A Little Bird Told Me So:
Inquiring Social Media’s Impact on Trust in Government and Civic Engagement

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Abstract

For an entire generation of Americans, social media platforms have emerged as a primary source of information. Information that citizens receive today via social media networks and platforms is much more horizontal (two-way) rather than hierarchical (one-way) traditional media. This information may influence citizens’ perceptions and behavioral decisions in a variety of ways, yet the rapidity of information exchange in these media largely preclude regard to the data publisher’s credentials, or the validity of the message. In light of this phenomenon, governments, private firms, and interest groups have searched for ways to utilize social media networks and platforms in order to increase civic engagement and foster positive public relations. However, little research exists that explores the extent to which using social media as one’s primary source of receiving or conveying information correlates with public trust or distrust in government, and how its relation to trust affects civic engagement.

Social media is an information source as well as a medium for civic engagement. This study asks two interrelated questions regarding this duality. First, how does social media’s status as an individual’s potential source of information translate into civic engagement? Secondly, how is this transfer from information source to a tool of civic engagement mediated by an individual’s level of trust or distrust in government?

To answer these questions, I review two distinct topics in the cognate social sciences: (1) the role of social media in today’s society and (2) trust in government. I present the research questions that emerge from this literature. I then propose a
specific research design. The essay concludes with some general observations on
the advantages and disadvantages of the research design.

The product of this thesis could serve useful for social scientists by identifying some
specific combinations of variables that can be used to formulate further research
designs for measuring the various dimensions of social trust in government, civic
engagement, and the corresponding impacts generated by social media.
Introduction

The concept and meaning of trust has long been a topic of great interest to social scientists and scholars in a wide range of fields. In this essay, I survey the scholarship on trust and develop the argument that trust is comprised of several dimensions that pertain to both contextual and contingent assessments by one person of another entity (whether person, group, or institution) (Mayer, Davis, Schoorman, 717, 1995). I follow by examining specifically what dimensions of trust are most prominent in determining an individual’s trust in government, and under what contexts.

Trust in government is fundamental because “the relationship of citizens to government is one of trust, not one of contract” (Hardin, 9, 1998 citing John Dunn, 1988, 1984). However, what is actually meant when it is said that one “trusts government”? Does it simply mean that he or she complies with government, or does not actively distrust government? What influences one’s decision to trust or distrust government? That is, what factors such as information sources or personal heuristics are at play behind one’s conscious or subconscious assessments of government’s trustworthiness? This thesis will present a step toward answering those questions.

What is Trust?

To answer this question, one should start by asserting a few distinct premises. First, trust as well as distrust is cognitive, that is, trust and distrust are both learned (Hardin, 1998). Trust and distrust are learned because each depends on our assessments of the trustworthiness of the potentially trusted person or
entity. Our knowledge built from an assessment of another’s ability, benevolence, and integrity constitutes our degree of trust or distrust (Hardin, 2006) (Mayer, Davis, Schoorman, 717, 1995).

Furthermore, propensity, or disposition to trust will vary from individual to individual, and from context to context, making the general willingness to trust others a very personalized characteristic (Mayer, Davis, Schoorman, 715, 1995). Propensity to trust is crucial and can be thought of as: “a personality trait of people interacting with a peripheral environment... that leads to the generalized expectation about the trustworthiness of others” (Mayer, Davis, Schoorman, 715, 1995). From this definition, one can assert that context is important for our propensity to trust because we are better judges of when to trust when we are in standard or familiar contexts, rather than abstract or unfamiliar contexts (Hardin, 2006).

A final basic element of trust is that it requires risk:

“It is pointless to say you trust someone unless there is a risk that you will lose if that person does not fulfill your trust after you have acted on that trust to their initial benefit” (Hardin, 2006).

Trust is the willingness to take risk, not just the act of risk taking (Mayer, Davis, Schoorman, 712, 1995). With this in mind, this thesis relies on a definition of trust proposed by Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995): “The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (Mayer, Davis, Schoorman, 712, 1995).
Typically, when one thinks of trust at the individual level, trust is a three-part relation: A trusts B to do X (or with respect to matters X) (Hardin, 12, 1998). This “trust” is based off an assumption that the potentially trusted person (B) has an interest in maintaining a relationship with the person granting their trust (A), an interest that gives the potentially trusted person an incentive to be trustworthy (Hardin, 17, 2006). However, it is important to not confuse cooperation with trust.

