Political Entertainment Media and the Elaboration Likelihood Model:

A Focus on the Roles of Motivation and Ability

Dissertation

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By

Heather Lyn LaMarre, MPA, MA

Graduate Program in Communication

The Ohio State University

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Dissertation Committee:

R. Lance Holbert, Advisor

David Ewoldsen

Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick

Michael McCluskey
Abstract

This dissertation extends the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to the study of political communication. In particular, the project focuses on the role of ability and motivation, relative to contact with a variety of political entertainment media messages, on cognitive elaborations. Two studies were conducted to examine these political entertainment processes and effects. The first study was a 2 (ability: low, high) x 2 (media stimuli: The Daily Show, Anderson Cooper 360°) between-subjects design that examined individual-level cognitive elaboration and attitudes about the AIG executive bonus scandal involving government bailout funds. The second study was a 2 (motivation: high, low) x 2 (media stimuli: Sicko, Sicko and An American Carol) between-subjects design that examined individual-level cognitive elaboration and attitudes concerning nationalized healthcare. Results replicated traditional ELM findings. Ability and motivation had direct effects on individual-level elaboration. The main effects of ability and motivation were also found for issue-relevant and positively valenced thoughts. Message directly influenced individual-level elaborations, including total and issue-relevant thoughts. Additionally, interactions between message and ability were found for source credibility, counter-arguments, and media engagement. Results are interpreted and a discussion relevant to the findings is offered. Finally, suggestions for bridging divides between narrative and rhetorical persuasion theory within the context of political entertainment research are outlined as future research.
Dedications

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my family for their continued support, encouragement, and unconditional love:

My husband, Brian LaMarre;

My two children, Sedona and Kade LaMarre; and

My father and mother, Marvin and Mollie Wolpert
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Vita

1994 Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, The Ohio State University

1998 Master of Public Administration, The Ohio State University

2008 Master of Communication, The Ohio State University

Publications


Fields of Study

Major Field: Communication

Minor Field: Social Psychology
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

Entertainment-oriented media is a staple in today’s political media environment (Prior, 2005), ranging from fictional narratives (e.g., *Frost/Nixon*, *Hotel Rwanda*) to entertainment-infused news programming (e.g., *Fox and Friends*, *Larry King Live*). In addition, new technologies are facilitating the enhanced distribution of entertainment-oriented political media content to audiences through additional media outlets (e.g., satellite and Internet), allowing for widespread consumption with media-on-demand capabilities. As news becomes increasingly reliant on entertainment-based formats (Underwood, 1998) and the distinction between news and entertainment becomes increasingly blurred (Mutz, 2001), mass communication scholars are expanding the study of political communication to media entertainment in order to assess a broader range of media influence on a range of democratic outcomes (e.g., Holbert, 2005; Holbert, Shah, & Kwak, 2003; Holbrook & Hill, 2005; Young, 2004, 2008).

However, much of this work has examined media effects through traditional news research paradigms, which rely heavily on priming, framing, and agenda setting (see Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2007). As such, the literature abounds with simple effects studies that pay little attention to the underlying processes responsible for such observable effects (e.g., Holbrook & Hill, 2005; Baum, 2004; Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, & Carlton, 2007). While these traditional approaches to political communication offer a means of understanding entertainment media’s influence on democratic outcomes, they are limited in their ability to fully explain the underlying social-psychological processes.
that form or help shape the observable outcomes (e.g., public opinion, attitudes). Not only has this approach been called into question for its inability to truly explain the persuasive nature of political entertainment (Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994), but the ability of priming, agenda setting, and framing to actually produce the range of effects for which they are credited has also been challenged (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Carpentier, 2002). In addition, these more classical approaches to the study of political media effects have been challenged relative to a wealth of changes unfolding in the current media environment (see Bennett & Iyengar, 2008).

More recently, there has been a call among select political entertainment scholars to produce a more systematic approach to the study of persuasive effects (Holbert, 2005), as well as to study the social-psychological processes underlying political entertainment persuasion (Young, 2008). Using Holbert’s (2005) typology to categorize political entertainment research, it becomes clear that use of social-psychological theory is limited to just two of the typology’s nine forms of political entertainment: namely late-night entertainment (e.g., Young, 2008) and political documentary film (Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994). Although attempts have been made to move from simple effects to process-oriented persuasion research in these two areas, much of the social psychologically-oriented arguments remain implied and methodological shortcomings have limited extant empirical results. As such, this dissertation revisits these two forms of political communication (political satire and film) with explicit social-psychological arguments and experimental designs that demonstrate the usefulness and potential benefits of moving toward a formal, explicit social psychological approach for the study of all types of political entertainment persuasion and attitude change research.
Additionally, extant media effects literature regarding narrative persuasion has sought to create conceptual boundaries between rhetorical and narrative persuasion processes (e.g., Busselle, 2000; Green & Brock, 2002; Poulliot & Cowen, 2007). Unfortunately, this has left a false impression that social-psychological persuasion theories such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) are limited to rhetorical arguments and cannot be applied to narrative forms of persuasion. As such, the political entertainment field has remained reticent about using well-known models (e.g., ELM, Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) to examine persuasion and attitude formation in political entertainment media. This dissertation challenges this false barrier in two ways. First, it extends the ELM into political entertainment and assesses the false limits assigned to the model. Second, it brings ELM variables (e.g., ability and motivation) together with narrative persuasion model variables (e.g., transportation) to demonstrate the importance of both social-psychological and narrative involvement theories in understanding the persuasive nature of political entertainment.

Putting all of these elements together, this dissertation extends the study of political entertainment media effects in the following three ways: (1) it demonstrates the potential utility of political entertainment research shifting toward a more social-psychological approach; (2) it directly extends the ELM to political entertainment research; and (3) it breaks down existing barriers between social-psychological persuasion (e.g., ELM) approaches and traditional entertainment and narrative persuasion (e.g., transportation) theories relative to the study of political entertainment media. This approach to the study of political entertainment offers an alternative theoretical lens through which entertainment’s political influence can be investigated, thereby broadening
our understanding of how, when, and why entertainment media influences socio-political cognitive activities, attitudes, opinions, and behaviors.

In addition, this research places political entertainment into the larger framework of strategic communication research by conceptualizing political entertainment media as a form of strategic communication with attributes and goals similar to other forms of strategic communication (e.g., education-entertainment as defined by Moyer-Gushe, 2008). Although the primary goal of political entertainment media content is to entertain audiences, some forms of political entertainment are developed with a secondary goal of influencing audiences and/or presenting political viewpoints. In a recent interview, director Oliver Stone noted that his 2008 film about President Bush (W) was intended to entertain audiences, but had a secondary goal of influencing public perceptions about the President and his administration (cnn.com, 2008). When asked about the importance of releasing his film Frost/Nixon during the 2008 presidential election, director Ron Howard stated that Frost/Nixon is politically relevant to the current election because it “happens to deal with a character who, you know, abused the power of the presidency and there are a lot of people who feel that's what we've had for the last eight years” (Murray, 2008). Comedian Steve Martin noted in his recent autobiography that while performing stand-up comedy and appearing on Saturday Night Live (SNL) he intentionally used parody and satire to influence attitudes about political issues and public officials (Martin, 2007). These exemplifiers support what political entertainment researchers have found; namely that much of what the public consumes as entertainment media includes a secondary emphasis on real-world political issues (Holbert, 2005).
More explicit examples of entertainment media as a strategic form of communication are found in pro-social media companies such as Affinity Films. The stated mission of this production company is to “produce ‘media with meaning’ which can work for pro-social change in our society (affinityfilm.org, 2009).” Affinity Films explicitly states that they “aim to be the message, as well as create the message,” offering a clear example of using entertainment to persuade audiences. This media organization has produced the following politically-oriented works, “The Quiet War (2009),” “Sea of Oil (1990),” and “No Word for Rape (1981).”

On the other hand, late-night comedian Jay Leno has said his job is just to entertain, and that people must already have an understanding of current political events to even “get the jokes” on late-night (Niven, Lichter, & Amundson, 2003). Another example comes from host of The Daily Show and Jon Stewart’s October 15, 2004 appearance on CNN’s Crossfire. When Stewart’s journalistic integrity was challenged by Tucker Carlson who accused him of being too soft in his interview with Democratic presidential nominee, John Kerry, Stewart retorted, “You know, it’s interesting to hear you talk about my responsibility… If your idea of confronting me is that I don't ask hard-hitting enough news questions, we're in bad shape, fellows… You're on CNN. The show that leads into me is puppets making crank phone calls” (mediamatters.org, 2009). This exchange made clear that while Stewart didn’t perceive his own role as late-night talk show host to be a serious part of the nation’s political discussion, the Crossfire show hosts, Tucker Carlson and Paul Begala, did.

Clearly not all political entertainment explicitly aims to deliver persuasive messages, but even unintentional socio-political arguments embedded in narratives can
play a significant role in shaping audience perceptions and attitudes (see McLeod & Reeves [1980] for discussion of the importance of unintended media effects). As the old adage states, “Within each joke is a hint of truth.” Conceptualizing political entertainment from this perspective (i.e., a combination of intended and unintended effects) provides a foundation for interpreting the results through a strategic communication lens and extending the results of the studies proposed herein to other forms of persuasion-based strategic communication (e.g., health, non-profit, commercial). Media scholars in others areas (e.g., health communication) are just beginning to make similar arguments about the potential for entertainment media to intentionally persuade and unintentionally influence attitude change (e.g., Quick, 2009).

As previously stated, the three goals set forth by this dissertation include the extension and testing of social-psychological theory to political entertainment stimuli. Specifically, Petty and Cacioppo’s (1986) ELM is the persuasion and attitude change model used to inform this investigation. The ELM was chosen for its ability to model attitude influence with strong validity and reliability (Wegener, Downing, Krosnick, & Petty, 1995; Booth-Butterfield & Gutowski, 1994; Krosnick & Petty, 1995). While the ELM is used in other areas of strategic communication research such as health (e.g., Slater, 2002), it has yet to be utilized in any systematic way in the communication subfield of political communication. This dissertation redresses this gap by using political entertainment as the context of study, thereby extending the use of the ELM into politics and media. As previously mentioned, this approach offers an exciting opportunity to re-conceptualize political messages found in entertainment media as a form of strategic
communication, and to understand how and when entertainment media influences audience cognitions, attitudes, and opinions.

In fulfillment of the first two stated goals of this work (testing the ELM in political entertainment and demonstrating the usefulness of moving toward a social-psychological approach), two traditional social-psychological experiments have been designed to test the hypotheses and research questions offered herein. Cognitive elaboration is the key process variable in the ELM. As such, the experiments focus on manipulating motivation and ability (two key recipient variables in the ELM) relative to various media political entertainment message manipulations and examining the differential effects of these manipulations on a range of cognitive elaboration activities within participants.

As a means of addressing the third goal (i.e., challenging barriers between rhetorical and narrative persuasion theory), key narrative persuasion and entertainment theory variables (i.e., source perceptions and transportation) are also given focus in this research project. Extant media effects research recognizes the important role narrative engagement plays in producing entertainment media effects such as enjoyment (Zillmann, 2006; Raney, 2004; Cohen, 2006). However, it has not been examined in the context of persuasive political entertainment media. Rather, little is known about media engagement’s role in the persuasion and/or attitude change process or its relationship with key ELM variables, such as ability and motivation (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002).

The dissertation addresses such questions in an attempt to better understand whether and how motivation and ability influence media engagement (e.g., transportation) in this type of persuasive media context. Specifically, this work concerns
itself with answering the most fundamental questions regarding the basic relationships between ability, motivation, message, and engagement as a means of creating a baseline for future research aimed at integrating narrative and social-psychological persuasion theories in a political entertainment context. Addressing these central persuasion and narrative involvement variables is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for introducing a systematic social-psychological theoretical approach to the study of entertainment media and politics and then shifting this research agenda to a broader range of contexts as this line of inquiry evolves across time.

Politics and Entertainment Media

In February 2009, President Barak Obama made history (again) by being the first sitting U.S. President to make an appearance on late-night comedy television programming (National Broadcasting Corporation, 2009). Obama’s decision to appeal directly to the electorate and appear on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno signaled what political entertainment researchers have long known; the age of entertainment has arrived in politics. While researchers are in the process of examining the emerging influence of political entertainment media (e.g., Young, 2008, LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009), public discourse regarding the growing importance of entertainment media in political and public policy campaigns has also grown among journalists and political actors (cnn.com, 2008). Growing interest concerning this topic of potential media influence within the public domain reaffirms the timeliness, relevance, and need for systematic, theory-based political entertainment research.

Democrat strategist and political analyst Dick Morris commented last November that vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin’s appearance on Saturday Night Live (SNL)
represented a growing strategy among public relations professionals of entertainment media outlets being used for the express purpose of influencing public opinion and delivering political messages in non-threatening environments (fnc.com, 2008). Morris argued that entertainment television holds the future for political campaigns, and pointed to the numerous talk show and entertainment appearances made by political candidates as evidence (e.g., Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and Barak Obama all appearing on World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), The Daily Show, Saturday Night Live (SNL), and the late-night show circuit during the primaries). Given presidential nominees Obama and McCain’s half-time appearances on ESPN’s Monday night football and SNL’s primetime special on the eve of the 2008 election, Morris’ comments appear to have hit the mark.

From a slightly different perspective, Cable News Network (CNN) public affairs journalist David Gergen recently discussed entertainment media’s growing presence in politics by asking a panel of political journalists and pundits, “How can [radio and cable news show host] Sean Hannity be driving political journalism when he doesn’t even have a journalism background or degree?” Gergen lamented the idea that an entertainer can have such a profound influence on the electorate in today’s presidential elections while the panelists speculated about the influence of entertainers such as The Daily Show host Jon Stewart and SNL’s Tina Fey on voters (cnn.com, 2009). Additionally, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger announced his candidacy on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, demonstrating the perceived relevance of late-night comedy.

Perhaps even more interesting is 2008 Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee’s move to host his own show on Fox News after his departure from the presidential race. The show, Huckabee, uses the live audience talk show format and airs
weekends on the popular, but highly partisan cable TV channel. Interestingly, Huckabee often hints at a 2012 presidential run and says that he hasn’t ruled out the possibility of holding future elected offices (fnc.com, 2009). While Huckabee offers an interesting example of the lines blurring between politics, entertainment, and journalism, late-night comedy hosts are demonstrating that traditional distinctions between entertainers and journalists are also changing in the public sphere. Late-night comedy show hosts Stephen Colbert (The Colbert Report) and Jon Stewart (The Daily Show) have both won the journalism industry’s prestigious Peabody Award for most outstanding journalist, and Stewart has been repeatedly identified as America’s best and/or most trusted news anchor (comedycentral.com, 2009; Baym, 2005). Cable news stations are attempting to replicate the success late-night comedy has enjoyed by adding their own brand of late-night news and entertainment. Specifically, CNN has launched D.L. Hughley Breaks the News, a late-night comedy style program in which stand-up comedian D.L. Hughley delivers news with a punch line (cnn.com, 2009), and Fox News Corp. is adding a The Daily Show style comedy news show to their cable news line-up in fall 2009 with a program that will be starring comedian Wanda Sykes (fnc.com, 2009).

Taken together, these examples demonstrate the perceived importance of entertainment media among communication professionals, journalists, and the public alike. The shift of politics to the realm of entertainment media has been well documented since research was conducted on the 1992 U.S. presidential campaign (see Just, Crigler, Alger, Cook, Kern, & West, 1996). Just et al. (1996) noted that the heated three-way U.S. presidential election between Bush, Clinton, and Perot led the campaigns of these political actors to think creatively about how to get their respective messages out to the
general public without having to go through the press as a filter, and one way in which to achieve this goal was to begin to use more entertainment-oriented media outlets. However, there is little empirical support regarding the actual persuasive political influence of entertainment-oriented media content on the general public. Rather, political communication researchers know almost nothing about entertainment media’s role in political persuasion (Holbert et al., 2007). Clearly, though, the media elite’s current public discussion raises interesting questions shared by political entertainment scholars.

If, as political entertainment scholars believe and industry professionals suggest, entertainment is a key media outlet for persuasive political communication efforts, then the systematic investigation of entertainment persuasion processes and effects merits investigation (Williams & Delli Carpini, 1994). Thus, as scholars interested in how media influence the electorate and whether entertainment media play a significant role in democracy, I submit that entertainment media warrants our full consideration. Further, it is important to not only understand the simple effects of using political entertainment media, but to also understand the underlying mechanisms and socio-psychological principles driving the observable effects. As such, the study of political entertainment’s influence on individual-level cognitive activity, attitudes, and opinions should provide insight into the importance of the entertainment media in the broader influence of mass communication on political outcomes.

The importance of the first objective set forth in this dissertation, demonstrating the need to move toward a social-psychological persuasion approach, becomes evident as we consider the above discussion. If we recognize the global shift occurring in American political media away from traditional news and toward what can best be defined as soft
news and infotainment style of news production (Mutz, 2001), along with the growing popularity of politically themed television shows (e.g., 24, The West Wing), films (e.g., Sicko, Earth, W), late-night comedy (e.g., The Daily Show), and satire (e.g., The Simpsons, Southpark), it becomes clear that a holistic approach to understanding these phenomena is in order (imbd.com, 2009; Neilson.com, 2009). Namely, a social-psychological, process-oriented approach to political entertainment can move beyond the collection of direct effect studies of message alone to include the broader understanding of why people use such media, how and when the various forms of political entertainment programming influence their socio-political attitudes and judgments, and under what conditions such influences translate into long-term shifts in attitude and behavior. Integrating social-psychological approaches and moving toward process-oriented persuasion models will not only allow us to fully comprehend the new political journalism paradigm unfolding in society, but will also allow researchers to make accurate predictions regarding its use and effects on our democracy. A continued focus on news as the sole generator of political media influence, coupled with an over reliance on the traditional theories of agenda setting, priming, and framing, will only get us so far in our attempts to generate a more complete understanding of the role of media on our democratic processes and outcomes.

**Political Entertainment Research**

To date, the expansion of political communication research beyond the artificial divide of entertainment and news (Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994) has resulted in a set of seemingly disparate works broadly defined as the study of political entertainment media effects (e.g., Baum, 2004; Holbert et al., 2003; Holbrook & Hill, 2005; Young,
This area of research encompasses a wide variety of content areas (e.g., political satire, political docu-dramas, and fictional political television programs), as well as several communication channels (e.g., television, film, music, and talk radio). However, recent work in this area has begun to explore the persuasive influence of entertainment media on individual-level attitudes and opinions (e.g., Young & Tisinger, 2006; Young, 2008).

Political entertainment offers what Holbert (2005) has called “a fundamentally different type of story-telling from what is generally provided by journalists“(p 438). Political entertainment media stimuli abound and, as a result, the field’s collection of extant political entertainment media research represents fragmentation and disarray. As a means of organizing the fragmented world of political media entertainment, Holbert (2005) offered a nine-part typology for political entertainment television which created a systematic way to approach an empirical examination of this topic of research. Following the establishment of Holbert’s typology for political entertainment television, subsequent research between and within these nine categories has been marked by seemingly disparate findings, contradictory effects, and mixed conclusions regarding the influence of entertainment media on political attitudes and behaviors (see Baum, 2004; Holbert, Shah, & Kwak, 2004; Young & Tisinger, 2006). One common thread, although rarely explicitly stated, is the focus of extant research on entertainment media’s persuasive influence on democratic outcome variables (e.g., political attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors). It is within this realm that political entertainment offers a rich context for testing a social-psychological persuasion and attitude change approach to the examination of entertainment media influences.
As previously mentioned, although the study of entertainment media and politics concerns itself with persuasion and attitude change, the current empirical literature is populated primarily with effects-based studies that pay little attention to developing a theoretical underpinning for understanding the social-psychological processes that produce such effects. This general trend in examining effects with little consideration for the processes that create them has persisted for the past 15 years, even after Delli Carpini and Williams (1994) called for a more dynamic, process-oriented approach that conceptualizes recipients as active participants in the persuasion process while rebuking what they termed the “hypodermic needle” approach to media effects that conceptualizes audiences as passive recipients. In this regard, persuasion process models and theories such as Petty and Cacioppo’s (1981, 1986) ELM are nearly absent from the study of political entertainment media (cf., Young, 2008). Moving toward the second goal set forth herein, to directly test the use of a social-psychological persuasion model in a political entertainment context, it makes sense to consider the ELM for its ability to provide a range of insights regarding how, when, and if political entertainment influences people’s thinking about the topics and issues addressed in the media stimuli.

Elaboration and Political Entertainment

Young’s (2008) recent work on cognitive processes in political satire has argued that political entertainment research benefits from including well-developed persuasion theories and taking a more process-oriented approach to understanding the persuasive influence of political entertainment on democratic outcomes. Specifically, Young noted, “By understanding the cognitive processes involved in comprehending and appreciating humorous messages, we can better formulate theory-driven hypotheses” (2008, p. 120).
Additionally, several scholars agree that reliance on overly simplistic explanations and potentially inadequate theoretical frameworks (e.g., framing or priming) constrain the ability to understand the dynamic processes contributing to entertainment media’s persuasive influence (e.g., Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994b; Young 2004, 2008; Baum, 2004). An overly heavy reliance on survey data is also problematic. Simon and Iyengar (1996) argued some time ago that too great a reliance on survey methodology has served to halt the continued advancement of the study of news effects in politics, and a similar argument could be made today regarding the study of entertainment media within the context of politics. Much of what we know is based on self-report survey data (Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994). Political entertainment scholars have yet to really apply solid experimental manipulations in their research designs, which hamper their ability to draw conclusions about the direct and indirect influence of key variables of interest to their various research agendas.

Moving toward a social-psychological process model approach will include the use of experimental design, tightly controlled variable isolation and manipulation, and reduction of reliance on subjective self-report measures. Namely, the ELM studies employed herein manipulate one’s ability (study one) and motivation (study two) to think about entertainment-oriented political media stimuli. This type of design allows for more sensitive analysis of the direct and indirect effects that ability and motivation have on how and when people think about the political issues in the media stimuli. Further, experimental design provides researchers a means of isolating variables and reducing confounds. Media, generally, and political entertainment, specifically, are complex stimuli that can be difficult to study (Nabi, Moyer-Guše, & Byrne, 2007). Asking people
if they thought about the stimulus, a commonly used survey-based operationalization in extant literature (see Young, 2004; Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994), is an inferior way to measure and examine the role of cognition in political entertainment persuasion research. The ELM, however, uses thought listing and counter-arguing techniques in combination with ability and/or motivation manipulations designed to generate highly reliable and valid data regarding the influence of the media on one’s thinking about the topic (Wegener et al., 1995). It is essential to include a formal assessment of these types of variables if a true social-psychological approach to the study of entertainment media and politics is to be undertaken in a proper fashion.

Cognitive elaboration (i.e., thinking about the arguments made in the stimulus) is a key cognitive process variable found to impact many of the phenomena political entertainment theorists examine such as attitude formation and change (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), perception (e.g., Shrum, 2002, 2006) and behavior (e.g., Petty et al., 2004; Bandura, 2002). Although extant political entertainment research lacks explicit consideration of cognitive elaboration, implicit discussions, inferences, and assumptions regarding elaboration saturate this literature (e.g., Holbrook & Hill, 2005; Holbert et al., 2003). For instance, Delli Carpini and Williams (1994) refer to the ‘silent conversations people had in their heads’ while watching a political docu-drama about nuclear waste, Incident at Dark River. Baym (2005) refers to Jon Stewart’s jokes as a means of helping people form rational responses and conversations about political issues, which can easily be reinterpreted as Stewart’s comments helping people form counter-arguments and the scrutinization of arguments being presented. Baum (2004) refers to people’s ability to make sense of soft news, which is clearly a cognitive process. Young and Tisinger (2006)
speak more explicitly about individuals’ ability to process satire and think about the jokes being told on late-night television. However, they offer no direct empirical assessment of this important variable. Finally, Young (2008) begins to explicitly refer to thinking about the topic and even begins to employ the term elaboration, stating that “humor fosters some kind of cognitive elaboration” (p.121). However, once again, there is no direct formal assessment of elaboration the likes of which will aid this area of research in providing some unique social psychological insights. These are but a few examples of the implicit conversations, assumptions, and inferences about cognitive elaboration peppered throughout extant political entertainment literature.

These examples demonstrate the need to explore the use of cognitive elaboration as a critical variable in persuasion and attitude change processes and effects studies regarding the influence of entertainment media on socio-political attitudes, perceptions, opinions, and behaviors. Political entertainment media scholars have been talking, with varying degrees of explicitness, about the variable for decades, and some studies are even now making an attempt, albeit more indirect than need be, to empirically assess this central persuasion variable. Expanding the current study of entertainment media and politics to directly and explicitly include the critical persuasion process variable of cognitive elaboration is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for gaining a true understanding of the persuasive influence of entertainment media on individual-level socio-political attitudes and behaviors. As such, an extended discussion of cognitive elaboration as a critical variable in political entertainment media persuasion research follows.
Cognitive Elaboration

Cognitive elaboration, as it is used in the ELM, has its roots in social psychological research (namely social justice theory, e.g., Ball-Rokeach, 1972; French & Raven, 1959; Greenwald & Ronis, 1978; see also Furnham & Procter, 1989 for a review) aimed at understanding the cognitive processes that mediate the relationship between stimulus (e.g., social information) and response (e.g., judgments and evaluations; see Markus & Zajonc, 1985). Throughout several of the foundational works in social psychology, cognition is consistently identified as a key determinant of how people acquire, store, retrieve, and use information (Bem, 1967; Festinger, 1957; Bandura, 1986). From this perspective, cognitions have been defined as the thoughts an individual generated in response to a stimulus (e.g., a political message; see Markus & Zajonc, 1985; Bandura, 1986). As social cognition became the predominant framework within the field of social psychology, the focus on cognitive processes such as elaboration dominated social psychological research resulting in key findings related to elaboration’s role in attitude formation and change (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1984, 1986, 1996; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), social judgment and decision-making (e.g., Trope & Liberman, 1996), and behavior change (e.g., Bandura, 1986, 2002; Petty et al., 2004).

Social cognition also profoundly impacted media effects research, an area of study which readily recognizes the critical role one’s thoughts play in shaping the way people perceive, understand, learn, enjoy, engage, evaluate, and behave in response to media stimuli (e.g., Shrum, 2002; Bandura, 2002; Petty, Priester & Brinol, 2002). Petty, Priester and Brinol (2002) have noted, “the cognitive response approach contends that the impact of variables on persuasion depends on the extent to which individuals articulate
and rehearse their own idiosyncratic thoughts to the information presented” (p. 163). As such, any discussion regarding the importance of cognitive elaboration in the study of entertainment media and politics should begin with an examination of cognitive elaboration’s current place in media effects literature.

