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**The Role of Emotion in Selective Exposure, Information Processing,
and Attitudinal Polarization**

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Attitudinal Polarization**

by

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The Role of Emotion in Selective Exposure, Information Processing, and Attitudinal Polarization

by

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This thesis reviews the role of emotions in one's choice of information, information processing, and political attitudes. Theoretical and empirical endeavors to date have focused primarily on *how emotions influence attitudes and information processing*, leaving the actual processes guiding these outcomes in the margins. Specifically, it has been largely unexplored *how emotions influence individuals' information search behavior and then attitudes and information processing*. Noting that the purposeful selection of likeminded information, often referred to as *selective exposure*, is commonly enacted when an individual first initiates information processing, and is also likely influenced by emotions, this study explores how emotions may affect people's tendency to seek out congruent information. In addition, this study examines how the relationship between emotions and selective exposure in turn may affect aspects of information processing and attitudes. By designing an online experiment, I first tested how certain negative emotions (anger/fear) affected one's pursuit of certain types of information (consistent/inconsistent) and second, I investigated how these emotions and information selections influenced subsequent information processing and attitudes. Results showed that while anger motivated more likeminded exposure for Republicans than fear, fear promoted more likeminded exposure for Democrats than anger. Further, anger prompted people to process messages more closely and to develop more polarized attitudes compared to fear. In addition, pro-attitudinal exposure produced more message-relevant thoughts for Republicans than counter-attitudinal message exposure, while it was counter-attitudinal exposure that yielded more message-relevant thoughts for Democrats. No such effect, however, was shown for attitudinal polarization.

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Introduction

How do citizens form attitudes about politics? One most basic factor is the information people have on a variety of political phenomena around them. People process information gathered from the media or from interpersonal others and form opinions about certain political events or public officials. It is notable that these days, because of the ever-increasing number of media channels, people can be more selective in the information they encounter. Faced with a vast amount of information, individuals are now better able to choose which information they would like to know. The types of information that individuals select play an important part in the formation of general impressions and attitudes toward politics.

One factor that may have a significant influence on political attitudes is emotion. Beyond the early consensus that reason precedes emotion and is normatively preferable, recent theorizing has provided evidence that emotion is tightly associated with and mutually dependent on the cognitive process (Damasio, 1994; Lazarus, 1991; Redlawsk, 2002). Instead of an outcome of the cognitive process, emotion plays a distinct role in influencing political interest, attention, learning, and behavior (Valentino, Hutchings, Banks, & Davis, 2008). Despite a growing body of research focusing on the role of emotion in a variety of aspects of information processing and attitude change, to date it is less clear whether and how discrete emotions influence *certain types* of information

processing.¹ Little research has systematically examined how individuals select certain types of information and subsequently process messages under the influence of particular emotions. Although the relationship between emotion and general aspects of information processing has received some attention among scholars, the question of whether emotion leads to a specific type of information search – for example, exposure to messages congenial/uncongenial with previous attitudes – has been virtually unexplored.

When considering real world settings, understanding the effects of emotions on selective information search is crucial. Today’s media environment facilitates citizens’ ability to selectively expose themselves to desired messages (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2008). Media consumers are often facing situations requiring them to choose certain types of information and, thus, it is somehow inevitable for them to be selective in their choice of information. With the ever increasing media options and the variety of outlets offering both congenial and uncongenial perspectives, people can be much more selective in the messages they encounter compared to the past; they may pursue political information on particular issues (Kim, 2009; Sunstein, 2001), be motivated to find certain news sources (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009), or avoid political messages altogether (Baum & Kernell, 1999; Prior, 2005).

A normative ideal, of course, is that citizens would be open to various types of political information including both pro-attitudinal and counter-attitudinal information (Lane & Sears, 1964; Mutz, 2002). However, citizens rarely live up to this ideal standard.

¹ Information processing has been characterized as consisting of several distinct stages including “exposure,” “attention,” “elaboration,” and “memory” (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Hovland, Janis, & Kelly, 1953). In this thesis, however, this term will be used as generally referring to two specific stages, *exposure* and *elaboration* (the depth of information processing).

They cannot, and perhaps do not want to encounter all kinds of information, not only because of the limits of their cognitive capacity, but also because of their previous beliefs.

The role of selective exposure, the motivated selection of likeminded information, in emotion's effects on attitudes and information processing is particularly important in the domain of politics. When it comes to politics, people are often more defensive of their beliefs compared to other topics since political attitudes are often linked to one's identity (Conover, 1988). People are influenced by their previous political attitudes - that is, their political predispositions - when given chances to choose information. Indeed, it has been shown that people who hold a particular partisan ideology are more likely to obtain information coming from a preferred candidate or party (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Chaffee & McLeod 1973; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; Lodge & Taber, 2005; Schramm & Carter, 1959).

Selective exposure literature to date, however, has not fully examined that individuals, as political beings, may be influenced by particular emotions when they encounter political messages. When people feel particular emotions about certain political figures, messages, or events, these emotions are likely to influence message processing, including the decision to encounter or to avoid certain information. Information selection then may guide subsequent message processing and attitudinal change. The unique emotional responses inspired by certain political messages, coupled with the tendency of selective information search, could exert a significant influence on message processing and attitudes. Do those who feel angry about a statement made by a

certain politician seek out information that confirms their previous beliefs? Or, instead, do they turn to a message showing what non-likeminded others believe? How might the relationship between emotions and the search for congruent/incongruent information affect attitudes and information processing?

In this thesis, I contend that it is important to look into the impact of discrete emotions on selectivity. In addition, I examine how this selective information search, influenced by discrete emotions, affects information processing and attitudes – specifically, the depth of information processing and attitudinal polarization. Following past research suggesting the distinctive effects of negative emotions (Damasio, 1994; Eysenck, 1992; LeDoux, 1996; Marcus, Neuman, & McKuen, 2000), this study focuses on two specific negative emotions: anger and fear. By incorporating the role of discrete emotions into the study of political information searches, the depth of message processing, and attitudinal polarization, this study aims to elaborate and contribute to the growing discussions on emotions in politics.

This study is organized as follows. First, I review the nature and characteristics of emotions, focusing on two discrete negative emotions, fear and anger. Second, I discuss the phenomenon of selective exposure and its relationship with emotion in the context of politics. The third section addresses how emotion and selectivity in the choice of information affect information processing depth and the polarization of attitudes. The fourth section describes the experimental design and the method of analysis and the final sections detail the results and implications of the study.

Emotion in Politics; Discrete Negative Emotions

The cognitive process, or cognition, often has been contrasted with emotions, or affective reactions. Following the long tradition that contrasts the purported features of rationality with the purported features of emotionality (Elster, 1999), research on emotion in politics has tended to regard emotion as an “unavoidable” factor that should be controlled and minimized (Marcus et al., 2000). As emotions have been seen as somehow irrational, illogical attributes interfering with reasonable thought processing, cognitive accounts have dominated the study of political judgment (Hilgard, 1980).

Despite the normative preference for “thinking” over “feeling” that once existed in political research (see Valentino et al., 2008, p. 249), more recent theorizing increasingly has emphasized the relationships between cognition/reason and emotion/feeling. In particular, emotion has become the focus of scholarly interest as to how it influences information processing and attitudinal change, where cognition once was the center of attention (Lodge & Taber, 2005; Marcus et al., 2000; Way & Masters, 1996).

Research focusing on the role of emotion suggests that emotion - because of the *preconscious, automatic* psychological reaction that gives rise to it - influences information processing from exposure to information to final judgment (Lodge & Taber, 2005; Marcus et al., 2000; Taber & Lodge, 2006, Way & Masters, 1996). Since emotions function without conscious realization, the impact of emotion can be more extensive and can persist longer than that of cognitive processes. Tightly intertwined with cognitive

evaluation processes, emotion guides information processing and attitudes. Two popular theories about emotions explain the mechanisms underlying the impact of emotions on attention and subsequent behavior (Brader, Valentino, & Suhay, 2008); I describe each in turn.

On one hand, Lodge and Taber (2005) emphasize an “automaticity” of affect, proposing that affect is activated automatically upon mere exposure to sociopolitical concepts. They suggest that most political concepts thought about in the past become affectively charged and this evaluative tally comes to mind unconsciously upon presentation of the associated object. Noting the impact of feelings in the judgmental process, Lodge and Taber (2005) state, “affect imbues the judgment process from start to finish – from the encoding of information, its retrieval and comprehension, to its expression as a preference or choice” (p. 456). As affect permeates the judgmental processes, the evaluation of new information is subject to certain forms of partiality. The fact that the initial emotional reaction biases subsequent information processing in a direction consistent with the initial reaction (Lodge & Taber, 2005) emphasizes the lingering effects of emotion on subsequent message processing.

On the other hand, Marcus et al. (2000) explain the influence of emotions on attention and behavior by focusing on two different emotional systems: “disposition” and “surveillance.” These distinct emotional systems generate feelings of enthusiasm and anxiety (fear), respectively, and motivate different patterns of attention and subsequent behavior. Marcus et al. emphasize the role of emotion in political information processing, suggesting that “evaluations arising from emotional processes, independent of prior or

concurrent cognitive processes, can influence not only emotional expression but also thoughts, decisions, and political behavior” (p. 224). Since emotion serves as an immediate evaluation of circumstances (Marcus et al., 2000), the affective state plays an influential role in individuals’ judgments about which factors are evaluated as well as how they are weighted (Rusting, 1998).