“Although trust can frequently lead to cooperative behavior, trust is not a necessary condition for cooperation to occur... A person may not be able to avoid a situation like the prisoner’s dilemma. His or her actions may appear to be trusting, but it is based on other motives or rationales” (Mayer, Davis, Schoorman, 712-713, 1995).

**Trust in Government, or Trust in Heuristics?**

If what is stated above is true for the fostering of trust, we run into an oddity when discussing trust in government. This is because for most people in the world, we know basically nothing about the true intentions those people may or may not have towards us, or whether to trust them. Similarly, the same can be said for most people when discussing government: We do not know each individual’s true motives or whether to trust them (Hardin, 11, 1998). Moreover, government as an institution is not a sum of its parts. Trust in the individuals who comprise a government institution is not necessarily equated with one’s trust in the institution itself.

Knowing an information source directly, or knowing someone assessed as being trustworthy who knows it personally, presents people with a more concrete basis for assessing the trustworthiness of the source, so previous encounters are vital to building assessments of trustworthiness and ultimately trust (Hertzum et al,
However, in such a case where one does not know whether to trust based on firsthand or nearly firsthand information, such as whether to trust government, he or she might be inclined to rely on *heuristics*.

Heuristics are “mental shortcuts that require hardly any information—to make fairly reliable political judgments” (Kuklinski, Quirk, 1, 1998). Often, people use their heuristics on a whim unknowingly and automatically, and rarely worry about the accuracy of the judgment. Humans are naturally programmed to use heuristics, and these broader, less discriminating sorts of heuristics generally trump strategic decision-making processes (Kuklinski, Quirk, 6, 1998). Unfortunately, the general population often uses heuristics incorrectly for assessing performance of the government, because most people lack the necessary information required to use these “mental shortcuts” accurately and effectively (Kuklinski, Quirk, 19, 1998).

As Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996, pp. 51-53) observe, citizens often lack the contextual knowledge needed to use heuristics intelligently because critical portions of the information required to properly use a heuristic might be missing from the citizen’s environment. A good example of a situation lacking heuristical cues often occurs in politics, where network news programs rarely air public officials’ positions on public policy issues in Congress (Althaus 1996 cited in Kuklinski, Quirk, 1998). If situational cues do not appear in such complex areas as politics or government, citizens cannot properly use them to make rational judgments (Kuklinski, Quirk, 6, 1998).

If most people use heuristics ineffectively, where do people receive most of their information on which he or she bases their heuristic? Equally important, how
does one “trust” the accuracy of the information that he or she receives in respect to the competency of government and government officials? “Some form of trust is inherent in all human relationships, specifically; trust is at play whenever people exchange information” (Hertzum et al, 576-577, 2002).

Perhaps the most commonly used heuristic in respect to voting or public policy is party affiliation, which allows uninformed citizens to compensate for their lack of political knowledge when selecting a political position (Kuklinski, Quirk, 3-4, 1998). Assessments of government performance almost entirely depend on party affiliation as well, whether you are a Republican, Democrat, or Independent (PEW 25). Political party heuristics are so predominant because they are quick and simple: “When attention and motivation are low, people employ fewer resources; rely on simple heuristics, and use top-down, stereotypic inferences” (Fiske & Taylor 1991, 475-480, cited in Kuklinski, Quirk, 17, 1998).

While heuristics give us a good rule of thumb for the general population, further inquiry is needed on the individual level. This is because any individual can receive information or have personal experiences that may lead that individual to have mixed perceptions and emotions towards different branches, departments, or institutions of government. For example, the Social Security Administration is seen as negative for Republicans, Independents, and especially those who are aged 50-64 (PEW, 57). However, satisfaction ratings for military and postal service remain high, which sets a clear distinction in how people feel about the performance of some agencies compared to others like the Department of Education or the Social Security Administration (PEW, 57-58). Why does this phenomenon occur?
For those individuals in the previously mentioned age group of 50-64, it could likely be due to experiencing a feeling of lack of security and a perception that these particular institutions do not have that demographic's interests encapsulated in its own institutional interests or mission. In other words, people aged 50-64 may feel their interest to retire or to live stress-free lives are not being encapsulated by the government because they are not yet receiving social security until the age of 65. Because citizens in this demographic cannot yet, but are very close to becoming eligible to receive social security, they may doubt the Social Security Administration’s benevolence. Also, people aged 50-64 typically do not have children young enough to be in grades K-12, so it may seem easier to criticize the Department of Education on its effectiveness in educating today's children, or doubt its integrity in efficient resource allocation, which is mainly provided via tax dollars.