*Conceptualizations of Cognition Elaboration in Communication Research*

Shrum (2002) defines social cognition as “an orientation toward the cognitive processes that occur in social situations” (p. 71), including ways in which people acquire, store, and utilize information that, in turn, shapes individual-level learning, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. In doing so, Shrum (2002) argues that social cognition and attitudes researchers have repeatedly identified two key underlying principles (dual processing and accessibility) that have profound effects on communication processes and media effects research; and these two principles have one common thread, differing levels of cognitive elaboration. Within the media effects literature, cognitive elaboration level is generally conceptualized as the amount of thinking one does in response to media stimuli (e.g., media characters or messages). Communication scholars have found that cognitive elaboration plays a critical role in media effects such as attitude formation and change (Young, 2008), comprehension and learning (Bandura, 2002; Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002), media-based perceptions (Shrum, 2002, 2006; Busselle, 2000), and media engagement (Green & Brock, 2000; Rubin & Perse, 1987).

Although cognitive elaboration is approached from many different theoretical frameworks within and across a wide range of academic disciplines, the conceptual definitions employed by various scholars to date are remarkably similar. The persuasion literature has generally adopted Petty and Cacioppo’s (1986) definition of cognitive
elaboration as individual-level thought generation that occurs in response to an attitude object or issue. With regard to attitude formation, Petty and Cacioppo (1986) set operational boundaries for cognitive elaboration wherein only relevant thoughts generated in response to the attitude object/issue under examination were retained in their cognitive elaboration studies. However, the researchers noted that when individuals were not able or motivated to think about the specific arguments, general thoughts, even those not specifically addressing the issue or object (e.g., political candidate perceptions or public policy issue knowledge), should still be considered valid forms of cognitive elaboration (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996).

Similarly, Shrum (2002) proposed a cognitive-based process model for cultivation theory that conceptualizes cognitive elaboration as moderating the cultivation effect. In doing so, Shrum (2002) defines cognitive elaboration as “the consideration of more information and greater scrutiny of the information that is considered” (p.84). Bandura’s (2002) social cognitive theory for mass communication considers cognitive elaboration a measure of effective cognitive function and suggests that people are active participants in the cognitive construction of meaning, judgments, and evaluations. Bandura (2002) situates cognitive elaboration as the means by which people, “generate ideas, act on them, or predict occurrences from them,” as well as “judge from the results the adequacy of their thoughts” (p.124). Slater’s (2002) examination of cognitive elaboration, in the context of narrative persuasion for entertainment education media, conceptually defined elaboration similar to attitudes theorists (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) suggesting that cognitive elaboration is a mental process in which individuals generate thoughts relevant
to a media stimulus (e.g., edutainment television program) and/or use cognitive effort to scrutinize arguments offered within or about the stimulus.

These conceptualizations of cognitive elaboration, although employed in the addressing of seemingly disparate research questions, are remarkably similar between the fields of social-psychology and communication, as well as within media effects research in particular. Additionally, it is well established that cognitive elaboration plays a central role in individual-level social-psychological processes underlying many of the phenomena examined by communication scholars (Bandura, 2002; Shrum, 2002, 2006; Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002; Slater, 2002). Considering the potential role of cognitive elaboration in the study of entertainment media and politics, it is helpful to also examine the influence of cognitive elaboration on basic communication processes and other traditional outcomes (e.g., attitudes and behaviors) commonly addressed in the media effects research tradition.

**Cognitive Elaboration and Media Effects**

Media effects studies examining the role of cognitive elaboration can be found in several lines of communication research, including entertainment media (e.g., Shrum, 2006), health communication (e.g., Slater, 2002; Slater & Roumer, 2004), and political communication (e.g., Young, 2008) to name just a few examples. Extant research has linked cognitive elaboration of media characters to increased enjoyment (Cohen, 2006; Raney, 2006) and media engagement (Oatley, 2002). For example, using a uses and gratifications framework of media engagement, Rubin and Perse (1987) found that cognitive elaboration led to stronger parasocial interactions with media characters and personae. Similarly, Wirth (2006) noted that the more one thought about the narrative, the
more involved they became and the greater enjoyment they expressed. Wirth’s (2006) involvement theory goes so far as to suggest a dual-process wherein cognition helps determine whether the individual will experience low or high involvement. Taken together, these examples demonstrate the influential role cognitive elaboration plays in extant media effects literature.

Two significant effects of elaboration have been identified in media enjoyment studies using transportation theory. Green and Brock (2000) found a direct effect of elaboration on media engagement such that thinking about characters involved in a narrative was positively related to self-reported transportation. Additionally, the researchers found that highly transported individuals (whom also had more elaborations about the characters in the narrative) held more story-consistent attitudes. The authors concluded that higher levels of cognitive elaboration predicted media engagement and stronger engagement led to reduced scrutiny of the messages in the narrative (i.e., biased message processing in the direction of the narrative). Thus, engagement mediated the influence of elaboration on attitude formation. This finding is particularly relevant to many types of political entertainment which also use narratives as a story-telling technique (e.g., Frost/Nixon, W, 24, to name a few). Here both groups had attitude change, but not in the same direction. It was only by including measures of elaboration that the researchers were able to identify this critical variable as the determinant of the attitude strength and valence observed in response to the narrative (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002). This pattern of results demonstrates that seemingly contradictory findings, such as opposing attitudes generated from the same media stimuli, can be explained potentially
by cognitive elaboration, an alternative explanation worth exploring among contradictory findings in political entertainment (e.g., Baum, 2004).

Referring back to the third objective of this dissertation (to directly challenge artificial barriers between narrative and social-psychological rhetorical-based persuasion theories), the use of cognitive elaboration in media effects studies demonstrates the importance of this goal. For example, Green and Brock (2000) used individual cognitive elaboration levels as a means of understanding their attitudinal results. This implies that cognitive elaboration plays an important role in the attitude formation process for narratives, and challenges the assumption that elaboration-based models are ineffective means of examining narrative persuasion and attitude change. Rather it appears that differing elaboration levels were the key that unlocked the seeming contradictions in their own results. Based on these empirical insights, it makes sense to examine elaboration in tandem with key narrative persuasion variables such as transportation as a means of unpacking the complexity of how and when narratives influence one’s thinking and attitudes.

Additionally, health communication studies focusing on entertainment education, another form of narrative persuasion, have found that viewers who engaged in relatively more cognitive elaboration experienced stronger opinion changes than those who engaged in relatively less elaboration (e.g., Slater, 2002; Slater & Roumer, 2004). Additionally, Slater (2002) found that attitudes changed via central processing (associated with higher levels of elaboration) were more predictive of socially risky behavior than those formed through peripheral processing (associated with lower levels of elaboration). Since political entertainment media also includes narratives (e.g.,...
it is reasonable to expect that cognitive elaboration plays an influential role in political entertainment narratives similar to that found by Slater and colleagues in health-related edutainment narratives.

Elaboration effects have also been found in studies regarding perceived realism of entertainment media where higher levels of perceived realism led participants to generate less critical thoughts about the messages provided in narratives (e.g., Busselle, 2000). This example demonstrates a moderating effect of perceived realism on elaboration, another important finding that warrants consideration in political entertainment studies.

Finally, within the field of political communication, Eveland and Dunwoody (2002) demonstrated the crucial role of cognitive elaboration plays in increasing comprehension, recall, and individual-level use of political knowledge.

As outlined above, cognitive elaboration has been identified as a key process variable in media effects research devoted to the study of attitudes, perceptions, enjoyment, engagement, learning, and behavior. These examples make clear the need to move more in a direction of looking at process-oriented social-psychological persuasion models that focus on elaboration (i.e., ELM) and can be extended to narrative persuasion research. The relationship between cognitive elaboration factors (ability and motivation), message, and narrative factors (e.g., transportation) merit consideration so that their relationships and effects can be better understood at a process level. Such is the focus of this dissertation, with attention being given to political entertainment media.

Additionally, the communication areas outlined above (general entertainment and entertainment education) all utilize elements (e.g., credible source), forms (e.g., narratives), and styles (e.g., humor) commonly found in political entertainment (Holbert,
Likewise, political communication, which concerns itself with much of the same phenomena as political entertainment, has identified cognitive elaboration as a key variable for democratic outcome variables that have long been deemed important to the study of political communication (e.g., political knowledge; Eveland, Hayes, Shah, & Kwak, 2005). Considering these similarities, it is likely that elaboration influences political entertainment persuasion in similar ways. Since the study of entertainment media and politics is interested in media effects and processes similar to those outlined above, extant research in media effects makes clear that cognitive elaboration merits equal consideration in political entertainment media persuasion research.

**Cognitive Elaboration, Persuasion, and Attitude Change**

To better understand why cognitive elaboration is needed in the study of entertainment media and politics, it is useful to specifically examine the role of cognitive elaboration in fundamental and basic persuasion processes. As previously mentioned, political communication (generally) and political entertainment (specifically) concern themselves with the influence of media on democratic outcomes (e.g., political attitudes and behaviors). As such, variables that impact this process warrant serious consideration. Turning to the attitudes literature, a well-validated and replicated set of findings regarding the ELM offers clear evidence of cognitive elaboration’s central role in the persuasion and attitude change processes (e.g., Petty et al., 2002; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty & Cacioppo, 1996; Krosnick & Petty, 1995; Petty, Haugtvedt, & Smith, 1995).

**Persuasion and Attitude Change**

Thus far, the discussion has focused on the need to move toward more process-oriented persuasion and attitude change models and employ elaboration-based social-
psychological models (i.e., ELM) to the study of political entertainment processes and effects research. Considering the relevance of cognitive elaboration described above, it makes sense to apply Petty and Cacioppo’s (1981, 1986) ELM as the theoretical foundation for examining cognitive elaboration of entertainment media (also referred to herein as entertainment elaboration). As detailed below, the ELM offers a systematic means by which post-stimulus entertainment elaboration can be predicted and resulting attitudes can be understood in terms of strength and behavior-consistency over time.

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984, 1986, 1996) is a dual-process model of persuasion that stipulates two qualitatively different routes to persuasion and attitude change, peripheral and central. The central route is characterized by relatively more thinking (i.e., high cognitive elaboration) about messages contained in persuasive arguments and/or cognitions about the relevant attitude object or issue. The peripheral route is characterized by relatively less thinking (i.e., low cognitive elaboration) about the persuasive arguments and/or attitude object/issue. Persuasion and attitude change that occurs via the peripheral route results from cues such as source credibility and/or cognitive shortcuts such as schemas, scripts, and stereotypes.

Persuasion and attitude change that results from central processing is a function of the amount and type of cognitive elaboration in which individuals engage. Specifically, the number of relevant thoughts generated by individuals in response to an attitude object (e.g., a political candidate or public policy issue) constitutes their level of cognitive elaboration. However, these thoughts can be favorable, unfavorable, or neutral, often depending on the strength of the arguments scrutinized. The likelihood of elaboration
(LOE) continuum, conceptualized to represent the amount of thinking individuals would be expected to do in response to an attitude object, represents the potential range of individual-level elaboration. The LOE ranges from very little thinking about the attitude object or issue (low elaboration) to quite a lot of thinking about the attitude object or issue (high elaboration). A person can fall anywhere on the continuum, where those falling near lower levels are thought to engage in relatively more peripheral processing and those falling closer to the high end of the range are considered to be engaged in more central processing.

**Ability, Motivation, and Elaboration**

Two recipient factors, ability and motivation, have been consistently found to predict LOE, such that when an individual has the ability and is motivated to think about the attitude object his/her LOE is high and central processing occurs (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). However, when either ability or motivation to think about an object or issue is low, LOE is low and the peripheral route of influence tends to dominate (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984, 1986). Given extremely low levels of ability and motivation, it would be entirely possible that people don’t engage a particular persuasive act at all. The LOE continuum, described above, depicts this range of possibilities using ability and motivation to predict individual-level cognitive elaboration. Petty and Krosnick (1995) outline a set of key variables shown over decades of research to influence one’s ability and/or motivation to engage in cognitive elaboration. For example, prior knowledge and distraction positively and negatively influence one’s ability to elaborate, respectively (Wegener et al., 1995; Petty, Wells, & Brock, 1976) while personal relevance and accountability positively influence one’s motivation to elaborate.
(Johnson & Eagly, 1989). The conditions for central processing are clearly demanding, requiring both high ability and high motivation to be present. Considering the arguments for extending the ELM to political entertainment provided above and the need to make cognitive elaboration a central element for this area of study, it makes sense to begin by replicating the ability and motivation findings with the following hypotheses that focus on the generation of total thoughts:

H1: Individuals placed in a high ability condition will generate significantly more individual-level thought generation than those individuals placed in a low ability condition.

H2: Individuals placed in a high motivation condition will generate significantly more individual-level thought generation than those individuals placed in a low motivation condition.

Although these are rudimentary hypotheses that focus on total thought generation only, they will serve as confirmation that ability and motivation are influencing cognitive elaboration levels from entertainment media consistent with their influence on cognitive elaboration from rhetorical arguments. Thus, affirming the use of these well-validated variables as manipulations of one’s ability and motivation to elaborate about political entertainment for future research. However, this dissertation is less concerned with general levels of elaboration and more interested in issue-relevant thought generation, which is a stronger threshold for establishing the relationship between the stimulus and the response (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). This is an important distinction, considering that mere exposure to a stimulus is likely to generate some thoughts, albeit they may be politically irrelevant. Imagine, for example, that watching late-night comedy generates
more thoughts, but those thoughts are not politically-oriented (e.g., “Jon Stewart is funny” or “I didn’t know that guest wrote a book”). In such cases, simply counting the number of one’s thoughts without regard to their political nature, generally, or issue-relevance, specifically, could lead one to find false associations between political entertainment use and politically-oriented thinking. In the interest of placing the ELM within the context of political entertainment media and confirming that post-stimulus elaborations are indeed issue-relevant, H3 and H4 predict that ability and motivation will influence issue-relevant thoughts, defined here as thoughts pertaining to the political issue discussed in the media stimuli:

H3: Individuals placed in a high ability condition will generate significantly more issue-relevant thoughts than individuals placed in a low ability condition.

H4: Individuals placed in a high motivation condition will generate significantly more issue-relevant thoughts than individuals placed in a low motivation condition.

One of the major premises of extending the ELM to political entertainment is that the persuasion and attitude change process for arguments consumed through entertainment narratives shares the same underlying process with those offered in political news or other forms of traditional public affairs content (e.g., political debates). As such, it is important to establish whether the theoretical underpinnings of the ELM can be used to examine persuasion in both rhetorical- and narrative-based arguments. Landreville and LaMarre (in press) have found that after watching a political entertainment film individuals with higher levels of issue knowledge and interest elaborated more about the arguments offered in the film than individuals with relatively
less issue knowledge and interest. These results provide some evidence that people can and do elaborate about political arguments made in media entertainment narratives. However, there has been no direct empirical test of whether people elaborate differently in response to rhetorical political arguments (i.e., arguments offered in news) and narrative political arguments (i.e., arguments offered in entertainment media). If political news\(^1\) does not have a significantly more positive effect on elaboration than political entertainment, the conceptual argument for extending the ELM beyond rhetorical news arguments to include narrative entertainment arguments will be confirmed. Thus, I propose the following research questions aimed at answering this question in relation to total thoughts and issue-relevant thoughts, respectively:

**RQ1**: Is there a significant difference in individual-level thought generation between participants who consume traditional news content and participants who consume political entertainment content?

**RQ2**: Is there a significant difference in individual-level issue-relevant thought generation between participants who consume traditional news content and participants who consume political entertainment content?

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*The Persuasion and Attitude Change Process*

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\(^1\) Political news is defined here as news media developed with journalistic intentions including, but not limited to, the intention to inform audiences. Additionally, the criteria set forth herein for political news includes production and delivery of content through a professional news outlet (e.g., newspaper, cable news program). Although the continued integration of entertainment and news makes clear the need to develop criteria for defining political news and entertainment in this area of research, this is beyond the scope of this dissertation. As such, traditional news and political news are terms used herein to describe media developed by news agencies and delivered through news outlets with the stated purpose of informing audiences about current events (i.e., CNN, New York Times).
Petty and Cacioppo (1986, 1996) outline four possible ways that a relevant variable can impact the persuasion and attitude change process in the ELM\(^2\). First, it can serve as a peripheral cue. Second, a variable can serve as an argument in the central processing route. Take, for example, John McCain as source and torture as a political issue. In the low elaboration condition, the source (McCain) is a peripheral cue that is used to form a quick judgment (e.g., favorable opinion of McCain as a credible source signals a more favorable attitude toward McCain’s policy position). In the high elaboration condition, the source can be a strong argument for or against the issue. For example, Senator McCain’s torture-induced war wounds offer a visual example of torture effects. As such, McCain himself provides a compelling argument against torture.

The third way a variable can influence the persuasion process is by moderating an individual’s LOE. For example, Senator McCain (as source) might make individuals (e.g., supporters, constituents, military, or colleagues) more motivated to think about the issue of torture. If, for example, McCain were speaking about torture, he could offer information that would increase the audience’s ability to think about the issue, or personal experience that might make the issue more personally relevant to audience members. There are a number of ways in which McCain could affect LOE. His physical impairments might be distracting to audiences (thereby reducing ability to think about it).

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\(^2\) Here persuasion is conceptually defined as any argument or message that intends to influence individual-level attitudes about a specific attitude object (e.g., political actor, issue). Additionally, attitude change is used herein to refer to the unintentional or general influence of a message or argument on individual-level attitudes or opinions regarding an attitude object. Because persuasion, specifically, and attitude change, generally, are discussed here as shifts in attitudes and opinions as the result of media exposure, both intentional and unintentional, the two terms are not parsed. This dissertation does not differentiate between a sender’s intended and unintended persuasive acts. It is not possible within the context of these studies to know the intentions of the political actors in these stimuli. Thus, there is no attempt to discern between what constitutes a specific intentional persuasive act and a general unintentional persuasive act that result in persuasion and attitude change, respectively. As such, the terms are used interchangeably and should be conceptually understood to mean both intentional and unintentional influences on individual-level attitudes.
Likewise, his testimony might provide new insights (increasing ability) or make personal the issue of torture (thereby increasing motivation). Perhaps his mere presence is inspiring and helps people formulate reasons against torture in their own minds.

Fourth, a variable can bias the information used to generate thoughts and/or scrutinize arguments under high elaboration conditions. For example, the tortured war veteran as source makes torture concepts more accessible so the information used to generate thoughts is biased toward negative torture-related ideas. In turn, the heightened accessibility makes it easier to generate more unfavorable arguments than favorable arguments for the policy issue.

Before thinking about the role of various political entertainment messages relative to these various scenarios (see subsequent hypotheses, H9 and H10), it is essential to gain an understanding of the roles performed by ability and motivation in the generation of valenced thoughts. As such, the following research questions are offered as a means of beginning to understand how and when these factors influence the direction of one’s thinking:

RQ 3: How does ability influence thought valance (i.e., positive and negative thought generation)?

RQ 4: How does motivation influence thought valance (i.e., positive and negative thought generation)?

These four distinctions are important for the study of entertainment elaboration. Since both peripheral and central processing can shape attitudes, it is important to understand that any variable under study can potentially influence attitudes, but in different ways. Researchers can benefit from understanding the specific conditions under
which individuals will likely respond to variable heuristically or with critical thought and evaluation. Additionally, a variable’s ability to introduce bias is an important consideration, especially in the realm of politics given partisan considerations that can serve to color any type of cognitive activity (Johnston, 2006). If, for example, a person is peripherally cued in a biased manner the resulting attitude (although weak and potentially temporary) could be extreme. On the other hand, if a person thinks about the attitude object (high elaboration), but does so with bias, the resulting attitude will likely be more extreme and resistant to change.

*Source, Elaboration, and Persuasion*

Since political entertainment media tends to use known sources (e.g., talk show hosts, celebrity actors, news show hosts, etc.) credibility, likability, attractiveness and other source attributes will likely play a role in the processing of information (Harkin & Petty, 1981). Theoretically, the ELM would predict that such influences would differ depending on the persuasion route (peripheral or central) taken by the recipient of the potentially persuasive act. Beginning with the peripheral route (i.e., relatively less elaboration), individuals would be expected to demonstrate more thinking in response to non-credible sources and less thinking in response to credible sources (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996). Presumably, this would occur because credible sources provide stronger peripheral cues than non-credible sources. Thus, under low elaboration conditions individuals rely on credible sources more than non-credible sources when developing or changing attitudes and, in turn, highly credible sources are more persuasive when counter-attitudinal information is presented.
Thinking specifically about political entertainment, it would make sense that when audience members are engaging in relatively less thinking about the arguments offered, source credibility becomes a heuristic for agreeing/disagreeing with the position advocated by the source. If for example, individuals watching late-night comedy such as *The Daily Show* are tired or distracted, then we would expect those audience members to form attitudes using a more peripheral route. Supposing that Jon Stewart offered a political opinion that was counter-attitudinal to those audience members, individual-level perceptions of Stewart’s credibility or likeability would likely drive audience members’ evaluation of Stewart’s position. The more one found Stewart to be a favorable source, the more likely one would be to agree with him.

High elaboration conditions should raise the level of argument scrutiny. Under high elaboration conditions, source credibility shouldn’t have a significant impact on persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996). Instead, thought generation should be driven by argument strength as opposed to source credibility. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) note that while source credibility shouldn’t matter to persuasion, more thinking occurs in response to highly credible sources but that this is largely guided by the quality of arguments offered. Referring back to the above mentioned Stewart example, imagine audience members who were highly motivated to process the messages. Under relatively more central processing of Stewart’s messages, these individuals would be expected to scrutinize the actual arguments. Thus, if Stewart offered strong arguments we would expect a high level of persuasion, but if the arguments were weak we would expect a lower level of persuasion. While argument strength is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the underlying principles should still be at work. Namely, people in the low
ability condition should use more peripheral cues to form judgments about show hosts while people in the high ability condition should apply more scrutiny to form judgments.

What is not known, however, is how people who watch a comedian portraying a news anchor (e.g., Jon Stewart) will differ from those watching a professional journalist serving as a news anchor on a cable news station (e.g., Anderson Cooper) in terms of their source perceptions. Thinking about the differences in source judgments between low and high ability described above, it would make sense that individuals low in ability, regardless of whether they consume political entertainment content or political news content, would apply heuristic cues to form judgments. Thus, the popularity of these two show hosts might cue “likability,” resulting in little (if any) difference between the political news and entertainment groups in terms of their source perceptions.

However, the ELM would predict that under high ability conditions the people would apply more scrutiny to the show hosts. In such case, the question becomes whether people will differ in their opinions of a political media host (e.g., Jon Stewart) and a traditional news journalist (e.g., Anderson Cooper) as credible sources for political information under high ability conditions. Considering that the former is a comedian and the latter is a professional journalist, it would seem that when people scrutinize the show host in the context of their presentation of political matters, the journalist should have more source credibility than the comedian. Additionally, while argument strength was not manipulated in this dissertation, recent research has shown that an argument offered with more levity is not as strong as one offered with gravity (Holbert, Hmielowski, Jain, Lather, & Morey, in press). As such, it would seem reasonable that traditional journalists would be able to separate themselves from comedians in terms of positive source
perception when audience members are more likely to be thinking about the issue being discussed in a given public affairs media segment. Thus, the following hypothesis concerning perceptions of source is offered:

H5: There will be a contingent condition interaction between message (news v entertainment) and ability (low versus high) such that differences in source perceptions of a political media entertainment host (e.g., Jon Stewart) and a traditional news media host (e.g., Anderson Cooper) are contingent on having a higher ability level, with separation in source perceptions being found across individuals high in ability and little to no difference across those individuals low in ability.

In theory, this process should function the same way using a motivation manipulation. However, this dissertation does not compare news to entertainment in combination with a motivation manipulation. Instead, this work compares one-sided and two-sided message exposure in relation to motivation (see Study 2 summary under method). Nevertheless, the study of these competing political communication information flows (one-sided versus two-sided) is directly applicable to the study of motivation as it relates to media influence on source perceptions. There should be a direct effect for information flow on source perceptions in that source perceptions should be more positive under the one-sided message scenario, especially if the two-sided information orientation involves a direct parodying of the source of the first political message. However, this message effect should vary across motivation levels. Individuals placed in high motivation conditions should produce greater differentials in source perceptions than that which should be witnessed among low motivation individuals who consumer the
one-sided versus two-sided political information message orientations. Thus, the following hypothesis is offered:

H6: There will be a contributory condition interaction between message (one-sided versus two-sided) and motivation (low versus high) such that source perceptions across the two political information orientations will vary greater among individuals placed in a high motivation condition than individuals placed in a low motivation condition.

Countervailing Arguments and Persuasion

The issue of varying source perceptions relative to coming into contact with one-sided versus two-sided political information flows raises a larger set of issues pertaining to the relationship between information flow and a broader set of persuasion outcomes as well (see Zaller, 1996). Rarely does one encounter a single argument from a single source about a key social or political issue (Holbert & Benoit, in press). Instead, it is much more likely that individuals will see, hear, or read many different arguments from many different sources, and that we seek out multiple sources of political information regarding the major issues of the day (Chaffee, 1986). As such, questions regarding the influence of viewpoint, repetition, and attribution arise.

Political arguments are often bidirectional with opposing viewpoints and counterarguments being offered to audiences (Kaid, 2004; McKinney & Carlin, 2004). For instance, political opinion television shows commonly use a two-sided message format that juxtaposes liberal and conservative experts on political issues with on-screen debate and banter (e.g., Hardball with Chris Matthews, The O’Reilly Factor). Satire offers another technique for offering countervailing arguments. Although satire is a playful
distortion of reality (Feinberg, 1967), late-night comedians often use satire and parody to highlight inconsistencies, absurdities, and seemingly flawed political arguments (e.g., Holbert, et al., in press; LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009; Baym, 2005). In so doing, the satire becomes a form of counter-arguing and can potentially influence the persuasion process (Young, 2008; Baym, 2005).

Countervailing arguments can also be consumed through the use of multiple programs and formats. Multiple television, radio, Internet, and film productions can and often do tackle the same or similar issues (e.g., climate change documentaries, television specials, or news stories). Individuals with interest in a particular issue will likely be exposed to more than one set of arguments and messages regarding the same topic (Garrett, in press). Whether by face-to-face debate, parodying an opposing viewpoint, or consumption of multiple programs, much of what audiences consume includes opposing or potentially countervailing views (see Webster, 2007). Thus, it is important to not only understand the influence of argument and source perceptions, but to also understand the influence of opposing arguments on the political entertainment persuasion process.

