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# Friending Your Way to Political Knowledge: A Field Experiment of Computer-Mediated Social Networks

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FRIENDING YOUR WAY TO POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE: A FIELD EXPERIMENT OF COMPUTER-MEDIATED SOCIAL NETWORKS

by

HOLLY A. TERESI

Under the Direction of Dr. Jason Reifler

ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of political information conveyed through computer-mediated social networks. Using a popular social networking website, Facebook, a randomized field experiment involving Georgia State University undergraduates explores the extent to which computer-mediated peer-to-peer communication can increase political knowledge. For this experiment two Facebook profiles were created, one to administer information about the 2009 Atlanta mayoral election and the other to administer timely entertainment information. Students were randomly assigned one of these profiles to "friend." Students choosing not to "friend" their assigned profile were aggregated to create an additional control condition. Treatments were administered to those who "friended" their assigned profile for the seven days preceding the mayoral election. To assess the transfer of knowledge between the profiles and the students a subsequent in-person survey was conducted (N=374). Results reveal that being exposed to political information by a peer through a social networking website increases the probability of recalling at least some of that

information by 18.2 percent. Notably, the same method of exposure to entertainment information produces no significant effects on the recall of that information.

INDEX WORDS: Political behavior, Political knowledge, Social networking, Social networking sites, Computer-mediated communication, Facebook.

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by

HOLLY A. TERESI

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2009

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Holly A. Teresi
2009

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by

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# DEDICATION

To my parents.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Political scientists are continually trying to understand how political communication happens and what effect it has on the electorate. Scholarship in this area is divided into two main subfields: mass communication and interpersonal communication or social networking. Modern mass communication research analyzes everything from policy discussions broadcast by radio (Denny 1941) to candidates' television image (McGinniss 1969); while social networking research focuses on the peer-to-peer dialogues that take place among family, friends, neighbors and co-workers (Beck et al. 2002; Djupe, Sokhey, and Niles 2009; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007; Gerber and Green 2004; Giles and Dantico 1982; Huckfeldt 1979, 2001; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987, 1995; Kenny 1992; Lake and Huckfeldt 1998; Leighley 1990; McClurg 2003; Mutz 2002a, 2002b; Pappi, Huckfeldt, and Ikeda 1998; Richey 2008; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). However, the evolution of computer-mediated peer-to-peer communication and the increasing penetration of the Internet are causing these two subfields to converge.

It has been observed that the peer-to-peer communication that occurs in traditional offline social networks increases a person's retention of political knowledge (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987, 1995; Kenny 1992), which leads to a greater likelihood to vote correctly (Bartels 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Lau and Redlawsk 1997), and higher rates of participation overall (Putnam 2000; Lake and Huckfeldt 1998;

McClurg 2003). Yet, little research measures how citizens respond to the peer-to-peer political communication that occurs in computer-mediated social networks. Instead, research regarding computer-mediated political communication focuses almost exclusively on the content of campaign websites and other candidate-driven or traditional top-down, mass communication (Bimber and Davis 2003; Chadwick 2006; Conners 2005; Farmer and Fender 2003, 2005; Gershon 2008; Hindman 2005; Howard 2005; Koltz 2004; Krueger 2006; Loader 2008; Lupia and Baird 2003; Nickerson 2007b; Norris 2003; Tolbert and McNeal 2003; Ward and Gibson 2003; Williams and Gulati 2007; Xenos and Foot 2005). However, as peer-to-peer communication extends beyond face-to-face and telephone conversations to include computer-mediated dialogues, it is reasonable to ask if the social interaction that makes social networks beneficial to civic engagement is still evident in this new medium. Unlike face-to-face and telephone conversations, computer-mediated communication can incorporate characteristics of mass communication. While computer-mediated communication increases the amount of information users receive from their traditional offline social network, it may also mean that there is no interpersonal effect. This research seeks to understand what impact, if any; peer-to-peer computer-mediated communication, through a social networking website, has on the saliency of political information and political knowledge.

# 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Mass Communication Exposure

A significant influencer of public opinion and political behavior is the mass media. Even subtle exposure to information impacts the saliency of that information among the public (Althaus 2003; Iyengar and Kinder 1987). As the gatekeepers of information, the mass media are able to shape the national agenda by deciding which information to present to the public; thus, influencing what issues are most salient to voters (Althaus 2003; Mutz 1998; Wanta 1997; Zaller 1992). While the mass media certainly try to persuade *how* voters think about certain issues (Fridkin et al. 2008), their ability to control *what* voters think about ultimately has the greatest impact on public discourse (Althaus 2003; Wanta 1997). By increasing exposure to information the mass media are able to increase the saliency of that information among the public, resulting in its incorporation into the public agenda (Althaus 2003; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Mutz 1998; Wanta 1997; Zaller 1992). A similar effect occurs on a smaller scale within social networks.

## 2.2 Traditional Social Networks

Although the mass media play an important role in exposing people to political issues and ideas, social networks are a main source of political information for many Americans (Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). According to McClurg (2003) these social interactions create "opportunities for

individuals to gather information about politics that allows them to live beyond personal resource constraints, thereby supporting [their] political activity" (449). Additionally, although networks are formed based on complicated reasoning and usually without any consideration of political behavior or preferences, it appears that the act of exchanging political knowledge is often used to facilitate social bonding (Djupe, Sokhey, and Niles 2009; Giles and Dantico 1982; Huckfeldt 1979, 2001; Huckfeldt, Ahn, Ryan, and Mayer 2009; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987, 1995; Kenny 1992; Lake and Huckfeldt 1998; Leighley 1990; McClurg 2003; Pappi, Huckfeldt, and Ikeda 1998; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) indicate that as a result of this social bonding "social networks… create solidarity rewards and bestow them, selectively, on those who act in the common interest" (23). Therefore, social networks are able to set expectations of political involvement and enforce consequences for deviant behavior. It is the presence of this social pressure that enables people to manipulate the behavior of those in their social network (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

According to Rosenstone and Hansen (1993), "Working through social networks, candidates, parties, interest groups, and social movements exploit friendships and social obligations" to increase civic participation (210). However, Gerber and Green (2004) note that even people who are not connected through a social network are able to exert some social pressure over each other during interpersonal encounters simply by setting expectations of what is socially desirable. Activities capitalizing on peer-to-peer

communication such as door-to-door canvassing (Gerber and Green 2000, 2001a, 2005; Green, Gerber, and Nickerson 2003; Nickerson 2006b; Nickerson, Friedrichs, and King 2006; Sinclair, McConnell, and Michelson 2008) and phone banking (Gerber and Green 2001a, Nickerson 2006a, 2007a; Nickerson Friedrichs, and King 2006) are the most effective mobilization methods for increasing civic participation. That said, this effect is magnified as relationship strength increases (Sinclair, McConnell, and Michelson 2008).

