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Life in the Bubble: Examining the forwarding of political videos

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ABSTRACT

We examined whether participants' political beliefs significantly predicted likelihood of forwarding political videos and the characteristics of the targets of these forwards. Participants viewed one of four political advertisements that varied in terms of the candidate's political party (Democrat or Republican) and the emotion that the advertisement evoked (Positive or Negative). Democrats were more likely to forward advertisements when they experienced positive emotional arousal, and the targets of the forwards were not especially similar to Democrat participants in terms of political orientation or personality. Conversely, Republicans were more likely to forward advertisements when they experienced negative emotional arousal, and the targets of the forwards were highly similar to the Republican participants in terms of political orientation and personality. This is consistent with previous research (e.g., Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003) indicating that conservatism is associated with greater negative affect sensitivity and insularity in communication.

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1. Introduction

Why is some information more likely to be shared than other information? Much of the research examining this question has focused on the emotions evoked by the shared content (Heath, Bell, & Sternberg, 2001). In terms of information available on the Internet, some researchers have posited that individuals may forward specific content because it evokes a specific emotion and that the sharing of the content would likely evoke that same emotion in others (Guadagno, Rempala, Murphy, & Okdie, in press). However, research indicates that content evoking both positive and negative arousal is more likely to be shared than content that evokes little emotion (Heath, 1996). These results suggest that general autonomic nervous system arousal may drive the sharing of information-regardless of emotion evoked. Recent research supporting that assertion has shown that general arousal mediates the social transmission of information (Berger, 2011). That is, arousal in any form-even unrelated to the content-is likely to increase the social transmission of information.

The current study examines a particular type of Internet media: political advertisements. Liberals and conservatives have well-established differences in their psychological profiles (e.g., Haidt, 2012), and we examine the differential impact that evoked emo-

0747-5632/\$ - see front matter @ 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.05.029 tion has on people of these different ideological categories. We also examine the characteristics of individuals who would be the targets of this forwarded information to see how similar or dissimilar they are to the sender.

1.1. Insularity

In an on-air incident that made national news on the night of the 2012 presidential election, Republican strategist Karl Rove relentlessly argued against the (ultimately correct) judgment of his own network that Barrack Obama had won the state of Ohio, and thus, the presidency (Kurtz, 2012). The incident took place on live TV and marked the culmination of months of insistence by Rove and other conservative commentators that the national polling organizations and statisticians that showed Obama with a lead had a liberal bias and that only Republican-approved polls were un-skewed (one polling website even going so far as to call itself "unskewedpolls.com"). Some media commentators saw this as a crystalized example of the tendency of some high-profile conservatives to immerse themselves in the cocoon of right-wing media and reject alternative sources of information as unreliable or hopelessly biased (Kurtz).

At its core, Conservative ideology emphasizes adherence to tradition and authority (Haidt, 2012). Conservatives also place far greater emphasis on loyalty to the in-group than do Liberals, going so far as to view the obligation toward in-group favoritism as a moral issue (Haidt). People almost universally show a preference for the in-group (Smith & Bond, 1993), but one would expect this





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magnified in-group loyalty among Conservatives to manifest itself as a significantly stronger preference for interacting with the ingroup and trusting and valuing the opinions of in-group members more than the opinions of out-group members.

Personality research reveals further evidence of Conservative insularity. McCrae (1996) argued that Openness to Experience is one of the major personality factors predicting political affiliation, with Liberalism showing positive correlations with Openness and Conservatism showing a negative relationship. He explains:

If Openness is seen in the need for novelty, variety, and complexity and intrinsic appreciation for experience, than Closedness to Experience (Closedness) is manifested in preference for familiarity, simplicity, and closure and in down-to-earth utilitarianism. (p. 326)

Indeed, other studies have uncovered positive relationships between social conservatism and Intolerance of Ambiguity (Ruch & Hehl, 1983), Value Obedience (Feather, 1979), and Social Conformity (Brief, Comrey, & Collins, 1994), as well as a negative relationship with autonomy, change, and understanding (Costa & McCrae, 1988).

Some researchers have identified resistance to change as a key component of Conservative ideology (e.g., Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), and shielding one's self from alternatives can insulate one from the pressure to change. In other words, exposure to alternative perspectives has the potential to create uncertainty and ambiguity in a belief system, which promote discomfort and anxiety (Rokeach, 1960), but maintaining a sense of "sameness" in terms of the information one receives can insulate one from the threat of ambiguity.

