Perceived News Media Importance: News Parody, Valuations of the News Media, and Their Influence on Perceptions of Journalism

Dissertation

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of declining public confidence in news media, this project explores the question of what could be contributing to increased skepticism toward the press and how the public’s apparent reluctance to express trust in news media might be interpreted by scholars. In an effort to address this basic query, this research effort is designed to (a) advance an understanding of news media perceptions, and (b) consider news parody’s role in influencing these perceptions.

More specifically, this study explores the influence of news parody—conceptualized as a form of media criticism—on varied forms of media trust. By its very nature, news parody (such as The Daily Show and Last Week Tonight) is understood to offer both explicit and implicit commentary about the news media industry and media personnel. In so doing, it is argued here that news parody serves to endorse the notion of the news media serving important functions in society, even as the press may fail to meet its obligations. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that perceptions of news media importance have a meaningful influence on aspects of media trust.

In an effort to better explore how parody-induced conceptions of news media importance may contribute to shaping perceptions of the industry’s trustworthiness, this project first develops and validates a measure for gauging personal valuations of several normative news media functions, labeled here as Perceived News Media Importance (PNMI). It is expected that the explication and operationalization of the PNMI concept
can serve as a tool for bringing greater clarity to patterns of public trust in the news media both within and beyond the scope of news parody. Employing survey data provided by a convenience sample (N=403) and a nationally representative sample (N=510), a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) indicates that the theorized PNMI measurement model fits the data well. Moreover, the proposed 12-item scale also exhibits appropriate convergent (political interest and political participation) and discriminant (media trust; negative content media image; ideology) validity. Finally, while demonstrated to be distinct from media trust, PNMI is also shown to meaningfully predict media trust, above and beyond additional variables included a hierarchical multiple regression model.

Upon establishing the validity of the PNMI scale, the measure was employed in an experimental context. A two-wave survey (N=227) exposed participants to news parody stimuli, measuring both dimensions of general media trust and PNMI about one week before and immediately after the experimental treatment. The degree to which a given parody stimulus was like-minded and trust in specific news sources was also measured after news parody exposure. Results provide evidence of a process of conditional influence, wherein pro-attitudinal news parody promotes PNMI, which in turn can favorably influence aspects of media trust in specific news outlets.

Ultimately, these findings suggest that news parody commentary may be contributing to public perceptions of the news media in ways that, at times, enhance media trust. Exploration of PNMI’s influence on media trust sheds light on one way in which news parody may influence trust: by endorsing the importance of and respect for the core functions of the news media, news parody can serve to encourage individuals to
place more trust in specific news media outlets. From a normative perspective, this highlights the value of news parody. Given that media trust is desirable, this study demonstrates that news parody commentary can benefit society by promoting the value of news media work.
Dedication

For Zoe.
Acknowledgements

As I complete graduate school and prepare to begin a new job with the Media School at Indiana University this fall, I recognize that am indebted to numerous people. To arrive at this point, various friends, family members, colleagues, and advisors have sacrificed much time, energy, and other resources on my behalf.

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Publications


Fields of Study

Major Field: Communication
Table of Contents

Abstract......................................................................................................................ii
Dedication..................................................................................................................v
Acknowledgments......................................................................................................vi
Vita..............................................................................................................................viii
Table of Contents.....................................................................................................ix
List of Tables...........................................................................................................xii
List of Figures..........................................................................................................xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction............................................................................................1
Chapter 2: Theoretical Foundations..........................................................................8
    News Media Perceptions.........................................................................................8
    Dimensions of News Media Trust.........................................................................12
    What Influences News Media Perceptions?.........................................................15
    News Parody as Media Criticism...........................................................................23
    Perceived News Media Importance.....................................................................36
    Key Functions of the Press....................................................................................41
    Normative Assumptions.......................................................................................44
    Summary...............................................................................................................47
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practical implications</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Directions</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Exploratory PNMI Items</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Finalized 12-item PNMI Scale</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Example of News Story Stimulus</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D: Descriptives of Hot Deck Imputation Variables</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E: Distribution of Survey Weight Variable</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1. Exploratory Factor Analysis Loadings.............................................................76
Table 2. Correlation Matrix with Dimensions of PNMI..............................................82
Table 3. OLS Regression Model Predicting Political Media Use...............................85
Table 4. OLS Regression Model Predicting PNMI....................................................86
Table 5. OLS Regression Model Predicting Media Trust............................................87
Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Stimuli Pretest Criticism Ratings............................98
Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of Stimuli Pretest Affective Responses.........................102
Table 8. Frequencies Table of “News Media” Conceptions.........................................107
Table 9. Predicting General Media Trust Dimensions..............................................120
Table 10. Change in PNMI from Pre- to Post-Parody exposure.................................122
Table 11. News Source Preference Predicting Outlet-specific Media Trust...............128
Table 12. Predicting Outlet-specific Trust Conditioned Upon Source Preference.......130
Table 13. Conditional Process Effects of Pro-Attitudinal News Parody.....................135
Table 14. Significant Moderated Mediation for Altruistic Trust.................................139
Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual Overview of Experiment 1……………………………………57
Figure 2. Conceptual Overview of Experiment 2……………………………………62
Figure 3. PNMI Measurement Model ……………………………………………………79
Figure 4. PNMI, Media Trust, and Negative Content Media Image Structural Model…81
Figure 5. Estimated Marginal Means of Interaction with Parody Criticism and Time…121
Figure 6. Moderating Role of News Source Preference……………………………131
Figure 7. PNMI’s Interaction with News Source Preference…………………………132
Figure 8. Pro-Attitudinal Parody’s Conditional Effect on Altruistic Trust…………138
Figure 9. Pro-Attitudinal Parody’s Conditional Effect on Believability Trust………138
Chapter 1: Introduction

The Gallup organization reported in 2014 that Americans’ faith in the institution of the press is at a record low, in terms of having “confidence” in newspapers, television news, and Internet-based news (Dugan, 2014). When respondents (N=1,027) were asked to express their opinions about the three major news media platforms, only 22% indicated “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in newspapers. Respondents’ confidence in television news (18%) and news via the Internet (19%) was not any stronger. The Gallup report asserts that this polling data showcases a continued decades-long decline in the public’s faith in the news media, a broad trend discussed at length by numerous media scholars and polling efforts (e.g., Bennett, Staci, & Flickinger, 2001; Fallows, 1996; Ladd, 2012). Such findings prompt two basic questions: what might be causing this decline in trust and how should the public’s apparent reluctance to express trust in the news media be interpreted?

This research project is designed to shed light on factors that can influence public perceptions of the news media and deepen a scholarly understanding of how the public’s low confidence in the news media might be understood. Whether the public’s trust is expressed in terms of confidence measures like the ones used by Gallup (e.g., Dugan, 2014), a simple news media feeling thermometer (Ladd, 2010), or some other gauge of faith in the news media industry, a decline in media trust has been highlighted by many research efforts in recent decades (Dugan, 2014; Jones, 2004; Ladd, 2101; Lee, 2010;
Kiousis, 2001). Scholars and cultural observers alike commonly express alarm about the declining faith in the news media, arguing that the deterioration of media trust does not bode well for democracy (Barnett, 2008; Fallows, 1996; Patterson, 1994). Ladd (2012), for instance, argues that a declining trust in news media contributes to the polarization of the American political system. Barnett (2008) asserts that, “good journalism makes a difference to the kind of society we live in, and to distrust it is eventually to destroy it. That’s why trust matters, and that’s why we should all be worried” (p. 13). But others question the basic premise that declining public trust in the news media need be overly worrisome (e.g., Peters, 2013; Schudson, 2013). Peters (2013) suggests that lower levels of trust in journalism may actually be an indicator of higher levels of media literacy among citizens. That is, in today’s high choice, diverse media environment, people have simply become more savvy and critical consumers of the news, which may translate into lower trust. Moreover, Peters (2013) posits that increased media literacy among citizens is not bad a thing. In view of this debate, it is apparent that in order to better comprehend the larger implications of a decline in media trust, scholarship should continue to strengthen an understanding of the factors that can undergird evaluations of media trust.

While it is recognized that a confluence of factors shape trust in the news media, this study posits that one source of influence in today’s media landscape is the commentary and media criticism embedded in popular forms of political humor. In particular, news parody (e.g., The Daily Show with Jon Stewart; Last Week Tonight with John Oliver) may play a meaningful role in shaping and reinforcing perceptions of the news media’s trustworthiness. News parody can be understood as a form of political
entertainment that both imitates and offers commentary on journalistic norms and practices.

With the rise of cable television programs like *The Daily Show (TDS)* and websites like *The Onion*, news parody has become markedly prominent in the media landscape over the last 15 years. For instance, it is striking that consumption of a political satire program like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (which 6% of Americans report watching “regularly”) is comparable to regular consumption of the *New York Times* (6%) and CBS News (7%) (Pew Research, 2012b). Even as new parody may not be directly accessed by large audiences on a consistent basis, snippets of such content is often widely distributed. Gray (2009) explains that “satire has a viral quality that aids in satirists’ attempts to speak to larger audiences, allowing it to broadcast via networks of online video-sharing sites and everyday discussion” (p. 164). Hence, morning news shows and websites like the *Huffington Post* commonly offer short re-caps of commentary offered by satirical programs; individuals share links to political satire/news parody content on social media like Facebook or Twitter. Notably, consumers of news parody-type content do not appear to be politically disengaged. They tend to be young, liberal, high in political interest, politically knowledgeable, and consumers of more traditional news sources (Feldman & Young, 2008; Hmielowski, Holbert, & Lee, 2011; Young & Tsinger, 2006; Young, 2004).

All this suggests that even as most of the national population is not necessarily tuned into news parody programming on a daily basis, this humorous content nonetheless has a capacity to meaningfully influence the citizenry, given that news media stalwarts

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1 *The Daily Show* won a Peabody award for its coverage of the 2000 election, recognized as a watershed for the show in gaining critical acclaim (Peters, 2013).
like the *New York Times* and CBS News (with their comparable consumption patterns) wield meaningful influence (e.g., McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Indeed, a growing number of political communication scholars (e.g., Delli Carpini, 2012; Graber, 2008; Holbert, Garrett, & Gleason, 2010; Mutz, 2001) share the view that traditional notions of what constitutes meaningful political communication are overly narrow when principally focusing on conventional news sources; they argue it is imperative to also examine the discourse and influence of political entertainment like *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, and *Saturday Night Live*.

Importantly, news parody commonly features humorous critiques of news media. For instance, Wise and Brewer’s (2010) analysis of 68 *TDS* segments found that 57% of comedy show’s segments included mention of the press; 44% of these instances were negative in tone (p. 138). Other content analyses similarly reveal evidence of substantial *TDS* airtime to segments about the news media (Brewer & Marquardt, 2007; Pew Research Center, 2008). Yet even as political entertainment/news parody now attracts considerable scholarly attention (see Young & Gray, 2013), relatively few studies examine how news parody critiques may be contributing to influencing citizens’ perceptions of the news media. Existing research related to political entertainment’s influence on news media perceptions offers evidence of news parody fostering both negative (e.g., Baumgartner & Morris, 2006) and positive (e.g., Brewer, Young, & Jones, 2013) evaluations of the news media. Continued research in this domain may help clarify the mixed findings regarding how news parody plays a role in shaping perceptions of the news media. To this end, this project examines news parody’s influence in terms of (a)
offering explicit criticism of the news media and also (b) in terms of the extent to which a viewer finds a given news parody message to be fundamentally pro-attitudinal.

To aid an investigation of news parody’s influence on media perceptions like media trust, this project also addresses an issue of measurement within the media trust literature. To understand this void, it is helpful to consider that one way in which news parody may contribute to shaping perceptions of the press is by drawing attention to the normative functions of the news media industry. Even as news parody may at times be explicitly critical of the news media, parody’s commentary arguably still communicates a message that news media matter. Working from this premise, this study examines how perceptions of the news media’s value can elucidate an understanding of (a) trust in the news media and (b) news parody’s influence on media trust. More specifically, it examines the role of news media importance. This concept broadly pertains to the question of how important individuals perceive certain conventional news media functions to be. Even as a given person may report having “a great deal” of confidence in, for example, newspapers, it does not necessarily follow that this same person also believes that various traditional functions of a newspaper are important or even relevant to her/his life (or vice versa). Scholarly research demonstrates that the importance attributed to an attitude/topic commonly exerts a strong influence on social perception and behavior (Festinger, 1954; Krosnick, 1988; Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965). Accordingly, an investigation of the importance attributed to the news media functions may further illuminate how and/or when perceptions of the news media’s trustworthiness is influenced by certain factors—like news parody—in today’s media landscape. Thus, in view of the value of gaining more insight into perceptions of news media importance and
noting that the concept is underdeveloped in scholarly literature, another goal of this dissertation is to further develop and validate a measure for perceived news media importance (PNMI).

Developing and validating a measure of PNMI can subsequently set the stage for gaining a better understanding of the complex relationship between news parody commentary and media trust. For instance, perhaps the media criticism that is embedded in news parody fosters perceptions of news media importance, which in turn influences elements of media trust (a mediating effect). Alternatively, perhaps news parody commentary’s potential effect on media trust is contingent upon existing perceptions of media importance (a moderating effect). Or maybe basic agreement with the key arguments of a news parody message (perhaps not explicitly related to the topic of the press) promotes more acceptance of the underlying premise embedded in news parody: that the news is important.

Taken together, this project is broadly guided by three basic aims—all designed to forge a stronger understanding of news parody’s influence on citizen-based perceptions of news media. First, this research effort explores the consequences of exposure to news parody—in terms of (a) explicit media criticism and (b) being in agreement with the parody message—as influencing three types of media trust assessments at different levels of specificity. Second, this project examines the effects of news parody commentary on media trust as influenced by the mediating or moderating role of Perceived News Media Importance (PNMI). Finally, to facilitate an investigation of PNMI vis-à-vis news parody and media trust, this project develops and validates a measure for gauging personal valuations of normative news media functions (PNMI). To this end, two studies were
conducted. The first study involved administering two stages of surveys to facilitate the formal explication, development, and validation of a PNMI measure. The second study relied on an experimental design to test news parody’s influence on various forms and levels of media trust, relative to PNMI.

The chapters that follow serve to lay a foundation for this research agenda. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the key concepts, theoretical frameworks, and related scholarship at the base of this project. An introduction of the study’s key hypotheses and research questions concludes the chapter. Chapter 3 outlines the research designs and methods used to address the hypotheses and research questions of Study 1, followed by a summary of the Study 1 results. Similarly, Chapter 4 provides an overview of the Study 2 experiments, including a summary of the experimental findings. Finally, Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the results, consideration of the project’s limitations, potential future research directions, and concluding remarks.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Foundation

News Media Perceptions

This research is built on the proposition that an individual’s perception of news media importance may help to clarify when and/or how news parody’s commentary is likely to influence news media trust. In order build the case for how PNMI can strengthen a scholarly understanding of the public’s perceptions of news media, it is helpful to first turn to consideration of different types of media perceptions. Over the last 40 years a significant body of research has addressed citizens’ attitudes and beliefs about news media—whether individual journalists, news organizations, or even contrasting news media platforms (e.g., newspapers, online news, broadcast news) (Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Gronke & Cooke, 2007; Jones, 2004; Ladd, 2012; Kiousis, 2001; Moy & Pfau, 2001; Mulder, 1980; Rimmer & Weaver, 1987). This broad research area has employed a variety of conceptual approaches to investigate different types of news media perceptions, including perceptions of how news media work (i.e., “media images”) and perceptions of how credible or trustworthy the news media are (i.e., media trust).

In overview, this chapter offers an examination of two key media perceptions identified by extant scholarship—(1) media images and (2) media trust—accompanied by an examination of a variety of potential influences on public perceptions of the news media. This review of media perceptions ultimately demonstrates the need for further
developing the news media importance concept, which in turn can provide insight into how news parody can contribute to shaping perceptions of media trust.

**Media images**

One way in which media scholars have investigated the ideas that people hold about how the news media work is through the concept of “media images” (Kosicki & McLeod, 1990). Media images are the relatively stable and implicit lay theories that the public retains about the news media and how news media work (Fredin & Kosicki, 1989)—even as many people have limited knowledge about how the news media operate (Becker, Whitney, & Collins, 1980). Fredin, Kosicki, and Becker (1996) explain that media images are different from global, like/dislike attitudes regarding news media. That is, media images function as a type of schema—a knowledge structure used to process, organize, and make inferences about events or behaviors (Wicks, 1992). Although media images can include summary attitudes/beliefs, these broad knowledge structures can include a variety of other attitudes and beliefs (Fredin & Kosicki, 1989).

Images identified by research in this domain include *news information quality* (i.e., the news as accurate, complete, responsible), *patterning of news* (i.e., does the news reveal meaningful patterns), *special interests* (i.e., an image of news media as a tool of special interests), *dependency and control* (i.e., the news media is too powerful), and *negative aspects of content* (e.g., biased news, bad news, sensationalistic news) (Kosicki & McLeod, 1990). Although not heavily used in mass communication research, the media images approach highlights the complexity and diversity of knowledge structures about how the press operate and function in society.
Media trust

Compared to the conceptual framework of media images, a more dominant approach used for investigating the public’s perceptions of the news media is media trust. As conceptualized within this project, news media trust refers to multi-faceted assessments of news media’s selectivity function for fulfilling expectations in the future. To provide a comprehensive understanding of this important concept, the following sections expound on the three key components of this definition.

Assessments of News Media

The first key component of this study’s conception of media trust pertains to evaluations of news media actors. Media trust can be understood as a judgment as to whether or not to label a news media entity as trustworthy or not (Vanacker & Belmas, 2009). Importantly, a trust evaluation needs to be directed toward another moral agent in order to qualify as “trust” (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Even though we may find a given piece information to be credible, we place trust in people, not information (Vanacker & Belmas, 2009). As Lewis and Weigert (1985) argue, “individuals would have no occasion or need to trust apart from social relationships” (p. 969). Importantly, the object of a subjective trust evaluation can pertain to an individual journalist, a particular news outlet, or the news media as a political institution. However, even though a news outlet or the press as an institution are not necessarily represented by an individual moral agent, one intuitively understands that a collective of moral agents ultimately operate a given news organization and the news media as a whole.

It is also notable that a trust assessment involves elements of subjectivity and personal responsibility. In line with Gunther’s (1992) contention that media attributes like
credibility can be understood as an audience member perception—and not an objective trait of that which is being judged—I conceptualize media trust assessments as the subjective evaluations on the part of news audiences. In this regard, Vanacker and Belmas (2009) point out that a certain level of personal responsibility is involved in trust assessments—a responsibility of the trustor “to use the information at hand to come to reasonable conclusions” (Vanacker & Belmas, 2009, p. 112). In this light, when analyzing the larger ramifications of declining media trust, citizens’ agency might also be considered. Trust is not solely dependent on the performance and traits of the trust object.

**Multifaceted Selectivity Function**

The second component of this project’s media trust conception focuses on the news media’s basic work of selecting and reporting information. Importantly, trust in the news media’s selectivity function can relate to a variety of news media qualities. News media trust can refer to, for instance, the objectivity, fairness, and credibility of news media producers as they select and report information. Notably, scholars have devoted a great deal of attention to the concept of credibility in particular, which principally pertains to believability (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000), along with perceptions of accuracy, bias, and thoroughness. The conceptual similarities between trust and credibility have resulted in the two concepts commonly being treated as synonymous, but trust involves more than credibility. Again, trust in news media broadly pertains to faith in the selectivity function of journalists (Kohring & Matthes, 2007), which encompasses not only issues of whether news media provide fair, unbiased, and accurate information, but also whether the news media entities are primarily motivated by the common good rather than self-interests. In addition, the selectivity function can relate to the use of sound
judgment in selecting stories and information, providing proper emphasis, and offering well-founded commentary.

**Fulfill Expectations in the Future**

Finally, media trust is future oriented. It pertains to one’s confidence that news media will meet certain expectations, such as providing informative, fair, accurate, thoughtful, and/or comprehensive news content. Accordingly, Citrin and Muste (1999) explain that trust involves an act of faith, as news consumers often do not know much about the journalists they rely on for news content. Given that most news consumers are generally unable to independently assess the veracity of a given news story, trust in the news media “always involves an unavoidable element of risk and potential doubt” (Lewis & Weigert, 1995, p. 968)—the risk of wasting time, money, social capital, personal credibility, and other resources by relying on news content. In sum, because of the uncertainty and risk inherent in news use, media trust involves future-oriented faith in the selectivity functions of news media. It necessitates some level of confidence that the press will ably provide truthful, relevant, and fair depictions of the world.

**Dimensions of News Media Trust**

Situated within a definition of media trust as *assessments of the news media’s multi-faceted selectivity function in fulfilling expectations in the future*, it is useful to emphasize that media trust can be conceptualized as referencing the news media as an institution (e.g., Tsfati & Cappella, 2003), distinct media platforms (e.g., Dugan, 2014), or individual news media outlets (e.g., Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Notably, media trust research tends to focus on trust in the broad sense (i.e., faith in the news media industry), but trust need not be restricted to a general level; the object of news media trust can vary
in its specificity.

*Types* of media trust can also vary. Herein, media trust is conceptualized as principally pertaining to the three fundamental aspects of news media work: faith in (1) the believability, (2) judgment, and (3) altruistic motives of the news media. All three of these dimensions are undergirded by the *selectivity function* of journalists. Kohring and Matthes (2007) argue that the press’s selectivity function is often overlooked, eliding how the press is not simply a conduit of information, supposedly mirroring the realities of the surrounding world. Instead, the press ‘construct reality’ (Tuchman, 1978) by actively making choices about *what* to report (and not report) and *how* to report the information. Therefore, a proper conceptualization of trust needs to encompass the various facets of how and why news media select information.

**Believability**

This dimension broadly aligns with the believability dimension of credibility developed by Gaziano and McGrath (1986) and later modified by Meyer (1988). The believability dimension of media trust refers to expectations and confidence that those who select the news content that one relies on are believable; that a given media entity will reliably provide truthful, accurate, fair, factual, and unbiased information. Notably, in today’s media environment, one of the most common critiques leveled against the news media is that it is politically biased (Domke, Watts, & Shah, 1999; Gunther, 1992; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). This charge is particularly common among conservatives, claiming a liberal bias (Lee, 2005; Research Center, 2012a). Given the ubiquity of the ‘mainstream liberal media’ notion, the believability dimension of media trust has perhaps drawn the most scholarly attention.
News Judgment

The second key type of media trust pertains to faith in *journalistic judgment*. Trust in news judgment involves expectations related to journalistic tasks like selecting essential and important information, providing an appropriate level of attention, and offering sound commentary. Of course judgment is also necessary when a journalist ascertains what information is accurate, true, and so forth—the domain of the believability dimension. I posit that what distinguishes news judgment from believability is that the news judgment dimension refers to how journalists *choose* to use the information at their disposal. Believability centers more on expectations of whether reporters will present true and verifiable information. A journalist can present true information in a relatively evenhanded manner, but it does not necessarily follow that the journalist is exercising good judgment in choosing what information to present.

Gatekeeping trust (see Pingree, Quenette, Tchernev, & Dickinson, 2013) is an example of a trust conceptualization linked to assessments of the news judgment function. As Pingree et al. (2013) point out, trust in the judgment of news actors to adequately cover important issues may not always be a desirable form of trust from a normative perspective. Particularly in terms of understanding how journalists select news content, perhaps people can be overly trusting.

Altruistic Motives

The altruistic motives dimension of media trust refers to perceptions of news media motivations relative to society’s common good and an individual’s self interest. This dimension represents trusting that news media actors are prioritizing the well-being of their surrounding communities and society-at-large as they purvey information, as well
as perceiving whether journalists/news organizations are primarily motivated by self-interest. As Cappella and Jamieson (1997) argue, “the public’s perceptions of the motivations of actors are what determines their trustworthiness” (p. 142). Alternatively described as the “community affiliation” dimension of credibility—as articulated by Meyer (1988)—this type of trust pertains to questions such as whether the news media care more about being the first to report a story or being accurate in reporting a story (see Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). In the U.S. context, one might argue that the altruistic motives dimension can be an especially naïve form of trust, given the commercialized nature of news (Baldasty, 1992), wherein news organizations are prioritizing profits, not altruism.

In summary, media images (i.e., conceptions of how the news media work) and media trust (i.e., assessments of the news media’s trustworthiness) represent two dominant ways in which scholars explore public perceptions about the news media. We now turn to various conceptions of what type of factors can influence such perceptions of the news media.

**What Influences News Media Perceptions?**

Building on the above-discussed conceptions of media perceptions (i.e., media images and media trust), another key question to address is what factors contribute to activating and shaping news media perceptions. Below I posit that flawed news media content and behavior (e.g., Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Fallows, 1996), individual differences (e.g., Lee, 2005; Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998), various structural factors (e.g., Ladd, 2012; Graber & Dunaway, 2015), and the prevalence of media criticism (e.g., Fan, Wyatt, & Keltner, 2001) all likely contribute to how the news media are perceived. Moreover, as a form of media criticism, I argue that news parody may be one meaningful
source of influence on media perceptions that is not yet well understood by scholars. The following section of this chapter builds the case for this argument by briefly examining these potential influences on news media perceptions as identified by extant scholarship.

**News Media Practices and Norms**

One plausible influence on perceptions of news media actors is the way the press covers public affairs. Perhaps citizens are basing their attitudes and opinions about the news media on declining journalistic standards. Some scholars argue that by increasingly emphasizing the negative and the sensational (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 1999; Patterson, 1993) and privileging coverage of political strategy over actual policy (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), the press contributes to creating a climate of frustration and distrust in political institutions (Robinson, 1975). In turn, as Cappella and Jamieson (1997) reason, the public’s cynicism about politics and the government “may have attached itself to the bearers of information about those institutions—the news media themselves” (p. 209).

**News Media Mistakes**

Beyond the scope of general journalistic norms and practices, the influence of media content can also relate to specific instances of news coverage in which members of the press or a news organization makes glaring mistakes, which in turn may undermine trust in journalists more broadly (Barnett, 2008). For instance, when NBC news anchor Brian Williams was suspended by NBC in early 2015 after he falsely claimed on air that he was in a military helicopter that was attacked in Iraq in 2003. Or when CNN and Fox News falsely reported a landmark Supreme Court verdict in 2012 (they originally reported that the individual mandate within a health care reform law was struck down, when the mandate had in fact survived). Or when the *New York Post* falsely identified
suspects in the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings in a front-page photo. Perhaps the accumulation of such failures fosters increased skepticism of news media sources.

**Unmet Citizen Needs**

Perceptions of news media may also be influenced by the unmet needs of the citizenry. That is, perhaps the public perceives that the news media are not sufficiently serving their interests. Following the 1988 presidential campaign, numerous journalists and scholars launched a public/civic journalism “movement” calling for the news media to better “frame the news in a way that invites people into civic activity and political conversation” (Rosen, 2000, p. 680). Participants in this ongoing movement contend that members of the news media too often “[do] journalism for journalists” (Rosen, 2000, p. 683)—for example, focusing on the ‘horserace’ dynamics of a campaign (i.e., who’s ahead and behind; the strategies being used to win) at the expense of discussing substantive and relevant issues at stake in an election. Existing research indeed suggests some disparities between what the public finds to be important in news work and what journalists themselves prioritize (e.g., see Chung, 2009; Gladney, 1996; Van der Wurff & Schoenbach, 2014).

**Media Literacy**

Another explanation for the declining favorability in citizens’ perceptions of the news media is that news audiences are changing. Baym (2010) argues that in contrast to the era of when Walter Cronkite was anchoring a news desk, today’s audiences bring a postmodern approach to the news, marked by an “epistemological relativism that rejects the possibility of objectivity while suspecting that all normative standards are culturally located and historically contingent” (p. 15). Accordingly, the expertise traditionally
attributed to journalists now carries less weight. Peters (2013) also cites an epistemological shift in which news consumers are now more likely to question the cultural authority of the news media as privileged producers of public knowledge. Peters suggests this is because citizens are more educated about the news media. That is, as compared to 50 years ago, the public is more “media literate,”—more knowledgeable about how the news media work.² Peters notes that, “higher levels of media literacy amongst the public seem to parallel lower degrees of trust in journalism” (p. 176). In short, this line of reasoning casts today’s news consumers as less naïve about the shortcomings and frailties of the press. It is notable, however that Vraga, Tully, and Rojas (2009) found in an experimental context that exposure to a media literacy presentation³ reduced perceptions of media bias—suggesting that media literacy does not necessarily lead to reduced media trust. In fact it may bolster it. Yet even if lower trust is generally associated with increased media literacy, lower levels of trust in this context may not be entirely problematic. As Schudson (2013) notes, “democracies can erode from having levels of trust too high, as well as too low” (p. 196).

**Individual Bias**

Bias on the part of news consumers may also play a role in shaping news media perceptions. A long line of research demonstrates that people tend to view news coverage as unfair and biased against their own views and political attachments—even as no bias

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² More formally, media literacy relates to one’s ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages in their varied forms (Livingstone, 2004; Silverblatt, 2001).

³ The presentation involved a 3-minute PowerPoint slide presentation about news processes, how audiences interpret news, and the value of incorporating a diversity of voices in the media content.
may actually exist. Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985) identified this pattern as the “hostile media phenomenon.” The effect has been demonstrated to be particularly evident among individuals with high involvement in a group (Gunther, 1992) and/or those highly motivated by ideology/partisanship (Lee, 2010). For example, Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt (1998) found that citizens with stronger partisan views were more likely to consider the media as unfair. Although the hostile media effect is evident across the ideological spectrum, perceptions of media bias and believability seem to be particularly strong among conservatives (Pew Research Center, 2012a). For instance, Lee (2005) finds that strong conservatives and Republicans are more likely to distrust the media, even if the news content is relatively balanced.

Notably, perceptions of media bias may not hold consistently across all news sources—particularly the sources that a person relies on most. A Pew Research Center (2011) study, for example, reported that although a lowly 25% of its respondents said the “news organizations in general” get the facts straight, a substantially higher portion of the sample, 62%, said that the news organization they use most gets facts straight (Pew Research Center, 2011, p. 14).