### 2.3 Computer-Mediated Political Talk

While computer-mediated communication is becoming an increasingly popular form of peer-to-peer communication; most scholarship dealing with the influence of this new technology on political behavior either focuses on how it is detrimental to offline social interactions (Kraut et al. 1998), how it manipulates the constructs of privacy (Gross and Acquisti 2005; Hewitt and Forte 2006; Kraut et al. 1998; Stutzman 2006), or assumes it is a channel of unidirectional mass communication exploited by political elites to manipulate the public agenda (Bimber and Davis 2003; Chadwick 2006; Conners 2005; Farmer and Fender 2003, 2005; Gershon 2008; Hindman 2005; Howard 2005; Koltz 2004; Krueger 2006; Loader 2008; Lupia and Baird 2003; Norris 2003; Nickerson 2007b; Tolbert and McNeal 2003; Ward and Gibson 2003; Williams and Gulati 2007; Xenos and Foot 2005). Research on e-mail, blogging, and online mobilization offer some assessment of computer-mediated, peer-to-peer political communication; however, this research still focuses on how citizens use technology to

communicate with opinion leaders and other users who are not members of their traditional, offline social network (Conners 2005; Juris 2005). Even research that examines the relationship between online communication and offline behavior focuses almost exclusively on how users convert online organization into offline activism through boycotts, buycotts, rallies, and petitions (Conners 2005; Juris 2005; Loader 2008). Ultimately, this research does not examine the role of interpersonal communication to meet these goals.

### 2.4 Computer-Mediated Social Networks

Computer-mediated communication facilitated by social networking websites incorporates the essential characteristics of both mass communication and interpersonal communication to form a hybrid model of peer-to-peer communication; computer-mediated social networks. Instead of contacting each person individually to facilitate interpersonal communication, computer-mediated social networks allow users to connect with their family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and even acquaintances by publicly posting information that they would otherwise share through traditional interpersonal communication channels. Additionally, social networking websites provide opportunities for active and passive information exchanges. Users are able to actively engage each other in direct conversations while everyone in their individual networks passively look on. This semi-public exchange of information not only allows users to form bonds with each other by providing opportunities for actively engaging

each other in discussion, but it also serves to enhance the social bonds of non-discussants through the passive observation of self-disclosed information (Cummings, Butler, and Kraut 2002; Golder, Wilkinson, and Huberman 2007; Grannovetter 1973; Merkle and Richardson 2000; Subramani and Rajagopalan 2003). Just by being able to observe each other's information and behavior, computer-mediated social networks allow users to feel that their relationships are enhanced (Cummings, Butler, and Kraut 2002; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007).

Moreover, computer-mediated communication is proven to facilitate trust-building between users. Frohlich and Oppenheimer (1998) find that computer-mediated communication can actually help facilitate social bonding. In Frohlich and Oppenheimer's (1998) experiment participants playing prisoner dilemma games who communicate via e-mail actually exhibit greater levels of cooperation and trust than those communicating face-to-face or not at all. This finding indicates that computer-mediated communication allows users to form stronger social bonds faster than offline communication, assuming that they are provided a stimulus to initiate the bonding process. This stimulus can range from playing a game, like in Frohlich and Oppenheimer's (1998) experiment, to a casual offline interaction that is enhanced by online connectedness. In the proper context, computer-mediated communication is an effective technique for developing aspects of social bonds, including trust (Frohlich and Oppenheimer 1998; Merkle and Richardson 2000).

Given that trust is critical in shaping political attitudes (Druckman 2001; Huckfeldt, Ahn, Ryan and Mayer 2009; Kuklinski and Hurley 1994), I posit that computer-mediated social networks have the potential to be an effective delivery channel for political information that can ultimately increase political knowledge. Academic research regarding computer-mediated social networks is still a relatively new subfield of study spanning many disciplines. Much of the research about computer-mediated social networks focuses on privacy (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Fogg and Eckles 2007; Golder, Wilkinson, and Huberman 2007; Gross and Acquisti 2005; Hewitt and Forte 2006; Stutzman 2006), self-disclosure (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007; Golder, Wilkinson, and Huberman 2007; Gross and Acquisti 2005; Hewitt and Forte 2006; Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds 2007; Stutzman 2006), personal presentation (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Hewitt and Forte 2006), patterns of use (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007; Fogg and Eckles 2007; Golder, Wilkinson, and Huberman 2007; Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield 2006), and the impact they have on social capital (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007; Kraut et al. 1998; Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield 2006). Few studies have addressed the profound impact that the incorporation of mass communication characteristics has had on peer-to-peer communication (Cummings, Butler, and Kraut 2002; Fogg 2008; Frohlich and Oppenheimer 1998; Merkle and Richardson 2000; Subramani and Rajagopalan 2003).

# 3 THEORY

Information sharing is the key component to creating and sustaining successful computer-mediated relationships (Merkle and Richardson 2000); however, before computer-mediated social networking websites, mass information sharing was difficult to organize within a social network and often viewed as inappropriate for computer-mediated communication channels. While e-mail has the capacity to facilitate such mass communication within an entire social network, it is guided by social norms that make it as ineffective as face-to-face and telephone communication for mass information sharing. Unlike information sharing that occurs by the mass media, discussants who engage in information sharing through face-to-face, telephone, or e-mail are involved in a social interaction and expect that the information being conveyed to them is somehow personally relevant (Walther 1995).

Social networking websites have eliminated this relevancy condition by relying on mass information sharing to facilitate social interactions. For example, most people do not visit, call, or e-mail everyone they know to tell them that they are undecided about whom to vote for because they might think that the people they know would not be interested in such information. However, disclosing such information on a social networking website provides users a non-invasive way to interact with their network; thus, increasing the frequency of their interactions and sustaining their social bond. Instead of taking the time to call each person in their network individually, users are

able to share their thoughts with their entire network and learn what their entire network is thinking about just by logging into a social networking website.

