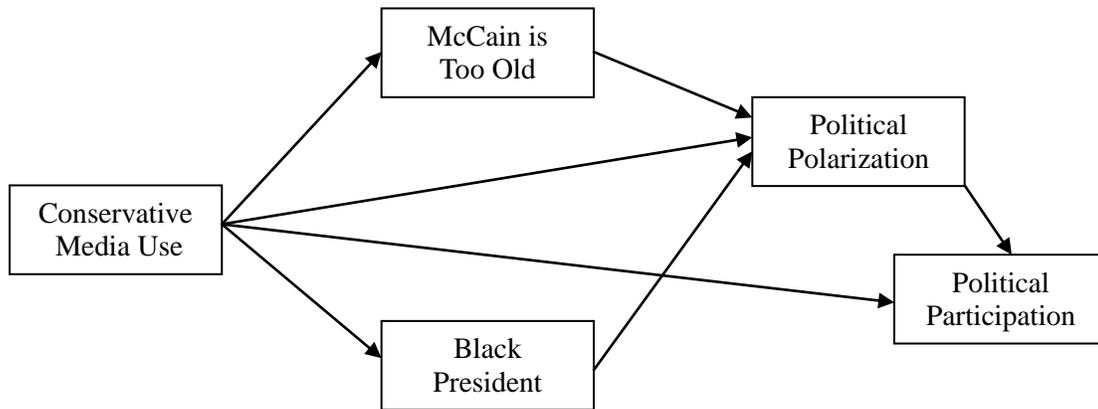
Hypothesis 5: Selective exposure predicts individuals' stereotypical perceptions of candidates.

Hypothesis 6: The relationship between selective exposure and polarization will be mediated by stereotypical perceptions of candidates.

Hypothesis 7: The relationship between selective exposure and political participation will be mediated by stereotypical perceptions of candidates and political polarization.

In order to test the mediating role of stereotypical perceptions of candidates, two path models are proposed: one for conservatives and one for liberals. Unlike the knowledge model which has one mediator, individuals' candidate issue knowledge, the stereotype model has two stereotypes (i.e., McCain's age and Obama's race) and the expected direction of relationship between selective exposure and both stereotypic perceptions of candidates may differ depending on whether it is conservative or liberal selective exposure. For this reason, separate hypotheses are more appropriate. Figure 2.4 presents the stereotype model for conservatives.

Figure 2.4 Path Model of Mediating Role of Stereotype (Conservatives)



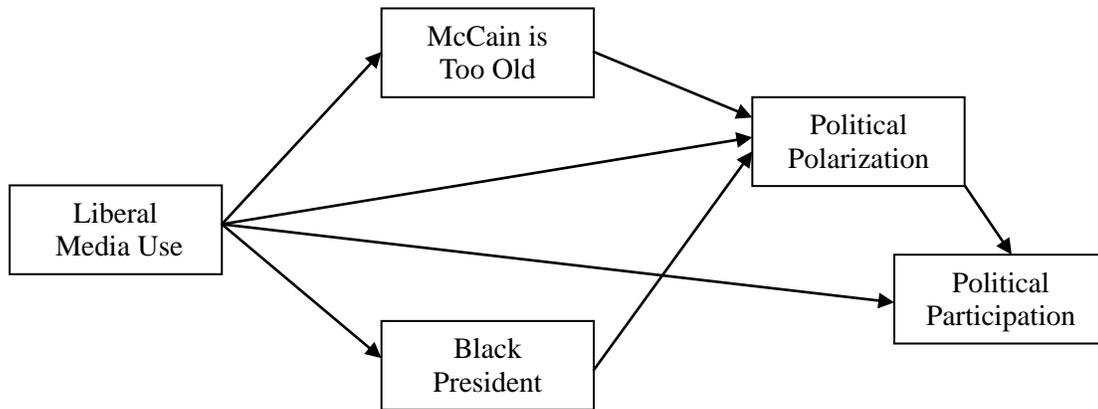
Hypothesis 5-1: Conservative selective exposure will be negatively related to (a) perceptions that McCain is too old to be a president, and (b) perceptions that Americans are ready to elect a black president.

Hypothesis 6-1: The relationship between conservative selective media use and polarization will be mediated by stereotypical perceptions of candidates—(a) McCain’s age, and (b) Obama’s race. (Indirect effects of conservative selective media use on polarization through stereotypes)

Hypothesis 7-1: The relationship between conservative selective media use and political participation will be mediated by stereotypical perceptions of candidates—(a) McCain’s age, and (b) Obama’s race—and (c) political polarization. (Indirect effects of conservative selective media use on participation through stereotypes and polarization)

The second stereotype model is for liberals. Figure 2.5 presents the stereotype model for liberals.

Figure 2.5 Path Model of Mediating Role of Stereotype (Liberals)



Hypothesis 5-2: Liberal selective exposure will be positively related to (a) perceptions that McCain is too old to be a president, and (b) perceptions that Americans are ready to elect a black president.

Hypothesis 6-2: The relationship between liberal selective media use and polarization will be mediated by stereotypical perceptions of candidates—(a) McCain’s age, and (b) Obama’s race. (Indirect effects of liberal selective media use on polarization through stereotypes)

Hypothesis 7-2: The relationship between liberal selective media use and political participation will be mediated by stereotypical perceptions of candidates—(a) McCain’s age, and (b) Obama’s race—and (c) political polarization. (Indirect effects of liberal selective media use on participation through stereotypes and polarization)

EXPOSURE TO COUNTER-ATTITUDINAL INFORMATION: DISSONANT MEDIA USE

Prior research fails to fully examine the role of dissonant media consumption in the relationships among consonant media use, political polarization, and participation. Thus, this dissertation examines the influence of exposure to counter-attitudinal information. While some previous studies on selective exposure have assumed that selective exposure (i.e., seeking opinion-reinforcing information) and avoiding opinion-challenging information co-occur (Festinger, 1957; Lazarsfeld, et al., 1944; Mutz, 2006a; Mutz & Martin, 2001), other studies challenge this notion and have provided evidence that exerting selective exposure does not necessarily indicate increased levels of avoiding exposure to attitude-discrepant information (Garrett, 2009a; Garrett, 2009b; Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2011). For example, people who use the internet for news and campaign information are likely to know arguments both for and against their preferred candidate (Garrett, 2009b). Further, articles containing attitude-challenging information do not decrease the likelihood of examining the news item (Garrett, 2009a). This is not to say that selective exposure is non-existent or less prevalent; although selective media selection remains a strong tendency, individuals continue to encounter counter-attitudinal information to some extent.

Exposure to counter-attitudinal information occurs for several reasons. For instance, when individuals have greater confidence in their views, higher interest in politics, and stronger party preference, they are more likely to seek opinion-challenging information (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). The mood management perspective explains that when people are in a state of boredom, they may seek out counter-arguments in order to increase their arousal levels and escape from a state of boredom (Zillmann, 1988). Information utility also has been suggested as one reason that people are less likely to avoid dissimilar perspectives – if they see attitude-challenging

perspectives as useful, they may be more likely to seek this information (Sears & Freedman, 1967). In addition, people may seek dissimilar perspectives and diverse information when they have greater levels of defensive confidence, which refers to the extent to which they are able to maintain their own opinion when encountering conflicting information (Albarracín & Mitchell, 2004). Individuals who have an accuracy goal motivation, the goal of reaching the most accurate conclusion, are also likely to seek counter-attitudinal information (Kim, 2007). Chaffee and his colleagues (2001) demonstrated that forms of political involvement such as knowledge, curiosity about politics, and discussion may lead people to pay attention to counter-attitudinal information as well as attitude-consistent perspectives. These studies indicate that despite a strong tendency for people to engage in selective exposure, there is “still ample room for consumption of information contradicting one’s own views” (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009, p. 443). In other words, citizens expose themselves not only to consonant perspectives but also to dissimilar points of view.

Addressing the role that exposure to counter-attitudinal information plays in affecting pre-existing views is important in an increasingly polarized society (Evans, 2003) in which individuals encounter opposing perspectives as well as consonant views through the mass media (Garrett, 2009b). The distinction between reinforcement seeking (i.e., exposure to opinions consistent with one’s views) and challenge avoidance (i.e., avoiding dissonant or challenging information) is important because the consequences of avoiding dissimilar perspectives are harmful to deliberative democracy (Garrett, 2009b). If people disproportionately consume politically likeminded news media, they might not reap the benefits of exposure to more diverse perspectives, such as more informed, tolerant attitudes (Dilliplane, 2011). Therefore, it is imperative to study the role of

exposure to counter-attitudinal information as well as selective exposure to likeminded media in the process of political polarization and participation (e.g., Wojcieszak, 2011).

Among the outcome variables of interest in this research (i.e., issue knowledge, stereotypes, polarization and participation) the influence of exposure to dissimilar perspectives on issue knowledge is relatively straightforward. Exposure to challenging information and perspectives could encourage citizens' greater thinking about politics and yield more informed citizens (Eveland, 2004; Mutz, 2002b; Price, et al., 2002). Thus, it is likely that individuals' dissonant media consumption could lead to greater levels of candidate issue knowledge.

Perhaps of greatest concern, however, is the question of whether exposure to dissonant media affects the polarization process, such that citizens' dissonant media consumption attenuates or reinforces attitudinal polarization. There have been contrasting views regarding the role of exposure to dissimilar messages. While deliberative theorists argue that exposure to cross-cutting information may decrease extreme views, psychological research contends that it may exacerbate individuals' attitude polarization. Deliberative theorists argue that exposure to diverse and dissimilar views may attenuate ideological conflicts as deliberative cognitive processes would encourage individuals to incorporate and understand dissonant perspectives and to respect dissimilar views, which in turn results in informed citizens with balanced political judgments and solutions (e.g., Barabas, 2004; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). At the same time, research on biased information processing suggests that there also are concerns that exposure to dissimilar perspectives may increase conflict rather than increase understanding of dissonant views (e.g., Kunda, 1990; Merelman, Streich, & Martin, 1998; Petty & Cacioppo, 1990). Indeed, psychological literature suggests that the way information is perceived, interpreted, and evaluated is biased; people tend to rationalize and accept consonant

information, but they are likely to counterargue and critically scrutinize dissonant views (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Fazio & Williams, 1986). Given these contrasting perspectives of deliberation and biased processing models (see also Wojcieszak, 2010), it is unclear what the impact of exposure to dissimilar views on polarization will be.

What would be the influence of cross-cutting exposure on other outcome variables then? While few efforts have been made to examine the role of dissimilar views on stereotypical perceptions, the two contrasting predictions reviewed above (i.e., deliberative and biased processing model of cross-cutting exposure) could shed light on whether citizens form stereotypes when they are exposed to dissonant views. In other words, if the deliberative model is correct, exposure to diverse or oppositional views could make people aware that various perspectives on ingroups or/and outgroups (i.e., stereotypes or prejudice) exist, which in turn could reduce peoples' stereotypical beliefs. On the other hand, based on the biased processing model, people could reinforce their preexisting stereotypical perceptions when exposed to dissimilar views.

Similarly, cross-cutting exposure could either discourage or encourage political participation. Deliberative and biased processing models suggest that dissimilar views would lead to attenuating strong opinions (or creating ambivalence) and reinforcing attitude polarization, respectively. This, in turn, could decrease or increase political participation (Dilliplane, 2011; Eveland & Hively, 2009; Mutz, 2002a; Scheufele, Nisbet, Brossard, & Nisbet, 2004). In sum, citizens' dissonant media use should impact the outcome variables directly, although the direction of this influence is unclear.

Beyond the direct effects of exposure to dissimilar information, this dissertation notes that prior research fails to consider whether selective exposure and exposure to dissonant media interact to influence the outcome variables examined in this dissertation. While some studies examined the direct influence of dissonant media exposure on

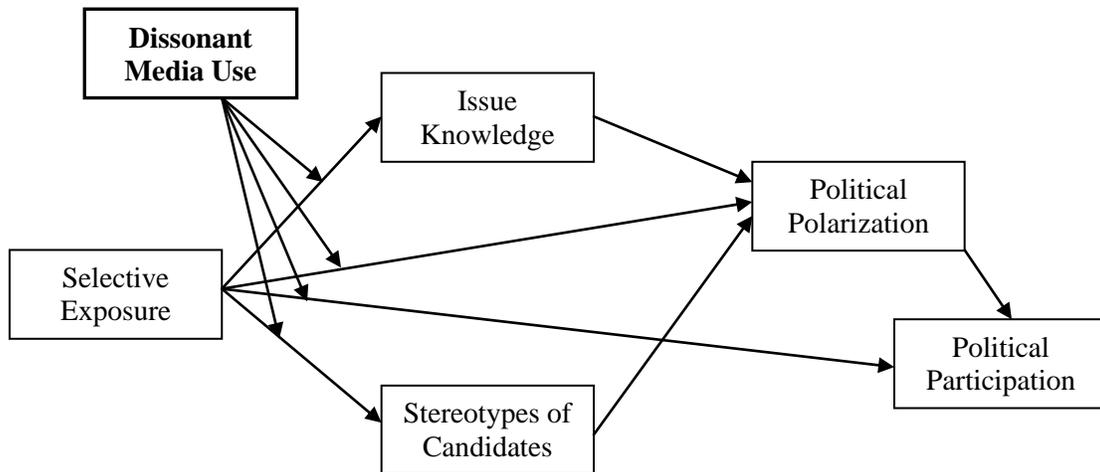
political polarization and participation (Dilliplane, 2011; Stroud, 2011), there has been no research exploring whether and how citizens' exposure to counter-attitudinal media *moderates* the associations between selective exposure and political polarization and participation.

These moderation analyses are important because they allow us to understand questions about the influence of more imbalanced media consumption (i.e., politically likeminded news consumption and avoidance of counter-attitudinal information) versus more balanced media consumption (i.e., exposure to dissimilar perspectives as well as selective exposure) in the process of citizens' political polarization and participation. Thus, this dissertation aims to explore whether we should care about disproportionate media consumption by examining whether and how likeminded media use and dissonant media use interact to influence individuals' issue knowledge, stereotypes, political polarization and participation.

As demonstrated previously, citizens' dissonant media consumption could have different effects on the outcome variables. Similarly, the interaction effect between selective exposure and dissonant media use (i.e., whether exposure to counter-attitudinal information will attenuate or reinforce the influence of selective exposure) also is unclear. Again, the literature from deliberative theory has shown that exposure to dissimilar views increases individuals' awareness of legitimate rationales for oppositional viewpoints, increases levels of political tolerance, and attenuates strongly held prior opinions and beliefs (Mutz, 2002b; Wojcieszak & Price, 2009), which suggests that exposure to opposing views might moderate the effects of selective exposure (see Wojcieszak & Price, 2009). If this is the case, counter-attitudinal media use may moderate the influence of selective exposure on variables of interest, including issue knowledge, stereotypical perceptions of candidates, political polarization, and

participation. Thus, in addition to the potential main effects of exposure to dissonant information reviewed above, this study examines the interaction effects of selective exposure and cross-cutting exposure on these outcome variables (see Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6 Interaction Effects of Selective Exposure and Dissonant Media Use



With the potentially positive role of exposure to dissimilar perspectives, as a deliberative model suggests, one can expect that those who use both pro- and counter-attitudinal media will have greater levels of issue knowledge compared to those using either type of media alone. Further, the use of counter-attitudinal media should mitigate the influence of selective exposure on stereotypes (i.e., less stereotypical perceptions about candidates). Consequently, counter-attitudinal media use might attenuate the influence of selective exposure on political polarization and participation. In this scenario, the interaction coefficient between selective exposure and dissonant media use

would be negative. More specifically, the relationship between selective exposure and individuals' attitudinal polarization will be weaker for those consuming more counter-attitudinal media than those with lower levels of counter-attitudinal media use; and the relationship between selective exposure and political participation will be weaker for those consuming more counter-attitudinal media than those with lower levels of counter-attitudinal media use. Of course, these expectations are based on deliberative theorists' hope—that is, exposure to dissimilar perspectives will decrease extreme views.

Yet there is also a contrasting contention, such that psychological research argues that dissonant views exacerbate extreme and polarized attitudes (Wojcieszak, 2011). Indeed, the potential interaction effects of selective exposure and exposure to dissonant media outlets on a set of outcome variables (i.e., issue knowledge, stereotypic perceptions of candidates, political polarization and participation) could go in precisely the opposite direction if exposure to counter-attitudinal media inflames partisan reactions. For example, if the biased model is correct, dissonant media use may reinforce the influence of selective exposure rather than attenuating individuals' extreme views or beliefs, which would be the result if the deliberative model is correct. Thus, in this case, the interaction coefficient between selective exposure and dissonant media use would have a positive sign.

To sum up, although exposure to dissimilar perspectives may impact the outcome variables directly (i.e., main effects) and influence the association between selective exposure and of the outcome variables of interest (i.e., interaction effects), it is unclear what this influence will be. A lack of empirical evidence and theoretical background means that there are not sufficient grounds to propose directional hypotheses regarding the main effects of dissonant media use and the interaction effects of likeminded media

use and dissonant media consumption and rather leads to state the following research questions:

Research Question 3: Does exposure to dissonant media outlets influence individuals' issue knowledge, stereotypical perceptions of candidates, attitudinal polarization, and political participation?

Research Question 4: Does selective exposure and exposure to dissonant media outlets interact to influence individuals' issue knowledge, stereotypical perceptions of candidates, attitudinal polarization, and political participation as depicted in Figure 2.6?