Lodge and Taber (2005) and Marcus et al. (2000) explain the mechanisms underlying the impact of emotions based on different perspectives. For Lodge and Taber (2005), *initial emotional reactions* direct attention and behavioral outcomes. For Marcus et al. (2000), distinct emotional responses generated by certain emotional systems direct attention and behavioral outcomes. Both explanations, however, emphasize that emotion plays a key role in the processing of political messages. Emotion, as a powerful source influencing the manner of information processing and attitudes (Way & Masters, 1996), is considered essential in speculating and theorizing about the way in which information is processed and attitudinal change occurs.

In this study, I focus on discrete emotions, as opposed to other related concepts, such as moods. It is important to distinguish between discrete emotions and moods to understand the focus of this study. Although these concepts are related, they are different. Unlike discrete emotions that are “targeted,” moods “tend to be untargeted, message-irrelevant affects ill-equipped to motivate adaptive behavior” (Nabi, 1999, p. 293). Although a discrete emotion is characterized by an episodic reaction to a specific person or object, a mood is a diffuse state with no particular target (Ekman & Davidson, 1994). Research suggests that discrete emotions motivate certain adaptive behaviors in response

to the object that caused the specific emotion (Frijda, 1986; Izard, 1977; Lazarus, 1991), while moods generally do not. In particular, message-relevant, discrete emotions are more likely to motivate the processing of emotion-relevant messages, whereas message-irrelevant moods may influence the processing of messages on topics that are not particularly related to the previously felt affect (Nabi, 1999).² Thus, the question of this thesis – how particular emotions *experienced on a political topic* influence the pursuit of *emotion-relevant* messages – is best addressed by analyzing discrete emotions, which are *targeted* toward certain objects and lead to *adaptive behavior*.³

In general, research has focused on how emotions motivate and affect information processing and attitudes. Lazarus (1991), in particular, suggests that emotion is associated with the realization of certain potential harms and benefits inherent in each person-environment relationship, which leads people to certain kinds of adaptive behavior (Smith & Lazarus, 1993). For example, anger results from a “demeaning offense against me and mine” (Lazarus, 1991, p. 222) and motivates action aimed at defending oneself and correcting something wrong (Averill, 1982; Frijda, 1986). Following this school of thought, Nabi (1999) also regards emotion as a powerful motivational source based on the cognitive functional model (CFM, Nabi, 1999, 2002a). According to Nabi (2002a), emotional response is associated with two motivations: “motivation to attend to or avoid

² Though some moods research suggests that bad moods are closely associated with systematic processing (Schwarz, 1990), while good moods are likely to motivate simplified and heuristic processing (Isen, 1987; Schwarz, Bless, & Bohner, 1991), the effects cannot be generalized to message-induced emotions since these affects are message-irrelevant.

³ Of note, some research suggests that the distinction between emotions and moods is not particularly necessary. Marcus and McKuen (1993), for example, use a measure that has been traditionally employed to examine discrete emotions - rather than moods - and still argue that the distinction between emotion and mood is not useful because of the same neurological processes assumed to generate moods and emotions.

the emotion-inducing stimulus” and “motivation to satisfy the emotion-induced goal” (p. 205). Based on the type of emotion experienced, Nabi argues, motivated attention either impedes or facilitates subsequent information processing. Because of the unique person-environment relationship associated with each discrete emotion, each emotion can serve as a distinctive motivational source. Each emotion can lead people to set different goals and can motivate certain states of action readiness, known as action tendencies (Nabi, 1999). These action tendencies, along with psychological changes, influence future perceptions and behaviors (Nabi, 2002b). For example, when a person feels afraid, it signals to the person that the situation is personally threatening and dangerous. This emotion may motivate the person to seek out information which provides protection. Alternatively, the feeling anger implies that the situation is personally undesirable and goal-blocking. Anger may motivate one to correct the situation by pursuing retribution.

Scholars examining emotions long have been interested in the motivational power of discrete negative emotions. Marcus et al. (2000), for example, stress the impact of negative affect in the political domain. They argue that, unlike positive affect, which likely leads people to rely on previously learned habits, negative affect leads people to pay closer attention to political information, helps them to learn, and motivates them to engage in political behaviors. Research evidence has shown that negative emotions can substantially increase the level of attention to potential threats in an environment, interest in new information, and the motivation to act (Damasio, 1994; Eysenck, 1992; LeDoux, 1996).

Among the many different discrete emotions, anger and fear stand out as emotions exerting distinctive impacts on information processing (Huddy, Feldman, & Cassese, 2007; Isbell, Ottati, & Burns, 2006). In fact, researchers attempting to explicate the effects of negative emotions have focused on these two emotions as most likely triggering distinctive effects (e.g. Nabi, 2002a; Valentino et al., 2008). In the following pages, I review each of these negative emotions in turn.

Anger has been viewed as having a unique quality and inducing distinct effects. Aristotle (1941) described anger as stemming from the belief that one is unfairly slighted and this feeling ultimately leads to the desire for revenge. Much research focusing on anger has addressed the mechanisms that give rise to anger. This work in general suggests that anger is triggered by situations in which one finds obstacles interfering with goal-oriented behavior or detects certain offenses against oneself or close ones (Averill, 1982; Izard, 1977; Lazarus, 1991; Nabi, 1999; Plutchik, 1980). With respect to motivational power, anger is believed to hold high levels of energy and this energy is expected to serve as a powerful source for adaptive behavior such as defending oneself or close ones and attempting to correct some appraised wrong (Averill, 1982; Izard, 1993).

Because of the intense attention paid to the target of anger and the motivation to reduce or eliminate the source of the feeling, anger is viewed as both an energizer and an organizer of behavior (Lemerise & Dodge, 1993). In fact, research on anger stresses the tendency of the emotion to evoke aggressive action (Lazarus, 1991). Lazarus (1991) notes that unlike other emotions where outside forces are not necessarily involved and blamed for the loss, anger is experienced while attributing fault to others and leads to an

“attack on the agent held to be blameworthy of the offense” (p. 226). In this sense, anger, as a powerful motivating source of behavior, stimulates people to focus their attention on ‘blamable’ others and leads to certain adaptive *retributive* behavior.

Fear has received much scholarly attention especially in the context of persuasion because of its power to agitate and shake people’s existing beliefs and attitudes. When a situation is perceived as threatening to one’s psychological or physical self, and when the situation is considered out of one’s control, the emotion fear arises (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991; Nabi, 1999). Since feeling afraid stems from the desire for protection from possible threats, it leads individuals to act in ways that will allow them to escape from the threatening situation (Lazarus, 1991; Plutchik, 1980; Roseman, Wiest, & Swam, 1994). Because of the deep-rooted psychological needs for protection and the strong action tendency that ensues, fear is viewed as one of the most effective persuasive emotions (Tomkins, 1984).

In particular, Nabi (2002a) considers these emotions, anger and fear, “approach” and “avoidance” emotions. As discussed earlier, the type of emotion experienced influences the willingness to attend to or to avoid the emotion-inducing stimulus. Anger, as an approach emotion facilitates, and fear, as an avoidance emotion impedes, subsequent information processing. Nabi (2002a) focuses on the potentially different effects that these emotions will have on information processing depth. In particular, she contends that these differences are contingent on the existence of reassurance in a message. According to Nabi, a reassuring message is one that provides a receiver with ways to “resolve the perceived problematic situation” (p. 206). To avoid the problematic

situation, a receiver is motivated to take emotionally-consistent action such that feeling angry/afraid leads one to process messages containing reassurance of retribution/protection more carefully. It is important to note that this study does not look at the effects of reassuring messages. Rather, the central idea here is that anger and fear may exert different impacts on how deeply subsequent information is processed – due to the *different motivational tendencies* elicited by each emotion. These motivational tendencies affect the extent to which people want to engage with the message topic. The current study asks how anger and fear affect processing depth and attitudinal change based on the selection of congenial or uncongenial messages. I examine the relationship between emotion and information selection in detail in the following section.

Emotion and Selective Exposure

In this section, I first review the phenomenon of selective exposure and discuss the relevant variables, effects, and implications with respect to emotions. Then I explore how discrete emotions such as anger and fear could be related to attitudinally congruent or incongruent message exposure by suggesting two possible explanations.

Attitude-Congruent Selective Exposure

Despite the abundance of evidence revealing the wide-ranging impact of emotions, it is less clear how emotions influence information processing and subsequently affect attitude change (Nabi, 1999). Emotions, in fact, may influence and permeate every stage of information processing. As Lodge and Taber (2005) note, “affect comes to mind automatically at the *earliest* stages of information processing” (p. 476) and, thus, how one feels toward certain information in the first place may have an immediate primacy effect on subsequent processing, such that one’s prior attitudes will powerfully constrain the interpretation, depth of processing, and evaluation of new information, as well as one’s ultimate course of action.

Among the various stages of information processing, information choice – especially in terms of attitudinally congruent/incongruent information – is expected to influence attitudes. We do not know much, however, about how emotion influences information choice. Given that people are more likely to be guided by their previous political predispositions in the face of a variety of political information, the effects of

selective exposure to political information should be more pronounced than in other issue domains (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet 1948; Lodge & Taber, 2005; Schramm & Carter, 1959). What connections, if any, exist between emotions and the selection of information?