A further benefit of social networking websites is their ability to enhance weak-ties (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007). Returning to the hypothetical example of a user who is undecided about which candidate to vote for; perhaps one of the user's acquaintances knows something about the candidates that could help the user decide, or maybe the user's acquaintance supports a particular candidate and wants to attempt to persuade the user; thus, an exchange of information occurs. Such information sharing is unlikely to occur by traditional communication channels among casual acquaintances, but the relaxed social norms of social networking websites allow users to interact more informally (Fogg 2008); providing more opportunities for information transfers to occur (Fogg and Eckles 2007).

Ultimately, social networking websites allow users to interact with their offline social network more efficiently. Users are able to manage larger social networks and interact with them more often; leading to greater exposure to information, which is proven to increase levels of political knowledge (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Lake and Huckfeldt 1998; McClurg 2003; and Iyengar and Kinder 1987). Additionally, computer-mediated communication is proven to facilitate bonding between users (Cummings, Butler, and Kraut 2002). Therefore, social networking websites allow users to consume information through exposure much like the mass media, while still providing the

opportunity to engage in the social interactions that make traditional, offline social networks influential in civic life.

# 4 EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

To evaluate the effectiveness of computer-mediated social networks to transfer political knowledge I design an experiment that delivers political information through a social networking website and evaluate participants knowledge about that information through a subsequent survey. Arguably, the best web-based social networking platform currently available to evaluate the effects of peer-to-peer communication is www.facebook.com (Facebook). Facebook clearly states its purpose on its homepage; to "[help] you connect and share with the people in your life" (www.facebook.com). Furthermore, unlike other websites that encourage peer-to-peer communication, such as dating websites or blogs, Facebook has explicitly focused on developing policies and social norms that encourage users to construct their offline social networks virtually (Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield 2006). For example, the platform's privacy settings are customizable to only allow those who are connected to the user through mutual friends to see that they are a Facebook user. This level of privacy control, in conjunction with the website's mission statement indicate that Facebook is designed to aggregate and organize the people in a user's existing offline social network rather than help them connect with strangers.

Using Facebook, a field experiment was constructed with three main conditions; two treatments and a control. Each treatment condition was represented by a unique persona; Tiffany Roper (political treatment) or Courtney Harris (entertainment

treatment). Potential participants received instructions for enrolling in the experiment which randomly assigned them to a treatment condition by indicating which persona they must "friend" during the enrollment process. People who did not enroll in the experiment by "Friending" their assigned persona were assigned to the control condition. Upon implementation of this randomization method I discovered that it would have been simpler have participants enroll in the experiment by contacting me personally in order to be assigned to a condition rather than combining the enrollment process with the condition assignment.

Students from eight sections of an introductory political science course were recruited to participate in the experiment in exchange for access to two final exam questions. Furthermore, participants were recruited into the experiment under the pretense that the person they were assigned to "friend" was an actual female, Caucasian, Georgia State University sophomore who volunteered to grow her network and have it observed. Given the unnatural circumstances of unsolicited contact between the participants and their assigned persona, indicating that the participants and the persona are from the same university and share a desire to participate in the experiment was meant to provide the stimulus necessary to initiate the bonding process between the participants and their assigned personas.

Furthermore, it was expected that participants might modify their interaction with their assigned persona if they were aware that they would need to answer

questions about their interactions with their assigned persona. Therefore, participants were not told about the subsequent survey. Instead, participants were led to believe that I was only seeking to observe how computer-mediated social networks grow and interact.

That said, ensuring participants are actually exposed to the stimulus is difficult through the Facebook platform. Depending on the number of "friends" and personal settings of the user the platform may not post every piece of information from the user's network, meaning that some users may need to seek out their assigned persona's profile page in order to be exposed to the stimuli. Additionally, users may "hide" or opt-out of being presented with information from a specific "friend;" however, just 3 percent of the sample reported taking this action. While the inability to strictly control stimulus exposure is undesirable for an experiment, those being sheltered from or opting-out of receiving information are randomized across the treatment conditions preventing any systemic selection bias. Furthermore, such limits to exposure increase the rigor of detecting a treatment effect.

Nevertheless, an incentive structure was created to attempt to discourage participants from sheltering themselves from the stimuli without alternatively requiring them to significantly alter their natural Facebook behavior. In order to encourage participants to monitor their assigned persona's profile page, participants were made aware that two questions for their final exam would be posted by their assigned

persona's "status update" function. While this incentive slightly increases the burden on respondents by asking them to monitor their assigned persona's profile page, such a behavior is not inconsistent with typical Facebook usage.

For external validity participants were provided with as authentic a Facebook experience as possible. The Facebook profile page for each persona was personalized with a unique name and profile picture; however, all of the "non-public" characteristics of each profile such as the personal information, other photos, and general physical characteristics of each persona remained constant. Additionally, I invited people from my personal Facebook network who had no existing relationship with the participants to "friend" the profiles for each persona in an effort to make them appear more authentic. These "friends" were identical across conditions and were instructed to post identical, non-descript comments on each persona's profile page in an attempt to subtly cue participants to engage with their assigned persona. To further facilitate an interpersonal relationship between participants and their assigned persona, both conditions were exposed to identical conversational stimuli, no more than once per day, during the duration of the experiment. These stimuli were meant to provide limited self-disclosure. In addition, acting as the assigned personas, I posted comments and responses and utilized the "like" function[1] when appropriate to facilitate relationships with participants. While researcher-initiated contact was identical across the conditions,

[1] The "like" function on Facebook offers users an automated way to indicate their support or agreement with another user's message without writing a personalized comment to that user.

participant comments and my responses to those comments were unique to each condition and were not equivalent in content or quantity across the conditions. Ultimately, none of the participants ever gave any indication that they doubted the validity of either persona. Instead, participants appear to have been fully convinced that both profiles created by the people pictured.

In addition to the conversational stimuli, there were three other categories of stimuli: political, entertainment, and supplemental entertainment. The political treatment condition received one political stimulus regarding the November 3, 2009 Atlanta mayoral race per day for the duration of the experiment, while the entertainment treatment condition received at least one entertainment and/or sports stimulus per day for the duration of the experiment. Additionally, both conditions occasionally received an identical supplementary entertainment and/or sports stimulus that was distinct from anything posted to the entertainment treatment condition. To ensure internal validity each condition received one unique post (either political or entertainment stimulus) and no more than two identical posts (comprised of a conversational and/or a supplemental entertainment stimulus) each day for the seven days of the experiment (see Table 1). All of the information posted was chosen to be timely and obtained from the headlines of major news outlet websites including: The Atlanta Journal Constitution, Yahoo! News, ESPN, and TMZ.