Interaction Effects of Dissonant Media Use and General Political Knowledge

In addition to a potential interaction effect between dissonant media use and selective exposure, this dissertation examines whether general political knowledge and exposure to dissonant media interact to influence the outcome variables (i.e., issue knowledge, stereotypes, polarization, and participation). As a result of contrasting perspectives on the consequences of exposure to dissonant information reviewed above, scholars have started to look at circumstances that may influence the consequences of cross-cutting exposure. For example, those who have stronger prior attitudes and politically sophisticated individuals are likely to exhibit greater opinion polarization when they are exposed to dissimilar perspectives (Taber & Lodge, 2006; Wojcieszak, 2011). These studies suggest that whether dissonant information attenuates or exacerbates political polarization is not simple, but may be influenced by other variables. Therefore, accounting for potential moderating variables that may interact with cross-cutting exposure is crucial for theoretical reasons because it could shed light on whether and how

citizens differently respond to opposing views, in that some are gaining more knowledge or stereotypic beliefs and some are becoming more polarized, and mobilized while others are influenced in the other way (e.g., gaining less knowledge and stereotypes, and becoming depolarized and demobilized). This study explores whether the influence of dissonant media use on outcome variables (i.e., issue knowledge, stereotypic perceptions of candidates, polarization, and political participation) is contingent on people's general political knowledge.

A brief comment on the two different types of political knowledge discussed in this dissertation is warranted. There are two types of knowledge—general political knowledge and specific (issue) knowledge (see Eveland & Hively, 2009; Price & Zaller, 1993). General political knowledge is less likely to be influenced by mass mediated communication and tends to be relatively stable compared to measures of specific knowledge. General knowledge is an indicator of one's ability to learn about a variety of campaign issues (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Price & Zaller, 1993). In contrast, issue specific knowledge is more likely to be influenced by mass media use during a campaign period because media reflect information about campaign issues and candidates' issue stances. Thus, research on communication effects has focused on specific issue knowledge (Eveland, Hayes, Shah, & Kwak, 2005; Johnson, Braima, & Sothirajah, 1999). Given this distinction, highly relevant to the current purpose is a measure of general political knowledge. This dissertation thus analyzes whether general knowledge is a potential moderator of the effects of dissonant media use on the outcome variables proposed in this dissertation. Note that this is in contrast with the knowledge model posited earlier, where issue knowledge is seen as a potential *mediator* of the relationship between selective exposure and polarization.

General political knowledge is an important variable that can moderate the effects of media use on individuals' cognitions and behaviors. First, in particular, general political knowledge may intensify the issue-knowledge gaining effects of dissonant media use. Individuals' gains in issue knowledge from media use may not be the same for all audience members. For example, the knowledge gap literature demonstrates that the gap in political knowledge between segments of the population by socioeconomic status (SES) tends to increase when mass media information gets into a social system because higher SES individuals tend to acquire information from mass media at a faster rate (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970). This is because people in the upper classes (e.g., those with higher level of education than less educated individuals) have more cognitive resources and motivations to process news information, which in turn leads to this segment becoming even more informed (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Kim, 2008). Similarly, it could be expected that political sophistication may moderate the relationship between dissonant media use and candidate issue knowledge, such that sophisticates may acquire more knowledge about candidates' issue stances than less knowledgeable individuals when they are exposed to dissimilar media outlets.

What's more important when it comes to the potential moderating role of general knowledge is that knowledge can be used either to objectively accept new information, which may lead to opinion change, or to defend one's prior attitudes and beliefs and reject new information, which may result in reinforcing prior opinions.

Literature demonstrates that knowledge increases critical and objective processing of information (Biek, Wood, & Chaiken, 1996). Well-informed individuals are more motivated and better able to evaluate new information against their existing information and beliefs than less-informed people (Biek, et al., 1996; Schemer, 2012; Wood, Kallgren, & Preisler, 1985). This indicates that the effects of cross-cutting exposure on

individuals' stereotypic perceptions can be moderated by general political knowledge since sophisticates are more likely to objectively evaluate new information than less knowledgeable individuals. Indeed, stereotype research shows that knowledge can moderate the effects of news on stereotypic attitudes (Pettigrew et al., 1997). Studies show that less-informed people are more susceptible to racial priming effects and more likely to be influenced by news stories about immigrants than well-informed individuals (Huber & Lapinski, 2006; Schemer, 2012). Therefore, it is possible that the impact of dissonant media use on stereotypical perceptions of candidates will be moderated by political knowledge, such that knowledgeable individuals may show less stereotypical perceptions than less-informed individuals.

Similarly, with regard to political participation, general political knowledge might moderate the relationship between dissonant media use and participation. Some research from interpersonal discussion finds interaction effects between dissimilar perspectives and political knowledge on participation. McClurg (2006), for example, found that the level of political knowledge, or sophistication, in an individual's social network exerts a positive influence on participation. Since knowledge helps people to recognize and reject dissimilar political views and to develop confidence in their opinions and attitudes (McClurg, 2006), knowledgeable people may be more likely to participate in politics when exposed to dissonant views. Thus, political sophisticates may be more mobilized than less knowledgeable people when they consume dissonant media. In summary, the reviewed research suggests that people who have higher levels of general political knowledge may gain more issue knowledge, form fewer stereotypes, and participate more in politics compared to less-informed individuals, when exposed to dissonant media outlets.

Interaction effects of exposure to dissimilar views and sophistication on polarization seem somewhat different, however. Some studies suggest that general political knowledge can be used to defend individuals' prior attitudes and reject opposing views, which in turn leads to greater levels of attitudinal polarization. For example, Taber and Lodge (2006) provided evidence of a sophistication effect, such that politically knowledgeable individuals showed greater attitudinal polarization when they were exposed to incongruent information than did those with less knowledge. This is because unsophisticated respondents may lack the ability and motivation to engage in attitude defense that sophisticates do (Taber & Lodge, 2006). Other studies demonstrate that although individuals recognize dissimilar information, they might tend to discredit it, while giving greater credit to consonant views that strengthen their prior attitudes (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Munro et al., 2002); this might happen if people have more knowledge which could be used to discredit or counterargue dissimilar perspectives when they encounter dissonant views.

Taken together, the literature reviewed above suggests that knowledge can enable either biased or objective processing of new information since individuals' knowledge can be used to bolster and defend existing attitudes or to motivate objective processing regardless of the congruence with their own attitudes (Biek, et al., 1996; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Prior evidence regarding the moderating role of exposure to dissimilar views is provided by experimental designs (Taber & Lodge, 2006) and in interpersonal communication contexts (McClurg, 2006), not by survey evidence. Experimental settings may arouse individuals' motivation to carefully process information. In other words, when people are exposed to dissimilar information through mass media, individuals might pay less attention than experimental participants (Taber & Lodge, 2006). In addition, interpersonal discussion, compared to mediated communication, may exert a

stronger influence on people's attitudes and behaviors because, for example, individuals may experience more social accountability pressures during interpersonal discussion (Lazarsfeld, et al., 1944; Mutz, 2002a; Nir, 2005). Little effort, however, has been made to analyze the role of mediated exposure to dissonant information by using survey research.

In addition, one may note different proposed relationships for stereotypes and polarization with regard to a potential moderating role of political sophistication. Although stereotypes may relate positively to polarization, prior literature suggests that that politically knowledgeable will hold more polarized attitudes, yet less stereotypical attitudes, when using counter-attitudinal media. The discrepancy may be in part because of different contexts of studies on the relationship of general knowledge with stereotypes and polarization. That is, while research on knowledge and polarization is conducted in the context of selective exposure in which two contrasting groups (e.g., Democrats/liberals vs. Republicans/conservatives), which might induce individuals' biased information processing (e.g., Taber & Lodge, 2006), studies on the relationship between knowledge and stereotypes examines individuals' stereotypical perceptions (e.g., immigrants) not in the selective exposure context—without comparison between dissimilar political/ideological groups (e.g., Huber & Lapinski, 2006; Schemer, 2012). These considerations make directional hypotheses of interaction effects between dissonant media use and political knowledge unclear, thereby leading to the following research question:

Research Question 5: Do exposure to dissonant media outlets and political knowledge interact to influence individuals' issue knowledge, stereotypical perceptions of candidates, attitudinal polarization, and political participation?

In sum, while extant literature has examined the consequences of selective exposure (e.g., its influence on polarization and participation), little is known about the underlying mechanisms of such process—that is, how and why selective exposure influences political polarization and participation. Without understanding these mechanisms, it is hard to know whether or not we should worry about selective exposure. This chapter proposes two models—the knowledge and stereotype models—which suggest that citizens’ selective exposure to congenial media influences (1) political knowledge and/or (2) stereotypic perceptions of candidates, which in turn leads to their attitudinal polarization and participation. If selective media use is positively associated with informing citizens and this leads to attitudinal polarization, which in turn increases individuals’ political participation, it could be argued that selective exposure is normatively desirable. However, if polarized citizens participate with less knowledge about politics, and if they form their attitudes toward candidates and participate in politics based on stereotypes and prejudice, the role of selective media use in democracy would be far less optimistic. Therefore, it is imperative to examine whether and how citizens’ issue knowledge and/or stereotypes mediate the effects of selective media use on political polarization and participation. In addition, this chapter argues that it is necessary to examine the role of citizens’ exposure to dissimilar information. Given the important role of diverse or challenging information in a deliberative democracy, dissonant media consumption was introduced to examine whether and how exposure to cross-cutting perspectives influences individuals’ issue knowledge, stereotypes, attitudinal polarization, and participation, in order to address important questions, for instance, whether should we care about disproportionate media consumption. For these purposes, the 2008 National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) data will be analyzed. I will

describe the methods used in the current study and then present the results of the analysis in the following chapters.

Chapter 3: Method

DATA

The data for this research come from the 2008 National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES), a rolling cross-sectional study based on surveys administered to a random sample of Americans throughout the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, from December 17, 2007 to November 3, 2008. Overall, interviews with 57,967 respondents were completed. The response rate was 23 percent. A focal purpose of this dissertation is to examine the relationship between selective exposure and polarization and participation, which is the relationship between media consumption and citizens' attitudes and behaviors. In order to better capture individuals' polarized attitudes, for example, data from the very beginning of the campaign period may not be appropriate because people are less likely to have formed their opinions and attitudes toward the candidates. Given that analyzing data after the primary and before the presidential election seems more appropriate, for this dissertation, data collected between these time periods will be used—more specifically, data between May 23 and November 3, 2008 for the knowledge model; and data between June 9 and November 3, 2008 for the stereotype model. Note that different time periods for the knowledge and stereotypes models are due to availability of survey questionnaire items asked (see more detail about the models and statistical analysis below).

MEASURES OF KEY VARIABLES

Political Polarization

Polarization is operationalized in terms of attitudes toward candidates based on previous studies (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008; Kim, et al., in press; Stroud, 2010). For instance, in NAES 2008 data, respondents were asked, “For the following person, please

tell me if your opinion is favorable or unfavorable using a scale from zero to 10. Zero means very unfavorable, and 10 means very favorable. Five means you do not feel favorable or unfavorable toward that person. Of course you can use any number between zero and 10.” On this 11-point scale, respondents rated their attitudes toward both McCain and Obama. Polarization was measured by taking the absolute value of the difference between ratings of McCain and Obama for each respondent (range = 0 to 10, $M = 3.67$, $SD = 2.87$); thus higher values indicate more polarized political attitudes.

Political Participation

Respondents were asked whether they had engaged in the following activities during the 2008 presidential campaign: talked to any people and tried to show them why they should vote for or against one of the presidential candidates; given money to any of the presidential candidates; done any work for one of the presidential candidates; gone to any political meetings, rallies, speeches, dinners, or things like that in support of a particular presidential candidate; worn a presidential campaign button, put a campaign sticker on their car, or placed a sign in their window or in front of their house. Responses to each item were added into a single index (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .50$, $M = .47$, $SD = .79$).²

² Although the reliability (Cronbach’s α) of participation is low, this measurement method has been widely used and low level of reliability is consistent with other studies focusing on similar political activities (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga, Puig-i-Abril, & Rojas, 2009; Sanchez, 2006; Scheufele, et al., 2004). Further, in some instances, reliability values are not reported for political participation (Dilliplane, 2011; Eveland & Hively, 2009; Nir, 2005). Eveland and Hively (2009), in particular, acknowledge that this may be reasonable because “a measure of participation such as these is more of a count of behaviors that are functional alternatives rather than a series of behaviors that each tap the same underlying construct” (p. 221).

Issue-Specific Political Knowledge

The survey dataset has items measuring respondents' knowledge about the issue positions of presidential candidates—McCain and Obama—across various issues. These items were: (1) Which candidate or candidates running for president would eliminate the Bush tax cuts for people above a certain income level: John McCain, Barack Obama, both, or neither? (Correct answer: Obama); (2) Which candidate or candidates running for president would provide more tax cuts to the middle class: John McCain, Barack Obama, both, or neither? (Correct answer: Obama); (3) Which candidate or candidates running for president is proposing a health care reform plan that mandates that children have health insurance: John McCain, Barack Obama, both, or neither? (Correct answer: Obama); (4) Which candidate or candidates running for president would provide uninsured individuals with a \$2,500 credit or uninsured families with a \$5,000 credit to help them buy their own health insurance: John McCain, Barack Obama, both, or neither? (Correct answer: McCain); (5) Which candidate or candidates running for president proposes taxing the health benefits an employee receives from an employer: John McCain, Barack Obama, both, or neither? (Correct answer: McCain); (6) Which candidate or candidates running for president opposed the war in Iraq: John McCain, Barack Obama, both, or neither? (Correct answer: Obama); (7) Which candidate or candidates running for president was the first to call for an increase in the number of troops as a way to make Iraq more stable, known as the surge: John McCain, Barack Obama, both, or neither? (Correct answer: McCain); (8) Which candidate or candidates running for president favors closing the base at which alleged enemy fighters are held at Guantanamo Bay: John McCain, Barack Obama, both, or neither? (Correct answer: Obama); (9) Which candidate or candidates running for president favors overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion: John McCain, Barack Obama,

both, or neither? (Correct answer: McCain). Each of nine items was coded as 1 if the respondent provided the correct answer and coded as 0 if the respondent incorrectly answered the question, did not know the answer, and refused to answer the question. The nine items were added into an index of issue knowledge (Cronbach's $\alpha = .64$, $M = 5.70$, $SD = 2.12$).

Stereotypes or Prejudice of Candidates

For stereotypes or prejudice related to the candidates, participants' perceptions about McCain's age and Obama's race were measured. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought John McCain was too old to be president, or not. They were also asked to answer to the following question: "Do you think the United States is ready to elect a president who is black, or not?" Both items were coded as dichotomous variables—that is, "yes" was coded "1" and "no" was coded "0." Almost thirty percent of the respondents (28.9%) perceived that McCain was too old to be president and 83.7% of the participants reported that they thought the United States is ready to elect a black president.

Selective Media Use and Counter-Attitudinal Media Use

Measurement is a key issue in selective exposure research. While there is less controversy over the measurement of selective exposure in experimental designs (e.g., Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2010; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009), the same is not true for survey studies. Measurement of selective exposure in survey research can be divided in two approaches: either focusing on media content or on individuals' perceptions of the media's political leanings. In other words, one approach to measuring selective exposure in survey research is to determine the slant of

media content (i.e., actual measure) whereas the other approach is based on respondents' perceptions of the political leanings of media content (i.e., perception measure).

One method that has been widely used in the selective exposure literature is to rely on respondents' perceptions of media slant. Using this approach, respondents are asked to self-report whether the media content that they use is similar to or different from their own political views. The self-reported perception approach has been employed in previous studies to measure respondents' selective exposure and exposure to counter-attitudinal perspectives through mass media as well as interpersonal discussion networks (Johnson, et al., 2009; Kim, 2011; Mutz & Martin, 2001; Scheufele, Hardy, Brossard, Waismel-Manor, & Nisbet, 2006; Valenzuela, Kim, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2012). For example, Johnson et al. (2009), examining blog users' selective exposure, measured selective exposure to blogs by asking respondents to indicate how frequently they visited political weblogs that provide information about public issues and policies with which they agree and disagree, ranging from 1 (never visited) to 5 (very often visited). In order to create an index of selective exposure to political weblogs, responses for "disagree with" were reverse coded and two items were summed. Johnson and his colleagues' other study also used similar survey items, adapted from the Pew Research Center, to measure selective exposure to political websites—the frequency of visiting political websites with which people agree and disagree (Johnson, Zhang, & Bichard, 2011). In addition, in order to determine the slant of media (whether it is conservative or liberal), a recent study (Dilliplane, 2011) examined the relationship between partisan slant of TV news program and political participation relied on the perception-based measure. Although she used the 2008 NAES online panel data in her analysis, which only has a list of TV news programs respondents watched, she relied on respondents' perceptions of media slant from a separate data set, the 2008 NAES cross-sectional phone survey, which asked respondents

to identify the TV news program's media slant they watched (see Dilliplane, 2011 for more in detail). Literature on interpersonal discussion has adopted a similar approach—relying on respondents' self-reports about their discussants' political leanings or support of a candidate/party. For instance, respondents were asked to report how frequently they discussed politics with people who share/challenge their political views; people who agree or disagree with them; people with right (or conservative) views or people with left (or liberal) views (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Scheufele, et al., 2006; Valenzuela, et al., 2012).