Such data underscore how people often process information and evaluate credibility in ways that allow them to maintain a favorable opinion of the self, avoiding blatant contradictions in beliefs and behavior. Avoidance of cognitive disharmony is often described in terms of cognitive dissonance theory, which stipulates that when people’s beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors are at odds in some way (i.e., dissonant), people are motivated to reduce the dissonance (Festinger, 1957). The theory of motivated reasoning is also helpful for understanding the nature of biased cognitive processing.
The motivated reasoning framework explains that although people are motivated to arrive at accurate conclusions, they are more likely to arrive at the conclusions they want to, in an effort to maintain cognitive consistency with their predispositions. This desire for consistency with one’s predispositions prompts individuals to assimilate information in biased ways (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979).

With regard to evaluating the credibility of news media sources, it is not difficult to see how survey respondents might feel psychological discomfort by (implicitly) stating that the news source(s) they use most heavily do not generally “get the facts straight.” If individuals are motivated by a desire to maintain positive self-perceptions (Bem, 1972), then they likely want to believe they are exercising good judgment when selecting their news sources. In this sense, the theoretical framework of motivated reasoning helps to explain why citizens may not be as critical of the news sources they personally turn to, as compared to the news media in general.

**Media Competition**

On a broader level, structural changes to the news media environment may help shape news media distrust (Graber & Dunaway, 2014). That is, increased competition among news media organizations may also contribute to shaping media perceptions. Ladd (2012) argues that part of the blame for negative attitudes toward the press can be attributed to fierce competition between political parties in the context of a high choice media environment. As partisan media voices and outlets (e.g., partisan talk radio and cable news channels) continue to proliferate and propagate their ideologies, criticism of opposing media discourse also intensifies—arguably fueling widespread mistrust of the news media. From another perspective, Graber and Dunaway (2014) posit that media
competition in today’s high-choice media environment results in low-quality news content and less professionalism on the part of journalists, thereby fostering greater distrust of the news media. In short, competition for revenue in an increasingly fragmented media environment may also contribute to low confidence in the news media.

**Elite Rhetoric**

In a similar vein, some scholars attribute negative assessments of the press to elite rhetoric voiced in mass media (e.g., Mutz, 2015). Given that people commonly model behavior after mass media content (Bandura, 2001) and take political cues from political elites (Zaller, 1990), it stands to reason that public opinions regarding the press are partly due to the rhetoric of elites in mass media. Indeed, some scholars posit that the persistent efforts of elite political figures to blame the press for problems in the political system may have taken hold in the public consciousness (Ladd, 2010; Watts, Domke, & Shah, 1999). For instance, Rosen (2012) argues that former Vice President Sprio Agnew’s well-known 1969 critique of the news media as being comprised of liberals “who do not represent the views of America” (para. 5) resonates even more strongly today—especially among conservatives—as a result of political elites repeatedly accusing the mainstream news media of having a liberal bias (see also Domke, Watts, & Shah, 1999).

Furthermore, Watts, Domke, Shah, and Fan (1999) suggest that perceptions of a liberal media bias can be attributed to “elite cues” about the media, involving both the news media’s self-coverage of media bias and conservative elites who persistently characterize the media industry as liberal (Watts, Domke, Shah, & Fan, 1999). Beyond accusations of a liberal bias, of course, the news media are frequently critiqued by elites from both the
political left and right (Lee, 2010; McChesney & Scott, 2004)—not to mention perspectives that transcend ideological affiliations.

**Media Criticism**

Similar to elite rhetoric, media criticism emanating from the news media itself may contribute to influencing citizens’ perceptions of the news media. Numerous scholars discuss how press “metacoverage” (Esser & D’Angelo, 2003) has increased in recent decades (Kerbel, 1999). Esser and D’Angelo (2003) define press metacoverage as “coverage of the presence, behaviors, products, and roles of the news media, journalists, and other media personnel” (p. 619). Although press metacoverage may not always be critical in nature, it often does include critiques of the news media (Haas, 2006). For instance, National Public Radio’s weekly program, *On the Media*, offers a strong dose of news media critiques. Cable news channels also air weekly programs like *Reliable Sources* (hosted by CNN’s Brian Stetler) and *MediaBuzz* (hosted by Howard Kurtz on Fox News), which regularly critique journalistic conduct. Notably, newspaper columns and journalism reviews like *The Columbia Journalism Review* and the *American Journalism Review* also offer self-criticism of the press.

Haas (2006) posits that news media self-criticism may be attributable to the erosion of mainstream journalists’ cultural authority, weakened by the emergence of alternative, web-based news providers and the various news media scandals of recent decades (e.g., the fallout of Jayson Blair at *The New York Times*). Today’s 24-hour news cycle may also contribute increased self-referential reportage, wherein the large news hole and the competiveness of the cable news landscape prompts much commentary and interpretation about existing news coverage (including news about the media industry
itself) rather than reporting on stories generated from independent news gathering and fact verification (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). Given the pressures of time and resources in cable news programming, metacoverage is cheaper to produce and caters to appetites for opinionated news content. In terms of the effects of self-referential coverage like media criticism, research suggests that the news media self-reportage can have a negative effect on the public’s confidence in the press (Fan, Wyatt, & Keltner, 2001). Furthermore, experimental research offers evidence of news media criticism having an influence on trust in the gatekeeping functions of the news media (Pingree, Quenette, Tchernev, & Dickinson, 2013).

**News Parody as Media Criticism**

Against this backdrop of scholarly considerations regarding what influences media perceptions like media trust and media images, we can now more deeply consider an increasingly prominent source of elite criticism about the news media: *news parody*. An examination of news parody will provide a foundation for this study’s core argument that news parody can influence media perceptions by broadly functioning as a form of media criticism. Although news parody is not a new phenomenon (Day & Thompson, 2012), this form of political humor is today most prominently typified by television comedy outlets like *The Daily Show*, *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, or the now defunct *Colbert Report*. Of course judgment of what constitutes “elite” is subjective, but I contend that such comedy sources can be characterized as *elite* in the sense that satirists like Jon Stewart have gained considerable cultural authority over the last decade (Carlson & Peifer, 2013; Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2009). The increasingly privileged cultural position of satirists was on display, for example, in 2010 when Stewart and Colbert
organized a rally in Washington D.C. that drew tens of thousands of people (Carlson & Peifer, 2013).

Moreover, the elite rhetoric of news parody like *The Daily Show* can be understood as a form of media criticism (see also Borden & Tew, 2007; Morris & Baumgartner, 2008). As described by Carlson (2009), media criticism consists of “challenges to journalism’s practices and norms” (p. 259). Even as contemporary media criticism stems from a long tradition of challenging the press (Goldstein, 2007; McChesney & Scott, 2004), forms of media criticism continue to evolve (e.g., Vos, Craft, & Ashley, 2012). *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* exemplify one facet of media criticism’s evolution, as “both overt and implicit media criticism are built into the DNA of [these] shows” (Lichter, Baumgartner, & Morris, 2014, p. 117). The argument that satirical voices commonly function as media critics is supported by empirical research. For instance a Pew Research Center (2008) content analysis of select *The Daily Show* episodes in 2007 found that 8% of the program’s content consisted of segments about the press and news—more than double the mainstream press’s coverage of news media (see also Brewer & Marquardt, 2007; Steinberg & Fox, 2014; Wise & Brewer, 2010). But before considering the influence of news parody (functioning as a form of media criticism) on perceptions of the news media, it is helpful to first provide deeper consideration of the parody concept.

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4 Though not confined to news parody outlets, Lichter, Baumgartner, and Morris’s (2014) content analysis of more than 100,000 political humor jokes from 1992 to 2011 indicates that “[close to] 3 percent of the jokes…catalogued target journalism or the media more generally” (p. 115).
Defining Parody

Parody can be defined as a form of discourse that on one level *imitates* a cultural object or practice, while—on another level—also *reworks* the traits/practices being parodied, thereby offering a form of commentary about the object of the parody. More succinctly, parody is “repetition with difference” (Hutcheon, 1985, p. 101). The ‘repetition with difference’ framework serves as an important starting point in defining parody because it spotlights how both similarity and intentional difference contribute to animating parody, setting parody apart from mere mimicry or—in a more deceptive vein—plagiarism, forgery, and being an impostor (Morson, 1989).

More specifically, the *similarity* component of parody points to a key implication of the concept: to recognize and appreciate parody’s replication, one greatly benefits from contextual, background knowledge. That is, people make sense of parody through what they already know. This feature is commonly discussed in terms of “intertextuality” (e.g., Brewer, Young, & Morreale, 2013; Landreville & LaMarre, 2013; Gray, 2005). Fiske (1987) explains that intertextuality refers to how “any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and that a range of textual knowledge is brought to bear upon it” (p. 108). Hence, in order for a parody to be most fully understood and appreciated, one needs to be able to draw from a larger body of knowledge about the object or practice being referenced by the parody message. Taking note of parody’s strong reliance on intertextuality serves to highlight how enjoyment of parody is driven, in part, by a “pleasure of recognition” (Gray, 2005)—the pleasure of recognizing what is being imitated.
Repetition is necessary but not sufficient for an imitative act to be considered parody. As noted above, the *difference* component of a parody message also animates the nature of one’s engagement with parody. To qualify as parody, aspects of the parody target (e.g., a trait, behavior, or some convention) should be reworked and “in some respect, antithetical to its target” (Morson, 1989, p. 67). In so doing, the inversion presented by parody’s double-voiced discourse renders a form of commentary about the object of the parody. As with humor in a general sense, parody “lets us see the familiar defamiliarized” (Critchley, 2002, p. 10), such that parody’s reworkings shed new light on the object of the parody. Absent such commentary, parody’s replication would be little more than pastiche—a mere imitation of style (Jameson, 1984; Gray, 2005). Notably, the commentary offered by a parody may not be negative in nature. Hutcheon (1985) argues that the thrust of parody’s commentary “need not be present in the form of ridiculing laughter for [it] to be called parody” (p. 6). That is, parody’s commentary can be critical and sympathetic (Rose, 1993). It can implicitly endorse or pay homage to the parody’s target, or subvert and mock the target. This point is important in consideration of how parody may influence news media perceptions. Even as a given parody may critique news media practices and norms, it may also simultaneously endorse and be sympathetic to the news media enterprise as a whole, underscoring the value of the news media even as it critiques.

**Genre v. Object-specific Parody**

Parody can take aim at a singular entity’s style, behavior, and mannerisms. Alternatively, it can comment on widespread cultural practices and conventions. In this light, a broad distinction between two types of parody can be made: *genre parody* and
Object-specific parody. Object-specific parody refers to parody representations that target, for instance, specific political figures or a singular cultural text. In contrast, genre parody refers to parodic representations that target the conventions, form, and style of broader discourse genres (see Morson, 1989, p. 74). Political comedy outlets like The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, The Onion, and Last Week Tonight with John Oliver can all be characterized as genre parodies, in the sense that they loosely imitate the news media genre and its conventions—conventions like the news anchor desk, dramatic headlines, the use of “talking heads,” field reports, and editorializing.

Moreover, political comedy programs like The Daily Show are often described as “news parody” (Baym & Jones, 2012) or “fake news” (Day & Thompson, 2012). Through their imitations, news parodies can offer perceptive commentary about news media practices. As Baym (2005) argues, news parodies invite audiences “to examine, evaluate, and re-situate the [television news] genre and its practices. The parody pieces may generate a laugh, but their deeper thrust is subversion, an attack on the conventions and pretensions of television news” (p. 269).

News parody often has considerable overlap with satire, although notably, satire and parody are not the same thing. Satire’s driving force is a mode of attack through humor (Knight, 2004), whereas parody’s underlying commentary is not necessarily aggressive (Hutcheon, 1985). The satirist is discontent with a given state of affairs in the world and plays the role of the “skeptical and bemused observer” (Knight, 2004, p. 3). Moreover, the satirist’s judgmental attacks through humor are motivated by a goal to reform some aspect of society (Ziv, 2010). In this sense, much political humor can be
described as “positive negativity” (Schutz, 1977, p. 297), wherein the larger purpose “is not negativity but positive change” (Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009, p. 12).

While recognizing the distinctions between parody and satire for the sake of conceptual clarity, parody is nonetheless often used in the service of satire. Particularly in terms of today’s dominant news parody shows, it is often entirely accurate to characterize news parody as satire. Indeed, comedy programs like The Colbert Report and Last Week Tonight can be interpreted as being propelled by a desire to improve news media practices and norms.

To reiterate, given that news parody commonly has a satirical edge—that is, it is an attacking form of humor with ameliorative impulse and implicitly focused on societal issues—I work from the premise that news parody broadly functions as a form of media criticism (see also Borden & Tew, 2007). Like news media criticism more generally, beyond the scope of political humor, news parody often offers up challenges to news media practices and norms, implicitly and explicitly communicating a desire for news media actors to perform better. Recall that content analyses reveal that The Daily Show—the vanguard of news parody programming—places a strong focus on the news media and its practices (Brewer & Marquardt, 2007; Pew Research Center, 2008; Steinberg & Fox, 2014). Anecdotally speaking, news parody outlets like The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore, Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, The Onion, and others demonstrate a similar focus.

**News Parody’s Influence**

With this conceptual background in view, I argue that news parody’s commentary (whether implicit or explicit) about the news media can have meaningful implications in
terms of shaping perceptions of the news media. Importantly, asserting that news parody frequently functions as a form of media criticism is not to say that news parody will consistently *negatively* influence people’s perceptions of the news media. It is plausible that news parody can actually function as an endorsement of the news media’s importance. That is, even as a news parody segment may offer critical commentary about news media practices and norms, it may implicitly communicate an argument that the work of the news media nonetheless deeply matters.\(^5\) To lay the groundwork for an exploration of potential influences of news parody, an examination of existing news parody research is in order.

**Research on News Parody’s Influence on Media Trust**

Extant empirical evidence of news parody’s influence on media perceptions is mixed. For instance, Morris and Baumgartner’s (2008) investigation of *TDS*’s influence demonstrated that experimental exposure to the show resulted in a stronger likelihood of having a negative view of the news media’s ability to cover political events fairly and accurately. Similarly, Holbert et al. (2007) found that exposure to *TDS* prior to viewing traditional mainstream news coverage can negatively influence the self-reported gratifications obtained (e.g., using news media “to keep up with the main issues of the day”) from watching a conventional news outlet (CNN News).\(^6\)

Such findings suggest that satire messages involving commentary about the news media can negatively influence the public’s trust in news media. However, other studies

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\(^5\) Note that news parody programs like *The Daily Show*, the now defunct *Colbert Report*, and the recently debuted *The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore* commonly invite journalists to appear on the shows, thereby implicitly attributing a certain level of credibility to the journalism industry.

\(^6\) Although the dependent variable here was not media trust, per se, this gratifications obtained variable broadly parallels trust in news.
provide less support for this notion. For example, Guggenheim, Kwak, & Campbell’s (2011) analysis indicates that self-reported satirical news parody exposure is not a significant predictor of distrust in media (p. 301). In addition, a field experiment conducted by Brewer, Young, and Jones (2013) found that being instructed to watch *TDS* for several nights in a row significantly predicted *positive* evaluations of the news media as fair and unbiased.

Simply put, extant research is equivocal regarding the potential effects of news parody. Even as news parody critics like Hart and Hartelius (2007) charge that that Jon Stewart and comedians of his ilk “make cynicism attractive” (p. 263), it is not clear that news parody’s comedic commentary about the press consistently undermines faith in the press. Nonetheless, there is reason to expect that news parody—particularly when explicitly critiquing the news media—will tend to generate unfavorable perceptions of the news media. The next sections outline several mechanisms that may help to explain news parody’s (hypothesized) negative effect.

**The Influence of Likeminded News Parody**

One potential avenue for helping clarify the influence of news parody is consideration of like-minded political humor effects. While it can be tempting to think of the media in general—and news parody in particular—as having powerful, direct effects on audiences, communication scholars have long understood that most media effects are typically nuanced and indirect. Potent and direct media effects are hardly commonplace. As McLeod, Kosicki, and McLeod (2009) note, “political communication effects research provides ample evidence that media impact is likely to be conditional rather than universal” (p. 238). Political entertainment’s influence is no exception in this regard.
Within the scope of political humor, one useful initial framework for considering political parody’s nuanced influence is the concept of the satiric triad (Simpson, 2003). Conceptualizing satire as a “discursive practice,” the satiric triad concept highlights how a satirical message involves the interplay of three main actors: the source of the satire (the satirist), the recipient of the satire (the satiree) and the target of the satire (the satirized). This framework illustrates that satire’s influence is not solely dependent the qualities of the satirical message. Rather, the satiree’s predisposition toward the message source—the satirist—can also influence the success of a satire message. Some level of trust and respect between the satirist and satire is generally necessary in order for the satire to be enjoyable and effective. Moreover, Simpson (2003) points out that satire is “misfired” (p. 8) when the audience is not in agreement with the satirist about the basic “truth” of the satirical message or whether the satirical commentary is justified. In this sense the satiric triad underscores the usefulness of considering, at a fundamental level, the extent to which an audience member is in agreement with the basic premise of a given news parody message (along with a given audience member’s disposition toward the source of news parody).

To be sure, the principle of a pro-attitudinal parody humor message being particularly influential is not unique to the satiric triad or humor message types. Persuasion researchers have long pointed out that source and message factors strongly influence how individuals process persuasive messages (e.g., Hovland, Janis, & Kelly, 1953; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The idea that one’s attitude about a given message topic will influence reception of the message is also addressed by the previously-noted theory of motivated reasoning. To reiterate, this theoretical framework posits that individuals are
motivated by “directional goals”—that is, a motivation to reach a preferred conclusion (Kunda, 1990; Lodge & Taber, 2000). Consequently, people tend to process messages through the lens of prior attitudes/beliefs (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). Furthermore, if a given message (humorous or otherwise) is generally counter-attitudinal for a message recipient, that individual is more prone to deeply scrutinize, misinterpret, discount, or perhaps altogether ignore the arguments(s) of the message (Festinger, 1957). For instance, research suggests that information that is inconsistent with a preferred conclusion produces more counter-arguing thoughts than does information associated with a preferred conclusion (Ditto & Lopez, 1992). Similarly, research suggests that attitude-discrepant arguments tend to be scrutinized longer than pro-attitudinal arguments (Edwards & Smith, 1996). Such message processing effects can subsequently influence the efficacy of a persuasive message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Directing this line of reasoning (i.e., that pro-attitudinal messages are more favorably and less critically received than counterattitudinal messages) to a news parody messages, it is sensible to expect that the more one is in agreement with the basic argument of a news parody message, the more likely the message as a whole is appreciated, valued, and accepted. Indeed—in the realm of political humor—both common sense and empirical research suggest that people are more appreciative of pro-attitudinal political humor than counterattitudinal humor (Peifer & Holbert, in press). Moreover, agreeable humor content may draw less critical scrutiny from the humor recipient. Therefore, given that an underlying message of much news parody is that the core functions of the news media is meaningful (even while perhaps arguing that news media coverage is often flawed), we might expect that the more likeminded a news
parody message (whatever the central topic at hand may be), the more parody’s commentary about the news media—whether explicit or implied—is likely to influence one’s perceptions of the media. In sum, examining the extent to which a news parody message is likeminded could be a useful vantage point from which to build an understanding of news parody’s influence on various media perceptions.

**The Influence of Attitude Importance**

Another vantage point from which to clarify the mechanisms of news parody’s influence on media trust is that of *attitude importance*. In this context, the attitude object is the news media. A central argument of this research is that we can advance an understanding of the public’s faith in the press, as well as news parody’s influence on that faith, by exploring perceptions of the news media’s importance. Indeed, research repeatedly demonstrates that a person’s belief in a given topic’s importance commonly influences information processing, judgments, and behavior (Gunther, 1992; Krosnick, 1988). The classic *social judgment theory* (Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965) highlights this point. The theory—which principally pertains to dynamics of information processing and attitude change—explains that an individual’s *ego involvement* (i.e., the degree to which an attitude object is connected to one’s self-concept and core values) has a strong influence on how readily a person will accept or reject a related persuasive argument. Those with high ego-involvement related to a given issue are more likely to resist attitude change upon exposure to a persuasive message (especially when counterattitudinal).

When personal involvement is low, the potential for rejection of the persuasive message is diminished.

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7 It is worth acknowledging that attitude importance is not an entirely distinct from pro-attitudinal considerations—the topic of the previous section.
Social judgment theory’s ego-involvement concept underscores how attaching *importance* to a topic or attitude often has meaningful implications in terms of judgments and behavior related to the topic. Boninger, Krosnick, and Berent (1995) explain that, “to attach great personal importance to an attitude is to care passionately about it and to be deeply concerned about it” (p. 62). What might be the implications, then, of ‘caring’ about and being ‘concerned’ about the work of the news media? The consequences of attaching importance to the work of the news media likely depends—in part—on why one attaches importance to the news media.

Boninger, Krosnick, and Berent (1995) argue that attitude importance can be linked to three basic antecedents: self-interest, values, and social identification. Self-interest-based importance is linked to a belief of having meaningful personal stakes—generally in a material sense—in a given issue. For instance, if a person perceives that s/he stands to gain or lose personal power and material resources as a result of news media coverage, this person may attribute great importance to certain aspects of the news media. Values-based importance in contrast, pertains to a perception that the given topic is somehow relevant to one’s sense of how things *ought* to be (i.e., what one *values*) (Rokeach, 1968). An example of values-based attitude importance is when an individual attributes great importance to the news because of valuing being knowledgeable about what is happening in the world. The person holds a conviction that people generally *ought* to be well-informed citizens.

Finally, the social identification basis for attitude importance relates to identification with or membership in a group and how much the attitude object affects the group’s larger interests. Those who self-identify as politically conservative, for instance,
often complain that news media treat the Republicans less favorably than Democrats. Even as a conservative-minded individual may see limited personal relevance in the work of mainstream news media, such a person may nonetheless attach high importance—albeit, in a pessimistic sense—to news media work because of a belief that the press meaningfully hampers the Republican party’s ability to fully realize their goals.

As suggested by the examples offered above, different reasons for attributing importance to the news media can plausibly result in contrasting assessments of the media’s trustworthiness. For this reason it is difficult to predict a uniform influence of media importance on media trust. As suggested by Boninger, Krosnick, and Berent’s (1995) explanation of the antecedents to a topic’s personal importance, the effects can be propelled by different motivations. Even so, all things being equal, it reasonable to expect news parody’s implicit premise (i.e., that the work of the news media is important) can positively influence individuals’ valuations of the news media. Furthermore, it is plausible to expect that the more one believes in the importance of the press, the more sensitive one will be to shortcomings and flaws of the press, which can translate into low media trust.

In review, we have considered how news parody can function as a form of media criticism. It is posited that such criticism—particularly explicit criticism of the press—can influence faith in news media. We also considered how the degree to which a given parody message is simply found to be pro-attitudinal (regarding whatever topic the parody text is explicitly focused on) will also likely have a bearing on the extent to which a parody message influences attitude change. Finally, the role of attitude importance—regarding the importance of the news media—was identified a potentially crucial factor
for understanding both trust in the news media and news parody’s effect on media trust. In order to eventually test the possibility that (a) news parody can promote stronger attitudes about the importance of the news media and that (b) increased media importance can ultimately influence faith in the news media, a solid conceptualization of and measurement for news media importance is needed. Accordingly, the following sections offer further consideration of news media importance.

**Perceived News Media Importance**

Whereas media perceptions like “media trust” and “media images” largely relate to judgments of the press’s performance and conceptions of how the news media works, the media importance concept centers on the question of how much an individual fundamentally believes in the importance and personal relevance of the press. Employing the label of *perceived news media importance* (PNMI), I define PNMI as the *subjective judgments of personal importance and relevance that individuals attribute to the work of the news media*. ⁸ PNMI relates to the perceived significance of and respect for various news media functions, essentially addressing the question of whether a person fundamentally believes she needs the press, as it operates in today’s media landscape. Even though media scholars and cultural elites commonly assert the importance of the press (e.g., Schudson, 2008), many members of the public may not share this conviction. As Kosicki and McLeod (1990) note, “people, events, and the policies discussed in the news have direct or indirect consequences for our lives, but people vary in the degree to which they recognize this relevance” (p. 72).

To aid the development of this concept and subsequently advance an

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⁸ This concept is independent of any objective assessments of news media, hence the label *perceived* importance.
understanding of news parody’s influence on media trust, it is useful to first examine existing approaches to perceptions of news media importance. Although PNMI (as conceptualized here) has not been directly addressed by extant research, variations of the concept have certainly been employed by past scholarship.

**Evaluating Communication Modalities**

One way that scholars have examined the notion of media importance is via perceptions of communication platforms and channels. For instance, Pinkleton and Austin’s (2001; 2002) look at media importance in terms of how useful citizens find news information sources to be for obtaining political information—as related to analysis of variables like news media satisfaction, media use frequency, efficacy, cynicism, and political involvement. Pinkleton and Austin operationalize their media importance concept with a single item, instructing study participants to rate the importance of different sources of political information, such as television news, newspapers, radio news, conversations with family or friends, and radio talk shows (see also Austin & Pinkleton, 1999; Pfau et al., 1997). Pinkleton and Austin (2001) argue that this measure offers greater validity than traditional media exposure measures, explaining that “importance measures acknowledge that participants could use a medium such as newspapers infrequently but nevertheless consider them an important source of public affairs information on the occasions when they need it” (p. 327).

As Pinkleton and Austin (2001) point out, this conception of media importance (i.e., how important one deems different political communication mediums to be) is valuable for providing a more nuanced understanding of news media influence, improving upon the predictive power provided by simple media exposure and media
attention measures (see Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986). It does not rely on an assumption that frequency of media use reflects the value people ultimately attribute to news media. Notably, this conception of media importance is essentially one-dimensional, focusing on evaluations of political communication platforms (e.g., television news versus newspaper) rather than on multi-faceted judgments about the news media’s societal functions.

**Evaluating Normative Functions of the Press**

In contrast to a conception of media importance in terms of modality, others do take a more multi-faceted approach, examining citizen expectations of the press and perceptions of various normative news media functions. For instance, Guo and Li’s (2011) exploration of the role of perceived media functions—in association with media use and news information processing strategies—focuses on judgments of what media “ought to do” (p. 52), pertaining to journalism’s role in supervising power, boosting economic development, educating people, and trying to influence what people think. Similarly, McLeod, Sotirovic, and Holbert (1998) also examined perceptions of news media functions, inquiring “what the public thinks the news media ought to pursue as social institutions” (p. 458). More specifically, McLeod, Sotirovic, and Holbert’s (1998) study focused on importance ratings for two dimensions of news media perceptions: consensual and pluralistic media functions. Consensual media functions relate to the role of news media as reinforcing consensus in society—related to goals for promoting economic development in the community and promoting social stability. In contrast, pluralistic functions refer to the role of the press as a watchdog on power, a venue for a diversity of viewpoints, and fostering strong political engagement and participation.
Another stream of research—in the domain of normative evaluations—seeks to identify expectations of the press and *which particular roles* of the news media are deemed more important than others. For instance, researchers have conducted a series of surveys since 1982 that examine how journalists themselves perceive the roles of the press, as well as which roles are most important to them (see Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007). The survey asks, for example, how important it is that journalists “be an adversary of public officials by being constantly skeptical of their actions” (p. 269). Four key roles of the press (based on the opinions of journalists) emerge in this body of work, including an interpretive/investigative role, disseminator, adversarial, and populist mobilizer (Weaver et al., 2007).

Others have conducted similar explorations of news media expectations, but from the perspective of citizens (e.g., Chung, 2009; Heider, McCombs, & Poindexter, 2005; Van der Wurff & Schoenbach, 2014)—pointing out that “research on what the audience thinks about journalistic roles and norms for news production are scarce” (Van der Wurff & Schoenbach, 2014, p. 436). This latter body of research identifies both overlap and divergences in terms of how journalists and the public rank the importance of different press roles. For instance, Heider, McCombs, and Poindexter (2005) highlight a significant gap between the perspective of the public and journalists on the importance of the press’s watchdog role; journalists deemed the watchdog role more important than news consumers did. Importantly, across both approaches (i.e., expectations of journalists versus those of the public), the key focus of the analyses is on *which* particular roles of the press are deemed most important, not how these roles function together.
Conceptual Gaps in Existing Approaches to Media Importance

In view of these existing conceptions and operationalizations of media importance, it is worthwhile considering how the concept may be underdeveloped and underutilized. Recall that I argue that PNMI is a meaningful perception because it can potentially clarify the significance of one’s trust in the news media. If one perceives that key functions of the press have little or limited value in the first place, a judgment of high trust may not be very meaningful. Indeed, a low rating of press importance is arguably more concerning than low trust in the media. To my knowledge, the above-discussed conceptions of media importance—whether evaluating the importance of political communication modalities, expectations of what the press should do, or ranking the various normative roles of the news media—have not been directly analyzed in relation to assessments of media trust. Furthermore, to the extent that the notion of media importance has been addressed in empirical news media research, focus on media importance is often secondary in nature, typically examined as an antecedent to or proxy of media use and attention. While analysis of media importance perceptions can indeed be useful for improving an understanding of news media use, I posit that the PNMI concept can be especially useful for elucidating public perceptions of the news media—augmenting a large body of existing research on media trust.

Perhaps more importantly, existing approaches to the media importance concept are limited in scope in terms of examining the *summative* perceived importance of the news media. Previous approaches to the media importance focus on what channels of information are important to an individual and which distinct roles the press should aspire to. However, this study’s conception of PNMI is positioned to explore *overall* judgments
of the press, particularly with regard to the personal importance that individuals attribute to a spectrum of press functions.

To be clear, this project’s conception of PNMI has overlap with the previous scholarly approaches to perceptions of media importance. Indeed, it seems unlikely that normative assessments of what the news media ought to do can be cleanly disentangled from how much one personally values and respects the work of and the societal functions of the news media. Even so, as opposed to being principally focused on assessing what the news media should be doing (a normative assessment), PNMI places emphasis to how much members of the public personally care about and value various key functions of the news media. Moreover, PNMI is principally conceptualized in summative terms, even as it can also be explored according to distinct dimensions.