**Table 1: Experimental Design**

| | Type of Stimulus | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Day of Experiment** | **Political** | **Entertainment** | **Conversational** | **Supplemental** |
| 1 | X | X | X | X |
| 2 | X | X | X | X |
| 3 | X | X | | |
| 4 | X | X | X | |
| **5** | X | X | | X |
| 6 | X | X | X | X |
| 7 | X | X | X | |

The day in which information was posted and the order in which it was posted on a particular day was randomized. However, randomization was sometimes constrained by the topic of the stimulus. For example, a post informing participants about the outcome of a sports event could not be administered before the game was played. Therefore, these posts were randomized based on the possible days they could appear[2].

Within six days of exposure to the final stimulus participants and non-participants (those who did not "friend" a persona) were given class time to complete a survey[3] that evaluated: how much of the political stimuli provided to the political treatment condition, the entertainment stimuli provided to the entertainment treatment condition, and the supplemental entertainment stimuli provided to both conditions could be recalled. Assessments of their platform usage (when applicable), the bond formed with their assigned persona (when applicable), their political behavior, political preferences, political socialization, and local media consumption were also collected, in

[2] The Stimulus Protocol Schedule is included in Appendix C.
[3] The complete survey is included in Appendix A.

addition to their full name and basic demographic information.

Completed surveys were initially cross-checked against a list of participants enrolled in each treatment condition using the respondent's full name. Respondents who did not "friend" one of the conditions were aggregated to form the control condition. After matching a respondent to a condition (political treatment, entertainment treatment, or control) the responses were aggregated within their specified condition for analysis. Additionally, content that the participants posted on their assigned persona's profile page was collected to loosely assess the quality of the relationships developed between the assigned personas and the participants (in aggregate). All content provided by my personal network was excluded from this analysis.

# 5 HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses specify expected outcomes from the different experimental conditions.

$H_1$ Subjects in the political treatment condition should have a higher level of political knowledge than subjects in the entertainment treatment condition and the non-participant condition.

$H_2$ Subjects in the political treatment condition should report a higher frequency of political discussion than subjects in the entertainment treatment condition and the non-participant condition.

$H_3$ Subjects who recall more interactions with their assigned persona should report stronger ties than those who report fewer interactions.

# 6 DATA AND ANALYSIS

**6.1 Sample:** This experiment is comprised of a convenience sample of Georgia State University undergraduate students enrolled in eight distinct sections of an introductory political science course. A total of 735 students are enrolled in these classes; however, 170 students chose to enroll in the experiment by "friending" their assigned persona on Facebook (64 political treatment; 106 entertainment treatment). All participants must have had access to the Internet and have an active Facebook account to enroll in the experiment. While Facebook users are not representative of the public at-large, 92% of survey respondents (which was mostly comprised of students who did not participate in the experiment) reported having a Facebook account. Using a homogeneous sample of university students who all have familiarity and access to the specified technology minimizes the demographic variance in the sample and helps provide both internal and external validity. Furthermore, the experimental design provides even greater external validity by randomly distributing any remaining selection bias or demographic skews associated with studying convenience samples[4].

The survey portion of this study was administered in the same eight sections of the introductory political science course from which experiment participants were recruited. Table 2 shows the complete sample distribution. A total of 374 respondents completed a survey, including 45 participants who were enrolled in the political

[4] Full sampling profiles are provided in Appendix B for each condition.

treatment condition and 71 participants who were enrolled in the entertainment treatment condition.

**Table 2: Sample Distribution**

| | Completed a Survey |
|---|---|
| Political Treatment | 45 |
| Entertainment Treatment | 71 |
| Control | 258 |
| Total | 374 |

**6.2 Control Variables:** The main control variables included in my analysis are: age, gender, ethnicity, party affiliation, media consumption, and political socialization (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Given that the sample is comprised of college students in the same level course, controls for education are not included.

**6.3 Measurement:** For the purpose of this research, the variable "knowledge" is measured by a respondent's ability to recall the exact information provided by the stimuli (18 pieces of information in total). A question corresponding to each political, entertainment, and supplemental entertainment stimulus is included in the survey. Responses assessing the knowledge retained from each stimulus are coded dichotomously to indicate whether or not the respondent was able to recall the specific information correctly. Responses are aggregated across a respondent to form three index scores of knowledge based on the number of questions the respondent correctly answered for each stimulus category; political, entertainment, and supplemental entertainment. Less than one percent of the entire sample correctly answered questions

regarding two particular stimuli (one political and one entertainment); therefore, the questions corresponding to these stimuli are excluded from the index[5].

**6.4 Analysis:** Using a regression models (ordered probit models where appropriate) I analyzed the following dependent variables: political knowledge, frequency of political discussion, and strength of "friendship." Additionally, predicted probabilities were calculated to quantify the treatment effect of being exposed to political information through a computer-mediated social network.

[5] Response distribution by stimulus is provided in Appendix D.

# 7 FINDINGS

The basic models included in Table 3 show the effects of condition assignment for each of the stimulus categories. These models include respondents who were not enrolled in any treatment condition, but completed a survey. Therefore, the variable "Political Treatment" in Table 3 evaluates respondents who were exposed to political stimuli against those assigned to the entertainment treatment condition combined with those who were assigned to the control condition. Likewise, the variable "Entertainment Treatment" in Table 3 evaluates respondents who were exposed to entertainment stimuli against those assigned to the political treatment condition combined with those who were assigned to the control condition. Table 3 clearly shows that being exposed to the political stimuli is a significant predictor of political knowledge, as measured by the political knowledge index. However, similar effects are not observable for any of the entertainment stimuli for either of the treatment conditions. Most notably, this means that participants assigned to the entertainment treatment condition were not significantly more likely to report greater entertainment knowledge, as measured by the entertainment knowledge index than those assigned to the political treatment condition or control condition. Assuming political information is generally less salient than entertainment information this result indicates that computer-mediated social networks are a viable method for increasing knowledge about low saliency information.