Thus, in terms of forwarding behavior, we would expect Conservatives to be more likely to forward information from other Conservatives, and forward that information to other Conservatives. We would also predict that Conservatives show a preference for sending information to targets with other indicators of in-group status (e.g., familial relationship, personality similarity).

1.2. The role of affect

The tendency of Conservatives to limit their exposure to unfamiliar information sources can be attributed, to a significant degree, to their greater sensitivity to negative affect. Conservatives have shown greater disgust sensitivity (Inbar, Pizarro, & Bloom, 2009) and threat sensitivity (Jost et al., 2003) than Liberals. Indeed, Conservatism has shown a strong positive relationship with Mortality Salience (Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989), Perception of a Dangerous World (Duckitt, 2001), and response latency to danger-related words (Lavine, Polichak, & Lodge, 1999), among other constructs. This increased sensitivity to negative affect has been attributed, in part, to genetic factors (Wilson, 1973) that are thought to predispose one to find greater comfort in Conservative ideology than Liberal ideology.

Research on use of political advertising supports the greater sensitivity to negative affect among Conservatives. A number of studies (e.g., Lau & Rovner, 2009) indicate that Republican candidates are especially likely to run negative political ads. Capra and Zimbardo (2004) found that people seek to match their own world view with those of those of candidates (i.e., if we think the world is a scary place, we prefer candidates who tell us that the world is a scary place), so this greater propensity to run negative ads could be due to candidates anticipating what messages are effective in motivating their constituency, or simply because their worldview is highly similar the worldview of their constituency.

While greater insularity and greater anxiety among conservatives can operate as independent phenomena, they also can have a reciprocal relationship. For example, as it relates to forwarding political information, Conservatives should seek to obtain their political information from sources that, they know from previous experience, possess an ideology similar to their own, because ideologically inconsistent information has the potential to create anomie and uncertainty. Anomie and uncertainty, then, create anxiety and discomfort ("fear of the unknown," Jost et al., 2003), and individuals who are especially sensitive to anxiety would be especially motivated to find an immediate resolution (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). One established means to reducing anxiety is to seek affiliation (Schachter, 1959), and affiliating with a familiar source is not only likely to insulate one from additional ambiguous information, exposure to familiar stimuli has been shown to be especially anxiety-reducing (Orive & Gerard, 1987). When in an arousing situation, we are also more likely to seek out individuals who are experiencing similar affective states because, in such circumstances, we not only seek "cognitive clarity" in order to make sense of the situation, but "emotional clarity," to make sense of our affective response (Gump & Kulik, 1997).

1.3. Hypotheses

- Conservative–Republicans will forward more videos than other groups (because greater negative emotion is associated with a greater motivation to affiliate; (Schachter, 1959).
- (2) Conservative–Republicans will show a preference for forwarding videos of Republican candidates.
- (3) Liberal–Democrats and Unaffiliated–Independents will be especially willing to forward videos that elicit positive emotion.
- (4) Conservative-Republican participants will be especially willing to forward videos that elicit negative emotion.
- (5) The targets of Conservative–Republican forwards will be similar to the sender in terms of political orientation and Openness to Experience.
- (6) The targets of Conservative–Republican forwards will be similar to the sender on more personality dimensions than the targets of Liberal–Democrat or Unaffiliated–Independent forwards.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

Three hundred and thirty six undergraduate participants from a state university in Ohio completed the study. When asked about their political affiliation, 127 identified themselves as either "Democrats" or "Liberals," 104 identified themselves as either "Republicans" or "Conservatives," and 92 identified as either "Unaffiliated" or "Independent." Thirteen of the participants were self-identified Libertarians and were excluded from the study. This is because, even though Libertarians overlap with Republicans on some key political beliefs, they are thought to differ from self-identified Republicans in terms of their emotional reactivity (Haidt, 2012). Indeed, in comparing self-identified Libertarians and Republicans using the current sample, we found significant differences in some of our key, emotion-related variables (i.e., PANAS scores). So, while we are interested in examining the forwarding behavior of Libertarians, the current sample fails to provide enough of a critical mass to do so. Of the remaining 323 participants (155 male, 166 female, and two who did not indicate gender), the average age was 18.62 years (SD = 1.52).

2.2. Procedure

Participants reported to a computer lab where they watched one of four political videos. After the video ended, participants answered a series of questions about the videos and about the person to whom they would most likely forward the video.

(α = .71), Agreeableness (α = .87), Conscientious (α = .85), Neuroticism (α = .74), and Openness (α = .84). Thus, all subscales showed sufficient reliability.

