HOLLYWOOD TO HILLTOP: DOES CELEBRITY

STATUS ACT AS A PERIPHERAL CUE

IN VOTING DECISIONS?

by

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ABSTRACT

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Given the increase in Hollywood celebrities running for political office and the young adult population's cultural tendency to glorify the lives of celebrities, this research explored tenets of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to determine whether celebrity status acts as a peripheral cue that makes thoughtful engagement of political candidates and their stances unlikely in young adult's voting decisions. Indeed, the results of this study found that celebrity status does serve as such a cue, in many cases making it more likely that a celebrity would be voted for and liked more, when compared to an otherwise-comparable candidate.

Further applying ELM to celebrity status as a peripheral cue, the study examined what, if any, differences existed between participants who had a high versus low need for cognition as well as differing levels of political involvement. However, the findings do not show that need for cognition or level of political involvement significantly increased the use of celebrity status as a cue.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In our society today, the average individual encounters over one million media messages per year, roughly 3,000 messages per day, up from 650 messages per day in 1985 (Coyne, 2004). The proliferation of news and advertising messages continues to increase due to technological advances and a dizzying array of media and entertainment choices. With a plethora of competing media messages as well as input from family, friends and colleagues, individuals are in a state of information overload (Peters, 2005).

Information overload is evident in American politics (Lammie, 2007). For many Americans, politics is a convoluted topic that involves difficult to comprehend issues such as economics, health care, social security, military defense, education reform, job security, etc. There is simply too much information to process, and many people don't have the ability or motivation to thoroughly seek and filter the vast number of political media messages they encounter (Abram, 2008). Additionally, the news media's tendency to condense complex political issues into short sound bytes (Lammie, 2007) causes many people to either tune out or rely on easy to process cues such as name recognition or attractiveness (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Thus, the lack of sufficient substantive knowledge about American politics can lead many people to form opinions of candidates and make voting decisions based on a 'shorthand' assessment of

politicians rather than an in-depth consideration of the relevant issues and political platforms.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) describes how people may deal with information overload. This theory recognizes that individuals do not always have the ability or motivation to process all the information they encounter daily, and thus, when receiving and processing a message, they may elect to rely on simple cues to make sense of it, whereas at other times, they may choose to engage in critical analysis of the message's content (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). According to ELM, these two routes are known as the peripheral route and the central route, respectively. Relying on shortcuts or heuristics (peripheral route) occurs without thoughtful engagement about the message's content. In contrast, carefully scrutinizing the strengths of the message is considered central processing. The route chosen by the individual depends on his or her ability to process the content (which may be a function of relevant previous knowledge, or the presence or absence of distractions at the time of processing), and also his or her motivation to process the content, a function of the level of interest in the topic as well as individual disposition to engage in and enjoy cognition. Thus, individuals are most likely to process messages peripherally when they lack ability and motivation, resulting in quick and intuitive attitude formation and behavioral responses.

An example of something that might act as a cue in peripheral route processing is a brand name. Brands often serve as shortcuts or cues to purchasing decisions, such that the purchaser can quickly assess the implied quality and benefits of the product without having to engage in elaborate thought about it (Strack, Werth & Deutsch,

2006). In a similar way, celebrity status may act as a peripheral cue in political decision-making. Celebrities are like brands, made familiar through mass media. Given the complexity of politics, it may be tempting for people, especially those low in ability and/or motivation, to quickly judge a politician's worth by his or her fame and what is already known about his or her 'brand,' rather than making an effort to centrally process political information by researching issues and candidates.

At the same time that American society is experiencing information overload, it is also seeing a growing trend of celebrity involvement in politics (West & Ornman, 2003). There are several distinct types of political celebrities, not all of whom are from the entertainment industry. West and Orman (2003) outline four types of celebrity: political newsworthies (politicians skilled at public relations and self-promotion); legacies (children or spouses of former politicians); famed non-politicians (known in fields outside of politics who run for office, such as actors, singers, business people, athletes, and astronauts); and event celebrities (victims who gain notoriety overnight due to a tragedy, event or life situation.) The definitions above show a variety of celebrity types that expand the issue. According to this typology, President George W. Bush and Governor Hillary Clinton would be considered legacies and Donald Trump a famed non-politician, for example.

More Hollywood celebrities are running for political office than ever before (Elliot, 1998). In 2003, action movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger won the gubernatorial race in California. Professional wrestler Jesse Ventura also campaigned for governor of Minnesota and won. Most recently, Fred Thomson, known for his

acting role on the television show *Law and Order*, campaigned for the Republican nomination for the 2008 presidential election. Celebrities draw considerably more media attention than mainstream politicians (West & Ornman, 2003). Moreover, because popular culture and the news media glorify the lives of celebrities (West & Orman, 2003), people may believe they know a celebrity even though they have not thoughtfully engaged in much substantive learning about them. This heavy media presence and sense of intimacy might result in celebrity status acting as a peripheral cue when people are faced with political decisions in races involving celebrities.

If it were the case that celebrity status acted as a peripheral cue in voting decisions involving celebrity politicians, this would most likely occur with voters in their early 20s. Young adults are the primary audience for entertainment news (Pew Research Center, 2002), so the effects of celebrity status may have a more pronounced effect on them than other demographics. Also, young adults tend to be politically disengaged, uninterested and uninvolved (Longo & Meyer, 2006), increasing the likelihood they would need to rely on peripheral cues in forming voting decisions.

Given the increase in Hollywood celebrities running for political office and the young adult population's cultural tendency to glorify the lives of celebrities, this research seeks to determine whether celebrity status acts as a peripheral cue that makes thoughtful engagement of candidates and their stances unlikely in young adult's voting decisions.

The importance of studying and understanding the power of celebrity status as a heuristic is its impact on American government. The underlying issue is that

Americans, particularly young adults, may lack the ability and motivation to act in participatory democracy, preferring instead to passively consume media. Since the young adults of today are the future of our democracy, it is worth investigating the impact that Hollywood celebrities who are not seasoned politicians may have on voting intention.