Interestingly, like those citizens using heuristics to assess the trustworthiness of government institutions, citizens using heuristics to assess the trustworthiness of politicians can often result in similar distrust. For the most part, politicians are perceived negatively and they are widely distrusted. Yet, when polled, the public holds no dominant or persistent criticism of elected public officials (PEW, 43). Overconfidence in the accuracy of one’s existing information, and the negative assessments of politicians derived thereof, can lead even those citizens who support working for government institutions to often be wary of government generally (Kuklinski, Quirk, 28, 1998).

Bias interpretation of political messages can lead to drastically different perceptions of the message's ideology. A good example to demonstrate the bias
interpretation of messages heuristic appears in a study conducted by Kuklinski and Hurley (1994, 1996). In the survey, African Americans were asked for their reactions to a statement recently made by a random liberal or conservative, black or white political figure; George Bush (white conservative), Clarence Thomas (black conservative), Jesse Jackson (black liberal), or Teddy Kennedy (white liberal). In the survey, each political figure was being portrayed as quoting: “African Americans must stop making excuses and rely much more on themselves to get ahead in society.” The respondents were then asked to record how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement. The respondents agreed with the statement when attributed to either of the black political figures, but disagreed with the statement when attributed to either of the white political figures. Later, when asked to recall their interpretations of the message, a similar pattern occurred. In all variances of the situation, the recipient of the message did not pay attention to the political figure’s record on civil rights or to the political ideology of the message; rather, they focused primarily on the politician’s race as a cue, which in turn led to a bias interpretation of the message (Kuklinski, Hurley; 1994, 1996 cited in Kuklinski, Quirk, 33-34, 1998).

When using heuristics, such as demographic cues, to form comprehensive positions on public policies, citizens should receive and use relevant information pertaining to each policy in a balanced and unbiased manner (Kuklinski, Quirk, 27, 1998). Yet, in some enduring policy debates, biased policy stereotypes can worsen the polar extremes of the conflict and intensify negative attitudes (Kuklinski, Quirk, 28, 1998). To avoid personal bias when politicians speak, citizens should listen and
interpret the message being conveyed rather than rely on ambiguous peripheral
cues (Kuklinski, Quirk, 33, 1998). To avoid overconfidence in one’s information, a
citizen should recognize the varying levels of knowledge the citizen has in the
assorted fields of politics, and use this recognition in subsequent matters to decide
whether to withhold judgment, look to leaders, or search for more information
(Kuklinski, Quirk, 28, 1998). However, some relatively simple heuristical cues, such
as one’s political party affiliation, race, or political ideology, can often be the best
representations of a person’s attitude judgments (Glynn, Herbst, O’Keefe, Shapiro,
Lindeman, 134, 2004).

Typical memory-based models of processing presume that citizens explore
their minds for previously stored information, then form an assessment or decision
based on what information they found (Druckman, 516, 2005). In contrast, on-line
models of reasoning presume that when an individual confronts new information,
such as an elected official’s public policy positions, the individual immediately
updates their overall assessment (Druckman, 516, 2005). The individual may then
soon forget the information that changed his or her assessment, such as an elected
official’s public policy positions (Druckman, 516, 2005). The individual is likely to
just retrieve their most proximate assessment or evaluation without probing for the
information on which the assessment or evaluation was based (Druckman, 516,
2005).

“Lodge et al. (1995, p. 401) explain that the result may be “that people
can often tell you how much they like or dislike a book, movie,
candidate, or policy [because they maintain a running evaluation] but
not be able to recount the specific whys and wherefores for their
overall evaluation”” (Druckman, 516, 2005).
From Where Does the Heuristic Information Most Predominantly Emanate?

The Internet has paved a way for social media platforms to host a broad range of intimate areas of conversation. Today, even a single blogger has the power to influence millions of people (Tham 226, 2009). When looking for reliable information, individuals are typically looking for at least three factors. The first factor is that the information is accessible in a way that allows the individual to form an assessment of its quality. The second factor is that the information found is actually perceived to be of great quality (Hertzum et al, 577, 2002). A third factor to be considered is that the information found affirms one’s previously held biases. The lack of overlap in liberal and conservative interests on Internet blogs and websites exacerbates the proliferation of specialized online news sources, which allows people with different political ideologies to be exposed only to information in agreement with their previously held views (Glance, 2-3, 2005). Hence, all individuals will not necessarily assess the same information similarly, because information sources are inherently personal (Hassenzahl 2001, as cited in Hertzum et al 593, 2002).