Although individuals' perceptions of whether media agree or disagree with their views have been widely used in the literature, there might be some perceptual errors in which the respondent incorrectly reports the political leaning of media content (Huckfeldt, Beck, Dalton, & Levine, 1995; Mutz & Martin, 2001). A concept involved with this issue (i.e., incorrect perception measure) is hostile media perception, the tendency for people to see media coverage as biased against or hostile to their own point of view (Gunther, Miller, & Liebhart, 2009). That is, people sometimes overestimate the extent of their true disagreement or agreement with the mass media (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985); therefore, respondents' perception-based approach may not be a perfect measure since it is subject to inaccuracy. It is possible that hostile media perceptions might be reflected when people report their perceptions of media slant. Given that the hostile media phenomenon is the tendency to see objectively neutral or balanced content as contrary to one's own point of view (Schmitt, Gunther, & Liebhart, 2004), one may argue that some of the counter-attitudinal effects may be due to misreporting that balanced media content is unfavorable. All perception approaches cannot completely rule out these perceptual distortions. In other words, it is not possible to distinguish between correct perceptions and distorted perceptions of media slant unless the *true* media slant is

known (e.g., comparing number of pro and con articles). Nevertheless, Mutz and Martin (2001) argue that perceptual measures are more appropriate than actual measures (see more details on their arguments below).

Given the possible errors of perception approach, another approach to measuring selective exposure has relied on determining actual media slant through, for example, content analysis of media coverage. Indeed, based on previous content analysis research, some studies have categorized CNN and MSNBC as liberal media outlets and Fox News as a conservative media outlet (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga, et al., 2012; Holbert, Hmielowski, & Weeks, 2012). Stroud (2010) also relied on this categorization for measures of partisan media use for cable news—FOX as conservative and CNN/MSNBC as liberal. For the other three types of media (i.e., newspaper, radio talk show, and Internet), she used different approaches: Newspapers' political leanings were categorized by newspaper endorsements. Respondents' talk radio use was “categorized as liberal or conservative based on the self-identifications of radio hosts/shows, the ideological affiliations ascribed to the programs by trade magazines (e.g., Talkers), or how prior research classified the programs” (p. 564); and for political internet sites visited, she used a content analysis of the websites respondents reported that they visited (see Stroud, 2010, pp. 563-564).

Mutz and Martin (2001), in their study examining the extent to which individuals are exposed to dissimilar political views via mass media and interpersonal discussion networks, showed that respondents sometimes report consonant or dissonant viewpoints inaccurately. However, they argued that perceptual measures of political leaning are more appropriate than actual measures and adopted the respondents' perceptions of similarity or dissimilarity of views. According to Mutz and Martin (2001), in order for exposure to dissimilar perspectives to stimulate individuals' deliberative processes, it should be *perceived* as dissimilar. They further explain that if people misperceive other's political

leaning as consonant, then “they will not be prompted to reconsider their opinions, broaden their perspectives, and so forth ... Thus, in one important sense, it may be meaningless to ask whether people are ‘really’ exposed to views different from their own” (p. 103). In a subsequent study, which explored how exposure to dissimilar perspectives influences citizens’ political engagement, Mutz also used perceptual measures of disagreement with a similar argument that it is respondents’ “*perceptions* of their discussants that should shape their tendency to engage or withdraw politically” (Mutz, 2002a, p. 842). For this reason, I consider perceptual measures of selective exposure and counter-attitudinal exposure appropriate for the purposes of this research. In the context of attitudinal polarization, individuals’ perceptions of media outlets’ perspectives compared to their own views are important in terms of forming and changing or reinforcing attitudes and opinions. For example, if people don’t perceive that a TV program shares their existing beliefs and views, then they are not likely to feel support from that media source, and then are less likely to reinforce their perspectives and beliefs.

More importantly, regardless of the advantages/disadvantages and similarities/differences between actual content measures and perceptual measures, evidence suggests that the measurement of selective exposure based on perception has a unique value. Beck et al. (2002) explain that studies of perceptions of media slant may have their own utility. They measured both the participants’ *perceptions* of media bias and *actual* (newspaper and television) media bias through a content analysis of media coverage. They showed that although neither perceptions of newspaper bias nor actual newspaper content had a significant relationship with individuals’ vote choice, perceptions of television bias, rather than actual content, were significantly related to vote choice. In addition, actual newspaper editorials appeared to be a significant predictor of

voting decisions. These findings suggest that the influence of media may vary across media sources and measures (Beck, et al., 2002), indicating that studies of selective exposure with perception measures may have their unique utility. Therefore, measures of selective exposure and counter-attitudinal media consumption employed in this dissertation are based on respondents' perception of media slant rather than tapping the actual similarity or dissimilarity of views.

Selective exposure refers to consumption of media outlets that are perceived to match respondents' political ideology while counter-attitudinal media use is defined as the consumption of media outlets that are perceived to contrast with respondents' political orientation. In the 2008 NAES, respondents were asked about four types of news media use (i.e., TV news, talk radio programs, newspapers, and Internet) and then asked to report the political leanings of the media outlets they used. Specifically, for TV news, the survey asked respondents who watched TV for campaign information at least one day in the past week: "In the past week, from what television program did you get most of your information about the 2008 presidential campaign?" and then "Which presidential candidate do you think [the program named by respondent] favors during the campaign, or don't you think [the program] favors any candidate?" Responses that mentioned McCain, the Republican candidate, or Obama, the Democratic candidate, were coded as slanted toward the Republicans or Democrats in the mind of the viewer, respectively. Similar questions were asked for talk radio, newspapers, and the Internet. For newspaper, respondents were asked: (1) "In the past week, from what newspaper did you get most of your information about the 2008 presidential campaign?" and (2) "Which presidential candidate do you think the [newspaper named by respondent] favors during the campaign, or don't you think [the newspaper] favors any candidate?" For talk radio, respondents were asked: (1) "In the past week, from which talk radio host or radio

program did you get most of your information about the 2008 presidential campaign?” and (2) “Which presidential candidate do you think [radio host/program named by respondent] favors during the campaign, or don’t you think [the host/program] favors any candidate?” Lastly, for the Internet, respondents were asked: (1) “In the past week, where did you get most of your information about the 2008 presidential campaign online?” and (2) “Which presidential candidate do you think [online source named by respondent] favors during the campaign, or don’t you think [the source] favors any candidate?”

For each media type (e.g., TV, talk radio program, newspapers, and Internet), two dichotomous variables were created: one for using media outlets favoring a Republican candidate, and one for using media outlets favoring a Democratic candidate. Two indices of media exposure were created from these four sets of dichotomous variables. The first index, “conservative media” use, was created by summing each dichotomous media use item: watching TV programs, listening to talk radio programs, reading newspapers, and using Internet sites seen as favoring a Republican candidate (range = 0 to 4, $M = .17$, $SD = .45$). The second one, “liberal media” use, was also created by summing the use of each of four media types favoring a Democratic candidate (range = 0 to 4, $M = .30$, $SD = .59$). These two indices of media exposure were operationalized “conservative media” use and “liberal media” use respectively. These indices, again, are based on the respondents’ perceptions as described above. Matching these two indices with respondents’ political predispositions, selective exposure is defined as media use corresponding with respondents’ political leanings (i.e., ideology and partisanship) while counter-attitudinal media use will be defined as the other way around (see more in detail about how political ideology and partisanship are used in the Statistical Analysis section below).

Demographics

The respondent's demographic variables were included as control variables in the analyses: age ($M = 53.2$, $SD = 16.0$), sex (57.2% female), education ($Mdn =$ Associate's or two-year college degree), income ($Mdn =$ \$50,000 to less than \$75,000 of total annual household income), and race (14.4% non-whites).

Political Ideology

Respondents were asked to rate their political ideology using a 5-point scale where 1 indicates very conservative and 5 represents very liberal (14.7% very conservative; 25.5% conservative; 33.0% moderate; 18.7% liberal, and 8.0% very liberal).

Partisanship

Respondents were asked to rate their party identification (12% strong Republican; 17% not strong/lean Republican, 29% no leanings, 12% not strong/lean Democrat, and 23% strong Democrat).

Political Efficacy

Using 5-point scale, respondents were asked their level of agreement ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*) with the following statements: "People like me have no say over what the government does" strongly agree" ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.53$).

Campaign Interest

Respondents were asked to report how closely they followed the 2008 presidential campaign using a scale ranging from 1 (*very closely*) to 4 (*not closely at all*) (reverse coded; $M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.22$).

General Political Knowledge

General political knowledge was assessed by adding the scores of four questions: “Who has the final responsibility to determine if a law is constitutional or not?” “How much of a majority is required for the US Senate and House to override a presidential veto?” “Do you happen to know which party has the most members in the United States House of Representatives?” and “To the best of your knowledge, do you happen to know how Supreme Court justices are chosen?” Respondents received one point for each correct answer, with the number of correct answers summed to create a political knowledge index (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .52$, $M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.22$).

News Media Use

Respondents’ use of TV news, political talk radio, newspaper, and online news was measured. Use of each news type was measured by asking how many days respondents used those media outlets: TV news ($M = 5.47$, $SD = 2.46$), political talk radio ($M = 1.72$, $SD = 2.57$), newspaper ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 3.02$), and online news ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 3.03$).

All of these variables’ descriptive statistics are provided in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Descriptive Statistics of Variables

	M	SD	N	Min	Max
Sex (female)	0.57	0.49	57,967	0.00	1.00
Age	53.25	16.00	56,686	18.00	97.00
Education	5.56	2.31	56,610	1.00	9.00
Income	5.77	2.15	50,161	1.00	9.00
Race (non-white)	0.14	0.35	56,191	0.00	1.00
Partisanship	3.14	1.44	56,113	1.00	5.00
Ideology	2.79	1.14	55,915	1.00	5.00
Political Efficacy	2.78	1.53	19,505	1.00	5.00
Campaign Interest	3.23	0.81	57,614	1.00	4.00
General Knowledge	2.13	1.22	57,967	0.00	4.00
TV News	5.47	2.46	57,160	0.00	7.00
Talk Radio	1.72	2.57	57,336	0.00	7.00
Newspaper	2.91	3.02	57,625	0.00	7.00
Online News	2.93	3.03	44,663	0.00	7.00
Conservative Media	0.22	0.50	57,967	0.00	4.00
Liberal Media	0.38	0.64	57,967	0.00	4.00
Issue Knowledge	5.70	2.12	6,876	0.00	9.00
McCain's Age	0.28	0.45	39,629	0.00	1.00
Black Presidency	0.83	0.36	23,181	0.00	1.00
Polarization	3.67	2.87	55,032	0.00	10.00
Political Participation	0.47	0.79	11,686	0.00	5.00

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

To test the hypotheses and research questions, regressions and path analysis were employed. Path analysis allows me to examine the direct and indirect relationships among all variables of interest rather than focusing on separate direct relationships (Holbert & Stephenson, 2003).

To conceptualize individuals' selective exposure, interaction terms between the respondent's political leaning and ideologically slanted media use have been used in previous literature. An interaction term has its value in that it can show whether the effects of conservative and liberal media use are strengthened when individuals' political leanings correspond with the media outlets' political leanings (Dvir-Gvirsman, 2012; Feldman, 2011; Stroud, 2010). In particular, by taking into account the effect of the respondents' strength of political leaning, the use of an interaction term as a measurement of selective exposure can contribute to an understanding of the effect of the strength of individuals' political leanings (e.g., very conservative and conservative, very liberal and liberal, strong Republican and not very strong Republican, strong Democrat and not very strong Democrat) when they engage in selective exposure. For example, having an interaction term between the respondents' political leanings and partisan media use allows us to understand whether people with stronger political leanings consuming more partisan media form more polarized attitudes and participate more in politics relative to others with weaker political leanings (Stroud, 2010, 2011). Given these advantages, this dissertation adopts this approach to examine the relationship between selective exposure and citizens' attitudinal polarization and participation (particularly for Hypotheses 2 and 3). Following the previous work (Stroud, 2010, 2011), respondents' political ideology and partisanship were added ($r = .53$, $p < .001$, $M = 5.93$, $SD = 2.27$, range = 2-10) to create interaction terms with media use.

Despite the benefits that the use of an interaction term as a measurement of selective exposure has (Dvir-Gvirsman, 2012), one concern is that selective exposure measurement using interaction terms includes individuals who don't have particular political leanings such as those who identify as moderates and Independents. Because it is not possible to match the media's slant with these respondents' political leanings, one may argue that excluding independents or moderates is necessary in order for operational definition of selective exposure. To take this view into account, the path models proposed in this research are tested in the absence of politically moderates or independents. Therefore, the analytic strategy employed here is to have separate path models for conservatives and liberals in order to operationalize selective exposure (i.e., conservatives use conservative media outlets and liberals use liberal media outlets) as an independent variable in each model.³ The respondents are separated into conservatives and liberals by using political ideology measure described in measurement section. Only those who identified as either conservatives or liberals are included and moderates are

³ In research on selective exposure, political ideology and/or partisanship have been used as indicators of individuals' political predispositions in order to operationalizing selective exposure (e.g., comparing one's predispositions with media slant). Some research has used a measure combining ideology and partisanship while some studies have adopted to use either political ideology or partisanship only. For instance, Stroud (2010) combined respondents' ideology and partisanship into a single measure of political leanings in order for the operationalization of selective exposure. In Knobloch-Westerwick and Kleinman's (2012) study, participants' like-minded and counter-attitudinal exposure was judged by comparing their partisanship with news article selection. Iyengar and Hahn (2009) used respondents' self-reported political ideology to examine their patterns of selective exposure—that is, participants' selection of news stories with the Fox News, NPR, CNN, and BBC labels. As described in the Method section, this dissertation, for a straightforward analytical strategy, opts to use political ideology in order to operationalize selective exposure as an independent variable when testing the proposed mediating models. The patterns of results are consistent when I substitute party affiliation for political ideology, but results with ideology are stronger. Accordingly, for parsimony, results of analyses with political ideology are presented.

excluded in the analysis. This strategy also allows a straightforward analytical procedure in order to examine the moderating role of exposure to dissonant media use. In sum, these two approaches are complementary and each has unique advantages to offer. Given these advantages, this dissertation uses both approaches.

The survey questionnaire items were not the same for all of the respondents because the survey did not include all items for the full survey period and other items were asked only of a random subset of respondents. For this reason, variables of interest differ in the number of the respondents. Because valid cases of all statistical analyses used in this research were obtained using listwise deletion, the sample size varies according to variables included in the models. Since some variables (e.g., candidate issue knowledge and political participation) were asked of a much smaller number of respondents than others, some analyses have a smaller sample included in analyses.

In the following chapter, based on analytical strategies mentioned here, I will present the results of testing the hypotheses and research questions. First, the results of regression analyses with regard to Hypotheses 1-4 (i.e., individuals' selective exposure, direct effects of selective exposure on polarization and participation, and the mediating role of polarization in the relationship between selective exposure and participation) are presented. Next, the chapter presents the results of testing the Knowledge and Stereotype models. Finally, the role of dissonant media consumption on the outcome variables (i.e., issue knowledge, stereotypical perceptions of candidates, attitudinal polarization, and political participation) will be discussed. At the end of the chapter, a summary of the findings will be presented.

Chapter 4: Results

SELECTIVE EXPOSURE: LIKEMINDED MEDIA USE

The first hypothesis in this dissertation deals with citizens' selective exposure, the proposition that individuals are more likely to consume media outlets that match their political ideology than ones which contrast with their views (Hypothesis 1). Table 4.1 presents the results of several regression models, including whether individuals' political perspectives predict conservative media use (Model 1) and liberal media use (Model 2). Results from the regression analysis support selective exposure, yielding consistent outcomes with previous literature (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga, et al., 2012; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Conservative Republicans are more likely to consume conservative media outlets ($\beta = -.227, p < .001$; see Model 1 in Table 4.1) while liberal Democrats are more likely to select liberal media for political information ($\beta = .035, p < .01$; see Model 2 in Table 4.1), controlling for respondents' demographic variables (i.e., sex, age, education, income, and race), political orientations (i.e., political efficacy, campaign interest, and political knowledge), and general news media use (i.e., television news, talk radio, newspaper, and online).

Table 4.1 Citizens' Selective Exposure

	Model 1	Model 2
	Conservative Media	Liberal Media
<i>Controls</i>		
Sex (female)	-.044***	-.003
Age	.034***	-.037***
Education	-.002	.042***
Income	.005	.022*
Race (non-White)	-.001	.007
Political efficacy	.014	-.022*
Campaign interest	.066***	.048***
Political knowledge	.047***	.078***
TV news	.036***	.050***
Talk radio	.206***	.106***
Newspaper	.053***	.168***
Online news	.047***	.130***
<i>Individuals' Ideology/Partisanship</i>		
Ideology/partisanship	-.227***	.035**
<i>Total R²</i>	.153***	.121***

Note: Cell entries represent standardized coefficients from OLS regression equations; Ideology/partisanship ranges 2 (= strong conservative/Republicans) to 10 (= strong liberals/Democrats). N = 12,645. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

SELECTIVE EXPOSURE AND ATTITUDINAL POLARIZATION

This research expects that citizens' selective exposure to ideologically-slanted media outlets will lead to polarized attitudes toward political candidates (Hypothesis 2). Results support this relationship, yielding findings consistent with extant literature (Dilliplane, 2011; Stroud, 2011). Conservative Republicans consuming more conservative media outlets were more likely to have polarized attitudes toward presidential candidates ($\beta = -.082$, $p < .001$; see Model 1 in Table 4.2). In the same manner, liberal Democrats who exposed themselves more often to liberal media outlets

were more likely to hold polarized attitudes toward candidates ($\beta = .048, p < .001$; see Model 2 in Table 4.2). These results indicate that citizens' likeminded media consumption is significantly associated with forming more polarized attitudes.