**Key Functions of the Press**

In order to build a solid foundation for an examination of how PNMI may undergird media trust and perhaps even function as a mechanism of a news parody effect, it is imperative to explicate the concept beyond how it represented by existing research. To that end, this project’s conception of PNMI is grounded in Schudson’s (2008) inventory of what journalism offers to democracy. Although not necessarily an exhaustive inventory (for instance, news can function as entertainment; see Bertrand, 2000; Holbert, Weeks, & Esralew, 2013) Schudson identifies six primary functions that efficiently capture a broad range of roles that the news media has served or can serve in society. As compared to, for instance, the four key roles of the press highlighted by Weaver et al. (2007), Schudson’s (2008) inventory offers a broader framework for considering how the press serve citizens in a multiplicity of ways. These functions
include *information, investigation, analysis, social empathy, public forum, and mobilization*. The PNMI concept is tethered to these six functions, which are individually described below.

**Information**

The information function relates to the news media’s traditional charge to inform the public, providing citizens with “the information they need to be free and self-governing” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). This function can be understood in terms of keeping citizens abreast of governmental activity and providing awareness of what’s happening in one’s community/country/surrounding world.

**Investigation**

The investigation function speaks to the press’s adversarial role (Weaver et al., 2007), serving as a watchdog of those in power and keeping the powerful accountable. The investigation dimension can also be thought of, in part, as a surveillance function wherein the news media’s mere presence/ongoing observation serves as a safeguard against abuses of power (Schudson, 2008). The investigation function can also apply to news work that uncovers corruption and incompetence (i.e., weaknesses) of those in power and generally having a skeptical disposition toward those who wield authority and influence—propelled by the understanding that power can corrupt.

**Analysis**

Commonly discussed in terms of “explanatory journalism,” the analysis function refers to journalists providing coherent interpretations to help citizens make sense of the complexities of current events (Weaver et al., 2007). It involves explaining not simply what happened, but why and how it happened and what the future implications might be.
As Schudson (2008) notes, journalism of this type “articulates a silence or foregrounds what was background, making it thereby available for conversation and collective notice” (p. 17).

**Social Empathy**

The social empathy function pertains to fostering an appreciation for the experiences other people—especially those less advantaged than oneself. Schudson (2008) notes that while scholars do not commonly discuss this function, it is nonetheless a meaningful one. The motivation of this function is to open people’s eyes to the plight of others in one’s community, country, and world, whereby the press serves to foster compassionate understanding and remind citizens of a shared humanity. The social empathy function can be understood an appreciation for different types of human experiences—both the difficulties of those suffering some misfortune and the triumphs of the more fortunate.

**Public forum**

The public forum function refers to news media as a venue for dialogue and deliberation among citizens, facilitating communication of the perspectives of varied groups in society (Bertrand, 2000; Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009). This function is aligned with the tenets of the public/civic journalism movement, which promotes a form of journalism that invites people to engage in political conversation (Rosen, 2000, p. 680), stimulating substantive discussion of important social issues and representing a diversity of voices in news coverage.
**Mobilization**

The mobilization function represents the role of the news media to rally citizens to political activity and involvement (Weaver et al., 2007). This function is action-oriented. Though not necessarily linked to explicit advocacy, this function can also encompass partisan journalism. Journalism has a long history of advocacy, as evidenced by editorial opinion pages in newspapers, which are still commonplace in newspapers. Because this function can, at times, veer into partisan politics, this function is likely among the least popular of the six news media functions discussed here. Qualities like detachment, nonpartisanship, and balance in news coverage are still commonly lauded in the scope of U.S. journalism, even as the notion of journalistic “objectivity” has long been critiqued as a problematic ideal (Mindich, 1998).

**Normative Assumptions**

On a concluding note regarding the theoretical foundations of this project, it is crucial to address the normative assumptions underlying this study’s conception of PNMI. These normative assumptions are nested within normative theories of the press—that is, “the ideal functions of the press, what the press *should* do” (Benson, 2008, p. 2591). As Althaus (2012) remarks, “making normative assessments more explicit in empirical research is important because empirical research is never entirely value-neutral” (p. 98). Consideration of the normative underpinnings of empirical research serves to clarify why a research effort is important and worth pursuing in the first place (Althaus, 2012). Indeed, I recognize that the six media functions discussed here are not self-evident and universally valued. They spring from a conceptual framework that privileges certain functions of the news media.
In order to articulate the normative stance of this project relative to PNMI, it should also be recognized that there is no universally accepted conception what a democracy *ought* to look like. Baker (2002) highlights several distinct theories of democracy, including *republicanism* (see also Althaus, 2012). A detailed examination of these different theories of democracy is tangential to the discussion at hand. Suffice it to say, republicanism is perhaps the most dominant theory of democracy undergirding most political communication scholarship (Althaus, 2012; Holbert, 2013). As Althaus (2012) explains, republicanism represents a conception of democracy that is ruled by deliberated consensus; it is “a system designed to help citizens discover their common interest by communication with one another across lines of difference” (p. 105).

Furthermore, Baker (2002) notes that republicanism strongly complements the journalistic ideals articulated by the classic social responsibility theory (SRT) (Peterson, 1963). The origins of SRT can be traced to a commission—the Hutchins Commission—that was formed in the early 1940s and funded by the prominent magazine publisher Henry Luce. The purpose of the commission was to investigate and report on the proper role of media in a democratic society. As explained by Baker (2002), the Hutchins Commission’s SRT identified three fundamental roles of the press: (1) provide information to the public, (2) to educate and enlighten the public so that it is capable of self-governance, and (3) to serve as a check on power. Even as SRT is not without its critics (see Nerone, 1995), Althaus (2012) posits that the ideals of social responsibility theory are “precisely what many political communication scholars seem to expect of the contemporary media environment” (p. 106), as situated within a republican theory of democracy framework.
Forthrightly stated, this research broadly evaluates the normative value of PNMI within a normative framework largely guided by the principles of republicanism and a conception of the press in the tradition of SRT (see Christians and Nordenstreng [2004] for an updated conception of SRT). That is to say, I work from the premise that the news media ought to foster an informed citizenry, encourage and facilitate reasoned debate, and help citizens empathize with each other and realize common goals across lines of difference. In more concrete terms, this study proceeds with the understanding that increased PNMI is a desirable outcome in a democratic system. Regardless of how PNMI may influence media trust or other variables of interest in further research efforts, it is effectively assumed that citizens should value the multiple functions of the press represented by PNMI.

This is not to say that PNMI fully represents all meaningful ways that the press serves society (c.f., Bertrand, 2000; Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009). It should be noted that, empirically speaking, the press largely does not adopt a social responsibility-type lens in practice. In contrast to a social responsibility framework—which emphasizes a duty to serve the public good—the journalism industry in the United States seems to be more closely aligned with what is traditionally discussed as a libertarian journalism model (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). That is, the American press is fundamentally propelled by commercial and market-driven interests, prioritizing profits (Baldasty, 1992) and freedom of speech. Thus PNMI does not necessarily represent the mainstream model of the press in the United States. If that were this project’s goal, PNMI might also include news media functions pertaining to offering utility to business interests and providing entertainment value. For this stage of PNMI’s
development however, PNMI’s normative conception of news media functions represents a more aspirational lens; it is animated by functions that many political communication scholars (see Althaus, 2012) as well as journalists themselves (see Weaver et al., 2007) often aspire to in terms of performing a watch dog function and serving the public’s interests. Accordingly, to the extent that PNMI does indicate perceptions of press importance, a high level of PNMI is understood to be a desirable outcome even as it may not fully encompass all news media functions in the an American context.

Moreover, this normative assessment (Althaus, 2012) also bears implications in terms of news parody’s influence on PNMI, pertaining to the normative value of news parody specifically and political satire more generally (see Holbert, 2013). While it is unclear whether trust in the news media is always desirable (Peters, 2013; Schudson, 2013), it is assumed within this project that any evidence of news parody fostering PNMI is also a laudable democratic outcome.

Summary

In review, this chapter examines different types of media perceptions and various theorized influences on public perceptions of the news media. It is argued here that the media criticism commonly featured in news parody and basic agreement with news-themed commentary (e.g., see Brewer & Marquardt, 2007; Pew Research Center, 2008) may play a meaningful role in influencing perceptions of media trust—both in terms of activating and reinforcing perceptions. Given that news parody can influence media trust judgments, a subsequent question emerges: how might one explain news parody’s potential influence on media trust? I posit that an understanding of news parody’s influence on media perceptions may be enhanced by considering how the key arguments
presented by a given news parody message broadly align with one’s attitudes and beliefs. At a fundamental level, one’s level of acceptance or agreement with a new parody message may play a key role in explaining how and why news parody wields influence among some and less so among others. I also suggest that PNMI may be able to shed light on when and/or how news parody’s critiques of the news media are able to influence perceptions of media trust.

As noted in the introduction chapter, this project can be understood as being motivated by three primary goals. First, this research is designed to explore the influence of news parody, particularly in terms of (a) the degree to which a news parody message is pro-attitudinal and (b) how the implicit and explicit media criticism embedded in much news parody may influence varied forms of media trust. As earlier discussed, much news parody can be understood as a form of elite media criticism that plays a role in shaping the media perceptions of some. In view of the limited and mixed findings regarding news parody’s influence on media trust (e.g., Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Brewer, Young, & Jones, 2013), it is appropriate to further investigate this relationship. Recalling the potentially meaningful distinction between general trust in the news media and trust in the specific news sources that one uses most (Pew Research Center, 2011), it is also worthwhile examining the extent to which news parody can influence media trust at different levels of specificity and preference.

The second goal of this project is to examine the role of PNMI for elucidating news parody’s effect on media trust. Perceptions of importance may wield an influence on assessments of media trust, such that when presented with an explicit argument (via news parody) that the news media failing in some way, news parody humor affects
perceptions of the media’s importance (PNMI), which in turn influences media trust (i.e., a mediating effect). Or perhaps PNMI is better conceptualized as a moderator of parody’s effect, wherein news parody most influences media trust when one is high in PNMI.

Finally, this research is aimed to develop and validate a measure for gauging the degree to which individuals attribute importance to key functions of the news media (i.e., PNMI). To be sure, this is a challenging concept to operationalize. In particular, it can be expected that many people feel pressure to give socially desirable responses when simply asked how important they believe news media to be. As Berelson (1949) discovered in a 1945 study during a labor strike involving eight New York City newspaper, “practically everyone pays tribute to the value of [news media] as a source of ‘serious’ information about and interpretation of the world of public affairs, although not everyone uses it in that way” (p. 114). Thus, any measure of new media importance must find ways to get beneath perfunctory responses, such as agreement with a statement like “it’s important for people to follow the news”—a notion many people have likely been socialized to affirm.

In light of these three broad goals, the last section of this chapter outlines how the relationships discussed herein can be explored and tested via formal hypotheses and research questions by way of both survey-based and experimental research. For the sake of clarity, these research inquiries and predictions will be divided into two sections: one for the survey research and the other for the experimental research.

**Survey Design Research Questions & Hypotheses**

Even as this project conceptualizes PNMI as a composite measure of valuing various news media functions, it is first useful to understand the dynamics of the
underlying dimensions of news media importance. In particular, it important to examine—from a statistical standpoint—how well the PNMI measure aligns with the theorized news media functions discussed above. Accordingly, an initial exploratory research question is posed:

**RQ1:** What are the underlying dimensions of the PNMI measure?

In order to validate the PNMI measure developed by this project, both the convergent and discriminant validity of the index need to be examined. In terms of convergent validity, it is expected that the PNMI measure will demonstrate a meaningful positive relationships with the conceptually similar variables of political interest and political participation. It stands to reason that people who find value in the various functions of the press are especially likely to have a strong curiosity about public affairs/politics (i.e., political interest). As Luskin (1990) notes, those with keen interest in politics are more likely to seek out political information, as well as notice and think seriously about the political information they encounter. Likewise, those who are politically active—i.e., people who tend to have resources like time, money, and civic skills (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995) and are motivated to understand political landscape—will be more inclined to perceive that a spectrum media functions are important. Thus, political participation should also positively correlate with valuing the core functions of the press. Based on this reasoning, the first hypothesis tests PNMI’s relationship with political interest and political participation.

**H1a-b:** The PNMI measure retains convergent validity with (a) political interest and (b) political participation.
Conversely, PNMI should be sufficiently statistically distinguishable from other types of news media perception concepts. In particular, it should be distinct from perceptions of news media as overly sensationalistic and the bearer of bad news (e.g., Patterson, 1996). That is, a fundamental belief in importance of news should be distinguishable from the “negative content” media image (Kosicki & McLeod, 1990, p.77). Similarly, because this project theorizes that PNMI can influence elements of media trust, it is important to establish that PNMI is also distinct from media trust—particularly in terms of how the media trust concept is typically measured (i.e., the news media in general as fair, accurate, and trustworthy; see Meyer, 1988). To be clear, it is expected that media trust and PNMI will have a significant correlation. However, I should find evidence of the measurement constructs being distinct. In addition, PNMI should not be strongly linked to ideology. While judgments about the fairness and accuracy of the press often have partisan overtones (Lee, 2005), perceptions of the news media’s importance (PNMI) should have limited association with ideology.

**H2a-c:** PNMI is discriminant of (a) the “negative content” media image, (b) general media trust, and (c) ideology.

Following up on an examination of how ideology in particular correlates with PNMI as a whole (H2c), it is worth further probing this relationship in a formal manner. In view of the partisan rhetoric that seemingly undergirds many citizens’ attitudes (especially those on the conservative end of the political spectrum; see Domke, Watts, & Shah, 1999; Rosen, 2012) about the news media, it is possible that ideological orientations will be uniquely associated with the distinct dimensions of PNMI in contrasting ways. That is, some aspects of the news media functions at the heart of the
PNMI concept may be more politically charged than others. Because patterns of variance in certain dimensions may mask trends with other factors within the larger PNMI variable, it is worthwhile examining how ideology correlates with the individual underlying factors of PNMI. Exploring ideology’s relationship with PNMI at both a broad and dimensional level will serve to clarify how PNMI relates to this important individual difference factor (Minar, 1961), which has been shown to be a significant predictor of distrust in the news media (e.g., Lee, 2010).

**RQ2:** How does ideology correlate with the underlying dimensions of PNMI?

Finally, returning to consideration of the full PNMI scale, it will be useful to understand PNMI’s predictive abilities as well. Two types of factors are of particular interest. First, considering that extant scholarship related to perceptions of media importance have focused on how media importance relates to media use and attention (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001), it should be useful to examine how PNMI relates to news information consumption patterns—for instance, the frequency of turning to newspapers, television, radio, the Internet, magazines, and social media for political information. Second, given that the full PNMI scale is not a redundant measure of media trust (see H2b), it will be insightful to examine if and how well PNMI predicts media trust—especially as relative to other potential political predictors like political interest, news media exposure, political participation, and need for cognition.9

**RQ3:** What types of political information media exposure does PNMI predict?

**RQ4:** Does PNMI account for unique variance in news media trust?

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9 Tsfati and Capella (2005) found that need for cognition was a significant moderator for explaining why people use news information they do not trust.
Experimental Design Research Questions & Hypotheses

Upon establishing the validity of PNMI, focus can turn to this project’s experimental examination of news parody’s influence on various aspects of media trust, relative to PNMI. Admittedly, it is difficult to predict news parody’s effect across different types of media trust, as news trust is conceptualized to be multi-dimensional—that is, aspects of news work in terms of (a) believability (b) news judgment, and (c) altruistic motives. Furthermore, any effect of news parody on trust in the news media is possibly contingent upon the specific content of a given parody message (e.g., a news parody segment that focuses on poor news judgment). With such reservations noted, it is nonetheless expected that explicit critiques of the news media via news parody will generally have an unfavorable effect on news media trust—across the trust dimensions of believability, news judgment, and altruistic motives. Yet is it also expected that news parody-based critiques of the news media will also heighten a sense of the news media’s importance (PNMI).

**H3a-c:** Exposure to news parody’s media criticism, as compared to news parody content devoid of overt criticism, decreases (general) trust in the news media’s (a) believability, (b) altruistic motives, and (3) news judgment.

**H4:** Exposure to news parody-based media criticism positively affects PNMI.

Another basic prediction of this project is that the more one highly values the key functions of the press (i.e., increased PNMI), the more likely one is to recognize and be sensitive to the gravity of news media shortcomings—herein hypothesized to be a catalyst for decreased trust in the press.
**H5a-c:** *Increased PNMI decreases (general) trust in the news media’s (a) believability, (b) altruistic motives, and (3) news judgment.*

The experimental component of this research effort is also designed to confirm this study’s expectation that PNMI can influence the causal relationship between exposure to news parody-based commentary about the news media and the varied dimensions of media trust. Given the exploratory nature of this research, two research questions serve as a foundation for examining PNMI’s potential as (a) a mediator and (b) moderator of news parody’s influence.

**RQ5a-c:** *Does PNMI function as a mediator of the relationship between news parody criticism and assessments of media trust (a-c)?*

**RQ6a-c:** *Does PNMI function as a moderator of news parody criticism’s effect on general media trust (a-c)?*

Based on the premise that news parody broadly serves to underscore the fundamental importance of the news media and that one’s level of agreement with a persuasive message will render the message more influential, it is also predicted that the more one finds a parody humor message to be pro-attitudinal, the more one will positively evaluate the importance of the press.

**H6:** *One’s self-reported level of agreement with a given parody message (i.e., pro-attitudinal news parody) positively influences PNMI.*

Given that a given news parody message may or may not be explicitly critical of the news media, it unclear how the like-mindedness of a news parody message will influence news media trust—especially in light of the mixed findings about general news parody’s influence on news media trust (Brewer, Young, & Jones, 2013; Morris &
Baumgartner, 2008). Similarly, PNMI’s mediating potential relative to pro-attitudinal parody is also difficult to predict given that agreement with a parody message devoid of explicit criticism could be promoting PNMI. Accordingly, the influence of pro-attitudinal parody is explored as a research inquiry, both in terms of a direct and indirect effect (relative to PNMI) on news media trust.

**RQ7a-c:** Does basic agreement with a news parody message directly influence general media trust assessments (a-c)?

**RQ8a-c:** Does PNMI serve as a mediator of the relationship between basic agreement with a news parody message and assessments of media trust, such that perceived agreement with the news parody message affects PNMI, which in turn affects evaluation of trust in the news media?

Finally, within the scope of exploring news parody’s effect on PNMI and general media trust, we also have the opportunity to explore whether the two parody commentary factors of this study (i.e., parody-based media criticism and like-mindedness with the parody message) interact to influence various perceptions of the news media. For example, perhaps general agreement with a parody message bears the most potential for affecting trust when parody is explicitly critical. (See Figure 1 for an overview depiction of the relationships discussed by H3-H6 and RQ5-RQ9.)

**RQ9a-d:** Do parody-based media criticism and the degree to which a parody message is pro-attitudinal interact to influence (a) PNMI and (b-d) general media trust assessments?

Recalling the earlier discussed findings that highlight a substantial difference in confidence in the news media as a whole versus one’s most-used news outlets (Pew
Research Center, 2011), it is worthwhile to also examine news parody’s effect on trust at a more concrete level—that is, trust in specific news outlets (e.g., CNN, The New York Times, Fox News, The Huffington Post, etc.). As Baum and Gussin (2007) found, simple manipulation of news source attributions for identical news transcripts can result in considerable differences in terms of assessing the trustworthiness of a given piece of news content. It is evident that one’s general trust in the news media industry is likely not the same as trust in any given news outlet. Furthermore, trust ratings in a specific news source may be more precise than general trust assessments. As Kohring and Matthes (2007) point out, with a specific media referent, “we can assume a concrete and stable point of reference for trustworthiness judgments” (p. 242). In short, an exploration source-specific trust can help address the question of whether any apparent news parody effect on trust is limited to news media trust in general, or if it also (or only) affects people’s trust in specific and/or preferred news outlets.

As will be explained in more detail below, to examine parody’s effect on media trust in specific news sources in terms of preference, participants were randomly assigned to provide source-specific trust assessments with regard to either (a) a preferred news source or (b) a randomly assigned non-preferred source. Given that individuals are motivated by a desire to maintain a positive and consistent self-perception (Bem, 1972) when evaluating the news sources they say they use/prefer most, and guided by existing polling research that indicates citizens evaluate their preferred (i.e., most used) news outlets more favorably than the news media in general (Pew Research Center, 2011), the data should confirm that those assigned to evaluate a preferred (specific) news source will report more favorable media trust assessments than those assigned to evaluate a
Figure 1. Conceptual Overview of Experiment 1 Analyses

Note: Research questions notated in parenthesis (RQ5; RQ8) represent tests of mediation, modeling PNMI as the mediator. Dashed line represent tests of moderating effect.
random, non-preferred source.\textsuperscript{10} This confirmatory hypothesis will serve as a foundation for subsequent analyses.

\textbf{H7a-c}: Preference for the specific referent of a given media trust assessment \textit{positively predicts trust in the news source’s (a) believability, (b) altruistic motives, and (3) news judgment}.

Given the central role of PNMI in this research, we can also consider the specificity of and preference for the object of a media trust assessment relative to PNMI. Again, I anticipate that the news outlets that participants indicate preferring will be rated more favorably than non-preferred sources, as people are motivated to make judgments that align with and complement one’s pre-existing attitudes and beliefs (Kunda, 1990; Lodge & Taber, 2000). Thus, I predict that PNMI’s negative influence on trust will be more influential on a non-preferred source, as trust in preferred news source is presumably more established and more impervious to persuasive influence.

\textbf{H8a-c}: Preference for the object of trust interacts with PNMI to influence assessments of media trust, such that PNMI’s hypothesized effect on trust is stronger when the object the trust is a non-preferred news source

Paralleling H3 (regarding the influence of explicit media criticism on general media trust), this study’s design also facilitates an examination of how news parody’s explicit criticism may affect trust in a specific news outlet that is either preferred or non-preferred. Here again, it is expected that judgments about a source previously designated

\textsuperscript{10} Although Baum & Gussin (2007) do not explicitly address the type of questions featured in this project, their findings that a news outlet brands function as powerful heuristics for judging relatively neutral news content bears relevance here (see also Vallone et al., 1985). Such findings suggest that one’s predisposition toward a particular news source (i.e., a “preferred” source) is a strong indicator of how trustworthy one will find a given news source, which may be contrary to how one views the news media as a whole.
to be preferred will be more resistant to media criticism’s hypothesized negative effect because individuals tend to be motivated by “directional goals” (i.e., reaching a preferred conclusion) when evaluating a persuasive message (Kunda, 1990). In other words, those exposed to non-preferred news sources should be more susceptible to parody-based media criticism’s negative effect. Note that the relationship of interest here is parody-based media criticism’s influence as interacting with preference for the referent of the trust assessment, effectively examining how preference moderates parody criticism’s effect on source-specific trust.

**H9a-c:** Exposure to explicit media criticism (via news parody) negatively influences trust in specific news outlet’s (a) believability, (b) altruistic motives, and (3) news judgment—when the news outlet being evaluated is a non-preferred source, as compared to a preferred news source.

Similarly, mirroring RQ7, this study also evaluates pro-attitudinal parody’s influence on source-specific trust, as conditioned upon a basic preference for the referent of the trust assessment. Because there is no known research to reference for guiding expectations of how general news parody commentary (whether including an explicit news media critique or not) might uniquely affect assessments of the news media with a concrete cognitive referent, this effect will be explored in a research question framework.

**RQ10a-c:** Does basic agreement with the news parody message (i.e., pro-attitudinal news parody) influence trust in specific news outlet’s (a) believability, (b) altruistic motives, and (3) news judgment—as moderated by one’s preference for the news source?

As examined in RQ9 of Experiment 1, it may also be insightful to explore
whether parody-based criticism interacts with pro-attitudinal parody to influence trust in a specific news source. Perhaps the effect of a like-minded news parody message functions in unique ways relative to when explicit parody-based criticism and a specific news source is in question.

**RQ11a-c:** Do parody-based media criticism and the degree to which a parody message is pro-attitudinal interact to influence a specific news outlet’s (a) believability, (b) altruistic motives, and (3) news judgment?

Finally, in view of this study’s discussion of PNMI’s potential effect on evaluations of general news media trust (see RQ5a-b), a hypothesis and research question are offered with regard to the mediating influence of PNMI and source-specific trust. Combining an examination of news parody’s influence and PNMI’s influence on source-specific media trust, it is predicted that PNMI will mediate the relationship between parody commentary and source-specific trust (H10). A research question is posed regarding whether pro-attitudinal news parody will indirectly affect source-specific trust (RQ10). (See Figure 2 for an overview of these tests of moderated mediation).

**H10a-c:** Exposure to parody-based commentary has a conditional indirect influence on media trust (a-c) as mediated by PNMI. Furthermore, it is predicted that this indirect effect is moderated by news-source preference, such that explicit criticism fosters greater PNMI, which in turn influences media trust as moderated by news-source preference.

**RQ12a-c:** Does pro-attitudinal news parody have a conditional indirect influence on media trust (a-c) as mediated by PNMI and moderated by news-source preference, such that greater agreement with the parody commentary fosters
increased PNMI, which in turn influences media trust as moderated by news-source preference?
Figure 2. Conceptual Overview of Experiment 2 Analyses

Note: Research questions notated in parenthesis (H10; RQ12) represent tests of indirect effects and moderated mediation. Dashed lines represent tests of moderating effects.
Chapter 3: Study 1

Methodology

Study 1 is designed to further develop and validate a multi-dimensional measure of perceived news media importance (PNMI), addressing this project’s initial set of hypotheses (H1-H2) and research questions (RQ1-RQ4). The process of developing and validating PNMI for Study 1 was carried out in two data collection stages, (Stage 1: N=403. Stage 2: N=510), conducted in October 2014 and March 2015 respectively.

The central purpose of the Stage 1 survey was to pilot test 35 preliminary PNMI items, grounded in Schudson’s (2008) explication of the six primary functions of the news media. With particular focus on how each of these six functions might be personally relevant to an individual, 5-7 items were developed for each news media function (see Appendix A). The purpose of the stage 1 survey was to identify poor questions, narrow down the preliminary list of survey items, and tentatively assess the reliability and underlying dimensions of the preliminary PNMI measure.

Upon reducing the preliminary battery of PNMI questions to 15 survey items (see asterisked items in Appendix A) through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (to be described below), the Stage 2 survey was administered to a nationally representative sample. In addition to the PNMI items, the Stage 2 survey also included measures for media trust, the negative content media image, political interest, political participation,
media use, need for cognition, and other basic demographics for validation purposes and examining exogenous predictors of PNMI.

Participants

Stage 1 Survey. A convenience sample of English speaking, American adult participants (N=403) was recruited from Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) resource in October 2014. MTurk is a web-based crowdsourcing system that uses anonymous workers to complete a diversity of tasks, including surveys. Although MTurk samples are not representative of the national population and, accordingly, are inappropriate to use for drawing conclusions about population means, MTurk convenience samples are nonetheless generally more diverse than student samples (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012). Because this first stage of PNMI’s development is principally designed to identify and refine a battery of survey items—and not to make broad claims about the national population—a representative sample was deemed unnecessary.

Respondents in the MTurk survey were between the ages of 19 and 82 (M=35, SD=11.54), 56% male, 83% White, 7% Black, 7% Asian, and 3% other. The sample was fairly educated (11% high school or less, 24% some college, 52% four years college or more) and included a range of incomes (62% <$50K, 20% $75K+). In terms of political affiliation, the plurality of the sample was Independent (46%); Democrats (37%) outnumbered Republicans (13%); 4% identified as “other” in terms of political affiliation. With regard to ideology, the sample skewed liberal (M=3.36, SD=1.66 on 7-point scale with conservatives coded high). Approximately 89% of the sample reported being registered to vote.
**Stage 2 Survey.** The Study 2 used a randomly selected, nationally representative sample recruited by the survey firm GfK (formerly Knowledge Networks) in March 2015. GfK provides a web-based panel of participants created through address-based sample procedures (ABS). Unlike with opt-in panels, individuals can become only become GfK panelists after being randomly selected; one cannot simply volunteer to be a GfK panel member. Persons randomly selected by GfK who do not have Internet access are provided a web-enabled computer and free Internet service (more information can be found at www.gfk.com).

Survey respondents were between the ages of 18 and 91 (\(M=46.78, \, SD=17.50\)), 52% female, 65% White, 12% Black, 15% Hispanic or Latino. In terms of education, 30% had a high school education or less, 18% some college, and 29% four years college or more. The sample represented a range of incomes (40% <$50K, 41% $75K+). In terms of political party identification, 34% self-identified as strong or weak Democrats and 24% as strong or weak Republicans; those who declared themselves Independent, “undecided,” lean Republican, or lean Democrat made up 42% of the sample. On average, the sample resided around the mid-point of a 7-point ideology scale with “very conservative” coded high (\(M=4.22, \, SD=1.55\)). Among those who answered a question about voting in the 2012 presidential election (\(n=421\)), approximately 82% (\(n=345\)) of the sample reported participating in that election.

**Procedure**

Both the Stage 1 (MTurk) and Stage 2 (GfK) surveys were administered online to U.S.-based adults over the age of 18. The Stage 1 survey with the MTurk respondents first inquired about various news media exposure habits and political interest before
administering the exploratory set of 35 PNMI items (see Appendix A); the PNMI questions were randomized within each set of questions, grouped according to the six theorized PNMI dimension. Following the PNMI questions, respondents answered questions related to media trust, the negative content media image, political participation, and basic demographics. The MTurk survey also involved asking participants to indicate what they first thought of when the survey mentioned the term, “the news media.”