**Table 3 Ordered Probit: Knowledge Assessments and Experiment Conditions**

| **Conditions** | **Political** | **Entertainment** | **Supplemental** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Political Treatment | 0.34*<br>(0.17) | -0.05<br>(0.17) | 0.28<br>(0.17) |
| Entertainment Treatment | -0.02<br>(0.15) | 0.00<br>(0.14) | -0.13<br>(0.15) |
| **N** | 374 | 374 | 374 |
| **$X^2$; *p*-value** | $X^2$ (2) = 4.16; $p$ = 0.13 | $X^2$ (2) = 0.08; $p$ = 0.96 | $X^2$ (2) = 4.07; $p$ = 0.13 |

*p<.05; standard errors in parentheses. Two-tailed test.

Looking more closely at just the political knowledge index, exposure to the political stimuli is still significant when evaluating just those survey respondents who were assigned to the political and entertainment treatment conditions and when controlling for other common factors that can increase political knowledge (Table 4). As expected, interest in the Atlanta mayoral election is also a significant predictor of higher scores on the political knowledge index. Interestingly, being a resident of Atlanta negatively predicts higher scores on the political knowledge index. This is likely a function of the sample composition. Because the survey respondents are college students it is likely that they have not yet established the community ties being evaluated by a residency question. Instead, students may consider themselves temporary residents of their college town/city while still being rooted in their hometown. In this case, the variable "Resident of Atlanta" is likely implying that respondents consider themselves transient residents of Atlanta, and therefore; they have not become invested in the community or its politics.

**Table 4 Ordered Probit: Political Knowledge Assessments and Exposure to Political Stimuli**

| **Variables** | **All Respondents** | **Assigned Respondents** |
|---|---|---|
| Exposed to Political Stimuli | 0.46*<br>(0.22) | 0.55*<br>(0.28) |
| Usage (Number of Times Logged-In/Week) | 0.00<br>(0.00) | 0.00<br>(0.00) |
| Interest in the 2009 Atlanta Mayoral Election | 0.55***<br>(0.08) | 0.74***<br>(0.17) |
| Resident of Atlanta | -0.44**<br>(0.16) | -1.1***<br>(0.29) |
| Number of Days of Local News Consumption | 0.06<br>(0.04) | 0.10<br>(0.07) |
| Age | 0.04**<br>(0.01) | 0.02*<br>(0.03) |
| Ethnicity | 0.33*<br>(0.16) | 0.31<br>(0.29) |
| Party Identification | 0.21<br>(0.15) | 0.62*<br>(0.28) |
| **N** | 247 | 84 |
| **$X^2$; *p*-value** | $X^2$ (9) = 95.61; $p$ = 0.00 | $X^2$ (8) = 46.61; $p$ = 0.00 |

*$p$<.05; ***$p$<.01; ***$p$<.001; standard errors in parentheses. Two-tailed test.

When comparing the predicted probability of correctly answering the questions comprising the political knowledge index, an average treatment effect of 7.2 percent is discovered. However, Table 5 shows that the most significant effects occur among those who would otherwise have gotten no questions correct (18.2 percent) and those who would have been able to answer just one question correctly (17.6 percent). That said, even the most knowledgeable respondents exhibited a small treatment effect (2.5 percent). This means that, assuming all else equal, exposure to the political stimuli through a computer-mediated social network increases the probability of even the most knowledgeable people to correctly answer at least four of the six political knowledge

questions that comprise the political knowledge index.

**Table 5: Treatment Effects of Political Stimuli**

| | Probability of Correctness | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Number of Correct Political Knowledge Questions** | **Political Treatment** | **Entertainment Treatment** | **Treatment Effect** |
| At least 1 | 81% | 63% | 18.2% |
| At least 2 | 35% | 17% | 17.6% |
| At least 3 | 21% | 9% | 12.2% |
| At least 4 | 3% | 1% | 2.5% |
| At least 5 | -- | -- | -- |
| At least 6 | -- | -- | -- |

However, exposure to political stimuli does not lead respondents to report higher frequencies of political discussion (Table 6). As expected, interest in politics and political socialization are both significant predictors of more frequent political discussions. However, these results indicate that exposure to the political stimuli through a computer-mediated social network is not considered when respondents evaluate how many days in the past week they discussed politics with their friends or family. I posit two theories for why this might be occurring. First, respondents may not qualify the information conveyed through their computer-mediated social network as "discussion." Second, participants may not have considered their assigned persona a "friend."

**Table 6 Regression: Frequency of Political Discussion**

| Variables | Frequency of Discussion |
|---|---|
| Exposed to Political Stimuli | -0.33<br>(0.38) |
| Number of Facebook Friends | -0.09<br>(0.07) |
| Political Interest of Facebook Network | 0.19<br>(0.23) |
| Usage (Minutes/Week) | 0.00<br>(0.00) |
| Interest in Politics | 0.93***<br>(0.21) |
| Political Socialization | 0.59**<br>(0.21) |
| Age | 0.05<br>(0.04) |
| Ethnicity | 0.17<br>(0.36) |
| Gender | -0.38<br>(0.53) |
| Constant | -3.03**<br>(1.20) |
| **N** | 93 |
| **$r^2$** | 0.45 |

**p<.01; ***p<.001; standard errors in parentheses. Two-tailed test.

Given that respondents in both conditions report a similar average number of days of political discussion and the same median number of days of Facebook use per week, it seems possible that the political treatment condition simply discount the political stimuli posted on Facebook as discussion. Moreover, since the political stimuli were administered over seven days and the median number of days that participants in both treatment conditions report logging into Facebook during that same week is also seven, treated participants have the opportunity to report seven days of political

discussion if they classify seeing a Facebook post as discussion; however, they report just 3 days of political discussion. Therefore, respondents may not be classifying information posed by their computer-mediated social network as "discussion." That said, the political treatment group report a slightly greater median number of days talking about politics with friends or family than the entertainment treatment group, but this difference is not statistically significant. While it is unclear whether or not social networks "discuss" politics through computer-mediated communication it would be inappropriate to assume that the act of reading such communication does not engage users in a way similar to traditional discussion.

In fact, the number of posts a respondent is able to recall is the only significant predictor when evaluating the level of "friendship" between respondents and their assigned personas (Table 7), confirming Hypothesis 3. This finding is fairly astonishing when considering that one-on-one exchanges (i.e. discussions) between the respondents and their assigned personas do not significantly predict greater levels of "friendship." Instead, friendship is cultivated simply by being an active user. While a component of being an active user may include one-on-one exchanges with other users, directly engaging other users is not a necessary behavior for strengthening friendships in computer-mediated social networks.