The value of information sources extends beyond providing information. Its value is also found in assisting the information seeker in assessing the trustworthiness of other sources (Hertzum et al, 596, 2002). However, the latter may not always be helpful. An individual may assess a website or blog is trustworthy because it has encapsulated the individual’s interests by affirming his or her previously held biases found therein. When researching communication on social media platforms, it is important to examine which media sources facilitate
specific kinds of learning and what elements of such media do so. That is, if the content in a message is held constant: tone, presentation, visuals, and other features boost learning (Druckman, 518, 2005). For example, some individuals make assessments of a website’s trustworthiness based on personification of the website, such as colors or pictures that can trigger heuristical cues, rather than what information is displayed in a plain text field. On the other hand, some individuals experience negative emotions from the website’s personification, and prefer the presentation of information to be on a plain text field (Hertzum et al, 595, 2002) (Kuklinski, Quirk, 17-18, 1998).

Once the information seeker is contingent upon his or her assessment that his or her interests are being encapsulated by the information provider, establishing an assessment of the quality of information or source of information is basically a matter of how much trust the information seeker is willing to place in the competency, integrity, and benevolence of the information provider (Hertzum et al, 577, 2002). Yet, how individuals use the Internet has profoundly different impacts on the production social capital (Shah, Kwak, Holbert, 142, 2001). For example, one of Norris and Jones’s (1998) four groups of Internet users labeled “party animals,” (those who use the Internet for playing on-line games or for other kinds of entertainment such as anonymous chat rooms), are found to be less trusting, less likely to be engaged in civic activity, and have lower levels of contentment with his or life compared to other groups of Internet users (Shah, Kwak, Holbert, 144, 149, 2001). In contrast, a different group of Norris and Jones’s Internet users labeled “researchers,” (those who use the Internet for e-mail and investigative purposes),
are found to be more trusting in other people, more likely to be engaged in civic activity, and have high degrees of contentment with his or her life (Shah, Kwak, Holbert, 149, 2001). Moreover, these “researchers” are found to be more politically knowledgeable than other new media users. This correlation suggests that only certain types of Internet users will receive the benefits of being more informed and politically engaged as a result of Internet use (Shah, Kwak, Holbert, 144, 2001).

Americans who use the Internet to learn or gather new information, maintain connections with other Internet users, and establish “virtual communities” may stimulate civic engagement. This is because the Internet allows users to gain knowledge, build linkages, and coordinate their actions to address joint concerns (Shah, Kwak, Holbert, 144, 2001). In contrast, Americans who use the Internet for social recreation appear to paradoxically impede the value of social capital, especially as it might be used to obtain useful information (Shah, Kwak, Holbert, 154, 2001). Thus, in understanding the linkages between the Internet, civic life, and democratic functioning, one must concentrate on what individuals do with the Internet medium, not simply what it does to them (Shah, Kwak, Holbert, 154, 2001).

**The Research Question and Hypothesis**

At this point is the research question presented by this essay: Pertaining to social trust in government and civic engagement, what implications do the findings of social capital stimulation or impediment being contextually dependent upon the actions of the information seeker have for social media websites such as Twitter or Facebook? My hypothesis: By fostering and conveying asymmetrical information in heavily trafficked and centralized platforms, social media exacerbates distrust in
government. One way to inspect this research question and test this hypothesis is to conduct a type of randomized field experiment (RFE), called a Solomon four-group design. Although this design is one of the more difficult RFE’s to implement and analyze, a Solomon four-group design can help ensure internal validity of the experiment by combatting the sway of confounding variables and superfluous factors.

The Solomon four-group design for measuring the influence of social media pertaining to trust in government is comprised of four randomly selected groups that are then randomly assigned to one of four tests. In the first instance, the first test group receives the pretest, the treatment, and the posttest. In second instance, the second test group receives the pretest, no treatment, and the posttest. In the third instance, the third test group receives no pretest, the treatment, and the posttest. Finally, in the fourth instance, the fourth group or (control group), receives no pretest, no treatment, and the posttest.

**The Method for Experiment**

This essay’s experiment will take place on Facebook, and will be directed toward federal government agencies generally. In this experiment, everyday I will post one link to a story about a government agency, which will come from a constantly held government source. The links will vary from day to day, one day being something positive and the next day something negative. All of the links I post will pertain to stories within the last week.