The second stage survey, administered by GfK, was embedded within a survey instrument shared with other researchers conducting research unrelated to media trust and PNMI. The full survey took about 20 minutes to complete. Within the segment of the questionnaire devoted to this project, the refined battery of PNMI items (i.e., 15 items) were administered first. Subsequently, media trust, negative content media images, political comedy exposure, and political interest were measured. A variety of additional profile variables—including political participation and media use—were measured at previous points in time by GfK. About 1,000 individuals were invited to take part in the survey (N=1008) with a completion rate of 60.1% (N=606) and an incidence rate of 84% (i.e., as based on the end result of 510 valid cases). The sample data was weighted to match demographic and geographic parameters from the March 2014 Current Population Survey (CPS). GfK’s recruitment protocol relies on probability-based sampling of addresses from the United States Postal Service’s Delivery Sequence File (DSF), a methodology that allows sampling of almost all United States households (more information can be found at www.gfk.com).
Measures

*Perceived News Media Importance (PNMI).* Stage 1 survey participants (MTurk) answered 35 questions (see Appendix A) pertaining to perceptions of the news media’s importance, while the Stage 2 survey (GfK) respondents answered a 15-item battery of questions (see Appendix A). These question sets, inspired by Schudson’s (2008) conception of core news media functions, consisted of a blend of items originally developed for this project and question wording employed in other existing research (see McLeod, Sotirovic, & Holbert, 1998; Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007). As described in the results section below, upon analysis of these pools of survey items, a 12-item solution for a six-dimensional PNMI scale was ultimately reached (see Appendix B). The finalized PNMI scale in the Stage 2 survey data ($M = 4.70, SD = 1.04$) was found to be reliable (Cronbach’s alpha = .88).

*General Media Trust – Believability.* For the purpose of validating PNMI, media trust was measured in the Stage 2 GfK survey based on agreement (on a 7-point scale) with the following statements: “In general, the news media… (a) are accurate, (b) are fair, (c) can be trusted” (see Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Meyer, 1988). The reliability of this media trust index was strong ($M = 3.63, SD = 1.40$; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .93$).

*Political Interest.* Participants were asked, “How interested are you in politics and public affairs?” on a 4-point scale, where 1 = “Very interested,” 2 = “Somewhat interested,” 3 = “Not very interested,” and 4 = “Not at all interested.” The variable was reverse coded so that a high value represents high interest ($M = 2.60, SD = 0.95$).

*Political Participation.* A political participation index was created based on responses to six political behavior questions included in the Stage 2 survey data,
pertaining to (1) attending a political protest or rally, (2) contacting a government official, (3) volunteering or working for a presidential campaign, (4) volunteering or working for another political candidate, issue, or cause, (5) giving money to a presidential campaign, (6) and giving money to a political candidate, issue, or cause. The response options were “yes” (1) or “No” (0) for each survey item. The index \( M = 0.37, SD = 0.82 \) did not demonstrate strong reliability (Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .59 \)). For this reason, the index measure was corrected for attenuation (Muchinsky, 1996) when correlated with PNMI for validation purposes.

**Negative Content Media Image.** A two-item measure was used to gauge perceptions of the news media as being dominated by negative content (Kosicki & McLeod, 1990). Participants were presented with the following two questions, measured on a 7-point scale: “In general the news media carry too much bad news” \( (M=4.60, SD=1.52) \) and “In general the news media are too sensationalistic” \( (M=5.10, SD=1.46) \). These zero order correlation of these two items was moderately strong in the Stage 2 survey \( (r = .47, p<.001) \).

**Frequency of Political Media Use.** For the purposes of examining PNMI’s predictive utility relative to political media use, this analysis examined frequency of general media use variables in terms of six news source platforms. The question wording was as follows: “How often do you get information about politics from…(a) print newspapers, (b) television, (c) radio, (d) Internet news sites, (e) magazines, (f) social

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11 Along with a variety of other profile/demographic information variables, this information was collected by the survey company, GfK, prior to the fielding of this study’s survey—in February, 2014. The timing of this data collection is notable because the political participation items were framed with the question stem, “In the past 12 months, have you…” Importantly, 2014 was not a presidential election season. Hence, few respondents reported participation in terms of volunteering for presidential campaigns \( (n=3) \) and giving money to presidential campaigns \( (n=26) \).
media websites?” Response options for frequency of general news media use were presented on a 6-point scale wherein 1 = “Never,” 2 = “Less than once a month,” 3 = “1 to 3 times a month,” 4 = “almost every week,” 5 = “3 times a week or more,” and 6 = “Every day.” The descriptive statistics for each source of political information are as listed below. Newspapers: \( M = 2.88, SD = 1.85 \); Television: \( M = 4.05, SD = 1.72 \); Magazines: \( M = 2.08, SD = 1.25 \); Social Media \( M = 2.52, SD=1.70 \); Internet news sites: \( M = 3.15, SD = 1.83 \); Radio: \( M = 3.24, SD = 1.86 \).

**TV Political Comedy Exposure.** Participants were asked, “Over the past six months, how often did you view the following programs, either on television or the Internet?: (a) *The Daily Show*, (b) *The Colbert Report*, and (c) *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*. Response options included (1) “almost every day,” (2) “several times a week,” (3) “several times a month,” (4) “rarely,” or (5) “never.” Responses to the questions were reverse coded and aggregated to create a TV Political comedy exposure index \( M = 1.31, SD = 2.38 \). In terms of the descriptive information for each show, *The Daily Show* was the most watched \( M=0.54, SD=0.96 \), followed by *The Colbert Report* \( M = 0.47, SD = 0.91 \) and *Last Week Tonight* \( M = 0.30, SD = 0.72 \).

**Need for Cognition.** Participant’s tendency to enjoy and engage in thinking (Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1984) was measured with a 5-item version of the scale (Epstein, Pacini, Denes-Raj, & Heier, 1996), asking subjects how well various statements describes them, including (a) “I don’t like to have to do a lot of thinking,” (b) “I try to avoid situations that require thinking in depth about something,” (c) “I prefer to do something that challenges my thinking abilities rather than something that requires little thought,” (d) “I prefer complex to simple problems,” and (e) “Thinking hard and for a
long time about something gives me little satisfaction.” The questions were based on 5-point scale ranging from “extremely uncharacteristic” to “extremely characteristic” was used. Items a, b, and e were reverse-coded. The measure ($M = 3.53, SD = 0.74$) demonstrated solid reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .75$).

**Analytical Methods**

**Missing Data**

Overall, missing values in the data were minimal. However, to varying degrees, several profile variables provided by the GfK survey firm (i.e., not collected by this study’s survey instrument) did have missing values. For instance, questions pertaining to the frequency of getting information about politics from the radio (missing $n=12; 2\%$), getting political information from Internet news sites (missing $n=9; 2\%$), and getting political information from magazines (missing $n=9; 2\%$) represent the high marks of missing data. To address this small amount of missing data, the Hot Deck Imputation technique (see Myers, 2011) was used to for the Stage 2 (GfK) survey data. The Hot Deck Imputation approach involves identifying a set of three variables in a data set with little to no missing values and that bear some theoretical relevance to the hypothesis/research question at hand—yet not of substantial theoretical interest (Myers, 2011). In simple terms, these deck variables are used to locate “donor” cases in the data set to replace missing values when the responses of the case with the missing values matches that of the (non-missing) donor case across the three hot deck variables. When there are multiple donor cases available, one donor is randomly selected to replace the given missing value. Importantly, this random selection component helps to ensure that the variation of a variable is not artificially deflated, which could happen if one were
instead using a mean substitution method. And in contrast to listwise and casewise deletion, the hot deck imputation technique is valuable for allowing retention of a fuller sample of respondents, helping to avoid the loss of data due to incomplete responses—omissions that can otherwise contribute to the erosion of statistical power (Myers, 2011).

Hot deck imputations were performed for the following measures: ideology, political interest, political party identification, the negative content media image, the 12 PNMI items, six news political media use items (i.e., print newspapers, television, radio, web-based news sites, magazines, social media websites), and five need for cognition items. The variables used to create the “hot deck” in the multiple imputation procedure were as follows: gender (52% female), education, which included 14 response options ranging from “no formal education” to “professional or doctorate” ($M=10.16$, $SD=2.04$, $Mdn=10$; note that 10 = “some college, no degree” in the ordinal scale), and income, which involved 19 responses options, ranging from “less than $5,000” to “$175,000 or more” ($M=12.00$, $SD=4.36$, $Mdn=13$; note that 12 = $50,000 to $59,000 in the ordinal scale). These three hot deck variables did not contain any missing data ($N=510$). As indicated by descriptive statistics (i.e., the means and standard deviations) in Appendix D, change in the values of each variable that was hotdecked was minimal, indicating that the imputation procedures performed well. Appendix D also indicates that upon conducting the hot deck imputation technique, a minimal number of missing data values still remained is several of the hotdecked variables. Cases with at least one missing value in any variable of interest in a given model were not included in the analyses reported in this study.
**Data Analysis**

Upon completing the first stage of the survey data collection (i.e., the MTurk survey), exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was first used to provide a preliminary assessment of the dimensionality of the original 35 PNMI survey items. This analysis was designed to provide a foundation for reducing and refining the preliminary battery of PNMI questions. Subsequently confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)/structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to confirm the tentative PNMI measurement model, as suggested by the EFA, in the Stage 1 data. In contrast to the partial-information estimations provided other multivariate techniques, SEM is a full information technique that facilitates simultaneous equation modeling and a variety of model fit statistics for assessing a measurement model (Holbert & Stephenson, 2002). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) were used as absolute fit statistics for all SEM analyses. The confirmatory fit index (CFI) was used as the incremental fit statistic for the models. As posited by Holbert and Stephenson (2002), indications of a good model fit for each test statistic are as follows: RMSEA [.09 or lower]; SRMR [.06 or lower]; CFI [.95 or greater] (see also Hu & Bentler, 1999). All SEM analyses in this study were conducted with the Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS) statistical software.

Upon collecting the Stage 2 GfK data, the 15 items retained from the Stage 1 survey were again reviewed with face validity considerations in mind, with a goal to further streamline the lengthy measure. As further described below, several additional items were dropped from the PNMI scale based on this face validity analytic approach,
resulting in a finalized 12-item set of questions. Attention was next directed to the process of validating the PNMI measure with the Stage 2 GfK data, addressing RQ1, H1, and H2. This validation process involved two steps. First, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the measurement model of the 12-item, 6-dimensional PNMI scale (RQ1). Next, the model was extended to include contrasting media perception scales: basic media trust (H2a) and the negative content media image (H2b). This CFA model was used to help establish the discriminant validity of the PNMI measure, allowing for a simultaneous assessment of PNMI’s relationships with media trust and the negative content media images, taking into account the concomitant influence of these two types of media perceptions on each other. To further probe the discriminant validity of PNMI, the scale was also correlated with ideology (H2c). To examine the convergent validity of PNMI, the scale’s zero-order correlations with political interest and political participation where calculated (H1a-b). Finally, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models were used to examine PNMI’s predictive abilities. The weights provided by the GfK survey firm were employed when conducting all the above-described analyses, with exception to the CFA procedures (the AMOS software is not compatible with weighted samples). A histogram representing the frequencies of the weights provided by GfK are depicted in Appendix E. As the figure illustrates, the mean weight is 1.00, ranging from 0.34 to 3.79—indicating the weights are relatively small.

\[ \text{12} \] The three dropped survey items at this stage of PNMI’s development were (1) “...be an adversary of businesses by being constantly skeptical of their action,” (2) “...provide a forum for a wide range of viewpoints on important issues,” and (3) “...point me toward possible solutions to society’s problems.”

\[ \text{13} \] Notably there are known issues when using weights in SPSS for regression analysis. Because SPSS was used for the study analyses, all analyses were rerun without the provided weights, yielding comparable in results across all the key analyses of interest in this project.
Results

Stage 1 Survey

To begin addressing the first research question (RQ1) related to identifying the underlying dimensions of the PNMI concept, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was first conducted with the preliminary MTturk survey data. An EFA is particularly useful early on in a scale development process, aiding the exploration of the dimensionality of a pool of items (Morrison, 2009). Here, the EFA served to provide a preliminary assessment of whether the PNMI construct was comprised—as theorized—of multiple dimensions, and to reduce the battery of 35 questions. The EFA analysis used maximum likelihood extraction. Because the PNMI items were expected to be moderately correlated with each other, a direct OBLIMIN rotation was used (Morrison, 2009). A 15-item solution converged in 6 iterations, comprised of six factors. To reach this solution, items were dropped one-by-one from the initial pool of PNMI questions based on the criteria of items demonstrating minimal variability, showing little commonality with other PNMI items, and high levels of cross loading on multiple factors (as revealed by the EFA). Upon narrowing down the pool of questions to 15 items with these criteria, examination of a scree plot suggested a six-factor solution that in combination accounts for 74% of the variance, with the point of inflection in the scree plot positioned after the sixth factor.

In alignment with the theorized dimensions of PNMI, the following six dimensions emerged as distinct from one another, discussed in the following order: (1) analysis, (2) investigation, (3) information, (4) mobilization, (5) public forum, and (6) social empathy. The first dimension, consisting of two items, included items designed to represent the analysis function (see Appendix A for an overview of the items of each
PNMI factor). As shown in Table 1, the dimension accounted for 31% of variance with an Eigenvalue of 4.65 ($r = .83, p<.001$). The second dimension—aligned with the investigative function—was comprised of three items. This dimension accounted for 12.9% of variance with an Eigenvalue of 1.93 (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$). A third dimension aligned with two information function items ($r = .48, p<.001$), representing 10.3% of variance with an Eigenvalue of 1.54. The next dimension, linked to the mobilization function, consisted of three items (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .74$), accounting for 7.3% of variance with an Eigenvalue of 1.10. The public forum function constituted a fifth dimension with three items (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .73$), accounting for 6.7% of variance with an Eigenvalue of 1.00. Finally, the lowest loading factor—aligned with the social empathy function—had two items ($r = .40, p<.001$) with an Eigenvalue of .87, accounting for 5.8% of the variance. It is recognized that the conventional cutoff of a 1.00 or greater Eigenvalue is commonly used as the standard for a factor to be considered articulated (Kaiser, 1960). Yet even as this latter factor falls below the traditional cutoff, it is worth noting that the cut-off of 1.00 is highly arbitrary (Morrison, 2009; Reagan, 2000) and critiqued by some as an overly strict cutoff (Jolliffe, 1986). Indeed, upon examination of a scree plot, the “elbow” of the scree plot was situated between the sixth and seventh factors, suggesting that the sixth factor of this solution may constitute a meaningful dimension of the PNMI scale. Therefore, the sixth factor (the social empathy factor) was retained for the preliminary 15-item PNMI index solution.

To further assess the measurement model of the preliminary 15-item version of the PNMI scale—thorized at the outset to include six dimensions—a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using maximum likelihood estimation to test the measurement
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preliminary PNMI Items (15)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>provide analysis and interpretation of the complex problems around me</td>
<td>1.016</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>-.068</td>
<td>-.050</td>
<td>-.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide analysis and interpretation of events in the news</td>
<td>.771</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>-.006</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be an adversary of public officials by being constantly skeptical of their actions</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>.952</td>
<td>-.092</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be an adversary of businesses by being constantly skeptical of their actions</td>
<td>-.021</td>
<td>.817</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>-.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expose the shortcomings of government officials and institutions.</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td>.588</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td>-.086</td>
<td>-.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide me with a daily account of what is happening in the world.</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>-.077</td>
<td>.901</td>
<td>-.057</td>
<td>.083</td>
<td>.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>keep me up to date on what my political leaders and government are doing.</td>
<td>-.029</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.537</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>-.109</td>
<td>-.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help me to play active roles in community controversies</td>
<td>-.078</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.031</td>
<td>.833</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>point me toward possible solutions to society's problems</td>
<td>.247</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>.548</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivate ordinary people to get involved in public discussions of important issues</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.540</td>
<td>-.099</td>
<td>.082</td>
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<tr>
<td>encourage substantive public debates about important issues</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>-.773</td>
<td>-.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide a forum for a wide range of viewpoints on important issues</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>-.081</td>
<td>-.617</td>
<td>.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help me learn more about issues and political causes that I don’t agree with</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.088</td>
<td>-.488</td>
<td>.224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open my eyes to the good things that are happening to people</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>-.028</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>-.062</td>
<td>.732</td>
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<tr>
<td>open my eyes to the misfortunes of other people</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eigenvalues</strong></td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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Table 1. Summary of exploratory factor analysis results for initial 15-item PNMI.

Note: Factor loadings over .30 appear in bold.
model fit of the composite scale as suggested by the EFA. Modeling the measure with a single higher-order latent variable (PNMI) and six lower-order latent variable (information, investigation, analysis, social empathy, public forum, and mobilization), a sufficient model fit was reached, as indicated by the following fit statistics: $\chi^2(84, 402) = 230.39, p < .001$; CFI = .932, RMSEA = .066 (90% CI from .056 to .076); and SRMR= .062. In summary, the set of 15 PNMI items identified by the MTurk sample was deemed strong enough to be carried forward for the Stage 2 survey.

**Stage 2 Survey**

The 15 items from the Stage 1 MTurk survey were employed in this study’s Stage 2 survey administered by the GfK survey firm in March 2015. Motivated by a desire to further refine and streamline the rather bulky measure, three additional questions were dropped from the scale prior to analysis, based on face validity considerations. The “be an adversary of businesses” question was cut because of concerns that this wording was rather strong and potentially politically charged. A fiscal conservative, for example, who might otherwise deem the work of the news media to be important, may balk at the idea that journalists should have an adversarial relationship with the business world. In addition, the “provide a forum for a wide range of viewpoints” item was dropped because, in totality, it seemed redundant with the other two questions of the public forum dimension of PNMI. Finally, the “point me toward possible solutions” item was omitted from analyses because—upon further consideration—I did not feel the question well represented the action-oriented nature of the mobilization dimension of PNMI.

Upon trimming the battery of PNMI items on the basis of face validity considerations, a total of 12 PNMI items remained, with two questions in each of the six
theorized dimensions. The basic zero-order correlations for the two items of each
dimension remained strong—across the information \( r=.68, p<.001 \), investigation \( r=.44, p<.001 \), analysis \( r=.70, p<.001 \), social empathy \( r=.38, p<.001 \), public forum \( r=.50, p<.001 \), and mobilization \( r=.56, p<.001 \) functions. With a streamlined list of questions motivated by a theoretical framework, the measurement structure of the 12 PNMI survey items was tested via a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to formally address the first research question of this study: (RQ1) What are the underlying dimensions of the PNMI measure? Modeling PNMI as hierarchical factor (of second order) consisting of six lower-order latent variables (see Figure 3), a CFA indicates that the 12-item PNMI structure aligned with the six hypothesized media functions theorized by this research effort (i.e., information, analysis, social empathy, public forum, and mobilization) exhibits a strong fit. The fit statistics are as follows: \( \chi^2(48, 510) = 150.18, p < .001; \) CFI = .955, RMSEA = .065 (90% CI from .053 to .077); and SRMR=.044.

To address the first hypothesis (H1a, b) that the PNMI index will demonstrate convergent validity with (H1a) political interest and (H1b) political participation, zero-order correlations were calculated for each variable. Political interest had a zero-order correlation of \( r=0.27 \) with PNMI \( (p<.001) \), while political participation had a raw zero-order correlation of \( r=0.09 \) with PNMI \( (p<.05) \). As noted in the Measures section above, because the tally-based participation index did not demonstrate strong reliability (Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .59 \)), the index measure was corrected for attenuation (Muchinsky, 1996) rendering a validity coefficient of 0.12. In sum, both variables demonstrate significant relationships with PNMI, supporting the convergent validity of the scale.
Figure 3. Measurement Model of Perceived News Media Importance (PNMI)

Note: See Appendix A for corresponding survey item wording.
To test the second hypothesis (H2) that PNMI is sufficiently statistically distinguishable from the (H2a) negative content media image (Kosicki & McLeod, 1990) and (H2b) basic media trust (i.e., judgments of the news media as accurate, fair, and can be trusted), the model used to confirm the PNMI measure (RQ1) was extended to include a 3-item media trust scale and a 2-item negative content media image. Media trust and the negative content media image were co-varied with PNMI and each other, allowing the model to assess the relationships of the three distinct latent constructs, each representing different forms of news media perceptions (see Figure 4). This model demonstrated a good fit, indicated as follows: \( \chi^2(110, 510) = 316.87, p < .001; \) CFI = .948, RMSEA = .061 (90% CI from .053 to .069); and SRMR= .061. Moreover, the co-varied path estimate between PNMI and Negative Content Media Image was 0.06, while the co-varied path estimate between PNMI and Media Trust was 0.44. Although the strength of PNMI’s relationships with these variables differ substantially, the analysis supports the proposition that PNMI is related to but distinct from these media perception concepts. Finally, the PNMI scale developed by this project is shown to be relatively distinct from ideology (H2c), as PNMI’s zero order correction of \( r = -0.13 \) (\( p < .01 \)) with ideology (7-point scale, conservative coded high) is small.\(^\text{14}\)

Turning to the second research question (RQ2), which examines how ideology correlates with the underlying dimensions of PNMI, it is evident that ideology significantly negatively relates to each dimension of PNMI with exception to the information function. As detailed in Table 2, the significant correlations range from zero-

\(^{14}\) Notably—as shown in the OLS regression model reported in Table 4—ideology is not a significant predictor of PNMI when controlling for basic demographics, political orientations, and media perceptions.
Figure 4. CFA Model Depicting Measurements of PNMI, Negative Content Media Image, and Media Trust
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Table 2. Zero-order correlations with PNMI (12-item scale) and dimensions of PNMI
Note: #p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001
order $r = -0.04$ (investigation) to $r = -0.15$ (analysis). In sum, although the zero-order correlations are modest, the more one’s ideology leans conservative, the less likely one is to value most of the media functions at the heart of the PNMI scale.

The third research question (RQ3) inquired what types of political news information use PNMI predicts. Modeling newspaper use, TV news use, radio news use, magazine news use, web-based news use, and social media-based news use as the dependent variables in separate OLS regression models, PNMI does not generally predict any type of media use when controlling for basic demographics, political orientation, political interest, need for cognition, and media trust variables. Notably, PNMI’s predictive value relative to web-based news use is marginally significant ($\beta = 0.08, p = .09$). It may be due to a lack of statistical power, but, as the coefficients in Table 3 indicate, overall there is little to no evidence that perceptions of PNMI predict political media use. Furthermore, as shown in the supplemental information provided in Table 4—modeling predictors of PNMI—neither does political media use predict PNMI.

The fourth research question (RQ4) examined whether and to what extent PNMI significantly predicts media trust. As shown in Table 5, a hierarchical multiple regression equation was created with media trust as the dependent variable; 20 predictor variables were entered in three blocks. The block 1 variables include demographic and political orientation factors, along with need for cognition (12 variables in all). Block 1 accounted for 12% of the variance in trust. Block 2 inserted seven variables into the model, including the negative content media image and the media use variables. These variables accounted for 7% of the variance. Finally, PNMI (i.e., block 3) was added, demonstrating strong predictive ability ($\beta = 0.39, p < .001$). For every standardized unit of change in
PNMI, there is a .39 increment of change in a standardized unit of trust. Moreover, the data demonstrate that PNMI outperforms all other predictors in the model, uniquely accounting for 13% of the variance in media trust (final $R^2 = 0.32$) (see Table 5).

In summary, serving as the cornerstone of this research project, these initial analyses provide confidence that, overall, the PMMI measure is internally consistent and reliable with solid discriminant, convergent validity, and predictive validity. Moreover, it serves as a strong predictor of media trust, above and beyond other factors. Notably, PNMI is a strong positive predictor of media trust. Having established a reliable measure, we can now turn to Study 2’s examination of how PNMI and news parody may both independently and jointly influence various dimensions of news media trust.
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<td>Need for Cognition</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.07*</td>
<td>-0.08*</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neg. Content M.I.</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Trust</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
<td>0.125*</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Block 2**

| PNMI             | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.03 | 0.03 | -0.03 | -0.03 | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.08# | 0.08# | 0.00 | 0.00 | -0.03 | -0.03 |
| Δ$R^2$%          | 0.1% | 0.1% | 0.1% | 0.3% | 0.3% | 0.3% | 0.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |

**Final $R^2$%** | 18.9% | 27.5% | 24.2% | 15.0% | 26.9% | 17.6% | 15.3% | 15.3% | 15.3% | 15.3% | 15.3% | 15.3% | 15.3% | 15.3% |

$N$ | 500 | 500 | 499 | 500 | 500 | 499 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 | 500 |

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting Sources of Political Information

Note: Standardized beta weights reported. *p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
**DV: PNMI**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>Upon Entry $\beta$</th>
<th>Final $\beta$</th>
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<td><strong>Block 1</strong></td>
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<td>Need for Cognition</td>
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<td>$R^2%$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Print newspaper use</td>
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<tr>
<td>Television news use</td>
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<td>0.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radio news use</td>
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<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine use</td>
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<tr>
<td>Web-based news use</td>
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<td>Social media news use</td>
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<td>-0.04#</td>
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<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2%$</td>
<td>15%***</td>
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</table>

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting PNMI.

Note: Standardized beta weights reported. #p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. Final $R^2 = 0.265$. $N=498$. 86
DV: Media Trust

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Predictor variables</th>
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<th>Final $\beta$</th>
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<tr>
<td>Race (Black)</td>
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<td>Party ID (Democrat)</td>
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<td>0.11*</td>
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<td>-0.19***</td>
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<td>Political Interest</td>
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<td>Political Participation</td>
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<td>-0.10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Cognition</td>
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<td>-0.14**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$ %</td>
<td>12%***</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Block 2</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Content Media Image</td>
<td>-0.13**</td>
<td>-0.17***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print newspaper use</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television news use</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
<td>0.09#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio news use</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine use</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web-based news use</td>
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<td>-0.15**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social media news use</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$ %</td>
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<td>--</td>
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<td><strong>Block 3</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>PNMI</td>
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<td>0.39***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$ %</td>
<td>13%***</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting Media Trust

Note. Standardized beta weights reported. #p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. Final $R^2 = 0.32$. N=502.
Chapter 4: Study 2

Methodology

The central aim of Study 2 is to advance an understanding of how news parody-based commentary may influence news media trust judgments, with particular interest in how perceptions of news media importance (PNMI) play a role in influencing news parody’s effect on media trust. To this end, Study 2 addresses eight hypotheses and eight research questions, examined via two experiments embedded within a two-wave online survey (wave 1: \( N = 403 \); wave 2: \( N = 227 \)).

The two-wave survey design afforded the ability to conduct two distinct, yet overlapping, experiments. The main experiment (Experiment 1) broadly explores how news parody commentary influences several types of trust in the news media industry in general. Enabling an examination of media criticism’s effect as embedded in news parody, the key manipulation of this first experiment involved exposure to (a) explicit criticism of the news media via news parody or (b) a news parody message devoid of overt media criticism. In addition, this first experiment also facilitates tests of pro-attitudinal parody’s effect (i.e., basic posttest agreement with the given parody stimulus) on general media trust. To examine these two types news parody commentary effects relative to PNMI, the two-wave panel study collected pre- and posttest measures of general media trust and pre- and posttest measures of PNMI. Collecting these data, with
about a one-week time interval, allows for an examination of change in both general trust and PNMI. Moreover, it enables an exploration of PNMI’s potential roles as either an intervening or moderating factor.

The second experiment (Experiment 2) was also designed to examine news parody effects relative to PNMI, as outlined above. Only the dependent variable in the second experiment is trust in specific news outlets, as opposed to the news media in general. The key manipulation in the second experiment was whether the participant was directed to evaluate (a) a preferred news source or (b) a randomly assigned non-preferred news source. As with the first experiment, Experiment 2 affords an examination of PNMI’s independent and intervening roles relative to the effects of parody commentary and media trust.

**Participants**

English speaking, American adult participants were recruited from an opt-in online panel administered by the Qualtrics survey firm. Participants who did not consent to participate, who failed to answer one of several quality control questions, who did not finish the survey, or who were judged to be inattentive were screened from the sample, resulting in approximately 400 valid completions of the Wave 1 questionnaire (N=415). The Wave 1 participants were 51% female and included a diversity of education levels (16% high school or less, 24% some college, 43% four years college or more), income levels (41% <$50K, 35% $75K+), and ages ($M=52.85, SD=13.12; 15% 18–35 years, 21% 36–50 years, 64% older). The Wave 1 sample was also evenly distributed in terms of political party identification (34% Democrat; 33% Republican); on average the sample

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15Qualtrics’ cutoff threshold for flagging inattentive (or “speeder”) respondents was determined by taking the median survey completion time of the sample and dividing that by three.
was moderate in terms of ideology, rated on a 7-point scale from *very liberal* to *very conservative* ($M = 4.14, SD = 1.73$). In terms of race, the sample was 89% White, 3% Asian, 6% Black, and 5% Hispanic or Latino.

Of 415 participants who participated in the first-wave survey, 307 agreed to participate in the second wave survey (that is, they at least started the survey) approximately a week later. Note that the targeted sample size for the Wave 2 data collection was about 200. More than 400 responses were collected with the Wave 1 survey in anticipation of not being able to successfully re-contact a sizeable portion of the original panel sample. Any Wave 2 panel participants who were unable to view the video stimuli or who failed to answer several quality control questions in the second survey were screened from the analyses. Ultimately, 227 complete, valid cases ($N=227$) were retained for the Wave 2 analyses (age: $M=53.93, SD=12.39$; 51% male; 91% white; 3% black; ideology: $M = 4.30, SD = 1.78$). In terms of the number of re-contacted panel members who started the Wave 2 survey relative to the completed/valid cases, the second panel survey had a 26% attrition rate.

Furthermore, participants of a separate MTurk data collection effort served to pretest the news parody stimuli manipulations used in Experiment 1. The six parody videos featured in this study’s experimental design were tested with a small sample ($N=128$). This sample included adults between the ages of 18 and 77 ($M=34.93, SD=12.56$); the sample was 58% male. Party affiliation was 29% Democrat, 9% Republican, and 56% independent. The sample leaned liberal in ideology, with conservative coded high on a 1 to 7 scale ($M=3.14, SD=1.49$). Approximately 58% of the participants had either an associate, bachelor’s, graduate, or professional degree; nearly
13% had a high school education. The majority of the sample earned less than $50,000 annually (58% <$50K, 23% $75K+).

In accordance with AAPOR guidelines, it is important to note that respondents for both data collection efforts of Study 2 (Qualtrics and MTurk) were selected from among those who volunteered to participate and/or were registered to participate in Qualtrics-affiliated online surveys and polls. The resultant data have not been weighted to reflect the demographic composition of general population. Because the sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation rather than a probability sample, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated (AAPOR, n.d.).