*Message inoculation and political entertainment persuasion.* Although little research has examined the influence of opposing arguments in political entertainment, extant persuasion literature offers some understanding of how counter-arguing and two-sided message exposure influence attitudes. Petty and Cacioppo (1996) offered two important ways that opposing viewpoints can influence persuasion. The first is through pre-exposure treatments such as inoculation (McGuire, 1985, 1969). Warning people of impending attempts to persuade them (i.e., inoculation) has been shown as an effective method for developing resistance to attitude change. If, for example, a political talk radio
show host (e.g., Rush Limbaugh) warns the audience that political opposition groups armed with counter attitudinal messages are planning a persuasive campaign about a political issue (e.g., climate change), then inoculation theory would predict that the audience members will be less susceptible to these counter-attitudinal arguments offered by the opposition groups after the radio host’s warning (Szabo & Pfau, 2002).

Extending inoculation to political entertainment films, it is possible that the pre-release film reviews along with discussion of such films on late-night, talk radio, and daytime talk shows could serve an inoculation function. Take for example Disney’s pro-environmental documentary, Earth, released in theaters nationwide on Earth Day 2009. Assuming that viewers considered the documentary film chronicling one year in the life of three different animal species a pro-attitudinal film, then the trailers being shown in theaters, guest appearances on late-night, and commentary by pro-environmentalists can serve to inoculate audiences against the expected backlash from political opposition groups. On the other hand, opposition groups speaking out about the film’s climate change message on talk shows, late-night, talk radio, and cable television could also inoculate viewers with counter-attitudinal or non-attitudinal opinions about climate change from being persuaded by the television special’s climate change message.

One rationale behind inoculation effects is that pre-exposure warnings provide individuals time, ability, and motivation to prepare against the counter-attitudinal arguments they are about to encounter (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996; Petty & Krosnick, 1995). Inoculation has been proven useful for the study of traditional political communication media effects (Chasu & Pfau, 2004). Applying this theoretical process to political entertainment media, it is likely individuals who consume opposing arguments
through entertainment outlets (i.e., daytime talk shows, cable news, talk radio, Internet, late-night, and entertainment critic reviews) prior to consuming the messages being opposed in those venues will have the ability to formulate more resistance and experience less persuasion than those who only hear the advocated position. Thus, the following hypothesis is offered:

**H7**: Individuals placed in a two-sided message condition in which nationalized healthcare is both advocated (i.e., *Sicko*) and opposed (i.e., *An American Carol*) will demonstrate less favorable attitudes toward nationalized healthcare than those in the one-sided message condition in which nationalized healthcare is advocated without any opposition (i.e., *Sicko* only).

**Heckler effects and political entertainment persuasion.** The previous discussion regarding opposing messages in political entertainment concerns itself with the influence of pre-exposure warnings. However, as already noted, many forms of political entertainment use a two-sided argument format which offers audiences simultaneous exposure to countervailing arguments. How then might consuming both sides of a socio-political issue in entertainment media affect persuasion differently than consuming only one side of the issue within a relatively short period of time (e.g., one show or episode)?

Petty and Cacioppo (1996) outline how a heckler can reduce persuasion and/or attitude change, and this particular influence can be extended to political debate as offered in entertainment television. Extant literature shows that when a heckler speaks out in a crowd, people exhibit less attitude change (Petty et al., 1995; Petty & Cacioppo, 1996). Theoretically, the heckler helps audience members form counter-arguments to the
messages. Perhaps you are at a political rally in which a heckler from the crowd argues against the platform being presented by a particular candidate who is giving a speech. It is quite likely that some people at the rally will consider the heckler’s remarks and discount the candidate’s arguments accordingly. It is also likely that some individuals already have some level of doubt, but perhaps they don’t have the ability or motivation to form strong counter-arguments to the candidate. In this case, the heckler might offer statements that the individual hadn’t thought of on their own, increasing their ability to counter the candidate’s political statements.

Similarly, individuals consuming political arguments in entertainment media outlets are also likely to be influenced by the heckler. This is often seen on late-night political television content where a host (e.g., Jon Stewart) serves the heckler role by ridiculing or satirizing a media clip or interrupting a guest to make an opposing point (Baym, 2005). Indeed, being a heckler has been defined as integrally related to the broader role performed by a satirist (Knight, 2004). Cable news opinion and daytime talk shows offer another form of debate similar to the heckler. Outspoken hosts such as Sean Hannity (Hannity’s America) and Joy Behar (The View) commonly interrupt guests and co-hosts in a heckling-type fashion. Live audience shows such as The Colbert Report and SNL sometimes permit audience booing and cheering along with audience outbursts to remain in the aired version. Even television entertainment dramas (e.g., The West Wing, NYPD Blue) and situational comedies (e.g., The Simpsons, The Office) that contain political content have provided opposition viewpoints that potentially serve the same role as the heckler when using political storylines.
Taken together, these media examples demonstrate how opposing viewpoints in political entertainment potentially influence the persuasion process in a manner similar to the heckler effects found in extant persuasion literature (Petty et al., 1995; Petty & Cacioppo, 1996). Applying these concepts to political entertainment, it can be predicted that when individuals are exposed to opposing arguments about a socio-political issue (e.g., universal healthcare) in a single setting (e.g., a show segment or episode) they are better able to counter-argue the counter-attitudinal position than individuals who are only exposed to a counter-attitudinal argument. Thus, the following hypothesis is posited:

H8: Individuals placed in a two-sided political entertainment message condition that both advocates and opposes an issue will generate significantly more counter-arguments against the issue than individuals placed in a one-sided political entertainment message condition that only advocates the issue.

Cognitive Elaboration and Attitude Formation

Although understanding there are two qualitatively different routes to persuasion and attitude change is insightful and relevant to the study of entertainment media and politics, it is the differential effects these routes have on attitudes that illuminates the critical need to include cognitive elaboration in political entertainment research. Scholars are not only concerned with whether media influences audience attitudes and opinions, but are also concerned with the strength, persistence, resistance, and durability of individuals’ attitudes. Questions regarding attitude-behavior consistency, as well as the impact of newly formed perceptions and attitudes on future judgments and evaluations are also of considerable interest (e.g., Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994a; Holbert et al., 2003).
While these questions are approached from various theoretical frameworks, they fundamentally address attitude strength (Fazio, 1995). Petty and Krosnick (1995) define attitude strength as a multi-dimensional construct that consists of attitude durability and impact. Durability is further defined as persistence (how long the attitude remains salient) and resistance (how well the attitude stand up to counter-persuasion or attack). Attitude impact is conceptualized as how much the attitude influences subsequent evaluations and judgments and how predictive the attitude is of behavior. Examination of the relationship between elaboration and attitude durability and impact provides further evidence of the need to include this key variable in examinations of political entertainment’s influence on individual-level socio-political attitudes and behaviors.

Attitudes formed or changed via central processing, mediated by cognitive elaboration, are more consequential than those formed or changed via peripheral processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, 1994). Stated differently, attitudes formed under high elaboration conditions will be stronger (e.g., more durable and impactful) than those formed under low elaboration conditions. Since political entertainment research concerns itself with the impact of attitudes and behaviors, knowing whether observed attitudes were formed under high or low elaboration conditions would be incredibly useful for predicting attitude-behavior consistency, attitude impact on social judgments and evaluations, attitude persistence over time, and attitude resistance to counter persuasion.

In addition to ability and motivation, other factors such as message likely influence initial attitudes. As political entertainment can take many forms (e.g., satire, film) it is important to understand the role message plays in attitudes. Additionally, as news and entertainment continue to merge, it is helpful to know if these two forms of
political communication differ in their influence on initial attitudes. Several persuasive influences for ability, motivation, and message have been offered in this dissertation in relations to several persuasion-oriented outcome variables, most notably cognitive elaboration. Before examining long-term attitudes, however, it is important to first get a sense of the influence of ability, motivation and political entertainment media messages have on initial attitudes. As such, the following three research questions are offered as a means of exploring the influence of ability, motivation, and message on initial attitudes:

RQ5: Does ability (high versus low) have a direct effect on issue-related attitudes?

RQ6: Does motivation (high versus low) have a direct effect on issue-related attitudes?

RQ7: Does political entertainment media exposure, both when compared to news exposure and as a result of political entertainment messages sidedness (one-sided versus two-sided) have a direct effect on issue-related attitudes?

Late-Night Comedy and Political Film as Contexts of Study

Returning to the previously stated goals of this dissertation, the arguments and rationales offered so far in this dissertation represent a baseline set of issues needed move in a more process-oriented direction using social-psychological persuasion models for the study of political entertainment media (goal 1) and to lay the foundation for directly testing the ELM in a political entertainment media context (goal 2).

However, it is also necessary to consider the specific forms of political entertainment which should used to test the ELM in this dissertation, as well as offering a
rationale for their selection. As is outlined below, the study of political entertainment media represents a diverse range of messages and outlets. So, where should we start to apply the ELM and the social-psychological approach to the study of political entertainment media that has been outlined in this work? A logical first step is to focus on those areas of political entertainment media which have made the closest attempts to employ a social psychological approach to the study of political entertainment media. Late-night satirical TV programming (e.g., Young, 2008) and political film (e.g., Delli Carpini & Williams, 2004b) offer the best examples of existing attempts in the political entertainment media literature to apply social-psychological persuasion models in some consistent manner. As such, it makes sense to outline what has been attempted in each of these areas, both theoretically and methodologically. As an added benefit, a more formal application of social psychological theory (as offered in this work) may serve to highlight or identify any false assumptions, theoretical deviations, or methodological weaknesses in these extant research areas which have failed to embrace fully a true social psychological approach. It is important that these issues/false starts be raised and addressed before moving forward with this approach to the study of political entertainment media effects, and doing so will help political communication researchers interested in entertainment media move forward in the most fruitful manner possible.

It is also necessary to set forth a means of organizing discussions of elaboration in extant political entertainment literature and provide an overview of the implicit discussions, assumptions, and inferences that appear throughout the literature in order to place this dissertation’s work in the broader study of political entertainment media. Only
after this task is accomplished should the two specific areas of political entertainment media study (late-night satirical television and political film) be focused on in particular.

*Types of Political Entertainment Outlets*

Political entertainment media is diverse and includes a wide variety of ways in which politics is presented, from interviews with political actors (e.g., *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*) to fictional political dramas (e.g., *The West Wing*). It is important to assess the role of cognitive elaboration across these different media outlets and to not make assumptions that this important cognitive variable shown to have influence on persuasion processes works universally across these disparate media outlet types. As such, Holbert’s (2005) typology for the study of political entertainment television offers a means for organizing implicit discussions of cognitive elaboration in extant political entertainment research.

With a growing literature focused primarily on the influence of entertainment media on democratic outcome variables (e.g., political attitudes, and behaviors), Holbert (2005) argues that “before there can be a serious empirical assessment of the varied roles of entertainment media in politics, political communication first needs to ground itself conceptually in how to approach such a diverse set of media messages” (p. 436). This conceptual grounding also provides a systematic way to examine implicit discussions of cognitive elaboration in extant research, as well as how the inclusion of cognitive elaboration in future studies benefits research within and between the content areas.
Holbert’s (2005) Typology for Political Entertainment

The nine-part typology was constructed using both audience feedback and content analysis, and is organized into two factors: level of explicit political content and degree of focus on politics (Figure 1). First, the three vertical levels reflect audience expectations of political content. At the highest level, audiences expect political content to be the primary focus of the media message, such as would be evident in political interviews on entertainment talk shows (e.g., candidate or elected official appearances on The Oprah Winfrey Show; Baum & Jamieson, 2006). The three categories (from left to right) at this level include entertainment talk show interviews with politicians (e.g., Larry King Live; Just et al., 1996), fictional political dramas (e.g., The West Wing; Holbert et al., 2003), and traditional satire (e.g., The Daily Show with Jon Stewart; Holbert et al., 2007). The mid-level represents audience expectancy to be somewhat political, but not the primary focus. These categories (from left to right) include soft news (e.g., Entertainment Tonight; Baum, 2003), political docu-dramas (e.g., made for television movies; Delli Carpini & Williams; 1994b), and satirical situation comedies (e.g., The Simpsons; Cantor, 1999). The lowest level represents audience expectations that socio-political elements will be secondary to the main focus of the entertainment form. From left to right, these categories include entertainment television events where the occasional political statement is offered (e.g., the Academy Awards), reality-based programming and documentaries (e.g., COPS or March of the Penguins, Holbert, Kwak & Shah, 2004), and what Gamson (1999) called lifeworld content (e.g., drama or comedy programs that deal with everyday life such as ER or The Office).
While these three horizontal levels represent whether audiences expect to consume primarily political, somewhat political, or mostly non-political content, the three vertical columns moving from left to right represent how explicit the political messages are within the content. The most explicit content categories (from political as primary to political as secondary) include entertainment talk show interviews with politicians (e.g., *Larry King Live*), soft news (e.g., *Entertainment Tonight*), and television events (e.g., the Academy Awards). These are media messages grounded in non-fiction oriented material. The political messages are explicit in nature and make obvious the tone and tenor of the arguments offered.

The middle column, which represents a balance between explicit and implicit political messages, includes fictional political dramas (e.g., *The West Wing*), political docu-dramas (e.g., made for television movies), and reality-based programming and documentaries (e.g., *COPS* or *March of the Penguins*). It is here that the entertainment media provides rich and complex political messages, some overt and others obscure. Viewers are generally aware of the more explicit messages, but another layer that is more subversive may go undetected by the less discerning viewers.

The far right column, representing mostly implicit political messages includes traditional satire (e.g., *The Daily Show*), satirical situation comedies (e.g., *The Simpsons*), and lifeworld content (e.g., *ER*). It is in these forms of political entertainment that the viewer may not even notice the political messages at first glance. Implicit political entertainment forms often use sub-text to make political points, which may or may not be processed by the audience. On one level it can serve a pure entertainment purpose, yet on another level sharp political points are made with clever innuendo and inference.
Clearly, these nine categories encompass vastly different types of political entertainment which vary in their focus, form, messages, and effects. As such, the study of entertainment media and politics must consider the complex audience and content differences for various stimuli. Thus, the following sections use Holbert’s (2005) nine categories to organize an examination of the implicit discussions of cognitive elaboration in extant research.

*Cognitive Elaboration in Extant Research*

As previously discussed, extant political entertainment research primarily focuses on media effects using traditional news theories such as priming (e.g., Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2005) agenda setting (e.g., Holbrook & Hill, 2005) and framing (e.g., Holbert et al., 2005) without explicit examination of the underlying psychological processes (i.e., cognitive elaboration) responsible for these effects (Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994b; Holbert, 2005). Recapping the above discussion, Delli Carpini & Williams (1994b) called for movement away from the recipient as passive consumer approach to a recipient as active processing agent approach to political entertainment research. Additionally, Roskos-Ewoldson et al. (2002) has cautioned that theories involving short term accessibility (e.g., priming) are not capable of producing the majority of effects political communication researchers repeatedly find, yet consideration for alternative theoretical explanations or explicit consideration of potentially relevant processes is conspicuously absent.

However, what is present in the literature is an on-going implicit discussion of cognitive elaboration that weaves a common thread throughout the nine categories of political entertainment research. By examining the assumptions and implicit references
relevant to cognitive elaboration that exist in the literature, it becomes clear that researchers intuitively know that this is a crucial variable which could enlighten current findings, as well as inform future research regarding entertainment media’s influence on political attitudes and behaviors.

Implicit discussions in extant research range from talking about elaboration without explicitly measuring the variable or empirically testing its influence (e.g., Young, 2004) to vague assertions and unstated assumptions that imply cognitive elaboration’s key role in the persuasion process under study (Holbert, Shah, & Kwak, 2003). Regardless of how transparent the importance of cognitive elaboration is, however, there is only one known instance of where it has been measured or explicitly examined in this area of political communication (e.g., Young, 2008). Since this dissertation provides only the first steps toward a systematic examination of cognitive elaboration in political entertainment media, this investigation of existing implicit discussions surrounding cognitive elaboration is limited to the two political media entertainment content categories that encompass a large share of extant political entertainment literature (i.e., traditional late-night TV satire and political docu-dramas). Limiting this dissertation to this pair of prevalent forms of political entertainment offers a solid starting point for this line of research.

*Late-Night TV Political Satire*

Under Holbert’s (2005) typology, traditional satire is categorized as a form of political entertainment that primarily focuses on political content, but does so in a relatively more implicit way. Although audiences expect the satire to target political topics, traditional satire is more implicit than fictional political dramas and entertainment
talk shows, requiring audiences to interpret the true meaning of the jokes (Young, 2004; Baym, 2005). There have been a substantial number of political entertainment studies examining political satire in *The Daily Show*. Young and Tisinger’s (2006) study of news consumption among late-night comedy viewers and Baym’s (2005) analysis of *The Daily Show* as a new form of journalism offer two excellent examples of where cognitive elaboration is discussed (or at least inferred) in the entertainment political media literature.

Young and Tisinger (2006) examined whether young audiences (ages eighteen to twenty-nine) get their political information from *The Daily Show*’s satirical newscast instead of traditional news or in combination with traditional news. The authors offered this analysis in response to popular press perceptions that young voters were turning to late-night for their political information. Similar to Young (2004), Young and Tisinger (2006) argue that satire requires audience participation to “get the joke,” and rather than “simply highlighting caricatured attributes of the candidates, *The Daily Show*’s segments take aim at the dynamics of politics, political rhetoric, and the institutions that govern” (p.118). These premises, that cognitive effort is required to understand the satire and that the satire serves as persuasive arguments, both implicitly refer to a persuasion process that requires effortful cognitive processing. However, this argument contains a flawed assumption of the ELM. Rather than predicting consumption level from ability and motivation factors, elaboration level should be predicted. In essence, Young and Tisinger (2006) make the flawed argument that political knowledge and interest (re-conceptualized here as ability and motivation, respectively) drive viewership of *The Daily Show*. 
Because individuals can still enjoy media even when they aren’t motivated or able to think about the messages (see enjoyment theory by Raney, 2004; Zillmann, 2006), we should not expect that ability or motivation factors can be used to predict consumption. Instead, such factors can be used to predict thinking when consumption occurs. Although Young and Tisinger (2006) did not explicitly refer to cognitive elaboration as the mechanism responsible for humor appreciation, they applied the same logic as Young (2004) in which elaboration was explicitly named as the key factor. This common thread across Young’s work exemplifies the consistent presence of cognitive elaboration in the background of extant political entertainment research, and points to the need for the application of social-psychological process models to replace the flawed methods currently employed.

Another example of a flawed but fruitful attempt at applying process-oriented models to satirical late-night TV political entertainment persuasion research can be found in Young’s (2008) most recent work. Young (2008) echoes Delli Carpini and Williams’ (1994b) sentiments, arguing for more process-oriented research examining how people think about the satirical messages in late-night political comedy (e.g., The Daily Show). In doing so, the author explicitly refers to cognitive elaboration stating, “If, as research seems to indicate, humor fosters some kind of cognitive elaboration but hinders scrutiny of underlying message arguments, the obvious questions concern why and how humor affects cognitive processing in this way” (p.121). In this study, cognitive elaboration is conceptualized as a key determinant of attitude formation and change that is somehow moderated by humor. Young makes the theoretical argument that cognitive elaboration is an inherent part of humor appreciation, suggesting that individuals need to elaborate to
get the joke. From this perspective, cognitive elaboration might be expected to focus on comprehension, leaving less cognitive resources available for message scrutiny (Young, 2008).

On the other hand, Petty and Cacioppo (1996) describe the multiple ways in which a variable can affect the persuasion process including activating biased thinking. From this viewpoint, it is quite possible that the humor might foster biased elaboration wherein jokes offer counter-arguments that individuals would not have thought of on their own. In this case, the humor works in a similar fashion to the heckler in a crowd (see Petty & Cacioppo, 1996 for review), helping individuals to process the joke while biasing the thinking about the attitude object. As such, individuals will likely generate more biased elaborations and develop relatively more counter-arguments to the joke target (represented as more joke-consistent thoughts). Since both cases should result in joke-consistent attitudes, it would be easy to assume that the joke served as a simple cue or that less cognitive resources were available for message scrutiny.

At first glance, this might appear a moot point since both low and high elaborators will likely show some attitude change. However, I argue this is actually an important distinction because the differences in elaboration level (low or high) and type (objective or bias) lead to consequential differences in resulting attitude strength and attitude-behavior consistency. If, for example, someone watching The Colbert Report devotes substantial cognitive resources to joke comprehension and engages in relatively less message scrutiny, then the resulting attitude formation may actually mirror the peripheral processing route. Even if elaborations were high, those thoughts wouldn’t be aimed at argument examination and, in turn, wouldn’t serve to strengthen one’s attitudes. Instead,
initial attitudes would likely be formed using peripheral cues. On the other hand, if Stephen Colbert serves a heckler function, assisting the audience in forming counter-arguments and activating biased elaborations, then individuals would likely develop relatively stronger attitudes that would be more predictive of future behavior.

As previously discussed, it is difficult to assess differences in initial attitudes between peripheral and central processing. As such, an alternative form of examining this process relies on the direction of one’s thoughts or their ability to develop counter-arguments (tangential to this issue was the earlier discussion concerning inoculation and heckler effects). In this dissertation, I attempt to make a prediction about the direction and amount of one’s thoughts based upon Young’s (2008) satirical processing load hypothesis. Assuming Young is correct and satire mitigates one’s ability to think about the message, then message (satire versus news) should influence thinking differently for political entertainment and news groups. Specifically, the political entertainment groups should rely more on peripheral cues to form thoughts and be less able to generate independent counter-arguments to the issue. As Jon Stewart is a popular show host, it is logical to assume he will serve as a positive cue and people will generate more favorable than thoughts in response to watching *The Daily Show*. However, political news does not have the satirical processing load requirement. Thus, political news watchers would be expected to demonstrate relatively more message scrutiny than political satire viewers. This would likely reveal itself as more unfavorable arguments among news users than entertainment viewers. So, while the general question regarding thought valence was previously asked, here predictions are made which are specific to satire:
H9: Individuals placed in a satirical late-night TV condition will generate significantly more favorable (positive) thoughts than those individuals placed in a political news condition.

H10: Individuals placed in a satirical late-night TV condition will generate significantly less unfavorable (negative) thoughts than those individuals placed in a political news condition.

Applying the same logic to counter-arguing, people with a satirical processing load will likely have less resources available for message scrutiny and, in turn, will be less able to generate independent counter-arguments opposing the stated position. More formally stated:

H11: Individuals placed in a satirical late-night TV condition will generate significantly fewer counter-arguments against the show host’s stated issue position than individuals placed in a political news condition will generate against the news anchor’s stated position when both hosts (satire and news) advocate the same or similar positions.

Insights generated from these hypotheses will begin to unlock whether the elaboration required to process humorous messages dampens one’s ability to scrutinize the joke content and results in more peripheral processing or generates more biased thinking about the joke content, resulting in more message scrutiny (i.e., central route processing).

Prior to Young (2008), there had only been implicit and indirect conceptualizations and discussion of cognitive elaboration within the political entertainment media literature (e.g., Young, 2004, Baym, 2005, Cantor, 1999). An earlier study examining the influence of late-night entertainment talk shows on political
knowledge also inferred cognitive elaboration saying, “late-night jokes are unlike
traditional forms of political information as they require active audience participation” to
appreciate the jokes and “several scholars have described the process of joke appreciation
in terms of cognitive elaboration” (Young, 2004, p.4). In this analysis of Daily Show
viewing’s impact on attitudes and perceptions, Young posited that the cognitive
elaboration needed to appreciate the jokes “ought to move viewers’ perceptions of the
candidates in the direction of the gist of late-night candidate jokes” (p. 5).

Young’s (2004) argument relies on three important assumptions regarding the
cognitive elaboration process, yet none of these assumptions were empirically tested.
First, cognitive elaboration was assumed to occur for all individuals’ as a means of
developing humor appreciation, described as a process by which individuals work out the
true meaning of the message hidden within the sarcasm or satire. However, it is quite
possible that some viewers use heuristic cues such as the joke target (e.g., former
President Bush) or political identity (e.g., Republican) to determine the meaning of the
joke. Second, cognitive elaboration is assumed to result in more biased processing in the
direction of the joke which, according to the ELM literature, only occurs under certain
conditions (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Third, there is an assumption that cognitive
elaboration would result in more attitude change, which Petty and Cacioppo (1984, 1986)
have repeatedly demonstrated to be untrue. These assumptions regarding elaboration’s
role were evident in the statement “as the incongruity mechanism in humor mandates a
form of cognitive elaboration on the part of the receiver to bridge the gap and see the
joke, it would seem that recall and even attitude change should be enhanced as a result”
(p.4).
Using OLS regression from survey data, Young (2004) did not find support for the hypothesized effects. Given that cognitive elaboration was arguably the key variable underlying Young’s (2004) assumptions and predictions yet it was not included in the analyses, it is not surprising that the hypotheses were not supported. This is an example of what Delli Carpini and Williams (1994b) were referring to when they said, “By using ‘snapshot’ surveys, the fluid, dynamic nature of public opinions is again largely missed” (p. 785). In this way, Young (2004) clearly missed the dynamic cognitive elaboration process that occurred by relying on closed-end survey data that failed to capture the nature of elaboration. This provides an excellent example of how cognitive elaboration is considered a critical variable in entertainment talk show research, yet its influence is not explicitly tested. Young (2004) concluded that the data did not support the contention that cognitive elaboration mechanisms influence candidate perceptions from late-night viewing. Although no support was found using this method and data set, the theoretical argument offered was compelling. It might be true that biased cognitive elaboration results from consuming late-night jokes, or that such elaboration influences perceptions of political candidates. Hypotheses 1 and 3 regarding the influence of ability on total and issue-relevant thought listing will help resolve the issue and provide evidence that better explains Young’s (2004) predictions using cognitive elaboration measures.

Political Film

The second context for study selected for this dissertation is political film. As with political satire, political film is one of the few areas of political entertainment where attempts have been made to move toward process and include cognitive elaboration
(Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c). As such, this category also serves as a context of studying the social psychological approach outlined in this dissertation.

Political docu-dramas represent a mix of entertainment and politics/public affairs content, as well as a mix between explicit and implicit messages. As such, they offer audiences a blending of emotion-laden topics (e.g., personal drama) and socio-political messages. Delli Carpini and Williams (1994a, 1994b, 1996) used focus groups to analyze the public opinion influence stemming from the made-for-television docu-drama movie, *Incident at Dark River*, that focused on toxic waste. Since all three articles covered similar topics using the same stimulus, participants, and method, they will be examined as a single entity for the purpose of this literature review.