**Table 7 Ordered Probit: Drivers of Relationship Quality**

| **Variables** | **Relationship Quality** |
|---|---|
| Exposure to Political Stimuli | 0.43<br>(0.31) |
| Number of Facebook Friends | 0.05<br>(0.05) |
| Usage (Minutes/Week) | 0.00<br>(0.00) |
| Number of Days a Post of Any Kind was Recalled | 0.21**<br>(0.08) |
| Researcher Made Individualized Contact | 0.16<br>(0.31) |
| Attractiveness of the Political Treatment Persona | 0.10<br>(0.14) |
| Attractiveness of the Entertainment Treatment Persona | 0.15<br>(0.12) |
| Age | 0.01<br>(0.03) |
| Ethnicity | -0.06<br>(0.32) |
| Gender | 0.52<br>(0.39) |
| **N** | 87 |
| **$X^2$; *p*-value** | $X^2$ (11) = 19.38; $p$ = 0.04 |

**p<.01; standard errors in parentheses. Two-tailed test.

# 8 DISCUSSION

Computer-mediated social networks are an emergent form of interpersonal communication and few published academic studies evaluate the properties of these networks in the context of civic engagement. Furthermore, published academic research to this point has been based solely on observation and surveying users about their behaviors and the behavior of their network. The experimental design of this study offers an innovative way to research computer-mediated social networks while balancing internal and external validity concerns. Ultimately, this experiment proves that political information can successfully be transferred through computer-mediated social networks. It confirms that social networking websites enable users to significantly impact the political knowledge of their social network without personally engaging each member in direct communication; most notable among those who are the least knowledgeable.

Also compelling is the significantly greater usage of social networking websites over traditional media and interpersonal communication in this study. Respondents in this experiment report logging into their social networking website more than twice as often as they watch a local news program or discuss politics with friends or family. Furthermore, 58 percent of those assigned to the political treatment condition report seeing a political post from their assigned profile compared to 6 percent of those assigned to the entertainment treatment condition. Therefore, further investigation is

needed to put into context the treatment effects discovered in this experiment with other methods of communication.

Ultimately, while this experiment is important to the study of internet political communication it was extremely limited. Participants were exposed to relatively few stimuli over a short period of time from a "person" with whom then they had no offline relationship. Any of these factors individually could be used to explain a null result and the fact that this particular experiment suffered from all these limitations and still found significant results make it reasonable to theorize that increasing any of these factors would produce even greater effects. Given the results of this experiment it is likely that computer-mediated communication between well-established discussants would increase the magnitude of the treatment effect discovered in this experiment. Further study is needed to fully test the capacity and limitations of computer-mediated social networks, but these initial findings suggest that at the very least the passive communication facilitated by computer-mediated social networks can significantly increase political knowledge.

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# # #

## **APPENDIX A** – THE FACEBOOK PROJECT SURVEY

1. Do you have a Facebook profile?

   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

2. About how many Facebook friends do you have at GSU or **elsewhere**?

   - ☐ None
   - ☐ 1 – 10
   - ☐ 11 – 50
   - ☐ 51 – 100
   - ☐ 101 – 150
   - ☐ 151 – 200
   - ☐ 201 – 250
   - ☐ 251 – 300
   - ☐ 301 – 350
   - ☐ 351 – 400
   - ☐ More than 400

3. In the past week, approximately how many **days** have you logged into Facebook? You may circle any number between **0 and 7**.

   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Approximately, how many **times per day** have you logged into Facebook in the past week? If you have not logged into the site at all please use "0" to indicate that.

   _____ times per day

5. Approximately how many **minutes per session** did you spend on Facebook during the past week? If you have not spent any time on Facebook please use "0" to indicate that.

   _____ minutes per session

6. Thinking about **the people you interact with on Facebook**, on the whole, how would you describe their interest in information about what's going on in government and politics?

   - ☐ Extremely interested
   - ☐ Very interested
   - ☐ Somewhat interested
   - ☐ Slightly interested
   - ☐ Not at all interested
   - ☐ I do not have a Facebook account

7. How interested are **you** in information about what's going on in government and politics?

   - ☐ Extremely interested
   - ☐ Very interested
   - ☐ Somewhat interested
   - ☐ Slightly interested
   - ☐ Not at all interested

8. During a typical week, how many **days** do you talk about politics with family or friends? Please exclude classroom discussions. You may circle any number between **0 and 7**.

   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. Often things come up and people are not able to register to vote. Would records from any state show that you are currently registered to vote or like many others are you not registered to vote at this time?

   - ☐ Yes, I am registered to vote **in Atlanta**
   - ☐ Yes, I am registered to vote but **not** able to vote in Atlanta
   - ☐ No, I am not a registered voter
   - ☐ Not sure

10. When you were growing up, how often did you talk about politics, government or current events with your parents?

   - ☐ Frequently
   - ☐ Often
   - ☐ Occasionally
   - ☐ Rarely
   - ☐ Never

11. From what you remember while you were growing up, would you say that your parents voted during every election, most elections, only in important elections, rarely, or not at all?

   - ☐ Every election
   - ☐ Most elections
   - ☐ Only in important elections
   - ☐ Rarely
   - ☐ Not at all

12. Please tell us if **you** have done any of the following.

| | Yes | No | Not sure |
|---|---|---|---|
| Voted in the last **presidential general election**<br>(The election was held on November 4, 2008) | | | |
| Vote in the most recent **Atlanta mayoral election** | | | |
| **Gave your e-mail address** to a candidate or political party | | | |
| **Visited the website** of a candidate or political party | | | |
| **Donated your Facebook status** to a candidate or political party | | | |
| **Friended** a candidate or political party on Facebook | | | |
| **Joined a Facebook group** that supported a candidate or political party | | | |
| **Posted** something about politics on Facebook | | | |

13. Below are several questions that range in difficulty about entertainment and politics. Please write-in your answers on the line provided for each question. If you are unsure about the answer please check the "Not sure" box provided. Please provide an answer to **each** question.

    a. Name one team in the 2009 World Series.

    _____

    ☐ Not sure

    b. If no candidate for mayor in Atlanta receives at least 50% plus 1 vote what happens?

    _____

    ☐ Not sure

    c. Did the Falcons win their last game?

    _____

    ☐ Not sure

    d. Which star was eliminated from the television show "Dancing with the Stars" Tuesday night?

    _____

    ☐ Not sure

    e. Which college football team is currently ranked number 1?

    _____

    ☐ Not sure

    f. Professors from which local university became involved in the most recent Atlanta mayoral race?