The next chapter describes the theoretical framework that forms the basis of this study. In particular, research and literature on the Elaboration Likelihood Model is reviewed in conjunction with discussion of the advent of celebrity politics and hypotheses suggested by the literature. The experimental method used to test the hypotheses, including a detailed description of independent, dependent variables and co-variants, is described in the third chapter. Results and data analysis are presented in Chapter 4. The final chapter presents a summation of the results, limitations of the study, a discussion of the findings and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion, developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1981), was devised in response to conflicts in social psychology research, as a "general theory of attitude change" (p. 6). Considered a dual-route process model, ELM includes the message, source and audience characteristics in one model to evaluate persuasion holistically. In the past decade, ELM research has been used in the fields of consumer and social behavior, advertising and communication, primarily as a useful tool to understand attitude and behavioral effects (Petty, Kasmer, Haugtvedt, & Cacioppo, 1987). Petty and Cacioppo (1986) define attitudes as "general evaluations people hold in regard to themselves, other people, objects and issues" (p. 4) and persuasion as "any effort to modify an individual's evaluation of people, objects or issues by the presentation of the message" (p. 25).

The model is based on the assumption that people can arrive at attitudes in a number of ways. On any given issue, individuals are categorized on a continuum of elaboration likelihood that ranges from utter thoughtlessness (peripheral route) to high elaboration (central route processing), in which the individual pays close attention to the message presented and evaluates the quality of the argument. When people engage in peripheral processing, they tend to rely on superficial "stimulus in the persuasion

content that can affect attitudes without necessitating processing of message arguments" (p. 18). Alternately, people who pay attention to and mentally engage the content of the message itself are processing the message centrally. "People are more likely to use central processing when they 1) believe an argument has personal relevance, 2) are knowledgeable about a given topic, 3) are motivated, and 4) are able to process the information in a message" (Freedman & Spyridakis, 2004, p. 241).

2.1 Source Characteristics

2.1.1 Celebrity Status as a Peripheral Cue

Peripheral cues such as source attractiveness, likeability and credibility have been the focus of much ELM research (McGuire, 1989). These source variables refer to the characteristics of the communicator to which the message is attributed and can include demographics such as gender, age, ethnicity, celebrity status and socioeconomic background (McGuire, 1989). In the case of celebrities running for political office, the celebrity politician is the source of the political message and, therefore voters might rely on peripheral cues such as source attractiveness and fame (Milburn, 1991).

Peripheral cues such as source attractiveness translate well to celebrity status as a heuristic. Much like a well-crafted message delivered by an attractive spokesperson to sell a branded product, celebrity status in politics serves the same purpose, to increase awareness and elicit voting behavior. Marshall (1997) describes how this process might work by stating that "the star has become an individualized corporate entity, with a recognizable brand and hoped-for audience loyalty" (p. 83). Celebrity politicians tend to have a photogenic quality and attractiveness that is portrayed in the media. Their

celebrity status and physical attractiveness may serve as cues, much like brands in advertisement.

Physical attractiveness is considered a common characteristic among celebrities (Chaiken, 1979; Dion et al., 1972, Horai et al., 1974) and researchers argue that physical appearance is useful in political persuasion because it contains information about the candidate's race, sex, age and physical appeal that guides voters' reasoning (Riggle & Ottati, 1992). Appearance may be particularly useful to individuals who know little about politics, giving them something easy to judge to make their choices. This sort of superficial processing is an example of ELM's concept of peripheral route processing. When information is scarce or overwhelming, "the way a candidate looks, moves, or speaks may provide a quick and often reliable cue to his/her suitability for office" (Kopacz, 2006).

An example of source attractiveness as a peripheral cue was found in Petty's (1983) study where the attractiveness of the endorser was manipulated in a disposable razor advertisement. The "attractive" endorsers were celebrity athletes and the "unattractive sources" were average-looking citizens. The "attractive" endorser significantly affected attitudes toward the disposable razor. In other words, "celebrities were more persuasive than average citizens" (Petty, 1983, pg. 669). In this study, celebrity status acted as a peripheral cue to persuade people to buy a disposable razor. In celebrity politics, the celebrity status of the candidate may persuade people to vote in their favor.

In yet another example of attractiveness as a peripheral cue, Norman (1976) compared source expertise and attractiveness to determine whether an attractive person is more influential than an expert. The attractive source was a young, good-looking college student and the expert source was an "unattractive middle-aged man" described in the experiment as a professor of physiological psychology. The attractive source was effective at persuading subjects to adopt his opinions without presenting arguments, only straight statements of opinion; the expert source was only effective when he presented quality arguments to support his case. In celebrity politics, one could argue that the "expert" could be seen as a mainstream politician and the "attractive" source as the celebrity politician. Since the attractive source in this study was able to persuade subjects with only straight statements of opinion, this suggests that celebrity candidates might be able to persuade voters without a substantive stances or political platforms, thereby influencing votes based on his celebrity status alone.

Lau and Redlawsk (2001) state that candidate appearance serves as "one of the most important heuristic cues informing voter's judgments" (pg. 953). The researchers measured appearance heuristic cues by making candidate photos available on-line during a survey. They found that subjects used the appearance heuristic at least once while seeking information about the candidate 95% of the time. Because participants were required to actively seek out the photos, the researchers argued that the candidate's appearance served as a cue to the participants. Participants in this study had to seek out the candidate's photo, but in a real election environment, the candidate's appearance is more likely found in mass media.

Source characteristics such as likeability and personality traits may also serve as peripheral cues. Voters unfamiliar with political issues and unmotivated to study candidates' policy proposals may turn to personal character as a criterion for making voting decisions. Since increased media exposure is highly correlated with an increased importance of candidates' character traits, rather than policy positions (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004), it is reasonable to expect that personal traits such as likeability of political candidates conveyed through mass media have an impact on character judgments made by voters (Rosenberg et al., 1986).