Selective exposure, the purposeful selection of information congruent with one's predispositions, has received much scholarly attention particularly with respect to its implications on attitudinal outcomes. As "protectors of predispositions and the handmaidens of reinforcement" (Klapper, 1960, p.64), selective exposure and related concepts posit that people are motivated to pursue information that coincides with their previous attitudes. Although it has been a matter of controversy whether this tendency indeed exists (see Freedman & Sears, 1965; Stroud, 2008 for a review), and some suggest a preference for congenial information may occur only under limited conditions (e.g. Zaller, 1992; Iyengar, Hahn, Krosnick, & Walker, 2008), research on selective exposure in general shares the belief that, when it occurs, it leads to reinforcement of one's previous beliefs, resulting in more polarized attitudes (Mutz, 2006; Redlawsk, 2002; Sunstein, 2001; Taber & Lodge, 2006).⁴

Many have expressed normative concerns about selective exposure's effect of screening off other thoughts, beliefs, and values. Mutz and Martin (2001), for example, point out that political talk that centers on reinforcing a shared viewpoint deprives discussants of the opportunity to understand their position more deeply through

⁴ Though some of the research discusses the effects of selective exposure in interpersonal contexts (e.g. Mutz, 2006), the same effects should hold in both interpersonal and mediated contexts (Stroud, 2007).

encountering different views. In addition, exposure to rationales for views with which one agrees makes it more difficult to see an undesired outcome as legitimate. Research also suggests, because of the tendency to seek out information matching one's view, people may form different impressions about the priorities of social and political issues and develop different beliefs about the world (Stroud, forthcoming) – all of which, in turn, could make it difficult for citizens to have a *common foundation* whereby they develop shared thoughts and opinions on important social issues.

In particular, selective exposure is related to important political consequences, such as general impressions and attitudes about politics as well as political participation, such as voting.⁵ Because people often have political predispositions, these beliefs are likely to promote selective exposure in the domain of politics (e.g. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; Lodge & Taber, 2005; Schramm & Carter, 1959). As Conover (1988) has noted, political attitudes in many cases are related to one's self-identity and this may lead to one's desire to protect one's political beliefs. That is, when individuals encounter certain political issues, those who hold partisan attachments or clear political beliefs are more motivated to adhere to their previous attitudes by selecting congenial information than those without partisan attachments or with weak political beliefs.

⁵ Despite research evidence confirming the effect of attitude-congruent selective exposure on political attitudes and behavior in *interpersonal* contexts, there have been mixed findings as to whether exposure to consistent information through *media* yields such effects. For example, while some research found that exposure to consonant views via interaction with similar others could result in the polarization of attitudes (e.g. Huckfeldt, Mendez, & Osborn, 2004; Sunstein, 2001), research focusing on media exposure has yielded inconsistent findings; some argue that there are relationships between exposure to congenial media and polarization (e.g. Adams et al., 1985; Mendelsohn & Nadeau, 1996; Stroud, 2007; Taber & Lodge 2006), while others insist there are not significant relationships (Ball-Rokeach, Grube, & Rokeach, 1981; Paletz, Koon, Whitehead, & Hagens, 1972).

Given the potential consequences of selective exposure, scholars on selective exposure have long probed the question: Why does selective exposure occur? One proposal is that individuals, as “cognitive misers,” tend to be efficient processors of information (Taylor, 1981). This tendency, it is argued, makes them strategic in the face of new information; it motivates them to choose information that is *easy* to process. Redlawsk (2002) notes that people assimilate information congruent with previous beliefs easily since it requires no significant cognitive effort. Incongruent information, however, requires a certain level of effort to make sense of the information. Taber and Lodge (2006) argue that, to the extent one’s attitude reflects considerable prior thought, previous attitudes are more trustworthy than new information. Thus individuals’ efforts to be consistent with their previous attitudes are reasonable in some respects.

Dissonance theory (e.g. Festinger, 1957) also has been proposed as an explanation for selective exposure. This school of thought considers selective exposure as originating from people’s desire to seek out belief-supporting information. When certain information contrasts with previous beliefs, it triggers an unstable cognitive state, thus leading people to try to avoid the information and pursue information that strengthens their previous attitudes.

Although the literature on the causes of selective exposure provides a helpful basis for understanding why the selective search for information occurs, absent from the literature is the recognition that individuals should be likely to pursue certain types of information depending on their emotions. In fact, the question of how discrete emotions may play a role in the selective exposure process has been relatively unexplored and no

research to date has addressed the impact of emotions on the tendency to seek out *congruent/incongruent* information.⁶

Yet research evidence strongly points toward the effects of emotions on a variety of aspects of information processing including information selection. According to Lodge and Taber (2005), emotion is aroused in a rather automatic way in the face of new information. An individual's emotion toward a certain political candidate is automatically aroused even before understanding the content of given information about the candidate (Taber & Lodge, 2006). Specifically for those with strong political predispositions, this automatic affective process can exert a powerful impact on attitudes since it establishes the direction and strength of biases in subsequent information processing (Taber & Lodge, 2006). That emotion influences the initial evaluation of a given message upon encountering it suggests that emotion will influence people's willingness to attend to or to avoid certain types of information.

Several research studies have documented the mechanisms underlying the effects of emotion on information selection. Focusing on the impact of affect on information seeking, Boyle et al. (2004) found that the desire to reduce the discomfort stemming from uncertainty plays an influential role in efforts to process relevant information and to learn about particular events conveyed via the mass media. Boyle et al., in particular, use

⁶ Though Valentino et al. (2008) examined the effects of emotions such as anger and fear in information seeking and learning and demonstrated that fear promoted information seeking and learning while anger depressed information seeking, their focus on information seeking was put on the behavior of "new information seeking" rather than unveiling specific patterns of search for congruent or incongruent information. That is, their measure for information seeking consisted of variables such as "total information seeking," "search for issue-based information" and "information about candidates' personal biographies," not about the content of the information.

uncertainty reduction theory to examine the role of emotions in information seeking. Uncertainty reduction theory suggests that individuals feel uncomfortable when in an *uncertain state* and thus engage in information-seeking behaviors to alleviate uncertainty. Boyle et al. argue that uncertainty conveyed by the mass media – not just in interpersonal interactions – can influence information seeking behavior. For example, some nationwide traumatic events conveyed via the media can create strong negative emotional reactions (Kubey & Peluso, 1990). In these situations, people often rely on news coverage since it is difficult for them to witness and learn about the events personally (Boyle et al., 2004). Boyle et al., in particular, suggest that this uncertainty could trigger affect. Noting the tight link between uncertainty and affect (e.g. Sunnafrank, 1990) and the relationship between the uncertain state and the feeling of “discomfort” (Boyle et al., 2004, p. 157), Boyle et al. point out that uncertainty may result in negative affect. The negative affect resulting from an uncertain state prompts individuals to engage in information seeking that is likely to alleviate this uncertain state.

Similarly, Nabi (2003) emphasizes the role of emotion in guiding information processing, suggesting that emotions serve as *frames* for issues by privileging certain information. Looking at how discrete emotions differentially affect information accessibility, information preference, and decision-making, she showed that anger and fear have distinct effects on the pursuit of certain information. Those who were primed to feel angry preferred *retributive* information more than those primed to feel afraid. Those who were primed to feel afraid preferred *protection-related* information more than those primed to feel angry. These findings suggest that emotion, by guiding and directing the

processing of subsequent messages, can affect the motivation to attend to or to avoid certain types of information. As Nabi (2003) notes, “message-relevant emotion can lead to selective processing of emotion-relevant information” and emotions in effect direct attention to certain kinds of information (p. 229).

More relevant, Zillmann and Bryant (1985) suggest that affect will have strong effects on selectivity. Specifically, they propose that people engage in selective exposure behavior because of their desire to facilitate “excitatory homeostasis,” to maximize “pleasant excitement,” and to reduce “aversion” (p. 186). Zillmann and Bryant argue that selective exposure occurs for individuals’ therapeutic value, which is keenly associated with the desire to lessen aversion-related affect.⁷ Despite Zillmann and Bryant’s contribution in explicating the underlying psychological mechanisms of selectivity, several questions remain. Since their work focused on the pursuit of information in the context of entertainment media, we do not know yet how affect can influence information search and subsequent processing in the domain of politics. In addition, since they examined the effects of emotions interchangeably with the effects of moods, the potentially distinct effects of discrete emotions are unclear.

All in all, this line of research suggests that emotion should influence selective exposure to information. However, as noted, what we do not know yet is how discrete emotions influence one’s willingness to encounter *congenial* or *uncongenial* information.

⁷ Zillmann and Bryant (1985) claim that such aversion reduction can be accompanied by exposure to arousing/calming materials, distracting materials, materials of positive hedonic valence, and materials containing comforting information.

In the following section, I discuss the potentially distinct effects of anger and fear on the pursuit of attitude-congruent and attitude-incongruent information.

Discrete Emotions and Selective Exposure

Do discrete emotions, anger and fear, lead to different patterns of selective exposure? Two contradictory predictions are possible regarding which emotion may prompt exposure to congruent information. I first show how fear may lead people to select more attitude-congruent information than anger. I then show how anger may lead people to select more attitude-congruent information than fear.

Fear, not Anger, Leads to Attitude-Congruent Selective Exposure

In contemplating the potential ways in which discrete negative emotions such as anger and fear may influence patterns of selective exposure, it is conceivable that individuals' *expectations about the content of a forthcoming message* may affect their choice of information.