All four groups will be subject to their ordinary Facebook posts. Two groups will receive the pretest, which is a survey questionnaire that accounts for: (1) their
time spent of Facebook, (2) political ideology, (3) propensity to rely on Facebook as their primary source of information, (4) disposition to convey information obtained from Facebook and, (5) whether the conveyance of such information reflects a tendency towards being positive or negative. A more robust draft of the experiment’s pretest instrument is located in the Appendix. Of the two groups who receive the pretest, one group will receive the treatment, which is exposure to my political Facebook posts, and the other will not. The group that receives the pretest, treatment, and posttest will be referred to in this essay as group (A). The group that receives the pretest, no treatment, and the posttest will be referred to as group (B).

Likewise, of the two groups who do not receive the pretest, one group receives the treatment, which is exposure to my political Facebook posts, and the other group does not. The group that receives no pretest, the treatment, and the posttest will be referred to as group (C). The group that does not receive either the pretest or treatment, but does receive the posttest will be referred to as group (D). Group (D) serves as the control group for measuring the cause and effect relationship of the pretest or treatment on the other groups who received at least one or the other.

All four groups will be subject to the posttest, which is a measurement of how often each group is conveying the political information that I produced on my Facebook account, and whether the information conveyed by each group has a propensity to be positive or negative. When done, I cross-examine between each of the groups: (1) how many of my links each group shared, (2) whether there was a propensity towards sharing my negative or positive links, (3) whether or not they
started sharing more information about government generally and, (4) the positive to negative ratio of the general government information they posted.

**Analyzing the Experiment’s Findings for Drawing Conclusions**

Comparisons of the posttest results between groups C and D to groups A and B will help reveal whether the pretesting affected the overall results. In this case, if the difference between the posttest results of groups C and D diverges from the difference of the posttest results of groups A and B, then I can presume that the pretest had some influence on the overall results.

The comparison of the results between group B’s pretest and group D’s posttest will help reveal whether any extraneous variables caused a temporal distortion in the results. Essentially, this comparison is a check on the experiment’s internal validity, in that it helps to determine if any other factors could have influenced the experiment’s results.

The comparison of Group B’s posttest and Group D’s posttest shows whether the pretest itself has affected behavior, independently of the treatment. If the results of this comparison are considerably different, then the pretest has influenced the experiment’s overall results, and the experiment is in need of improvement.

The comparison of Group A’s posttest to Group C’s posttest helps the examiner to determine the effect that the pretest has had on the treatment. In this case, if the posttest results for groups A and C differ, then the pretest has effected the experiment’s treatment and the experiment is flawed.
Appendix

Pretest Survey Questionnaire

1. Where are you currently located (City and State)?
2. At what location were you raised (City and State)?
3. What is your age?
4. What is your current occupation (Name of Company, Title of Position, if applicable)
5. How long have you worked at this current place of occupation (if applicable)?
6. Average number of hours worked per week at current place of occupation (a) 1-20 (b) 21-39 (c) 40-50 (d) more than 50
7. What is your current annual income (a) $0-$8,700; (b) $8,701-$35,300; (c) $35,351-$85,650; (d) $85,651-$178,650 (e) $178,651-$388,350 (f) over $388,350
8. List any places of previous occupation (Name of Company, Title of Position, if applicable)
9. Time elapsed at places of previous occupation (if applicable)
10. Average number of hours worked per week at previous place(s) of occupation (a) 1-20 (b) 21-39 (c) 40-50 (d) more than 50
11. What was your annual income at any place(s) of previous occupation (a) $0-$8,700; (b) $8,701-$35,300; (c) $35,351-$85,650; (d) $85,651-$178,650 (e) $178,651-$388,350 (f) over $388,350
12. Are you currently a collegiate student?
13. If you answered yes in Question 12, what is the name of the college or university you currently attend?

14. Please list any other colleges or universities previously attended.

15. If you answered yes in Question 12, please list: (a) your current standing (freshman – graduate or postgraduate), (b) years enrolled at any other colleges or universities, (c) any or all majors/minors/areas of concentration, (d) current or undergraduate GPA, (e) graduate or postgraduate GPA (if applicable)

16. If you did not answer yes to Question 12, did you previously attend or graduate from a college or university?

17. If you answered yes in Question 16, what is the name of the college or university from which you graduated or attended?

18. Please list any other colleges or universities previously attended from which you did not graduate and the years enrolled is each place.