**Procedure**

An Internet-based program was used to administer the two waves of surveys for Study 2. The median length of time to complete the first survey session was approximately 7.5 minutes; the median survey duration time for the second session was approximately 17 minutes. The Wave 1 survey was principally designed to gather basic demographic and political orientation information, along with pretest measures of media trust, PNMI, and other potential covariates. The Wave 2 questionnaire featured the two experiments at the center of Study 2.

After answering a political efficacy-related question and several basic news media exposure questions, participants began the second wave survey by indicating which news outlet they most preferred, choosing from a pre-determined list that included the Fox News Channel, CNN, MSNBC, The PBS Newshour, ABC News, CBS News, NBC News, *The Huffington Post*, NPR, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA*
Today. Next, each subject was exposed to a short video, preceded by the instructions, “Please carefully watch the following video clip in its entirety. Note that due to time constraints this clip has been edited. Following the clip, you will be asked several questions about the video’s content.” Half of the study participants were randomly assigned to view a publically available clip of a news parody show (featuring either the comedians Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, or John Oliver) that explicitly critiqued news media practices in some way, while the other half viewed a news parody video (again, featuring Stewart, Colbert, or Oliver) that was devoid of explicit news media criticism. Following exposure to one of the six news parody videos, participants were asked if they had any difficulties hearing or viewing the video, to indicate their level of enjoyment of the video, and asked a quality control question to assess if they paid sufficient attention to the video stimulus. All participants were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with the “main arguments” of the news parody video, their level of interest in the given topic, and the extent to which the video’s content made them feel afraid.

Following a battery of questions pertaining to attitudes about the news media (i.e., posttest measures of media trust and PNMI [see Appendix B]), participants in both parody treatment conditions were randomly assigned to read a brief, fact-based news story about President Obama’s proposal to fund initiatives for curtail illegal immigration (see Appendix C), preceded with the instructions “Please read the following news story and be prepared to answer several basic questions about the source and the main topic of the news content.” All participants read this basic news story, only—as informed by respondents’ self-reported preferred news outlets at the beginning of the questionnaire—

---

16 Notably, the most frequently selected source was Fox News (30%), followed by CNN (15%), CBS News (11%), ABC News (11%), and NBC News (10%).
the participants were randomly assigned to an experimental condition in which the news story was attributed to either (a) one’s preferred news source or (b) a random non-preferred source. Following exposure the text-based news story (see Appendix C for an example stimulus), participants were asked to evaluate the story and the news outlet associated with the story, in terms of media trust (i.e., believability, news judgment, and altruistic motives).

Importantly, the outlet-specific media trust questions for each participant included a news source referent, which was based on the news outlet that each participant reported seeing in the stimuli. For a majority of the participants, the news source they reported seeing matched with the stimuli to which they were actually exposed (N=147). However, some participants did not correctly identify the source of the story they read, although they were all able to correctly identify the topic of the news story stimuli, as well as correctly answer several other quality-control questions in the survey. There was no significant difference in the frequency of incorrect responses between the two experimental conditions to which participants were originally assigned—36 in the preferred news source condition and 44 in the non-preferred source condition, \( \chi^2 (1) = 1.84, p = .18 \). Because (a) the outlet-specific media trust questions were designed to include a specific referent and (b) I did not want to introduce a potential confound by contradicting what respondents reported reading in the stimuli, the media trust questions presented to respondents following the news story stimuli was tailored according to what each person reported reading, not the news source attribution we know they actually saw. Because the key dependent variable related to this manipulation is not about knowledge retention but, instead, about having a concrete cognitive referent, even when
respondents were not able to correctly identify the source of the news story they read, they were nonetheless retained for the study analyses discussed below. (Notably, incorrect identifications were controlled for in all analyses.) Finally, after evaluating the trustworthiness of either a preferred or non-preferred news source, participants were debriefed about the manipulated news story stimuli (i.e., the source attribution) that they read and thanked for their participation.

**Stimuli and Pretest**

In an effort to strengthen the generalizability of any resultant news parody effects, stimulus sampling (Wells & Windschitl, 1999) was used for the news parody video component of the experiment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: the *explicit critique condition* and the *no-overt critique condition*. Participants in each of these conditions were then randomly assigned to view one of three videos: either a clip from *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, Last Week Tonight with John Oliver,* or *The Colbert Report.* Across both conditions, the experiment featured six videos in total. The videos were all produced in 2014 and edited by this author to be similar in length, ranging from approximately 5.5 to less than 6 minutes in length. Each of the six clips are described below.17

**Description of explicit critique condition**

*The Colbert Report* clip (5:41 minutes in length) used in the *explicit critique condition* focused on the speculative media coverage surrounding the Malaysian airliner that went missing mid-flight in the spring of 2014. Originally aired on March 24, 2014,

17Access to the video stimuli is available upon request. Alternatively, one can find the clips via the comedy programs’ websites; links are provided in this document’s References section. The show segments used for this study can be found at the approximately the following time marks in the full episodes: Malaysian airliner clip: 9:40; India election: 5:40; Ebola: 1:20; ISIS: 1:45; Nuclear weapons: 8:38; Oil pipeline: 0:35.
Colbert mocked his “colleagues in the 24-hour news game” for entertaining a variety of far-fetched theories to explain the plane’s disappearance (Moreschi & Hoskinson, 2014a)—an example of how the comedy show segment critiqued the news media. Meanwhile, the Last Week Tonight with John Oliver segment (5:52 minutes) used in this experimental condition pointedly critiqued the news media for “completely ignoring…the biggest election in human history”: the 2014 general election in India that brought Prime Minister Narendra Modi to power (Oliver & Perota, 2014a). The Oliver clip originally aired on April 27, 2014. Finally, The Daily Show with Jon Stewart video segment (5:33 minutes) centered on the news media’s hyped coverage of the Ebola virus surfacing in the U.S. in the fall of 2014. During the program, which aired on October 14, 2014, Stewart lamented that “we can’t count on the news media to take a reasoned approach” to reporting on the emergence of the Ebola virus in the U.S. (Kalan & O’Neil, 2014a). In sum, all three comedic video clips in the explicit critique condition relayed some form of disapproval regarding how members of the news media—beyond the scope of just one organization—were conducting their work.

Description of no-overt critique condition

First aired on September 16, 2014, The Colbert Report video (5:54 minutes) featured in the contrasting no-overt critique condition discussed the Obama administration’s strategy for combatting ISIS (i.e., the so-called Islamic State) and the ambiguity (at the time) about the identity of allies to the U.S. in the forthcoming efforts to combat ISIS (Moreschi & Hoskinson, 2014b). Notably, the Colbert segment devoted parts of the segment to explaining the context surrounding the challenges of combating ISIS. Meanwhile, the July 27, 2014 Last Week Tonight clip (5:55 minutes) used in this
The experimental condition was devoted to explaining and critiquing America’s handling of its aging nuclear weapons stockpile (Oliver & Perota, 2014b). Finally, *The Daily Show* video (5:56 minutes) used in this condition was originally featured in the show’s November 20, 2014 episode. The segment broadly explained the debate surrounding the Keystone XL Oil Pipeline legislation then under consideration in Congress. This particular segment noted some of the benefits and drawbacks of the project, but ultimately did not take a clear stance for or against the pipeline project. Importantly, all three videos featured in the *no-overt criticism* did not explicitly focus on the news media. Instead, the segments mainly directed attention to and explained some notable news stories of the day.

**Video stimuli pretesting**

The news parody videos used in this study were all pretested prior to fielding the experiment. The chief purpose of piloting the videos was to (a) confirm that the news parody clips would in fact be perceived as critical (or not) of the news media. The pilot survey was also designed to examine if (b) the videos were comparably humorous and (c) not meaningfully different in terms of eliciting other affective responses. Administered on February 6, 2015, the pilot test was conducted using respondents from Amazon.com’s MTurk system. More than 100 participants (N=127) completed the survey and correctly answered a basic quality control question embedded in the survey.

The question of how the stimuli ultimately used for the main experiment compare as perceived critiques of the news media was examined from two vantage points. First, following random exposure to one of the six video clips, participants were asked about their perceptions of the featured comedian’s commentary. That is, the survey inquired of the
respondents’ level of agreement on a 7-point scale (agreement coded high) with the statements, “The comedian was critical of the news media,” “The comedian seemed disapproving of the news media,” and “The comedian discussed the news media in an unfavorable way.” A criticism scale was constructed by calculating the mean of responses to the three survey items. Due to evidence that the data from the small MTurk sample was not normally distributed within all the groups (i.e., a K-S test indicates that the criticism scale within Colbert’s Malaysian Airline clip was significantly non-normal, $D(20) = .24, p<.01$; Stewart’s Ebola segment was significantly non-normal, $D(20) = .21, p<.05$), a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to compare the criticism index across the six exposure conditions.

As expected, the Kruskal-Wallis omnibus test indicated significant differences in perceived media criticism across the six different videos, $H(5) = 53.45, p< .001$. Mann-Whitney tests were used to follow up this test, revealing no differences in perceived criticism among the three news parody clips that comprise the explicit criticism condition; similarly, there were no significant differences among the three news parody clips making up the no-overt criticism condition. However, all pairwise comparisons with (a) a given clip from one condition with (b) each of the three clips in the contrasting experimental condition were significantly different in perceived news media criticism. Each video used in the explicit criticism condition was greater in criticism ratings than each video in the no-overt criticism set (see Table 6 for the descriptive statistics of the criticism ratings and an overview of the post-hoc tests). Furthermore, when comparing the media criticism index more broadly, aggregating the ratings of the three videos in each experimental conditions, Mann-Whitney test indicates that—as intended—there was greater agreement with the idea that the given
videos were critical of the news media among those exposed to an “explicit criticism” video, as compared to those exposed to a “no overt criticism” video. That is, the criticism index in the explicit criticism parody condition \((M = 6.00, SD = 0.84)\) was significantly greater than that of the no-overt criticism condition \((M = 4.16, SD = 1.46), U = 528.00, p < .001\). In summary, this stimuli pretest provides considerable confidence that explicit criticism condition indeed functions as overt media criticism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Criticism Index</th>
<th>% Critical of Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit Critique of Media</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>70.40 (26.25)(<em>a</em>)</td>
</tr>
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<td>LWT/India</td>
<td>6.14 (0.64)(<em>a</em>)</td>
<td>68.29 (24.52)(<em>a</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCR/Missing Airliner</td>
<td>5.97 (1.05)(<em>a</em>)</td>
<td>80.60 (19.93)(<em>a</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Overt Critique of Media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDS/Oil Pipeline</td>
<td>3.79 (1.60)(<em>b</em>)</td>
<td>37.82 (29.16)(<em>b</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LWT/Nuclear Weapons</td>
<td>4.36 (1.36)(<em>b</em>)</td>
<td>37.63 (27.02)(<em>b</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCR/Combatting ISIS</td>
<td>4.32 (1.44)(<em>b</em>)</td>
<td>39.50 (31.72)(<em>b</em>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Pre-testing perceived criticism of news parody stimuli

Note: Means with different subscript letters within a column are significantly different when employing non-parametric Mann-Whitney tests, applying a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons so that all effects are reported at a .003 level of significance.

A second approach to examining the media criticism embedded in the stimuli involved asking participants to assess how much the video content, as a whole, was critical of the news media industry. Participants were asked, “In your opinion, what
percentage of the video clip you just viewed was devoted to critiquing the news media industry?” Again, due to evidence of non-normal distributions (e.g., the percentage ratings within Oliver’s Nuclear weapons segment was significantly non-normal, $D(24) = 0.22, p<.01$), a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to compare the media criticism assessments across the six parody video conditions. The test indicates significant differences in assessments of criticism across the six different videos, $H(5) = 42.17, p< .001$. Post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests in each of the two broad experimental conditions reveal no differences in perceived criticism among the clips in each of the main experimental conditions. However, pairwise comparisons reveal that all six of the news parody clip conditions are significantly different from any given news parody messages in a contrasting experimental condition (see Table 6 for overview). More broadly, a additional Mann-Whitney test highlights a significant difference between the explicit criticism condition ($M = 73.02, SD = 23.95$) and the no-overt criticism condition ($M = 38.26, SD = 28.77$), $U=707.50, p<.001$. This pretest also reveals a clear distinction between the two sets of stimuli in terms of being critical of the news media.

Given that all the news parody clips are intended to function as comedic messages, the six news parody clips were also compared in terms of their entertainment value. This check was designed to confirm that any contrasting effects from exposure to the various news parody clips are not the result of dissimilar levels of humor enjoyment. Enjoyment was measured with a 7-point semantic differential scale via the following adjectives: not funny/funny, not amusing/amusing, not entertaining/entertaining, and not humorous/humorous (see Nabi, Moyer-Gusé, & Byrne, 2007). Participants read the following introduction to the differentials: “Please rate your feelings about the video you
just viewed. Don't worry about trying to determine the precise distinctions between the
descriptions listed below. Just indicate your first reactions.” Aggregating the responses to
these four items, a humor enjoyment scale was constructed. Due to evidence of non-
normal distributions, a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to compare
humor enjoyment across the six parody video conditions. The test revealed no significant
differences in enjoyment across the six different videos, $H(5) = 5.11$, n.s.

Finally, the video stimuli were examined in terms of their capacity to generate
affective responses, which could in turn influence dependent variables of interest like
media trust or PNMI. For example, perhaps the different news parody clips—featuring
topics like ISIS, the Ebola virus, and nuclear weapons—could elicit different levels of
anxiety. This could, in turn, prompt respondents to be more attentive to and ultimately
critical of the message itself or the object of the news parody’s critique (i.e., the news
media). To examine such potential affective responses, respondents were asked upon
exposure to a respective news parody stimulus, “To what extent did [the video clip] make
you feel…(a) angry, (b) anxious, (c) disgusted, (d) afraid, and (e) hopeful]…” on a 0-4
(5-point) scale. Answer options included “Not at all [0],” “Not very much [1],” “Some
[2],” “Quite a bit [3],” and “A lot [4].” Employing Kruskal-Wallis tests that compared the
self-reports of the affect-laden adjectives across the six news parody exposure conditions,
there were no significant differences in terms of feeling angry ($H(5) = 6.18$, n.s.), anxious
($H(5) = 9.64$, n.s.), disgusted ($H(5) = 4.14$, n.s.), or hopeful ($H(5) = 6.34$, n.s.). However,
there was a significant difference in terms of feeling “afraid” ($H(5) = 11.09$, $p=.05$).
Upon closer examination of the stimuli effects in terms of feeling “afraid,” it is evident
that the Last Week Tonight clip about nuclear weapons was responsible for the
significance of the Kruskal-Wallis omnibus test (see Table 7 for the mean values of the affective responses to each video). Subsequent Mann-Whitney tests involving the nuclear weapons-themed clip—five tests in total\(^{18}\)—show that, in terms of feeling “afraid,” the Oliver clip \((M = 1.25, SD = 0.99)\) significantly differed from the Ebola clip \((M = .45, SD = 0.83)\), \(U=129.50, p<.01\), and the Malaysian airliner video \((M = .50, SD = 0.76)\), \(U=138.00, p=.01\). The statistical significance of these differences, however, is not overly concerning, as the magnitude of the response is modest. Among those exposed to the nuclear weapons-themed video \((n=24)\), the average response for feeling “afraid” \((Mdn = 1; M=1.25, SD = 0.99)\) is roughly equivalent to “not very much” on the question’s scale. Even so, in view of the potential of a low level of fear functioning as a confound in the experiment, all participants in the main experiment’s questionnaire were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the question, “the main issues discussed in the video made me feel afraid” following exposure to a news parody clip. The potential influence of this factor was controlled for in all relevant analyses for the main experiment.

18 Text-based news story stimuli

The second set of stimuli used in Study 2 featured a text-based news story published by the Associated Press (AP) (Caldwell, 2015). Recall that this story was presented to participants after exposure to the parody stimuli. Responses to the news story were expected to be influenced by exposure to the video stimuli. This AP news story, which was carried by many news outlets in early 2015, reported on President Obama’s budget request for $1 billion to curb illegal immigration from Central America.

\(^{18}\)Due to the need to conduct multiple comparison tests (5 tests) between the groups—potentially introducing a Type I error—a Bonferroni correction was applied so that all effects are reported at a .01 alpha level of significance—determined by dividing the conventional .05 alpha level by 5 (the number of comparison tests conducted.)
Affective responses to the question (on a 5-point scale), “To what extent did [the video clip] make you feel [angry, anxious, disgusted, and afraid].” Answer options included “Not at all [0],” “Not very much [1],” “Some [2],” “Quite a bit [3],” and “A lot [4].”

This news story was selected in part because it was published by a news organization (i.e., AP) not typically associated with any particular ideological slant. Indeed, AP regularly provides news content for many news organizations across the ideological spectrum (e.g., AP content can often be found on the websites of both Fox News and MSNBC). This track record offers a basis for confidence that its content is relatively neutral. Moreover—in the judgment of this study’s author at least—the reportage of the chosen article (Caldwell, 2015) was devoid of bias. Furthermore, in order to optimize the possibility of generating discernable effect relative to rating trust in a given news source, the selection of this article was also motivated by its potential to raise

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Angry (M SD)</th>
<th>Anxious (SD)</th>
<th>Disgusted (SD)</th>
<th>Afraid (SD)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explicit Critique of Media</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDS/Ebola</td>
<td>0.65 (0.99)</td>
<td>0.40 (0.82)</td>
<td>1.00 (1.17)</td>
<td>0.45 (0.83)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LWT/India</td>
<td>1.19 (0.93)</td>
<td>1.05 (1.16)</td>
<td>1.29 (1.15)</td>
<td>0.76 (1.22)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCR/Missing Airliner</td>
<td>0.80 (1.11)</td>
<td>0.55 (0.89)</td>
<td>0.70 (1.03)</td>
<td>0.50 (0.76)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No Overt Critique of Media</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDS/Oil Pipeline</td>
<td>1.18 (1.01)</td>
<td>0.73 (0.99)</td>
<td>1.27 (1.12)</td>
<td>0.77 (0.92)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LWT/Nuclear Weapons</td>
<td>0.96 (0.96)</td>
<td>1.25 (1.15)</td>
<td>1.04 (1.23)</td>
<td>1.25 (0.99)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCR/Combatting ISIS</td>
<td>1.05 (1.19)</td>
<td>0.75 (1.16)</td>
<td>1.15 (1.39)</td>
<td>0.75 (1.02)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Pre-testing news parody stimuli in terms of perceived criticism of news media.

Note: This news story was selected in part because it was published by a news organization (i.e., AP) not typically associated with any particular ideological slant. Indeed, AP regularly provides news content for many news organizations across the ideological spectrum (e.g., AP content can often be found on the websites of both Fox News and MSNBC). This track record offers a basis for confidence that its content is relatively neutral. Moreover—in the judgment of this study’s author at least—the reportage of the chosen article (Caldwell, 2015) was devoid of bias. Furthermore, in order to optimize the possibility of generating discernable effect relative to rating trust in a given news source, the selection of this article was also motivated by its potential to raise

102
(at a surface level) initial suspicion of bias. That is, the news story seemed ideal because the basic subject matter and headline of the story related to immigration—a politically charged issue in today’s political environment. Thus, even as the article was simply reporting on a White House budget request, the relatively neutral story had the potential to raise suspicion of bias—from the left or right side of the political spectrum—by virtue of involving the often-polarizing topic of immigration.

Although all participants were exposed to the same news article body, the article’s attribution varied between the experimental conditions. As Baum and Gussin (2007) demonstrate, a simple manipulation of a news transcript—manipulating the news brands attributed to a news story—can generate meaningful differences in perceptions of a news story’s bias. Baum and Gussin found that pre-existing assessments of news outlets like CNN and Fox heavily influenced perceptions of bias in relatively neutral news content. This present study’s manipulation is similarly designed to examine trust in the news media as based on when the object of trust is a specific news brand—moving beyond the realm of general news media trust assessments. Accordingly, participants in the preferred news source condition were exposed to the AP article as attributed to the news source that the respondent earlier indicated preferring—in a question posed at the beginning of the survey. The non-preferred news source condition randomly attributed the article to one of the 11 news sources that was not selected as a most preferred source at the top of the questionnaire. Across both conditions, 12 news outlets\(^\text{19}\) were variously referenced as the source of the story, as indicated by the positioning the news source’s logo at the top of

the page and the organization’s website address at both the top and bottom of the page (see Appendix C).

The non-exhaustive list of the specific news outlets featured in the second set of experimental stimuli was developed via consideration of two questions posed in a separate survey, which was administered in October of 2014 and used respondents from Amazon.com’s MTurk system (N=403). Half of the sample (n=202) were asked the closed-ended question, “When we mentioned the term ‘the news media’ at different points in this survey, what were you thinking of—in terms of the types of news sources that first came to mind?” Respondents were asked to select sources from a list of 30 news providers—both at an object-specific level (e.g., CNN) and at a categorical level (e.g., local TV news). Participants were also provided with the ability to enter text for any news source not listed. Response options were randomized—across the object-specific and category-level news sources—and, importantly, respondents were able to select more than one news source. The other half of the sample (n=201) was asked the same question, (i.e., what news sources first came to mind), only instead of selecting closed-ended answers, participants were instructed to list all the news sources that came to mind.

Among those presented with the closed-ended question (n=202), which asked participants to select the news sources that first came to mind when thinking of the news media, the most commonly mentioned sources were specific news outlets. A large majority of the respondents (70%) indicated that CNN was among the news sources that first came to mind. Fox News Channel (50%) and MSNBC (47%) were the next most frequently cited news sources, followed by NBC News (42%), The New York Times (38%), and ABC News
(37%). The other half of the sample (n=201) who were presented with the open-ended version of this same question provided an array of open-ended responses. However, in terms of the specific news sources mentioned, CNN was again the most specifically cited news outlet, mentioned by approximately 45% of the respondents. Behind CNN was Fox News (41%), followed by MSNBC (24%), NBC News (13%), ABC News (11%), and The New York Times (10%). Interestingly, in terms of the top six specific news outlets noted in each group (i.e., those presented with the closed-ended versus the open-ended question), the rank order of the open-ended responses matched the rank order of the top closed-ended responses almost identically (see Table 8 for a full listing of the frequencies of each news source selected in the closed-ended question). When determining which news sources would be used as potential attribution source cues in the second experiment, these top-ranked sources were included. In addition, it is notable that the top responses were not confined to one communication medium; in addition to cable and network television, a newspaper (The New York Times) was also frequently cited. Accordingly, a variety of news outlets types were selected to be included in the experimental design, including radio (i.e., NPR) and web-based news (i.e., The Huffington Post). Because of this design choice, the study findings can be more easily generalized beyond a particular news media platform (e.g., cable news).

In summary, the news sources used for the attribution manipulation in Experiment 2 were derived from a list of the most commonly cited sources in convenience sample survey

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20 Although not the central focus of this analysis, the most commonly cited news sources at the categorical level in the closed-ended version of the question was local TV news (36%), news websites (32%), local newspapers (32%), cable news (26%), and network TV news (22%)—among others. See Table 8.

21 The open-ended responses proved difficult to code at the category-level because some sources mentioned by respondents could qualify as both a website and a television news channel (e.g., CNN). For this reason, the more quantifiable closed-ended responses are given primary focus.
conducted for this project (N=403). The data suggest that when people think of the rather nebulous term, “the news media,” they often first think of cable news sources like CNN, Fox, and MSNBC (see also, Pew Research Center, 2011). However, they do also think of news sources across other media—like websites and radio. This diversity of news outlets is reflected in Study 2’s experimental design.

Measures

The following description of the Study 2 measures are organized into the following three sections: dependent variables, independent variables, and control variables. A brief note regarding the independent variables: As noted earlier, the main outcome of interest in this study is media trust. Importantly, media trust is examined in terms of three dimensions (i.e., believability, altruistic motives, and news judgment) and at two levels of specificity (i.e., general and outlet-specific). Global assessments (general) of trust were measured following exposure to the video stimuli, while outlet-specific trust assessments were measured following exposure to the text-based stimuli. In addition, another outcome of interest is PNMI, which is also explored herein as a predictor, a mediator, and a moderator.

Dependent Variables

*General Media Trust (three dimensions).* In alignment with the three dimensions of media trust conceptualized in Chapter 2 (i.e. trust in believability, altruistic motives, and news judgment), this study conducts tests of influence with each individual trust dimension, taking advantage of the more nuanced understanding of trust afforded by spectrum of trust items. This project is interested in what aspects of trust are influenced by PMNI and news parody, not simply that trust—in a broad scope—may be influenced.
Closed-Ended Responses (n=202)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific News Outlets</th>
<th>% (Frequency)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>70.3% (142)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox News</td>
<td>49.5% (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>46.5% (94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC News</td>
<td>41.6% (84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>37.6% (76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>37.1% (75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Huffington Post</td>
<td>34.7% (70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS News</td>
<td>34.7% (70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Associated Press</td>
<td>34.3% (69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>30.2% (61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahoo! News</td>
<td>26.2% (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Post</td>
<td>26.2% (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>25.2% (51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNBC</td>
<td>22.8% (46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wall Street Journal</td>
<td>22.3% (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuters</td>
<td>19.8% (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google News</td>
<td>18.3% (37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politico</td>
<td>11.9% (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedy Central</td>
<td>10.9% (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBO</td>
<td>2.5% (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorical News Outlets</th>
<th>% (Frequency)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local TV news</td>
<td>35.6% (72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News websites</td>
<td>32.2% (65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local newspapers</td>
<td>31.7% (64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cable News</td>
<td>26.2% (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National network TV news</td>
<td>21.8% (44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National newspapers</td>
<td>19.3% (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio news</td>
<td>14.4% (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News magazines</td>
<td>11.9% (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political talk radio</td>
<td>10.4% (21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. Conceptions of what constitutes “the news media” in a closed-ended MTurk survey question.

Note: The responses reflected here were not provided by a representative sample. Also, note that the MTurk survey participants were able to select more than one news source.
Nonetheless, a CFA was conducted with all three dimensions of trust (outlined below) in order to ascertain whether the dimensions of trust theorized herein, load as dimensions of one latent construct—here discussed in terms of media trust. The first wave participants (N=415) provided the sample data for this analysis. Modeling media trust as a first-order latent construct with three second-order latent variables and 10 observable variables, the three-dimensional model of media trust fit the data well. The CFA fit statistics of the measurement model are as follows: $\chi^2 (32, 415) = 52.67, p = .012; \text{CFI} = .995, \text{RMSEA} = .04 (90\% \text{ CI from .019 to .058});$ and $\text{SRMR} = .020.$ The data indicate that it is appropriate to conceptualize the three trust dimensions as part of a larger latent construct.

The first trust dimension, believability, was measured both a week before and immediately after news parody exposure. Four items were used to construct a media trust believability scale, based on agreement (on a 7-point scale) with the following statements: “In general, the news media… (a) are accurate, (b) are fair, (c) can be trusted, (d) are unbiased” (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Meyer, 1988). The reliability of both the pretest believability measure (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .95; M = 3.71, SD = 1.52$) and the posttest measure (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .95; M = 3.75, SD = 1.47$) is strong. The second dimension, news judgment, was also measured at two time points with three questions on a 7-point scale: (a) “The news media focus on the important facts concerning the major issues of the day;” (b) “The frequency with which the major issues of the day are covered by the news media is adequate;” and (c) “The commentary offered by the news media concerning the major issues of the day consist of well-reasoned conclusions.” The
measure was adapted from Kohring and Matthes’s (2007) trust in news media scale. The reliability of both the Wave 1 (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.88$; $M = 4.29, SD = 1.42$) and Wave 2 (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.84$; $M = 4.37, SD = 1.36$) news judgment scales is solid. Finally, the third dimension, trust in the altruistic motives of the news media, was gauged by averaging responses to three questions measured on a 7-point scale: “In general, the news media are… (a) concerned with your interests, (b) concerned with society’s welfare, (c) mainly concerned about the public’s interest.” This measure is based on the “community affiliation” scale identified by Meyer (1988). Both the altruistic motive pretest measure (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.93$; $M = 3.84, SD = 1.48$) and the posttest measure (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.92$; $M = 3.83, SD = 1.49$) were found to be reliable.

**Outlet-Specific Media Trust (three dimensions).** News outlet-specific trust within the scope of the believability dimension was measured on a 1 to 7 scale after exposure to the text-based news story stimuli that was attributed to either (a) a preferred news outlet or (b) a specific non-preferred news source. Based on the news source that the participant reported seeing in the stimulus, subjects responded to the following question: “Bearing in mind the source of the news story you just read [news outlet name parenthetically inserted], please indicate your level of confidence as to whether this story was: (a) accurate, (b) fair, (c) unbiased, (d) trustworthy.” On average, this form of trust was higher ($M = 5.61, SD = 1.22$) when the news story stimuli was attributed to one’s preferred source compared to when attributed to a non-preferred source ($M = 4.64, SD = 1.66$). Overall, the news outlet-specific believability measure was found to be reliable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.97$).

Source-specific trust in terms of news judgment was also measured on a 1 to 7 scale after exposure to the text-based news story stimuli. Based on the news source the
participant reported seeing in the stimulus, respondents were asked the following questions: “Thinking about [specific news outlet name inserted], how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (a) “The frequency with which the major issues of the day are covered by this news organization is adequate,” (b) “This news organization focuses on the important facts concerning the major issues of the day,” and (c) “The commentary offered by this news organization concerning the major issues of the day consists of well-reasoned conclusions.” On average, news judgment trust in a preferred news source ($M = 5.48, SD = 1.04$) was higher than trust in a non-preferred source ($M = 4.57, SD = 1.38$). Overall, the outlet-specific news judgment measure was also found to be reliable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$).

News outlet-specific trust in altruistic motives was measured on a 1 to 7 scale via responses to the following prompts, based on the news source the participant reported seeing in the stimulus: Thinking about the source of the story you just read [specific news source name parenthetically inserted], how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (a) “This source is concerned with my interests,” (b) “This source is concerned with society's welfare,” and (c) “This source is mainly concerned about the public’s interest.” Trust in altruistic motives for a preferred news source ($M = 5.02, SD = 1.15$) was greater than altruistic trust in a non-preferred source ($M = 4.07, SD = 1.45$). The outlet-specific altruistic motives trust measure was reliable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .90$).