Research suggests that an individual's desire to address negative affect motivates one to change his or her relationship with the environment to lessen the negative affect and to resolve the uncomfortable situation (Frijda, 1986; Nabi, 1999). To change the relationship – at least to feel the relationship is changed – one possible solution is to seek specific information that may help to manage the uncomfortable feelings. With regard to the types of information likely to offer this stabilization of mind, Nabi (1999) suggests that an individual's expectations about forthcoming-message content influence one's

motivation to process the given information.⁸ Consistent with Nabi (1999), Lodge, Taber, and Galonsky (1999) found that when people knew the likely valence of available political information, they chose information confirming their previous view, suggesting that expectations about a message affect one's motivation to select specific types of messages. In particular, Nabi (1999) notes that discrete emotions such as fear and anger may influence the selection of messages. She states that if a person feels afraid, he or she may pursue information that is likely to provide a feeling of *protection* and likewise, if angry, one is likely to search for information about *retribution*. Since these types of messages are expected to deal with negative affect more effectively, people will be more motivated to engage in the processing of these messages.

Following this theoretical line, it is expected that individuals will seek information in accordance with the particular emotions that they experience (e.g. fear-protection, anger-retribution). They will select information they expect to make them feel better – particularly when they can ascertain the content of the message. In the political domain, the phenomenon ‘partisan selective exposure,’ connects to this idea since in many cases, people can ascertain whether a message will be politically congenial or uncongenial simply by knowing the source of the message. Emotional responses, therefore, are expected to exert a significant influence on patterns of selective exposure.⁹

⁸ Nabi (1999)'s discussion of discrete emotions was focused on the context of persuasive messages, but the logic underlying the mechanism and the overall idea – emotions directing specific patterns of information seeking – may apply well to other contexts as well.

⁹ Of note, some research suggests that information seeking is not so motivated by emotional factors. Meffert, Chung, Joiner, Waks, and Garst (2006), for example, emphasize the effects of motivational force, focusing on the strength of initial evaluation on subsequent information processing and voting. In a political campaign context, they found that people develop more

Extending Nabi's work and other similar discussions (Forgas, 1995; Izard, 1977, Izard & Buechler, 1980), one possibility is that fear – rather than anger – leads to selective exposure. As discussed in Nabi (1999), fear promotes the search for information that is likely to provide the feeling of *protection* and this tendency is likely associated with the desire for attitude-congruent information – which protects one's existing beliefs and knowledge. Encountering congenial, pro-attitudinal information can be much more relieving and comforting than confronting messages reflecting oppositional views. Thus, when an individual feeling afraid about certain topic is given the choice to encounter either congenial or uncongenial information, the person will be motivated to select the more comforting, congenial information to relieve the fear. Likewise, if anger dominates a person, he or she is likely to seek out information in which one can find and know the target of blame. In many cases, this information is included in counter-attitudinal messages. Since anger motivates the desire for *retribution*, those feeling angry need the *other* party and counter-attitudinal messages may give people an outlet for their anger.

Anger, not Fear, Leads to Attitude-Congruent Selective Exposure

Contradictory predictions are possible based on the unique person-environment relationships theorized in cognitive appraisal theories of emotion. According to this view, an individual experiences certain emotions based on the evaluation of events - evaluations concerning the meanings of events for the self and for the satisfaction of

positive evaluations about an initially preferred candidate regardless of the valence of information that received their attention. In this case, people are guided by their initial evaluations and this motivates not likeminded information selection, but the direction of subsequent information processing.

individual goals (Frijda, 1993). For example, if a certain event is considered undesirable for oneself or for accomplishing particular goals, negative emotion will result. Since discrete emotions are the products of individuals' cognitive appraisals of particular circumstances around them (Lazarus, 1991), discrete emotions such as anger and fear also may stem from individuals' own evaluations of their relationships with circumstances, which may generate distinct motivations and subsequent behaviors (Frijda, 1988; Lazarus, 1991; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985).

In particular, with regard to the relationship between a person's emotional state and their circumstances, some research suggests that feelings of certainty/uncertainty about one's situation are related to the patterns of selective exposure. It has been argued that *certainty* and *confidence* are conceptually quite similar to *polarization* and that these are antecedents of selective exposure (Stroud, 2010; Ziemke, 1980). Those who are more certain about their political beliefs are more likely to use likeminded information sources (Stroud, 2010; Ziemke, 1980). Lerner and Keltner (2001), in particular, demonstrated interesting relationships between emotions and individual characteristics concerning the level of certainty. They showed that anger rises with the level of certainty (about the cause of the threat), while fear is triggered with less certainty. Noting that specific appraisal patterns such as the level of certainty provide important distinctions among emotions, Tiedens and Linton (2001) also provide evidence that certainty-related appraisal patterns are differentially related to each emotion. Specifically with regard to certainty, they show when people feel angry or remember feeling anger, they are "certain about what is happening," while when experiencing fear, people report that they are

highly “uncertain about what has happened and what will happen” (p. 974). This research points toward the possibility that anger and fear are closely related with higher and less certainty, respectively.

Following this line of work, it is possible that anger and fear may lead to distinctive forms of selective exposure. If anger is related to high levels of certainty, and certainty predicts selective exposure, then anger may prompt selective exposure. Similarly, if fear arises with less certainty, feeling afraid is less likely to lead people to the purposeful selection of congruent information. Since anger may stem from one’s confidence that he or she knows about something quite well and thus the other side is wrong, when those with high certainty feel angry, they could ignore and dismiss others’ opinions when given choices to read congruent or incongruent information. Likewise, as fear may originate from an individuals’ evaluation that he or she cannot clearly make sense of the events or issues going around themselves, those feeling afraid in the face of certain information may seek out new, and possibly contradictory, information.

Although past research on selective exposure and emotions gives useful guidance in hypothesizing that emotions affect patterns of selective exposure, the complex mechanisms underlying this phenomenon makes clear prediction difficult. Whether citizens’ emotional responses such as anger and fear prompt selective exposure in the realm of politics warrants critical empirical examination. I therefore pose my first research question:

RQ1: Which type of emotion – fear or anger – motivates people to expose themselves to pro-attitudinal/counter-attitudinal information?

Impact of Emotion and Selectivity on Processing Depth and Polarization

So far, I have described how discrete emotions such as anger and fear may influence selective exposure. I next examine how discrete emotions, anger and fear, and selective exposure, influence message processing depth with a particular focus on the contradictory findings regarding which emotion leads to *closer* processing of information. Then I review how these discrete emotions could be related to attitudinal polarization when coupled with selective exposure.

Anger, Fear and the Information Processing Depth

How do discrete negative emotions such as anger and fear affect the depth of information processing? Whether a person processes information closely or not influences subsequent attitudinal outcomes (Nabi, 1999). Previous research has documented the importance of processing depth focusing on the concepts of “central-route” and “peripheral-route” processing, theorized in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM, Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986). When engaging in central processing, people give thoughtful consideration to the arguments and information presented in a message. When engaging in peripheral processing, people focus on only simple, relatively easy cues of the message. Since “greater message elaboration is expected to generate more thoughts that are then incorporated into cognitive schema” (Nabi, 1999, p. 293), attitudinal outcomes differ depending on how deeply people process information.

Research on emotions and attitudes has addressed the effects of discrete emotions on information processing (Nabi, 2002). Message (topic) induced emotions, however, are

viewed to have distinct effects on subsequent information processing and attitudes since these emotions, unlike *message-irrelevant moods*, are substantially “linked to a message’s focal topic” (Nabi 1999, p.293). Discussing the distinctive effects of message-irrelevant moods and discrete message-induced emotions on the information processing, Nabi (1999) suggests that the effects of message-irrelevant affect may not apply to message-induced emotions. According to Nabi (1999), sadness, for example, could yield different processing outcomes as a “message-induced emotion” and as a “message-irrelevant mood.” *Distraction theory*, for example, posits that a message-irrelevant mood of sadness prompts systematic information processing because of respondents’ desire to distract themselves from unpleasant thoughts. The desire to avoid unpleasant thoughts leads to careful processing of affect-irrelevant messages. Here, a topic-irrelevant mood stimulates more systematic processing. Topic-relevant sadness, however, may lead to less systematic message processing since sadness, as an “avoidance” emotion, likely triggers withdrawal from a stimulus (Nabi, 1999).¹⁰

Given the potentially distinctive effects of message-relevant emotions on information processing depth, it is expected that negative message-induced emotions, which are generally regarded as producing strong motivations, are likely to play a key role in information processing. In particular, research to date is mixed about the effects of anger and fear on information processing. These arguments can be organized as either

¹⁰ Nabi (1999), however, notes that different predictions are possible from the literature. Bad moods may signal potential threats and thus promote more careful evaluation of information. Here, “sadness-as-mood” and “sadness-as-discrete-emotion” both stimulate careful information processing. She concludes, however, that the findings of moods research cannot be expanded to the effects of discrete emotions on information processing (p. 302).

“fear, rather than anger, promotes closer processing” or “anger motivates more systematic processing than fear.” I review both in turn.

Some research suggests that fear leads to the more systematic processing of information while anger motivates the use of cognitive heuristics (Bohner & Weinerth, 2001; Tiedens & Linton, 2001). According to this account, fear leads to a focus on potentially negative outcomes. In response, individuals are more attentive to new information. Anger, however, yields simpler cognitive processing, less attention to available information, and greater reliance on heuristics (Lerner et al., 1998). In accord with Lerner et al.’s findings, Smith and Dillard (1997) showed that people who were prompted to feel anger had less on-topic thoughts about the given persuasive message because anger facilitated emotion-relevant (*revenge relevant*) thoughts and alleviated the ability or motivation to engage in *issue relevant* thinking.