2.3. Video stimuli

We pre-tested ten political advertisements (five from Democratic campaigns and five from Republican campaigns) obtained from the Internet in effort to find the Democratic video that elicited the most positive emotion, the Democratic video that elicited the most negative emotion, the Republican video that elicited the most positive emotion, and the Republican video that elicited the most negative emotion. The four videos ranged from 30 to 71 s and were specifically selected from campaigns outside of the state of Ohio so that participants would have minimal exposure to them (15 participants in the main sample reported having seen one of the videos before but did not differ from the rest of the sample on the variables of interest).

Twenty-two raters (14 females and 8 males) watched each video and answered the following four questions using a Likert scale (1 = "None at all," 7 = "A great deal"): "How much happiness did you experience while watching the video?" "How much disgust did you experience while watching the video?" "How much disgust did you experience while watching the video?" The first item will be referred to as the Positive Emotion measure, and the last three items were combined into a composite Negative Emotion measure (the composite Negative Emotion ratings for the Republican-Negative and Democrat-Negative videos were α = .90 and .85, respectively).

We sought videos with the highest Positive and Negative Emotional ratings for both Republican and Democratic candidates for use in the study, but we also wanted to make sure that, for the pair of videos of a particular emotional valiance, the Democrat and Republican videos did not differ from one another in terms of emotional intensity. We measured political affiliation of the raters by asking them indicate their political orientation using a Likert scale (1 = "Conservative," 7 = "Liberal"), and, controlling for rater political orientation, the Republican-Positive and Democrat-Positive videos did not differ significantly from one another (p = .22), nor did the Republican-Negative and Democrat-Negative (p = .43) videos.

2.4. Measures

Participants first indicated their political affiliation (i.e., what political party, if any, they most closely associated with) and their political orientation (i.e., the degree to which they were liberal or conservative; 0 = "Conservative," 7 = "Liberal"). To ensure that reporting on political topics did not affect subsequent questions, the presentation of the political affiliation and orientation items were counterbalanced such that half of the participants reported on these items after viewing the video. We categorized political affiliation responses into three groups: Democrats/Liberals (which we will refer to as "Democrats"), Unaffiliated/Independents ("Independents"), and Republicans/Conservatives ("Republicans").

Next, participants completed the Big Five Personality Inventory-Short Form (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998) about themselves. This scale consists of 45 items and can be used to determine subscale scores for each of the Big Five personality traits. Participants are given one sentence fragment, "I see myself as someone who...," and for each item that completes the statement (e.g., "is talkative"), they are asked to indicate the degree to which they agree that the item applies to them using a nine-point, Likert-like scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree", 9 = "Strongly Agree"). The subscales' reliability scores for the current sample were as follows: Extraversion After watching the video, participants responded to the following three items using eight-point, Likert-like scales: "Rate how much you liked the individual in the video that you just watched" (0 = "Dislike," 7 = "Like"), "Rate how much you liked the video that you watched" (0 = "Dislike," 7 = "Like"), "Rate how much you liked the message of the video that you just watched," (0 = "Dislike," 7 = "Like"), and "How likely would you be to forward this video to someone you know?" (0 = "Very Unlikely," 7 = "Very Likely").

The Positive and Negative Affect Scale. To assess mood following the video, participants also completed the full Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Zevon & Tellegen, 1982). The PANAS is a commonly used measure of individuals' affective responses to stimuli. The scale consists of 60 emotional descriptors, and participants were instructed to "indicate to what extent you feel this way right now." For each item, participants provided a rating from 1 ("very slightly or not at all") to 5 ("extremely"). This scale can be broken down into several different subscales, but we chose to focus on the 10-item Positive Affect (PA) and Negative Affect (NA) subscales. Higher scores indicate greater positive or negative affect. Both the PA subscale (α = .94) and the NA subscale (α = .87) had sufficient reliability.

Target Characteristics. To investigate who would be the target of participant emails, we asked participants two open-ended questions: "Who would you be most likely to forward this video to?" and "What is your relationship to that person?" Finally, we asked them to indicate the person's political affiliation (a categorical variable) and political orientation using an eight-point, Likert-like scale (0 = "Conservative," 7 = "Liberal"), and we asked them to complete the Big Five Personality Inventory-Short Form (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998) about the other person. As with the selfratings, all the Big Five subscales for the target ratings showed sufficient reliability: Extraversion (α = .82), Agreeableness (α = .75), Conscientious (α = .74), Neuroticism (α = .81), and Openness (α = .77). After completing this information about the target of their forwards, participants indicated their own gender, age, and ethnicity.