Delli Carpini and Williams (1994a, 1994b) focused a significant portion of their arguments on political discussion, which has been identified as a key moderator of elaboration (Petty et al., 1995). In doing so, the authors argue that discussion was a means by which people shared the silent conversation in their heads (i.e., elaboration). Delli Carpini and Williams (1994a, 1994b) implied that elaboration was the critical process which needed explored saying, “much (perhaps most) of the ‘real conversation’ that takes place between a viewer and television is unspoken” (p. 791). They confirmed the central role of this silent elaboration in which audiences engage in when they explained, “We were able to approximate what we argue is the ongoing, silent conversation people are regularly engaged in while watching television” (p.791). Here the authors have implicitly argued that focus group discussion served as a measurement of the cognitive elaboration process in which people engaged while viewing the docu-drama, and inferred that such elaboration is a regular process that accompanies television
viewing. Clearly, Delli Carpini and Williams (1994a, 1994b) were indirectly measuring cognitive elaboration and situating it as a key variable necessary for examining the persuasive influence of political television docu-drama viewing. This set of focus group studies offers the closest attempt made by political entertainment scholars to measure elaboration and examine its role in political entertainment persuasion at that time (i.e., prior to Young’s later work).

However, Delli Carpini and Williams (1994) stopped short of explicitly referring to this process as cognitive elaboration, and instead refer to it as “ongoing, silent conversations” in people’s minds. Delli Carpini and Williams (1996) extended the silent conversation metaphor into a study aimed at understanding how individual-level thought about the mix of entertainment and political content in a political docu-drama, as well as how these thoughts shaped their opinions about pollution. In short, this study is almost completely predicated on cognitive elaboration.

As the authors argue in Delli Carpini and Williams (1994b), the focus group discussions were used to approximate (measure) the silent conversations (i.e., cognitive elaborations) participants had in response to the show. In this study, they also examined the content used (e.g., entertainment messages or political messages) to form arguments, finding that people drew from both types of arguments and sources when reacting to the media. From a social-psychological cognitive elaboration framework, this methodology was attempting to indirectly measure whether people engaged in relatively more or less elaborating, as well as whether those elaborations were focused on strong (assumed to be political) or weak (assumed to be entertainment) arguments. Measuring the level of elaboration would indicate whether opinions were formed peripherally or centrally, and
determining the arguments used would indicate whether the processing was biased or objective. This demonstrates an indirect elaboration-based process approach to examining the influence of political docu-dramas on public opinion.

While this is a notable step toward the necessary use of cognitive elaboration in persuasion-oriented research designed around the context of political entertainment media, the authors constrained themselves by ironically using a methodology (focus groups) that is incapable of isolating the key variable of interest, elaboration. Considering Delli Carpini and Williams’ (1994b, 1994c) claim that “the method is the message,” it seems relevant to point out that trying to capture the “silent, ongoing conversations” in peoples’ minds through group discussion is fundamentally flawed. The potential confounds of social desirability, researcher expectancy bias, willingness to self-censor (Hayes, 2007), and many other interpersonal phenomena hamstring the researchers’ ability to validate any significant findings that might arise from such studies (see Krueger & Casey, 2000).

It is argued in this work that using experimental designs with reliable and valid manipulations and measures of elaboration offer a better way to approach this line of research. However, what focus group as method can do is to highlight potentially important variables and processes, which, in turn, can be isolated and examined in subsequent studies. To this end, Delli Carpini and Williams (1996) offer an excellent starting place and clear evidence that elaboration matters to political entertainment persuasion research.

Replication of this political documentary study with explicit elaboration and opinion measures provides empirical support for the arguments outlined in Delli Carpini
and Williams (1996). Replication of documentary use effects is particularly compelling given the increased usage of documentary-style film techniques in recent socio-political films (e.g., *Sicko, Supersize Me, March of the Penguins, Earth*). The box office success of these and other political docu-dramas point to large audiences and potentially widespread consumption of socio-political arguments in this political entertainment format. *Sicko*, for example, grossed over $24.5 million, won seven industry awards, and was shown in nationwide theaters.

Extending the arguments regarding silent conversations in people’s heads and resulting public opinion outlined by Delli Carpini and Williams (1996), it is reasonable to expect that people who watched Michael Moore’s film about the benefits of nationalized healthcare (*Sicko*) were holding these silent conversations with themselves about issues raised in the film. Using the ELM to re-conceptualize these private thoughts as cognitive elaboration, individuals would generate cognitions relative to their own ability and motivation to scrutinize and think about the topics and arguments presented (see H2 and H4 discussed earlier). Additionally, high elaborators should also have formed stronger connections that increase their ability to discuss the film with others. By examining these central ideas we can validate Delli Carpini and Williams’ (1996) premise that individual-level focus group discussion has a positive relationship with cognitive elaboration. While the first was previously addressed in H2 and H4, I offer these additional research questions regarding discussion intention:

RQ8: Does motivation have an effect on intention to discuss the topic of interest in a political documentary?
RQ9: Does message have an effect on intention to discuss the topic of interest in a political documentary?

Addressing the Divide between Narrative and Rhetorical Persuasion Models

The majority of the discussion outlined so far has focused on the first two goals of this dissertation. Specifically, the aim has been to demonstrate the need to move toward a social-psychological persuasion process approach and to extend the ELM to political entertainment media as a framework for doing so. Having provided a very detailed analysis of the need for applying social-psychological persuasion models to political entertainment research, I now turn to the third objective; namely to challenge artificial barriers that seem to exist between narrative and rhetorical persuasion theory. Green and Brock (2002) offer the Transportation Imagery Model (TIM), which is framed as a narrative persuasion process model. In doing so, the authors argue that the ELM is limited to rhetorical arguments and should not be used to examine narrative-based persuasion. Although this viewpoint has been heavily disputed by health communication scholars (e.g., Slater, 2002), it appears to have taken hold among entertainment effects scholars (e.g., Busselle, 2000, Pouliot & Cowen, 2007). As a result, false assumptions about the limitations of the ELM to provide meaningful insights to narrative-based persuasion research have ensued. As political entertainment mediated communication relies heavily on narrative forms (e.g., Sick, Frost/Nixon) it becomes necessary to address this issue and begin breaking down some of the barriers between narrative and rhetorical persuasion theory. As a first step, it is helpful to understand the TIM offered by Green and Brock (2002) as a narrative-based persuasion model.

*Transportation Imagery Model (TIM)*
Green and Brock (2002) proposed the TIM, which suggests that transportation is the key to narrative persuasion. The essence of the entire model is quite simple; the greater the transportation, the more persuaded the recipient will be by the narrative. While this argument retains a certain degree of face validity, there is no real evidence that transportation is the only way to generate narrative persuasion. In fact, recalling the earlier discussion regarding media effects, Green and Brock (2000) had to use elaboration to make sense of their own attitudinal data. What is even more interesting is the authors’ assertion that transportation is more predictive of attitudinal outcomes than cognitive elaboration when focusing on the influence of entertainment media. It seems that transportation can easily be re-conceptualized as one of many forms of media engagement. Media engagement literature, as previously outlined, has demonstrated an array of factors ranging from enjoyment (e.g., Zillmann, 2002, 2006; Raney, 2004) to character identity (e.g., Cohen, 2006) that influence entertainment media effects. Thus, it is illogical to conclude that transportation is the only path to narrative persuasion. Instead, it is much more likely that key entertainment variables such as enjoyment, disposition, and transportation are significantly related to key persuasion factors such as ability and motivation.

Although the TIM was offered as an alternative to the ELM, the competing models have never been tested. Thus, there is no empirical evidence that demonstrates transportation is necessarily better or worse in terms of predicting attitudinal influence when compared to the ELM in studying the influence of narrative-based arguments. Additionally, the TIM has only been tested using static text narratives (i.e., written
stories). Television and film narratives have not been empirically examined using the TIM to date.

Although the TIM, as a narrative persuasion model lacks proper validity and reliability testing, the transportation scale (as a predictor variable) has been shown to influence learning, attitudes and recall in narratives (Green & Brock, 2000, 2004). In essence, the authors had limited success using the transportation scale to predict a set of outcomes (e.g., story knowledge and attitudes) and, in turn, assumed that transportation was the key to narrative persuasion. As such they posited the TIM, which is predicated on transportation. It appears that several leaps in logic occurred from which the authors assumed that if transportation led to attitude change in written narratives, then one’s level of transportation into the narrative must be the underlying mechanism responsible for all narrative persuasion outcomes. Clearly, this is flawed logic. What’s more was the astonishing argument that transportation, as part of the un-validated TIM, was evidence that the ELM was limited to rhetorical arguments and inappropriate for narratives without actually testing such bold assertions. Clearly one should not take a scaled item used to predict direct effects and bill it as a comprehensive persuasion model, yet that appears to be what has occurred with the TIM.

Regarding measurement, the main contention that transportation is superior to cognition is also conspicuously confounded in the TIM measure. Ironically, the transportation scale used to measure media engagement under the TIM includes several cognitive measures such as focusing on the topic, thinking about the topic, and comprehending the topic, which challenge the model’s theoretical framework. The TIM uses a 15-item self report scale for transportation which is comprised of eleven cognitive
and affective items and four repeated measures of one imagery item. For example, the scale asks participants to rate how distracted they were during the narrative. Using a 5-point strongly disagree to strongly agree response scale, people are asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statements: “I was easily distracted while (viewing, reading) the story,” “I could easily understand the main points in the story,” and “I found myself thinking about the story after it ended.” Clearly, there is overlap between these cognitive measures and the ELM. Distraction and comprehension are both considered factors that influence ability under the ELM. Additionally, thinking about the story after it ends is essentially elaboration. The transportation scale uses these items (along with others) to measure narrative involvement (i.e., transportation). The TIM uses the same scale to predict narrative persuasion (i.e., attitude change). The overlap between the transportation scale and the ELM makes clear that this is a false barrier. Taken as a whole, the TIM falls short of explaining why transportation is more important than cognition in narrative persuasion and, in no way, invalidates the ELM’s ability to be extended to narrative persuasion.

However, the TIM and transportation theory do point to an interesting difference between rhetorical and narrative argumentation; namely narrative involvement. Green and Brock (2002) successfully demonstrate the important role engagement plays in moderating the amount of thinking one does in response to narratives, offering valuable insight into why media engagement needs to be included in political entertainment persuasion research. In essence, I submit that it is more beneficial to the study of political entertainment to examine transportation and the ELM as complementary processes, as opposed to juxtaposing them as competing theories.
With this in mind, it makes sense to begin with a simple research question designed to illuminate whether ELM factors, motivation or ability, influence one’s transportation into the media stimulus. Additionally, the goal of breaking down artificial barriers between rhetorical and narrative persuasion theory can also be served by examining whether message (e.g., entertainment or news) influences one’s transportation. These research questions are stated as follows:

RQ10: Does ability significantly influence transportation?

RQ11: Does motivation significantly influence transportation?

RQ 12: Do a variety of political entertainment media messages significantly influence transportation?

Integration

At the outset of the chapter, three primary objectives were offered for this dissertation: (1) demonstrate the need and potential utility for inclusion of social-psychological process-oriented persuasion models to political entertainment media research; (2) extend the ELM to political communication research through the study of political entertainment media; and, (3) bridge gaps between narrative and rhetorical persuasion theory. The above discussion has offered a detailed analysis for each of these objectives and posited 11 hypotheses aimed at directly testing the ELM in two political communication forms. Additionally, 12 research questions have been presented as a means of exploring more broadly and completely political entertainment media persuasion processes through an ELM lens and setting a baseline for future research. The next chapter offers a detailed outline of two experiments designed to test the above-mentioned hypotheses and research questions.
CHAPTER 2: METHOD

Two experiments were conducted to test the above stated hypotheses and research questions. These studies utilize two basic manipulations (i.e., ability and motivation), which replicate early cognitive response attitude studies (e.g., Petty, Cacioppo & Goldman, 1981; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Additional media message manipulations were added to these replications as a means of expanding current theory and testing the hypotheses outlined above for political entertainment media. Specifically, Study 1 examined differential effects of cognitive elaboration between the consumptions of news versus entertainment media. Study 2 included a one-sided versus two-sided political entertainment-based argument manipulation. Both studies also examined the influences of motivation, ability, and message on key entertainment and persuasion theory variables (i.e., source perceptions and engagement). The two studies are detailed below.

Study One: Ability Manipulation for Cable TV News and Late-Night TV Satire Elaboration

Following Petty and Cacioppo’s (1984, 1986) basic methodological design for testing ability’s influence on individual-level cognitive elaboration, the first study was a 2 (ability: high, low) X 2 (media stimulus: entertainment, news) posttest only experiment with random assignment. Ability was manipulated by increasing prior knowledge for the treatment group. Additionally, a media format manipulation was used to compare
cognitive elaboration processes and effects between entertainment (e.g., late-night satire television shows) and news (e.g., cable television news shows).

Data

The data were collected using an adult sample ($N = 132$) recruited from Franklin County, Ohio. All participants were entered to win a $100 gift card in exchange for their voluntary participation. All participants were ages 18 and over. Slightly more than half of the participants were female (51%). The average age was 36 years. Ninety-two percent of participants were Caucasian, 3.2% were African-American, 1.6% were Hispanic, .08% were Asian, and the remaining 3.12% reported themselves as other or chose not to answer the question. The average household income was $50,001-75,000. The mean level of education for this sample was a four-year college degree.

Procedure

Study 1 utilized a jury pool sample. First, the Franklin County Court was contacted by the lead author with a request to conduct academic research. The Clerk of Court referred the request to the duty judge assigned to Franklin County jury oversight. Management Jury Administrator Scott Rankin granted permission for the on-site research. The permission was limited to one researcher, between the hours of 12:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. All research was conducted on-site using a laptop computer in the attorney-client conference rooms. The researcher reported to the jury room with permission from the duty judge and asked the group of jurors if they would like to participate in a voluntary online survey about political entertainment. The researcher explained that the study would take 20-25 minutes to complete and required individuals to watch a short video clip and answer some questions about news in general,
politics in general, and, more specifically, the clip they viewed. They were also told that volunteering to participate would enter them into the raffle, they were free to skip any questions they wished, they could exit and delete their answers at any time, and all information was confidential.

All volunteers were taken to a private room in the courthouse where a laptop was used to conduct the experiment. Once logged into the program, participants read the online consent form and were guided through one of four conditions determined by random assignment. Participants were randomly assigned a URL, which linked them to one of four conditions in the computer program created to reflect the 2 x 2 experimental design. The two high-ability conditions (high ability - entertainment and high ability - news) began with an artificial news article authored by the lead researcher about AIG bonuses provided using taxpayer dollars.

The artificial news article was used to increase individuals’ prior knowledge about this issue, and in turn, increase their ability to think about the topic of AIG executive bonuses. The two low-ability conditions (low ability - entertainment and low ability - news) were given a non-relevant artificial news article, also authored by the lead researcher, about video games (see Appendix C for complete article wording). The video game news article was the same length and news style as the issue-relevant article in order to maintain consistent time and effort across conditions, but did not include any information regarding the AIG issue. The news articles were text only with no publication source information provided.

Following consumption of the news article, two multiple-choice questions were asked of all four groups to ensure that the ability manipulation was effective. The first
question simply asked participants to identify the topic of their news article and the second asked a basic knowledge question from the high ability artificial news article (i.e., Which member of Congress claimed he had no involvement in writing the amendment that allowed for AIG bonuses to be given using taxpayer dollars? Correct Answer: Senator Chris Dodd, D-CT). A t-test revealed a significant difference between the low and high ability groups regarding this knowledge question, $t$-value = 11.06, $p < .001$, where 92% of the participants in high ability group answered the question correctly and only 23% of the participants in the low ability were able to offer the correct response. The low ability correct response level is roughly that of chance based on the number of possible responses offered relative to the knowledge question. Based on this finding, the ability manipulation was deemed highly effective.

After reading the artificial news article and answering the manipulation check questions, all four groups watched a four-minute embedded media clip about the issue of AIG bonuses. The entertainment media group viewed a clip from The Daily Show with Jon Stewart while the news group viewed a clip from CNN’s Anderson Cooper 360° cable TV news show (see Appendix E). Immediately following these acts of media consumption, all four groups were asked to list their thoughts about the television segment they viewed. In keeping with several ELM studies utilizing thought listing, four minutes was provided for this procedure (Krosnick & Petty, 1995; Wegener et al., 1995). Thoughts were either typed into an open response box that allowed each participant to elaborate as much as individually desired or hand written on pen and paper provided by the researcher. Each participant was given the option to type or write their responses. Once the four-minute time period ended, an on-screen box thanked the participant and
directed them to the second cognition measure, counter-arguing. Participants were asked to counter-argue a statement similar to one made by the host (e.g., generate arguments that opposed the host’s advocated position) and counter-argue a statement that directly opposed the hosts viewpoint (e.g., generate arguments that would mirror arguments presented in the stimulus). Afterward, participants answered the remainder of the post-test survey questions.

The post-test computer-administered survey included a series of media engagement and attitude questions asked in a computer survey format. These questions measured emotional and cognitive engagement, perceptions about the show’s host, and attitudes about the attitude objects in the clip (e.g., AIG executive bonuses, the bailout plan, congressional approval, complete Study 1 question wording available from author upon request). The last segment of the survey included basic demographic measures as well as political interest and knowledge measures. The survey itself took approximately 20-25 minutes to complete, and the entire process from start to finish averaged roughly 45 minutes per participant.

**Stimuli**

*Ability manipulation article.* A one-page artificially created news article was used to manipulate ability (see Appendix C for complete article wording). The article covered the AIG executive bonus scandal from spring 2009. Republican and Democrat viewpoints were offered in the form of quotes from key congressional members. Similarly, White House opinion was offered in the form of quotes from the Treasury Secretary and a White House spokesperson. Additionally, specific information regarding the AIG bailout
amounts, timeline, and executive compensation was provided in the artificial news article.

The article was portrayed as a real news article written by M. Smith (the same by-line was used for the artificial news article about video games as well). No other source identification was supplied. The ambiguity regarding source was done to reduce source effects. Examples of specific information supplied in the article include the total amount of bailout monies provided AIG, the congressional amendment that permitted AIG to offer the bonuses, and publicly stated positions offered by Democrat and Republican leadership in the topic. Although the news article was fictitious, the information was accurate and taken from real news articles collected by the lead researcher. The tone of the article was designed to be objective and neutral. Both sides of the debate were offered, but no commentary or intentional framing was used.

*Political entertainment clip.* The entertainment media clip used in this study was a 4m:11 sec clip from a segment entitled “Notorious AIG,” which originally aired during the March 19, 2009 episode of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. The clip was the entire original segment, faded in from black and out to commercial break in which Jon Stewart provided commentary about the $165 million in AIG bonuses paid using federal government funds. *The Daily Show* segment included a montage of news clips about the executive bonus scandal coupled with Stewart’s satirical commentary about the events. The tone was satirical, but Stewart’s message was unequivocal in being opposed to the use of taxpayer monies for executive pay. A copy of the clip used is available for viewing at: http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=220572&title=the-notorious-aig-outrage.
Political news clip. The news clip was 4m: 15sec segment entitled “AIG Controversy,” which originally aired during the March 20, 2009 episode of Anderson Cooper 360° (AC 360°). As with The Daily Show clip, the AC 360° clip was the entire original segment, faded in from black and out to commercial break in which Cooper included a montage of media statements along with his own comments about the issue. One notable difference between the AC 360° and The Daily Show segments was that Cooper used a live expert panel to discuss the issue, while Stewart offered commentary alone. The commentary offered by Anderson Cooper was straightforward, as opposed to Stewart’s predominant use of satire in the entertainment clip. However, Cooper also took a position that clearly opposed the use of taxpayer funds for executive bonuses. Although Cooper’s show is generally considered a news program, it should be noted that this segment was more political commentary than hard news (i.e., traditional reporting). Thus, both the entertainment and the news stimuli were offering highly similar opinions on the same subject (i.e., opposition to the AIG bonuses). A copy of the AC 360° clip is available for viewing at: http://www.cnn.com/video/?/video/politics/2009/03/20/ac.aig.bonus.cnn.

Stimuli selection. Several factors were considered in the selection process. First and foremost, both stimuli had to deal directly with the same issue. In this case, the AIG issue was chosen as a means of selecting a personally relevant issue (related to economic current events) so that motivation would be high across the groups. Simply put, the issue was timely, relevant to the sample, and would likely keep motivation high across groups. Additionally, the two stimuli needed to advocate the same or at least highly similar positions. Both Stewart and Cooper were clearly opposing the AIG executive bonuses in
the respective clips. Segment length and form were also considerations. The two clips were essentially the same length, both contained opinion, host commentary, and a collection of media images. Finally, quality and production features were considered. Both clips were entire, professionally edited segments taken directly from the programs’ respective websites. These considerations were taken into account in order to control the possible range of confounds which could affect the media influences of primary interest to this study. However, it should be noted that content differences did exist, which simply could not be controlled (e.g., humor, show host, graphics).

**Coding Procedures**

Since individual-level elaboration plays a central role in the story being presented in this dissertation, an important methodological concern centered on the coding of the open-ended elaborations and counter-arguments offered by participants. Three coders were trained to undertake this rather arduous endeavor. The procedures explained herein were used for both Study 1 and Study 2.

**Coders.** Three graduating seniors in communication from The Ohio State University were hired and trained to conduct the coding of the open-ended elaborations and counter-arguments. Each coder had already successfully completed methods courses as part of their undergraduate major requirements and had previously worked as a coder on university research projects conducted at The Ohio State University. The coders were paid an hourly wage for their efforts (no other compensation was offered). Coders had no knowledge of, interaction with, or connection to the participants. In an effort to reduce researcher demand effects, coders were not provided any information regarding the analysis expectations or hypothesized results. The lead researcher had never met the
coders before the project, had no personal connection to the coders, and was not in a position to affect their grades or graduation status in any way. These barriers were also established to reduce demand effects, the introduction of coder biases, and other potential reliability/validity issues.

**Coding procedures.** Before coders were given any sample data, the researcher met with them as a group to discuss cognitive elaboration and counter-arguing as concepts. Examples of open-ended elaborations and counter-arguments were provided to the coders for review. After a lengthy discussion regarding the topics, format, and nature of cognitive elaboration, the three coders were asked to interpret the example data provided to them by the lead researcher with regard to the following characteristics: thought, thought relevance, and thought valence (valence assessed for only those thoughts deemed relevant). For example, coders were asked, “Do the statements directly address the topic, are the statements related to the topic generally, but not directly, or are the statements completely unrelated to the topic?” The example topic used was nationalized healthcare. An example of an elaboration that directly related to the topic might include “Americans should have nationalized healthcare.” An example of a statement that would be generally, but not specifically, related might be “Drug companies make too much money.” An example of an unrelated elaboration would be “Michael Moore is funny.”

After coders spent time differentiating between direct, indirect, and unrelated statements, they were asked to determine whether the relevant statements favored, opposed, or were neutral to the position advocated in the media clip (i.e., study one was against AIG bonuses). Favoring statements were categorized as “positive,” opposing as “negative,” and neutral as “neutral.” Coders were specifically trained to understand that a
positive statement meant that the statement supported or favored the position taken in the
clip, not that the tone of the comment was upbeat versus pessimistic. For example, if the
issue was executive bonuses for AIG, then the “positive” statement might actually be
negative in tone. For instance, the statement “executives shouldn’t get paid using our tax
dollars” sounds negative. However, it supports the position taken by Stewart and Cooper.
Thus, it favors the position and is coded as positive (i.e., favoring the position advocated
in the clip).

Inner-coder reliability. After coders were trained on how to identify individual
thoughts, thought relevance, and thought valance, they were each given a copy of ten
percent of the full sample (separate samples for each study). The data were randomly
selected by the computer. All three coders were provided a copy of the codebook, coding
sheets (see Appendices A, B), and the data. Coders were given ten days to complete the
initial coding beginning on May 11 and ending May 21, 2009. Coders were instructed to
work independently and not confer with one another while completing the inter-coder
reliability testing.

Once all three coded data sets were returned, inner-coder reliability was assessed
for each variable under examination (e.g., total thoughts, relevant thoughts, thought
valances, counter-arguments). All reliabilities were calculated using the Krippendorff’s
alpha macro for SPSS created by Hayes and Krippendorff (2007). The macro allows for
any number of judgments, at any level, by any number of judges. Krippendorff (2004)
indicates that reliabilities at $\alpha = .80$ or above are deemed highly reliable, while those
falling between $\alpha = .667$ and $\alpha = .799$ allow for cautious interpretation.
The analyses revealed solid reliabilities between all three coders. Specifically, five of the Krippendorff’s alphas for Study 1 were above the .80 level: relevant thoughts Krippendorff’s $\alpha = .82$; relevant positive thoughts Krippendorff’s $\alpha = .82$; relevant negative thoughts Krippendorff’s $\alpha = .82$; counter-arguments for limited AIG executive pay Krippendorff’s $\alpha = .92$; and counter-arguments against limited AIG executive pay Krippendorff’s $\alpha = .82$. The two counter-arguing variables were coded in the same manner as total number of relevant thoughts – only those counter-arguments for or against the stated position that were deemed relevant were counted by the coders. Only one variable was below .80, and it was very close to meeting the high reliability threshold (total thoughts, Krippendorff’s $\alpha = .78$). Thus, it was determined that coders were properly trained and reliability was strong enough to keep all three coders and continue coding the entire data set.

Once inter-coder reliability was established, the remaining Study 1 open-ended responses were randomly divided into three approximately equal sub-sets. Each coder was provided a second copy of the codebook, coding sheets, and one sub-set of open-ended responses to code. Coders were provided three weeks to complete the coding beginning on May 29 and ending June 12, 2009. Once coding was complete, the data were merged into a single SPSS data file for analysis.

**Measures**

*Cognitive elaboration.* The criterion cognition variable is amount of cognitive elaboration. This was conceptualized as total number of issue-relevant thoughts. However, as indicated in the open-ended coding procedures, this study’s operationalization of elaboration also included thought relevance and valance as detailed.
Specifically, total number of thoughts (M = 2.80, SD = 1.87), total number of relevant thoughts (M = 2.70, SD = 1.82), relevant positive thoughts (M = 1.64, SD = 1.91), relevant negative thoughts (M = .52, SD = .98), counter-arguments for the stated position (M = 1.56, SD = 1.24) (e.g., consistent with the position advocated in the stimuli), and counter-arguments against the stated position (M = 1.45, SD = 1.24) (e.g., opposing the position advocated in the stimuli) were all used as outcome variables (see Wegener et al., 1995 for an overview). Appropriate cognition variables were used in relation to specific hypotheses and research questions offered in this dissertation and the remaining cognitive elaboration variables were employed in post-hoc analyses (see Chapter 3 – Results).

**Attitudes.** Individual-level attitudes toward three objects were measured for this study. These included individual-level attitudes about AIG executive compensation (treated as criterion attitude measure), the government bailout plan, and Congress. Each attitude measure used a three-item index created from unique items measured along six-point semantic differential scales. Participants were asked to select the number on the scale that most represented their opinion of the statements (ranging from 1 to 6). The attitudes were assessed asking individuals to complete the following phrases: “AIG’s executive bonuses are,” “the government’s bailout plan (TARP plan) is,” and “Congress is.” Each phrase retained the following anchors: “good (1)/bad (6),” “wise (6)/unwise (1),” and “honest (1)/corrupt (6).” The answers to “good/bad” and “honest/corrupt” were reverse coded. All three indices had solid reliabilities: AIG bonus attitude index, $M = 1.80$, $SD = 1.46$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$; government bailout plan attitude index, $M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.70$.\end{flushright}
$SD = 1.77$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .76$; and congressional attitude index, $M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.76$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$.