As the literature above establishes, celebrity attractiveness and status used to attract political media attention is not a new phenomenon and has existed over time and across the world. Street (2004) notes that celebrity politics "is not as new, or as atypical, as is sometimes implied by critics" (pg. 440) and dates celebrity involvement in politics back to the English Civil War with John Milton and John Dryden, a English playwright.

2.1.2 Mass Media's Role in Celebrity Status

Mass media have help paved the way to stardom for many celebrities. Boorstin (1961) defines a celebrity as "a person who is known for his wellknownness." Dyer (1986) has a similar opinion and says celebrities are, "the ultimate example of media hype, foisted by the media's constant need to manipulate our attention" (p.15). The consensus is that celebrities are nothing more than the image that is created by the mass media and public relations professionals "to disguise the fact that they are just as much produced images, constructed personalities as 'characters' are" (Dyer 1998, p. 20).

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Meyer and Gamson (1995) identify the ability to attract attention and provide visibility as a celebrity's primary asset in politics. In a world where many suffer from information overload, celebrity acts as a signal that directs attention (Lammie, 2007). Gitlin (1980) says that celebrities assume political authority for no other reason than their ability to rise above the commotion of democracy. He identifies a significant trend in celebrity politics – that the mass media facilitate the broader and more rapid distribution of images, highlighting the status of celebrities as a class apart from society. Gitlin's perspective corresponds to the two main objectives that most critics have about celebrities entering politics: (1) excess attention given to image and appearance, and (2) apparent irrelevant expertise which celebrity politicians possess (Street, 2005). Once the process begins, celebrities who had no experience in politics emerge as political figures.

Celebrities also have power to influence behavior in politics (Marks, 2002) Marks argues the real democracy has been replaced by a simulated one as it is represented in the media: "by inspiring the popular masses to take up political causes, entertainment celebrities have re-deployed relationships of authority that simulate political consent" (p. 375). Marks argues that celebrity charisma in political movements can facilitate mass media attention and ultimately shape democracy. His premise is that instead of leadership in a celebrity candidate, there is popularity, which when embodied is invoked as authority or credibility. According to Page and Shapiro (1992), "voting preferences seem to depend on candidate's looks rather than on their political programs" (pg. 10).

ELM research on source attractiveness helps to clarify the role of celebrity status as a peripheral cue. Physically attractive sources are often more persuasive than less-attractive ones, even when they lack substance in their arguments. Pairing this reality with the power of celebrities to procure media attention and influence behavior, particularly in the political arena, it is possible that celebrity status could act as a peripheral cue to voting intentions in races for political office.

Another theory that helps to illustrate the power of celebrity status in mass media is Uses & Gratification Theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974). Uses and Gratification Theory attempts to answer the question, why do people tune into particular media programming, and in which ways does such programming satisfy the desires and needs of the audience? (Klapper, 1963). The most important facet of Uses and Gratification Theory is that rather than focusing on what the media does to its audience, it instead looks at what people do with the media (O'Donohoe, 1993). According to the theory, the public choose certain mediums of news coverage to fulfill a type of gratification – whether it's gratification of knowledge or the gratification of celebrity gossip. Other gratifications from the media include diversion and entertainment as well as information, and these vary according to the social roles and psychological disposition of the individual.

An active audience is assumed with this theory, but all too often, when an individual is seeking gratification in the form of entertainment they will passively consume media as either a diversion or pure entertainment (Ruggerio, 2000). In studies of passive audiences, celebrity status influences positive attributes associated with the

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topic or advertisement presented in mass media (Rubin & Perse, 1987). For example, in a study on audiences that read celebrity tabloid news (Armstrong, Keum & Clair, 2003), researchers found that individuals seeking celebrity gossip news passively consumed information for entertainment purposes and were therefore more influenced by the subtleness of celebrity status, especially those that reported heavy consumption of tabloid news.

Uses & Gratification Theory and ELM have similar parallels to celebrity politics. In ELM's peripheral route processing and Uses & Gratification's passive audience pattern with regard to entertainment news, both point to the power of celebrity status in mass media. Whether the mass media is the outlet for celebrity news and helps create well-known celebrities or the individual is seeking celebrity news for entertainment sake, celebrity status gains influence in our society through mass media.

<u>2.2 Message Characteristics</u>

In addition to source characteristics, ELM also recognizes message characteristics as an important determinant of the route individuals choose in processing information. In ELM research, the term message argument refers to "any information contained in a message the permits a person to evaluate the message target (e.g., issue, object and person) along with whatever target dimensions are central for that person" (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986, p. 18). Communication researchers have studied such message factors as delivery style, types of appeal, inclusion and omission, message length and repetition (McGuire, 1989).

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Inclusion and omission of the message content is particularly relevant to political news coverage. "In mass media messages about politics, relatively more attention is devoted to information about the political source and their relation with each other than to information about the issues" (Kerkhof, 2000, p. 139). The omission of pertinent information about the candidate's political platform in news media leads voters to rely on cues in the message because the argument presented lacks substance.

An example of cue information in political news is shown in a study conducted by Klandermans and Goslinga (1996). News media content was studied after a highly controversial government issue proposed a drastic cut in disability benefits. The researchers' analysis led them to conclude, "It is clear who the actors are…it is much less clear what exactly the controversy is about" (p. 322). In other words, in a natural media setting, cue information was more salient than message quality. This is also true of mass media coverage of celebrity politicians that tends to reflect their achievements in the entertainment world rather than provide substantive analysis of their political stances on public affairs (Torrey, 2006). Not only are unsubstantiated messages likely to lead to peripheral route processing, but so too are substantiated message if they are lengthy and complex, such as political news (Kruglanski & Thompson, 1997).