Possible Covariate. We asked participants the question, "How active are you politically?" (0 = "Not at all," 7 = "Extremely"). We planned to use this measure as a covariate in our main analyses, but it did not significantly correlate with the Likelihood of Forwarding variable (p = .40), and thus, will not be discussed further.

3. Results

3.1. Likelihood of forwarding specific videos

We first conducted a 4×3 between groups ANOVA (Video \times Participant Political Affiliation) on Likelihood of Forwarding. We predicted that Republicans would forward more videos (in particular, more videos of Republican candidates).

There was a significant main effect for Participant Political Affiliation, F(2, 311) = 3.36, p = .04, r = .14. Bonferroni post hoc analyses revealed that Republicans (M = 1.62, SD = 2.02) were significantly more likely to forward videos than Independents (M = .93, SD = 1.61), t = 2.64, p = .03, and Democrats (M = 1.02, SD = 1.65), t = 2.76, p = .02. We found no main effect for Video. There was a significant interaction effect for Video and Participant Political Affiliation, F(6, 311) = 3.64, p = .01, r = .26. To examine the nature of the interaction, we conducted Bonferroni post hoc analyses comparing Likelihood of Forwarding across Political Affiliation categories for each of the videos.

For the Republican-Positive video, the Bonferroni tests revealed that Republicans (M = 1.80, SD = 2.09) were significantly more likely to forward this video than Independents (M = .50, SD = 1.34), t = 2.54, p = .01. Republicans were also more likely to forward the video than Democrats (M = 1.00, SD = 1.58), but this difference only approached significance t = 1.91, p = .06. For the Republican-Negative video, Republicans (M = 2.67, SD = 2.30) were significantly more likely to forward this video than Democrats (M = .97, SD = 1.64), t = 3.90, p < .01, or Independents (M = .92,)SD = 1.66), t = 3.76, p < .01. For the Democratic-Positive video, there were no significant differences between the Republicans (*M* = .87, SD = 1.36), Democrats (*M* = .88, SD = 1.56), and Independents (*M* = 1.48, SD = 1.92). Finally, for the Democratic-Negative video, there were no significant differences between the Republicans (*M* = .67, SD = 1.28), Democrats (*M* = 1.28, SD = 1.93), and Independents (*M* = .71, SD = 1.30).

3.2. Factors in forwarding

To examine the factors that influenced the general forwarding of the videos, a series of multiple regressions were conducted on each Participant Political Affiliation category separately. Candidate Liking, Video Liking, Message Liking, PA scores, and NA scores served as predictors while Likelihood of Forwarding scores served as the outcome variable. We expected non-Republicans to be more willing to forward videos when those videos induced positive affect, and we expected Republicans to be more willing to forward videos when those videos induced negative affect.

3.2.1. Democrats

For participants identifying as Democrats, the overall regression model was significant, F(5, 121) = 10.14, p < .01. Democrats' Likelihood of Forwarding scores showed a significant negative relationship with Candidate Liking, t(126) = -2.06, $\beta = -.29$, p = .04, r = .18, such that the less Democrats liked the candidate in the video, the more likely they were to forward the video. Video Liking, t(126) = 2.68, $\beta = .39$, p = .01, r = .23, Message Liking, t(126) = 2.03, $\beta = .25$, p = .04, r = .18, and the PA scores, t(126) = 2.40, $\beta = .24$, p = .02, r = .21, all showed a significant positive relationship with Likelihood of Forwarding scores, such that the more people liked the video and its message and felt more positive emotion, the more likely they were to forward the video. NA scores had a non-significant negative relationship with Likelihood of Forwarding, p = .30.

3.2.2. Independents

For participants identifying as Independent, the overall regression model was significant, F(5, 91) = 13.77, p < .01. The Likelihood of Forwarding scores of Independents were influenced by Video Liking, t (91) = 2.03, $\beta = .29$, p = .05, and Message Liking, t (91) = 4.96, $\beta = .58$, p < .00, such that the more they liked the video and its message, the more likely they were to forward the video. Candidate Liking (p = .13), PA scores (p = .85), and NA scores (p = .87) showed a non-significant negative relationship with Like-lihood of Forwarding.

