

Political discussion, news exposure and argument recall

This survey taps into different concepts and dimensions relevant for the understanding of how interpersonal discussion and news media content influence argument recall, political preferences and political behaviour.

A one-factorial experiment was embedded into the survey. Respondents were randomly assigned to read one of three different versions of a newspaper article on healthcare (Obamacare). The newspaper articles were constructed based on previous news reporting on healthcare. The first article mentioned seven arguments favourable to universal healthcare, the second article mentioned seven arguments against universal healthcare, and the third article was a mixed condition with arguments both favourable and unfavourable to healthcare.

Following exposure, respondents were asked how many of the arguments presented in the newspaper article they recalled. This recall was measured with both one open and several closed questions, i.e. free and aided recall were measured. Following exposure to the newspaper articles respondents were also asked how tolerant they are toward opposing arguments (see Pattie & Johnston, 2008). Information processing (accuracy and directional motivations) were measured both prior to and following exposure to the stimulus material (the approach follows previous research, see Matthes, Wirth, & Schemer, 2007; Schemer, Matthes, & Wirth, 2008). Emotions (e.g., anger, hope) about universal healthcare were measured both prior to and following exposure to the newspaper articles (inspired by previous work in this realm, see e.g. Hasell & Weeks, 2016; Parsons, 2010; Redlawsk, 2006).

Healthcare was chosen as an issues because it is was a focal policy issue in recent US politics. Attitudes toward universal healthcare were measure both prior to and following exposure to the stimulus material. The survey also included a post-exposure manipulation check (battery) asking respondents how they received the newspaper articles.

Prior to exposure to the experiment also general interpersonal discussion frequency as well as discussion agreement and discussion disagreement were measured (for discussions on these concepts, see e.g. Huckfeldt, Johnson, & Sprague, 2004; Mutz, 2006; Schmitt-Beck & Lup, 2013). With respect to the media, media use and perceptions of media content (bias) with respect to Obamacare were measured prior to exposure to the experimental stimulus. Also, the traits need for cognition and need for evaluation as well as internal and external efficacy were measured prior to

exposure to the newspaper articles.

The survey contains various background measures, including gender (measured prior to the experimental manipulation), education (prior), race (prior), political interest (prior), political ideology (prior), marital status (post stimulus exposure), number of children (post), population size of region of residence (post), and household income (post).

Note there is a mistake in the first sentence in the articles. In the article favourable to universal healthcare and in the article with both favourable and unfavourable arguments, it should have said “in favor of” (instead of “in favor”) in the first sentence, in the article unfavourable to universal healthcare it should have said “against”. Note, however, that the concluding paragraphs of the conditions correctly either state seven favourable or unfavourable arguments, or both favourable and unfavourable arguments (in the mixed condition).

Literature

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