Table 4.2 Citizens' Selective Exposure Predicting Attitudinal Polarization

	Model 1	Model 2
	Conservative Media	Liberal Media
<i>Demographics</i>		
Sex (female)	.094***	.090***
Age	.067***	.070***
Education	-.048***	-.050***
Income	-.047***	-.048***
Race (non-White)	.082***	.078***
<i>Predispositions and News Use</i>		
Ideology/partisanship	.038***	-.007
Political efficacy	.028**	.032***
Campaign interest	.226***	.230***
Political knowledge	-.016	-.016
TV news	-.006	-.006
Talk radio	.058***	.072***
Newspaper	.000	-.007
Internet for campaign information	.043***	.040***
<i>Partisan media use</i>		
Partisan media use	.041***	.049***
<i>Interactions: Selective exposure</i>		
Ideology/partisanship \times partisan media use	-.082***	.048***
<i>Total R²</i>	.105***	.100***

Note: Cell entries represent standardized coefficients from OLS regression equations; partisan media use for model 1 and model 2 are “conservative media use” and “liberal media use”, respectively.

Ideology/partisanship ranges 2 (= strong conservative/Republicans) to 10 (= strong liberals/Democrats). N = 12,483. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

SELECTIVE EXPOSURE AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

In addition, it is expected that individuals' selective exposure will be positively related to their engagement in political activities (Hypothesis 3). Table 4.3 presents the results of regression analyses predicting citizens' political participation. Findings show that selective media use has significant effects on political participation controlling for respondents' demographic variables, political variables, and news media use. The significant interaction coefficients demonstrate that conservatives and Republicans consuming more conservative media outlets were more likely to participate in political activities ($\beta = -.045, p < .001$; see Model 1 in Table 4.3). In the same manner, liberals and Democrats who use liberal media outlets more often were more likely to engage in politics ($\beta = .049, p < .001$; see Model 2 in Table 4.3). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Table 4.3 Citizens' Selective Exposure Predicting Political Engagement

	Model 1	Model 2
	Conservative Media	Liberal Media
<i>Demographics</i>		
Sex (female)	.022*	.021
Age	.001	.002
Education	-.026	-.028*
Income	.020	.018
Race (non-White)	.059***	.057***
<i>Predispositions and News Use</i>		
Ideology/partisanship	.099***	.069***
Political efficacy	.050***	.052***
Campaign interest	.216***	.215***
Political knowledge	.027*	.024
TV news	-.020	-.022
Talk radio	.065***	.067***
Newspaper	.072***	.061***
Internet for campaign information	.106***	.099***
<i>Partisan media use</i>		
Partisan media use	.020	.062***
<i>Interaction: Selective exposure</i>		
Ideology/partisanship × partisan media use	-.045***	.049***
<i>Total R²</i>	.128***	.132***

Note: Cell entries represent standardized coefficients from OLS regression equations; partisan media use for model 1 and model 2 are “conservative media use” and “liberal media use”, respectively.

Ideology/partisanship ranges 2 (= strong conservative/Republicans) to 10 (= strong liberals/Democrats). N = 6,618. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

POLARIZATION AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN SELECTIVE EXPOSURE AND PARTICIPATION

Beyond the direct influence of selective exposure on political polarization and participation separately, this dissertation hypothesized that the relationship between selective exposure and political participation would be mediated by individuals' attitudinal polarization (Hypothesis 4). To test the mediating relationship, I employed two

sets of regression analyses, one each for conservatives and liberals. As mentioned in the method section, the analytic strategy of having separate models for conservatives and liberals is to operationalized selective exposure—that is, selective exposure as operationalized by matching individuals’ political ideology with perceived media leanings (i.e., conservatives use conservative media outlets and liberals use liberal media outlets). This strategy allows a straightforward analytical procedure in order to examine mediating relationships.

First, regression analyses testing the mediating role of polarization in the relationship between conservatives’ selective exposure and political engagement are presented in Table 4.4. To be a mediator, according to Baron and Kenny (1986), there should be a significant effect of the independent variable (conservative media use) on the mediator variable (polarization) ($\beta = .128, p < .001$); a significant effect of the mediator on dependent variable (political participation, $\beta = .172, p < .001$); and including the mediator in the regression model reduces the degree of a previous relation between the independent and the dependent variables (from $\beta = .068, p < .01$ to $\beta = .041, p < .05$). These results are depicted in Figure 4.1. Thus, it turns out that individuals’ attitudinal polarization mediates that the relationship between conservatives’ selective exposure and political participation.⁴

⁴ Path analysis using Mplus also additionally supported this result. To analyze the significance of the indirect effect, Mplus was used. Results (of testing the knowledge and stereotype models) indicated that conservatives’ selective exposure indirectly influenced political participation via polarization with an indirect effect of .035 ($p < .05$) and .025 ($p < .001$) in the knowledge and stereotype models, respectively.

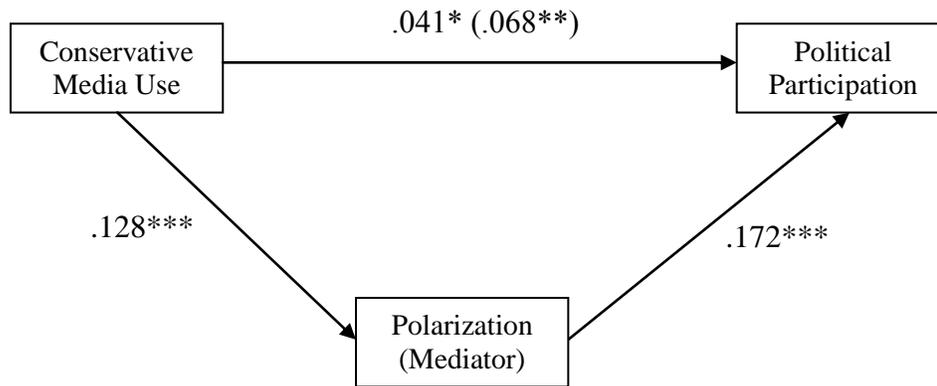
Table 4.4 Regression Analyses Testing Polarization as Mediator between Conservative Selective Exposure and Political Participation

	Polarization Model 1	Participation Model 2	Participation Model 3
<i>Controls</i>			
Sex (female)	.097***	-.003	-.016
Age	.076***	.016	.005
Education	-.061***	-.030	-.013
Income	-.018	.025	.026
Race (non-White)	.047**	.048*	.040*
Political efficacy	.029*	.036	.035
Campaign interest	.217***	.189***	.153***
Political knowledge	-.013	.007	.002
TV news	.016	.000	.000
Talk radio	.042**	.070**	.065**
Newspaper	-.038*	.075***	.078***
Online news	.025	.090***	.089***
<i>Selective Exposure & Polarization</i>			
Conservative media use	.128***	.068**	.041*
Polarization	–	–	.172***
<i>Total R²</i>	.101***	.106***	.132***

Note: Cell entries represent standardized coefficients from OLS regression equations; N (Model 1) = 4,947; N (Model 2) = 2,629; N (Model 3) = 2,587. In order for the operationalization of conservative selective exposure, the regression models were conducted only among conservatives.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Figure 4.1 Path Diagram of Mediating Effects of Polarization in the Relationship between Conservative Selective Exposure and Political Participation (Conservatives)



Note: The number in the parentheses is the regression coefficient before adding the mediating variable (polarization) in the model.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Next, the same analytical process was conducted for liberals. Table 4.5 shows regression analyses testing a mediating role of polarization in the relationship between liberals' selective exposure and political engagement. Results also show that there is a significant effect of the independent variable (liberal media use) on the mediator variable (polarization) ($\beta = .095, p < .001$); a significant effect of the mediator on dependent variable (political participation, $\beta = .228, p < .001$); and adding the mediating variable in the regression model reduces the degree of a previous relation between the independent and the dependent variables (from $\beta = .093, p < .001$ to $\beta = .065, p < .01$) (see also Figure 4.2).⁵

⁵ Likewise, path analysis using Mplus additionally demonstrated a mediating role of polarization in the relationship between liberals' selective exposure and political participation. Results (of testing the knowledge and stereotype models) indicated that

Table 4.5 Regression Analyses Testing Polarization as Mediator between Liberal Selective Exposure and Political Engagement

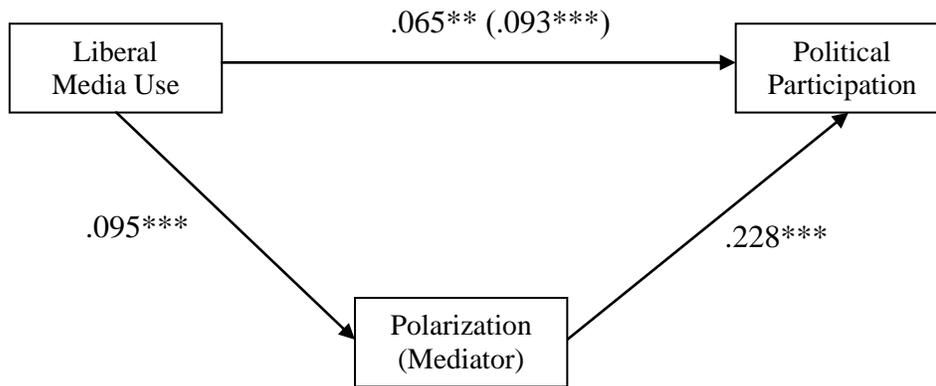
	Polarization Model 1	Participation Model 2	Participation Model 3
<i>Controls</i>			
Sex (female)	.112***	.058**	.028
Age	.056**	-.014	-.026
Education	-.051**	-.032	-.011
Income	-.065***	.012	.025
Race (non-White)	.104***	.043	.021
Political efficacy	.011	.049	.041
Campaign interest	.255***	.248***	.191***
Political knowledge	-.024	.009	.016
TV news	-.025	-.023	-.013
Talk radio	.042**	.016	.008
Newspaper	.072***	.067**	.052*
Online news	.065***	.129***	.111***
<i>Selective Exposure & Polarization</i>			
Liberal media use	.095***	.093***	.065**
Polarization	–	–	.228***
<i>Total R²</i>	.143***	.152***	.196***

Note: Cell entries represent standardized coefficients from OLS regression equations; partisan media use for model 1 and model 2 are “conservative media use” and “liberal media use”, respectively. N (Model 1) = 3,624; N (Model 2) = 1,894; N (Model 3) = 1,876. In order for the operationalization of liberal selective exposure, the regression models were conducted only among liberals.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

liberals’ selective exposure indirectly influenced political participation via polarization with an indirect effect of .047 ($p < .10$) and .026 ($p < .001$) in the knowledge and stereotype models, respectively.

Figure 4.2 Path Diagram of Mediating Effects of Polarization in the Relationship between Liberal Selective Exposure and Political Participation (Liberals)



Note: The number in the parentheses is the regression coefficient before adding the mediating variable (polarization) in the model.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

In sum, as expected, individuals' polarized attitudes mediate the direct effects of selective exposure on political participation. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported.

THE KNOWLEDGE MODEL

This dissertation proposes research questions regarding the potential mediating role of political knowledge in the relationship between selective exposure and political polarization and participation. That is, Research Question 1 examines whether selective exposure will be associated with issue knowledge. And Research Question 2 explores whether selective exposure indirectly influences political polarization and participation through knowledge about the candidates' issue positions.

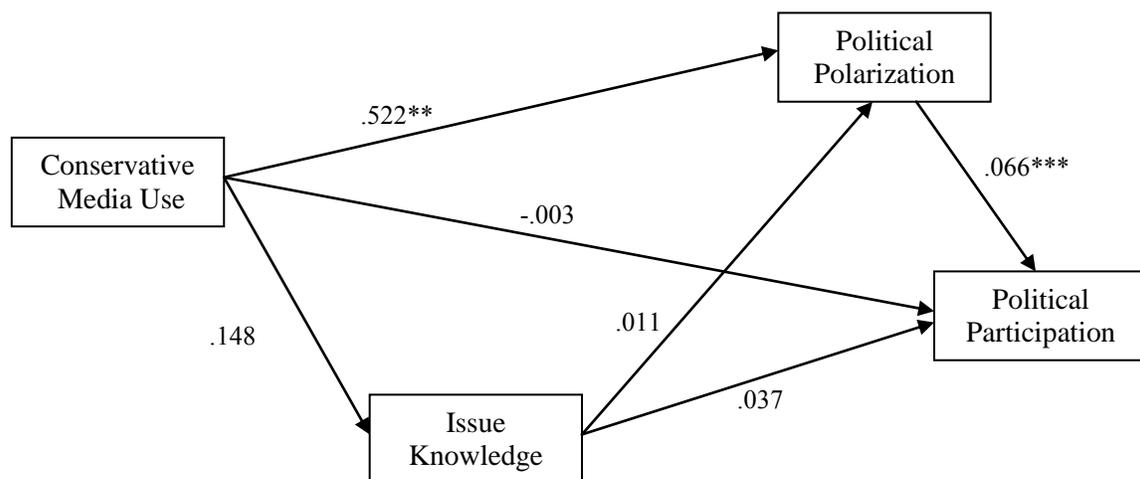
Testing path models by using Mplus allows us to discern whether a potential mediating variable (i.e., issue knowledge) is associated with outcome variables (i.e., attitudinal polarization and political participation), as well as whether the independent variable (i.e., selective exposure) is related to the mediator (i.e., issue knowledge). In particular, as described in the method section, while creating and entering an interaction term between individuals' political ideology and media consumption as selective exposure in the regressions has unique advantages, the interaction terms include even respondents who do not report their political leanings (e.g., moderates). Thus, instead of having interaction terms as independent variables in the path models, in order to test path models in a more straightforward way and define selective exposure more strictly (i.e., matching individuals' political ideology and media outlets' leading), path models employed in this study exclude the respondents who do not report their political leanings.

Path analyses provide no evidence that the relationship between selective exposure and political polarization and participation is mediated by citizens' issue knowledge about candidates. Figure 4.3 shows results of path model of mediating role of issue knowledge for conservatives.⁶ The variables included in this model accounted for

⁶ Given the nature of this study which focuses on testing the potential mediating role of political knowledge in the relationships between selective exposure and political polarization and participation, the influence of control variables are not discussed in the text. The effects of demographic variables (gender, age, education, income, and race), political orientations (political efficacy, campaign interest, and general political knowledge), and general media consumption (TV, radio, newspapers, and online) were included in the model in which such variables, as control variables, predict all outcome variables. Also, the path model of knowledge does not provide the goodness of model fit since it is a saturated model, which leaves no degrees of freedom for testing the goodness of fit of model. This saturated model, however, is appropriate in order for the goal of this study which is investigating the potential mediating role of issue knowledge in the relationships between selective exposure and political polarization and participation, rather than building a model as parsimonious as possible that satisfactorily fit a set of data.

15.2% of the variance in issue knowledge, 7.9% in polarization, and 15.3% in political engagement.

Figure 4.3 Path Model of Mediating Role of Issue Knowledge (Conservatives)



Note: The effects of demographic variables (gender, age, education, income, and race), political orientations (political efficacy, campaign interest, and general political knowledge), and general media consumption (TV, radio, newspapers, and online) were included in the model in which demographics, political orientations, and general media use, as control variables, predict all outcome variables, but not shown in the Figure. Number of observations = 472. ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 4.6 Direct and Indirect Effects of Structural Equation Model of Issue Knowledge (Conservatives)

	b
Cons. Media → Polarization	.522**
Cons. Media → Knowledge → Polarization	.002
Cons. Media → Participation	.006
Cons. Media → Knowledge → Participation	.005
Cons. Media → Polarization → Participation	.035*
Cons. Media → Knowledge → Polarization → Participation	.000

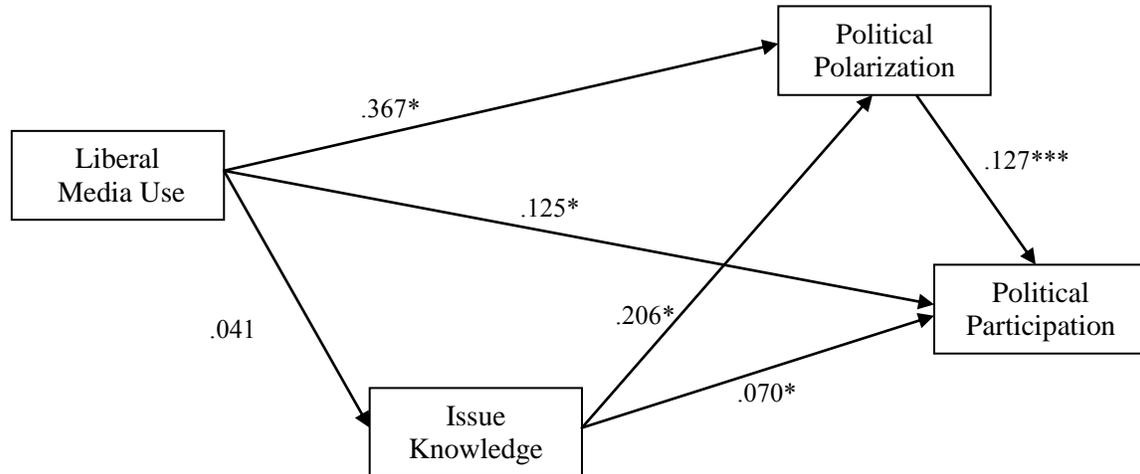
Note: Table reports unstandardized direct and indirect Mplus estimates.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

As demonstrated in Figure 4.3, conservative selective exposure had no significant influence on issue knowledge ($b = .148$, $p = \text{n.s.}$). Thus, issue knowledge does not mediate the relationship between selective partisan media use and political polarization and participation. Indeed, the Mplus estimates of indirect effects (Table 4.6) confirm that issue knowledge does not mediate the relationships between selective exposure and political polarization and participation.