*Perceived News Media Importance (PNMI).* The 12-item PNMI scale developed and validated in Study 1 (see Appendix B) was measured approximately one week before and immediately after exposure to the news parody stimuli of Experiment 1. The 6-dimensional PNMI scale demonstrated strong reliability in Study 2 sample, both in the
Wave 1 (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .88; M = 5.25, SD = 0.88$) and Wave 2 (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86; M = 5.32, SD = 0.79$) data collection efforts.

**Independent Variables**

*News Parody Media Criticism.* A dichotomous variable was constructed to represent exposure to (a) explicit parody-based media criticism or (b) the no-overt criticism news parody condition. Participants were random assignment to one of three news parody videos associated with each respective parody exposure condition (0=no overt criticism, 1= explicit media criticism).

*Pro-attitudinal News Parody.* Following exposure to the parody news stimuli, participants indicated their level of agreement with the following statement on a 7-point scale: “I am in agreement with the main arguments that the comedian put forward in this video clip” ($M=5.21, SD=1.59$). There were no significant differences in this factor across the six video conditions, $F(5, 221) = 1.97, p = .08$.

*News Source Preference.* A dichotomous variable was constructed to represent exposure to a text-based AP news story attributed to either (a) a preferred news source or (b) a randomly assigned non-preferred news source. Those in the non-preferred news source condition were randomly exposed to one of the 11 news sources that the participant did not selected as a most preferred source at the top of the questionnaire. Note that some participants were not able to correctly recall the news source to which they were exposed. In such cases, this news source preference variable aligns with what respondents *reported* reading, not the news source they technically saw.
Control Variables

Comedy Source Liking. Based on the well-established understanding that one’s attitude toward a message source can meaningfully influence the reception of a persuasive message (Hovland, Janis, & Kelly, 1953), a comedy source liking variable was controlled for in all analysis related to the news parody stimuli. This measure was based on the favorability ratings of (a) Jon Stewart, (b) Stephen Colbert, and (c) John Oliver provided in the Wave 1 questionnaire. Respondents were asked to rather their “feelings towards several comedians on a scale from 0 to 10 – based on what you know of them,” wherein feeling very favorable towards the person equals 10, feeling very unfavorable equals 0, and feeling neutral towards the person is represented by 5. The favorability rating used for each respondent was aligned with the rating provided for the comedian/news parody clip that the participant was exposed to in the Wave 2 survey. Across all participants (N=227), the average favorability rating for each comedian on a 0-10 scale was as follows: John Stewart (M=6.19, SD=3.00); Stephen Colbert (M=5.67, SD=3.00); John Oliver (M=5.26, SD=2.42).

Parody-induced Fear. To guard against the potential confounding influence of negative affect in the form of parody-induced fear, fear was controlled for in the key analyses of Study 2. Participants of the main experiment were instructed to indicate their level of agreement (on a 1-7 Likert scale with agreement coded high) with the following statement following exposure to the parody news stimuli: “The main issues discussed in the video made me feel afraid.” The nuclear weapons-themed parody clip (via John Oliver) generated the most fear (M=3.58, SD=1.75), followed by Colbert’s ISIS-themed clip (M=3.24, SD=1.67). As a point of comparison, the least fear-inducing parody
message was the missing Malaysian plane clip from *The Colbert Report* (*M*=2.08, *SD*=1.40).

**Data Analysis**

Embedded within the main experiment (*N*=227), the video stimuli were tested in several ways to further rule out rival explanations beyond that of the media criticism manipulation’s effect. First, to help ensure that contrasting levels of interest in the specific subject matter of the various video clips were not driving any emergent news parody effect, participants were instructed to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement on a 7-point scale following exposure to the parody news stimuli: “I am interested in the main issues that were talked about in this video clip.” There were no significant differences in this variable across the six video conditions, *F*(5, 221) = 1.50, *p* = .19. A one-way ANOVA was also conducted to test the equality of humor arousal across the six parody exposure conditions. No significant difference in humor enjoyment was evident across the six video conditions, *F*(5, 221) = 1.39, *p* = .23.

In addition, the two main treatment conditions at the center of this experiment (i.e., the explicit criticism versus no-overt criticism conditions) were compared in terms of several factors in an effort to provide confidence that random assignment was broadly successful. In terms of basic interest in the parody content, there was no difference between the explicit criticism condition (*M*=5.12, *SD*=1.54) and the no-overt criticism group (*M*=5.35, *SD*=1.51), *t*(225)=1.14, *p*=.26. There was also no difference in general political interest between the explicit criticism condition (*M*=5.44, *SD*=1.56) and the no-overt criticism condition (*M*=5.42, *SD*=1.58), *t*(225)= -0.07, *p*=.95. Neither were there differences in age (explicit criticism condition: *M*=54.54, *SD*=11.97; no-overt criticism
condition: \( M=53.33, SD=12.83, t(225)=-0.73, p=.46 \), self-identification with the Republican party, \((\chi^2[1] = 1.63, p=.20)\), self-identification with the Democratic party, \((\chi^2[1] = 2.87, p=.09)\), or ideology (explicit criticism condition: \( M=4.07, SD=1.84 \); no-overt criticism condition: \( M=4.53, SD=1.70, t(225)=1.96, p=.051 \)). Note, however, that the difference in ideology is close to significant at the .05 alpha level. In sum, there is solid evidence that random assignment largely succeeded.

In overview, to address the central research questions and hypotheses of this study, OLS regression was used for all main analyses. This analytical approach was chosen in an effort to minimize the risk of type I and type II errors that can emerge when a continuous independent variable (in the case of this study, pro-attitudinal news parody) is converted into categorical variables for an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test. Indeed, analysis of variance is merely a special case of multiple regression (Hayes, 2013). Furthermore, both mediation and moderated-mediation analyses are conducted within the study, employing conditional process analysis techniques. In this regard, Hayes’s (2013) SPSS PROCESS macro was frequently utilized. The PROCESS macro uses a regression-based approach to examine moderation, indirect, and conditional indirect effects.

Notably, all experimental data analyses account for assignment to the basic experimental news parody conditions (no-overt criticism condition = 0, explicit media criticism condition = 1). Of course this experimental manipulation is the key independent variable in many of the analyses. However, this is not always the case—for example, when exploring the influence of pro-attitudinal parody on media trust. In such instances, the media criticism manipulation is still included in the models in order to rule out any confounding influence relative to parody-based media criticism. In addition, in order to
rule out the possibility that an individual parody clip (within the stimulus sampling framework) is uniquely driving a given effect, dummy coded variables representing exposure to each of the news parody clip were also included in all relevant OLS regression models, with the Colbert Report clips arbitrarily serving as the omitted dummy reference group.

Additional controls include each participant’s level of self-reported fear upon viewing a news parody stimulus and whether one incorrectly identified the source of the news story stimuli in the latter half of the experiment—a potential indicator of inattentiveness across the experiment. Because this study used random assignment, basic demographic controls (i.e., gender, age, education, race, income, ideology, party ID, political interest) were not deemed imperative for analyses. Nonetheless, all key models were also tested with the basic demographic variables, revealing no meaningful difference in the study results. For the sake of parsimony, these variables were not used in the reported models.

**Results: Experiment 1**

Note that the results reported below are organized according to the two experiments conducted within Study 2 (i.e., the video stimuli manipulation and the text-based attribution manipulation). In each experiment, news parody commentary effects are first discussed in terms of the media criticism manipulation and then the pro-attitudinal nature of the parody message. Examination of PNMI’s influence is nested within each of these sections.
Parody-based media criticism’s effect on general media trust

In overview to how the initial tests in Study 2 work together, the first hypotheses (H3a-c) predict that exposure to explicit media criticism within a news parody message will have a greater negative effect on trust in the news media’s (a) believability, (b) altruistic motives, and (c) news judgment, as compared to no-overt criticism news parody content. Similarly, the fourth hypothesis (H4) predicts news parody’s explicit criticism will positively influence PNMI, as compared to news parody with no overt criticism. Causally linked to H4, the fifth hypothesis (H5a-c) predicts that increased PNMI will negatively influence perceptions of general media trust in terms of (a) believability, (b) altruistic motives, and (c) news judgment. Combining these hypothesized relationships, the fifth research question of this study (RQ5a-c) inquires whether change in PNMI serves as a mediator of the indirect relationship between news parody criticism and assessments of media trust (a-c), such that parody’s explicit media criticism positively affects perceptions of news media importance, which in turn diminishes trust in the news media. (A conceptual overview of the RQ5 mediation models can be viewed in Figure 2.)

To address these hypotheses and the research question, Hayes’s (2013) PROCESS macro was employed. Based on ordinary least squares path analysis, the PROCESS macro facilitates a test of mediation, generating a bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence interval for an assessment of the indirect effect (labeled herein as “ab,” representing the product of [a] the criticism \(\rightarrow\) PNMI effect by [b] the PNMI \(\rightarrow\) trust effect), based on 10,000 bootstrap samples. Each model (one constructed for each of the three dimensions of media trust) tests whether an estimate of parody commentary’s indirect effect on trust—as mediated by change in PNMI—is statistically different from
zero. Simultaneously, the regression models used in these analyses provide unstandardized coefficients for the specific predictions of H3, H4, and H5.

Note that within each regression model—with either trust in the news media’s (a) believability, (b) altruistic motives, or (c) news judgment serving as the dependent variables—the posttest measure of the respective type of trust is modeled as the outcome variable, while controlling for the pretest measure of the same trust dimension. In addition, posttest PNMI was modeled as the intervening variable, while controlling for the pretest PNMI measure. Consequently, this modeling of media trust (a-c) and PNMI reflect tests of whether the given predictor variable is associated with a change in PNMI and/or media trust.

First examining the effect of parody-based media criticism (explicit criticism coded high), we do find partial support for H3. In terms of the tests that do not support H3, there is no evidence of significant change in believability-based trust \( (b = -0.16, p = \text{n.s.}) \) when testing parody-based media criticism’s effect. Similarly, when modeling altruistic motives trust as the dependent variable, no significant effect emerges \( (b = -0.01, p = \text{n.s.}) \). However, as indicated in “Model 1” of Table 9, a test of parody-based criticism’s effect on news judgment trust does indicate a significant effect \( (b = -0.49, p < .05) \), offering partial support for H3c (see Table 9). Figure 5 depicts the estimated marginal means of news judgment trust from time 1 to time 2 (a 1-week interval), reflecting parody commentary’s transversal interaction with time. Basic paired t tests within each condition provide a clearer picture of how each parody exposure condition
News judgment trust in the no-overt exposure condition \((n=113)\) significantly increased from pretest \((M=4.13, SD=1.51)\) to posttest \((M=4.42, SD=1.43)\), \(t(112) = -3.39, p = .001\). However, change in news judgment trust within the explicit criticism condition \((n=114)\) was not significantly different from time 1 \((M=4.45, SD=1.30)\) to time 2 \((M=4.32, SD=1.29)\), \(t(113) = 1.34, p=.18\). Thus, although parody exposure does appear to have an influence on trust in news judgment, the dominant influence among the two experimental conditions actually seems to be driven more by the no-overt criticism condition than the explicit news criticism condition. Interestingly, while change in trust from the pretest to posttest time frames is only significant in terms of the no-overt criticism’s effect on trust in news judgment, there is nonetheless a pattern across all the dimensions of trust wherein trust consistently decreases with exposure to explicit media criticism and consistently increases with exposure to no-overt criticism news parody. This raises the issue of whether additional power (i.e., a larger sample size) would be able to better detect an explicit criticism effect.

Next, examining news parody exposure’s effect on change in PNMI (H4), no significant relationship was found between parody-based media criticism and changed

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22 It should be recognized that, as shown in Table 10, the pretest and posttest trust scores in the no-overt criticism condition are lower than the trust scores in the explicit criticism condition across all three dimensions of news media trust. Recall, as discussed earlier, that random assignment otherwise appears to be successful in terms of humor enjoyment, interest in the parody content, general political interest, political party identification, and ideology. Furthermore, note that all key experimental analyses were also rerun with a battery of control variables (i.e., age, gender, race, education, income, political interest, party identification, and ideology), revealing no meaningful changes in the key findings of the study. Although the models that included the controls are not reported in this document for the sake of parsimony, these checks suggest individual differences (e.g., ideology) across the experimental conditions do not account for the contrast in pretest news media trust between the two conditions.
perceptions of news media importance \((b = -0.22, p = \text{n.s.})\). The fourth hypothesis does not find support.

Moving beyond the immediate scope of news parody exposure, the fifth hypothesis (H5a-c) predicts that increased PNMI will negatively influence perceptions of general media trust (a-c). This prediction also fails to find support across all dimensions of trust. As shown in Table 9, controlling for pretest PNMI (along with the other standard control variables used in this study), posttest PNMI is not found to be associated with change in the believability dimension of media trust \((b = 0.12, \text{n.s.})\). There is also no significant effect with regard to PNMI’s influence on trust in altruistic motives, \((b = 0.07, \text{n.s.})\). Finally, examination of PNMI’s effect on news judgment trust is also found to be insignificant \((b=0.13, \text{n.s.})\). In sum, this study does not offer evidence of perceptions of news media importance exerting a causal influence on change in general perceptions of media trust.

The fifth research question (RQ5a-c) inquires whether change in PNMI may serve as a mediator of the relationship between news parody criticism and assessments of media trust (a-c), such that parody’s explicit media criticism affects perceptions of news media importance, which in turn is hypothesized to diminish trust in the news media. It is evident that PNMI does not function as a mediator. Using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013), the regression models used for this analysis (for each dimension of trust) tested whether an estimate of parody exposure’s indirect effect (labeled herein as “\(ab\)”) on trust is statistically different from zero. The indirect effects as mediated by PNMI are not significantly different from zero with a 95% confidence interval, as estimated with regard to believability trust \((ab = -0.04, 95\% \text{ CI: } -0.49, 0.48)\), altruistic trust \((ab = -0.02, \text{ CI: } -0.53, \text{ times})\).
### Believability Trust (General)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media Criticism Exposure (0,1)</td>
<td>-0.16(.20)</td>
<td>-0.22 (.20)</td>
<td>0.39 (.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-attitudinal Parody</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.03 (.04)</td>
<td>0.09 (.05)#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest PNMI</td>
<td>0.12 (.10)</td>
<td>0.08 (.09)</td>
<td>0.07 (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Criticism x Pro-att. Parody</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-0.12 (.07)#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest Believability Trust (control)</td>
<td>0.81 (04)***</td>
<td>0.77 (04)***</td>
<td>0.77 (04)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest PNMI (control)</td>
<td>-0.14 (.09)</td>
<td>0.14 (.09)</td>
<td>0.13 (.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parody source liking (control)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.06 (.02)**</td>
<td>0.06 (.02)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.03 (.44)</td>
<td>1.00 (.44)</td>
<td>0.77 (.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.696</td>
<td>.712</td>
<td>.715</td>
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</table>

### Altruistic Motives Trust (General)

<table>
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<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media Criticism Exposure (0,1)</td>
<td>-.01 (.22)</td>
<td>-.04 (.22)</td>
<td>0.24 (.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-attitudinal Parody</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.02 (.05)</td>
<td>.01 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest PNMI</td>
<td>.07 (.11)</td>
<td>.05 (.11)</td>
<td>0.05 (.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Criticism x Pro-att. Parody</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-0.06 (.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest Altruistic Trust (control)</td>
<td>.76 (.05)***</td>
<td>.72 (.05)***</td>
<td>0.72 (.05)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest PNMI (control)</td>
<td>.08 (.10)</td>
<td>.08 (.10)</td>
<td>0.08 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parody source liking (control)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.06 (.03)*</td>
<td>0.06 (.03)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.02 (.22)</td>
<td>0.12 (.49)</td>
<td>0.02 (.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.633</td>
<td>.642</td>
<td>.643</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### News Judgment Trust (General)

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<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media Criticism Exposure (0,1)</td>
<td>-.49 (.22)*</td>
<td>-.54 (.22)*</td>
<td>0.39 (.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-attitudinal Parody</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.02 (.05)</td>
<td>0.11 (.06)#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest PNMI</td>
<td>.13 (.11)</td>
<td>.10 (.11)</td>
<td>.10 (.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Criticism x Pro-att. Parody</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-0.19 (.08)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest News Judgment Trust (control)</td>
<td>.71 (.05)***</td>
<td>.69 (.05)***</td>
<td>.69 (.05)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest PNMI (control)</td>
<td>-.07 (.10)</td>
<td>-.07 (.10)</td>
<td>-.07 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parody source liking (control)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.04 (.03)</td>
<td>.04 (.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.32 (.48)</td>
<td>1.31 (.49)</td>
<td>0.96 (.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.565</td>
<td>.572</td>
<td>.582</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. OLS Regression models predicting dimensions of general news media trust.

Note: Unstandardized coefficients reported with standard error in parentheses. Model 1 tests (a) news parody criticism’s effect and (b) PNMI’s effect on media trust. Model 2 examines the influence of pro-attitudinal news parody media trust. Model 3 tests the interaction effect of media criticism and pro-attitudinal news parody. #p < .10  *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001
Figure 5. Depictions of estimated marginal means of media trust from pre- to post-news media criticism exposure.

Note: Estimates are based on setting covariates to their sample means.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Believability Trust</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Altruistic Motives Trust</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest Mean</td>
<td>Posttest Mean</td>
<td>Mean Diff.</td>
<td>Pretest Mean</td>
<td>Posttest Mean</td>
<td>Mean Diff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit media</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>(1.44)</td>
<td>(1.40)</td>
<td>(0.97)</td>
<td>(1.30)</td>
<td>(1.29)</td>
<td>(1.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-overt Media</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>(1.55)</td>
<td>(1.51)</td>
<td>(0.79)</td>
<td>(1.51)</td>
<td>(1.43)</td>
<td>(0.90)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10. Paired sample t tests indicating change in trust from pre- to post-news parody exposure.

Note: Mean and difference trust score reported with standard deviation in parentheses. Significant paired sample t-test indicated by asterisks. *$p = .001$
.03), and news judgment trust ($ab = -0.03$, 95% CI: -.15, .01). In short, PNMI’s influence is also not found to function as a causal link between news parody criticism and media trust.

The purpose of the sixth research question (RQ6a-c) was to explore if PNMI’s influence might be understood as a moderating effect, such that media criticism’s effect on general media trust is amplified when PNMI increases. The data suggest that PNMI does not have a moderating effect either. This conclusion was reached using Hayes’s (2013) PROCESS macro, modeling posttest PNMI as the moderator, the parody exposure conditions as the focal predictor, and the trust dimensions as the dependent variables for each regression model. Upon conducting these tests of moderation across all three models, PNMI was not shown to be a significant moderator of parody exposure’s effect on media trust in terms of believability trust ($b= -.11$, $p = n.s.$), altruistic trust ($b= -.03$, $p = n.s.$), or news judgment trust ($b= -.05$, $p = n.s.$). This research effort does not provide support for a conception of PNMI as a moderator of media criticism’s effect on trust—at least for media criticism embedded in news parody.

**Pro-attitudinal news parody’s effect on general media trust**

In conjunction with considering the direct influence of exposure to news parody commentary on media trust and PNMI, this project is also designed to examine the theorized causal influence of basic agreement with a news parody message, regardless of the nature of the news parody commentary. As Simpson (2003) notes, satire’s success is influenced by the degree to which a satire message recipient is fundamentally in agreement with the underlying thesis of a satirical message.
To this end, a research question (RQ7a-c) is posed to explore if basic agreement with a news parody message influence general media trust assessments (a-c), accounting for exposure to the news parody stimuli (i.e., either the explicit media criticism conditions). Similar to the analyses described above, the sixth hypothesis (H6) predicts that the degree to which a parody message is pro-attitudinal will positively influence change in PNMI and a research question (RQ8a-c) inquires whether PNMI serve as a mediator of the relationship between perceptions of pro-attitudinal news parody and assessments of media trust, such that perceived agreement with the news parody message positively affects perceptions of news media importance, which in turn affects evaluation of trust in the news media. Modeling pro-attitudinal news parody agreement as the independent variable, the PROCESS macro was again employed, using ordinary least squares path analysis to conduct tests of mediation, simultaneously addressing the effects at the center of H6 and RQ7. (See Figure 2 for an overview of this model.)

Examining the question of how one’s level of agreement with a news parody message directly affects media trust (RQ7), regression analyses indicate that the degree to which the news parody content was pro-attitudinal did not significantly predict pre- to posttest change in (a) believability-based trust \( (b=0.03, p = \text{n.s.}) \). Neither does pro-attitudinal news parody positively influence trust in (b) altruistic motives \( (b=-0.02, p = \text{n.s.}) \) or (c) news judgment \( (b=0.02, p = \text{n.s.}) \) (see the second models in Table 9 for overview). However, with regard to the hypothesis (H6) that pro-attitudinal news parody positively influences change in PNMI, the data do offer support, \( (b=0.06, p<.05) \). Like-mindedness with a news parody message—regardless of whether it explicitly critiques
the news media or not—positively predicts change in perceptions of news media importance. (See below for further examination of this intriguing relationship.)

Turning to RQ8’s assessments of mediation, pro-attitudinal parody’s indirect effect on trust (through PNMI) was not demonstrated to function as an intervening variable across different forms of media trust, as indicated by the following confidence intervals that include zero: believability trust (\(ab = -0.004, 95\% \, \text{CI}: -0.00, 0.03\)), altruistic trust (\(ab = -0.003, \text{CI}: -0.01, 0.03\)), and news judgment trust (\(ab = 0.01, 95\% \, \text{CI}: -0.01, 0.03\)). In short, PNMI’s influence also fails to function as a link between pro-attitudinal parody commentary and each dimension of general media trust.

Having found that like-mindedness with a news parody message does positively predict change in perceptions of news media importance, it is important to investigate whether this effect is perhaps conditioned (or not) on explicit media criticism. The last research question of the Experiment 1 (RQ9a-d) explores this question, along with whether parody-based criticism interacts with like-mindedness to influence the three dimensions of media trust (b-d). In terms of an interaction effect on PNMI, the data indicate that media criticism and like-mindedness do not interact to influence change in PNMI; the interaction term is not significant (\(b = -0.02, p = \text{n.s.}\)). In other words, we have no evidence that the influence of pro-attitudinal parody is contingent on the presence of explicit media criticism (and vice versa).

However, when examining this interactive influence across the media trust dimensions, several notable findings do emerge. First, with regard to news judgment trust as the criterion variable, this interaction is significant (\(b = -0.19, p = .02\)), as indicated in “Model 3” of Table 9. Probing the interaction, we find that pro-attitudinal
parody’s effect on news judgment trust is close to significant when exposure to news parody is devoid of explicit media criticism (conditional effect $b = 0.11$, 90% CI from 0.012 to 0.205). Yet note that this conditional effect is only significant at a 90% confidence interval. When exposed to explicit media criticism, pro-attitudinal parody’s conditional effect on news judgment trust is insignificant ($b = -0.08$, 90% CI from -0.182 to 0.206). In short, while recognizing that the significance level of this interaction (when probing the interaction as conditioned upon no-overt criticism) exceeds the .05 alpha level, the data nonetheless suggest that pro-attitudinal parody’s positive effect on change in news judgment trust may be contingent on the absence of explicit media criticism.

Similarly, with believability trust as the outcome, there is a marginally significant interaction between explicit media criticism and like-mindedness ($b = -0.12$, $p = .09$)—as shown in “Model 3” in Table 9. Probing this interaction, pro-attitudinal parody’s affect on believability trust is found to be marginally significant (i.e., only significant within a 90% confidence) within the no-overt criticism parody exposure condition (conditional effect $b = 0.09$, 90% CI from 0.005 to 0.176). The effect is clearly insignificant within the explicit criticism condition, as the confidence interval includes zero (conditional effect $b = -0.03$, 90% CI from -0.125 to 0.060). The marginally significant interaction with regard to believability trust also suggests that the more like-minded a news parody message, the greater the trust in the news media’s believability—as conditioned upon exposure to news parody with no overt criticism. Lastly, in terms of an interaction effect on altruistic motives trust, there is no significant interaction ($b = -0.06$, $p = .50$).

To recap, while the correlational analyses of representative survey data highlighted in the previous chapter (Study 1) suggest a strong association between PNMI
and media trust, the first experiment of this study does not provide strong evidence of a causal link between (a) media criticism or (b) PNMI and media trust—as pertaining to global trust assessments of the news media. Notably, however, news parody commentary exposure does exhibit a causal influence on trust in news judgment. In addition, like-mindedness with a news parody message does significantly predict an increase in PNMI from the pretest to posttest time frames. Building on this foundation, the following sections—centered on the second experiment of Study 2—investigate whether there are there are meaningful alternative ways to understand parody effects on news media trust.

**Results: Experiment 2**

It is hypothesized here that examining trust by manipulating the specific object of media trust (i.e., trust in specific news outlets) may serve to enhance an understanding of media trust effects. Accordingly, participants were also exposed to text-based news story stimuli (emulating a web-based news story), thereby providing the participants with a specific referent for making trust evaluations. The manipulation of this experiment (Experiment 2) was whether participants were prompted to evaluate (a) a preferred news outlet or (b) a random, non-preferred news source.

**Parody-based media criticism’s effect on outlet-specific trust**

Serving as a confirmatory hypothesis, H7 tests whether trust evaluations of a preferred news source are more favorable than the trust evaluations provided for random, non-preferred news sources—as primed by the text-based news story stimuli. Basic OLS regression models indicate that this hypothesis finds strong support across all dimensions of trust (see Table 11). New source preference’s effect is strongest when modeling news judgment trust as the outcome \( b = .70, p < .001 \), uniquely explaining 4%
### Table 11. OLS Regression models with news source preference predicting outlet-specific dimensions of media trust.

Note: Unstandardized coefficients reported with standard error in parentheses. Model 1 principally pertains to tests of difference in trust evaluations of specific news outlets as based on contrasting preferences for the given news source. Model 2 examines the influence of the news parody message being pro-attitudinal, accounting for comedy source liking and the previously noted variables. Both Models 1 and 2 also account for exposure to each individual news parody stimulus, self-reported fear following news parody exposure, and any misattribution of the stimulus news source in Experiment 2.  

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Independent Variables:</th>
<th>Believability Trust (Outlet-Specific)</th>
<th>Altruistic Motives Trust (Outlet-Specific)</th>
<th>News Judgment Trust (Outlet-Specific)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>Model 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Source Preference (0,1)</td>
<td>.54 (.24)*</td>
<td>.53 (.23)*</td>
<td>.62 (.21)**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media Criticism Exposure (0,1)</td>
<td>-.15 (.33)</td>
<td>-.31 (.33)</td>
<td>.16 (.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNMI (posttest)</td>
<td>.43 (.16)**</td>
<td>.33 (.16)*</td>
<td>.34 (.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-attitudinal Parody</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.10 (.07)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parody source liking (control)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.08 (.04)*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest PNMI (control)</td>
<td>.31 (.14)*</td>
<td>.30 (.14)*</td>
<td>.32 (.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.40 (.75)</td>
<td>1.27 (.76)</td>
<td>0.76 (.67)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N = 227$
of the model’s variance ($sr^2 = .04$)$^{23}$, followed by trust in altruistic motives ($b = .62, p \leq .01$), uniquely explaining 3% of the variance in altruistic motives trust ($sr^2 = .03$).

Similarly, news source preference for believability-based trust ($b = .54, p < .05, sr^2 = .02$) uniquely explained 2% of the variance. As expected, one’s pre-existing preference for a given news outlet clearly influences assessments of trust in that particular news source.

It was also predicted (H8a-c) that perceptions of news media importance will influence outlet-specific trust, such that posttest PNMI should be negatively associated with source-specific trust when the source is non-preferred; in contrast, trust in a preferred source should largely be impervious to PNMI’s influence. Interestingly, while significant results were found, the results were contrary to what was predicted. Instead of demonstrating a negative influence on object-specific trust, (posttest) PNMI positively influenced media trust when the news source in question was non-preferred. This is shown in the three OLS regression models of Table 12. As predicted, within each dimensions of trust, PNMI demonstrated a significant interaction with preference for the object of trust assessments (see the third model in each trust dimension in Table 12).

Probing the interaction with believability trust ($b = -0.75, p < .001$), PNMI’s effect on source-specific media trust is significantly different from zero when trust is directed toward a random, non-preferred source ($b=0.87, 95\% \text{ CI}: 0.59, 1.15$). However, PNMI’s influence is not manifest in terms of evaluating preferred sources ($b=0.07, 95\% \text{ CI}: -0.38, 0.53$). Probing the interaction related to altruistic trust ($b = -0.86, p < .001$), posttest PNMI’s effect is again significantly different from zero when trust is directed toward a

$^{23}$Note that $sr^2$ represents the squared semipartial correlation—an assessment of how much an independent variable contributes to $R^2$ over and beyond what the other independent variables in the model are able to explain.
### Believability Trust (Outlet-Specific)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables:</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preferred News Source (0,1)</td>
<td>0.59 (.30)#</td>
<td>1.85 (.66)**</td>
<td>4.58 (1.43)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Criticism Exposure (0,1)</td>
<td>-0.23 (.37)</td>
<td>-0.23 (.33)</td>
<td>-0.30 (.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-attitudinal Parody</td>
<td>0.09 (.07)</td>
<td>0.20 (.09)*</td>
<td>0.07 (.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest PNMI</td>
<td>0.54 (.13)***</td>
<td>0.49 (.13)***</td>
<td>0.75 (.15)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parody source liking (control)</td>
<td>0.09 (.04)*</td>
<td>.09 (.04)*</td>
<td>0.09 (.04)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Criticism x Preferred Source</td>
<td>-0.05 (.39)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-attitudinal x Preferred Source</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-0.26 (.12)*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest PNMI x Preferred Source</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-0.75 (.26)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.70 (.74)</td>
<td>1.33 (.75)</td>
<td>0.73 (.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Altruistic Motives Trust (Outlet-Specific)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables:</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News Source Preference (0,1)</td>
<td>0.64 (.27)*</td>
<td>1.66 (.58)**</td>
<td>5.18 (1.25)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Criticism Exposure (0,1)</td>
<td>0.19 (.33)</td>
<td>0.16 (.29)</td>
<td>0.08 (.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-attitudinal Parody</td>
<td>-0.07 (.06)</td>
<td>0.02 (.08)</td>
<td>-0.09 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest PNMI</td>
<td>0.46 (.11)***</td>
<td>0.42 (.11)***</td>
<td>0.70 (.13)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parody source liking (control)</td>
<td>0.15 (.04)***</td>
<td>0.14 (.03)***</td>
<td>0.14 (.03)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Criticism x Preference</td>
<td>-0.15 (.35)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-attitudinal x Preference</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-0.22 (.11)*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest PNMI x Preference</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-0.86 (.23)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.45 (.65)</td>
<td>1.16 (.66)</td>
<td>0.35 (.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### News Judgment Trust (Outlet-Specific)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables:</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News Source Preference (0,1)</td>
<td>0.69 (.26)**</td>
<td>1.75 (.56)**</td>
<td>3.31 (1.23)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Criticism Exposure (0,1)</td>
<td>0.07 (.31)</td>
<td>0.08 (.28)</td>
<td>0.02 (.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-attitudinal Parody</td>
<td>-0.02 (.06)</td>
<td>0.08 (.07)</td>
<td>-0.03 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest PNMI</td>
<td>0.46 (.11)***</td>
<td>.42 (.11)***</td>
<td>0.59 (.12)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parody source liking (control)</td>
<td>0.11 (.03)**</td>
<td>.10 (.03)</td>
<td>0.11 (.03)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Criticism x Preference</td>
<td>-0.03 (.34)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-attitudinal x Preference</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.21 (.10)*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest PNMI x Preference</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-0.49 (.23)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.01 (.63)</td>
<td>1.70 (.64)</td>
<td>1.38 (.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12. Analyses predicting dimensions of outlet-specific trust, conditioned upon preference.