Message argument and quality are important to the study of celebrity politics. When mass media frame news stories of celebrities based on their visual presence and prior acting roles rather than the quality of their arguments and positions, voters may make voting decision based on peripheral cues. An apparent lack of substance in news media messages can lead to peripheral processing. Due to the proliferation of media

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outlets, unsubstantiated media stories often masquerade as legitimate news stories, which in political news can lead to an uninformed electorate and uninformed voting (Sivy, 2001).

2.3 The Role of Ability and Motivation in Celebrity Politics:

According to ELM, several factors can modify the route of persuasion through which an individual processes communication. At the core of ELM are variables defined as moderating or determining an individual's likelihood of elaboration. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) divided these factors into two broad categories: motivation and ability. According to ELM, an individual must have both the basic ability and high motivation to process a message centrally. If one or the other is absent or low, peripheral route processing will occur. The personal disposition of the individual's ability in ELM is defined as "variables that affect the extent or direction of message scrutiny with the necessary intervention of conscious intent" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 8). A person's ability might be affected by topic-relevant prior knowledge, their capability to understand the message or distractions in the environment.

Lack of prior knowledge decreases an individual's ability, and they will likely process the message peripherally (Wood, Kallgren, & Priesler, 1985). ELM posits that in the absence of topic-relevant knowledge (ability), peripheral cues in the message are employed to form opinions (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This aspect of the model can apply to politics effectively. With politics, knowledge of political processes, government regulations, and general history are fundamental to understanding the message. One can reason that individuals who are highly involved in politics have

topic-relevant knowledge to evaluate the message thoughtfully, or centrally. For individuals without political knowledge, celebrity status may serve as cue to forming an opinion.

With respect to ability, most would agree that young adults are not well-versed in politics and tend to be "politically uninformed" (Converse, 1975, pg. 221); therefore they are an age group who is likely to be lured by celebrity status as a peripheral cue since they don't have the knowledge base to centrally process political information. Young adults also have a greater tendency to glorify the lives of celebrities (Boon & Lomore, 2001), making it logical that celebrities would be a peripheral cue for young adults to turn to when forming voting decisions.

Distractions such as an overwhelming amount of information may also affect an individual's ability to process a political message centrally. Petty et al.'s 1976 study illustrates how distractions in the environment affect message processing. The study asked individuals to count the number of "Xs" that popped up on a screen while listening to either a strong or weak message argument. When individuals were asked to engage in these two tasks at once, it disrupted processing and diminished the argument quality effect. Outside of a testing environment, people are often challenged with completing more than one task at a time while listening to political messages.

With environmental distractions vying for an individual's attention, it is easy to become overwhelmed and lose the ability to process centrally. When this occurs, reliance on peripheral cues is more likely to occur (Petty, 1976). Similarly, when people are exposed to a barrage of political messages, information overload can be

considered a distraction, at the same time that there are likely to be distractions present in the environment. Studies suggest that in such a situation, the ability to carefully analyze the information may be nearly impossible. As a result, peripheral stimulus such as a candidate's attractiveness, name recognition and familiarity from media exposure may prevail as means of assessing a political situation.

In addition to ability factors, motivational attributes are also central to ELM (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) and include factors such as personal relevance or interest in the message. Personal relevance or interest is of particular importance in politics. Most people are not actively engaged in politics; therefore, according to ELM, they lack the necessary motivation to evaluate political messages thoughtfully. As Zaller (1992) stated, "most politics, at least in contemporary United States, is notoriously low-key and uninvolving. The stakes are high, but people find it hard to stay interested" (p. 31). The level of involvement may be related to the processing route the individual will choose. In the fields of consumer behavior and social psychology, researchers view an individual's involvement as a moderating variable that affects both the type and level of information processing that occurs after presented with a persuasive message (Burnkrant & Sawyer, 1983). One can reason that an individual who is highly involved in politics will have more interest in the message and make the effort to process it carefully; on the other hand, someone who doesn't see the relevance of a political race or issue will be less likely to do so.

There are two suggested reasons for why higher involvement increases persuasion (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981), one related to ability and the other

related to motivation. As mentioned previously, politically involved individuals may have a greater ability to process topic-relevant information because they have the political knowledge to develop a reasoned opinion. Secondly, related to motivation, if an issue is personally relevant, individuals may become more motivated to thoughtfully engage the issues because they feel greater pressure to maintain a position that they could later defend.

To study involvement, most studies manipulate involvement by assigning subjects to a high or low involvement condition generally, by way of telling subjects they will be interviewed on the topic at a later time or presenting an issue that is of local concern. For example, an experiment by Petty et al. (1981) manipulated involvement by telling half the college-aged subjects that their university was considering requiring a comprehensive exam for graduating seniors the following year (high-involvement condition) and telling the other half that the comprehensive exams would be implemented in 10 years (low-involvement condition). However, political involvement is not as easily manipulated, because subjects have pre-existing levels of interest in politics (Greer, 1996).

Individuals presumed to have greater involvement may also have a greater resistance to change their attitude. Because individuals with greater involvement are more likely to reject a wider range of attitude position, they may automatically discount or negatively evaluate the message (Eagly & Manis, 1966). When a message is presented with which an individual is highly involved, it is seen as having greater personal relevance and therefore stimulates more processing than low-involvement

messages. Petty and Cacioppo (1979) found that increased involvement inherently increases motivation to process the message and could lead to either an increased or decreased persuasion, depending on the quality of the message content. When a substantial message is presented for highly involved individuals, persuasion is enhanced. On the contrary, unsubstantial messages decrease persuasion for highly involved individuals.

Another important consideration of motivational factors and political involvement is the young adult population's glorification of celebrities. The effects of celebrity status may have a more pronounced effect "among politically uninformed and disinterested voters, such as young adults, who appear to constitute a sizeable portion of the electorate" (Converse, 1975, pg.221). There is a strong belief that celebrities have a persuasive influence on young voters, an appeal that may be effective in reaching them and interesting them in politics (Brownstein, 1990), thus increasing their political involvement. John Kerry said that celebrities help validate politics because young people seem to have a trust level with celebrities and seem to have a sense that they know them (Access Hollywood, 2004). Since young adults are the primary audience for entertainment news media (Pew Research Center, 2002), it make sense that celebrity politicians would influence voting decisions with a younger demographic.