A similar pattern of results emerged in the liberal selective exposure context. Results of the path analysis examining the mediating role of candidate issue knowledge for liberals are shown in Figure 4.4. The variables in the path model accounted for 35.5% of the variance in issue knowledge, 26.3% in attitudinal polarization, and 27.8% in political participation.

Figure 4.4 Path Model of Mediating Role of Issue Knowledge (Liberals)



Note: The effects of demographic variables (gender, age, education, income, and race), political orientations (political efficacy, campaign interest, and general political knowledge), and general media consumption (TV, radio, newspapers, and online) were included in the model, but not shown in the Figure. Number of observations = 267. * $p < .10$; *** $p < .001$.

Results show that there is no significant relationship between liberal selective exposure and issue knowledge ($b = .041$, $p = \text{n.s.}$). In addition, there is no evidence that issue knowledge mediates the associations between selective exposure and political polarization and participation. Neither the indirect effect of liberal selective exposure on attitudinal polarization via candidate issue knowledge nor the indirect influence of selective exposure on political engagement through issue knowledge and polarization are significant (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7 Direct and Indirect Effects of Structural Equation Model of Issue Knowledge (Liberals)

					b
Lib. Media	→	Polarization			.367 [†]
Lib. Media	→	Knowledge	→	Polarization	.008
Lib. Media	→	Participation			.125 [†]
Lib. Media	→	Knowledge	→	Participation	.003
Lib. Media	→	Polarization	→	Participation	.047 [†]
Lib. Media	→	Knowledge	→	Polarization → Participation	.001

Note: Table reports unstandardized direct and indirect Mplus estimates.

[†] $p < .10$

In sum, path analyses demonstrate that there is no evidence that the relationships between selective exposure and political polarization and participation are mediated by citizens' issue knowledge about candidates. There is no support for the knowledge model.

THE STEREOTYPE MODEL

Turning to the mediating role of stereotypical perceptions of candidates in the relationship between selective media use and attitudinal polarization and political participation, I hypothesized a mediating role of two types of stereotypical perceptions of candidates (i.e., McCain's age and the potential for a Black president).

As described earlier, this dissertation tests a model of stereotypes—that is, selective exposure influences individuals' stereotypic perceptions of candidates (Hypothesis 5); further, the relationship between selective exposure and political

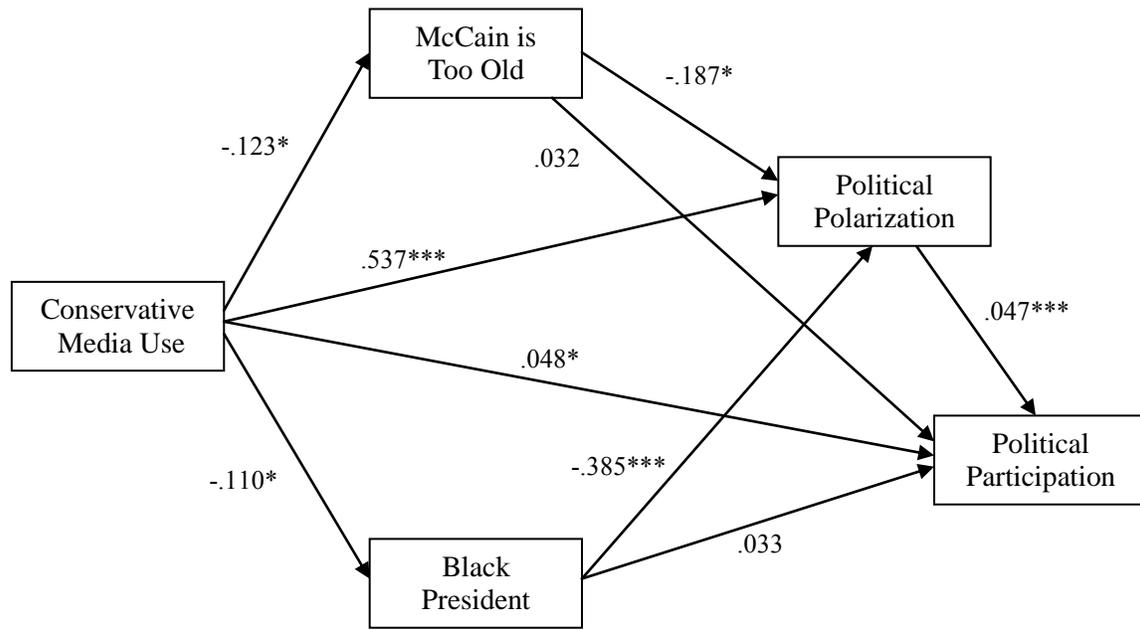
polarization will be mediated by citizens' stereotypical perceptions of candidates such as (a) prejudice about McCain's age and (b) racial prejudice about the U.S. president (Hypothesis 6); and the relationship between selective media use and political participation will be mediated by stereotypical perceptions of candidates (i.e., prejudice about McCain's age and racial prejudice about the U.S. president) and political polarization (Hypothesis 7). To examine these indirect effects as well as the relationship between selective exposure and stereotypical perceptions of candidates, I ran models in which individuals' selective exposure influences stereotypical perceptions of candidates' age and race, and stereotypical perceptions mediate the relationships between selective exposure and polarization and political polarization. Two path models were proposed and tested, one each for conservatives and liberals.

Figure 4.5 presents a model where conservatives' selective exposure influences their stereotypical perceptions of the candidates and these perceptions mediate the impact of conservative media use on political polarization and participation. The overall model fits the data well ($\chi^2(1) = 2.455, p = .117, RMSEA = .025, CFI = .998, TLI = .866$). The variables included in this model accounted for 11.5% of the variance in McCain's age, 6.5% in black presidency, 12.7% in political polarization, and 13.4% in political engagement. As Figure 4.5 shows, conservatives' selective exposure had a negative influence on both stereotypical perceptions about McCain's age and racial prejudice about the U.S. president. That is, conservatives who consume more conservative media are more likely to perceive that McCain is *not* too old to be president ($b = -.123, p < .05$) and that the United States is *not* ready to elect black president ($b = -.110, p < .05$).⁷ Thus,

⁷ Note that the stereotypic perceptions of candidates were measured with the following question: "Do you feel John McCain is too old to be president" and "Do you think the United States is ready to elect a president who is black?"; and each was coded dichotomous variable—that is, "yes" was coded "1" and "no" was coded "0".

Hypothesis 5-1, stating that conservatives' selective exposure will be negatively related to (a) perceptions that McCain is too old to be a president, and (b) perceptions that Americans are ready to elect a black president, was supported. These two stereotypical perceptions about candidates also significantly influenced attitudinal polarization. When conservative people perceived that McCain was not too old to be a president and that the U.S. is not ready to elect a black president, they were more likely to form more polarized attitudes towards candidates ($b = -.187, p < .05$; $b = -.385, p < .001$, respectively). As demonstrated earlier, selective exposure is positively associated with political polarization ($b = .537, p < .001$) and political engagement ($b = .048, p < .05$). In addition, polarization has a positive influence on political participation ($b = .047, p < .001$).

Figure 4.5 Path Model of Mediating Role of Stereotype (Conservatives)



Note: The effects of demographic variables (gender, age, education, income, and race), political orientations (political efficacy, campaign interest, and general political knowledge), and general media consumption (TV, radio, newspapers, and online) were included in the model, but not shown in the Figure. Number of observations = 2,329. Path entries are unstandardized coefficients. The goodness of fit: $\chi^2 = 2.455$ ($df = 1$, $p = .117$), RMSEA = .025, CFI = .998, TLI = .866. Different from the knowledge models tested above, it is now possible for the stereotypes model to calculate goodness of fit statistics due to the overidentified model. Given the nature of this study which focuses on testing the mediating role of knowledge and stereotypes in the relationships between selective exposure and political polarization and participation, the influence of control variables which are included in the model in predicting all outcome variables are not discussed in the text.

Hypothesis 6-1 proposed that the relationship between conservative selective media use and polarization would be mediated by stereotypical perceptions of

candidates—(a) McCain’s age, and (b) Obama’s race. Mplus estimates of indirect effects show that conservatives’ selective exposure had indirect influences on political polarization through stereotypical perceptions of candidates’ age and race (see Table 4.8 for indirect effects of conservative selective exposure). Specifically, conservatives’ selective exposure to conservative media outlets led to perceptions that the U.S. is not ready to elect black president, which in turn influenced political polarization indirectly .042 ($p < .05$). In addition, conservatives’ selective exposure influenced their perceptions of McCain’s age, which in turn influenced political polarization indirectly .023 ($p < .10$). These results suggest that the influence of conservatives’ selective exposure on attitudinal polarization toward candidates is mediated by stereotypical perceptions of candidates’ age and race. Thus, Hypothesis 6-1 is supported.

Furthermore, Hypothesis 7-1 predicts the indirect effects of conservative selective media use on participation through stereotypes and polarization. Table 4.8 shows that conservatives’ selective exposure indirectly influences political participation via perceptions of Black presidency and attitudinal polarization with an indirect effect of .002 ($p < .05$). That is, conservatives’ selective exposure to conservative media outlets influenced perceptions of Black presidency, which, in turn, influenced attitudinal polarization, which ultimately is linked to increased levels of political participation. On the other hand, the indirect effects of conservatives’ selective exposure on participation through perceptions of McCain’s age and political polarization were not significant. Thus, Hypothesis 7-1 is partially supported.

Table 4.8 Direct and Indirect Effects of Structural Equation Model of Stereotype (Conservatives)

	b
Cons. Media → Polarization	.537***
Cons. Media → MC's age → Polarization	.023 [†]
Cons. Media → Black pres. → Polarization	.042*
Cons. Media → Participation	.048*
Cons. Media → MC's age → Participation	-.004
Cons. Media → Black pres. → Participation	-.004
Cons. Media → Polarization → Participation	.025***
Cons. Media → MC's age → Polarization → Participation	.001
Cons. Media → Black pres. → Polarization → Participation	.002*

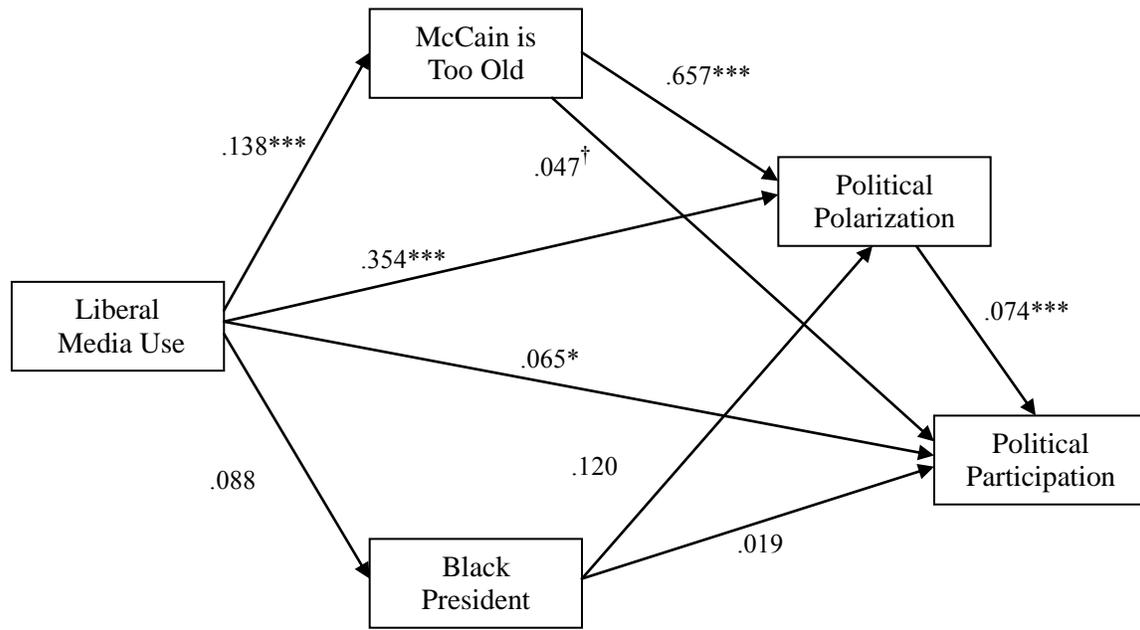
Note: Table reports unstandardized direct and indirect Mplus estimates.

[†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Figure 4.6 presents the results of the stereotypes model for liberals. This model also fit the data well, which indicates that the theorized model successfully reproduces the data ($\chi^2(1) = 1.699, p = .192, RMSEA = .020, CFI = .999, TLI = .933$). The variables included in this model accounted for 9.7% of the variance in prejudice about McCain's age, 8.8% in black presidency in U.S., 21% in attitudinal polarization, and 20.1% in political participation. In addition to the overall model fit, results show a significant positive relationship between liberals' selective exposure and stereotypical perceptions of McCain's age, which means that liberals who consume liberal media outlets more often were likely to perceive that McCain *is* too old to be a president ($b = .138, p < .001$).

However, although there was a positive relationship, the influence of liberals' selective exposure on perceptions of Black presidency did not reach statistical significance ($b = .088, p = \text{n.s.}$). Therefore, Hypothesis 7-1, predicting that liberals' selective exposure will be positively related to (a) perceptions that McCain is too old to be a president, and (b) perceptions that Americans are ready to elect a black president, is partially supported, with only perceptions of McCain's age. Regarding the other direct relationships in the model, liberals' selective exposure has significant influences on attitudinal polarization ($b = .354, p < .001$) and political participation ($b = .065, p < .05$); and higher levels of attitudinal polarization leads to greater levels of participation in politics ($b = .074, p < .001$). Stereotypical perceptions of McCain's age increase attitudinal polarization ($b = .657, p < .001$) and political participation ($b = .047, p < .10$).

Figure 4.6 Path Model of Mediating Role of Stereotype (Liberals)



Note: The effects of demographic variables (gender, age, education, income, and race), political orientations (political efficacy, campaign interest, and general political knowledge), and general media consumption (TV, radio, newspapers, and online) were included in the model, but not shown in the Figure. Number of observations = 1,677. Path entries are unstandardized coefficients. The goodness of fit: $\chi^2 = 1.699$ ($df = 1$, $p = .192$), RMSEA = .020, CFI = .999, TLI = .933.

Regarding the mediating role of stereotypical perceptions of candidates, Hypothesis 6-2 proposes indirect effects of liberals' selective media use on political polarization through stereotypical perceptions about candidates—in other words, the relationship between liberal selective media use and polarization will be mediated by perceptions of McCain's age and Black presidency in the United States. Results of

indirect effects show that liberals' selective exposure has indirect influences on political polarization via perceptions of McCain's age (see Table 4.9). Liberals' selective exposure to liberal media outlets influences their perceptions that McCain is too old to be a president, which in turn influences attitudinal polarization with an indirect effect of .091 ($p < .05$). These indicate that the influence of liberals' selective exposure on political polarization is mediated by stereotypical perceptions of McCain's age. However, there is no significant indirect effect of liberals' selective exposure on polarization through perceptions of Black presidency. Thus, Hypothesis 6-2 is partially supported.

With regard to the indirect effects of liberals' selective exposure on political participation, Hypothesis 7-2 states that the relationship between liberals' selective media use and political participation will be mediated by stereotypical perceptions of candidates (i.e., McCain's age and Obama's race) and attitudinal polarization. As Table 4.9 presents, liberals' exposure to liberal media outlets indirectly influences political participation through perceptions of McCain's age and polarization with an indirect effect of .007 ($p < .01$). In other words, liberals' selective exposure influences their perceptions of McCain's age, which, in turn, influences attitudinal polarization, which consequently contributes to increased levels of political participation. However, the indirect effects of liberals' selective exposure on political participation via perceptions of Black presidency in the U.S. and political polarization are not significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 7-2 is partially supported.

Table 4.9 Direct and Indirect Effects of Structural Equation Model of Stereotype (Liberals)

					b
Lib. Media	→	Polarization			.354***
Lib. Media	→	MC's age	→	Polarization	.091**
Lib. Media	→	Black pres.	→	Polarization	.011
Lib. Media	→	Participation			.065*
Lib. Media	→	MC's age	→	Participation	.007
Lib. Media	→	Black pres.	→	Participation	.002
Lib. Media	→	Polarization	→	Participation	.026***
Lib. Media	→	MC's age	→	Polarization → Participation	.007**
Lib. Media	→	Black pres.	→	Polarization → Participation	.001

Note: Table reports unstandardized direct and indirect Mplus estimates.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

THE EFFECTS OF DISSONANT MEDIA USE

Next, this research explores the role of dissonant media use in the relationships among consonant media use, attitudinal polarization, and participation. In addition to the main effects of exposure to dissonant media (Research Question 3), this dissertation examines whether individuals' exposure to counter-attitudinal media moderates the impact of selective exposure on outcome variables (i.e., issue knowledge, stereotypical perceptions of candidates, polarization, and political participation) (Research Question 4). Furthermore, this research explores whether individuals' general political knowledge moderates the influence of dissonant media use on issue knowledge, stereotypes, political

polarization, and political participation (Research Question 5). These main and moderation effects were explored based on the models proposed and tested in the previous sections—two “knowledge models” for conservatives and liberals; and two “stereotype models” for conservatives and liberals.