Source perceptions. Perceptions of Jon Stewart and Anderson Cooper as credible sources for political information were measured using a three-item index, $M = 2.21$, $SD = 1.70$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$. Specifically, three measures were source credibility, source likability, and source competence. All three asked participants to strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, or strongly agree with the statement “Jon Stewart/Anderson Cooper is a credible, incompetent (reverse coded), and likable source for political information.”

Engagement. Media engagement was measured using a modified version of the well-known transportation scale (Green & Brock, 2000). The original 15-item scale was paired down to seven key items used in extant media effects literature focusing on political stimuli (e.g., Pouliot & Cowen, 2007). Participants were asked to place themselves on 5-point scales that ranged from (strongly agree) to (strongly disagree) for each of the seven statements. The traditional use of this scale calls for five repeated measures of the imagery item which were consolidated into a single imagery item for this study (i.e., I could clearly imagine the details of the story in my mind). Additionally three cognitive items commonly used in the transportation scale were tailored to the specific stimuli, including “I was easily distracted while watching the Daily Show/A C 360° clip (reverse coded),” “I lost track of time while watching the Daily Show/AC 360° clip” and “I could easily understand the points being made by Jon Stewart/Anderson Cooper in the media clip.” The final three items were affective measures including “I felt a strong emotional reaction to the Daily Show/AC 360° clip,” “I could easily identify with Jon
Stewart/Anderson Cooper in the media clip,” and “I found it difficult to empathize with the points made by Jon Stewart/Anderson Cooper (reverse coded).” The mean was 2.73 ($SD = 2.45$), and reliability for the index was solid, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$.

_Covariate._ Political interest was used as the covariate. Extant political communication literature has demonstrated the influence of political interest on thinking about a topic (Young & Tisinger, 2006), as well as transportation (Green & Brock, 2002), source perceptions (LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009) and attitudes (Holbert, Shah, & Kwak, 2003). With this in mind, it seemed likely that individual-level interest in politics would influence one’s elaboration about the topic, political stimuli engagement, and perceptions and attitudes about the political topic. Political interest was measured by asking people how interested in politics they were on a seven-point Likert-type scale from _not at all interested_ (1) to _very interested_ (7) ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.21$).

_Analysis_

A total of eight Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) tests were run to assess the Study 1-relevant hypotheses and research questions. Each test retained the same pair of independent variables, ability and stimuli (political entertainment versus political news), and also retained the same covariate, political interest. The ANCOVAs focused on the following outcome variables: total thoughts (H1, RQ1), total relevant thoughts (H3, RQ2), positive thoughts (RQ3, H9), negative thoughts (H10), counter-arguments against the stated position (H11), source perceptions (H5), attitude about AIG (RQ5, RQ7), and transportation (RQ10, RQ12).

Since total relevant thoughts, relevant positive thoughts, and relevant negative thoughts were sub-sets of the more general total thoughts, the use of individual
ANCOVAs was deemed more appropriate than a single MANCOVA that would examine these elaboration-related outcome variables as a single entity at the omnibus level. Additionally, counter-arguing, and source perceptions are conceptually distinct and not highly correlated (zero-order $r = .15$), suggesting that they should be run in separate ANCOVAs as well.

*Post-Hoc Statistical Power Assessment*

A post-hoc statistical power analysis was performed for this study using the software package, GPower (Faul & Erdfelder, 1992). In accordance with Cohen (1977) GPower uses the effect size of $f$ when assessing power in an ANCOVA. This statistic is the “standard deviation of the standardized means” (Cohen, 1977, p. 275). The alpha level for this study was pre-established at .05, and the sample size for the study was 132. GPower, also in accordance with Cohen (1977) suggests the following $f$ values for small, moderate, and large effects, respectively: .10, .25, and .40. These $f$ values translate to the following $\eta^2$ values, the most commonly reported effect size statistic in the communication sciences: .01, .06, and .14 respectively (see Cohen, 1977, p.283, table 8.2.2). The power assessment was conducted in light of the study design (4 groups) and the inclusion of a single covariate (1 group), creating a total of 5 groups. The following results were found for the power analysis: $f = .10$, power = .123; $f = .25$, power = .602; $f = .40$, power = .967. Overall, this study retains weak statistical power for detecting small effects when judged against the desired power level of .80, and the power for properly detecting moderate effect sizes is also below what is deemed desirable. However, the study retains adequate power to detect large effect sizes.
Study 2: Motivation Manipulation and Counter-valenced Message Study

Following the Petty, Goldman, and Cacioppo’s (1981) methodological design for testing motivation’s influence on individual-level cognitive elaboration, the second study of this dissertation was a 2 (motivation: high, low) X 2 (media stimulus: one-sided message, two-sided message) posttest only experiment with random assignment. Motivation was manipulated by increasing personal relevance for the treatment group (see procedure below).

Data

The data were collected using a college student sample. Students were recruited from communication courses using an IRB approved recruitment script. All participants were ages 18 and over. A convenience sample ($N = 223$) was collected using on-line survey software (i.e. www.limesurvey.org). All participants were provided extra credit by their instructors in exchange for their voluntary participation. Fifty-six percent of participants were female. The average age was 20.6 years old. 87% of participants were Caucasian, 6.27% were African-American, 3.27% were Hispanic, 2.45% were Asian, and the remaining 1.1% reported other or chose not to answer the question. The average household income was $75,001 - $100,000.

Procedure

Each instructor posted the recruitment script for the study on his/her respective course’s website and announced the extra credit opportunity in class. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions (mix of message and motivation manipulations) and provided a link to the online survey through their course website.
Upon logging into the survey, participants read and agreed to the consent form, then were directed to their randomly assigned condition.

*Treatment groups.* Each participant began by reading an artificial news article authored by the lead researcher about congressional legislation that would enact universal healthcare (see Appendix D for complete wording of treatment manipulation article). The artificial news article was designed to manipulate motivation by altering the date national healthcare legislation would take effect (now versus in ten years). Individuals in the high motivation condition read the artificial news article that said the legislation enacting universal healthcare is likely to pass this year and will take effect in 2010 (thereby affecting the participant, raising personal relevance, and increasing motivation to think about the arguments made in the political entertainment stimuli). Individuals in the low motivation group read the same artificial news article with the only difference being that the message stated that the legislation would take years of debate before it is passed and would not be enacted before 2020 (thereby, reducing the immediacy of the issue, its personal relevance to participants, and lowering motivation to think about the arguments). This manipulation of time has been successfully used to create high and low motivation in previous ELM studies (e.g., Krosnick & Petty, 1995; Wegener et al., 1995).

Following the artificial news article, all participants were asked two questions as a manipulation check. The first question asked individuals to identify what year the proposed legislation would take effect and the second asked participants how relevant the nationalized healthcare legislation was to their lives on a five-point scale, ranging from *not at all relevant* to *very relevant.* A comparison of means revealed a significant difference between the low and high motivation groups *t*-value = 42.67, *p* < .001 where
the high motivation group ($M = 4.40, SE = .048$) reported significantly more personal relevance than low motivation group ($M = 1.56, SE = .045$). This $t$-test confirmed that the motivation manipulation was highly successful.

Next, the one-sided message group watched a 2 min: 27 sec clip from the film *Sicko* that featured Michael Moore advocating nationalized healthcare (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0frVWk3YUgo). The two-sided message group watched two clips, not just the previously mentioned *Sicko* segment. First, they watched the counter-attitudinal clip, which included a 2 min: 28 sec second clip of *An American Carol*, a film parody of *Sicko* (offering overt criticism of the universal healthcare arguments put forward in the *Sicko* clip; see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0GefZD5o9M). Then they watched the same *Sicko* clip as provided to the pro-attitudinal group. The decision not to randomize the order of the clips was made so that the satirical counter-attitudinal clip could be examined for inoculation and counter-arguing effects, which have been found in the existing communication resistance-to-persuasion literature (Pfau et. al, 2009; Ivanov, Pfau, & Parker, 2009).

Immediately following the video clips, two cognitive elaboration related measures were taken. First, all individuals were asked to simply list their thoughts about the media clips they watched in an open-response format. As with Study 1, four minutes were provided for this procedure (Petty, Harkins, & Williams, 1980). At the end of the four-minute thought listing period, the second measure was taken in which all participants were asked to counter-argue the statement “nationalized healthcare is good for our nation.” However, unlike Study 1, counter-arguing was only against the stated position.
The experiment concluded with a posttest questionnaire that asked a series of media engagement, attitude, source perception, and demographic questions. These questions measured emotional and cognitive engagement in *Sicko* and/or *An American Carol*, as well as attitudes and perceptions about nationalized healthcare and perceptions of U.S. hospitals and insurance companies. The entire study took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

*Stimuli*

*Sicko clip. Sicko*, released on June 22, 2007 and grossing over $24.5 million, was nominated for a dozen industry awards, and won Best Documentary Film by the American Film Critics Association in 2008 (imdb.com, 2009). The film, directed by and starring Michael Moore, was also nominated for an Academy Award and a People’s Choice Award for best documentary in 2008 (imdb.com, 2009). *Sicko* was classified as a documentary film that compared the American private healthcare system to countries with universal healthcare systems. However, the film mixed elements of traditional documentary film and fictional narratives using scripts, elaborate sets, dramatic film and editing techniques, and paid actors. The clip used as the stimulus for this study was an edited montage of short segments from the film. The clip included direct statements made by Moore about the purpose of the film (to show healthcare disparities between U.S. and socialized systems), video footage of 9/11 workers receiving free healthcare in Cuba after U.S. insurance companies had denied coverage, and video testimonies of citizens and insurance company whistleblowers who condemn the U.S. private healthcare system. The clip is clearly pro-universal healthcare, with many disparaging images and commentary about the current U.S. privately-funded health care system.
An American Carol clip. An American Carol, starring Kelsey Grammer, is a humorous response to Moore’s Sicko. This David Zucker film was released on October 3, 2008 during the height of that year’s U.S. presidential election season. Categorized as a comedy, An American Carol was marketed as Hollywood conservatives’ response to Sicko, parodying Michael Moore and using satire to highlight alleged health care distortions presented in Moore’s film. The clip was edited to include segments of the film that directly challenged the assertions made in the Sicko clip. For example, a parody of the 9/11 workers sought to discredit Moore’s claims that Cuba has a better healthcare system than the US and a patriotic monologue by Kelsey Grammer playing the ghost of General Patton directly challenged Moore’s claims about the ails of the U.S. healthcare system. An American Carol used satire and parody to offer opposing viewpoints to arguments made in the Sicko clip.

Measures

Cognitive elaboration. The criterion variable was amount of cognitive elaboration. The conceptualization, operationalization, and coding of elaboration relevance and valance outcome variables were the same as outlined above for Study 1. Specifically, the criterion variable was total issue-relevant thoughts, while the more general level total thoughts included all utterances. Total positive thoughts were those favoring the stated position, total negative thoughts were those opposing the stated position. Counter-arguments were the total number of distinct arguments opposing nationalized healthcare. As previously explained, Krippendorff’s (2004) threshold for reliability levels was used to assess the strength of the outcome variable reliabilities. All five coded open-ended outcome variables were above the .80 threshold, and were deemed
highly reliable. Specifically, the Krippendorff’s alphas for Study 2 were as follows: total thoughts, $M = 2.38, SD = 1.59$, Krippendorff’s $\alpha = .92$; relevant thoughts, $M = 2.27, SD = 1.51$, Krippendorff’s $\alpha = .92$; relevant positive thoughts, $M = 1.00, SD = 1.13$, Krippendorff’s $\alpha = .89$; relevant negative thoughts, $M = 1.92, SD = 1.30$, Krippendorff’s $\alpha = .89$; and counter-arguments for nationalized healthcare, $M = 1.88, SD = 1.48$, Krippendorff’s $\alpha = .88$.

**Attitudes.** As with Study 1, individual-level attitudes were measured in relation to three objects. These objects were as follows: nationalized healthcare, private health insurance companies, and hospitals. Each attitude measure was a three-item index created from individual items assessed with six-point semantic differential scales. Participants were asked to select the number on the scale that most represented their opinion of the statements (ranging from 1 to 6). The attitudes were assessed asking individuals to complete the following phrases: “Nationalized healthcare in the U.S. would be…” “Private health insurance companies are…” and “U.S. hospitals are…” Each phrase was set on a six-point scale with the following anchors: “good (1)/bad (6),” “fair (6)/unfair (1),” and “honest (1)/corrupt (6).” The answers to “good/bad” and “honest/corrupt” were reverse coded. All three indices retained solid reliabilities: Nationalized healthcare attitude index, $M = 3.82, SD = 1.66$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$; private health insurance company attitude index, $M = 3.20, SD = 1.29$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .77$; and hospital attitude index, $M = 4.29, SD = 1.49$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .77$.

**Source perceptions.** Perceptions of Michael Moore as a credible source for political information were measured using a three-item index, $M = 3.14, SD = 1.44$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$. As with study one, the three measures were source credibility, source
likability, and source competence. All three asked participants to strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, or strongly agree with the statements, “Michael Moore is a credible, incompetent (reverse coded), and likable source for political information.”

**Engagement.** As with Study 1, media engagement was measured using a modified version of the well-known transportation scale (Green & Brock, 2000). The original 15-item scale was paired down to seven key items. Participants were asked to place themselves on a scale that ranged from (strongly agree) to (strongly disagree) for each of the seven statements. The traditional use of this scale calls for five repeated measures of the imagery item which were consolidated into a single imagery item for this study (i.e., I could clearly imagine the details of the movie in my mind). Additionally three cognitive items commonly used in the transportation scale were tailored to the specific stimuli, including “I was easily distracted while watching the Sicko/American carol (reverse coded),” “I lost track of time while watching Sicko/American carol clip,” and “I could easily understand the points being made by Michael Moore/Kelsey Grammer in the film clip.” The final three items were affective measures including “I felt a strong emotional reaction to the Sicko/American carol clip,” “I could easily identify with Michael Moore/Kelsey Grammer in the media clip,” and “I found it difficult to empathize with the points made by the 9/11 workers in the film (reverse coded).” The scale mean was 4.42 (SD = 1.27), and reliability for media engagement was strong at Cronbach’s α = .92.

**Covariate.** As previously outlined, extant political communication literature has demonstrated the influence of political interest on thinking about a topic (Young & Tisinger, 2006), as well as transportation (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002), source
perceptions (LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009) and attitudes (Holbert, Shah, & Kwak, 2003). As such, it was included in the analyses as a covariate. Political interest was measured by asking people how interested in politics they were on a seven-point Likert-type scale from not at all interested (1) to very interested (7) ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.17$).

**Analysis**

A total of nine Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) tests were run to assess the Study 2-relevant hypotheses and research questions. Each test retained the same pair of independent variables, motivation and stimuli (pro-attitudinal versus counter- and pro-attitudinal), and also retained the same covariate, political interest. The nine outcome variables included: total thoughts (H2), total relevant thoughts (H4), counter-arguments against the stated position (H8), positive thoughts (RQ4), negative thoughts (RQ4), engagement (RQ11, RQ12), source perceptions (H6), discussion intention (RQ8, RQ9), and attitude about nationalized healthcare (H7, RQ6). As with study one, with relevant thoughts being a sub-set of total thoughts and the remaining outcome variables not being significantly correlated, a determination was made to use separate ANCOVAs as opposed to MANCOVAs.

**Post-Hoc Statistical Power Assessment**

A statistical power analysis was performed for this study using the software package, GPower (Faul & Erdfelder, 1992). In accordance with Cohen (1977) GPower uses the effect size of $f$ when assessing power in an ANCOVA. This statistic is the “standard deviation of the standardized means” (Cohen, 1977, p. 275). The alpha level for this analysis was pre-established at .05, and the sample size for the study was 223.
GPower, also in accordance with Cohen (1977) suggests the following $f$ values for small, moderate, and large effects, respectively: .10, .25, and .40. These $f$ values translate to the following $\eta^2$ values, the most commonly reported effect size statistic in the communication sciences: .01, .06, and .14 respectively (see Cohen, 1977, p.283, table 8.2.2). The power assessment was conducted in light of the study design (4 groups) and the inclusion of a single covariate (1 group), creating a total of 5 groups. The following results were found for the power analysis: $f = .10$, power = .184; $f = .25$, power = .853; $f = .40$, power = in excess of .99. Overall, this study retains weak statistical power for detecting small effects when judged against the desired power level of .80. However, the study retains adequate power to detect moderate to large effect sizes.
CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Study One

As stated above, the first study’s hypotheses were addressed through a series of eight Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) tests. The independent variables for each test reflected the experimental design, media stimuli (news versus entertainment) and ability (low versus high). The covariate for each test was political interest. The dependent variables analyzed are presented as follows: total thoughts (H1, RQ1), total relevant thoughts (H3, RQ2), positive thoughts (RQ3, H9), negative thoughts (H10), counter-arguments against the stated position (H11), source perceptions (H5), attitude about AIG (RQ5, RQ7), and transportation (RQ10, RQ12)

Total Thoughts

The covariate of political interest did not prove to be statistically significant for the total thoughts dependent variable, $F(1, 127) = 3.59, p = .06$, although this effect approached statistical significance. There was a main effect for ability on total thoughts, $F(1, 127) = 19.42, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$. An analysis of the adjusted means revealed that higher ability led to more generation of total thoughts (adjusted $M = 3.39, SE = .202$) than did lower ability (adjusted $M = 2.07, SE = .223$). This finding supports H1. There was also a main effect for message on total thoughts, $F(1, 127) = 9.60, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02$. Adjusted means analysis finds that The Daily Show viewers generated more total thoughts (adjusted $M = 3.20, SE = .206$) than CNN viewers.
(adjusted $M = 2.26, SE = .219$). The ability-by-message interaction was not significant for the outcome variable total thoughts $F (1, 127) = 2.05 p > .65$.

**Relevant Thoughts**

The covariate of political interest was statistically significant for relevant thoughts, $F (1, 127) = 4.15 p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$. There was also a main effect for ability on the dependent variable relevant thoughts, $F (1, 127) = 22.97, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$. An analysis of the adjusted means revealed that higher ability led to the generation of more relevant thoughts (adjusted $M = 3.32, SE = .193$) than did lower ability (adjusted $M = 1.94, SE = .213$). Simply stated, the higher ability group generated more thoughts about the political issue in the stimulus than the lower ability group, thus supporting H3. There was also a main effect for message on relevant thoughts, $F (1, 127) = 8.81, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02$. Adjusted means analysis finds that *The Daily Show* viewers generated more relevant thoughts (adjusted $M = 3.05, SE = .197$) than CNN viewers (adjusted $M = 2.20, SE = .209$). The ability-by-message interaction was not significant for the outcome variable, total relevant thoughts $F (1, 127) = 1.25 p > .25$. In response to RQ2, these results indicate that there was a difference between political entertainment and news in terms of relevant thinking where political entertainment actually led to more thinking about the AIG issue.

**Relevant Positive Thoughts**

The covariate of political interest did not prove to be statistically significant in this test, $F (1, 127) = 1.70 p > .15$. There was a rather sizeable and statistically significant main effect for ability on relevant positive thoughts, $F (1, 127) = 21.095, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$. An analysis of the adjusted means revealed that higher ability led to more generation
of positive thoughts (adjusted $M = 2.25, SE = .107$) than did lower ability (adjusted $M = 0.87, SE = .222$). Additionally, message had a significant direct effect on positive thoughts, $F (1, 122) = 18.20, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$. The main message effect was also relatively sizeable when compared to the other message effects found in this dissertation. An analysis of the adjusted means revealed that positive thought generation was higher in *The Daily Show* condition (adjusted $M = 2.20, SE = .205$) than in the CNN condition (adjusted $M = .92, SE = .218$). This result led to the support of H9. The ability-by-message interaction was not significant for positive thoughts, $F (1, 127) = .393, p > .50$.

**Relevant Negative Thoughts**

The covariate of political interest was not statistically significant in this test $F (1, 127) = 2.93, p > .05$. However, message had a significant direct effect on negative thoughts $F (1, 127) = 19.03, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$. An analysis of the adjusted means revealed that negative thought generation was higher in the CNN condition (adjusted $M = .90, SE = .118$) than in *The Daily Show* condition (adjusted $M = .19, SE = .111$). This finding supports H10. There was no main effect for ability on the dependant variable of negative thoughts, $F (1, 127) = .78, p > .35$, and the same can be said of the ability-by-message interaction $F (1, 127) = .00, p > .95$.

**Counter-arguing Against Stated Position**

The covariate of political interest was statistically significant for the outcome variable counter-arguing against the stated position, $F (1, 127) = 18.28, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$. There was no main effect for ability on the dependant variable counter-arguing against the stated position, $F (1, 127) = 2.34, p > .128$, nor was there any direct effect of message on counter-arguing against the stated position, $F (1, 127) = 1.62, p > .20$. 

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However, there was a statistically significant interaction for ability by message on the counter-arguments for the stated position outcome variable, $F(1, 127) = 6.08, p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$. A plotting of the adjusted means for the interaction revealed a contingent condition with *The Daily Show* group trending downward from the low to high ability conditions and the CNN condition remaining relatively level across low and high ability (see Figure 2). In short, *The Daily Show* and CNN viewers show little difference in counter-arguing under high ability conditions, but a strong significant difference between the groups emerges under low ability conditions where *The Daily Show* group (adjusted $M = 2.08$, $SE = .195$) was better able to counter-argue the stated position than the CNN group (adjusted $M = 1.34$, $SE = .221$). As a result of these analyses, the main effect for message on counter-arguing was not supported (H11). However, this is not to say that message had no effect. Rather, its effect on counter-arguing was conditional in combination with ability. Simply put, message did not directly affect counter-arguing; its effect on counter-arguing was evident only in the interaction.

*Source Perceptions*

The covariate of political interest was statistically significant for source, $F(1, 127) = 13.05, p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$. There was no main effect for ability on source perceptions, $F(1, 127) = 2.22, p > .10$. However, a main effect for message was found on source perceptions, $F(1, 127) = 6.04, p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$. An analysis of the adjusted means finds that source perceptions were more positive in the CNN condition (adjusted $M = 3.50$, $SE = .089$) than in *The Daily Show* condition (adjusted $M = 3.20$, $SE = .083$). Surprisingly, subjects in the CNN condition rated Anderson Cooper as being more credible than *The Daily Show* condition viewers rated that show’s host, Jon Stewart.
However, the main effect for source was trumped by the finding of a statistically significant interaction for ability-by-message for this outcome variable, $F(1, 127) = 4.93$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$. A plotting of this interaction revealed a contingent condition interaction with *The Daily Show* group being relatively flat-lined across the low and high ability conditions, while there is a significant positive trend in source perception from low to high ability within the CNN condition (see Figure 3). This result provides support for H5. In short, there is no difference in source perceptions between Stewart and Cooper among the low ability group, but the high ability group is where we see the traditional journalist, Anderson Cooper (adjusted $M = 3.73$, $SE = .114$), begin to separate himself in a positive manner from the satirist, Jon Stewart (adjusted $M = 3.15$, $SE = .118$).

**AIG Attitude**

The covariate of political interest did not prove to be statistically significant in Study 1’s attitude dependent variable, $F(1, 127) = 1.70$, $p > .15$. In fact, the only statistically significant effect on attitudes can be found in the main effect for message, $F(1, 127) = 4.65$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$. An analysis of the adjusted means for this main effect revealed a lower attitude mean for *The Daily Show* condition (adjusted $M = 2.04$, $SE = .124$) than the CNN condition (adjusted $M = 2.43$, $SE = .132$), with the lower mean indicating less favorable attitudes. In short, *The Daily Show* proved to be more persuasive than CNN in this study. The main effect for ability was not statistically significant, $F(1, 127) = 2.24$, $p > .10$, and the same can be said of the ability-by-message interaction, $F(1, 127) = 0.03$, $p > .85$. 
Media Engagement

The covariate of political interest was statistically significant for dependent variable media engagement, \( F(1, 127) = 64.36, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06 \). There were no main effects for ability \( F(1, 127) = 1.17, p > .25 \) or message, \( F(1, 127) = 0.189, p > .65 \) on engagement. However, the ability-by-message interaction proved to be statistically significant for media engagement, \( F(1, 127) = 5.45, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01 \). A plotting of the adjusted means for this interaction revealed a transverse interaction whereby there was an upward trend in greater engagement from low to high among the CNN group. Those high in ability achieved greater engagement than the low ability group. Conversely, it is the low ability group which achieves greater engagement than the high ability group in *The Daily Show* condition (see Figure 4). High ability subjects were more easily engaged through media by news (CNN adjusted \( M = 3.33, SE = .205 \); *The Daily Show* adjusted \( M = 2.72, SE = .212 \)), while low ability individuals were more easily engaged through political entertainment media (*The Daily Show* adjusted \( M = 3.47, SE .215 \); CNN adjusted \( M = 3.05, SE = .244 \)).

Post-Hoc Analyses

In addition to the ANCOVAs outlined above, there was an additional cognitive variables of interest, counter-arguments in favor of the stated position, which was also content analyzed (see summary of this variable in method). This outcome variable was explored in order to gain a well-rounded and deeper understanding of the news versus entertainment media effects processes at work in this study. As with the ANCOVAs previously described, the independent variables for this test reflect the experimental
design, media stimuli (news versus entertainment) and ability (low versus high), the covariate for the test was political interest.

*Counter-arguing in Favor of the Stated Position*

The covariate political interest was significant in this test $F(1, 127) = 8.87$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$. There was also a significant main effect for ability on counter-arguing in favor of the stated position in the stimulus, $F(1, 127) = 6.82$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$. As per the adjusted means, it appears that people in the low ability group (adjusted $M = 1.73$, $SE. = .151$) actually generated more arguments in favor of the stated position than did those in the high ability group (adjusted $M = 1.19$, $SE. = .137$). The direct effect of message on the outcome variable was not significant $F(1, 127) = 1.62$, $p > .20$.

The ability-by-message interaction for this counter-arguing variable approached statistical significance, $F(1, 127) = .3.22$, $p = .075$, $\eta^2 = .01$. A plotting of the means reveals that The Daily Show group trended downward in generating counter-arguments that mirrored the stated position from low to high ability while the CNN group remained relatively flat (Figure 5). With enough power, this interaction would likely be statistically significant. As such, this interaction is interpreted with caution in the discussion.