ELM argues that personal relevance is a key indicator of how an individual will process information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). As previously mentioned, lack of motivation increases the probability that individuals will process messages peripherally. If the presented message is of importance or interest to an individual, they are most

likely to process that information centrally, meaning they will pay close attention to the message and analyze its significance. In contrast, if the message is of little importance to the individual they will rely on cues. Since young adults tend to be politically disengaged, uninterested and uninvolved (Longo & Meyer, 2006) one can assume that they also tend to rely on peripheral cues in forming voting decisions.

2.3.1 Need for Cognition

In politics, voters are information seekers, looking for information about a candidate's platform and party affiliation, trying to assimilate information to form a voting decision. After all, as a voting citizen, their goal is to make an informed decision that relates to their pre-existing attitude and knowledge of politics. To organize, obtain and prioritize the facts, voters look to news organizations for assistance (Greer, 1996). If all voters were created equal in regards to political knowledge (ability) and political involvement (motivation), the ideal citizen would process all political messages centrally. In reality, multiple factors determine an individual's type and level of processing. Researchers studying these factors have found that only a portion of the variance can be explained with situational factors, such as personal relevance and previous knowledge, so researchers started looking for individual differences or dispositional factors that could be used to measure constant variations among individuals cognitive processing. As a result, the Need for Cognition scale was developed.

Need for cognition refers to the individual's preference to actively think and evaluate information when it is not necessary versus those who prefer not to evaluate

issues carefully when they don't have to. Cacioppo & Petty (1983) developed the Need

for Cognition Scale to measure the tendency for individuals to enjoy engaging in

effortful thinking.   The researchers argue that there are stable, but not invariant,

individual dispositional differences in intrinsic motivation to engage in thoughtful

thinking or elaboration (Cacioppo & Petty, 1983). Those who tested high in the need to

evaluate tend to form opinions as information is made available to them, whereas

individuals low in the need for cognition will form attitudes only when necessary by

recalling peripheral cues (Cacioppo & Petty, 1983). Individual disposition is likely the

key to the difference in processing stimulus. Some individuals simply have a higher

intrinsic motivation to think critically about a topic, including politics (Greer, 1996).

Therefore, they tend to be more motivated to centrally process information, regardless

of their level of involvement or prior knowledge.

The Need for Cognition scale has withstood many scientific tests to ensure its

validity. In a review of need for cognition research, 100 published studies found the

scale statistically legitimate (Cacioppo et al., 1996).   Initially, Petty and Cacioppo

(1982) sought to identify two groups that differed in need for cognition. University

professors, by profession, were thought to have a higher need to critically evaluate

information. As the polar opposite, researchers used factory workers as the low need

for cognition condition. Thirty-four out of 45 questions showed discriminating

differences between the groups. Analysis showed that "much of the inter-individual

variation in people's tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive endeavors

could be represented in terms of a single factor, called need for cognition" (Cacioppo,

Petty, Feinstein & Jarvis, 1996, p. 197). This scale extended the elaboration likelihood model beyond central and peripheral route processing to account for cognitive misers (low-need for cognition), who resist virtually all effortful thinking; and concentrated cognizers (high-need for cognition), who enjoy problem solving and deep thinking about virtually all subjects.

The resulting definitions for low and high need for cognition were consequently proposed: those low in the need for cognition were characterized as "more likely to rely on other (e.g., celebrities and experts), heuristics, or social comparison processing." Those classified as high in the need for cognition, "naturally tend to seek, acquire, think about, and reflect back on information to make sense of stimuli, relationships, and events in their world" (Cacioppo et al. 1996, p. 198).

<div align="center">2.4 Hypotheses</div>

ELM has several pertinent implications for political communication research. The model's holistic approach incorporates the source, the message and the audience's personal disposition and has the potential to shed light on the issue of celebrities in the political arena and their possible influence. Given that most people are overwhelmed with the sheer amount of general information encountered daily, especially political messages, and given a documented decline in political interest among the electorate, ELM would suggest that most people give little thought to political messages and arguments in evaluating candidates. Therefore, the majority of voters would rely on peripheral cues such as source attractiveness (Milburn, 1991). This research seeks to

determine whether celebrity status acts as a heuristic that makes thoughtful engagement of candidates and their stances unnecessary or unlikely in voting decisions.

This study first hypothesizes that celebrity status acts as a peripheral cue to voting decisions. As discussed, young adults are more apt to identify with celebrities and less likely to be politically involved; therefore, regardless of the message quality, young adults will utilize celebrity status as a peripheral cue to voting decisions.

Given celebrities' attractiveness as evident in the news media, this research seeks to establish whether young adults use celebrity status as a peripheral cue to voting intention. Participants were asked to indicate how likely they are to vote for a candidate based on a newspaper article that features a known celebrity or an unknown candidate in an article with either vague or substantive content on the candidate's political platform. Intention to vote in this study does not serve the purpose of predicting the outcome of the race, but solidifies the subject's reliance on peripheral cues to form a voting decision. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Young adults will report being more likely to vote for the celebrity candidate than the unknown candidate, regardless of article type.

Since it is difficult to predict whether a person's intention to vote is an accurate prediction of their actual voting behavior (Bassili, 1993), and the study is conducted with a fictitious race, likeability was tested, presuming that the more likeable a candidate is the more likely they are to do well as a politician. Therefore, this study also looked at the impact of celebrity status on likeability, arguing that if young adults say they like a candidate more, it stands to reason that they might be more likely to vote for

him too. Subjects were asked to rate their opinion of the candidate based on a likeable demeanor. The following hypothesis was developed:

> Hypothesis 2: Young adults will find the celebrity candidate more likeable than the unknown candidate, regardless of article type.