    _____

    ☐ Not sure

    g. Please name one organization that creates a nonpartisan voter guide?

    _____

    ☐ Not sure

    h. Please name one candidate who ran in the most recent Atlanta mayoral election?

    _____

    ☐ Not sure

    i. Which Atlanta musician was recently arrested?

    _____

    ☐ Not sure

14. Below are several more questions that range in difficulty about entertainment and politics. Please write-in your answers on the line provided for each question. If you are unsure about the answer please check the "Not sure" box provided. Please provide an answer to **each** question.

    a. During what hours are the polls open in Atlanta on any given Election Day?

    _____AM - _____PM
    ☐ Not sure

    b. Ellen DeGeneres will be a judge on which popular television show?

    _____
    ☐ Not sure

    c. Which football team did the University of Georgia play this past Saturday?

    _____
    ☐ Not sure

    d. Which former Atlanta Falcons player is now a quarterback for the Philadelphia Eagles?

    _____
    ☐ Not sure

    e. After 4 years of marriage what did Heidi Klum do?

    _____
    ☐ Not sure

    f. Name one sport being added to the Olympics in 2016.

    _____
    ☐ Not sure

    g. When was the last Atlanta mayoral election held?

    Month: _____ Day: _____ Year: _____
    ☐ Not sure

    h. Which demographic group was reportedly likely to swing the most recent Atlanta mayoral election?

    _____
    ☐ Not sure

    i. Where was the current season of the television show "Survivor" filmed?

    _____
    ☐ Not sure

15. A couple of weeks ago you were asked to "friend" someone on Facebook for access to two extra credit questions for this class. What did you do?

    - ☐ I "friended" Courtney Harris
    - ☐ I "friended" Tiffany Roper
    - ☐ I "friended" someone, but I do not remember who
    - ☐ I did not "friend" anyone

16. **IF YOU FRIENDED SOMEONE FOR ACCESS TO EXTRA CREDIT QUESTIONS:** On a scale of 0 to 7 where 0 means you are "not at all friends" and 7 means you have become "very good friends" please circle the number that best characterizes your current feelings about the person you "friended."

    0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. **IF YOU FRIENDED SOMEONE FOR ACCESS TO EXTRA CREDIT QUESTIONS:** Would you describe the person you "friended" as…?

    - ☐ Trustworthy
    - ☐ Untrustworthy
    - ☐ No opinion
    - ☐ Not sure

18. **IF YOU FRIENDED SOMEONE FOR ACCESS TO EXTRA CREDIT QUESTIONS:** Approximately, how many status updates, links, and posts **do you remember seeing** from the person you "friended?" Please write a number below. If you did not see any posts from that person please use "0" to indicate that.

    _____ status updates, links, and posts

19. **IF YOU FRIENDED SOMEONE FOR ACCESS TO EXTRA CREDIT QUESTIONS:** How many days do you remember seeing something posted by the person you "friended?"

    0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. **IF YOU FRIENDED SOMEONE FOR ACCESS TO EXTRA CREDIT QUESTIONS:** Did you ever visit the profile page of the person you "friended?"

    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ Not sure

21. **IF YOU FRIENDED SOMEONE FOR ACCESS TO EXTRA CREDIT QUESTIONS:** Did you hide the profile of the person you "friended?"

    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ Not sure

22. **IF YOU FRIENDED SOMEONE FOR ACCESS TO EXTRA CREDIT QUESTIONS:** From what you remember, did the person you "friended" post any political information on Facebook?

    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ Not sure

23. During the past week, how many days did you watch a local news program? You may circle any number between **0 and 7**.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24. How interested were you in the most recent Atlanta mayoral election?

- ☐ Extremely interested
- ☐ Very interested
- ☐ Somewhat interested
- ☐ Slightly interested
- ☐ Not at all interested

25. Do you currently reside in the city of Atlanta?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

26. In general, how important would you say voting is to you personally?

- ☐ Extremely important
- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Slightly important
- ☐ Not at all important

27. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?

- ☐ Republican
- ☐ Democrat
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Something else
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Decline to answer

28. Are you…?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

29. In what year were you born? Please enter your response as a four-digit number (such as 1992).

_____

30. Do you consider yourself…?

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black / African American
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Native American or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Mixed Race
- ☐ Some other race
- ☐ Decline to answer

**Those are all the questions we have for you. Thank you for your participation!**

## APPENDIX B – SAMPLE PROFILE

**Table 8: Sample Profile**

| | Political Treatment | Entertainment Treatment | Control |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Facebook Statistics** | | | |
| Has a Profile | 100% | 100% | 92% |
| Average Number of Facebook Friends | 251-300 | 251-300 | 251-300 |
| Median Number of Times Logged-In Per Day | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| Median Usage Per Week (days) | 7 days | 7 days | 7 days |
| Median Usage Per Week (hours) | 6 hours | 5 hours | 4 hours |
| Average Number of Days a Post of Any Kind was Recalled | 2 days | 1 days | -- |
| Average Political Interest of Facebook Network | Somewhat Interested | Somewhat Interested | Slightly Interested |
| **Demographics** | | | |
| Gender (Male/Female) | 12% | 15% | 42% |
| Ethnicity (White/Non-white) | 39% | 37% | 47% |
| Median Age (Users/Non-users) | 19 | 19 | 19 |
| Party Identification (Democrat/Non-Democrat) | 63% | 47% | 52% |
| Resident of Atlanta | 66% | 72% | 65% |
| **Political Interest** | | | |
| Average Interest in the Atlanta Mayoral Election | Slightly Interested | Slightly Interested | Slightly Interested |
| Average Interest in Politics | Somewhat Interested | Somewhat Interested | Somewhat Interested |
| Average Political Socialization | Occasionally Talked About Politics | Occasionally Talked About Politics | Occasionally Talked About Politics |
| Average Number of Days of Political Discussion | 3 days | 2 days | 2 days |
| Average Number of Days of Local Media Consumption | 2 days | 3 days | 2 days |
| **Relationship** | | | |
| Average Relationship Rating | 1 | 1 | -- |
| Average Attractiveness of the Political Treatment Personal | 6.9 | 6.4 | 6.2 |
| Average Attractiveness of the Entertainment Treatment Personal | 6.5 | 6.9 | 6.5 |