*Attitudes*

Two additional attitudinal outcome variables were also explored in a single multivariate analysis of variance (MANCOVA). Once again, the independent variables reflected the experimental design, media stimuli (news versus entertainment) and ability (low versus high), the covariate for each test was political interest, and the outcome variables for the MANCOVA focused on subjects’ post-stimulus cognitive activities. Wilks’ Lambda was used to assess the omnibus test results.
Multivariate. The covariate political interest was significant at this level of analysis, $F (1, 126) = 8.87, p < .01$. There were no main effects for ability $F (1, 126) = .39, p > .674$ or message $F (1, 126) = .91, p > .407$ on attitudes at the multivariate level. However, there was a significant message-by-ability interaction on attitudes, $F (2, 126) = 4.88, p < .01$.

Univariate. In exploring more closely the multivariate interaction effect, there was a significant interaction for ability by message on attitude about congress $F (2, 126) = 4.21, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$. A plotting of the interaction reveals a transverse interaction where The Daily Show- high ability group trended toward more negative attitudes of Congress than their low ability peers (The Daily Show- high ability adjusted $M = 2.25, SE = .283$; The Daily Show- low ability adjusted $M = 3.11, SE = .286$), whereas the CNN group trended upward with more favorable attitudes toward Congress with movement from the low to the high ability levels (CNN-high ability adjusted $M = 2.47, SE = .273$; CNN-low ability adjusted $M = 2.11, SE = .325$; see Figure 6). Simply put, higher levels of ability resulted in more positive attitudes of Congress for political entertainment and more negative attitudes toward Congress for the political news groups.

Since the ability and message main effects were not significant at the multivariate level, their results were not interpreted at the univariate level. However, it should be noted that there were no statistically significant main effects for either independent variable on these two attitude measures, nor was the message-by-ability interaction statistically significant for the bailouts attitude measure at the univariate level, $F (1, 127) = 0.07, p > .75$. 

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An OLS-based hierarchical multiple regression equation was created with AIG attitude as the dependent variable. Political interest was the control variable included in Block 1, the two conditions, ability (low, high) and message (entertainment, news) were entered in Block 2, and the cognitive variables (total thoughts, relevant thoughts, positive thoughts, and negative thoughts) were entered in Block 3. This equation allowed for the examination of cognitive elaboration and thought valance as predictors of attitude. The cognitive outcome variables from the ANCOVAs reported above were used as predictors as a means of exploring the mediating role of elaboration on attitude change. From the results it appears that only positive thoughts ($B = -.49, SE = .149, p < .05$) significantly predicted AIG attitudes. Specifically, increased thoughts in the same direction of the show host (i.e. positive thoughts) led to less favorable AIG attitudes. As both show hosts were negative toward the AIG bailouts, it makes sense that the more people generated thoughts consistent with the message (i.e., opposing the AIG bonuses) the less favorable their attitude was toward AIG. Interestingly, total thoughts ($B = .10, SE = .173$), relevant thoughts ($B = .40, SE = .174$) and negative thoughts ($B = .18, SE = .176$) did not significantly predict attitudes. This also demonstrates the importance of looking beyond total thoughts and relevant thoughts and examining the influence of thought valance in future analyses.

**Thought Valence**

Finally, the relationship between positive and negative thoughts was assessed using Pearson’s correlation. Overall, there was a significant inverse relationship between
positive and negative thoughts (zero-order $r = -.313, p < .01$). However, when this was examined with respect to message (news versus entertainment) and interesting difference emerged. For CNN viewers the significant inverse relationship remained (zero-order $r = -.336, p < .01$), but for the *Daily Show* viewers positive and negative thoughts were not significantly related (zero-order $r = -.141$).

**Summary of Study 1 Findings**

Re-capping the main effects for study 1 in terms of ability, there was a main effect for total thoughts suggesting that increased ability led to increased overall thinking. Additionally, increased ability had a direct effect on issue-relevant and positive thinking. While ability did not have a main effect for counter-arguing against the stated position, it did have a direct effect on generating arguments in favor of the stated position (generating statements that would be consistent with the advocated positions in the media stimuli; i.e., counter-arguing the statement “AIG executives should have unlimited compensation including bonuses”). In terms of message, main effects were again found total thoughts, issue-relevant thoughts, and positive thoughts. All three direct effects indicated that the political entertainment led to more thinking, issue-relevant, and positively valenced thinking than the political news. Conversely, political news led to more negative thoughts than did political entertainment. Regarding source perceptions, the political news group held more favorable perceptions of Anderson Cooper as a credible political source than the political entertainment group for Jon Stewart. Finally, message had a direct influence on attitude about AIG wherein the *Daily Show* group held more negative opinions of AIG than the CNN group.

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A summary of the interactions found that higher levels of ability resulted in more positive attitudes of Congress for political entertainment and more negative attitudes toward Congress for the political news groups (Figure 6). The ability-by-message interaction for counter-arguing in favor of the stated position (or generating thoughts consistent with the hosts’ advocated positions) approached statistical significance, revealing that \textit{The Daily Show} group trended downward in generating counter-arguments that mirrored the stated position from low to high ability while the CNN group remained relatively flat (Figure 5). However, with regard to counter-arguing against the stated position (generating independent thoughts that opposed the show hosts’ advocated positions) \textit{The Daily Show} viewers showed a strong downward trend in counter-arguing when moving from low to high ability. This resulted in little difference under high ability conditions where CNN viewers counter-argued slightly more, but a strong significant difference between the groups under low ability conditions where \textit{The Daily Show} group was better able to counter-argue the stated position than the CNN group (Figure 2). In terms of transportation, high ability subjects were more easily engaged through media by news while low ability individuals were more easily engaged through political entertainment media (Figure 4). Finally, with regard to source perceptions there was no difference between Stewart and Cooper among the low ability group, but the high ability CNN group rated Anderson Cooper more favorably than the high ability political entertainment group rated Jon Stewart (Figure 3).

\textbf{Study Two}

As stated above, the second study’s hypotheses were addressed through a series of nine Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) tests. The independent variables for each test
reflected the experimental design, media stimuli (one-sided message versus two-sided message) and motivation (low versus high). The covariate for each test was political interest. The dependent variables are reported as follows: total thoughts (H2), total relevant thoughts (H4), counter-arguments against the stated position (H8), positive thoughts (RQ4), negative thoughts (RQ4), engagement (RQ11, RQ12), source perceptions (H6), discussion intention (RQ8, RQ9), and attitude about nationalized healthcare (H7, RQ6).

**Total Thoughts**

The covariate of political interest had no significant impact on the dependent variables, $F(1, 218) = .365, p > .50$. There was a significant main effect for motivation on total thoughts, $F(1, 218) = 8.33, p < .01, \eta^2 = .01$. An analysis of the adjusted means revealed that higher motivation led to more total thoughts (adjusted $M = 2.72, SE = .156$) than did lower motivation (adjusted $M = 2.09, SE = .147$). This finding provides support for H2. There was no direct effect of message on total thoughts, $F(1, 218) = .937, p > .30$, and the message-by-motivation interaction was also not significant, $F(1, 218) = .937, p > .50$.

**Total Relevant Thoughts**

The covariate of political interest had no statistically significant impact on the dependent variable relevant thoughts, $F(1, 218) = .46, p > .45$. There was a main effect for motivation on total relevant thoughts that approached statistical significance, $F(1, 218) = 3.54, p = .06, \eta^2 = .01$. An analysis of the adjusted means revealed that higher motivation (adjusted $M = 2.50, SE = .150$) led to more total relevant thoughts than lower motivation (adjusted $M = 2.09, SE = .141$). Simply stated, the higher motivation group
generated more thoughts about the political stimulus than the lower motivation group. Thus, there is qualified support for H4. There was no direct effect of message on relevant thoughts, \( F(1, 218) = 1.31, p > .25 \), and the same can be said of the message-by-motivation interaction, \( F(1, 218) = .23, p > .60 \).

Counter-Arguments against Stated Position

The covariate of political interest had no significant impact on the dependent variable, \( F(1, 218) = .32, p > .50 \). There was a significant main effect for message on counter-arguing against the stated position, \( F(1, 218) = 18.28, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03 \). Adjusted means analysis revealed that people who watched both films (\textit{Sicko} and \textit{An American Carol}) generated significantly more counter-arguments against universal health care (adjusted \( M = 2.24, SE = .128 \)) than those who only watched only Moore’s \textit{Sicko} (adjusted \( M = 1.40, SE = .147 \)). This finding lends support to H8. There was no main effect for motivation on the dependent variable counter-arguing against the stated position, \( F(1, 218) = .01, p > .90 \), nor was the motivation-by-message interaction significant for the Study 2 counter-argument outcome variable \( F(1, 218) = .23, p > .60 \).

Relevant Positive Thoughts

The covariate of political interest was not statistically significant in this test, \( F(1, 218) = .24, p > .60 \). However, there was a significant main effect of message on the outcome variable positive thoughts, \( F(1, 218) = 13.74, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03 \). An analysis of the adjusted means indicates that the \textit{Sicko} only group generated significantly more positive thoughts (\( M = 1.33, SE = .113 \)) and the group that watched both \textit{An American Carol} and \textit{Sicko} (\( M = 1.33, SE = .113 \)). No main effects for motivation, \( F(1, 218) = \).
.752.20, \( p > .10 \), or message-by-motivation interaction, \( F(1, 218) = 1.16, \ p > .25 \), were found for positive thoughts.

**Relevant Negative Thoughts**

The covariate political interest was not statistically significant in this test, \( F(1, 218) = .33, \ p > .55 \). No main effects of message, \( F(1, 218) = .81, \ p > .35 \), or motivation, \( F(1, 218) = .75, \ p > .35 \) were found in this analysis. However, the message-by-motivation interaction approached statistical significance, \( F(1, 218) = 2.92, \ p = .089 \) for negative thoughts. A plotting of means revealed that the most negative thoughts were generated among people in the high motivation group who were exposed to both *American Carol* and *Sicko* (see Figure 7).

**Media Engagement**

The covariate of political interest had no significant impact on the dependent variables at this level, \( F(1, 218) = .17, \ p > .65 \). No main effects for message \( F(1, 218) = .84, \ p > .35 \), motivation \( F(1, 218) = .09, \ p > .70 \), or message-by-motivation, \( F(1, 218) = .02, \ p > .85 \), were found for media engagement. These analyses did not yield much insight regarding the influence of message and/or motivation on engagement in the stimuli.

**Source Perceptions**

The covariate of political interest was not significant for the dependent variable source perceptions, \( F(1, 218) = 2.54, \ p > .112 \). There was a main effect of message \( F(1, 218) = 5.26, \ p < .05, \ \eta^2 = .004 \). Analysis of the means revealed the people in the one-sided message group (*Sicko* only, \( M = 3.40, SE = .146 \)) held significantly more favorable perceptions of Michael Moore as a credible source for political information than people
in the two-sided message condition \((\text{Sicko and An American Carol, } M = 2.95, SE = .127)\).

There was no significant main effect of motivation \(F(1, 218) = 1.45, p > .23\), or message-by-motivation interaction \(F(1, 218) = .008, p > .93\) on the outcome variable source perceptions.

**Discussion Intention**

The covariate of political interest was significant for the dependent variable discussion intention, \(F(1, 218) = 21.11, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01\). No main effects of message \(F(1, 218) = 1.14, p > .29\), motivation \(F(1, 218) = .35, p > .56\), or message-by-motivation interaction \(F(1, 218) = .003, p > .90\) were found for discussion intention.

**Attitude**

The covariate of political interest did not prove to be statistically significant for the attitude dependent variable, \(F(1, 218) = .065 p > .75\). As with the Study 1 ANCOVA results for attitude, the only statistically significant effect on attitudes can be found in the main effect for message, \(F(1, 218) = 7.91, p < .01, \eta^2 = .01\). An analysis of the adjusted means for this main effect revealed a lower attitude mean for the \text{Sicko and American Carol} condition (adjusted \(M = 3.54, SE = .145\)) than the \text{Sicko only} condition (adjusted \(M = 4.20, SE = .168\)), with a lower mean indicating less favorable attitudes toward nationalized healthcare. In short, watching \text{Sicko} alone proved to be more persuasive than watching both, \text{Sicko and American Carol} in this study. The main effect for motivation was not statistically significant, \(F(1, 218) = 1.31, p > .25\), and the same can be said of the motivation-by-message interaction, \(F(1, 218) = 1.06, p > .30\). These results offer support for H7.
Post-Hoc Analyses

Attitudes

In addition to the ANCOVAs outlined above, two additional attitude measures (U.S. Hospitals and U.S. private health insurers) were also explored in a single multivariate analysis of variance (MANCOVA). Once again, the independent variables reflected the experimental design media stimuli (pro-attitudinal versus counter- and pro-attitudinal) and motivation (low versus high). The covariate for each test was political interest, and the outcome variables for the MANCOVA focused on subjects’ post-stimulus cognitive activities. Wilks’ Lambda was used to assess the multivariate test.

Multivariate. The covariate political interest was not statistically significant at this level of analysis, $F(2, 217) = .37, p > .65$. In addition, there were no significant main effects for message $F(2, 217) = 1.62, p > .20$, motivation $F(2, 217) = 1.00, p > .35$, or message-by-motivation $F(2, 217) = .42, p > .65$, at the multivariate level for this additional assessment of attitudinal influence.

Univariate. Since motivation, message, and the motivation-by-message were not significant at the multivariate level, no univariate level results were interpreted.

Elaboration as a Predictor of Attitude

An OLS-based hierarchical multiple regression equation was created with nationalize healthcare attitude as the dependent variable. Political interest was the control variable included in Block 1, the two conditions, motivation (low, high) and message (one-sided, two-sided) were entered in Block 2, and the cognitive variables (total thoughts, relevant thoughts, positive thoughts, and negative thoughts) were entered in Block 3. As with the post-hoc analysis in study one, this equation allowed for the
examination of cognitive elaboration and thought valance as predictors of attitude. The cognitive outcome variables from the ANCOVAs reported above were used as predictors as a means of exploring the mediating role of elaboration on attitude change. From the results it appears that only message \( (B = -.22, SE = .213, p < .01) \) significantly predicted nationalized healthcare attitudes. Specifically, people in the two-sided condition (coded high) who watched both *Sicko* and *An American Carol* held less favorable attitudes toward nationalized healthcare than people in the one-sided condition who only watched *Sicko*. Interestingly, total thoughts \( (B = .10, SE = .298) \), relevant thoughts \( (B = -.03, SE = .321) \), positive thoughts \( (B = -.16, SE = .176) \) and negative thoughts \( (B = -.15, SE = .160) \) did not significantly predict attitudes. This suggests that the best predictor of nationalized healthcare attitudes was message wherein people who viewed arguments on both sides of the issue held less favorable attitudes than those who only viewed arguments supporting the issue.

*Thought Valence*

Finally, the relationship between positive and negative thoughts was assessed using Pearson’s correlation. Overall, there was a significant inverse relationship between positive and negative thoughts (zero-order \( r = -.294, p < .01 \)). When this relationship was examined with respect to message sidedness (one-sided versus two-sided), the significant inverse relationship remained for both groups; *Sicko* only viewers (zero-order \( r = -.305, p < .01 \)) and *Sicko* and *An American Carol* viewers (zero-order \( r = -.287, p < .01 \)). It appears that for political film elaborations positive and negative thought generation has a significant inverse relationship regardless of message sidedness (one versus two-sided film messages). Putting this together with the correlation results for news and political
entertainment (see study 1 post-hoc analyses), it becomes clear that there are differences in the elaboration process between news and various forms of political entertainment (e.g., late-night comedy, docu-drama) that merit future inquiry.

Summary of Study 2 Findings

In conclusion, there were direct effects for motivation on total and issue-relevant thinking where higher levels of motivation led to more general and issue-specific thinking. No other direct effects were found for motivation on the outcome variables.

Message revealed several direct effects including source perceptions, counter-arguing, and attitudes. Specifically, people who watched both Sicko and An American Carol, held less favorable perceptions of Michael Moore as a credible political source than did those who watched Sicko only. Likewise, the Sicko and An American Carol group reported less favorable attitudes toward nationalized healthcare and could counter-argue the stated position more than those in the Sicko only group.

Finally, there was a motivation by message interaction for negative thoughts (Figure 7) where people who watched both film clips (Sicko and An American Carol) generated significantly more negative thoughts about nationalized healthcare under high motivation than people who watched Sicko by itself. These results are interpreted and discussed further in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The outset of this dissertation set forth three primary goals: (1) demonstrating the need to move toward a social-psychological process-oriented persuasion model for the study of political entertainment media influence, (2) extending the ELM to political entertainment as means of demonstrating the benefits and usefulness of taking a process-oriented approach (and to place back on track some extant false starts that have implied the need for taking a persuasion-based approach to this area of research), and (3) beginning to bridge narrative and social-psychological persuasion theories so that future research can examine the complementary effects of these two key areas in political entertainment persuasion research. Together, these goals reflect the broader desire to create a deeper understanding of when and how political entertainment influences individual-level thinking, attitudes, and opinion about political topics. Put simply, this dissertation sought to create a foundation for the study of political entertainment persuasion, as well as a process-based means of systematically examining the impact of political entertainment in the face of today’s new political communication paradigms. As such, the key process variable focused in this research was cognitive elaboration, operationalized as a criterion variable in this dissertation as total number of issue-relevant thoughts one generated in response to various media messages.

At a more global level, these objectives also place political entertainment research in better alignment with other forms of narrative persuasion research (e.g., health
communication; Slater, 2002, education-entertainment; Moyer-Guße, 2008) which have already adopted a process-oriented approach. The introduction of such an approach allows for the re-conceptualization of political entertainment as part of the larger network of strategic communication forms. In essence, refocusing the field’s research efforts on process and using social-psychological persuasion models frames political entertainment in a distinct fashion from the dominant means by which it has been approached to date. Whereas this area of research has been previously relegated to the status of a political communication sub-field (and a most minor one at that compared to the study of news), the results of this dissertation support the recognition of political entertainment as a key form of strategic communication. As with health and education-entertainment, political entertainment is a persuasive form of communication that can be used to develop and achieve specific strategic communication campaign goals. As such, the influence of entertainment on individuals’ political attitudes, opinions, and behaviors is consequential to democracy and plays an important role in today’s entertainment-infused world of political news and communication.

The Need for a Process-Oriented Approach to Political Entertainment Persuasion

The first objective of this dissertation was to demonstrate the benefits and usefulness of moving away from the simple effects studies that rely on the priming, framing, and agenda setting trifecta (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2007) to the more process-oriented approach of examining the underlying mechanisms that account for observable effects. This is equivalent to moving away from repeated studies demonstrating that the apple falls from the tree and refocusing on how, when, and why the piece of fruit falls from the tree. Without such an analysis we are left watching it fall without ever knowing
why or how it falls and never being able to predict, plan for, or even prevent its fall. Likewise, in political entertainment, knowing that political entertainment use affects attitudes or opinion leaves us with a dearth understanding of the role entertainment plays in democracy. On the other hand, discovering how, when, and why it affects thinking, attitudes, and opinions allows strategic communication professionals and scholars to predict, plan for, moderate, and even impede political entertainment’s influence on society. Clearly, this level of information is useful to the field.

The criterion variable used herein, cognitive elaboration is capable of providing these insights. Decades of research in social-psychology (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1996) and media effects (e.g., Shrum, 2002) have demonstrated consequential differences in the persuasion process as a result of individual-level elaborations. As described in chapter one, recipients are active participants in the persuasion process and their self-referent thought processes are key determinants of how persuasive the messages they consume will actually be (Bandura, 2002; Petty et al., 2002). Decades of research outlined in the first chapter also reveal the importance of several input variables such as ability, motivation, and source. As such, the extension of the ELM along with the inclusion of key process variables (i.e., source perceptions, transportation) provides researchers with a theoretical framework that can be easily applied to all nine areas of political entertainment (Holbert, 2005). For instance, simply by changing the input variables and manipulating ability, motivation, and message political entertainment scholars can study most any combination of source, recipient, message, and channel combinations desired. This approach allows for a nuanced examination of the direct and in-direct effects of any number of entertainment, narrative involvement, media character, source, or persuasion
variables in a systematic, cohesive manner. In doing so, we can extend what we know about the role of political entertainment as form of political persuasion affecting individuals (specifically) and a dynamic strategic communication process influencing democracy (generally).

*Extending the ELM to Political Entertainment Research*

While it is useful to argue for a more process-oriented approach to political entertainment research, doing so without any real evidence of its merits leaves us with hollow arguments. As such, the second objective of the dissertation sought to directly extend the ELM to political entertainment persuasion research, thereby offering concrete evidence that the movement toward a social-psychological, process-oriented persuasion model is beneficial to the field. The results from these two ELM studies not only support using the ELM in political entertainment, but also reveal new insights regarding how, when, and why political entertainment influences audiences; thereby meeting the first two objectives of this dissertation. Specific examples of such results are discussed below.

* Ability and Motivation. At the most fundamental level, Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that the ELM works in political entertainment in a manner similar to political news. Namely, both ELM factors (ability and motivation) had a direct influence on individual-level thinking for entertainment and news. This suggests that the ELM works for the narrative (entertainment) as well as the rhetorical (news), a finding that directly supports the extension of social-psychological persuasion models to political entertainment research. What is interesting, however, is the type of thinking that occurred. Prior to this body of work there has been speculation that post-entertainment
stimulus elaborations would likely have little to do with the political issue in the narrative, and instead, would center more on common media effects variables such as enjoyment, characters, plot, or even the artistry (e.g., Green & Brock, 2000, 2004). The common wisdom behind such speculation has been that people watch entertainment to be entertained, not to hold correct attitudes about a political issue or to be more politically informed. Without a solid body of research regarding motivations for political entertainment use and selection, this assumption has largely gone unchallenged. With this in mind, these results offer interesting insight about such assumptions. Not only did ability and motivation effect total thought generation, but they also had direct effects on issue-relevant thought generation. These findings challenge long held assumptions about post-political entertainment stimulus thinking.

Looking specifically at the elaboration results for Studies 1 and 2, the findings demonstrate the usefulness and appropriateness of extending the ELM into political entertainment. Study 1, for example, demonstrated that ability and message directly affected one’s total thought generation, as well as their issue-relevant thought generation. Likewise, both ability and message directly influenced positive thoughts. Study 2 results mirrored those for ability in Study 1, demonstrating that motivation also had a direct effect on total and issue-relevant thought generation. Likewise, Study 2 also found that message had a direct influence on positive thoughts. Taken together, the ability and motivation manipulations were successfully replicated demonstrating that the ELM can be applied to narratives such as those found in political entertainment. Additionally, finding that political entertainment was as effective in promoting issue-relevant thoughts as political news (and actually more effective in this study) further supports the use of
ELM type frameworks in political entertainment persuasion studies. Specifically, what was once thought to be only a rhetorical persuasion framework has been successfully replicated in a narrative context.

These are key findings for political entertainment research on two levels. First, it signals that political entertainment use can engage audiences in issue-related thinking. Second, it tells us *when* this is most likely to occur; namely, under higher levels of motivation and ability. It is also important to note that this process mirrored the direct effects found in the news group. These findings provide evidence that the ELM can be used to examine persuasion processes in political entertainment. Here is an example of the importance of using a process-oriented approach. Under a simple effects model, it is likely that some studies would produce a direct effect on thinking while others would not. Without the process model to examine when people are likely to generate issue-relevant thoughts, such results would appear contradictory.

In fact, a debate focusing on learning from soft news has already been taking place due to contradictory empirical findings (see Baum, 2002, 2003 versus Prior, 2003). While Baum (2002) found that soft news was an effective way for the politically uninterested to learn about politics Prior (2003) found that soft news users had very low political knowledge scores. This led to a debate about whether people were learning from the newly emerging and wildly popular soft news programs (e.g., *The Oprah Winfrey Show*). This is an example of where simple effects studies were largely missing the underlying learning process and only providing quick snapshots of learning (or lack thereof), which left the field wondering which explanation to embrace. Had Baum (2002) and Prior (2003) used process-oriented approaches in their research this debate might
have been avoided. Perhaps, as with significant levels of elaboration, learning only occurs under certain conditions.

Additionally, the lack of operational uniformity with regard to learning employed in the various studies led to more contradictions as there was no agreed upon operationalization of the key criterion variable under study. Applying a process approach would have called for a standardized measurement for learning, revealed the specific conditions under which the criterion variable was influenced by soft news, and settled the debate. Comparing the scattered soft news debate results to the cohesive elaboration results found herein, it is clear that the process-oriented approach provides more useful information and a deeper level of insight. As such, there is no need to debate whether political entertainment leads to issue-relevant thinking. Clearly it does, but significant levels of elaboration will only occur when people are able and motivated to think about the stimulus.

Beyond demonstrating the usefulness of the ELM in political entertainment research, the elaboration findings also provide meaningful information about political entertainment effects. Central processing requires high motivation and ability, which is a strong threshold to achieve. If people are not able or not motivated to really think about the entertainment they are using, then considerably less issue-relevant elaboration occurs. In turn, judgments and attitudes will likely be formed through peripheral cues (e.g., source likability, affective disposition, enjoyment). Considering that people tend to be cognitive misers and that entertainment users may not be motivated to form correct attitudes about the political topic, central processing may be a difficult threshold to achieve in everyday life. From here two very important lines of research would be
helpful; political entertainment uses and the role of key entertainment variables. First, a
study designed to investigate the specific reasons and motivations behind individuals’
selection and use of political entertainment would be helpful to understanding if and
when people are motivated to think about the political topics in the entertainment they
consume. Second, examining the role of entertainment and persuasion variables such as
enjoyment, disposition, and character involvement will illuminate the how such variables
cue people during the peripheral processing route of persuasion.

Message. Simply put the message format matters. Three outcome variables (total
thoughts, relevant thoughts, and positive thoughts) were directly influenced by message.
What’s more, in all three cases The Daily Show group had higher levels of thinking than
the CNN group. People who watched The Daily Show thought more about the AIG bonus
issue than those who watched CNN. Likewise, The Daily Show users agreed more with
Jon Stewart’s stated position than CNN viewers agreed with Anderson Cooper’s position.
Taken together, the political entertainment had a stronger effect on one’s thinking than
the political news. Comparing this to the lack of effect for message on thinking in Study
2, an interesting point arises. The first study was comparing news with entertainment,
while the second was comparing entertainment with entertainment. It is quite remarkable
that when two forms of entertainment were compared, message didn’t influence thinking.
However, when entertainment was held up against news a significant difference emerged.
This suggests that entertainment, in general, may influence audience thinking more than
news. Although this interpretation is tentative and additional studies comparing multiple
forms of messages (e.g., news, debate) with entertainment should ensue before any strong
conclusions are made, these findings do provide evidence that entertainment can be more influential than news with regard to one’s elaboration level, relevance, and valence.

The idea that political entertainment media has a strong influence over how much thinking one does as compared to political news is interesting. However, more interesting is that political entertainment trumps news in terms of influencing relevant thoughts and thought favorability. Specifically, people who watched *The Daily Show* generated more thoughts that directly related to the political topic than people who watched CNN. This finding runs counter to common wisdom which suggests that entertainment users are less likely to think about the issues addressed in the media than news users.