Others, on the other hand, argue that both chronic fear and message-induced fear lead to less careful processing of message (Gleicher & Petty, 1992; Hale, LeMieux, & Mongeau, 1995; Jepson & Chaiken, 1990), while anger motivates closer processing of information (Nabi, 1999, 2002a). Nabi (1999, 2002a), in particular, theorizes the impact of fear and anger based on the mechanism of “approach-avoidance” instincts (Roseman, Spindel, & Jose, 1990), which suggests that the depth of information processing is directed by the initial avoidance-approach response to the message – with “approach emotions” such as anger promoting closer processing of information and “avoidance emotions” like fear discouraging such systematic processing. Some empirical findings

where fear and anger have been manipulated from messages show that anger prompts closer processing of information than fear (e.g., Nabi, 2002a).

Though both strands of research provide distinct proposals about the effects of fear and anger, the contradictory predictions and inconsistent findings as to whether individuals engage in closer processing of information when feeling angry or afraid suggest that it is important to critically examine this phenomenon.

One potential explanation for these mixed findings is the different ways in which emotions have been manipulated. To induce emotions in some studies, for example, people were asked to recall certain events/people that made them feel particular emotions (e.g. Valentino et al., 2008; Isbell & Ottati, 2002; Lerner & Keltner, 2001). In other studies, subjects were asked to report their feelings when provided with certain messages/topics designed to trigger specific emotions (e.g. Nabi, 2002a). In yet other studies, people were asked to answer questions about whether they had experienced a particular emotion about a certain political event, issue, or (most often) person (e.g. Marcus & McKuen, 1993). It is possible that these different manipulations of emotions used by different researchers might have led to the distinct ways in which people experience and represent their feelings cognitively. Whether emotions are induced by reading certain messages, recalling one's own memories, or even by just being exposed to certain stimuli irrelevant to the message may generate different psychological experiences, which will be incorporated into the message processing in differential ways.

Turning back to the question of which emotion facilitates more systematic processing of messages, it is expected that whether the aroused emotion is topic relevant

or not likely makes a difference as to how individuals will process a topic-relevant message. In fact, many research studies suggesting that anger promotes simplified cognitive processing and fear leads to systematic processing have tested the effects of each emotion as *message-irrelevant affect* where participants were led to experience emotions in response to a video clip shown prior to evaluating a message (e.g. Lerner et al., 1998) or writing a report of a fearsome life event (e.g. Bohner & Weinerth, 2001; Tiedens & Linton, 2001). The emotions triggered in these studies were *irrelevant* to the topic of the following message or judgment tasks. However, unlike the *message (topic) irrelevant* anger, which may motivate people to distract themselves from the anger-related sources or messages, anger derived from the given topic is likely to promote thinking and behavior relevant to the topic.¹¹ As the occurrence of this feeling leads to the “desire for revenge,” this might motivate people to think about the objects – especially the blameworthy one – and generate more message-relevant thoughts overall (e.g. Nabi, 2002a). Thus, focusing on anger and fear, triggered by specific topics, the following hypothesis is posited.

H1: Anger will promote more careful message processing than fear.

In addition, exposure to counter-attitudinal information may motivate people to produce more message-relevant thoughts by engaging in closer processing of message. As discussed earlier, in the face of attitudinally incongruent information, people are

¹¹ Research on topic-irrelevant emotion suggests that individuals tend to distract themselves from unpleasant thoughts and engage in other activities diverting their attention from the negatively felt stimuli (Isen & Simmonds, 1978).

motivated to counter-argue the incongruent evidence (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Lodge & Taber, 2000; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Accordingly, people put forth more cognitive effort to denigrate and counter-argue attitudinally incongruent evidence compared to the effort required for processing attitudinally congruent information. Thus, this study posits that counter-attitudinal exposure may prompt people to provide more message-relevant thoughts by motivating them to engage with closer processing of message.

H2: When exposed to counter-attitudinal information, participants will provide more message-relevant thoughts than when exposed to pro-attitudinal information.

Emotion, Selective Exposure and Polarization

Attitudinal polarization, when an attitude changes to become more extreme in its initial direction, has long been investigated by scholars. Accordingly, scholars have found a variety of variables that are likely associated with polarization such as the strength of prior beliefs or attitudes (Abelson, 1959; Allport, 1954; Lord, Ross, & Lepper 1979), thinking over attitude objects (Chaiken & Yates, 1985; Sadler & Tesser, 1973; Tesser, 1978; Tesser & Leone, 1977), discussion with group members who share similar beliefs (Brown, 1965; Pruitt, 1971; Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969; Myers & Bishop, 1970), and knowledge structure/schema (Chaiken & Yates 1985; Leone & Ensley 1985; Tesser & Leone, 1977).

Although relatively fewer scholarly efforts have evaluated how emotion plays a role in the process of attitude polarization, it has been constantly demonstrated that emotion plays a key role in the formation of attitudes. Positive and negative emotional

responses to political matter occur at a preconscious level and impact downstream attitudes and preferences (Lodge & Taber, 2005; Murphy & Zajonc, 1993). Specifically with respect to the context of politics, Taber and Lodge (2006) state “sociopolitical concepts are ‘hot’ for most people, so that associated attitudes come to mind automatically along with, indeed prior to, semantic information” (p. 756), suggesting that emotion experienced in the face of certain political figures or events – independent from the actual content of messages – can influence subsequent information processing and the attitudes.

In particular, much work in this area has found that emotional responses such as anger and fear lead to distinct political attitudes. For example, Conover and Feldman (1986) demonstrated that anger was significantly linked to disapproval of Reagan’s performance in office while anxiety had no such effect. Also, looking at people’s emotional responses to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Huddy, Feldman, Taber, and Lahav (2005) found that those who had angry reactions toward the 9/11 attacks were more supportive of the military campaign in Afghanistan, while those expressing anxiety were less so. In addition, with respect to more general political attitudes, Skitka, Bauman, and Mullen (2004) revealed that anger and fear have unique effects on political tolerance; while those who felt angry about the 9/11 attacks showed lower levels of tolerance, those who felt afraid about the attacks demonstrated higher levels of tolerance.

Although these research studies show that anger and fear influence certain kinds of political attitudes such as the support for government, political figures, and other citizens, the findings here also speak to the distinctive effects of anger and fear, which

may influence other aspects of political attitudes, such as polarization. Taber and Lodge (2006), for example, noted that affect could exert a significant impact on attitudinal polarization whereby people's pre-existing biases can influence message processing and lead to more extreme opinions. According to Taber and Lodge (2006), people tend to seek out arguments confirming their previous beliefs (confirmation bias) and spend more cognitive efforts and time counterarguing attitudinally incongruent arguments (disconfirmation bias), which, in turn, drives more polarized attitudes. They, in particular, suggest that biased information processing and polarization are triggered by an initial affective response. Anger and fear, therefore, may influence polarization.

In examining which emotion – anger or fear – is more likely to promote polarization, the conceptual overlap between polarization and certainty is worth consideration. As noted earlier, attitudinal polarization is closely related with the level of certainty; those with higher certainty hold more extreme positions than do those with less certainty. The fact that anger rises with high level of certainty while fear rises with less certainty (Lerner & Keltner, 2001) implies that those feeling angry are more likely to disregard others' views even if given chances to learn about the different views. To the extent that they are certain about their beliefs, they may not feel the need to change them by incorporating others' opinions. This, in turn, could lead them to be more extreme in their initial attitudes. Anger, therefore, is likely to promote more attitudinal polarization than fear.

H3: Anger will produce more extreme opinions than fear.

Selective exposure literature has shown that encountering likeminded views triggers attitudinal polarization (Huckfeldt, Mendez, & Osborn 2004; Isenberg, 1986; Mutz, 2006; Sunstein, 2001). Selective exposure induces attitude polarization by exposing people to persuasive arguments during the interaction with similar others (Isenberg, 1986) and based on the biased manner of information processing that occurs when congruent information is assimilated uncritically, whereas incongruent information is counter-argued (Lodge & Taber, 2000; Rucker & Petty, 2004).

When exposed to congenial, pro-attitudinal information, people may encounter arguments or facts that are supportive of their previous attitudes, which may provide reassurance of their own positions and make them more confident in their beliefs. This, in turn, can lead to polarization of attitudes. For example, looking at the effect of network heterogeneity, Huckfeldt, Mendez, and Osborn (2004) found that discussing politics with others sharing similar views is significantly related to polarization, suggesting that exposure to congenial thoughts and opinions can lead to attitudinal polarization. Cappella, Price, and Nir (2002), in their discussion of argument repertoire and opinion quality, also note the effect of pro- and counter-attitudinal exposure on the content and characteristics of opinions. By pointing out “one’s own reasons may grow as one searches for responses to challenges from others,” while “knowledge of others’ opinions may increase as more diverse reasons are heard from others” (p. 88), they suggest that selective exposure to attitude-congruent messages may result in the development of one-sided opinions. Mutz (2002) also cautions against the potential polarizing effects resulting from interactions with likeminded others. She emphasizes the *crosscutting*

interactions as “potential antidotes to the kind of intergroup polarization” (p. 852) and suggests that exposure to dissimilar views may have a positive impact on preventing polarization and developing tolerance toward different others. Taken together, it is expected that pro-attitudinal message exposure will lead to more polarized attitudes than counter-attitudinal message exposure.