## APPENDIX C – STIMULUS PROTOCOL SCHEDULE

**Table 9: Stimulus Protocol Schedule**

| | Political Treatment | Entertainment Treatment |
|---|---|---|
| **Day 1 – October 28, 2009** | | |
| is trying to decide what to be for Halloween. Any suggestions? | Conversational | Conversational |
| Golf as an Olympic sport in 2016? Seriously? Maybe I'll be a Golf Olympian for Halloween :) http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5joBrBs5y2U-RSVx-GkuhArYhQWNQ | Supplemental | Supplemental |
| Undecided Men Could Swing Atlanta Mayoral Election? http://www.11alive.com/news/local/story.aspx?storyid=136007&catid=3 | Political | -- |
| Rapper T.I. Arrested in Atlanta… I totally forgot about this! http://www.tmz.com/2007/10/13/rapper-t-i-arrested-in-atlanta/ | -- | Entertainment |
| **Day 2 – October 29, 2009** | | |
| had a really strange dream last night about being locked in Aderhold! Really, are there any worse places to be locked in!?! | Conversational | Conversational |
| The League of Women Voters of Georgia has put together a Voter Guide. Use it to get info about elections in your area! http://www.thevoterguide.org/a-ajc09/ | Political | -- |
| Jay-Z to perform before game two of the World Series tonight between the Phillies and Yankees! http://backporch.fanhouse.com/2009/10/29/jay-z-to-perform-before-yankees-game-is-bigger-than-new-york/ | -- | Entertainment |
| I heard Ryan Seacrest talking about Ellen DeGeneres, the new American Idol judge, while I was volunteering at the Atlanta Ronald McDonald House – here's the footage to prove it! http://blogs.ajc.com/american-idol-blog/2009/10/25/ryan-seacrest-interview-at-ronald-mcdonald-house-in-atlanta/ | Supplemental | Supplemental |
| **Day 3 – October 30, 2009** | | |
| Does anyone know why there would be a run-off for Atlanta mayor unless one candidate gets at least 50% of the vote? Why doesn't the person who gets the most votes win, geesh! | Political | -- |
| is predicting UGA will get crushed by the Florida Gators tomorrow… sorry Bulldog fans. | -- | Entertainment |

| continued… | Political Treatment | Entertainment Treatment |
|---|---|---|
| **Day 4 – October 31, 2009** | | |
| Happy Halloween! Candy coma here I come! | Conversational | Conversational |
| Professors from Clark Atlanta University wrote a memo saying blacks need to "band together today to elect a black mayor" in Atlanta. Do you think it was ok for them to get involved? http://features.csmonitor.com/politics/2009/09/01/was-atlantas-black-mayor-first-memo-racist-or-just-blunt/ | Political | -- |
| Every time I see a commercial for "Survivor Samoa" I think of the Girl Scout cookie! What's your favorite Girl Scout cookie? | -- | Entertainment |
| **Day 5 – November 1, 2009** | | |
| Either give Michael Vick the QB job or don't, but letting the former Atlanta Falcon ride the bench in Philly to help him save a few of his endorsement deals isn't actually letting him back into the NFL. http://www.philly.com/inquirer/sports20091024_Eagles_using_Vick_sparingly.html | Supplemental | Supplemental |
| Mayoral Hopefuls Lisa Borders, Mary Norwood, and Kasim Reed All Try Using Facebook to Persuade and Organize Voters! http://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta/mayoral-hopefuls-try-social-168753.html | Political | -- |
| Heidi Klum's been married for 4 years and she's just changing her name, at this point why bother!?! | -- | Entertainment |
| **Day 6 – November 2, 2009** | | |
| says the Atlanta mayoral election is tomorrow... make sure you vote! Find your polling place at http://www.vote411.org/pollfinder.php | Political | -- |
| Florida is still ranked #1 in the BCS rankings... big freakin surprise | -- | Entertainment |
| While trying to study today I realize I have horrible handwriting… does anyone like their handwriting? | Conversational | Conversational |
| Falcons lose to the Saints... finally (I thought that game would never end)! | Supplemental | Supplemental |

| continued… | Political Treatment | Entertainment Treatment |
|---|---|---|
| **Day 7 – November 3, 2009** | | |
| The polls are open form 7AM - 7PM today. Go Vote! | Political | -- |
| Louie Vito (the snowboarder) was eliminated from Dancing with the Stars last Tuesday. Who do you think will go home tonight? | -- | Entertainment |
| If you could have a $10,000 shopping spree to one store, which store would it be and how long would it take you to spend the $10,000? | Conversational | Conversational |

## APPENDIX D – QUESTION-BY-QUESTION RAW PERCENTAGES OF RESPONDENTS CORRECTLY ANSWERING KNOWLEDGE QUESTIONS SHOWN BY CONDITION

**Table 10: Knowledge Questions Results by Condition**

| | Political Treatment | Entertainment Treatment | Control |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Political Stimuli** | | | |
| Which demographic group was reportedly likely to swing the most recent Atlanta mayoral election? | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Please name one organization that creates a nonpartisan voter guide. | 2% | 3% | 2% |
| If no candidate for mayor in Atlanta receives at least 50% plus 1 vote what happens? | 49% | 35% | 36% |
| Professors from which local university became involved in the most recent Atlanta mayoral election? | 0% | 0% | 2% |
| Please name one candidate who ran in the most recent Atlanta mayoral election. | 40% | 31% | 32% |
| When was the last Atlanta mayoral election held? | 24% | 21% | 17% |
| During what hours are the polls open in Atlanta on any given Election Day? | 24% | 10% | 16% |
| **Supplemental Stimuli** | | | |
| Name one sport being added to the Olympics in 2016. | 16% | 7% | 7% |
| Ellen DeGeneres will be a judge on which popular television show? | 49% | 45% | 38% |
| Which former Atlanta Falcons player is now a quarterback for the Philadelphia Eagles? | 64% | 44% | 61% |
| Did the Falcons win their last game? | 44% | 38% | 51% |
| **Entertainment Stimuli** | | | |
| Which Atlanta musician was recently arrested? | 33% | 30% | 28% |
| Name one team in the 2009 World Series. | 6-% | 55% | 63% |
| Which football team did the University of Georgia play this past Saturday? | 39% | 36% | 37% |
| Where was the current season of the television show "Survivor filmed? | 4% | 4% | 4% |
| After 4 years of marriage what did Heidi Klum do? | 7% | 13% | 4% |
| Which college football team is currently ranked number 1? | 22% | 31% | 35% |
| Which star was eliminated from the television show "Dancing with the Stars" Tuesday night? | 0% | 0% | 0% |