Earlier discussions found that ability and motivation influenced thinking levels, relevance, and valance as well. However, it was also noted that people often do not have the ability and the motivation to think about the media stimulus. As such, it was concluded that for many, the peripheral route to persuasion will occur. What is interesting about these results is that it appears that ability and motivation are not the only ways to increase thinking. Message itself offers a means of prompting people to think about a political issue. Here we see that the political satire was more effective than the news at promoting elaboration. Additionally, it prompted more favorable elaborations. Perhaps this is an artifact of humor which cannot be generalized to all types of entertainment (e.g. drama). Would a serious political documentary have the same effect or would the gravity of the narrative fair worse than news in terms of promoting issue elaboration? In order to unpack whether all political entertainment is equally capable of promoting significant levels of issue-relevant thinking, a series of studies comparing forms of political entertainment needs to be designed and implemented. Such a set of studies would help
researchers understand whether these findings are specific to humorous political entertainment or generalizable across all types of political entertainment genres. In addition to elaboration levels, relevance, valance, and message directly affected attitudes. In fact, the only significant effects found for initial attitudes came from message in both studies (described below).

*Attitudes.* When looking at attitudes, *The Daily Show* was more persuasive than *AC 360°*. Specifically, people who watched *The Daily Show* held less favorable opinions of AIG than those who watched *AC 360°*. This is an important finding for political entertainment research. Not only can political entertainment be as persuasive as traditional news, but it can actually be *more* persuasive. In fact, the late-night comedy clip was more persuasive than the CNN clip regardless of ability, suggesting the satirical arguments were influencing audiences at all levels. Thinking about this finding in terms of peripheral and central processing, it is likely that while initial attitudes appear not to differ between groups different mechanisms led to the formation of such attitudes. Because attitudes formed through the central processing route are often more consequential in the long-term than those formed through the peripheral route (even when such attitudes show no initial differences) it is helpful to discuss the different mechanisms at work in each group. Stated differently, even though the groups ended up with essentially the same initial attitudes, different roads got them there. Those roads will likely have consequential differences over time, even if it does not appear so in the initial attitude (Krosnick & Petty, 2005).

At the peripheral level, people are using heuristic cues to form judgments. The political satire seems to create stronger cues than the traditional news at this level. For
example, in study one people in the low ability *Daily Show* group had more negative attitudes than those in the low ability CNN group. This suggests that somehow the *Daily Show* was providing stronger cues than the political news and, in turn was more persuasive at lower levels of thinking. This opens the door to questioning what those cues may be and when they trump cues found in political news. Is this another indication of media personae influence? Or, perhaps, levity provides a stronger heuristic than gravity. Future research would do well to examine the range of political entertainment peripheral cues that garner the most influence, and gain insight as to when these cues trump peripheral cues found in political news. A more nuanced approach to the study of political humor has already begun (see Holbert et al., in press), but there is a tremendous amount of work which needs to be completed on this front.

At the central processing level, *The Daily Show* was still more persuasive than *AC 360°*. In many ways, this is more interesting. Considering that central processing is marked by more thinking, and often more critical evaluation of arguments, one begins to wonder why the comedy was more persuasive than the news in this study. Biased thinking is one potential explanation. However, another possibility comes to mind. Young’s (2004, 2008) work has repeatedly argued that satire requires a high cognitive demand to process the joke. According to Young, people devote so many cognitive resources to processing the joke intention and meaning that little is left for thinking about the issue. If true, then it would seem that satire plays a mitigating role in one’s likelihood to elaborate. So while prior knowledge was increasing the ability to think about the issue, the satire was reducing the resources available to do such thinking. From the results herein, a determination cannot be made as to whether people were engaged in high but
biased thinking or satire was dampening their ability to think about the topic. However, it does seem from the direct influence of ability on relevant and positive thoughts specifically related to AIG, that the former is more likely. If Young’s hypothesis is correct, then it might reveal itself in the form of less relevant thinking, or perhaps less ability to counter-argue the topic. After all, central processing should increase one’s ability to scrutinize the topic and provide counter-arguments to the stated position. Although relevant and positive thinking effects point more toward biased thinking, a look at counter-arguing is still warranted to better understand what is happening when people are centrally processing satire.

*Thought valence.* The first study revealed very interesting results regarding the direction of one’s thoughts. It appears that the more ability one had to think about the issue, the more their thoughts favored the advocated position taken by the show host. This is interesting because the ELM predicts more message scrutiny under higher levels of thinking (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). However, later ELM work outlines the potential for more biased thinking in which higher elaboration does not necessarily lead to more objective elaboration (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996). It would seem that in Study 1, the influence of ability on positive thoughts provides some evidence that biased thinking ensued. It may be that people are more equipped to scrutinize messages under the central route to persuasion, but that bias skews their willingness to engage in such scrutiny unless the arguments are very weak. The absence of a strong and weak argument manipulation makes it difficult to affirm this interpretation, suggesting that future studies should include strong and weak arguments to help unpack these findings. Assuming, however, that people who engaged in more issue-relevant thinking also engaged in more
biased thinking in the direction advocated by the host, the obvious question is why. Specifically, what mechanism is potentially causing biased thinking to occur?

Considering the importance of media characters and personae in the media effects literature (e.g., Raney, 2004, Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985), it is likely that Anderson Cooper and Jon Stewart, as media personae, influenced the thinking people did. It would be interesting to explore whether character identity, empathy, or affective disposition played a role in biasing the direction of thoughts under central processing. If, for example, people were exposed to the same set of arguments from a less favorable media persona, would the valence of relevant thoughts be affected? I can imagine a study in which disposition toward the media characters/personae is manipulated as a means of testing whether one’s disposition influences the direction of their thinking.

This area of research is ripe for bridging media character/personae and political entertainment persuasion theory, and delving deeper into the mechanisms and processes that influence thought valence under the central processing route to persuasion. It would be easy to simply assume this was a source credibility effect, but considering the source findings described below it cannot be dismissed as such. Thus, much more research regarding what variables bias one’s thinking would be most beneficial in future studies.

Source. Looking at the results in terms of source reveals an interesting set of findings. First, it is important to note that source effects were different for low and high elaborators in Study 1. When participants were not thinking too much about the stimulus, the comedian and the news anchors faired equally well in terms of source credibility rating. This is quite interesting in and of itself. Thinking about the average person at
home watching television, this suggests that viewers watching a comedian hosting late-night comedy can perceive the host of the show to be as credible a source for political information as the news anchor hosting the news program on a cable news station.

This is a key finding for the study of political communication. It tells us that professional journalists may have lost their edge as credible sources for political information among the masses of viewers who are either unable or unmotivated to think much about it (Bucy, 2003; Sundar, 1999). In this study, it was only under central processing that Cooper could set himself apart as the more credible source for political information. Clearly, when people began thinking at a more critical level, they found the news anchor more credible for political information than the comedian. However, as previously mentioned, the threshold for this type of thinking is quite high and oftentimes people aren’t both able and motivated enough to process their entertainment at a central level.

Turning to Study 2, the only significant effect on source was found in message. Michael Moore fared much worse in terms of source perceptions among those who watched the parody of Moore in An American Carol along with the Sicko clip. One might expect that poking fun of Moore in the form of a parody would negatively influence audience perceptions of him, which appears to be the case in Study 2. This is a very important finding as it speaks to humor and satire’s ability to hamper people’s opinion of political actors as credible sources for political information. Considering the amount of ridicule and parody used in political satire (e.g., SNL), this is quite interesting. Recalling for instance, Tina Fay’s famous impression of vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin during the 2008 presidential election, these results suggest that Fay’s negative portrayals
of Palin may have significantly influenced voters’ opinions of Palin. Additionally, a cumulative effect may exist. When a political leader is parodied once or twice, it might have a small effect, but what happens when the politician is continually ridiculed and satirized in political entertainment? It may be that continued parody of a political actor over time would result in considerably less favorable perceptions. A panel design that examined viewer perceptions over time with repeated exposure to parody would be an excellent next step in this direction.

As with the direction of thinking (discussed above), these findings not only provide important information about whether source credibility matters, but also tell us when source credibility matters. They also point to the importance of message, suggesting that certain forms of political entertainment (i.e., satire) are capable of exacting persuasive influence on individuals’ thoughts and perceptions. In doing so, they provide further evidence of the benefits process-oriented persuasion models such as the ELM bring to the study of political entertainment when used in conjunction with continued examination of various forms of political entertainment. Beyond this, however, the information about source also tells us that late-night show hosts and news anchors can, under certain conditions, be perceived by audiences with equal credibility. Thinking about this phenomenon in the larger picture, it becomes easy to see how more and more people are using late-night comedy as a primary source for political information (PEW, 2004).

Considering that for many people peripheral processing is the dominant form and that under such conditions people really don’t distinguish between the comedian and the news anchor, then it makes sense that people would prefer to get their political
information from a comedy show. From this viewpoint, people are being entertained and obtaining information, which may be much more gratifying than just watching the news. As suggested earlier, a uses and gratifications study would be very beneficial to understanding why people choose political comedy over political news and what they gain from watching it.

*Media Characters/Personae versus Source*

Looking deeper at the discrepancy in source perceptions at higher levels of thinking, however, something rather interesting emerges. Recalling that people who watched *The Daily Show* generated more favorable thoughts than those who watched *AC 360°*, it appears in Study 1 that the comedian was more influential in biasing thought direction than the news anchor. However, Cooper was actually rated more favorably as a credible source for political information than Stewart at this same level of elaboration. Why, when under higher elaboration conditions Cooper enjoyed more favorable source credibility ratings than Stewart, did people actually generate more positive thoughts while watching *The Daily Show* and more negative thoughts while watching *AC 360°*? This is counter-intuitive. One would expect that participants would tend to agree with the host’s position more if they considered them a credible source, but the opposite occurred.

People who watched *The Daily Show* and were processing through a more central route rated Jon Stewart as a less credible source for political information, but at the same time they generated more thoughts consistent with Stewart’s opinion. On the other hand, people who watched the CNN clip and were processing through a more central route rated Anderson Cooper as a more credible source for political information, but at the same time they generated more thoughts opposing Anderson’s opinion.
This discrepancy between source perceptions and thought valence highlights a very important point for the study of political communication. Clearly, source credibility and media character/personae should not be equivocated. There is something else occurring here, and it is inappropriate to simply say that media characters/personae in entertainment and narratives work the same way as sources do in rhetorical or traditional political communication persuasion processes. If that were true, then the more favorable source (Cooper) would have played a stronger role in biasing thought valance (i.e., increasing positive thoughts). However, this dissertation’s findings ran in the opposite direction from what is described above. On the one hand, people who were centrally processing generated more thoughts consistent with Stewart than Cooper. On the other hand, these same people regarded Cooper as a more credible political news source. Thus, source credibility is not driving the direction of one’s thinking. This pattern suggests that media character/personae theories such as disposition (Raney, 2006) identity (Cohen, 2006), and para-social interaction (PSI) (Rubin & Perse, 1987) warrant much more consideration in political entertainment persuasion research than previously garnered.

Again, we see the importance of making entertainment media variables more central to the study of political entertainment. Future research should work to untangle the source – personae differences more and try to establish a better understanding of when and how late-night show hosts, along with other political entertainment characters/personae, influence thought valance and bias audience thinking. Additionally, it is important to understand how this works across other forms of political entertainment (e.g., television drama, political film). If attachment to media characters/personae trumps source credibility in terms of biasing one’s thoughts, then it is entirely possible that show
hosts (e.g., Stephen Colbert, *The Colbert Report*), lead characters (e.g., Jack Bower, *24*), or even animated personas (e.g., Bart Simpson, *The Simpsons*) significantly influence the way people think about the political topics embedded in the entertainment they use. Imagine, for instance, that an audience member has a particular affinity for lead character and protagonist Jack Bower from *24*. The results herein suggest that such a relationship with or attachment to a fictitious character could potentially influence the individual’s thinking. Thus, when the anti-terrorism FBI hero, Bower, gives his monologues on why torture is necessary, the attached viewer may be influenced by the media character’s arguments. In this sense, the show writers and producers could use well-liked media characters/personae to strategically offer political arguments in entertainment television. While it is not likely that producers and writers are cognizant of this potential level of influence, the influence is there none the less. As such, political entertainment researchers would do well to better understand how media characters/personae intentionally or unintentionally influence audience members thinking about social and political topics addressed in the storyline.

Taken together, these results also shed light on the role late-night show hosts play in our democracy. It appears that a two-prong influence is at work. On one level, the late-night host can be considered an equally credible source for political news as the professional political news anchor (through the peripheral processing route). On the second level, the relationship viewers develop with the late-night host (e.g., identity, PSI) can bias the way one thinks about the issue presented by the host. With late-night hosts wielding this much potential influence on political thinking, it appears their role in shaping the direction of political debate may be quite large.
**Counter-arguments.** When looking at counter-arguments, an interesting story emerges. People who watched *The Daily Show* could actually produce more counter-arguments for limiting executive bonuses and more counter-arguments against limiting executive bonuses under peripheral processing while the CNN groups produced more counter-arguments under central processing. So, for people who watched political news, more thinking led to more counter-arguing, but the reverse was true for people who watched political satire. These findings lend support to Young’s (2008) arguments regarding satire’s cognitive load. It appears that people may have been expending more energy interpreting the joke and processing the satire, which reduced their ability to form counter-arguments. Meanwhile, political news arguments, which are straightforward and require much less viewer interpretation, were easier to counter-argue at higher levels of ability. As the political news group results are in line with ELM counter-arguing literature (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996), it seems that the mechanism of interest lies within the political entertainment. The political entertainment groups’ ability to counter-argue the issue seems to run counter to the direction predicted by the ELM. Satire appears to dampen one’s ability to counter-argue to such a large degree that people actually fall below peripheral processing levels for counter-arguing. Interestingly, this dampening effect may extend beyond counter-arguing to engagement.

*Thought listing versus counter-arguing.* Do the counter-arguing and the positive thought results contradict one another or do they simply point to different mechanisms affecting the process? Earlier it was suggested that people were either engaging in more biased processing under political entertainment central processing or there was a mitigating effect of cognitive load for satire processing at play. Interestingly, the results
point to both. The relevant and positive thinking results support the biased thinking explanation while the counter-arguing results support the cognitive load explanation.

A closer look at thought listing and counter-arguing may resolve this seeming disparity. Thought listing is an open-ended, undirected exercise in which people simply write down what comes to mind. On the other hand, counter-arguing is a directed, valance-specific exercise in which people are told to think about a specific topic and to form arguments in a specific direction. In this context, the results make more sense.

When *The Daily Show* groups were engaged in free form, stream of conscious thought listing, they tended to generate thoughts consistent with the host. So after watching *The Daily Show* people were thinking about AIG in a manner consistent with Stewart’s position. Thus, their amount of thinking increased with ability, but was biased. On the other hand, when *The Daily Show* groups were told to critically analyze a specific argument and provide opposing arguments, their level of thought generation dropped off significantly. In this case, their issue-specific thinking ability appears to have decreased.

Putting these two ideas together, it appears that thought listing produces more, but biased thinking and counter-arguing produces less thinking for political satire viewers. Still though, is this simply an artifact of satire, or is there a more general effect for entertainment processing at work? Without comparing across different types of political entertainment, this question remains unanswered. Thus, the next step should be to include multiple forms of political entertainment to unpack whether this phenomenon is limited to satire.

This set of inquiries has a tremendous impact for method, as well as for understanding when and how political entertainment influences elaboration. Future
studies will need to consider these differences when determining how to operationalize elaboration. The simple difference between thought listing and counter-arguing can potentially yield contradictory results. Without careful consideration of these underlying processes, extending the ELM to political entertainment research could result in a set of seemingly disparate findings simply because elaboration was not carefully operationalized. Perhaps even more interesting than the individual process differences is the realization that both processes point to a stronger influence of political entertainment on opinion and attitude formation. Increased levels of biased thinking will likely lead to stronger attitude formation (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). However, reduced ability to counter-argue an issue will potentially have a similar effect. If one cannot produce sufficient opposition to a position, then they will likely conclude it is because they agree with the position. “I can’t think of anything to oppose it, so I must agree with it,” is a behavior-attitude response that has been shown to influence judgments and opinions (Fazio, 1995). In essence, people will likely form attitudes consistent with the advocated position when centrally processing political entertainment.

Challenging Artificial Divides

The third goal of this dissertation was addressed by offering a set of research questions aimed at exploring the relationship between ability, motivation, message, and transportation, and including the narrative persuasion variable, transportation, in this dissertation’s ELM studies as a means of testing these potential relationships.

Engagement. At first glance, the transverse interaction for engagement in study 1 seems awry. In study 1, people who watched the Daily Show found it easier to be
engaged at lower ability levels than high, while people who watched the CNN clip increased their engagement as their ability increased. Why would engagement increase for the AC 360° viewers but decrease for The Daily Show viewers as ability to think about the stimuli rose? Could it simply be a byproduct of the cognitive load required to process the satire? When people were not really thinking about the stimulus, the late-night comedy proved more engaging than the news. Not surprising considering that late-night comedy should cue light-hearted humor that people find entertaining.

However, what is surprising is that engagement actually goes down as thinking goes up for The Daily Show group. What would account for such a decrease? One explanation is that people are simply putting more thought into the show and, as such, are less able to become blissfully engaged. However, if this were true the political news groups should have also decreased engagement with increased thinking. Instead, the opposite was true and political news viewers became more engaged as they began to think more about it. Clearly then another process must be at work. Perhaps Young’s (2008) cognitive load explanation offers some insight. If people had to devote more resources to actually thinking about the stimulus, then it may have been more difficult to become cognitively and affectively engaged in the narrative. One interesting question to pursue in future research is how processing load and lack of engagement influence enjoyment. It would seem that people who are heavily processing the satire and are, in turn, less engaged may also enjoy the show less. Because people often select and use entertainment they enjoy (Zillmann, 2006; Zillmann & Knobloch, 2001) it is possible that reduced enjoyment through increased satire processing would ultimately lead to reduced
use. In the end, the regular users may be those less inclined to engage in the heavy processing. However, these questions cannot be answered by this study.

Turning to Study 2, there were no effects for engagement. Simply stated, ability, motivation, and message did not influence engagement in the stimuli. Perhaps this is because both stimuli compared were entertainment films. Is there a reason to even suspect that people would be more or less engaged by watching one film clip as compared to watching two film clips? After all, they are both political film clips. Perhaps it would make more sense to reverse the order and test whether engagement is a predictor of ability or motivation. Certainly an argument can be made both ways. On the one hand, people who have the ability and/or the motivation to think about the stimulus are likely to become more engaged in the stimulus. However, this was not found in these studies. Even in the case of the engagement interaction in Study 1, high ability didn’t lead to more engagement for news users as much as it led to less engagement for entertainment users. Thus, it appears that engagement is not driven by ability or motivation.

On the other hand, an argument can be made for turning the relationship around. Perhaps engagement is a moderator of ability or motivation. Green and Brock (2002) argued that the more engaged people became, the less critical they were of the narrative. The authors concluded that engagement led to less message scrutiny. Applying this to the ELM it would appear that engagement would negatively reduce elaboration, and in turn, message scrutiny. However, as previously discussed, more thinking does not equivocate with more scrutiny.
Considering the results found herein regarding positive thoughts and biased thinking, it might be the case that engagement is the key. Perhaps engagement actually increases one’s ability and/or motivation to think about the stimuli, but it also biases the direction of the thinking. This would account for Green and Brock’s (2000) results wherein people who elaborated more were more transported but applied less scrutiny to the messages. It would also help explain why The Daily Show watchers produced more biased elaborations in favor of the host’s position than CNN watchers. Assuming that comedy is more engaging than news, The Daily Show watchers would likely become more motivated to think about the stimulus than the less engaged news watchers. This, in turn, could potentially lead to such high levels of character involvement or enjoyment that ensuing thoughts become biased in the direction presented in the media. Simply reassessing the relationship between ability, motivation, and engagement from the opposite direction is the best way to approach this issue. Using engagement as a predictor rather than an outcome variable would be helpful for future research in this area. Additionally, the inclusion of engagement, character involvement, and enjoyment as a process that moderates elaboration levels and biases the direction of one’s thoughts warrants serious consideration.

Broader Conclusions

In totality, these results offer much insight into the influence of ability and motivation on cognitive elaboration, as well as the differences between political satire, news, and political film in relation to political persuasion process. Overall, the results overwhelmingly support the use of the ELM as appropriate for the study of political entertainment, demonstrating that its application yields fruitful results and provides new
insights to when and how political entertainment influences individual-level thinking and attitudes. Additionally, the usefulness of and appropriateness of applying the ELM to political entertainment also suggests that the narrative-rhetorical persuasion divide is artificial, and the ELM is not limited to the study of rhetorical arguments. This is a key point as it paves the way for the use of social-psychological persuasion models in political entertainment research and corrects the false assumption that such models are inappropriate for studying narratives.

Although the first two objectives of this dissertation were met without reservation, the third requires pause. Clearly the results support the extension of the ELM into narrative persuasion. Some evidence of significant relationships between ELM factors and transportation also emerged. However, there simply was not enough analysis to fully understand how narrative persuasion variables such as transportation influence the political entertainment persuasion process. The suggestion to re-examine transportation as a predictor of ability and motivation might prove fruitful. However, what is really apparent is the need to achieve a deeper understanding of the role media persona play in the entertainment persuasion process.

With regard to the third objective of this dissertation, it is quite apparent from these limited results that there needs to be a much stronger integration of character involvement, enjoyment, and media engagement in political entertainment research. Without recognizing the importance of engagement, enjoyment, and character involvement, results will continue to seem contradictory and counterintuitive. The results of this dissertation provide clear evidence that more is occurring than the simple ability, motivation, source variables often considered in rhetorical persuasion. While extending
the ELM to political entertainment has proven meaningful in this dissertation, the next step must certainly be to examine how enjoyment, character involvement, and engagement influence the persuasion process.

Finally, to continue ignoring key narrative and entertainment variables and treating political entertainment as a sub-field of the more traditional rhetorical-based political communication form is simply foolish and short-sighted. Political entertainment is, by definition, the combination of politics and entertainment. If anything it is larger in scope than traditional political communication (i.e., news). Additionally, this dissertation has clearly demonstrated that political entertainment sits at the crossroads of politics, entertainment, and persuasion. Taken together, it forms a powerful form of strategic communication that influences how and when people think about political issues embedded in the media. Whether by strategically placed messages delivered by well-loved characters or unintentional jokes told by favorite late-night comedians, political entertainment influences our citizenry. As such, it has an undeniable impact on democracy that warrants systematic analysis and a deeper understanding of the persuasion processes underlying the various forms of political entertainment.

This dissertation has provided evidence for the need to move toward a social-psychological process-oriented approach to understanding how, when, and why political entertainment influences audiences. Additionally, the ELM has successfully been applied to the study of political communication, demonstrating its appropriateness and usefulness in discovering nuanced relationships affecting the persuasion process. Finally, the artificial divide between narrative and rhetorical persuasion has been exposed and a foundation for integrating enjoyment, engagement, and character involvement into the
study of political entertainment persuasion has been set forth. In doing so, all three objectives of this dissertation have been met.

However, in the larger scope of political entertainment research, this work simply lays the foundation for a systematic approach to examining political entertainment persuasion. There is still much to do and much to learn about the role political entertainment plays in society. Moving forward, it helps to first address some of the limitations encountered in this body of work and set forth suggestions for future research. Before doing so, however, I conclude the discussion of the studies contained herein with these thoughts: political entertainment media effects research is in its infancy. While media effects and politics have long been examined by communication scholars, the combined influence of politics and entertainment is still largely an unknown. However, we can take the best of what is known from more established fields and integrate the ideas and methods to create a stellar program of research. In the broadest sense, that was the overarching goal of this body of work. Laying out a social-psychological process-oriented approach that integrates key narrative, entertainment, and persuasion variables will serve as the jumping off point for such endeavors.

Limitations

Study 1

The first study used a jury pool sample. While this was undertaken as a means of establishing an adult, random sample, there were limitations that merit discussion. First, the jury pool consisted of adults registered to vote in Franklin County, Ohio. Thus, it was not a true random sample. Second, not all jurors volunteered to participate. Thus, it was
merely a convenience sample of adults serving as jurors. In an attempt to overcome these limitations and ensure individual-level differences were equally disbursed between groups, random assignment was also used to assign participants to the various conditions. Additionally, several jurors chose not to type their elaborations and counter-arguments into the on-screen text box, which resulted a mixed method problem. The majority of participants did use the open-ended on-screen box \((n=101)\), but there may have been some unaccounted for differences between those who typed their responses and those who hand wrote their elaborations. Fortunately, the participants who elected to write their responses were about equally disbursed between the four conditions, which should have reduced any adverse effects on the analyses.

**Attrition rate.** While there were several small procedural limitations, as outlined above, the biggest methodological limitation was found in the delayed post-test procedure. Less than one-third of the original sample chose to participate in the delayed post-test, which leaves any long-term attitude analyses moot for this dissertation. After careful consideration of the issue, it seems apparent that participants were simply unmotivated to participate after their juror duty had ended. Considering that the initial contact was made in-person while jurors were sitting idle and the follow-up request was made by email after those same jurors had returned to their working lives, it makes sense that the attrition rate was so high. The delayed post-test invitation came during a time many people were returning to their daily lives, busy trying to catch up on missed work, and had little motivation to take the delayed post-test. Future studies should carefully consider ways to incentivize participation in delayed post-testing which are compelling enough to reduce study attrition rates over time. Due to these limitations, delayed post-
testing data were not used in this study as originally planned. While this is an unfortunate limitation to the present study, important methodological lessons were learned for future research. Going forward, panel designs need better implementation so that longer-term attitudes and observed behaviors can be examined.

*Manipulation limitation.* In addition to the issues outlined above, Study 1 suffered from a manipulation flaw. In an effort to achieve maximum differences in elaboration level, the decision was made to select an issue with high motivation across all conditions. Thus, a current, highly relevant economic issue (i.e., AIG bailout debacle) was chosen. A simple motivation question was asked of all participants to ensure motivation was high across conditions (i.e., “In your opinion, how relevant is the AIG bonus issue to your daily life?”). Although the results of this question revealed a high mean level of motivation for all participants on a seven-point scale, there was, perhaps, an unintentional consequence. Since knowledge was used to manipulate ability, it is quite likely that the differences between the low and high ability groups, in terms of prior knowledge, were not maximized. Rather, if all groups had a high motivation level and a high interest in the economy, then it is probable that all groups already had a relatively high level of prior knowledge. If so, then the ability manipulation probably resulted in average ability and high ability, as opposed to low ability and high ability. Since the results indicated a significant difference between the groups with respect to elaboration, then the manipulation was at least marginally successful. However, a stronger ability manipulation would have likely resulted in stronger results. Future studies should consider testing prior knowledge, using different ability manipulations, or attempt to find highly motivating issues about which people know very little to overcome this potential
issue. For example, it may have been more effective to use distraction or cognitive load
techniques to reduce ability as opposed to increasing ability with increased prior
knowledge. Having said this, however, it should be noted that even the weak ability
manipulation produced support for the hypotheses, suggesting that refined manipulations
would only serve to increase results and support for the theoretical arguments made
herein.