H4: When exposed to pro-attitudinal information, participants will exhibit more extreme opinions than when exposed to counter-attitudinal information.

Method

To analyze these hypotheses and the research question, an online experiment where participants were randomly assigned to either a fear or an anger condition was conducted between March 10 and April 10, 2010.

Participants

This study used two methods to recruit participants. First, students at a large research university were recruited to participate in this study in exchange for extra credit. In addition, an email describing the study was distributed to colleagues and community contacts; these contacts were asked to forward the email on to those who might be interested in participating in this study. This generated a snowball sample of additional respondents. Only those aged 18 and over were asked to participate. A total of one hundred and seventy-six participants completed the online survey. The subjects' mean age was 23 years ($SD = 2.08$). Of the respondents, 42 percent were men and 58 percent were women. Respondents were asked their partisan identification (Republican 34.9%, Democrat 44.6%, independents and others 20.5%), political ideology (Conservative 30.5%, Liberal 42.6%, moderate and others 26.9%), and employment status (student 71.6%, full/part-time working 21.4%, others 7%). There were no significant differences between the anger and fear group on any of the control variables or demographic variables.

Design and Procedure

The study employed a one-way experimental design with emotion (fear, anger) as

a between-participants factor. Participants invited to the online study completed a questionnaire that queried respondents about their emotional responses, thoughts and attitudes about unemployment, political orientations, party identification, and demographics.

After reading a short description of the current unemployment situation, participants were randomly assigned to either a fear or an anger condition. They were then asked to write about how the unemployment situation made them feel angry/afraid in as much detail as possible. Next, participants were instructed to choose one of two messages relevant to the unemployment situation. To allow them to know whether a message would be congenial or uncongenial to their attitudes, the following notice was presented prior to choosing a message: “Now, you will read a short commentary about the Department of Labor’s recent report on unemployment. Two different views are available; (A) shows the view of Democrats, claiming the unemployment figures show the recession is ending and the economy is getting better, while (B) reflects the view of Republicans, suggesting economic recovery might not be happening and there is a continuing economic downturn.” After selecting and reading one of the messages, participants were then asked to provide up to ten thoughts about unemployment. Upon completing the thought-listing task, participants were asked about their attitudes on unemployment again and answered party identification and demographic questions.

Stimuli

Two types of messages were created: the emotional induction messages and the pro/counter-attitudinal messages. For the emotional induction, this study followed past

research in which respondents were asked to recall and focus on individuals, objects, or events that led them to feel a certain emotion (Isbell & Ottati, 2002; Lerner & Keltner, 2001; Valentino et al., 2008). Specifically, after they were given a short statistical description of the current unemployment situation, participants were asked to describe something about the current unemployment situation that made them feel angry/afraid and to write about their feelings in as much detail as possible. The prompt is included below:

“Now we would like you to describe something about the current unemployment situation that made you feel ANGRY/AFRAID. Please describe how you felt as vividly and in as much detail as possible. Think about the relevant authorities and issues concerning unemployment, and the real world consequences. Examples of things that have made some people feel ANGRY/AFRAID are statements made by politicians, things said by the relevant authorities, and real world events that happened to themselves or their close ones. It is okay if you don’t remember all the details, just be specific about what exactly it was that made you ANGRY/AFRAID and what it felt like to be ANGRY/AFRAID. Take a few minutes to write out your answer.”

In addition, participants were able to select only one message, either a pro-attitudinal or a counter-attitudinal message. The pro- and a counter-attitudinal messages were designed to reflect either (A) Democratic or (B) Republican views, which argue that the unemployment situation was getting better or worse, respectively. The message content is included below.

Message (A)

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA): "Today's jobs report demonstrates that economic stabilization is taking hold: the unemployment rate held steady despite the disruptions caused by the winter storms, and manufacturing jobs grew for the second straight month. The report was cautious evidence that America's business are gaining confidence and that the Recovery Act continues to restore strength in key sectors of our economy. To keep the recovery moving in the right direction on behalf of all Americans, we must continue to invest wisely and act with fiscal discipline."

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV): "Only 36,000 people lost their jobs last month, which is really good. The unemployment rate around America has not changed."

Prognosticators thought it would go up. It has not ... Remember, if you compare where we were last year and where we are today – if you compare where we were before the Recovery Act and where we are after – there is no question we stopped a terrible situation from getting even worse."

Other economic reports support the idea of an economic turnaround. The Federal Reserve Board reported that U.S. consumers increased their debt in January for the first time in a year. An increase in consumer debt normally means consumers are optimistic enough about their personal finances that they are willing to spend more money. Consumer credit rose 2.4 percent in January to \$2.46 trillion. Meanwhile, retail stores reported a 3.7 percent increase in sales in February.

Message (B)

House Minority Whip Eric Cantor (R-VA): "Today's jobs report is the latest warning that the threat of oppressive regulations and health care mandates from Washington, as well as skyrocketing deficits and tax increases, are actively preventing job creation ... Instead of trying to ram through a health care overhaul that we can't afford and that a majority of Americans don't support, the President and Speaker [Nancy] Pelosi should focus on getting our fiscal house in order and getting Americans back to work."

House Minority Leader John Boehner (R-OH): "Today's disappointing jobs report makes the case for scrapping Democrats' government takeover of health care, which is already keeping people out of work by saddling our small businesses with uncertainty amid the threat of higher taxes and burdensome mandates. All these job losses certainly validate the American people's opposition to putting the federal government in charge of one-sixth of our economy...The Obama Administration's job-killing policies are only making matters worse"

Criticism from Republican leaders coincides with a Congressional Budget Office report saying the long-term U.S. deficit is likely to be bigger than anticipated by Obama. The nonpartisan CBO said Obama's economic policies would generate a national deficit of \$9.8 trillion over the next decade, or \$1.2 trillion more than Obama predicted. For the current fiscal year, the CBO predicts a record \$1.5 trillion deficit.

Measurement

Emotional induction. To measure emotional arousal, participants rated how much of each emotion (fear, anger, and sadness) they felt about the unemployment situation on a 7-point scale ranging from 7 (extremely) to 1 (not at all).

Selective Exposure. Pro- and counter-attitudinal message exposure was measured by combining two variables: which article was chosen and the subject's partisan

identification. If a subject whose partisan identification was Democrat (Republican) chose a Democrat (Republican) article, it was regarded as pro-attitudinal message exposure. Similarly, if a Democrat (Republican) subject chose a Republican (Democrat) article, it was coded as counter-attitudinal message exposure. The subjects who did not identify themselves as Democrats or Republicans (e.g. independents or others) were excluded from the analysis.

Information Processing Depth. Following past research linking processing depth to the number of message-relevant thoughts (e.g., Nabi, 2002), this study analyzed the number of message-relevant thoughts provided by participants. By summing up the total number of message-relevant thoughts participants wrote out after reading the pro/counter-attitudinal message, the extent to which one engages in systematic processing was determined. More thoughts on the issue were scored as deeper processing.

Attitudinal Polarization. To determine attitudinal polarization, the difference between initial attitudes and post-message exposure attitudes on unemployment were assessed. To measure the initial attitude on unemployment, participants were asked about their attitudes on unemployment at the beginning of the survey. Upon a completion of the emotional induction task and the message selection, participants were then asked to respond to the same item again. Both pre- and post-attitudes on unemployment were measured by asking participants to rate their expectations about unemployment over the next year on a 10-point scale, with 10 (get better), 5 (stay about the same), and 0 (get worse). A folded measure of attitudinal polarization was created for both pre- and post-attitudes on unemployment where 0 and 10 is scored as 5, 1 and 9 as 4, 2 and 8 as 3, 3

and 7 as 2, 4 and 6 as 1, and 5 as 0. By subtracting the pre-wave attitude score from the post-wave attitude score, the level of polarization was measured, with higher scores indicating more polarization.¹²

¹² Given that polarization is more extreme attitudes “in the original direction,” few people switched sides (e.g. Those who were above/below 5 in the pre-wave scored below/above 5 in the post-wave) in this study. Only 7 percent switched their opinion of unemployment.

Results

Emotion Manipulation

To test the validity of the emotion manipulation, the level of emotional arousal in each condition was examined. T-tests indicated that in each emotion condition, subjects expressed the expected emotion most strongly. As shown in Table 1, significantly more anger was evoked in the anger condition than in the fear condition, $t(175) = 7.22, p < .001$, and significantly more fear was expressed in fear condition than anger condition, $t(175) = -10.40, p < .001$. No significant difference in terms of sadness between the anger group and the fear group was revealed, however, $t(175) = -1.77, p = .078$. These results showed that anger and fear were successfully induced in the anger and fear conditions, respectively.

Table 1 Emotion Means for Anger/Fear Condition

Condition	Anger		Fear		Sadness	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Anger (n=86)	4.65	1.18	3.27	1.43	3.07	1.65
Fear (n = 90)	3.40	1.19	5.29	1.20	3.49	1.54
<i>t</i> -value	7.22***		-10.40***		-1.77	

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

RQ1: Anger, Fear, and Attitude-congruent Selective Exposure

Research question 1 asked which emotion – anger or fear – was more likely to promote exposure to pro- or counter-attitudinal information. To probe the relationship between emotion and selectivity, cross-tabulation analyses were conducted on the choice

of article for Republicans and Democrats separately since which article counts as pro/counter attitudinal differs for these two groups. Table 2 presents the article selections based on each emotion condition. For Republicans, results indicated that those in the anger and fear conditions were significantly different in their choice of articles, χ^2 (df = 1) = 8.21, $p = .004$. While 44.8 percent of the fear group selected a Democratic article and 55.2 percent of the fear group chose a Republican article, in the anger group, most of the subjects (89.3%) chose a Democratic article and only 10.7 percent selected a Republican article. There were also significant differences between Democrats in the anger and fear conditions in their choice of articles, χ^2 (df = 1) = 9.95, $p = .002$. The effects of anger and fear on the choice of article, however, were quite different from those for Republicans. While those in the anger group were almost evenly divided on the choice of a Democratic article (48.9%) or a Republican article (51.1%), 82.9 percent of the fear group selected a Democratic article and 17.1 percent of the fear group chose a Republican article.