1) DISSONANT MEDIA USE FOR CONSERVATIVES

Table 4.10 presents the results of the potential moderating role of dissonant media use among conservatives. In addition to the main effects of dissonant media consumption (i.e., liberal media use), it demonstrates the interaction effects of dissonant media use and selective exposure and the interaction effects of dissonant media and general political knowledge on the respondents’ issue knowledge and stereotypical perceptions of candidates. First, the main effect of dissonant media use (i.e., liberal media use) turns out to have a positive association with issue knowledge, suggesting that conservatives who consume greater levels of liberal media show higher levels of candidate issue knowledge ($\beta = .117, p < .01$). The interaction coefficients displayed in Table 4.10 provide evidence that there is no moderation effect of dissonant media use in the relationship between conservatives’ selective exposure and individuals’ issue knowledge and perceptions that McCain is too old to be a president and United States is ready to elect a black president (Research Question 4). That is, the influence of conservatives’ selective exposure on citizens’ knowledge about candidates’ issue stances and stereotypical perceptions was not influenced by dissonant media consumption.

Addressing the interaction effects of dissonant media use and general political knowledge (Research Question 5) on outcome variables, Table 4.10 shows that the

interaction terms (Liberal media × General knowledge) are not significant predictors of individuals' issue knowledge or perceptions about the candidates' age and race.

Table 4.10 Moderating Role of Dissonant Media Use for Issue Knowledge and Stereotypical Perceptions of Candidates among Conservatives

	Issue Knowledge	McCain is Too Old	Black President
<i>Controls and Main Effects</i>			
Sex (female)	.007	.171	.153
Age	-.021	-.001	-.005
Education	.049	-.039	.088***
Income	.093**	-.061**	.000
Race (non-White)	.014	1.132***	-.041
Political efficacy	-.075*	-.136***	.130***
Campaign interest	.161***	-.091	.218***
General Political knowledge	.208***	-.234***	.205***
TV news	.078*	.034	.021
Talk radio	.012	-.022	.020
Newspaper	.035	.034*	-.014
Online news	.025	.032*	-.028*
Conservative media use	.062	-.146***	-.076*
Liberal media use	.117**	-.009	.029
<i>Interaction for Dissonant Media</i>			
Cons. media × Lib. media	-.056	-.043	.022
Lib. media × General Knowledge	-.025	-.029	.012
N	914	4,978	4,240
<i>Total R²</i>	.182***	.113***	.051***

Note: R square for “McCain is Too Old” and “Black Presidency” is Nagelkerke R Square. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Re-running the models without non-significant interaction terms didn't change the significance of the main effects results, ensuring that the findings of main effects are robust.

In addition, results show the significant main effects of dissonant media use (i.e., liberal media use) on polarization ($\beta = .093, p < .001$) and political participation ($\beta = .091, p < .001$). The results of testing the moderating role of dissonant media demonstrate that the influence of conservatives' selective exposure on political polarization and participation was not contingent upon dissonant media consumption. The coefficients of the interaction terms (conservative media use \times liberal media use) in Table 4.11 show that dissonant media use does not moderate the relationship between selective exposure and political polarization ($\beta = -.002, p = \text{n.s.}$) and participation ($\beta = .017, p = \text{n.s.}$).

Table 4.11 Moderating Role of Dissonant Media Use for Polarization and Participation among Conservatives

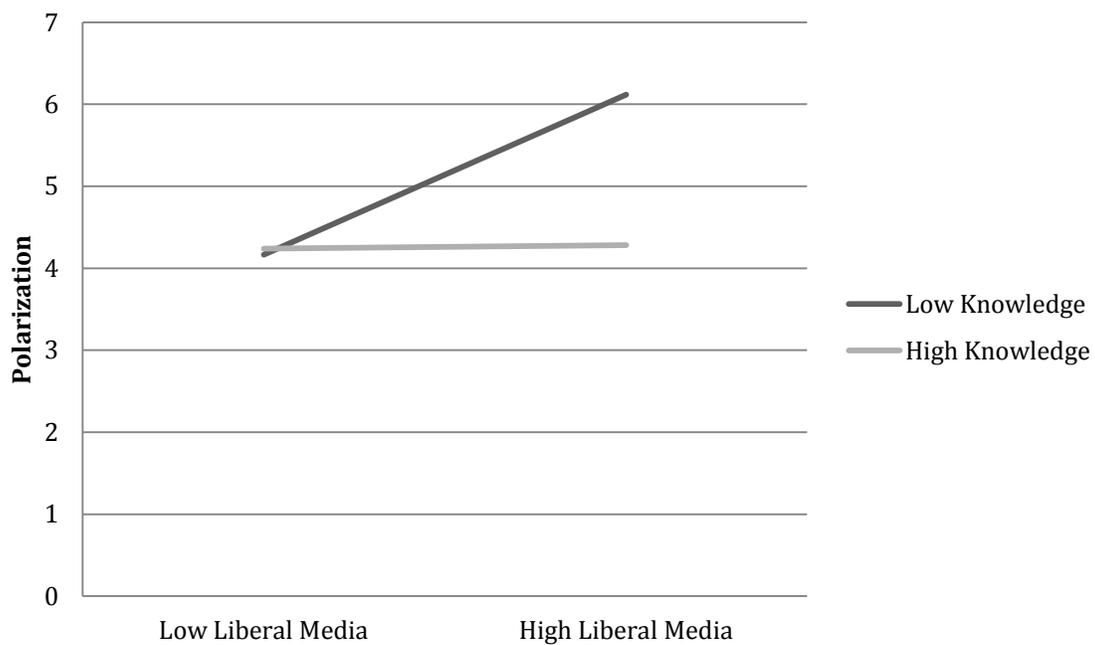
	Polarization	Participation
<i>Controls and Main Effects</i>		
Sex (female)	.095***	-.005
Age	.078***	.017
Education	-.064***	-.034
Income	-.021	.021
Race (non-White)	.048**	.051**
Political efficacy	.029*	.039*
Campaign interest	.215***	.189***
General Political knowledge	-.013	.005
TV news	.010	-.007
Talk radio	.035*	.062**
Newspaper	-.046**	.062**
Online news	.019	.080***
Conservative media use	.133***	.073***
Liberal media use	.093***	.091***
<i>Interaction for Dissonant Media</i>		
Cons. media × Lib. media	-.002	.017
Lib. media × General Knowledge	-.067***	-.044[†]
N	4,947	2,629
<i>Total R²</i>	.107***	.111***

[†]p < .06* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001.

Yet the effects of conservatives' dissonant media consumption on political polarization and political engagement were moderated by general political knowledge. The coefficient of the interaction term (liberal media use × general political knowledge) in Table 4.11 demonstrates that general political knowledge moderates the relationship between dissonant media use and political polarization ($\beta = -.067, p < .001$). To better understand this significant interaction coefficient, Figure 4.7 displays the interaction

effects of dissonant media use and general political knowledge on attitudinal polarization among conservatives. The light gray line represents those who have higher levels of political knowledge (i.e., sophisticates) whereas the dark line represents those who have lower levels of general political knowledge. Less knowledgeable individuals report higher levels of attitudinal polarization when they report greater amounts of dissonant media use compared to political sophisticates. In fact, more knowledgeable individuals show little change in levels of polarization regardless of increases in the amount of exposure to dissonant media outlets.

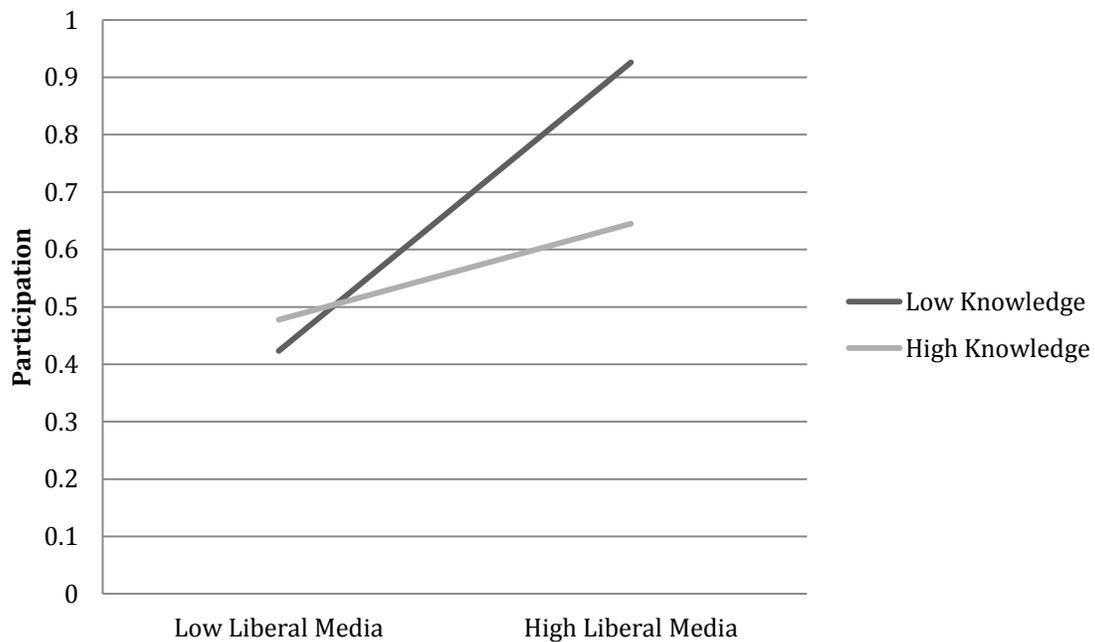
Figure 4.7 Interaction Effects of Dissonant Media use and Political Knowledge on Polarization among Conservatives



Note: General political knowledge and liberal media use values are calculated using one standard deviation from the mean, holding all other variables constant at their means.

The interaction between dissonant media use and general political knowledge on political participation is plotted in Figure 4.8. Again, the dark line indicates those who are less knowledgeable while the light line represents those with higher levels of political knowledge. The graph shows that individuals low in general political knowledge reported greater levels of political participation when they reported greater amounts of dissonant media use compared to those with high general political knowledge. These findings indicate that although exposure to dissonant media outlets leads to greater levels of political participation among conservatives, such effects are greater for less knowledgeable people than for political sophisticates.

Figure 4.8 Interaction Effects of Dissonant Media Use and Political Knowledge on Political Participation among Conservatives



Note: General political knowledge and liberal media use values are calculated using one standard deviation from the mean, holding all other variables constant at their means.

2) DISSONANT MEDIA USE FOR LIBERALS

Next, similar analyses were conducted for the main and potential moderating role of dissonant media use for liberals. Table 4.12 presents the results of the main effects (Research Question 3) and the potential moderating role of dissonant media use (with selective exposure and with general political knowledge—Research Question 4 and 5, respectively) among liberals. It examines these effects on the respondents' issue knowledge and stereotypical perceptions of candidates. The main effect of dissonant media use (i.e., conservative media use) turned out to be significant in influencing perceptions of McCain's age among liberals ($\beta = .102, p < .05$). The significant coefficient documents that liberals were more likely to perceive that McCain is too old to be president of the United States when they reported greater amounts of conservative media use, suggesting that exposure to uncongenial media is related to reinforcing stereotypical perceptions of an opposing candidate.

Next, the interaction coefficients displayed in Table 4.12 offer no evidence that dissonant media use moderates the relationship between liberals' selective exposure and issue knowledge and perceptions of the candidates' age and race. That is, the influence of liberals' selective exposure on citizens' knowledge about candidates' issue stances and stereotypical perceptions was not influenced by dissonant media consumption.

Research Question 5 addresses the interaction effects of dissonant media use and political sophistication on the outcome variables. Results show no significant interaction effects of conservative media consumption and general political knowledge on issue knowledge and stereotypical perceptions of the candidates.

Table 4.12 Moderating Role of Dissonant Media Use for Issue Knowledge and Stereotypical Perceptions of Candidates among Liberals

	Issue Knowledge	McCain is Too Old	Black President
<i>Controls and Main Effects</i>			
Sex (female)	-.081*	.341***	-.044
Age	.000	.002	.002
Education	.145**	-.036	.017
Income	.025	-.019	-.023
Race (non-White)	.030	.526***	-.680***
Political efficacy	.017	-.011	.158***
Campaign interest	.268***	.325***	.334***
General Political knowledge	.273***	.019	.241***
TV news	.073*	.019	.007
Talk radio	.076*	-.013	.002
Newspaper	.053	.011	-.032
Online news	.075*	.044***	.013
Liberal media use	-.057	.121***	.023
Conservative media use	-.024	.102*	-.098
<i>Interaction for Dissonant Media</i>			
Lib. media × Cons. media	-.064	-.047	.052
Cons. media × General Knowledge	.045	.007	-.025
N	592	3,609	3,073
<i>Total R²</i>	.345***	.061***	.078***

Note: R square for “McCain is Too Old” and “Black Presidency” is Nagelkerke R Square. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Re-running the models without non-significant interaction terms didn’t change the significance of the main effects results, ensuring that the findings of main effects are robust.

Furthermore, Table 4.13 shows the results of the potential interaction effects of dissonant media use and liberals’ selective exposure and the interaction effects of dissonant media use and general political knowledge as well as the main effects of

dissonant media consumption on political polarization and participation. Dissonant media use among liberals (i.e., conservative media consumption) turns out to be non-significant which indicates that uncongenial media consumption among liberals does not have any influence on political polarization and participation.

Table 4.13 Moderating Role of Dissonant Media Use for Polarization and Participation among Liberals

	Polarization	Participation
<i>Controls and Main Effects</i>		
Sex (female)	.112***	.058**
Age	.056**	-.012
Education	-.051**	-.034
Income	-.065***	.011
Race (non-White)	.104***	.043
Political efficacy	.011	.052*
Campaign interest	.255***	.247***
General Political knowledge	-.025	.006
TV news	-.025	-.025
Talk radio	.042**	.012
Newspaper	.072***	.065**
Online news	.065***	.127***
Liberal media use	.097***	.104***
Conservative media use	.009	.033
<i>Interaction for Dissonant Media</i>		
Lib. media × Cons. media	.004	.034
Cons. media × General Knowledge	-.008	-.028
N	3,624	1,894
<i>Total R²</i>	.143***	.154***

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Re-running the models without non-significant interaction terms didn't change the significance of the main effects results, ensuring that the findings of main effects are robust.

Table 4.13 also presents the results of the potential moderating effect of liberals' dissonant media use in the relationships between selective exposure and political polarization and participation (see first interaction terms in the models). These results address Research Question 4, asking whether selective exposure and exposure to dissonant media use interact to influence individuals' polarization and political participation. Results demonstrate that dissonant media use does not moderate the influence of liberals' selective exposure on political polarization ($\beta = .004, p = \text{n.s.}$) and participation ($\beta = .034, p = \text{n.s.}$). These results indicate that the influence of liberals' selective exposure on political polarization and participation was not affected by the extent to which they are exposed to dissonant media outlets. In addition, results document non-significant interactions between liberals' conservative media use and general political knowledge in the political polarization and participation models.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The results provide a comprehensive examination of the mechanisms of political polarization and participation derived by citizens' selective exposure and the role of dissonant media consumption in the relationships between likeminded media use and political polarization and participation. Table 4.14 provides a summary of the findings for the hypotheses and research questions.

There was considerable support for the hypotheses regarding the occurrence of selective exposure and the direct influence of citizens' selective exposure on political polarization and participation. The hypothesis with regard to a mediating role of polarization between selective exposure and political engagement also was supported. There was no evidence in favor of the knowledge model (i.e., selective exposure \rightarrow issue

knowledge → polarization → participation). In contrast, selective exposure was found to influence individuals' stereotypic perceptions of candidates; and likeminded media consumption was found to have indirect effects on political polarization and participation through stereotypical perceptions of the candidates' age and race. With regard to the role of dissonant media use, results show that conservatives' dissonant media consumption increased issue knowledge, polarization, and political participation while liberals' dissimilar media use reinforced stereotypes (i.e., McCain's age). Also, there were some results of the moderating role of dissonant media use in predicting polarization and participation among conservatives. Dissonant media consumption interacted with general political knowledge to influence conservatives' attitudinal polarization and political participation. However, there were no significant interaction effects between dissonant media use and selective exposure on outcome variables of interest (i.e., issue knowledge, stereotypic perceptions of candidates, polarization, and political participation). In the next chapter, I will discuss the findings and implications of the study and elaborate on limitations of the study and directions for future research.