3.2.3. Republicans

For participants identifying as Republicans, the overall regression model was significant, *F* (5, 103) = 15.86, *p* < .01. Republicans' Likelihood of Forwarding scores were influenced by Video Liking, *t* (103) = 3.35, β = .47, *p* < .01, and NA scores, *t* (103) = 2.69, β = .24, *p* = .01, such that the more Republican participants liked the video, and the more negative emotion they experienced, the more likely they were to forward the video. Message Liking (*p* = .12) showed a non-significant positive relationship with Likelihood of Forwarding, while Candidate Liking (*p* = .64) and PA scores (*p* = .74) showed

a non-significant negative relationship with Likelihood of Forwarding.

3.3. Target of forwarding

3.3.1. Relationship to target

We next looked at to whom participants were willing to forward the video. Participants were asked to answer the open-ended questions, "Who would you be most likely to forward this video to?" and "What is your relationship to that person?" We were able to categorize the responses in terms of the closeness of the relationship as follows: 0 = "No one," 1 = "Stranger," 2 = "Acquaintance," 3 = "Friend," 4 = "Family or Significant Other" (see Table 1 for the distribution of responses across affiliation categories). Using this "Closeness" item as an ordinal dependent variable, we conducted a one-way ANOVA using participant political affiliation as the independent variable. We expected targets of the Republican forwards to be closer to the participant than the targets of non-Republican forwards.

The result was significant, F(2, 320) = 5.94, p < .01, r = .19, and Bonferoni post hoc analyses revealed that the targets of Republican forwards (M = 2.98, SD = 1.49) were significantly closer to the participant than the targets of Democratic forwards (M = 2.28, SD = 1.63), t = 3.30 p < .01, and the targets of Independents' forwards, (M = 2.40, SD = 1.66), t = 2.53, p = .04. Targets of forwards from Independents did not significantly differ from Democrats (p = 1.00). To provide greater clarity as to what these values represent, Table 1 provides a distribution across affiliation categories.

3.3.2. Political affiliation of target

In order to determine the political affiliation of the target of forwards, we asked "If you would be likely to forward this video to someone you know, what is their political orientation?" (0 = "Conservative," 7 = "Liberal") and "With what political party (if any) does this person affiliate with?" (1 = "Republican," 2 = "Democrat," 3 = "Independent/Unaffiliated"). Responses to this second, categorical variable are reported in Table 1. We conducted a one-way AN-OVA using Participant Political Affiliation as the independent variable and the ordinal Target Political Orientation measure as the dependent variable. We expected the targets of Republican forwards to be more conservative than targets of Democrat forwards.

The overall ANOVA was significant, F(2, 333) = 7.58, p < .01, r = .21, and Bonferroni post hoc analyses determined that the targets of Republicans' forwards (M = 2.13, SD = 2.11) were significantly more conservative than the targets of Democrats' forwards (M = 3.10, SD = 2.18), t = 3.61, p < .01, or the targets of Independents' forwards (M = 3.01, SD = 1.99), t = 3.01, p = .01. The targets of Democrats' forwards or Independents' forwards did not significantly differ from one another (p = 1.00).

3.4. Personality congruence between participant and target

In effort to determine the personality congruence between the participants and the target to whom they would forward a political video, we conducted a series of correlations examining the relationship between participants' political orientation scores and Big Five subscale scores and the corresponding target scores. We conducted a separate set of correlational analyses for Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, with an expectation that Republicans would show more dimensions with which they significantly correlated with the targets of their forwards (in particular, Openness to Experience and Political Orientation) compared to non-Republicans.

Democrats' Political Orientation scores did not significantly correlate with target Political Orientation scores (p = .20). In terms of personality scores, participant scores on the Extraversion (p = .57), B.M. Okdie et al./Computers in Human Behavior 29 (2013) 2425-2430

Table 1Characteristics of the targets of forwards.

	Participant political affiliation		
	Liberal/ Democrat (n = 127)	Unaffiliated/ Independent (n = 92)	Republican/ Conservative (n = 104)
Target relationship			
No target	27.6% (<i>n</i> = 35)	28.3% (<i>n</i> = 26)	15.4% (<i>n</i> = 16)
Stranger	6.3% (<i>n</i> = 8)	4.3% (<i>n</i> = 4)	4.8% (<i>n</i> = 5)
Acquaintance	9.4% (<i>n</i> = 12)	2.2% (<i>n</i> = 2)	3.8% (<i>n</i> = 4)
Friend	23.6% (<i>n</i> = 30)	29.3% (<i>n</i> = 27)	18.3% (<i>n</i> = 20)
Family/Sig. Other	33.1% (<i>n</i> = 42)	35.9% (<i>n</i> = 33)	57.7% (<i>n</i> = 60)
Target political affiliation			
Democrat	36.2% (<i>n</i> = 46)	16.3% (<i>n</i> = 15)	4.8% (<i>n</i> = 5)
Republican	37.0% (<i>n</i> = 47)	28.3% (<i>n</i> = 26)	76.9% (<i>n</i> = 80)
Independent	26.8% (<i>n</i> = 34)	55.4% (<i>n</i> = 51)	18.3% (<i>n</i> = 19)

Agreeableness (p = .95), Conscientiousness (p = .72), Neuroticism (p = .89), and Openness (p = .15) subscales did not significantly correlate with target personality subscale scores.