Table 2 Article Choice by Emotion and Party Identification

Condition	Republican		Democrat	
	Democratic Article	Republican Article	Democratic Article	Republican Article
Anger	3 (10.7)	25 (89.3)	23 (48.9)	24 (51.1)
Fear	13 (44.8)	16 (55.2)	29 (82.9)	6 (17.1)
Total	16 (28.1)	41 (71.9)	52 (63.4)	30 (36.6)

The findings here suggest that emotions played distinctive roles for Republicans and Democrats in their choice of information. While anger motivated more likeminded exposure for Republicans than fear, fear promoted more likeminded exposure for Democrats than anger. Further, there was some evidence of selective exposure such that partisans were more likely to choose the likeminded articles. As shown in Table 2, 71.9 percent of Republicans chose to read a Republican article, while only 28.1 percent of Republicans selected a Democratic article. Similarly, 63.4 percent of Democrats chose a Democratic article, whereas 36.6 percent of Democrats selected a Republican article. These results show that overall, partisan selective exposure occurred for both Republicans and Democrats.

A logistic regression analysis confirmed these findings. As shown in Table 3, analyses of the effects of emotion, party identification, and the interaction between these two on article choice revealed no significant interaction between emotion and party identification ($\beta = .22$, $SE = .90$, $p = .810$).

Table 3 Logistic Regression on Selective Message Choice by Emotion and Party Identification

	β	S.E.
Constant	-.04	.29
Emotion (1=Fear/ 0=Anger)	1.83***	.56
Party Identification (1=Republican/ 0=Democratic)	-2.26***	.67
Emotion*Party Identification	.22	.90
Nagelkerke R-square	.36	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. The dependent variable (selective message choice) was coded as 1=Democratic article, 0=Republican article.

There were, however, significant main effects for emotion ($\beta = 1.83, SE = .56, p = .001$) and party identification ($\beta = -2.26, SE = .67, p = .001$) when predicting article choice. These results confirm the cross-tabulation findings from Table 2.

In sum, the analyses for research question 1 show that anger promoted more likeminded exposure than fear for Republicans, while fear motivated more likeminded exposure than anger for Democrats. Thus, anger and fear did not have a consistent influence over people’s willingness to encounter pro- or counter-attitudinal information.

H1 & H3: Anger and Fear on the Processing Depth and Attitudinal Polarization

Hypotheses 1 and 3 posited that anger promotes more careful message processing than fear, producing more message-relevant thoughts and attitudinal polarization. ANOVAs indicated a main effect for emotion type for both of the dependent measures; message-relevant thoughts, $F(1, 175) = 5.09, p = .025$ and attitudinal polarization, $F(1, 175) = 11.01, p = .001$. Consistent with the hypotheses, those in the anger group expressed significantly more thoughts and showed more attitudinal polarization than those in the fear group (see Table 4). The results, thus, show that it is anger, rather than fear, that leads to more polarized attitudes as well as closer message processing. These results offer support for hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 3.

Table 4 Message-Relevant Thoughts and Polarization by Emotion

	Anger (n=86)		Fear (n=90)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Thoughts	5.95	2.50	5.03	2.89
Polarization	.09	1.06	-.53	1.43

H2 & H4: Pro/Counter Attitudinal Message Choice on Processing Depth and Attitudinal Polarization

Hypothesis 2 suggested that those who select counter-attitudinal information may provide more message-relevant thoughts than those who choose pro-attitudinal information. Hypothesis 4 posited that selective exposure to pro-attitudinal information may lead to more extreme opinions than exposure to counter-attitudinal information. As shown in Table 5, Republicans who chose a Republican article provided significantly more thoughts than those who selected a Democratic article, $t(55) = -3.95, p < .001$. In terms of attitudinal polarization, however, no significant difference between those who chose a Republican article and those who selected a Democratic article was revealed, $t(55) = -1.85, p = .069$. For Democrats, those who chose a Republican article expressed more thoughts than those who selected a Democratic article, $t(80) = -2.04, p < .05$. There was also no significant difference in polarization between those who selected a Republican article and those who chose a Democratic article, $t(80) = -1.83, p = .071$.

Table 5 Message-Relevant Thoughts and Polarization by Selective Message Choice

	Republican		Democrat	
	Democratic Article <i>M (SD)</i>	Republican Article <i>M (SD)</i>	Democratic Article <i>M (SD)</i>	Republican Article <i>M (SD)</i>
Thoughts	3.59 (1.77)	6.38 (2.69)	4.66 (2.68)	6.18 (2.31)
Polarization	-.94 (1.35)	-.24 (1.34)	.02 (1.52)	.61 (1.03)

These results show that pro-attitudinal message choice had different effects on message-relevant thoughts for Republicans and Democrats: While pro-attitudinal

exposure led Republicans to provide more thoughts, it was counter-attitudinal exposure that prompted Democrats to express more thoughts. Selective message choice, however, had no significant influence on polarization both for Republicans and Democrats.

In order to further examine hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 4, regression analyses were conducted for the effects of party identification, article choice, and the interaction between these two on message-relevant thoughts and attitudinal polarization. I also control for the manipulated variable, emotion, in this analysis. For message-relevant thoughts, results indicated a significant interaction between party identification and article choice ($\beta = -1.92$, $SE = .87$, $p = .038$) (see Table 6).

Table 6 Regressions of Message-Relevant Thoughts and Polarization by Party Identification, Article Choice, and Emotion

	β	<i>SE</i>
<i>Message-Relevant Thoughts</i>		
Constant	5.73	.48
Party Identification (1=Democrat/0=Republican)	1.01	.64
Article Choice (1=Democrat/0=Republican)	-.64	.61
Party Identification*Article Choice	-1.92*	.87
Emotion (1=Fear / 0=Anger)	-.72	.46
R-square	.18	2.01
<i>Polarization</i>		
Constant	6.71	.42
Party Identification (1=Democrat/0=Republican)	-.64	.62
Article Choice (1=Democrat/0=Republican)	-.78*	.34
Party Identification*Article Choice	.35	.49
Emotion (1=Fear / 0=Anger)	-.69	.46
R-square	.16	2.32

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

The significant interaction between party identification and article choice here confirms the results of the t-tests described above. Regarding polarization, the results revealed no significant interaction between party identification and article choice as shown in Table 6 ($\beta = .35$, $SE = .49$, $p = .351$).¹³ This finding provides additional evidence that selective exposure to pro-attitudinal message did not generate more polarized attitudes in this study. Hypotheses 2 and 4, therefore, were not supported.¹⁴

In sum, the analyses of hypothesis 2 suggest that pro- and counter-attitudinal message exposure may have different influences on message-relevant thoughts for Republicans and Democrats. For Republicans, pro-attitudinal exposure promoted more message-relevant thoughts than counter-attitudinal exposure, while for Democrats, it was counter-attitudinal exposure that led to more message-relevant thoughts. Whether likeminded exposure motivates more message-relevant thoughts than non-likeminded exposure, thus, was contingent on respondents' party identification. Further, the results of hypothesis 4 provide no evidence that pro- or counter- attitudinal exposure leads to polarization.

¹³ There was a main effect of article choice for polarization (see Table 6). Those who chose a Democratic article were less likely to show the polarization of attitudes.

¹⁴ Of note, despite the significant effects of anger and fear on message-relevant thoughts and polarization shown in Table 4, the emotion variables are not significant in these analyses. It is possible that causal relationships between emotions, partisan selective exposure, and message-relevant thoughts/polarization in this study affected the effects of emotion here. Since anger and fear had distinct effects on exposure patterns for Republicans and Democrats, variables such as party identification and selective article choice would have diluted the effects of emotion.

Discussion

By incorporating the increasing discussion of emotion in politics into the literature on selective exposure, this study examined how exposure to congruent/incongruent information, influenced by discrete emotions, affects information processing and attitudes – specifically, the depth of information processing and attitudinal polarization.

This study shows that discrete emotions indeed influence the depth of information processing and attitudinal polarization. The findings of this study indicate that emotions such as anger and fear play distinctive roles in processing depth and attitudinal polarization. In addition, this study suggests that discrete emotions have more complicated effects on exposure patterns than merely stimulating more or less likeminded exposure. While anger promoted more likeminded exposure than fear for Republicans, fear motivated more likeminded exposure than anger for Democrats. Further, this study found some evidence of selective exposure such that partisans were more likely to choose likeminded articles: Republicans were more likely to choose the Republican article and Democrats were more likely to choose the Democratic article. Consistent with prior research suggesting people's tendency to seek out congruent information (e.g. Taber & Lodge, 2006), this study also finds that people pursue messages congenial to their previous views.