Table 4.14 Summary of Results of Hypotheses and Research Questions

	Results
<i>Hypotheses & Research Questions:</i>	
H1: Selective Exposure (SE)	Yes
H2: SE → Polarization	Yes
H3: SE → Participation	Yes
H4: SE → Polarization → Participation	Yes
RQ1: SE → Issue Knowledge	No
RQ2: SE → Issue Knowledge → Polarization → Participation	No
H5: SE → Stereotypes	
H5-1: Con. SE → (a) McCain's age (b) Obama's race	Yes
H5-2: Lib. SE → (a) McCain's age (b) Obama's race	Yes (a)
H6: SE → Stereotypes → Polarization	
H6-1: Con. SE → (a) McCain's age (b) Obama's race → Polarization	Yes
H6-2: Lib. SE → (a) McCain's age (b) Obama's race → Polarization	Yes (a)
H7: SE → Stereotypes → Polarization → Participation	
H7-1: Con. SE → (a) McCain's age (b) Obama's race → Polarization → Participation	Yes (b)
H7-2: Lib. SE → (a) McCain's age (b) Obama's race → Polarization → Participation	Yes (a)
RQ3: Diss. Media → (a) Issue Kn, (b) Stereotypes, (c) Polarization, (d) Participation	Yes (a, c, d)* (b) [†]
RQ4: Diss. Media × SE → (a) Issue Kn, (b) Stereotypes, (c) Polarization, (d) Participation	No
RQ5: Diss. Media × Sophistication → (a) Issue Kn, (b) Stereotypes, (c) Polarization, (d) Participation	Yes (c, d)*

Note: * only for conservatives; [†] only for McCain's age among liberals. a, b, c, or d in parentheses refer to outcome variables or mediating variables of interest in each research question and hypothesis; they are modified in parentheses when results are statistically significant. For example, H7-1 is supported only with (b) Obama's race (i.e., conservatives' SE → Obama's race → Polarization → Participation).

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

This dissertation analyzed the mechanisms of political polarization and participation derived by selective exposure. In doing so, it provided models that went beyond the simple or direct relationship that selective exposure has on citizens' attitudinal polarization and political participation. Given that little was known about how and why selective exposure leads to attitudinal polarization and participation, this research proposed and empirically examined two mechanisms (i.e., issue knowledge and stereotypic perceptions of candidates) by which citizens' selective exposure could lead to attitudinal polarization and political participation. Thus, this research focused on the process by which likeminded media consumption exerts an influence on political polarization and participation. In addition, this dissertation examined the potential main and moderating effects of dissonant media use. Beyond analyzing the main effects of dissonant media use, I tested whether and how dissonant media consumption interacts with likeminded media use to influence the outcome variables interest (i.e., issue knowledge, stereotypic perceptions of the candidates' age and race, polarization, and participation); and whether and how exposure to dissonant media and political sophistication (i.e., general political knowledge) interact to influence outcome variables of interest.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Selective Exposure, Polarization, and Participation: Knowledge vs. Stereotypes

This dissertation research starts with citizens' selective exposure, the idea that individuals use media outlets that match their attitudes and beliefs more than individuals who do not share the outlets' viewpoints, and its influence on attitudinal polarization and

political participation. Based on prior literature, three hypotheses were tested as necessary prefatory relationships: first, citizens will engage in selective exposure (i.e., likeminded media outlets); second, selective exposure to ideologically-likeminded media will be positively related to individuals' attitudinal polarization; and third, selective exposure to likeminded media will be positively related to individuals' political participation. All three hypotheses were supported. Results provide evidence that citizens exert selective exposure and this likeminded media consumption is significantly linked to individuals' attitudinal polarization and engagement in political activities, yielding consistent outcomes with recent studies (Dilliplane, 2011; Gil de Zúñiga, et al., 2012; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Johnson, et al., 2009; Johnson, et al., 2011; Stroud, 2010, 2011). The findings of this study add evidence of citizens' selective exposure and the consequences of selective exposure.

The extant literature on the consequence of selective exposure has focused on attitudinal polarization and political participation separately. Beyond the direct and separate influence of selective exposure on polarization and political participation, I found that individuals' attitudinal polarization mediates the influence of likeminded media use on political participation. That is, individuals who engage in selective exposure are more likely to form more polarized attitudes, and, in turn, those with polarized attitudes are more likely to participate in politics. I present and test these relationships as necessary benchmark relationships for consideration of the mediating mechanisms considered in the knowledge and stereotype models.

The current literature is somewhat limited in its ability to describe the normative role of selective exposure in the democratic process—that is, should we worry about selective exposure? Examinations of the direct relationships of selective exposure to polarization and selective exposure to participation fail to provide an answer to this

question. The question of whether selective exposure is normatively desirable or not remains open until we know the underlying mechanisms—how and why selective exposure affects political polarization and participation. Therefore, drawing from the O-S-O-R model, I argued that citizens’ likeminded media consumption might affect individuals’ cognitions, such as factual knowledge and stereotypical perceptions of candidates. These cognitive resources, in turn, may be used to evaluate and form attitudes toward candidates, which finally influence citizens’ engagement in a variety of political activities. To test these relationships, I proposed and tested the knowledge and stereotype models, as demonstrated in Chapter 2. The knowledge and stereotype models propose that individuals’ issue knowledge and stereotypical perceptions of candidates mediate the relationship between selective exposure and political polarization and participation, respectively.

First, the knowledge model examined whether selective exposure is associated with individuals’ campaign issue knowledge and whether this issue knowledge, in turn, influences attitudinal polarization and political participation. Although there are concerns that likeminded media consumption may lead to a less politically-informed public, this study provides no evidence that selective exposure decreases citizens’ factual issue knowledge. Results from this research showed that issue knowledge does not mediate the relationship between selective exposure, attitudinal polarization, and political participation. Although selective exposure may contribute to a healthy democracy by energizing citizens to actively participate in politics, the present results could suggest that participatory activities driven by congenial media consumption might not be desirable because political participation is not based on political knowledge.

The stereotype model expects that stereotypical perceptions of candidates play a significant role in the relationship between selective exposure and political polarization

and participation. The stereotype model set forth suggests the following sequence: selective exposure affects individuals' stereotypical perceptions of candidates; stereotypical perceptions of candidates, in turn, trigger attitudinal polarization; and, finally, polarized attitudes lead to higher levels of political participation. This study found considerable support for the theorized model. The results demonstrated that selective exposure was significantly associated with individuals' stereotypical perceptions of the candidates' age and race, and these stereotypes subsequently played a substantial role in citizens' attitudinal polarization and political participation. More specifically, conservatives' perception that U.S. is not ready to elect black president mediated the influence of selective media use on political polarization and participation. This finding suggests that conservative media may have motivated conservative people by providing and activating a stereotypical cue (i.e., Obama's race) and subsequently polarizing their attitudes toward candidates and mobilizing them to participate in politics. Liberals, meanwhile, were more likely to use the other stereotypical perception of candidates—McCain's age. Liberals consuming liberal media outlets were more likely to think that McCain is too old to be a president, and this perception subsequently contributed to attitudinal polarization and increased levels of political participation.

In sum, this study provides evidence of a significant link between politically like-minded media use and stereotypical perceptions of candidates. When individuals engage in selective exposure, they are more likely to have stereotypical perceptions of the candidates' age and race. This indicates that ideologically slanted media use may trigger stereotypes and prejudice. Once stereotypical perceptions of candidates have been activated by likeminded media consumption, these beliefs are more accessible for subsequent judgments in one's cognitive network. As a consequence, the enhanced accessibility of stereotypes toward candidates may influence citizens' attitudes toward candidates. These

findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that stereotypes are activated by media use and influence viewers' attitudes (Domke, 2001; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Higgins, 1996). While prior research on the relationship between media use and stereotypes has focused mainly on general media use, this study expands the current literature by providing evidence that selective exposure can affect stereotypes. These results indicate that stereotypes may play an important role particularly when citizens engage in selective exposure, form polarized attitudes, and participate in politics. Regarding the mediating role of stereotypical perceptions of candidates, one might argue that views about McCain's age (i.e., a YES response to whether McCain is too old to be president) could be a rational assessment of his qualifications. However, the patterns of the results regarding the two paths (i.e., McCain's age and a Black president) among conservatives and liberals may counter that argument. In the full model of stereotypes, only the "McCain's age" path was significant among liberals while only the "Obama's race" path was significant among conservatives. The mediating role of perceptions of McCain's age in the relationship between selective exposure and political polarization and participation was significant among liberals while perceptions of a Black presidency turned out to be not significant. In contrast, conservatives' selective media use indirectly influenced attitudinal polarization and political participation only through the perception of a Black presidency in the U.S., not via McCain's age.

Notably, these findings—the knowledge model versus the stereotype model—show the contrasting mechanisms of political polarization and participation derived by selective exposure, and thus provide evidence for discussing the normative consequences of selective exposure. Citizens' like-minded media consumption fails to increase factual issue knowledge. Instead, ideologically like-minded media use produces stereotypical perceptions of candidates (i.e., McCain's age and Obama's race), and these stereotypical

perceptions of candidates, in turn, lead to more polarized attitudes and higher levels of political participation.

Therefore, the answer to the main question of this study “how and why does selective media use facilitate citizens’ political polarization and participation?” is stereotypes and prejudice about candidates. Stereotypical perceptions or prejudice of candidates’ age and race can be explained as mechanisms of polarization and political participation that is driven by ideologically like-minded media consumption.

Attenuate or Reinforce? The Role of Dissonant Media Use

The role of exposure to dissonant media outlets was examined to understand whether and how counter-attitudinal exposure influences the relationship between selective exposure and outcome variables of interests—issue knowledge, stereotypical perceptions of candidates, attitudinal polarization, and political participation. In addition to main effects of dissonant media use, two sets of interaction terms were created and tested (i.e., dissonant media use \times likeminded media use and dissonant media use \times political sophistication).

A prominent finding of the analyses is that exposure to dissonant media outlets increases conservatives’ issue knowledge and political participation. This research found that conservatives’ dissonant media consumption is related to higher levels of issue knowledge and greater levels of political participation. Specifically, exposure to liberal media among conservatives increased knowledge of the candidates’ issue stances and political participation. These results are consistent with prior research that showed a positive role of exposure to diverse or dissimilar views in increasing citizens’ awareness of legitimate rationales for oppositional viewpoints and levels of political tolerance, as well as decreasing false public opinion (Mutz, 2002b; Wojcieszak & Price, 2009) and

contributing to greater levels of participatory activities (Leighley, 1990; Scheufele, et al., 2006; Scheufele, et al., 2004).⁸ These results support the notion that exposure to dissimilar views may contribute to a democracy by helping citizens to learn about candidates' issue policies, which also indicates that avoiding diverse and dissonant perspectives might not reap such benefits (Dilliplane, 2011; Garrett, 2009b; Mutz, 2002b; Sunstein, 2001, 2007).

The positive relationship between dissonant media use and political participation among conservatives may be explained by “corrective actions” (Rojas, 2010). Rojas (2010) suggests that people may engage in corrective behaviors to advance their own views and counterbalance other views. When faced with different viewpoints that may sway public opinion (e.g., perceptions that public opinion would be influenced by dissonant media outlets), individuals may employ reactive actions to correct discrepant opinions. Conservatives exposure to dissonant media outlets may elicit motivations to defend their own views and counteract the dissimilar point of views that in turn result in a

⁸ Unlike the findings with regards to exposure to dissimilar perspectives here, Mutz (2002a) showed that cross-cutting exposure decreased political participation. Her argument regarding the negative effect of cross-cutting exposure on participation, given that it is within the interpersonal discussion networks, is that people may have a sense of social accountability to the views of others when they talk with other people having dissimilar views. Therefore, a negative effect of exposure to dissimilar views on participation would be from “cross-pressures” (Lazarsfeld, et al., 1944) within one’s political discussion network. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that there have been inconsistent results regarding the effects of cross-cutting exposure in one’s discussion network on participation and there is a significant debate regarding the conflicting findings. Simply put, literature on this issue suggests that different conceptualizations and measures of cross-cutting exposure (e.g., dissimilarity in terms of views on issues/ideology or party identification and individual level/network level) and participation (e.g., position-taking/non-position-taking activities and private/public participation) may produce somewhat different results (see, for more about this, Eveland & Hively, 2009; e.g., Lee, 2012; Leighley, 1990; McLeod, et al., 1999).

willingness to engage in political activities. This explanation, however, requires additional research.

Despite the contributing role of exposure to dissimilar views, another prominent finding is that exposure to dissonant media outlets tends to reinforce individuals' prior opinions or beliefs, which relates to motivated information processing. *Motivated reasoning* refers to a biased information processing in which individuals are motivated to interpret and process (dissimilar) information in a biased matter that reinforces their predispositions or prior beliefs (Kunda, 1990; Taber & Lodge, 2006). This study found that when individuals were exposed to dissimilar media outlets, they were more likely to reinforce their polarized attitudes and stereotypical perceptions of candidates. Specifically, I found that, among conservatives, liberal media use increased their attitudinal polarization, rather than attenuating the extent of attitudinal polarization. These results are consistent with previous studies demonstrating the participants reinforce their existing attitudes and beliefs when exposed to counter-attitudinal information. Meffert, Chung, Joiner, Waks, and Garst (2006), for example, found that although participants with strong candidate preferences selected and spent more time reading negative information about their preferred candidate, they ended up having more positive evaluations of the preferred candidate. Their findings suggest that individuals engage in motivated information processing by counter-arguing negative information about the preferred candidate and supporting an existing candidate preference (Meffert, et al., 2006). Interestingly, a similar pattern appeared with regard to liberals' stereotypical perceptions of candidates. Results showed some evidence that exposure to dissonant media outlets reinforced stereotypes or prejudice of candidates—that is, when liberals are exposed to dissonant media outlets (i.e., conservative media outlets), they were more likely to perceive that McCain is too old to be a president.

In sum, regarding the main effects of dissonant media use, the results provide some evidence of motivated reasoning or reinforcing polarization when individuals are exposed to dissonant media outlets, and show no evidence of attenuating polarization. Mutz (2006b), indeed, noted that public opinion usually does not converge when people are exposed to information that contradicts their predispositions, suggesting that it is doubtful that information from mass media would decrease the opinion gaps. This is because people process information in a biased manner. She further explains that:

Biased processing models underscore a skepticism prevalent in contemporary political psychology that information is the cure-all for what ails the quality of political decisions. If people are not passive recipients of information, but rather active choosers, interpreters, and rationalizers, then mass media are severely limited in what they can do about political polarization. (p. 231)

In the analysis of the interaction effects of dissonant media use and political sophistication, results showed some evidence that sophistication moderated the influence of exposure to dissonant media outlets on attitudinal polarization and participation among conservatives. Specifically, less-informed conservatives, compared to politically sophisticated conservatives, showed more polarized attitudes when they were exposed to greater amount of dissonant media; and in fact, knowledgeable conservatives showed little change in degrees of attitudinal polarization. Similarly, less knowledgeable conservatives reported greater levels of political participation when they used more dissonant media outlets compared to those with higher general political knowledge, suggesting that the contributing effects of dissonant media use on political participation are greater for the less-informed than for political sophisticates.

These results contradict some research showing that polarization was greater for more knowledgeable individuals than among less-informed ones when they were exposed

to dissimilar information (e.g., Taber & Lodge, 2006). A possible explanation for different results involves the methodological approaches used in previous studies. Evidence for attitude polarization when encountering cross-cutting perspectives largely comes from experimental designs which manipulate exposure to dissimilar points of view, in settings that do not resemble the actual circumstances where citizens use dissonant media outlets (Wojcieszak, 2011). In particular, participants in such studies were given a task, for example, to explain the controversy or arguments to others after they were exposed certain information (Taber & Lodge, 2006). Given the task in a limited time, participants may make a decision or take a position regarding controversial issues and arguments even though they may need more time to think about the pros and cons. These processes might make it hard to capture individuals' information processing when exposed to dissimilar perspectives. In other words, experimental designs with regard to the consequences of exposure to counter-attitudinal information might prevent the detection of the effects documented here. In experimental settings where both less knowledgeable and sophisticated individuals have the same limited amount of time to make a decision, political sophisticates may be more likely to counter-argue dissimilar perspectives and reinforce their preexisting beliefs compared to less knowledgeable people. However, this may be somewhat different in more realistic settings. Being exposed to contradictory information may increase individuals' need for further information; thus, when people are exposed to dissimilar perspectives in reality, they may want more information from other sources in order to rethink or bolster their original positions (Eveland, 2004; Scheufele, et al., 2006). Post hoc information seeking may occur more for sophisticated individuals than less knowledgeable people because knowledgeable individuals are more motivated and have more cognitive resources to expend on researching certain issues and arguments. This may mean that knowledgeable

individuals display similar attitudes when they search more information from other sources. In other words, when exposed to dissimilar views, sophisticates, compared to the less-informed, may spend more time critically processing new information which in turn may lead them to have either similar, or more ambivalent, attitudes (Schemer, 2012). When knowledgeable people are exposed to dissimilar perspectives through mass media in a natural setting, they may come to recognize more reasons for the other side's arguments and over time, exposure to dissonant information may enhance ambivalence, or simultaneous activation of conflicting attitudes, which is related to balanced judgments and may lead to moderate evaluations of issues and objects (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Meffert, Guge, & Lodge, 2004). Therefore, politically sophisticated people, compared to less knowledgeable individuals, would show little increase in polarization and a smaller increase in political participation, in part because of having attitude ambivalence which refers to an endorsement of competing beliefs or considerations simultaneously present in the evaluation of attitude objects such as issues and candidates (Kim, et al., in press; Lavine, 2001; Nir, 2005). In contrast, less knowledgeable individuals may be less inclined to spend the time to critically evaluate conflicting perspectives and instead, may dismiss other arguments and bolster their previous attitudes or beliefs, which may in turn lead to polarized attitudes (Schemer, 2012). This explanation, however, needs additional research.

This study also analyzes whether and how selective exposure and exposure to dissonant media interact to influence outcome variables of interest (i.e., issue knowledge, stereotypic perceptions of candidates, polarization, and political participation). No interaction effects were significant. This is probably because individuals who engage in selective exposure might want to preserve their belief system based on goals "to maintain one's existing belief structure as much as possible, even if contradictory evidence exists"

(Kim, 2007, p. 190). These individuals may not be influenced by dissonant media use—regardless of any combination of likeminded and dissonant exposure. In other words, although dissonant media consumption does have an effect in some instances (i.e., main effects, controlling for selective exposure), it does not influence the effects of selective media use on individuals’ issue knowledge, stereotypes, attitudinal polarization, and political participation.