ELM also suggests that the level of involvement can predict the route to persuasion. A low level of involvement is believed to elicit peripheral route processing, whereas a high level of involvement individuals likely have topic-relevant knowledge (ability) and personal relevance (motivation). When an individual has low political involvement, they lack both ability and motivation and will process the message peripherally. Level of political involvement was measured for two reasons. One is because it is assumed that those who are more involved in politics care more, and would therefore be more motivated to centrally process. Of course, if they are politically involved, they are also probably politically savvy and knowledgeable enough to have a higher ability, too. For that reason, this thesis hypothesizes that young adults with a high level of political involvement will report being more likely to vote for the candidate mentioned in the substantive article, regardless of celebrity status, suggesting central route processing due to personal relevance (motivation) and topic relevant knowledge (ability). This research also hypothesizes that young adults with a low level of political involvement will report being more likely to vote for the celebrity candidate, regardless of article type, as a result of peripheral processing, due to low motivation and ability. The following hypotheses are suggested to test the role political involvement plays in political decision-making involving celebrities.

Hypothesis 3a: Young adults with a high level of political involvement will report being more likely to vote for the candidate mentioned in the substantive article, regardless of celebrity status, suggesting central route processing due to personal relevance.

Hypothesis 3b: Young adults with a low level of political involvement will report being more likely to vote for the celebrity candidate, regardless of article type, as a result of peripheral processing.

According to ELM, individuals differ in their personal disposition to process messages; some will process in the central route by critically analyzing the message, whereas others will process in the peripheral route, relying on superficial cues. One aspect of motivation is determined by the individual's disposition to thoughtfully engage the message presented, called need for cognition. To examine personal disposition, need for cognition is examined. Need for cognition as a dispositional factor also plays a role in how people process political races involving celebrities. Based on ELM's need for cognition, this study hypothesizes that young adults with a low need for cognition--in other words, those who prefer not to engage in central route processing-- will report being more likely to vote for the celebrity candidate regardless of article type. Conversely, young adults with a high need for cognition will report being more likely to vote for the candidate mentioned in the substantive article, regardless of celebrity status, suggesting central route processing. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4a: Young adults with a low need for cognition, in other words, those who prefer not to engage in central route processing, will report being more likely to vote for the celebrity candidate regardless of article type.

Hypothesis 4b: Young adults with a high need for cognition will report being more likely to vote for the candidate mentioned in the substantive article, regardless of celebrity status, suggesting central route processing.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

An experiment was designed to evaluate whether a candidate's celebrity status acts as a peripheral cue in voting decisions. Participants were asked questions about their level of political involvement and need for cognition, then shown a photograph of a fictional mayoral candidate along with a short article about his candidacy and platform, and finally, asked questions about the candidate. The goal was to use the results of the questionnaire to see whether celebrity status and/or the level of substance in the article affected how much participants liked and how likely they were to vote for the candidate. Additionally, survey data was used to explore how participant's need for cognition and prior level of political involvement affected their opinion of the candidate they saw and read about.

The experiment was pilot tested on a convenience sample of 34 university students to establish that there were no logistical problems with the stimulus material or the questionnaire.

3.1 Participants

Participants in this study were communication undergraduate students at the University of Texas at Arlington. Twelve classes were surveyed, including Introduction to Public Relations, Introduction to Advertising, Communication Campaigns, Communication Theory and Writing for Mass Media, after permission was granted

from their professors. The sample consisted of 424 students. Their average age was 24 years old (SD = 4.395; range, 19 to 54 year old), and 60.8% were female.

To gain a better perspective of the participant's political demographics, two questions were asked regarding whether they were registered to vote and their political affiliation. The results showed that 78.1% were registered voters.   On a five point semantic differential scale, participants were asked indicate which best corresponded to their political affiliation (liberal to conservative). Participants that indicated they were very liberal or somewhat liberal were considered politically liberal for this study. Participants that indicated they were very conservative or somewhat conservative were considered politically conservative. Using this methodology, 35.9% considered their political view liberal, 36.3% were neutral and 27.9% were conservative.

3.2 Stimulus

Each participant was given a fictional newspaper article about a person running for mayor, accompanied by a photograph of the candidate. There were four versions of this article, and participants were randomly assigned to receive one of the four versions. Two of the four articles featured the name and photograph of a celebrity (actor Dennis Quaid) as the person running for mayor; the other two featured a photograph of an unknown candidate with a fictitious name (Tim Eller).   Additionally, one set of news articles described the candidate's political platform specifically, whereas the other set of articles mentioned the person was running for office while providing no details about their political platform. Thus, there were four experimental conditions: (1) celebrity candidate and substantive article; (2) celebrity candidate and non-substantive article; (3)

unknown person and substantive article; and (4) unknown person and a non-substantive article, creating a 2x2 factorial design experiment where the independent variables are celebrity status and substance.

Because Petty and Cacioppo (1981) argue that peripheral cues are not likely to be successful when people have prior information or are involved in the issue, a fictional political race was used. To replicate a real world election involving a celebrity candidate would almost assuredly lead to prior knowledge of the candidate.

Dennis Quaid was selected as the celebrity due to his presence in the news media at the time of this study and the believability that he might run for a political office. It was also thought that Dennis Quaid would be recognizable to a young adult audience as a celebrity, but was not likely to be someone about whom they had strong preexisting feelings or awareness, other than to recognize him as a celebrity. The unknown candidate photo was chosen because it closely resembled the photo of Dennis Quaid in that both candidates were pictured in suits, from the waist up, and with the same facial expression. Paralleling the photos was important to decrease bias based on factors other than celebrity status. A manipulation check was conducted on the celebrity stimulus to confirm that Dennis Quaid, in fact, was seen as a celebrity. Results of the manipulation check are in the next section.