*Generally weak statistical power for detecting small effects.* The total N for this
case was rather small resulting in weak statistical power for detecting small effect
sizes. Although the power analysis revealed enough statistical power to detect moderate
to large effect sizes, this study was primarily looking at smaller effects. As such, the
small N became a limitation. Future studies and replications using a larger sample size
would be beneficial in detecting small effects for these types of analyses.

*Study 2*

*Attrition rate.* As with study one, the high attrition rate created a limitation for
studying attitude consistency and decay across time. After careful consideration of the
issue, it seems apparent that participants were simply unmotivated to participate after
their extra credit had been earned at Time 1. IRB requires that all participants receive
their extra credit for participation in Time 1 without regard to whether they completed the
survey or participated in any follow-up surveys. Savvy students are aware of this rule and
take advantage by simply logging into the study, answering one question, and exiting the
survey without completion. The large recruitment pool compensated for this issue at
Time 1, but the problem became evident in the delayed post-test attrition rate. While
some students actually stated they didn’t need to participate for extra credit, most simply chose not to reply to multiple email invitations. Clearly, this issue has negative consequences for researchers. Unfortunately, this problem was beyond my control. Perhaps paying the students or otherwise incentivizing continued participation would be an option for circumventing the extra credit problem. As with Study 1, this was a great loss in data and future research must really do more to reduce the attrition rate and examine long-term effects.

Sample appropriateness. Perhaps the biggest drawback for Study 2 was the use of a college student sample. It could be argued that college students are faced with rising healthcare costs and are often responsible for their own healthcare. As such, it might be quite appropriate to use this population to examine healthcare attitudes. However, it could also be argued that most college students are still covered by parent healthcare policies and have access to university healthcare for little to no charge. In this case, the use of a college student sample might be considered less than optimal. I would argue both are true. However, this potential limitation was addressed, in part, by creating the motivation manipulation. Additionally, using a sample wherein the average person has a relatively low motivation to think about the topic was actually beneficial to the study. Unlike the ability manipulation problem in Study 1 (where all groups had relatively high ability), having college students who aren’t really motivated to think about the issue provided the opportunity to maximize the difference in motivation between the groups. Using the time relevance manipulation, students in the high motivation groups were led to believe that the issue would affect them within the next calendar year regardless of their standing as a full-time student. In doing so, the differences between the low motivation and high
motivation groups could be maximized. Although the college student sample often creates external validity issues and prevents social scientists from extending their findings to the general population, the nature of study two actually benefitted from using this sample. In fact, the use of an adult sample would likely have caused manipulation problems similar to those experienced in study one (detailed above).

*Generally weak statistical power for detecting small effects.* As with study 1, there was a limitation regarding weak statistical power for detecting small effect sizes. Again, the power analysis revealed enough statistical power to detect moderate to large effect sizes. However, as with the first study, study 2 was primarily looking at smaller effects. So here again the sample size was a limitation. Although this is a common problem for political communication effects research, the suggesting still remains that future studies and replications should attempt to employ much larger sample sizes when conducting these types of analyses.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

*Methodological Improvements*

Two methodological concerns were outlined in the limitations section; manipulations and attrition rates. Although both of these issues were addressed to the extent possible in the current studies, these limitations provide an opportunity to learn from and improve upon the methodological designs used in future research. Clean, strong manipulations are an essential element in experimental research. The failure to isolate and/or clearly manipulate key variables makes it difficult to successfully test the stated hypotheses. Thinking about ability and motivation manipulations, future research would
do well to employ alternative manipulation methods. When dealing with hot topic political issues, for instance, it is important to consider that high levels of motivation across groups might also mean that prior knowledge is already relatively high across groups. When all groups are already relatively high in ability it makes more sense to decrease one group’s ability. Cognitive load or distraction could be used to decrease the ability of one or more treatment groups to think about an issue. There are many examples in extant social-psychological literature where researchers have used distraction techniques (e.g., blinking lights) or increased cognitive load (e.g., completing multiple tasks while watching the video) to decrease one’s ability to perform the intended function (e.g., think about the topic). Future studies would benefit from utilizing these techniques and replicating the ability study herein using alternative ability manipulations.

Message Manipulation and Comparison

Going forward, message manipulation and format comparison will be the key to understanding the full extent of political entertainment’s influence on democracy. Considering that nine distinct forms of political communication have been identified (Holbert, 2005) the next important step will be to examine the key variables identified herein across these nine categories. To date, there has been no real attempt to design between group studies that compare different forms of political entertainment, yet clearly this is an important step. The limited results provided here already point to significant message effect differences between satire and news, as well as between docu-drama and parody. Clearly, we should expect differences between political dramas (e.g., *Frost/Nixon*) and political satire (e.g., *The Colbert Report*) to emerge. But what about more similar forms such as political talk shows (e.g., *Latenight with Dave Letterman* and
soft news (e.g., The Oprah Winfrey Show)? A systematic examination of each area of political entertainment can not only provide insight within the various forms, but can also provide insight regarding differences across the different forms. Additionally, there needs to be more inclusion of narrative involvement, enjoyment, and character involvement variables. Putting these suggesting all together, I suggest a plan of research that is two-fold.

*Replication.* First, it will be important to take the basic findings provided here and replicate them across the nine categories of political entertainment. In doing so, source, ability, motivation and narrative/character engagement should be included (at a minimum). Establishing a line of research devoted to testing the source, recipient, message, channel, and context using the framework established by this dissertation will allow for the generalization of findings, as well as reveal the nuanced differences between the various forms of political entertainment. Replication can help accomplish this goal.

*Entertainment focus.* Second, there needs to be much more focus on entertainment process variables such as enjoyment, disposition, character involvement, and media engagement. The results discussed above point to the need to re-focus political entertainment and ground it more in narrative and entertainment media effects theory. As an off-spring of traditional and often rhetorical forms of political communication, political entertainment seems to only be in touch with half of its identity. As political entertainment scholars we need to engage in much less hand wringing about the alternative formats we examine (as opposed to the more traditional political communication formats widely accepted, i.e., news), and embrace political entertainment
as a vibrant, dynamic form of media that mixes entertainment and politics in a highly persuasive and influential manner. Before this can occur, however, we need to understand the entertainment side of the equation much better. As such, future research should systematically include and manipulate disposition, empathy, enjoyment, involvement, and character attachment. This can be done in conjunction with the ability and motivation manipulations and applied across the nine contexts of study. Together, this will create a dynamic line of research that will take a lifetime to fully understand.

Strategic Communication Perspective

Finally, from a broader perspective it is time to extend political entertainment to other forms of strategic communication research. Going forward, there needs to be an increased effort to demonstrate the role of political entertainment in strategic communication campaigns. Public relations and public affairs research lacks any consideration for political entertainment as an emerging outlet for strategic communication. However, as detailed in chapter one, professionals are clearly shifting away from traditional campaign strategies and communication outlets to include more entertainment venues and programs. As continued interest in using entertainment media as an alternative platform for social and political campaigns emerges, examining political entertainment from the strategic communication perspective will prove an important and useful path to take.

In all, political entertainment research is a dynamic field with many options for future endeavor. Still in its infancy, this line of research will continue to grow and paths
for future research will reveal themselves as media environments, political strategies, and entertainment formats continue to evolve.
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<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Low Ability</th>
<th>High Ability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political entertainment</td>
<td>1.78 (.200)</td>
<td>.88 (.198)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political news</td>
<td>1.67 (.228)</td>
<td>1.51 (.191)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 1 Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Counter-Arguing For Limited Pay for Ability* Message Interactions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Low Ability</th>
<th>High Ability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political entertainment</td>
<td>2.08 (.195)</td>
<td>1.28 (.192)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political news</td>
<td>1.33 (.221)</td>
<td>1.52 (.186)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2 Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Counter-Arguing Against Limited Pay for Ability* Message Interactions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Ability</td>
<td>2.07 (.223)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Ability</td>
<td>3.39 (.202)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political entertainment (Daily Show)</td>
<td>3.20 (.206)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political news (Anderson Cooper 360)</td>
<td>2.26 (.219)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 3 Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Total Thoughts for Ability and Message
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Ability</td>
<td>1.93 (.123)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Ability</td>
<td>3.31 (.193)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political entertainment (Daily Show)</td>
<td>3.05 (.197)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political news (Anderson Cooper 360)</td>
<td>2.20 (.209)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 4** Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Relevant Thoughts for Ability and Message
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Ability</td>
<td>.86 (.222)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Ability</td>
<td>2.24 (.201)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political entertainment (Daily Show)</td>
<td>2.19 (.205)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political news (Anderson Cooper 360)</td>
<td>.92 (.218)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 5 Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Positive Relevant Thoughts for Ability and Message
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Ability</td>
<td>.61 (.120)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Ability</td>
<td>.47 (.109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political entertainment (Daily Show)</td>
<td>.19 (.111)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political news (Anderson Cooper 360)</td>
<td>.89 (.118)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 6 Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Negative Relevant Thoughts for Ability and Message
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Ability</td>
<td>1.73 (.151)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Ability</td>
<td>1.19 (.137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political entertainment (Daily Show)</td>
<td>1.33 (.140)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political news (Anderson Cooper 360)</td>
<td>1.59 (.148)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 7 Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Counter Argue for Limited Pay for Ability and Message
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Ability</td>
<td>1.71 (.147)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Ability</td>
<td>1.40 (.133)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political entertainment (Daily Show)</td>
<td>1.68 (.136)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political news (Anderson Cooper 360)</td>
<td>1.43 (.144)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 8 Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Counter Argue Against Limited Pay for Ability and Message
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Low Ability</th>
<th>High Ability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political entertainment</td>
<td>3.24 (.119)</td>
<td>3.15 (.118)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political news</td>
<td>3.27 (.136)</td>
<td>3.72 (.114)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

TABLE 9 Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Source Attitude for Ability* Message Interaction
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Low Ability</th>
<th>High Ability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political entertainment</td>
<td>3.47 (.215)</td>
<td>2.71 (.212)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political news</td>
<td>3.04 (.244)</td>
<td>3.32 (.205)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 10 Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Engagement for Ability* Message Interaction
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Ability</td>
<td>3.25 (.090)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Ability</td>
<td>3.44 (.082)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political entertainment (Daily Show)</td>
<td>3.20 (.083)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political news (Anderson Cooper 360)</td>
<td>3.49 (.089)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 11 Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Source for Ability and Message
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Ability</td>
<td>2.37 (.134)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Ability</td>
<td>2.10 (.121)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political entertainment (Daily Show)</td>
<td>2.04 (.124)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political news (Anderson Cooper 360)</td>
<td>2.45 (.132)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 12 Adjusted Mean and Standard Error AIG Bonus Attitude for Ability and Message
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Motivation (Sicko)</td>
<td>.90 (.183)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Motivation (American Carol and Sicko)</td>
<td>.76 (.160)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Motivation (Sicko)</td>
<td>.75 (.197)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Motivation (American Carol and Sicko)</td>
<td>1.21 (.167)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 13 Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Negative thoughts for Motivation*Message Interaction**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Motivation</td>
<td>2.09 (.147)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Motivation</td>
<td>2.71 (.156)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sicko</td>
<td>2.51 (.162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Carol and Sicko</td>
<td>2.30 (.140)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 14 Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Total Thoughts for Message and Motivation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Motivation</td>
<td>2.09 (.141)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Motivation</td>
<td>2.48 (.150)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sicko</td>
<td>2.40 (.155)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Carol and Sicko</td>
<td>2.17 (.135)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 15  Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Relevant Thoughts for Message and Motivation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Motivation</td>
<td>.94 (.103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Motivation</td>
<td>1.16 (.110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sicko</td>
<td>1.33 (.113)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Carol and Sicko</td>
<td>.77 (.098)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 16  Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Positive Relevant Thoughts for Message and Motivation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Motivation</td>
<td>.83 (.121)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Motivation</td>
<td>.98 (.129)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sicko</td>
<td>.83 (.134)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Carol and Sicko</td>
<td>.99 (.116)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 17**  Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Negative Relevant Thoughts for Message and Motivation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Motivation</td>
<td>1.81 (.134)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Motivation</td>
<td>1.83 (.142)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sicko</td>
<td>1.40 (.147)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Carol and Sicko</td>
<td>2.24 (.128)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 18  Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Counter Arguing for Message and Motivation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Motivation</td>
<td>3.06 (.133)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Motivation</td>
<td>3.29 (.141)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sicko</td>
<td>3.40 (.146)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Carol and Sicko</td>
<td>2.95 (.127)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 19**  Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Source for Message and Motivation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Motivation</td>
<td>4.98 (.119)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Motivation</td>
<td>5.09 (.126)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sicko</td>
<td>5.13 (.131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Carol and Sicko</td>
<td>4.94 (.113)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 20  Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Discussion for Message and Motivation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Motivation</td>
<td>4.45 (.119)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Motivation</td>
<td>4.40 (.127)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sicko</td>
<td>4.50 (.132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Carol and Sicko</td>
<td>4.34 (.114)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 21  Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Engagement for Message and Motivation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Adjusted Mean (Standard Error)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Motivation</td>
<td>3.98 (.152)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Motivation</td>
<td>3.73 (.162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sicko</td>
<td>4.17 (.168)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Carol and Sicko</td>
<td>3.54 (.145)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 22  Adjusted Mean and Standard Error Healthcare Attitude for Message and Motivation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political as Primary</th>
<th>Fictional Political Dramas</th>
<th>Traditional Satire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entertainment Talk</strong></td>
<td><strong>Soft News</strong></td>
<td><strong>Political Docudramas</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show Interviews with Politicians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment Television Events</td>
<td>Reality-Based Programming/Documentaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: A Typology for the Study of Entertainment TV and Politics
Figure 2 Ability by Message Interaction for Counter-arguing Against Stated Position
Figure 3 Ability by Message Interaction for Source Perceptions
Figure 4: Ability by Message Interaction for Media Engagement
Figure 5 Post Hoc Analysis of Ability by Message Interaction on Counter-arguing for the Stated Position
Figure 6 Post Hoc Analysis of Ability by Message Interaction for Congress Attitude
Figure 7 Message by Motivation Interaction on Negative Thoughts
**APPENDIX A: CODING SHEET**

**Note:** Each coder was provided an excel file with the participant ID, the data, and the following categories to code.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>participant ID</th>
<th>counter arguing</th>
<th>Total number of counter arguments</th>
<th>thought listing</th>
<th>Total Thoughts</th>
<th>Total UNRELATED thoughts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ID provided here</td>
<td>data provided here</td>
<td>data provided here</td>
<td>data provided here</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total ISSUE-RELEVANT Thoughts</th>
<th>POSITIVE ISSUE-RELEVANT</th>
<th>NEGATIVE ISSUE-RELEVANT</th>
<th>NEUTRAL or not sure ISSUE-RELEVANT</th>
<th>Total RELATED Thoughts</th>
<th>POSITIVE RELATED</th>
<th>NEGATIVE RELATED</th>
<th>NEUTRAL or not sure RELATED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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APPENDIX B: CODE BOOK

Codebook

Instructions:

1. Count the number of thoughts in each column. Enter the TOTAL number of thoughts in the columns labeled "total thoughts."
   Example: Total thoughts (code is 100)
   Person1 4
   Person2 7

2. Categorize thoughts into the following categories and enter the TOTAL number of EACH type of thought in the appropriate categories.
   Example:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total thoughts</th>
<th>Issue Relevant Thoughts</th>
<th>Related Thoughts</th>
<th>Unrelated Thoughts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(100)</td>
<td>(101)</td>
<td>(102)</td>
<td>(103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Issue Relevant Thoughts** are defined as thoughts that directly relate to the political topic in the media clip (e.g., healthcare, AIG exec pay)

- **Related Thoughts** are defined as thoughts that related to the political issue in the clip generally, but might not specifically name the exact issue (e.g., generally about executive pay for bailed out companies, generally about nationalized healthcare or universal health coverage)

- **Unrelated Thoughts** are defined as all thoughts NOT related to the political issue in the clip (e.g., about the host, the show, the guests, or other things the show reminds the person of while watching)

3. Using ONLY the issue relevant and related thoughts, determine if the thoughts are positive or negative (favoring or opposing the host’s stated position regarding the political issue)
Example: | Issue Relevant | Related |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive/Negative/Not sure</td>
<td>Positive/Negative/Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Positive thoughts** (1) are defined as thoughts **supporting** the advocated position of the political issue in the film (e.g., for national healthcare or against bailouts and exec bonuses)

- If a person has thoughts that generally agree these positions (national healthcare is good – AIG bonuses are bad) then we call this **POSITIVE**, because it supports or favors the position that was advocated by the show
  - **For Sicko** – Moore is in favor of nationalized healthcare (pro-
  nationalized or government run healthcare and against private or current system) and the film is in support of nationalized healthcare. Any thoughts that are generally supportive or favoring nationalized, government run healthcare OR opposing the way our healthcare currently runs are coded POSITIVE
  - **For CNN/Daily Show** – both hosts opposed the AIG bonuses and were against using bailout money to pay executives high salaries; any thoughts that line-up with these views (e.g., AIG bonuses are bad, negative about bonuses, etc) are coded as POSITIVE because the support or positively agree with the host views.

- **Negative thoughts** (-1) are defined as thoughts disagreeing with the host viewpoint or **OPPOSING** the view (e.g., AGAINST national healthcare, FOR AIG bonuses or unlimited executive pay)
  - **For Sicko** – Any thoughts that disagree with the movie’s theme of nationalizing our healthcare and/or support keeping private healthcare are considered NEGATIVE thoughts.
  - **For CNN/Daily Show** – Any thoughts that are positive about AIG bonuses, support unlimited pay for executives of AIG are coded as NEGATIVE because they oppose the views given by the hosts.
Congress plays blame game over AIG bonuses

By M. Smith

(WASHINGTON) A firestorm over $165 million in executive bonuses hit the country Monday, March 16, AIG has received $130 billion in federal bailout dollars under the TARP fund and has been promised an additional $30 billion in 2009.

AIG CEO, Liddy, said these bonuses must be paid under employment contracts. "These bonuses were announced over a year ago. Everyone was told about them and they were approved by Congress in the stimulus bill" Liddy said.

Senator Dodd (CT-D), head of the Senate banking committee, has admitted to adding a special amendment to the stimulus package passed in January 2009, which allowed companies like AIG to pay executive bonuses.

"I was pressured by the administration to add this language," Dodd said. "Quite frankly, the Treasury Department and the White House told me it had to be in there or we would be facing lawsuits from the executives."

Treasury Secretary, Timothy Geithner, denies knowing anything about the bonuses until this week. "We had no knowledge of these outrageous bonuses and did not ask Senator Dodd to make any amendments regarding them" said Geithner.

President Obama has openly criticized these payments saying that it is "not about the money, but about our value system."

Republican Senator Olympia Snowe (ME) says she is shocked by the outrage the President and Congress are pretending to show.

Senate Finance committee member Charles Grassley (IA-R) claims republicans were left completely out of the closed door negotiations that took place between the Treasury Department, Democrat congressional leaders, and AIG.

"We were not told where the meeting were being held or when they were meeting until 2 hours before we had to vote. We were not given the bill to read and the chair (Dodd) said that we would be
allowed to debate, make changes, or remove amendments" Grassley said.

White House Press Secretary, Gibbs, released a statement saying that Senator Dodd is trying to deflect blame. "The President and the administration had no knowledge of these bonuses" said Gibbs.

While congress and the white house are pointing fingers Americans are losing confidence in the financial markets and the countries leadership. In a recent Rasmussen poll, the President's approval rate has slipped to 62% and the number of people who disapprove of the president has risen to its highest level at 38%.

87% of Americans polled in the latest Gallop Poll say they don't trust Wall Street executives and have little confidence in the financial markets.

--filed March 18, 2009
**High Motivation Fake News Article**

**Obama’s health plan to nationalize healthcare by 2010**

By, M. Smith

(AP) The omnibus spending bill signed by President Obama on March 11, included $600 million for universal healthcare. The President signed the omnibus spending bill saying, “This is a down payment on healthcare for all Americans.”

The bill calls for universal healthcare coverage for all Americans by the end of 2010. The swift movement to government-run healthcare has been defended by top aides in the administration.

Top Democrats agree that universal healthcare is a step in the right direction. Speaker Pelosi (CA-D) who supports nationalized healthcare, introduced The Healthcare Nationalization Act (HR 2110) into the house yesterday saying, “This time we will not fail.”

Senate majority leader Harry Reid (NV-D) said that the bill should easily pass the house, and has enough support in the Senate.

“We foresee this bill being passed with or without GOP support in the Senate. The President and the country are ready for this. It is time that all Americans have access to healthcare,” said Reid in a statement supporting the measure.

Republican opposition argues that the President and congressional democrats are using the economic crisis to push their political agenda through without scrutiny. House minority leader John Bayner (OH-R) opposes the move to nationalized healthcare.

“The only sector in the economy still doing well right now is the healthcare industry. We have the best healthcare system in the world. This will kill jobs, slow medical innovation, and reduce incentives to medical professionals,” said Bayner.

If passed, the President said he will immediately sign the Healthcare Nationalization Act into law.

“The law will take effect on July 1, 2010.”
Low Motivation Fake News Article

Obama’s health plan to nationalize healthcare by 2020 likely held up by Senate

By, M. Smith

(AP) The omnibus spending bill signed by President Obama on March 11, included $600 million for universal healthcare. The President signed the omnibus spending bill saying, “This is a down payment on healthcare for all Americans.”

The bill calls for universal healthcare coverage for all Americans by the end of 2020. The slow phased in approach was called “a pragmatic implementation plan” by the White House and has been defended by top aides in the administration.

Top Democrats agree that universal healthcare is a step in the right direction. Speaker Pelosi (CA-D) who supports nationalized healthcare, introduced The Healthcare Nationalization Act (HR 2110) into the house yesterday saying, “This time we will not fail.”

Senate majority leader Harry Reid (NV-D) said that the bill should easily pass the house, but will be a slow process in the Senate. The bill is not scheduled for debate in 2009.

“We foresee this bill being an uphill battle without GOP support in the Senate. The President and the country are ready for this. It is time that all Americans have access to healthcare,” said Reid in a statement supporting the measure.

Republican opposition argues that the President and congressional democrats are using the economic crisis to push their political agenda through without scrutiny. House minority leader John Bayner (OH-R) opposes the move to nationalized healthcare. Minority Leader Bayner has promised a long battle and says he “will do everything possible” to keep the bill from passing anytime soon.

“The only sector in the economy still doing well right now is the healthcare industry. We have the best healthcare system in the world. This will kill jobs, slow medical innovation, and reduce incentives to medical professionals,” said Bayner.

Too Government aides project a long battle ahead. If it clears committee, the bill will not even see formal debate for at least a year. Once passed, there will be a phased in program. The bill calls for a July 1, 2020 effective date.
APPENDIX E: STIMULI URLS

Study One Stimuli

Political Entertainment Stimuli: *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, “Notorious AIG”

March 19, 2009, 4 minutes 11 seconds, available at


Study Two Stimuli

Pro-attitudinal political film stimuli: *Sicko* edited clip, 2 minutes 27 seconds, available at

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0frVWk3YUgo

Counter-attitudinal political film stimuli: *American Carol*, edited clip, 2 minutes 28 seconds, available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0GefZD5o9M
APPENDIX F: LIST OF HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

H1: Individuals placed in a high ability condition will generate significantly more individual-level elaborations than those individuals placed in a low ability condition.

H2: Individuals placed in a high motivation condition will generate significantly more individual-level elaborations than those individuals placed in a low motivation condition.

H3: Individuals placed in a high ability condition will generate significantly more issue-relevant thoughts than individuals placed in a low ability condition.

H4: Individuals placed in a high motivation condition will generate significantly more issue-relevant thoughts than individuals placed in a low motivation condition.

H5: There will be a contingent condition interaction between message (news v entertainment) and ability (low versus high) such that differences in source perceptions of a political media entertainment host (e.g., Jon Stewart) and a traditional news media host (e.g., Anderson Cooper) are contingent on having a higher ability level, with separation in source perceptions being found across individuals high in ability and little to no difference across those individuals low in ability.
H6: There will be a contributory condition interaction between message (one-sided versus two-sided) and motivation (low versus high) such that source perceptions across the two political information orientations will vary greater among individuals placed in a high motivation condition than individuals placed in a low motivation condition.

H7: Individuals placed in a two-sided message condition in which nationalized healthcare is both advocated (i.e., Sicko) and opposed (i.e., An American Carol) will demonstrate less favorable attitudes toward nationalized healthcare than those in the one-sided message condition in which nationalized healthcare is advocated without any opposition (i.e., Sicko only).

H8: Individuals placed in a two-sided political entertainment message condition that both advocates and opposes an issue will generate significantly more counter-arguments against the issue than individuals placed in a one-sided political entertainment message condition that only advocates the issue.

H9: Individuals placed in a satirical late-night TV condition will generate significantly more favorable (positive) thoughts than those individuals placed in a political news condition.

H10: Individuals placed in a satirical late-night TV condition will generate significantly less unfavorable (negative) thoughts than those individuals placed in a political news condition.

H11: Individuals placed in a satirical late-night TV condition will generate significantly fewer counter-arguments against the show’s hosts stated issue position than
individuals placed in a political news condition will generate against the news anchor’s stated position when both hosts advocate the same or similar positions.

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in individual-level thought generation between participants who consume traditional news content and participants who consume political entertainment content?

RQ2: Is there a significant difference in individual-level issue-relevant thought generation between participants who consume traditional news content and participants who consume political entertainment content?

RQ 3: How does ability influence thought valance (i.e., positive and negative thought generation)?

RQ 4: How does motivation influence thought valance (i.e., positive and negative thought generation)?

RQ5: Does ability (high versus low) have a direct effect on issue-related attitudes?

RQ6: Does motivation (high versus low) have a direct effect on issue-related attitudes?

RQ7: Does political entertainment media exposure, both when compared to news exposure and as a result of political entertainment messages sidedness (one-sided versus two-sided) have a direct effect on issue-related attitudes?

RQ8: Does motivation have an effect on intention to discuss the topic of interest in a political documentary?

RQ9: Does message have an effect on intention to discuss the topic of interest in a political documentary?

RQ10: Does ability significantly influence transportation?
RQ11: Does motivation significantly influence transportation?

RQ 12: Do a variety of political entertainment media messages significantly influence transportation?