Note: Unstandardized coefficients reported with standard errors in parentheses. Models also control for exposure to each news parody stimulus, self-reported fear, and any misattribution of the stimuli. #p < .10   *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001
random, non-preferred source \( (b = 0.79, 95\% \text{ CI}: .54, 1.05) \), but not with regard to a preferred news source \( (b = -0.07, 95\% \text{ CI}: -0.47, 0.34) \). Finally, within the scope of news judgment-based trust interaction \( (b = -0.49, p < .05) \), PNMI’s effect is different from zero in terms of evaluating non-preferred sources \( (b = 0.68, 95\% \text{ CI}: 0.43, 0.92) \), but not as conditioned upon evaluating a preferred source \( (b = 0.17, 95\% \text{ CI}: -0.22, 0.56) \). In sum, as illustrated in Figure 7, PNMI clearly has an association with all dimensions of source-specific media trust when the news source in question is a non-preferred news outlet.

The next hypothesis (H9a-c) predicts that exposure to explicit parody-based media criticism (compared to the non-overt criticism condition) will negatively influence trust in outlet-specific trust, as conditioned upon whether the specific news outlet being evaluated is a preferred or non-preferred source. Because the dependent variable responses (media trust evaluations) are specific to various news outlets across the sample, it is important to examine any news parody effect as contingent upon whether the evaluated source is preferred or non-preferred. Otherwise, analytic results would have limited meaning, relative to explaining any effect of interest. That is, discussion of an unconditioned effect (without factoring in news source preference) would not properly represent how trust was measured in Experiment 2. Figure 6 depicts a conceptual overview of this relationship.

![Figure 6. Conceptual overview of the moderating effect of preference for a news source.](image-url)
Figure 7. Posttest PNMI predicting dimensions of outlet-specific trust in news media, conditioned upon news source preference.

Note: Estimates are based on setting covariates to their sample means.
In terms of H9, it is expected that explicit parody-based media criticism will have a more potent effect on (source-specific) media trust when the news source referent is non-preferred, given that assessments of self-proclaimed preferred sources is less likely to be subject to influence. In addition, building on H9 and H8, a final hypothesis (H10a-c) tests whether a broader process of influence is in operation, relative to parody-based criticism, PNMI, and source-specific trust. That is, H10 tests the prediction that a process of moderated mediation is at work, such that news parody criticism indirectly influences source-specific media trust (as mediated PNMI’s conditional influence) and is conditioned upon whether the media trust referent is non-preferred. In preview, we unfortunately do not find that parody-based media criticism influences media trust, either directly or indirectly (through PNMI).

To simultaneously test H9 and H10, a moderated mediation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro; models were constructed for each of the three dimensions of outlet-specific media trust, which was measured after exposure to the text-based news story stimuli. News parody-based criticism was modeled as the independent variable, posttest PNMI was modeled as the mediator (controlling for pretest PNMI), and “News source preference”—that is, one’s placement in either the non-preferred news source (dummy code = 0) or the preferred news source condition (dummy code =1)—was modeled as a moderator of (a) PNMI’s effect on outlet-specific media trust and (b) media criticism’s direct effect on trust (see H10 in Figure 2 for an overview).

Moderated mediation analyses in PROCESS provide confidence interval assessments of both a conditional direct effects (parody criticism → media trust) and conditional indirect effects (parody criticism → PNMI → media trust) at the two levels of
the “preference” moderator. Furthermore, PROCESS calculates an index of moderated mediation, which functions as a test of equality of the model’s indirect effects on trust between the two preference conditions (i.e., exposure to a preferred and non-preferred news source) (see Hayes, 2013).

Modeling believability trust as the outcome for H9, parody-based media criticism exposure does not exhibit a direct effect on this trust in either the non-preferred ($b = -0.22, 95\% \text{ CI:} -0.94, 0.50$) or preferred ($b = -0.12, 95\% \text{ CI:} -0.99, 0.62$) news source condition. Similarly, in terms of trust in the altruistic motives of a news source, no conditional direct effect on altruism trust is evident in either the non-preferred ($b = 0.10, 95\% \text{ CI:} -0.54, 0.74$) or preferred ($b = 0.09, 95\% \text{ CI:} -0.62, .80$) news source condition. Finally, there is also no evidence of a conditional direct effect on source-specific trust in news judgment (non-preferred source condition: $b = 0.04, 95\% \text{ CI:} -0.58, 0.66$; preferred source condition: $b = 0.12, 95\% \text{ CI:} -0.57, 0.82$). Just as new parody criticism demonstrated limited direct influence on general media trust (see Experiment 1), these analyses also suggest that explicit criticism of the press in news parody programming lacks a clear influence on source-specific media trust as well.

Turning to the H10 analyses of whether any indirect effect of media criticism on trust is dependent on news source preference (effectively combining H8 and H9), there is no evidence that the relationship between the proposed the indirect effect (parody-based media criticism $\rightarrow$ PNMI $\rightarrow$ trust) and news source preference is different from zero. That is, using 10,000 bootstrap samples, the index of moderated mediation is not demonstrated to be different from zero for believability trust (point estimate = 0.15, 95\% CI from -0.02 to 0.52), altruistic trust (point estimate = 0.15, 95\% CI from -0.02 to 0.52),
and news judgment trust (point estimate = 0.15, 95% CI: -.02, .52). Therefore, while PNMI exhibits a clear conditional influence on different types of source-specific trust, this conditional effect does not meaningfully mediate the relationship between news parody criticism and media trust.

**Pro-attitudinal news parody’s effect on outlet-specific trust**

While news parody-based media criticism generally does not demonstrate a clear influence on media trust—both independent of and as mediated by PNMI—investigating the influence of likeminded news parody can shed light on how news parody may influence on assessments of trust, both independent of and relative to PNMI. In preview, I do find that, in certain respects, pro-attitudinal parody exposure does influence object-specific media trust. This is demonstrated when examining RQ10a-c, which explores whether basic agreement with the news parody message (i.e., pro-attitudinal news parody) directly influences trust in a specific news outlet’s (a) believability, (b) judgment, and (c) altruistic motives—as conditioned upon one’s preference for the news source. Furthermore, a subsequent research question (RQ12a-c) explores whether pro-attitudinal news parody has a conditional indirect influence on media trust (a-c) as mediated by PNMI and moderated by news-source preference, such that as agreement with the parody message increases, PNMI increases, which in turn influences media trust as conditioned upon news-source preference (see RQ12 in Figure 2 for an overview of this process of influence).

To explore RQ10 and RQ12, I again constructed models that facilitate tests of (a) conditional direct effects, (b) conditional indirect effects, and (c) a test statistic of moderated mediation based on a bootstrap confidence interval (using 10,000 bootstrap
samples). With believability trust as the dependent variable, the degree to which a news parody message is pro-attitudinal does significantly directly influence trust when the object of the trust is a non-preferred source ($b=0.18$, 95% CI: 0.01, 0.35). Yet likeminded parody’s influence is not significantly different from zero when the news source referent is preferred ($b=-0.04$, 95% CI: -0.22, .15). This significant contrast between the two preference conditions is depicted in Figure 8.

In terms of trusting a news source’s altruistic motives, a conditional direct effect on altruism-based trust is not significant with a non-preferred trust referent ($b=-0.002$, 95% CI: -0.15, 0.15). However, the pro-attitudinal parody effect on altruistic trust is different from zero when the trust referent is preferred ($b=-0.17$, 95% CI: -0.34, -0.01), as depicted in Figure 9. Note that this pattern is essentially flipped as compared to the conditional direct effect of pro-attitudinal parody with believability trust. Finally, examining trust in news judgment, there is no evidence of a conditional direct effect in terms of either the non-preferred source condition ($b=0.06$, 95% CI: -0.08, 0.21) or the preferred source condition: $b=-0.13$, 95% CI: -0.29, 0.03).

Significant results also emerge with regard to RQ12’s examination of whether an indirect effect between pro-attitudinal parody and trust (i.e., like-mindedness $\rightarrow$ PNMI $\rightarrow$ trust) is dependent on news source preference (a test of moderated mediation). Modeling trust in a news source’s altruistic motives as the criterion variable, we find significant evidence of moderated mediation with a 95% confidence interval (point estimate = -0.05, 95% CI from -0.133 to -0.003) (see Table 14). It can be inferred that pro-attitudinal news parody’s positive indirect effect on altruistic-based trust (as mediated by change in PNMI) is significantly dependent on whether the news source is non-preferred.
Meanwhile, a moderated mediation process at a 95% confidence interval is not evident for news judgment trust (point estimate = -0.02, 95% CI from -0.096 to 0.005) and believability-based trust (point estimate = -0.04, 95% CI from -0.12 to 0.001). However, in terms of believability trust, a 90% confidence interval does exclude zero, suggestive of moderated mediation (90% CI from -0.108, -0.003).

Finally, RQ11(a-c) examined the possibility of an interaction between (1) parody-based media criticism and (2) the parody message being pro-attitudinal, as influencing the three different dimensions of source-specific media trust. The tests conducted for this analysis were essentially tests of 3-way interactions (i.e., parody criticism X pro-attitudinal parody X preference for the news source). In short, no significant interactions were found. Using the PROCESS macro for the tests, the 3-way interaction terms were not significant in terms of believability trust ($b=.09, p=.74$), news judgment trust ($b=0.28, p=.19$), or altruistic motives trust ($b= 0.04, p=.86$). In total, these results indicate that the effects of parody-based media criticism and pro-attitudinal parody are not contingent on one another within the scope of object-specific trust.
Figure 8. Pro-attitudinal parody predicting altruistic motives trust.

Note: Estimates are based on setting covariates to their sample means.

Figure 9. Pro-attitudinal parody predicting believability trust.

Note: Estimates are based on setting covariates to their sample means.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediator:</th>
<th>Dependent Variables:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PNMI (posttest)</td>
<td>Altruistic Motives Trust (Outlet-Specific)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Believability Trust (Outlet-Specific)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>News Judgment Trust (Outlet-Specific)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b$ (se) $p$</td>
<td>$b$ (se) $p$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b$ (se) $p$</td>
<td>$b$ (se) $p$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b$ (se) $p$</td>
<td>$b$ (se) $p$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-attitudinal parody</td>
<td>Pro-attitudinal parody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNMI (posttest)</td>
<td>-0.00 (.08) .974 0.18 (.09) .036 0.06 (.07) .403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNMI (pretest)</td>
<td>0.49 (.16) .002 0.48 (.18) .009 0.45 (.16) .005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedy source liking</td>
<td>0.23 (.12) .066 0.27 (.14) .056 0.12 (.12) .306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parody Criticism Exposure</td>
<td>0.14 (.03) .000 0.08 (.04) .037 0.10 (.03) .003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for News Source</td>
<td>-0.26 (.14) .062 0.06 (.29) .837 -0.32 (.33) .326 0.02 (.28) .003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-attitudinal x Pref.</td>
<td>5.47 (1.30) .000 4.98 (1.47) .001 3.78 (1.27) .003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNMI (posttest) x Pref.</td>
<td>-0.17 (.11) .111 -0.22 (.12) .072 -0.19 (.10) .071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.76 (.23) .001 -0.62 (.26) .020 -0.40 (.23) .079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.47 .000 .34 .000 .31 .000 .28 .000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13. Model coefficients for the conditional process effect of pro-attitudinal news parody predicting dimensions of (outlet-specific) media trust, modeling change in PNMI as the intervening variable.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of moderator:</th>
<th>Indirect Effect on altruistic trust</th>
<th>Direct Effect on altruistic trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 (Non-preferred Source)</td>
<td>$b$ = 0.03, 95% CI: 0.0015 to 0.0820</td>
<td>$b$ = -0.002, SE = 0.076, $p$ = 0.975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (Preferred Source)</td>
<td>$b$ = -0.02, 95% CI: -0.0755 to 0.0082</td>
<td>$b$ = -0.172, SE = 0.083, $p$ = 0.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of Moderated Mediation</td>
<td>$b$ = -0.05, 95% CI: -0.1331 to -0.0026</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14. Significant moderated mediation for altruistic motives trust.

Note: Top rows represent model coefficients for the conditional effects of pro-attitudinal news parody predicting trust in altruistic motives (outlet-specific), mediated by PNMI and conditioned upon news source preference. Bottom row includes point estimate for test of moderated mediation.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

This project is principally focused on exploring the interplay of news parody-based commentary, perceptions of news media importance (PNMI), and trust in the news media. Broadly speaking, a key argument of this project is that PNMI can further illuminate an understanding of how news parody may be able to influence perceptions of the news media’s trustworthiness. In overview, I do find evidence in this research of a process of influence among these factors—most appreciably, that basic agreement with a given news parody message seems to promote an increased sense of the news media’s overall importance (i.e., change over time in PNMI), which in turn can positively influence aspects of media trust. Recall that PNMI’s positive influence on trust was not anticipated.

To better understand the underpinnings and larger implications of these key findings, the following sections offer a review of and discuss the key findings outlined in the previous chapters. In order to set the stage for a closer examination of parody’s effect on PNMI and PNMI’s influence on trust, we first review Study 1’s effort to develop and validate a measure for PNMI. Subsequently, we will turn to the key analyses of Study 2’s experimental data collection effort.
Study 1 Discussion

Perhaps the most meaningful (and unexpected) finding of Study 1 is that PNMI is such a strong positive predictor of media trust. This finding underscores the significance of a research gap with regard to the media importance concept. This lacuna is rather surprising, given that attitude importance has been shown to commonly influence judgments of an attitude object (Gunther, 1992; Krosnick, 1988). In order to address this gap, this project developed a theoretically grounded operationalization of PNMI, employing two different survey samples—a convenience sample and a representative sample—to validate a measure for PNMI. Within this validation process, a 12-item solution was ultimately reached, demonstrated to be internally reliable and consisting of six dimensions that represent a spectrum of normative media functions that journalists commonly aspire to—whether consciously or not (Weaver et al., 2007). Taken together, these steps provide confidence that PNMI is a meaningful perception relative to media trust.

Importantly, the PNMI scale is demonstrated to have a meaningful association with political interest and (to a lesser extent) political participation, helping to establish PNMI’s convergent validity. Those who tend to be curious about and are drawn to political matters and public affairs also have a propensity to more highly value the varied functions of the news media. Similarly, there is a significant relationship between PNMI and using one’s resources to advance political causes. Conversely, this study was able to discriminate PNMI from ideology and the negative content media image. Finally, as noted above, PNMI is shown to be a strong, positive predictor of basic trust in the news media—above and beyond all the other predictors in an OLS regression model.
Taking stock of the preceding analyses, several points warrant discussion. First, while PNMI was expected to predict media trust, this project did not anticipate that PNMI would *positively* influence media trust. We find that rather than prompt individuals to perhaps be more sensitive to and critical of the shortcomings of the news media (as hypothesized in Study 2), PNMI may actually promote trust in the press. Of course it could also be the case that high media trust actually fosters high PNMI. Indeed, an inherent limitation of Study 1 is that the study data can only facilitate correlational analyses. Accordingly, Study 1 is unable to squarely address the causal forces at work in the PNMI-media trust relationship.

Even as it is evident that media trust and PNMI are meaningfully correlated, it is less clear here whether PNMI would be best conceptualized as antecedent to media trust, as an outcome of trusting in the news media, or an equal partner in largely reciprocal relationship. This limitation highlights the value of taking an experimental, multi-wave approach in Study 2, allowing for an investigation of experimentally manipulated changes in PNMI and media trust. This fundamental relationship will constitute a key component of the discussion sections that follow.

Considering the successful development and validation of a PNMI measure, it is also noteworthy that PNMI can serve as a multi-faceted tool for researchers. As anticipated, deeply caring about a variety of news media functions appears to have meaningful implications when evaluating the news media. But looking beyond examination of this omnibus influence, the PNMI scale can also be valuable for its ability to facilitate more nuanced explorations of media perceptions—as well as other democratic outcomes. For instance, research could focus on how valuations of the
*investigative* functions to influence trust in a given news source. Or how the mobilization function might relate to, for instance, political self-efficacy. In view of the distinct features of each news media function, the PNMI measure may be relevant to array of political communication variables.

It should be acknowledged that while this study’s survey instruments devoted considerable space to investigating various facets of PNMI, much less attention was directed to the measurement of media trust. To be sure, media trust is also a multi-dimensional construct, extending beyond issues of “fairness,” “accuracy,” and explicit “trust” (e.g., see Kohring & Matthes, 2007). While Study 1’s 3-item trust scale is informative, additional examination of PNMI’s relationship with broader conceptions of media trust via a representative sample would be valuable.

In summary, Study 1 demonstrates how PNMI can ably facilitate an examination of the value that individuals attribute to multiple functions of he news media, offering advancement to the study of media importance and media trust. To be sure, more work could be taken up to more fully understand the implications of fundamentally caring about the work of the news media (versus simply expressing trust in the news media). For instance, perhaps additional media functions (e.g., as a source of entertainment or community boosterism) could be explored through the PNMI framework. Even so, the firm foundation afforded by Study 1 enables a deeper exploration of how perceptions of importance may contribute to animating trust in the news media, particularly as related to news parody. Accordingly, having confirmed the validity of PNMI, we next discuss how PNMI—in conjunction with news parody commentary—may exert a causal influence on media trust.
Study 2 Discussion

In an exploration of news parody’s influence on media trust, it quickly becomes apparent that processes of parody’s influence are nuanced. News parody messages are not virtually all the same and news parody clearly does not have a uniform influence on PNMI and media trust. Furthermore, it is clear that media trust can be conceptualized as representing more than judgment of a news source/the news media industry as “fair” and “accurate.” In this light, what Study 2 most strikingly demonstrates is that (1) prior attitudes and beliefs (reflected in pro-attitudinal news parody and news brand preference), (2) news parody message features (i.e., parody-embedded media criticism), (3) and attitude importance (i.e., PNMI) can all contribute to the manner in which news parody commentary shapes various types of media trust assessments. In its most distilled form, the Study 2 results ultimately indicate that news parody can foster change in PNMI over time and that change in PNMI can influence, in particular, assessments of the altruistic motives underlying the work of specific news outlets; furthermore, results suggest (at 90% confidence interval) that the same process of influence can promote the believability of certain news sources. While this is certainly no simple process of influence to explain, I posit that these core findings are meaningful in several respects. The sections that follow help to further clarify and consider the implications of these key findings.

First, at the outset of discussing the Study 2 results, a brief note on the organization of the following sections should be helpful for navigating the remainder of the chapter. Recall that this project examines both the influence of news parody and media trust from multiple angles. First, news parody commentary’s influence is investigated in terms of (a) explicit news media criticism (or lack thereof), and (b) in
terms of the extent to which a given news parody message is like-minded/pro-attitudinal. Second, media trust (as the principal dependent variable of the project) is examined with contrasting levels specificity. That is, media trust is explored as (a) global assessments of the news media industry in a general, and (b) also explored in terms of evaluating a specific news outlet (i.e., a preferred news brand or a random/non-preferred brand). Note that while this research effort measured pre- and posttest measures of general media trust, it only addresses posttest measures of news outlet-specific trust. With this backdrop in mind, the following sections will first direct attention to PNMI’s influence on media trust (both general and specific media trust). Next, the discussion will turn to news parody commentary’s influence (both in terms of media criticism and the like-mindedness of the parody message) on PNMI and the three dimensions of media trust. Finally, the interplay of PNMI and news parody, and their joint influence on trust, will be considered.

**PNMI’s Influence on Media Trust**

Moving beyond examination of correlational relationship between PNMI and media trust featured in Study 1, this study embarks on an investigation of causal relationships between PNMI and trust. In overview, although Study 2’s data does not demonstrate PNMI’s influence on global assessments of trust in the news media (i.e., H5 did not find support across the trust dimensions), the data nonetheless highlight how PNMI can influence media trust when the dimensions of media trust are conceptualized beyond the scope of generalized assessments of the news media. That is, PNMI significantly influences assessments of all types of media trust when the object of the media trust is a non-preferred source. (See Figure 6 for a depiction of these relationships.)
An understanding of how PNMI can influence trust can be illuminated by the findings that individuals generally express greater trust in news sources that they prefer. As indicated in Table 11, this study demonstrates that an individual’s preference for the referent of the trust evaluation has a strong effect on trust evaluations, such the a preferred source is rated significantly higher in believability, news judgment, and altruistic motive trust, as compared to non-preferred news sources. This suggests that familiarity with a given news source (in terms of being preferred or frequently used) fosters loyalty—much in the same way that citizens often judge their own political representatives more favorably than Congress in general (e.g., Mendes, 2013). What this also indicates is that individuals have a relatively high media trust baseline when it comes to trust in preferred news media sources. This high trust baseline for preferred sources may help to explain why PNMI’s influence on trust is most robust when the evaluated news source is non-preferred. A ceiling effect may be in play with regard to PNMI’s effect on outlet-specific trust in preferred sources, wherein it is difficult to detect increased trust because the trust in a preferred source tends to be high, stable, and generally impervious to influence. Hence, PNMI’s capacity to influence trust is most evident within the scope of trust in a non-preferred source, wherein opinions are less salient and firm.

This key finding highlights several important points. First, PNMI’s basic influence on outlet-specific media trust further supports a fundamental hypothesis of this project—that PNMI undergirds dynamics of media trust. To be sure, these data suggest

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24 This is hardly surprisingly, yet it is plausible that even as some individuals prefer certain some news sources over others—perhaps considered preferred because access to certain news content is convenient—they do not necessary highly trust their preferred source.
that PNMI’s influence is conditional—contingent on evaluations of a specific news source and contingent on one’s underlying preference for the news source. Yet the pattern is consistent across media trust dimensions and strong (see Table 12).

In addition to finding evidence of PNMI’s influence on media trust, it is noteworthy that the specificity of the trust object matters. Indeed, an important principle of survey methodology is to craft survey questions that are as concrete as possible; vague terms (such as, “the news media”) can be interpreted differently by different people (Groves et al., 2009). Recall that in this experimental context PNMI does not exhibit an influence on global assessments of trust in the news media; an effect is only manifest when the study participants express trust in specific news outlets. This raises the interesting question of what referent survey participants tend to use when evaluating the news media in general. When providing trust evaluations of the news media industry as a whole, it’s quite possible that many people are largely thinking of some of their least favorite news sources. Strong conservatives, for instance, are shown to be distrustful of most mainstream news sources, but highly loyal to and trusting of Fox News or The Wall Street Journal (Pew Research Center, 2014). Or perhaps general news media evaluations are largely reflective of opinions about the 24-hour cable news genre. Recall that this project’s exploratory MTurk survey data (n=202) indicated that CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC were the three most commonly cited news sources that came to mind when thinking about “the news media” (see Table 8).

Of course measuring people’s opinions about their least favorite news sources or the cable news genre is interesting and informative, but it paints an incomplete picture for scholars. Indeed, conceptualizing media trust in these vague terms has limited utility.
Especially at a time when people able to engage with a diversity of news content via, for instance, social media (American Press Institute, 2015), it’s useful to understand perceptions of the news media beyond thinking of a least-favored source or the 24-hour cable news genre. In this regard, this project offers a valuable examination of specific news source perceptions.

Moreover, an exploration of trust in specific news sources reveals that PNMI may in fact function as a causal mechanism in shaping perceptions of trust, relative to news parody commentary. Returning to a question raised earlier regarding whether PNMI is an antecedent or outcome of trust, these analyses suggest that PNMI can be understood—at least in part—as an antecedent of news media trust. It seems that PNMI can provide a reference point from which to assess the news media. That is, perhaps an appreciation for what the news media can do for a democratic society prompts citizens to be more understanding of the complex challenges that face many journalists (e.g., investigating corruption while respecting privacy), and so citizens high in PNMI are perhaps less harsh in judging news media outlets.

**News Parody’s Influence**

This project demonstrates that news parody commentary can wield influence—only in ways that are largely contrary to the initial expectations of this research effort. Recall that upon highlighting numerous potential influences on media trust in the literature review of this study (e.g., journalistic failures, individual bias, elite rhetoric), I hypothesized that contemporary news parody—as one form of commentary about the news media—may contribute to decreased confidence in the press. It was noted that existing research related to political entertainment’s influence on news media perceptions
offers evidence of news parody fostering both negative (e.g., Baumgartner & Morris, 2006) and positive (e.g., Brewer, Young, & Jones, 2013) evaluations of the news media.

Interestingly, on the whole this project actually does not provide much evidence of news parody undermining trust. To be sure, at first glance the data might be interpreted to indicate that parody commentary negatively influences news judgment. As highlighted by the H3 analyses in Table 9, explicit parody-based media criticism (compared to no-overt criticism) is a significant negative predictor of change in news judgment trust from before and after the parody exposure. However, closer examination reveals the significant change over time in news judgment trust was within the no-overt criticism condition, not the explicit criticism condition. And while there was a decrease in trust within the explicit criticism parody condition, the significant change in the non-overt criticism conditions was positive. So while news parody commentary—from either of the treatment conditions—did not significantly affect general trust in the believability or altruistic motives of the press, this research indicates that trust in news judgment may be enhanced by news parody that does not explicitly draw attention to news media shortcomings. Here we find some initial evidence that news parody may in certain respects actually promote media trust. Perhaps this is due to a perception among some people that news parody functions as a news source. Thus, when they are exposed to news parody content that seems to function as a news story (i.e., explaining a complex news event), such people have more favorable feelings about the news media.

As previously discussed, news parody commentary’s influence can be examined beyond the scope of explicit (and non-overt) media criticism. This study shows that it can also explored in terms of the degree to which a parody’s overall argument is found to
be pro-attitudinal. When news parody’s commentary is examined with this lens, parody demonstrates a more consistent—albeit, modest—influence on trust, in the scope of source-specific trust. While pro-attitudinal parody exposure does not exhibit an influence on general trust assessments (RQ7), it does demonstrate a conditional influence on trust in the altruistic motives and believability of specific news sources. More specifically, pro-attitudinal parody exposure has a direct conditional (negative) effect on trust in altruistic trust when the news source is preferred; in contrast, it positively influences believability-based trust when the specific source is non-preferred (see Figure 7). In sum, in the light of pro-attitudinal parody’s influence on source-specific media trust, we find mixed patterns of influence. On the one hand, increased agreement with a given parody message seems to undermine trust in the altruistic motives of preferred sources. On the other hand, like-mindedness appears to fostering trust in the believability of non-preferred sources.

It is intriguing that these direct effects are dependent on contrasting factors (variously contingent on a preferred or non-preferred object of trust). One discussion point this contrast raises is that news parody commentary can, in certain respects, reduce trust—arguably in a desirable way. Indeed, strong trust in the altruistic motives of a given news entity may often be misguided—especially with regard to a self-declared preferred source, where an individual may have a blind spot for seeing how the news outlet may not be serving the public interest. Thus, it is notable to find that pro-attitudinal news parody negatively influences trust in the altruistic motives of a preferred news source. This effect indicates that news parody is better at casting doubt on the motives of a preferred source as compared to that of a non-preferred source—perhaps because
judgments of the motives of a non-preferred source are already low. The finding that trust in altruistic motives can be negatively influenced by news parody also suggests a point of leverage from a strategic communication standpoint. If one is interested in using news parody as a tool for encouraging more critical thinking about one’s preferred source of news content (e.g., Fox News, MSNBC, or CNN), it is worth noting that perceptions of news media motives may be more malleable than other forms of media trust. Recall that perceptions of a preferred source being believable (i.e., fair, accurate, and unbiased) seem more resistant to parody’s influence, compared to judging the believability of a non-preferred source.

At this largely exploratory stage of research, it is not entirely clear how to best interpret the directions of these conditional influences and conclusions are best tentatively stated. However, at the very least, the opposing patterns highlights the value of examining different types of media trust when examining news parody’s influence. It indicates that not all media trust varieties (e.g., trust in believability, altruistic motives, and news judgment) function in the same ways. Some forms of media trust may be more malleable than others or subject to influence with contrasting boundary conditions.

Turning to how news parody commentary can influence PNMI, this study shows that while the parody-based media criticism does not influence change in PNMI (H4), the degree to which a given news parody message is like-minded does influence significant positive change in PNMI from before and after news parody exposure (H6). The more one reports being in agreement with a parody message (however that agreement is defined by the viewer), the more PNMI increases from time 1 to time 2. Thus, while parody exposure in and of itself does not seem to directly promote PNMI, we find that as
the pro-attitudinal quality of a news parody message increases—reflective of individual differences—it promotes increased perceptions of media importance.

The influence of pro-attitudinal parody confirms this study’s expectation that pro-attitudinal news parody can enhance PNMI—even if a given news parody message does not explicitly discuss the news media. It seems that a parody humor message that is largely agreeable to an individual is less apt to draw critical scrutiny from that person with regard to the parody message’s finer points. Given that one underlying message of much news parody is that the key functions of the news media are meaningful, it appears that the more likeminded a news parody message is, the more accepting an individual will be of the parody’s commentary (both explicit and implied) about the importance of the news media.