19. If you answered yes in Question 16, please list: (a) any or all majors/minors/areas of concentration, (b) undergraduate GPA, (c) graduate or postgraduate GPA (if applicable)

20. If you did not answer yes to Questions 12 or 16, please list your highest level of education (a) middle school or less (b) some high school (c) attained a high school diploma or the equivalent.

21. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all and 10 being extremely), rate your degree of life contentment.
22. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being almost always), how likely are you to spend (a) 0-1 hours per week on the Internet; (b) 1-2 hours per week on the Internet; (c) 2-3 hours per week on the Internet; (d) 3-4 hours per week on the Internet; (e) 4-5 hours per week on the Internet; (f) 5-6 hours per week on the Internet; (g) 6-7 hours per week on the Internet; (h) 7-8 hours per week on the Internet; (i) 8-9 hours per week on the Internet; (j) 10 or more hours per week on the Internet

23. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost none and 10 being nearly all) for each of the answers provided in Question 17, how much of your Internet use time is spent on blogging websites or social media websites such as Facebook or Twitter (a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f) (g) (h) (i) (j)

24. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), how frequently do you visit political websites or websites with a political emphasis?

25. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), how frequently do you visit blogging websites?

26. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), how frequently do you visit social media websites, such as Facebook or Twitter?

27. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), how frequently do you participate in online discussion on social media or blogging websites?

28. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), how frequently do you rely on blogging websites for political information?
29. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), how often do you rely on social media websites for political information?

30. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), how often do you convey information obtained from political websites or websites with political emphasis?

31. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), how often do you convey political information obtained from blogging websites?

32. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), how often do you convey political information obtained from social media websites?

33. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), how often do you rely on mass media, such as T.V. news channels, radio, or newspapers for political information?

34. Please list the names of the T.V. news channels, radio stations, and newspapers you prefer for reliable political information.

35. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), how often do you convey political information obtained from mass media sources?

36. On a scale of 1-10 (1 not likely and 10 being very likely), how prone are you to convey information obtained from political articles that you view as negative or that upset you?

37. On a scale of 1-10 (1 not likely and 10 being very likely), how prone are you to convey information obtained from political articles that you view as positive or that make you happy?
38. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), when reading an article on political websites or websites with political emphasis, how often do you: (a) read the entire article; (b) read most of the article; (c) read about half of the article; (d) read less than half of the article

39. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), when reading an article on political blogging website, how often do you: (a) read the entire article; (b) read most of the article; (c) read about half of the article; (d) read less than half of the article

40. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), when reading a political article on a social media website, how often do you: (a) read the entire article; (b) read most of the article; (c) read about half of the article; (d) read less than half of the article

41. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), when reading a political article in a newspaper, how often do you: (a) read the entire article; (b) read most of the article; (c) read about half of the article; (d) read less than half of the article

42. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), when watching a political T.V. news broadcast, how often do you: (a) watch the entire broadcast; (b) watch most of the broadcast; (c) watch about half of the broadcast; (d) watch less than half of the broadcast

43. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being habitually), when listening to a political broadcast from a radio station, how often do you: (a)
listen to the entire broadcast; (b) listen to most of the broadcast; (c) listen to about half of the broadcast; (d) listen to less than half of the broadcast

44. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being lightly and 10 being intensely), how closely do you typically pay attention when you read articles from political websites or websites with political emphasis?

45. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being lightly and 10 being intensely), how closely do you typically pay attention when you read articles from political blogging websites?

46. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being lightly and 10 being intensely), how closely do you typically pay attention when you read political articles from social media websites?

47. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being lightly and 10 being intensely), how closely do you typically pay attention when you read political articles from newspapers?

48. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being lightly and 10 being intensely), how closely do you typically pay attention when you watch to political T.V. news broadcasts?

49. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being lightly and 10 being intensely), how closely do you typically pay attention when you listen to political radio broadcasts?

50. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being lightly and 10 being intensely), how closely do you typically pay attention to the information sources of your political information suppliers (a) political websites (b) political blogs (c) social media (d) mass media
51. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being almost always), how often do you crosscheck your preferred political information sources with other political information sources?

52. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all and 10 being very), how reliable do you think is the political information you receive from (a) political websites; (b) blogging websites; (c) social media websites; (d) T.V. news channels; (e) radio stations; (f) newspapers

53. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all and 10 being very), how politically conservative do you view yourself?

54. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all and 10 being very), how politically liberal do you view yourself?

55. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all and 10 being very), how politically knowledgeable do you view yourself compared to the average American citizen?