For the substantive news articles, the articles were written with specific information on the candidate's political platform. The non-substantive articles were written to contain little information on the candidate's political background or political platform. Close attention to the verbiage used to substantiate political platform was

examined to decrease bias based on political values. For example, controversial issues such as abortion and religion were excluded in favor of issues such as economic growth, education reform and job creation. Petty and Cacioppo (1981, 1986) note that subjects' perception of strong and weak arguments will vary, but the best way to test ELM is to develop arguments that the majority will find either compelling or weak. For this reason, a manipulation check was conducted on the substance versus non-substantive condition to ensure that the majority of participants perceived the news article as intended. Details on the manipulation check are included in the next section.

The articles were then placed in a newspaper format similar to the style used in most major news publications. The newspaper article included a photo of the candidate, a headline and the supporting copy. In other words, actions were taken to replicate actual newspaper articles, so it would appear to be authentic, as if cut out of a newspaper page for the participant's review.

The newspaper format was chosen as the appropriate form of manipulation because of its real-world context. The majority of information an electorate receives about a political campaign appears in the news media (Popkin 1994; Stromberg 2004). Although there are several forms of news media such as broadcast, cable news and the internet, the newspaper medium was best suited as a manipulation on this study due to its design simplicity and ease of replication. See Figure 3.1 to 3.4 for article types used in the experiment.

3.2.1 Stimulus Manipulation Check

A manipulation check was conducted to determine whether the stimuli did in fact vary along the two independent variables: celebrity status and the degree of substance of the article. Eighty-eight participants were surveyed. As a check on how well known the candidates pictured in the news article were, participants were asked to indicate their response on a five-point semantic differential scale of known/unknown. Results of a t-test comparing the mean scores for each candidate indicated that participants perceived the celebrity candidate as significantly more well-known than the fictional candidate ($M_{known} = 4.29$; $M_{unknown} = 2.72$; $t = 5.767$, $p < .000$).

In order to verify that the articles used as stimuli did in fact vary on the substance of their content, two questions were asked, both using a five-point semantic differential scale. Participants were asked to indicate how substantive or non-substantive the articles were and then how informative or uninformative they were. Each participant's responses to these two items were summed, creating a score from 2 to 10. T-tests were then preformed on the means of the summed scores. Results indicated that participants perceived the news article that was intended to be more substantive as significantly more so than the one intended to be less substantive ($M_{substantive} = 7.36$; $M_{non-substantive} = 3.29$; $t = 11.948$, $p < .000$).

Dennis Quaid Proposes Plan to Restore Santa Monica

Dennis Quaid announced yesterday his intention to run for mayor of Santa Monica in the upcoming election. In his announcement speech, he pledged to aim at solving the city's budget problems and demanded an overhaul of worker compensation laws in the city to cut employers' costs and create more jobs.

Quaid said that creating more jobs is his priority. He referred to statistics that show many employers leaving Santa Monica to avoid high premiums for worker compensation insurance. "Restoring growth is the key to restoring our budget balance," he says.

Education reform in the Santa Monica school systems is also a top priority. Quaid has proposed a plan to increase per pupil funding for education and re-allocating funds to provide computer equipment in all public school classrooms. For most of the proposed state funding, Quaid plans to devote funds to help pay for local police and fire departments, as well as the Parks and Recreation services in Santa Monica.

Quaid's fate as Santa Monica Mayor has yet to be sealed. His supporters are among Santa Monica's elite, and locals are warming up to his progressive social and economic strategies.

Next week, Quaid will deliver a speech further detailing his platform.

Figure 3.1: Celebrity / Substantive News Article

Dennis Quaid Announces He's Running for Mayor

Dennis Quaid announced yesterday his intention to run for mayor of Santa Monica in the upcoming election. In his announcement speech, Quaid mentioned how committed he was to working to help Santa Monica.

The community of Santa Monica knows Quaid best as an agreeable, charismatic guy, but his speech today may have convinced voters he's also the right guy for mayor. A lot of people have noticed that Quaid's character resembles that of the current mayor, Bob Dunbar, which is comforting to some voters.

Quaid's fate as Santa Monica Mayor has yet to be sealed. His supporters are among Santa Monica's elite, and locals are warming up to his approach.

Figure 3.2: Celebrity / Non-Substantive News Article

Tim Eller Proposes Plan to Restore Santa Monica

Tim Eller announced yesterday his intention to run for mayor of Santa Monica in the upcoming election. In his announcement speech, he pledged to aim at solving the city's budget problems and demanded an overhaul of worker compensation laws in the city to cut employers' costs and create more jobs.

Eller said that creating more jobs is his priority. He referred to statistics that show many employers leaving Santa Monica to avoid high premiums for worker compensation insurance. "Restoring growth is the key to restoring our budget balance," he says.

Education reform in the Santa Monica school systems is also a top priority. Eller has proposed a plan to increase per pupil funding for education and re-allocating funds to provide computer equipment in all public school classrooms. For most of the proposed state funding, Eller plans to devote funds to help pay for local police and fire departments, as well as the Parks and Recreation services in Santa Monica.

Eller's fate as Santa Monica Mayor has yet to be sealed. His supporters are among Santa Monica's elite, and locals are warming up to his progressive social and economic strategies.

Next week, Eller will deliver a speech further detailing his platform.

Figure 3.3: Unknown/ Substantive News Article

Tim Eller Announces He's Running for Mayor

Tim Eller announced yesterday his intention to run for mayor of Santa Monica in the upcoming election. In his announcement speech, Eller mentioned how committed he was to working to help Santa Monica. The community of Santa Monica knows Eller best as an agreeable, charismatic guy, but his speech today may have convinced voters he's also the right guy for mayor. A lot of people have noticed that Eller's character resembles that of the current mayor, Bob Dunbar, which is comforting to some voters.

Eller's fate as Santa Monica Mayor has yet to be sealed. His supporters are among Santa Monica's elite, and locals are warming up to his approach.