It is important to note that some evidence of the role of exposure to dissimilar views was found only among conservatives (e.g., main effects on issue knowledge, polarization, and participation and interaction effects with sophistication for political polarization and participation) and some evidence was found only among liberals (e.g., dissonant media use’s effect on stereotypical perceptions). A few studies have shown the results occurred only for one ideological leaning. For example, Iyengar et al. (2008) found that conservative partisans were like to access information about the Republican candidate, but liberal partisans did not prefer messages about the Democrat candidate. They explained that the finding may be “idiosyncratic (i.e., specific to this particular election)” (Iyengar, et al., 2008, p. 197). Similar findings and explanations are provided by a more recent study. Knobloch-Westerwick and Kleinman (2011) showed that liberals and Democrats preferred consonant articles, but a preference for consonant messages was not present among conservatives and Republicans. According to the authors, conservatives/Republican-leaning participants sought articles in line with the Democratic Party because, given the conditions of the 2008 campaign in which Obama was polling ahead of McCain, learning about Obama would be more useful than information about McCain (Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2011). In the context of the 2008 campaign, conservatives could be likely to form more polarized attitudes when they are exposed to dissonant perspectives, and more likely to participate in politics (note that

these patterns were stronger for less knowledgeable individuals than sophisticates)—in order to correct discrepant opinions—as their preferred party fell behind in the polls during the 2008 election campaigns. In other words, when exposed to dissonant information, conservatives may have exerted motivated information processing (Taber & Lodge, 2006) and employed reactive actions (e.g., political participation) (Rojas, 2010) in order to correct or make an effort to change the situation that their preferred candidate was falling behind, as opposed to liberals whose candidate was leading. Taken together with such prior studies, the question of how to explain these patterns of partial findings by political leaning warrants further investigation.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are some limitations in the current study that have to be acknowledged. A first limitation of the research refers to the causal relationships. It should be noted that the data used are not well-suited for proving the causal relationships. I have argued that exposure to likeminded media outlets directly and indirectly influences attitudinal polarization and political participation via issue knowledge or stereotypic perceptions of candidates. Although these causal hypotheses were based on previous research, the cross-sectional data analyzed cannot provide clear insight regarding causal direction. This means that the relationships between selective exposure, attitudinal polarization, and political participation reported here could be interpreted otherwise—that is, it is still possible that individuals who are more participatory and polarized are more likely to engage in selective exposure. Some research found reciprocal relationships between selective exposure and polarization—in addition to the causal effects of selective exposure on attitude polarization, some evidence indicated that polarization leads to selective exposure (Stroud, 2010).

Although the data cannot rule out the possibility of reverse causal directions, there are strong theoretical reasons to expect that the causal direction is as proposed. When taking into account the potential mediating variables (i.e., issue knowledge and stereotypical perceptions of candidates) in the models tested in this research, the causal directions proposed here are plausible. For example, the idea that those who participate more often and/or have more polarized attitudes form more stereotypical perceptions about candidates' age and race seems to make less sense than a notion that media use may influence individuals' perceptions of candidates, which in turn influences candidate evaluations and participatory activities. Indeed, many studies using cross-sectional data have assumed that media consumption relates to individuals' attitudes and behavioral outcomes (e.g., Brundidge, 2010; Jung, et al., 2011; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). Panel studies also have provided more evidence of the causal relationships proposed and tested here thereby lending support to the causal order proposed here (Dilliplane, 2011; Shah, et al., 2005; Stroud, 2010). In particular, this study's causality approach has been drawn from the longstanding O-S-O-R model of communication effects which has provided the broad foundations for the causal orderings or indirect processes adopted in this research. Using cross-sectional and panel data, there is strong theoretical and empirical evidence showing that audience members' predispositions (O_1) are antecedents of citizens' media use (S) and it has the effects on the ways in which individuals interact with media content (O_2) and their responses including political behaviors (R) (e.g., Cho, et al., 2009; Jung, et al., 2011; Shah, et al., 2005; Shah et al., 2007). Drawing causal relationships from the O-S-O-R framework, the model proposed and tested in this research posits that citizens' selective exposure to politically consonant media outlets leads to candidate issue knowledge (i.e., knowledge model) or/and stereotypical perceptions of candidates (i.e., stereotype model), which in turn lead to political polarization and political participation.

Nevertheless, testing a non-recursive model, by, for example, using panel data and experiments could shed more light on the causality issue, which is a suggestion for future research.

Another point that should be noted is that this dissertation has a somewhat straightforward assessment about candidate issue knowledge. Although this study provides no evidence of the significant link between selective exposure and individuals' issue knowledge, these results may be due to the issue knowledge measurements used. Considering that the measures of issue knowledge were somewhat general, it could be argued that the non-significant relationships between like-minded media use and issue knowledge are attributable to a lack of more sophisticated issue knowledge items (e.g., more specific or detailed information about campaign issues, for example, asking specific policies regarding tax cuts rather than just asking “which candidate would provide more tax cuts to the middle class?”). Thus, future research that keeps improving upon the measurement of issue knowledge is one path to pursue; such studies on the relationship between selective exposure and factual knowledge with more developed measures will generate more understanding.

Another limitation of the study relates to the measurement of the key variable, selective exposure. This study measures selective exposure based on respondents' perceptions of media slant. Yet people do not interpret the slant of media coverage in the same manner. For instance, age and education proved to be significant factors influencing individuals' perceived media slant (Gunther & Chia, 2001). Literature also demonstrates that a higher level of involvement (e.g., personal importance and value-relevant involvement) would lead to greater hostile media perception—that is, more highly involved individuals would perceive a greater degree of unfavorable slant in the news media (Choi, Yang, & Chang, 2009; Gunther & Christen, 2002). Since people are likely

to display the hostile media phenomenon in different manners according to knowledge levels (Vallone, et al., 1985), measuring selective exposure based on perceptions could account for some findings of the significant moderation effects of political sophistication found in this research. That is, because knowledgeable individuals are more likely to display the hostile media phenomenon, the results of the moderation effects of general political knowledge could be an artifact of the perception approach to the measurement of selective exposure. Despite the perception approach's advantages and unique implications, therefore, further analysis with the actual measures approach could be an important avenue for future research to see whether it will replicate the findings of the current study or yield a different picture.

More Mediation and Moderation Mechanisms: Misperceptions and Disagreement

Most important is to continue expanding studies of the consequences of selective exposure to account for the normative implications of exposure to likeminded perspectives and exposure to diverse opinions in a democratic process. Future work needs to further probe the factors that mediate or/and moderate the influence of selective exposure on outcome variables such as political polarization and participation. The focus on direct consequences of selective exposure may gloss over the complexity of mechanisms of attitudinal polarization and participatory activities, which may limit discussions about, for example, the normative implications of the effects of selective exposure. The mediating models proposed and tested in this research are only two possible mediating mechanisms. Thus, more efforts should be made to identify and refine mediating mechanisms through which selective exposure might have influences on attitudinal polarization and political engagement in order to better understand why and

how polarization results from selective exposure and how it relates to behavioral consequences such as political participation.

A possible mediating variable that could be examined in future research is misperceptions. Specifically, selective exposure may lead to individuals' misperceptions about politics, which in turn may lead to forming polarized attitudes and participating in politics. Misperceptions are "people's beliefs about factual matters are not supported by clear evidence and expert opinion—a definition that includes both false and unsubstantiated beliefs about the world" (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010, p. 305). For example, Nyhan and Reifler define the belief that Saddam moved or hid weapons of mass destruction (WMD) before the U.S. invasion of Iraq as a misperception. Kuklinski et al. (2000) noted that while studies have documented deficiencies in citizen knowledge about public affairs, misinformation has received little attention. They found evidence of misinformation about welfare—individuals had highly inaccurate beliefs—and this misinformation was closely related to individuals' policy preferences about welfare. These studies indicate that misinformation about candidates can be related to citizens' evaluations and attitudes toward candidates, which could be closely associated with one's attitudinal polarization.

Understanding the role of misperceptions in attitude formation and political behaviors is important (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Eveland, 2001; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010), particularly in the context of political polarization and participation. This is because people's lack of information may lead to incorrect decision making. Further, misinformation not only functions as a "barrier to factually educating citizens, it can lead to collective preferences that differ significantly from those that would exist if people were adequately informed" (Kuklinski, et al., 2000, p. 792). Unfortunately, very little research has attempted to explore the role of misperceptions in

the context of selective exposure, political polarization, and participation. Recognizing the importance of misperceptions in influencing individuals' attitudes and behaviors, future research can explore how selective exposure relates to citizens' misperceptions about politics, polarization, and participation—that is, proposing and testing a model that suggests citizens' like-minded media consumption influences misperceptions, which in turn leads to their attitudinal polarization and participation.

In addition to counter-attitudinal media consumption, the role of interpersonal political conversation in the process of political polarization and participation is also worth taking into account. Previous research on political polarization and participation mainly focused on the influence of individuals' media use (i.e., whether it is a congenial or counter-attitudinal source) on the polarization process (e.g., Dilliplane, 2011; Johnson, et al., 2009; Stroud, 2008, 2010). While a body of research on selective exposure has focused on media outlets, a separate body of research has focused on interpersonal-communication factors that influence political attitudes and behaviors (Huckfeldt, Mendez, & Osborn, 2004; Scheufele, et al., 2004).

Political discussion helps citizens to develop their attitudes and beliefs about politics and to become involved in the campaign process. Since classic studies contended that political discussion exerted a strong influence on the political process (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Lazarsfeld, et al., 1944), subsequent studies examining the role of political discussion in the democratic process have shown the positive influence of interpersonal political conversation among citizens on democratic outcomes such as political knowledge and participation (McLeod, et al., 1999; Valenzuela, et al., 2012; Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000). Most studies have examined how patterns of news media use and political discussion influence various outcomes such as citizens' attitudes, political knowledge acquisition, and behaviors, including political participation (Eveland &

Hively, 2009; Jung, et al., 2011; Shah, et al., 2005). However, little research has investigated the role that citizens' discussion might play in the relationship between patterns of media selection (i.e., selective media use) and political polarization and participation.

Research on interpersonal discussion networks has examined how various attributes of discussion relate to important democratic variables such as citizens' opinion change, political knowledge, and participation (e.g., Eveland & Hively, 2009; Mutz, 2002a; Scheufele, et al., 2004; Wojcieszak & Price, 2009). Democratic theories point out that disagreement is an essential component of a sound democracy because exposure to various points of view forces individuals to learn about different perspectives and to consider challenging opinions more carefully, thereby enhancing understanding of contrasting viewpoints (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; McPhee, Smith, & Ferguson, 1963). Studies examining the role of disagreement in the political process have provided a rationale for linking disagreement to political polarization. The literature has shown that exposure to dissimilar views contributes to increasing individuals' awareness of legitimate rationales for oppositional viewpoints and levels of political tolerance (Mutz, 2002b). Prior studies also have shown that the extent to which citizens' political conversations cross lines of political difference is positively related to greater knowledge acquisition and having more balanced judgments (Mutz & Mondak, 2006; Sniderman, 1981). Wojcieszak and Price (2009) examined the role of disagreement in political discussion and found that interpersonal disagreement attenuated the association between individual opinions and beliefs about others' opinions. They found that those who strongly favored gun regulation and whose discussion networks were high in disagreement perceived less public support for gun-regulation policy than those whose discussion networks were likeminded.

Building on the past literature, one can investigate whether and how disagreement in discussion networks influences the relationship between selective media use and political polarization and participation. Questions about the influence of exposure to dissimilar perspectives through interpersonal communication networks, however, were not explored in this dissertation due to unavailability of data. Thus, the role of disagreement in interpersonal discussion networks can be an important avenue for future research.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation argues that it is critical to investigate mediators and moderators of the influence of partisan media exposure on attitudinal polarization and political participation in order for a discussion about the normative role of selective exposure. There is some research pointing out the contrasting consequences of likeminded media use. Stroud (2010), for example, argued that selective exposure which leads to polarization is not necessarily normatively undesirable given the evidence demonstrating a positive relationship between likeminded media use and levels of citizen participation in politics. Indeed, there has been strong evidence both in the previous research and in the present study that congenial media consumption leads to citizens' attitudinal polarization and their engagement in political activities (Dilliplane, 2011; Mutz, 2006a; Stroud, 2010, 2011). It has been argued that selective exposure may have a positive influence on participatory democracy because of the positive association between like-minded media use and political participation. Therefore when considering whether citizens' selective exposure should concern us, literature has shown that it can be both "yes and no" (Dilliplane, 2011; Stroud, 2010).

However, given the contrasting perspectives on the role of selective exposure in influencing polarization and participation, it seems that the normative question turns on how and why selective exposure leads to attitudinal polarization and higher levels of participation. This study suggests the necessity of taking mediating variables into account and then proposes and tests the knowledge and stereotype models. The findings show that stereotypic perceptions of candidates mediate the relationship between selective exposure and political polarization and participation while issue knowledge is not a significant mediator. What does this mean for citizens in a democracy? These results indicate that if average citizens rely mainly on likeminded media outlets, they do not fulfill the requirements of rational behavior in a democracy, relying on stereotypes to motivate attitudes and participation, rather than greater issue knowledge.

In sum, this dissertation challenges the argument that selective exposure is normatively desirable due to its contribution to citizens' greater levels of political participation. The mediating role of stereotypes in the relationship between like-minded media consumption and political engagement calls into question such a contention since the results suggest that individuals who engage in selective exposure are motivated to participate in political activities by forming stereotypical perceptions of candidates rather than by gaining factual issue knowledge, which is in contrast to democratic theory's assumption of informed citizens. Given that it is imperative that citizens equipped with rational criteria make up the politically participatory public, results of this dissertation indicate that selective media use may undermine the quality of democratic participation.

The role of exposure to dissimilar views in a democratic process is another area of importance since diverse opinions contribute to a democratic system by providing an impetus for citizens' deliberative activities. To understand the role of dissonant media consumption, this study examined whether and how exposure to dissonant media outlets

influences outcome variables of interests (i.e., issue knowledge, stereotypical perceptions of candidates, attitudinal polarization, and political participation). There have been contrasting contentions regarding the role of exposure to dissimilar views. Although exposure to cross-cutting perspectives can attenuate—as deliberative theorists hope—individuals’ extreme views, it also can rather exacerbate—as psychological research argues—extreme and polarized opinions (Wojcieszak, 2011). In support of psychological research, this dissertation finds some evidence that exposure to dissonant media outlets reinforces individuals’ prior opinions or beliefs. That is, when some individuals were exposed to dissimilar media outlets, they were more likely to reinforce their polarized attitudes and stereotypical perceptions of candidates. And the polarizing consequences of dissonant media use were stronger for less-informed conservatives than politically sophisticated conservatives. The findings lead us to call into question democratic theories’ hope that counter-attitudinal exposure would mitigate extreme and polarized attitudes.

Despite the findings of reinforcing polarization, the analyses also provide some evidence of a positive role of exposure to dissimilar media outlets. Specifically, dissonant media use contributed to increasing conservatives’ issue knowledge and their engagement in political activities, which is consistent with deliberative theorists’ hopes. Based on these findings, exposure to dissimilar perspectives can work against attenuating polarized opinions or beliefs as well as work for informing citizens and increasing their participation in politics.

Taken together, my answer to a key question this project aims to investigate—should we worry about selective exposure?—is yes. It seems rather discouraging to conclude that the relationship between selective exposure and political polarization and participation is mediated by individuals’ stereotypical perceptions of candidates, rather

than through factual knowledge about candidate issue knowledge. What's more discouraging is that there seems no easy solution to this issue in part because of the difficulty of changing individuals' media consumption (e.g., selective exposure). Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that these findings have implications for the burgeoning empirical literature on consequences of selective exposure. What we now know is that we may need to challenge—or at least be careful to conclude—the optimistic notion that selective exposure contributes to democracy by encouraging citizens to engage in politics and public affairs. Although participation is a key marker of a strong democracy (Mutz, 2006a; Putnam, 2000; Verba, et al., 1995), citizens exerting selective exposure participate in politics via having stereotypical perceptions of candidates.

My answer to another question of this research—does exposure to cross-cutting views have meaningful consequences for a democracy?—is yes. Whether dissonant media use should be encouraged, however, is not clear. The findings lend some supporting evidence to arguments about the benefits of exposure to dissonant perspectives. The finding that dissonant media use is positively related to issue knowledge for some suggests that dissonant media use may contribute to informing citizens. These findings support, to some extent, democratic theory's assumption that citizens should be encouraged to seek diverse and dissimilar points of view. Yet other evidence shows the reinforcing effects of exposure to dissimilar views whereby some have more polarized attitudes and beliefs. This calls the normative benefits of dissonant media use into question.

This dissertation project provides a somewhat disappointing conclusion—that is, several consequences of using media sharing one's views, namely, one's evaluations of the candidates and political participation, are based not on gaining new information, but on stereotypical perceptions. Given this normatively undesirable basis for polarization

and participation resulting from selective exposure, what is one to do? The results show that dissonant media consumption may not be the cure-all solution. Nonetheless, this dissertation calls our attention to the necessity of critically examining the consequences of likeminded media use and exposure to dissimilar views in a democratic process and carefully examining potential fixes.

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