Independents' Political Orientation scores showed a significant, positive relationship with the Political Orientation scores of their targets, r (92) = .22, p = .04. There was also a significant positive relationship between Independents' Agreeableness scores and the Agreeableness scores of their targets, r (92) = .21, p = .04. There was no significant correlation for the subscales of Extraversion (p = .29), Conscientiousness (p = .12), Neuroticism (p = .98), or Openness (p = .12).

Republicans' Political Orientation scores showed a significant, positive relationship with the Political Orientation scores of their targets, r(103) = .60, p < .01. There was also a significant positive relationship between Republicans' Agreeableness scores and the Agreeableness scores of their targets, r(103) = .22, p = .03, and Republican Openness scores and the Openness scores of their targets, r(103) = .41, p < .01. The correlation between Republicans' Neuroticism scores and the Neuroticism scores of their targets approached significance, r(103) = .17, p = .09. There were no significant correlation for scores on the Extraversion (p = .62) or Conscientiousness (p = .12) subscales.

4. Discussion

The results produced distinct profiles for participants of each political affiliation, with Democrats on one extreme, Republicans on the other extreme, and Independents falling in the middle. Democrats reported a low likelihood of forwarding political videos. They were most likely to do so when they experienced positive emotion and disliked the candidate, but liked the message and the video. The target of their forwards did not fit any discernible pattern. They were dissimilar to the target of their forwards and were just as likely to forward the video to a Republican as they were to a Democrat (see Table 1).

Independents were not likely to forward political videos. However, when they did choose to forward the videos, they were most likely to do so when they liked the video and its message. The targets of their forwards were most likely to be family or friends who were politically unaffiliated and who were similarly agreeable.

Republicans were more likely to forward political videos than any other political affiliation, but only when the videos were of Republican candidates. They were most likely to forward videos when they liked the video and when it induced negative emotion. Overwhelmingly, the targets of the videos were likely to be family who were also Republican and who were similarly open, agreeable, and neurotic.

Taken together, this speaks to the idea that Republicans are more likely than non-Republicans to engage in political communication when they are experiencing negative emotion. However, the targets of these communications are also highly likely to be similar, as compared to the targets of non-Republicans. This is consistent with the notion that Conservatism, as compared to Liberalism, is associated with a greater degree of insularity in communications, greater sensitivity to negative emotion, and a greater desire to seek like-minded affiliation when experiencing negative emotion. These findings are supported by previous research (e.g., Jost et al., 2003), and this study extends the application of these phenomena to the specific behavior of forwarding political advertisements. Extrapolating these results further, the consequences of being a member of a group of people that is especially interested in negative emotional information and that relies on a narrow range of information sources are quite predictable: upsetting information can be cycled throughout the group without any alternative information to mitigate the emotional impact (in many cases, regardless of the veracity of the information).

One future direction in which to take this research involves examining the forwarding of types of political information other than advertisements. It's possible that people do not put much stock in the veracity of political advertisements since they are short and tend to place the candidate in an angelic light. Another possible direction would involve examining whether the results replicate with a different sample. Not only did the current sample exclusively consist of college students from a single university, it was an especially young sample, with a mean age of less than 19 years old. Thus, generalizability of these results should be done with care as the sample is not a true representation of the voting public. Replicating the current results with a more demographically diverse sample would allow for greater ecological validity.

One limitation of this study was that participants were simply not likely to forward the videos, as indicated by the mean scores lurking well toward the bottom of the scale. This may have been the result of the use out-of-state videos from past elections leading to low relevance within our sample. We sought to limit previous exposure to these advertisements, but in retrospect, we could have avoided the problem of low relevance by asking them to imagine that the person in the video was running for office in their state.

Ultimately, we were able to show that differences between Conservatives and non-Conservatives in terms of insularity of communication and sensitivity to negative affect are not merely artifacts of personality scales. Political orientation produces demonstrable behavioral differences between individuals that could shed some light on how and why people disseminate political information.

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