It is also possible that some individuals are partially evaluating news parody when they offer media trust assessments. That is, expressions of like-mindedness with a parody message is an indication of seeing news parody as legitimate news content. Therefore, when providing evaluations of PNMI after exposure to a seemingly insightful news parody message, respondents (at least those who in practice embrace news parody as a form news content) have a renewed respect for news work and consequently feel more positive about the news media’s trustworthiness.

Evidence of pro-attitudinal parody exposure’s influence also suggests that news parody effects will be substantially weaker—perhaps non-existent—among people who are prone to disagree with the arguments of a comedian like Jon Stewart, John Oliver, or
Trevor Noah. The more counter-attitudinal one finds the main argument of a comedian’s message to be, the more likely the secondary/implicit components of that message will be ignored or rejected. Fundamental agreement with news parody content may help to explain why news parody does not seem to exhibit a uniform effect on PNMI, as well as other variables (i.e., altruistic motives trust; believability trust).

It is also worth directing consideration to pro-attitudinal parody’s interaction with parody-based media criticism to influence dimensions of general media trust. Recall that in terms of news judgment trust there was a significant interaction between the media criticism manipulation and pro-attitudinal ratings ($b = -0.19, p = .02$). When probing this interaction as conditioned upon each media criticism exposure condition, we find that the effect of like-mindedness on news judgment trust is nearly—but not quite—significant at a 95% confidence interval when exposed to news parody devoid of explicit media criticism. (Meanwhile, the effect is clearly insignificant within the explicit criticism condition). A similar pattern emerges with regard to believability trust. The coefficient for the interaction is marginally significant ($p = .09$) and when probing the interaction, pro-attitudinal parody’s effect only approaches significance within the non-overt media criticism condition. Perhaps a larger sample size could serve to clarify these questionable relationships, but the general patterns nonetheless are consistent with media criticism’s direct effect on news judgment trust: news parody effects are most evident within the scope of non-overt criticism news parody content. Again, these findings suggest that the power of news parody’s commentary (in terms of influencing news media trust) may not principally lie in the explicit media criticisms often featured in news parody content.

25 Noah is slated to become the host of Comedy Central’s The Daily Show in the latter part of 2015.
Instead, parody’s influence on news media perceptions (like PNMI and media trust) may principally reside with the implicit features of news parody messages, promoted by agreement with the more explicit arguments of the comedic content that, on the surface at least, are not really about the news media.

This raises another interesting question: why might the implicit features of news parody content bear more influence on evaluations of the news media than the explicit features? One possibility is that we are observing a form of reactance (Brehm & Brehm, 1981), wherein survey respondents have a heightened awareness of this study’s goals (i.e., gauging patterns of media trust) vis-à-vis the explicit criticisms of the news media within the select news parody clips. Not wishing to feel like the sort of person who is overly influenced by political humor, some individuals may underreport the effect of the explicit parody-based media criticism. Or, in a similar vein, perhaps there is a discounting effect at work (see Nabi, Moyer-Gusé, & Byrne, 2007), wherein participants are somewhat dismissive of the explicit commentary about the news media because they cognitively label the commentary as ‘just a joke.’

Regardless of why exactly the implicit features of news parody may have more robust effects on media trust than explicit media criticism, this pattern highlights the need for a diversity of methodological approaches to the study of news parody. The strong suit of various quantitative research methods—such as those featured in this study—is that they are better suited for addressing the influence of explicit message features in the aggregate. But such methods are less helpful for examining the more subtle and evasive implicit message qualities. In this regard, more qualitative approaches are appropriate. To be sure, many different research approaches have been employed in news parody
research, spanning contrasting epistemological orientations (see Young and Gray, 2013). This project simply underscores the value of and continued need for a diversity of approaches for understanding the influence of news parody’s implicit features.

**The Joint Influence of News Parody & PNMI on Media Trust**

Finding evidence of news parody’s influence on both PNMI and media trust points to the possibility of news parody having an indirect effect on media trust through PNMI. Indeed, the experimental components of this study examined not only the independent influence of both news parody and PNMI, but also their joint influence on media trust. Tests of moderation (RQ6), mediation (RQ5 and RQ8), and moderated-mediation (H10 and RQ12) were conducted, in accordance with the different scopes of media trust (general- and outlet-specific trust) and varied aspects of news parody commentary (i.e., media criticism content and like-mindedness of the message).

In review, we find that in certain respects, news parody and PNMI can work in tandem to influence media trust—particularly with regard with trust in altruistic motives and, to a lesser extent, trust in the believability of news media sources. More specifically, when modeling a process of influence on trust in specific news outlets, significant paths of mediation emerged. A conditional indirect effect on trust was evident in terms of like-minded parody’s influence on trust in the altruistic motives of specific news outlets, as conditioned upon preference for the news source (i.e., pro-attitudinal parody $\rightarrow$ change in PNMI $\rightarrow$ conditional positive effect on source-specific trust). The index of moderated-mediation (Hayes, 2013) for trust in altruistic motives was significant at a 95% confidence interval, indicating a significant contrast between PNMI’s effect on trust in a non-preferred source versus a preferred source. This supports the notion that pro-
attitudinal news parody exposure can indirectly affect assessments of altruistic-based trust by influencing change in perceptions of news media importance (PNMI), as conditioned upon whether the object of trust is a non-preferred source. Notably, a very similar process of moderated-mediation was evident with trust in the believability of specific news sources, although the index of moderated mediation was only significant with a 90% confidence interval. Here again, more power should be able to clarify this relationship.

Notably, I found no evidence of an interaction between parody criticism exposure and PNMI; posttest PNMI does not moderate any parody-based media criticism effect on general media trust. Neither were basic tests of mediation (news parody $\rightarrow$ change in PNMI $\rightarrow$ change in general trust) found to be significant with the trust dimensions at a general level. Nonetheless, we can trace causal links between news parody exposure, PNMI, and media trust in specific news sources—affirmatively answering the key empirical question at the heart of this research: can perceptions of the news media importance shed light on news parody’s mechanisms of influence on media trust?

The broad process of influence highlighted here is meaningful in several ways. First, it further illuminates our understanding of news parody. The data not only demonstrate that news parody can influence trust; it suggests how it can wield influence on trust—by emphasizing (often implicitly) the importance of what the news media arguably aspire to do. Secondly, the process of influence bears implications regarding the malleability and utility of PNMI. It is evident that perceptions of importance are not just an interesting correlate of media trust. The data suggest that PNMI can change over time and that change in PNMI can have meaningful implications. One implication is that
increased PNMI can promote trust in a news media outlet—particularly sources that are not initially highly preferred. It is important to recognize, however, that the effects highlighted in this process of influence are modest. It is not suggested here that news parody exposure renders strong effects in terms of perceived news media importance and media trust. Even so, small effects can nonetheless be meaningful, significantly contributing to phenomena that shape media perceptions.

**Summary**

In summary, this research considers the interplay of news parody, PNMI, and media trust. It demonstrates that news parody can have influence on news media perceptions—only not quite as originally hypothesized. Rather than explicit media criticism negatively influencing trust, it appears that the *implicit* aspects of parody content may be more responsible for influencing media perceptions, seemingly in favorable ways. We might attribute the effects of the non-overt criticism news parody to the journalistic functions that news parody often performs, even as such parody so often lampoons news media conventions. News parody programs like *Last Week Tonight* and *The Daily Show* commonly inform people about, comment on, and explain complex political/public affairs issues—arguably performing acts of journalism in the process (Peters, 2013). Recalling that news parody is a form of imitation (with intentional difference; see Hutcheon, 1985), it should perhaps be unsurprising that news parody’s mimicry incidentally performs news media functions. As Baym (2005) points out, political entertainment like *The Daily Show* is not merely ‘fake news;’ it is “an experiment in journalism” (p. 273) that embodies ways in which political journalism may very well evolve in the 21st century. Moreover, news parody programs commonly feature
content from extant mainstream news footage to undergird its commentary. Perhaps
drawing attention to existing news content (even as explicitly critiquing the news content
at times) contributes to enhancing perceptions of news work.

Therefore, whether performing or highlighting the work of conventional news
media, news parody seems to broadly underscore the importance of the press. A case can
be made that news parody often grossly simplifies complex issues and circumstances for
the sake of a laugh. Perhaps it can also promote cynicism about the political institutions
(Hart & Hartelius, 2007). Such concerns are not unwarranted. Certainly news parody is
not a panacea for the issue of low public confidence in the press. But, as this research
suggests, neither are we better off without it. As Meyer (2000) notes, humor can be a
“double-edged sword,” in that it functions to both unite and divide. Similarly, we find
that news parody may both undermine and strengthen the news media. While has it surely
has its limitations, this study underscores news parody’s value.

In terms of PNMI’s relationship with media trust, it is striking that, also contrary
to the expectations of this study, PNMI shows signs of promoting trust. In view of the
larger objective to better understand media trust through PNMI, how might we make
sense of low trust in the media in light of this study’s findings? This research suggests
that low trust may be related to citizens undervaluing or having low respect for what the
news media actors aspire (or arguably should aspire) to do. In this light, perhaps we
should not be overly concerned about low-to-moderate faith in the press. I would argue
that some skepticism is actually warranted. What would be more worrisome is a steady
decline in the public’s perceptions of the news media’s importance. (To my knowledge,
such a trend has not been tracked.) If people are not fundamentally finding value in and
respecting the core functions of the news media, how meaningful is low or high media trust? This is normative question worth future consideration in view of the PNMI concept.

**Practical Implications**

This research also bears some practical implications. First, while widespread distrust of the news media may very well be problematic (though not everyone agrees with that sentiment), any notion of trying to curtail this mistrust by solely focusing on somehow trying to earn the public’s trust with better news coverage or simply emphasizing that citizens ought to follow the news may be ill conceived. This study suggests that it may be worthwhile directing energies toward bolstering a sense of the news media’s importance.

By finding ways to spotlight the value and importance of news work, advocates of the news media may be able to leverage greater media trust among citizens. This could involve doubling efforts to showcase the significance of the news media in educational settings as well as journalists taking time to explain—when possible—to audiences the rationale behind decisions of news media choices relative to normative functions of the news media. As the research of Esser and D’Angelo (2003) suggests, “metacoverage” (i.e., news coverage about the news media) about the press’s normative functions do not seem to be commonplace. Esser and D’Angelo (2003) found that press’s use of accountability frames—relating to portrayals of the press in terms of the news media’s normative function in democracy—was least covered in a content analysis of metacoverage, constituting 3% of its coverage (p. 633).
Admittedly, bringing attention to the importance of the press is a particularly challenging goal within today’s high choice and fragmented media landscape in which citizens—if they so desire—are able to seek out entertainment options with great ease and largely sidestep more traditional sources of political information (see Prior, 2007). How might journalism advocates reach such audiences in an effort to promote PNMI? There is of course no simple solution, but perhaps encouraging entertainment programming in the vein of past shows like HBO’s The Newsroom and The Wire or films like All the President’s Men and Good Night, and Good Luck can play a role in this regard. These narratives centrally focused on news media practices, arguably showcasing the societal value of the press, even while highlighting shortcomings of the press.

This study also bears implications in terms of operationalizing media trust in communication research. Scholars should continue to explore how much stock to put into the public’s assessments of “the news media” when it’s unclear what survey respondents are actually evaluating. A variety of questions are worth substantive debate, including: should perceptions of the news outlets that people dislike serve as an indicator of societal-level opinions about the press—given that many survey respondents may be thinking of their least favorite news sources (e.g., MSNBC or FOX News) when evaluating the news media? What are researchers missing by asking about “the news media” in general, as if the news media is a clearly definable singular entity? (I would argue it’s not a singular entity; see Nerone, 1990.) Would news media observers have a different outlook about trust in the news media if polling firms were more often asking respondents to rate the news organizations they use most (e.g., Kohring and Matthes,
2007; Pew Research Center, 2011)? Hopefully this research effort can contribute to this conversation by underscoring the value of examining source-specific media trust.

Limitations

No research is without its limitations and this study is no exception. Taking stock of the limitations of this project, several points warrant brief discussion related to the PNMI measure, the pro-attitudinal parody measure, the experimental stimuli, and the experiment’s sample size.

It is first worth noting that the PNMI scale at the heart of this project could use further refinement. Undoubtedly the multi-dimensional PNMI scale used herein was valuable tool, especially as validated with nationally representative data. Yet the scale (as measured by the nationally representative survey data) is negatively skewed with a mean value above the midpoint of the scale (\(M=4.70, SD=1.04, Skewness = -0.83, Kurtosis = 1.60\)). In order to develop a more sensitive measure of PNMI, with greater variance, the scale items could use further revision. Perhaps the addition of new questions and reverse-coded items could help in this regard.

Another limitation of the PNMI measure is that it is confined to a normative framework. Note that Schudson (2008), who largely inspired this study’s conception of PNMI, prefaces his inventory as what “journalism offers to democracy” (p. 12). This operationalization of PNMI does not represent all the meaningful ways in which the news media could be relevant and important to the general public. Interpretation of analyses employing the scale should bear this in mind.

Furthermore, as acknowledged earlier in this study, there are different normative

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26 To be sure, such questions about interpreting public opinion data are not new, as the work of, for instance, Converse (1962), Price (1992) and Zaller (1992) demonstrate.
standards for democracy in general and the press in particular with which this project could have aligned. It should be noted that PNMI privileges a democratic system of governance, loosely aligned with a ‘social responsibility’ framework (see Peterson, 1963)—representing just one scholarly conception of what is important about the press. But even within the existing functions represented in the scale, PNMI’s dimensions could be further expanded to include other functions that some may deem to be important, perhaps more representative of the libertarian nature of how the American press operates in practice (not just in aspirational terms). For instance, news media publications like the Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times serve a function to provide financial news for business interests. The utility of news content for making financial decisions could be one domain to include in a PNMI measure. Or perhaps, as earlier noted, the entertainment value of news content—including sports and celebrity news—might be examined within a PNMI context. In addition, as PNMI stands the investigative dimension does not do a good job of representing the normative function of the press challenging forms of power other than that of the state (Nerone, 1995). In the mind of some at least, that’s an important normative function. Finally, it should be recognized that the criteria used for the operationalization of PNMI is based on a rather Western/U.S.-centric notion of “the press.” But of course news media systems function differently elsewhere (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009).

As related to the news parody component of the research, this study was also limited in that the pro-attitudinal news parody measure was rudimentary. It was a self-reported posttest measure, asking about agreement with the statement, “I am in agreement with the main arguments that the comedian put forward in this video clip.” While this
item was useful in that it allowed respondents to set the terms of what they considered the ‘main argument’ to be, the vagueness of the question renders it difficult to ascertain what particular aspects of the parody messages they found to be pro-attitudinal. Future research on the trust effects of pro- and counter-attitudinal news parody could benefit from collecting pretest measures of opinions regarding the topics featured in a given news parody message. Furthermore, given that pro-attitudinal parody may be tapping opinions about the legitimacy of news parody as a form of news content, it is also advisable to examine evaluations of news parody as a meaningful news source in conjunction with pro-attitudinal news parody. Nonetheless, even this study’s rudimentary gauge of like-mindedness proved insightful.

The varied nature of the news parody stimuli also represent a limitation of the study, making it difficult to pinpoint which news parody message features may be driving the effects highlighted in this study. To be sure, a strength of the experimental study is that stimulus sampling was employed, involving random assignment to one of three versions of a news parody clips in each treatment condition. Hence, this study is not just exploring the effect of one news parody show, such as the now-defunct Colbert Report. Because of the random assignment and controlling for each individual news parody clip in the analysis models, we have greater confidence that we are examining the effects of the news parody more generally (albeit, in the scope of TV-based news parody), thereby promoting the generalizability of the study. Yet we find that the key manipulation of the news parody stimuli—whether it featured explicit media criticism—did not appear to drive the effects that emerged. Thus, in finding that the no-overt criticism condition
seemed to be driving many of the effects, it’s unclear what news parody message feature(s) is responsible for the influence.

Moreover, it should be noted that certain topics featured in the news parody stimuli may have generated confounds. For instance, the ISIS-themed (Colbert) and Nuclear weapons-themed (Oliver) parody segments may have induced a certain degree of negative affect (i.e., fear) that contributed to a heightened sense of media importance. Importantly, self-reported fear was controlled for in all analyses. That said, humorous treatments of so-called serious subject matter (like ISIS, nuclear weapons, or Ebola) is consistently featured in news parody content. Thus, while examination of affect-laden topics may complicate our ability to trace the mechanisms of influence at hand with news parody message (i.e., internal validity), this aspect of the study design also notably bolsters the realism (i.e., external validity) represented in the experiment—reflective of the diversity of content featured in contemporary news parody programming.

Another significant issue that marks a limitation of this study is the misidentification (among some) of the text-based news story stimuli source. As noted in the methodology section of Study 2, a concerning issue with the experimental design used for Study 2 is that even as all participants were randomly assigned to read a text-based news story that was attributed to either (a) a preferred source or (b) a non-preferred source (as informed by answers provided earlier in the survey questionnaire), some participants \((n=80)\) were unable to identify the source of the news story they read. So as to not contradict what the respondents (incorrectly) reported reading—thereby introducing another potential confound—the source-specific trust questions were tailored to what respondents reported reading, not what they actually read. (Importantly, all
retained participants were able to correctly identify the topic of the news story—suggesting that, at a certain level, they were paying attention to the stimulus.) Consequently some participants who, for example, were randomly assigned to evaluate a preferred source actually ended up providing trust assessments about a non-preferred source—meaning they were analyzed as part of the non-preferred news source condition. To help guard against the possibility that this reassignment represented a meaningful difference among the sample participants, misidentification of the stimulus news source was controlled for in all analyses. Thus while random assignment was disrupted for this secondary part of the study’s main experiment (i.e., outlet-specific trust), it seems unlikely that the limitation significantly undermine the results reported here. In sum, inclusion of those who misidentified the news source was ultimately not deemed to be debilitating to the quality of the data, yet it is surely important to acknowledge.

Finally, another notable limitation of this research is the power afforded by the sample size of the experimental data. That is, the sample size for Study 2 was modest (N=227). Even as the sample was large enough to detect significant effects, extending this data collection effort by another 100-200 participants—as originally targeted—could further clarify the significance or insignificance) of the relationships highlighted here.

**Future Directions**

Turning to consideration of how this study’s findings could be extended and built upon in future research endeavors, we might first direct attention to further exploration of news parody’s influence on media trust. Given that most of this project’s significant findings relate to parody content devoid of explicit media criticism, it would be beneficial to examine news parody effects as compared to other types of (non-parody) news content.
If news parody’s effect on PNMI and trust is indeed driven by it capacity to demonstrate the value of news media function, it could be insightful to compare parody’s effect to that of more conventional news media content.

It could also be interesting for future research to explore how attributions made about the source of a news parody message (e.g., John Oliver)—that is, perceptions of the comedian’s personal opinions about the news media—might influence (a) a given individual’s interpretation of a news parody message and (b) its effect on media perceptions like PNMI or media trust. For instance, if a participant was primed within an experimental context to believe that John Oliver is actually rather cynical about the work of the news media (i.e., the new media are not really important), would that meaningfully undermine the influence of the news parody message—for instance, in terms of PNMI? Furthermore, within the scope of this project’s exploratory foray into the influence of like-minded news parody (and finding significant effects), it would likely also be worthwhile to investigate the effects of pro- and counter-attitudinal news parody relative to media trust.

The PNMI measure also offers promise for fruitful future scholarship. For instance, one might further probe when and why an individual may be high or low in PNMI. That is, what might be key antecedents to PNMI? And what other political communication/political entertainment-related variables could retain a meaningful relationship with PNMI? For instance, perhaps political self-efficacy, which broadly pertains to a person’s perceived competence to comprehend and influence the political system (Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990), is meaningfully related to PNMI. Those who see high value in the news media may also be more inclined to feel efficacious when it comes
to the politics. Or—in the realm of political entertainment—perhaps PNMI helps to explain an affinity for political humor (Holbert, Lee, Esralew, Walther, Hmielowski, & Landreville, 2013). These are questions worth taking up as this line of research is expanded and refined.

Future research might also further explore the dimensionality of PNMI. As noted earlier, the conceptualization offered here was largely derived from one normative paradigm. Yet the press may well serve more than the six functions that were focused upon. For instance, as highlighted by the uses and gratifications literature (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973), news media content can offer diversion/entertainment and social utility.

It may also worthwhile to explore PNMI in in trans-national research context. Even as PNMI privileges American conception of the press—aligned with a ‘social responsibility’ framework (Peterson, 1963)—PNMI could bear relevance elsewhere, although perhaps with different results. For instance, it would be intriguing to see how PNMI relates to media trust in Russia, China, or Egypt, where press freedom is more restricted. This would, of course, be no simple task. But it nonetheless could be a research direction well-worth pursuing in an effort to understand dynamics of media trust in a more global context.

Finally, as noted before, this project highlights a potentially fruitful research avenue with regard to exploring trust in specific news outlets. Certainly there is greater simplicity to measuring general trust in the news media, but such an approach is rather imprecise. Whether in the scope of news parody or beyond, existing knowledge about
trust in the news media can be greatly enhanced by probing trust assessments at a more nuanced level of specificity.

**Conclusion**

This study began with brief consideration of a public opinion poll (Dugan, 2014) showing the public’s low confidence in different news media platforms. I posited that this polling data is emblematic of a notion shared by many scholars—that the public generally has low regard for news media. To strengthen an understanding of the factors that undergird such evaluations of the news media’s trustworthiness, this study looked beyond the question of whether the news media are worthy of the public’s trust. Instead, it focused on a more fundamental line of inquiry, asking: What exactly is media trust? How much does the public even care about the core functions of the news media and do such valuations influence news media trust assessments? And, finally, how does media content like news parody help shape the public’s trust assessment of the press? This study offers some answers to these queries, indicating that news parody content and perceptions of news media importance can work in tandem to influence different types of media trust—especially when media trust is conceptualized in more concrete terms, pertaining to specific news sources.

Interestingly, the time frame in which this dissertation project was carried out coincided with major transitions within the news parody landscape. After an 11-season run, Stephen Colbert brought his *Colbert Report* program to an end in late 2014. Just a few months later, Jon Stewart announced that he would be stepping down as host of *The Daily Show* in 2015. Of course Colbert and Stewart were centrally featured in the experimental stimuli at the heart of this project. Moreover, the two comedians are
arguably the most prominent exemplars of the news parody genre analyzed in this study. Their departures from their respective news parody programs prompts the question of whether we may be witnessing a decline of some golden era in television-based news parody. Will the (TV-based) news parody genre maintain the relative prominence that it gained under the tutelage of Stewart and Colbert?

Speculatively speaking, I doubt that news parody will lose its footing in the contemporary news media landscape. Both Stewart and Colbert were immensely talented comedians and political commentators, as evidenced by the critical acclaim they garnered from the early 2000s to 2015. Yet it’s important to remember that these men did not invent news parody (e.g., see Day & Thompson, 2012; Jones, 2010). Undoubtedly they innovatively experimented with and advanced the genre, but all within the context of a broader, longstanding tradition. Thus, while it may take some time for the likes of John Oliver, Larry Wilmore, and The Daily Show’s forthcoming host, Trevor Noah to build rapport and credibility with their audiences, news parody commentary will likely continue to be a part of the news information diets for many people. Given the appetite for entertainment so often demonstrated by members of the public (e.g., Prior, 2007), I anticipate that news parody content will only become more ubiquitous. Surely the genre will evolve, but it is unlikely that the public’s interest in news parody will wane.

Given that my predictions of news parody’s staying power is correct, news parody research—such as the research featured in this study—should prove to be valuable for the continuing efforts to build an understanding of the contemporary media environment and public perceptions of the news media within that environment. Even as many citizens do not regularly consume news parody shows like The Daily Show (see Pew Research
Center, 2012b), the genre nonetheless represents a meaningful component of the news media landscape (Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009). As a form of media criticism, news parody functions as an important counterpoint to mainstream news media discourse. Yet I have posited herein that news parody, by virtue of its imitative functions, can also serve as a form of news content. As an “experiment in journalism” (Baym, 2005, p. 273), news parody can perform normative news media functions—such as providing political information and analysis, and serving as a check on power in its various forms. Indeed, this study indicates that one way in which news parody may influence media trust by underscoring the importance of the press through acts of journalism. If imitation is indeed ‘the sincerest form flattery,’ then it follows that news parody sources like Last Week Tonight, The Daily Show, and The Onion can function as implicit endorsements of the news media’s importance. This project demonstrates such endorsements can be meaningful. It indicates that as scholars continue to explore what shape the public’s trust in the news media and how to interpret their trust assessments, we should pay attention to the critical and imitative functions of news parody and its ability to foster perceptions of news media importance.
References


172


Appendix A

Exploratory Set of PNMI Questions (35 original items)

Introduction: Some people say that what they value in the news differs from what people in the
news media say is important, while others are more likely to agree with the goals that the news
media often prioritize. We’d like to know what you value in the news, regardless of what others
say the news media should do. Carefully read each statement and ask yourself: Thinking
about my news preferences, it is important to me that the news media…

Information function

…provide me with a daily account of what is happening in the world.*
…keep me up to date on what my political leaders and government are doing. *
…raise my awareness about the negative things facing society.
…raise my awareness about the positive things happening in society.
…regularly fill me in on what’s happening in the local community.
…regularly fill me in on what’s happening in my country.
…regularly fill me in on what’s happening in the world at large.

Investigative function

…expose the shortcomings of government officials and institutions.*
…be an adversary of public officials by being constantly skeptical of their actions*
…be an adversary of businesses by being constantly skeptical of their actions*
…be a watchdog over the behavior of the government and public officials
…test claims that politicians and public officials make
…keep a close eye on businesses and powerful organizations
…just report what our leaders say and not question them

Analysis function

…provide analysis and interpretation of international developments*
…provide analysis and interpretation of the complex problems around me*
…provide analysis and interpretation about the events in the news
… help me make sense of what’s happening in the country
… are able to explain the future implications of news events

Social Empathy function
… open my eyes to the misfortunes of other people.*
… open my eyes to the good things that are happening to people.*
… focus on what’s mainly relevant to my life.
… give me sense of what other people in my local community are experiencing
… give me sense of what other people in my country are experiencing
… give me a sense of what other people around the world are experiencing

Public Forum function
… provide a forum for a wide range of viewpoints on important issues.*
… help me learn more about issues and political causes that I don’t agree with.*
… encourage substantive public debates about important issues.*
… ask the kinds of questions of political leaders I would like to have asked
… gives me the opportunity to make my voice heard in society

Mobilization function
… help me to play active roles in community controversies.*
… motivate ordinary people to get involved in public discussions of important issues.*
… take clear positions on issues to help guide my decisions.*
… point me toward possible solutions to society’s problems
… avoid trying influence what I think and do.

Note: Questions marked with asterisks denote the 15 questions carried forward for use in the nationally representative Stage 2 survey.
Appendix B

Finalized PNMI Scale (12 items) Question Wording

Carefully read each statement and ask yourself: Thinking about my news preferences, it is important to me that the news media…

Information function

… provide me with a daily account of what is happening in the world. (Info1)

… keep me up to date on what my political leaders and government are doing. (Info2)

Investigative function

… expose the shortcomings of government officials and institutions. (Inv1)

… be an adversary of public officials by being constantly skeptical of their actions. (Inv2)

Analysis function

… provide analysis and interpretation of events in the news. (Any1)

… provide analysis and interpretation of the complex problems around me. (Any2)

Social Empathy function

… open my eyes to the misfortunes of other people. (SE1)

… open my eyes to the good things that are happening to people. (SE2)

Public Forum function

… help me learn more about issues and political causes that I don’t agree with. (PF1)

… encourage substantive public debates about important issues. (PF2)

Mobilization function

… help me to play active roles in community controversies. (M1)

… motivate ordinary people to get involved in public discussions of important issues. (M2)
Obama Wants $1 Billion to Curb Central American Immigration

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama wants to spend $1 billion to help curb illegal immigration from three Central American countries, according to the president's budget request. The request was outlined in the president's $4 trillion budget request sent to Congress Monday.

The administration first proposed financial aid to Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala last year after more than 51,000 children from those countries were caught crossing the border alone. At the same time, more than 69,000 people traveling as families, mostly young mothers and children from Central America, were also apprehended at the Mexican border.

The spike in children apprehended at the border caught the Obama administration off guard, despite years of increasing numbers of unaccompanied children found trying to sneak across the border. The situation strained resources within the Homeland Security and Health and Human Services departments, both of which are responsible for dealing with children caught crossing the border alone.

Obama described the situation last spring and summer as a humanitarian crisis.

The U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, will be responsible for providing Congress with a strategy "to address the key factors in the countries in Central America" where the child immigrants have fled, according to Obama's proposed State Department budget. The budget request said the money would be spent on helping improve border security and economic and social development and make improvements to law enforcement and judicial systems in those countries, among other things.

Some of the money would also be used to support repatriation facilities to help process immigrants deported by the United States.

The State Department budget request also includes $142 million to help Mexico bolster its southern border.
## Appendix D

### Mean and Standard Deviations of Hot Deck Imputation Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pre-imputation</th>
<th>Post-imputation</th>
<th>Initial N</th>
<th>Final N</th>
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<td>$M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>510</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.27 (0.45)</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Content - ‘Bad News’</td>
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<td>4.65 (1.52)</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
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<td>PNMI – Info A</td>
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<td>5.75 (1.38)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>5.52 (1.46)</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNMI – Investigate A</td>
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<td>5.00 (1.56)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNMI – Investigate B</td>
<td>3.84 (1.63)</td>
<td>3.83 (1.62)</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>509</td>
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<tr>
<td>PNMI – Analysis A</td>
<td>4.37 (1.72)</td>
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<td>Radio political info use</td>
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<td>Internet news sites use</td>
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<td>Social media political info use</td>
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Appendix E

Distribution of Survey Weight Variable

[Histogram showing the distribution of survey weight variable with the following statistics: Mean = 1.0000, Std. Dev. = .5115, N = 510]