As shown by the significant effect of emotion on article choice, fear led more people to choose the Democratic article. As research documents that people prefer

messages that deal with a negative affect more effectively (Nabi, 1999), subjects may have expected this article to contain more *relief* information about the unemployment situation compared to the Republican article. This may be the case because the article suggested that the unemployment situation was improving. This would be consistent with prior research suggesting that fear prompts exposure to messages about *protection* (Nabi, 1999; 2002a). Discrete emotions generated by respondents in this study, in this sense, indeed influenced message choice.

Discrete emotions, however, did not have a consistent influence over people's willingness to expose themselves to politically congenial or uncongenial information. Given prior research studies documenting the distinct impact of discrete emotions on information seeking behavior (e.g. Valentino et al., 2008), the findings of this study – anger and fear did not consistently influence the pursuit of attitudinally congruent/incongruent information – seem at odds with previous findings. Some may argue that the acknowledged, wide-ranging role of emotion in information processing (Lodge & Taber, 2005; Marcus et al., 2000) may not persist in selective exposure to partisan messages. Yet in this study, emotions did influence exposure patterns. While Republicans and Democrats were more motivated to choose a pro-attitudinal message than counter-attitudinal message in the anger and fear conditions, respectively, partisan differences did emerge. In fact, considering that emotion permeates and influences every type of political information processing (Lodge & Taber, 2005; Marcus et al., 2000), a more plausible explanation is that partisan selective exposure *is influenced by discrete emotions*, but in more complex ways than originally expected in this study.

It is worth considering, therefore, the potential factors that might have affected the effects of discrete emotions in this study. One possibility resides in the nature of message topic used in this study. Because the issue “unemployment” is directly related to one’s everyday life and likely is regarded as one of the most threatening issues especially when realized as a potential harm to oneself or close ones, subjects who were primed to feel afraid about this issue might have been dominated more by their own desire to avoid from the threat (Frijda, 1986, 1988; Nabi, 1999, 2002a) – rather than *by a desire to encounter politically congruent information*. Those in the fear condition could be more influenced by their strong desire to eliminate the source of this negative feeling by choosing the Democratic article since the Democratic article is expected to deal with more positive expectations about unemployment than the Republican article. This may have led to the partisan differences uncovered.

Although this study provides mixed evidence for the effects of discrete emotions on people’s willingness to choose congenial or uncongenial information, the results of this study confirm the importance of looking at the effects of emotion on selective exposure. This analysis is particularly important given that in real world settings, citizens have ample opportunity to select which messages they encounter. The findings here add to evidence that people’s decisions to engage with certain types of messages are influenced by how they *feel* about the message. Indeed, no one may be free from the automatic emotional responses generated in the face of certain political messages (Lodge & Taber, 2005). Being influenced by emotions, people may engage with certain forms of information in their everyday lives.

Various theories and research studies have provided mixed predictions and findings on the effects of anger and fear on information processing depth. The results of this study suggest that anger, rather than fear, leads to closer processing of messages as well as more polarized attitudes. Those who were in the anger condition produced significantly more thoughts and displayed more attitudinal polarization than those in the fear condition. As Nabi (1999, 2002a) conceptualizes anger as “approach” emotion, subjects who were stimulated to feel angry appear to get closer to the message, actively expressing their thoughts about the given issue. Caution is warranted, however, in simply concluding that anger, and not fear, prompts systematic processing. First, it is notable that research studies using different emotional manipulations also have generated different findings on the effects of anger and fear on processing depth (e.g. Marcus et al., 2000; Nabi, 2002a, 2002b; Valentino et al., 2008). Considering that this study induced message-relevant emotions by having subjects recall their own experiences, the findings of this study do not apply to all instances. Here, I focus on the effects of *message-relevant* discrete emotions, as opposed to message-irrelevant moods. Since this study did not test the effects of different methods inducing emotions, for example by comparing the effect of recalling a certain emotion to the effect of inducing an emotion from a given message, it is possible that different methods may generate different results. In addition, the context may have affected the effects of emotions. It is worthwhile to note that politics is the field where individuals’ political/partisan ideologies play important roles in processing new information (Redlawsk, 2002; Taber & Lodge, 2006). The distinct characteristics and strength of partisan responses to unemployment thus could have been

responsible for the effects of discrete emotions in this study.

Despite these possibilities, the findings of this study speak to the distinct roles of anger and fear in politics. Feeling anger motivates people to approach information about an issue and ultimately leads to more polarization than fear. Given scholarly concerns about political apathy and public indifference to important social issues, the motivating power of anger could be encouraging. That anger leads to more polarization, however, raises a normative concern; as more people feel angry with political matters, more polarization may result. Research primarily documenting that anger is irrational has pointed out the negative democratic outcomes such as aggression (e.g. Berkowitz, 1993). The results of this study, however, suggest that feeling anger may have two sides in its effects on politics. Those feeling angry produce more thoughts about an issue. However, this thought-producing process may prompt more polarized attitudes.

Research has proposed that exposure to counter-attitudinal messages may prompt people to engage in more systematic message processing whereby people spend more cognitive resources to refute the opposite's rationale (Lodge & Taber, 2000; Redlawsk, 2002; Rucker & Petty, 2004; Taber & Lodge, 2006). In this study, however, the effects of exposure to pro- and counter-attitudinal messages were more complicated. While counter-attitudinal exposure indeed promoted more thoughts for Democrats, it was pro-attitudinal exposure that motivated more thoughts for Republicans. It is conceivable that the reasons presented in the pro-attitudinal message may have provided subjects with more rationale supporting their previous attitudes. Just as prior research suggests that one's reasons for attitudes grow as one searches for congruent arguments (Cappella,

Price, & Nir, 2002), exposure to similar views may allow people to equip themselves with a variety of persuasive arguments about their point of view (Isenberg, 1986). However, given that pro-attitudinal messages led to more message-relevant thoughts than counter-attitudinal messages for Republicans, it seems that certain individual characteristics – partisan ideologies in this case – may play a part. Although it is not clear whether it was Republican/Democrat identity-related characteristics or some other relevant political variables that influenced the relationship between pro/counter attitudinal exposure and message-relevant thoughts, the results of this study suggest that the effects of selective message choice on message-relevant thoughts may be quite different for people with different partisan identifications.

The results of this study indicate that selective message exposure did not generate attitudinal polarization. Inconsistent with previous research demonstrating that selective exposure to likeminded views promotes attitude polarization (Huckfeldt, Mendez, & Osborn, 2004; Isenberg, 1986; Mutz, 2006; Rucker & Petty, 2004), there were no significant differences between those who selected attitudinally congenial information and those who selected uncongenial information in terms of the extremity of attitudes. Of note, this study examined the attitudinal outcomes of selective exposure based on a single exposure to a message. Yet, as Taber and Lodge (2006) suggest, *stubborn adherence to one's existing attitudes* can be found even for non-zealots in politics. It may be challenging, therefore, to demonstrate a change of political attitudes after a single exposure to a message. In addition, given the experimental design, the time interval between pre-and post-wave attitude measures in this study was relatively short. If there

was a longer time interval between the measures, subjects may have been able to more fully process the information and incorporate it into their schema. In this situation, the results might be different. Likewise, repeated exposures to pro-attitudinal messages instead of a single instance of exposure may prompt polarization to occur.

Despite the unique contributions of this study to our understanding of the role of emotion in politics and selective exposure, this study has several limitations. First, following research measuring message-relevant thoughts for the depth of processing, this study used the number of message-relevant thoughts provided by subjects to evaluate their processing depth. Simply counting the number of thoughts, however, may not serve as an ideal, comprehensive measure of processing depth. Future research should incorporate other measures that complement this measure, for example, by examining the content of thoughts, the processing time, the strength of message arguments, or the “argument repertoire” (Cappella, Price, & Nir, 2002).

In addition, since this study used an experimental survey design, it is possible that results may differ from the real world conditions. For example, in this study, subjects were directed to recall something that made them feel angry/afraid and then directed to choose one of two messages related to the topic. This may have led subjects to make the connection between emotion and message choice in a more intentional way than they do in reality. It is possible that other variables may influence the effects of emotion on selective choice in the real world – such as the frequency with which one discusses politics with others and the motivation to pursue political information. Future studies should examine the relationship between emotion and the attitudinally-

congruent/incongruent message exposure by incorporating other potential variables that are likely related.

Last but not least, as noted earlier, this study analyzed the effects of emotion and selective exposure on processing depth and polarization following a single exposure to pro- and counter-attitudinal information. The effects may have provided different results if subjects were exposed to those messages repeatedly or on a regular basis. Considering that people tend to show strong adherence to prior attitudes (Sears & Whitney, 1973; Taber & Lodge, 2006), it may require a longer period of time to evaluate the genuine effects of attitudinal polarization resulting from selective exposure than was possible in this study.

This study adds insight to the understanding of the role of discrete emotions in politics as well as the reexamination of the phenomenon of selective exposure. Research suggests that emotion permeates every stage of message processing and the results of this study confirm that this is the case. From the willingness to engage with certain types of information exposure to the depth of processing and to attitude polarization, discrete emotions played influential roles. This study also speaks to the need to take a deeper look at emotional factors in examining the phenomenon of selective exposure. Though this study did not find evidence that discrete emotions consistently influence patterns of partisan selective exposure, it did show that emotions influence exposure patterns. With more systematic investigations into how discrete emotions operate in the face of the new political information, we can continue to understand how emotions influence information

processing and attitude development. Without question, emotions are one of the most important factors in explaining how individuals respond to our dynamic political reality.

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