Figure 3.4: Unknown / Non-Substantive News Article

3.3 Procedure

The researcher spoke to students during their regular class time, inviting them to participate in the study. In each class, the instructor made a quick introduction followed by the researcher addressing the class directly. Assurance was provided that their participation was voluntary, with no punishment or reward for participating, and anonymous, posing no threat to any of the participants. Students were then handed one of the four versions of the stimulus article and a five-page questionnaire, and verbally instructed that the survey would take between 5-7 minutes to complete. Participants were also told to respond honestly to all questions. Participants were able to refer to the article and photograph while answering the survey.

3.4 Measures

A questionnaire was designed to measure participants' demographics, their need for cognition, their prior political involvement, how likely they were to vote for the candidate they read about, and how likeable they found this candidate.

3.4.1 Demographics

Participants were asked to indicate their gender and age. They were also asked to indicate on a 5-point scale ranging from liberal to conservative what their political views were, and whether they were registered voters.

3.4.2 Intention to Vote

In order to assess the role of celebrity status on voting decisions, after reading the news article, participants were asked: "If the election were right now, how likely are you to vote for this candidate?" Participants were asked to indicate a response

choice of "very likely"; "somewhat likely"; "somewhat unlikely"; "unlikely." Participants were only given options to vote for the candidate or not vote for the candidate; an opt-out or 'don't know' response was not included.

3.4.3 Likeability

Attitudes toward the candidate may have a powerful impact on whether celebrities are more likeable than mainstream politicians. To test likeability, measures were developed that asked participants to express on a five-point semantic differential scale how unfriendly/friendly and likeable/unlikeable they found the candidate. These two measures were combined into a scale by computing participants' mean scores on each to create a variable called Likeability ($\alpha = .756$).

3.4.4 Political Involvement

To test the hypotheses that low political involvement decreases both the ability and motivation of an individual to process a political message centrally, a scale measuring political involvement was included in the survey. The scale used in this study was developed by Greer (1996) when conducting research on adwatch effectiveness in political campaigns. By reviewing dozens of political participation measures used in past studies, Greer arrived at eleven question items based on their past validity and relevance to a young voting audience ($\alpha = .84$). The first six items on the scale relate to political action, whereas the last five items were linked to communication about politics. Participants in this study were asked to circle the number that best describes how often they engage in the activity listed in the statement. The scale responses range from "never" (1) to "always" (5). The higher the number on the scale

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indicates high political involvement, while a lower number indicates low political involvement. In the data analysis, responses to negatively worded items were recoded.

The eleven-item scale is as follows:

1. Talk with my friends and family about politics.

2. Vote in an election in which I am an eligible voter.

3. Work for a campaign by doing things like distributing information or making phone calls.

4. Contribute money to a candidate's campaign.

5. Wear a button or put a bumper sticker on my car showing my support of a candidate.

6. Write a lawmaker to express my views on an issue.

7. Avoid watching television news about politics.

8. Watch political debates.

9. Read political stories in a newspaper or magazine.

10. Attend political rallies or events.

11. Pay no attention to political advertising on TV.

Respondent's scores for each of the 11 items were averaged. The scale proved reliable (α =.83). Average scores on the political involvement scale ranged from 1.00 to 4.55 (M = 2.42, SD = .60). In order to employ political involvement in later ANCOVAs, a separate variable was created on a mean split. Those with a political involvement score below 2.10 were classified as low in political involvement, scores between 2.11 – 2.64 were classified as medium, while participants scoring 2.65 or

higher were classified as high in political involvement. The mean split for political involvement produced three groups. In the low political involvement group, there were 149 participants (35%), the medium political involvement group had 146 participants (34%), and the high political involvement group consisted of 129 participants (30%). The split was determined by the dividing the average score into respective thirds, relative to the scores generated.

3.4.5 Need for Cognition

Participants were asked a series of questions to assess their individual need for cognition; these questions were based on the need for cognition scale by Petty and Cacioppo (1982). This scale reveals a person's personal disposition to enjoy or dislike cognitive thought, which has been shown to play role in determining the route (central or peripheral) through which participant's process information. The original scale included 34 items, measured on a 9-point Likert scale. Several researchers, including Petty and Cacioppo, have condensed the scale based on the highest factor items, reliability estimates, statistical significance and ease of comprehension by participants (Cacioppo, Petty & Kao, 1984; Fergusson, et al., 1985; Perri & Wolfgang, 1988).

For the purposes on this study, the Ferguson et al. (1985) scale was used to assess need for cognition, primarily because it most closely resembles the original scale developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1982) with fewer items but nearly equal reliability (α = .86). The condensed version has 15 measurement statements versus the 34-item scale. The scale asks respondents to rate the extent to which statements pertaining to how curious and thoughtful they are characterize them.

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Need for cognition was measured by asking individuals to respond to the following 15 statement:

1. I like tasks that require little thought once I've learned them.

2. I prefer to think about small daily projects instead of long-term projects.

3. I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions and problems.

4. I don't like to have the responsibility of handling situations that require a lot of thinking.

5. The idea of relying on thought to make my way to the top does not appeal to me.

6. I prefer complex problems to simple problems.

7. I think only as hard as I have to.

8. I prefer to just let things happen rather than trying to understand why they turned out that way.

9. The notion of thinking abstractly is not appealing to me.

10. I would rather do something that requires little thought than something that challenges my thinking abilities.

11. Thinking is not my idea of fun.

12. I find satisfaction in deliberating hard and for long hours.

13. I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve.

14. I try to anticipate and avoid situations where there is a likely chance that I will have to think in depth.

15. Simply knowing the answer rather than understanding the reasons for the answer to a problem is fine with me.

A five-point Likert scale, in which 1 meant that the subject "strongly disagreed" with the statement, 5 meant the subject "strongly agreed," and three meant "neither agree nor disagree," was adopted instead of a seven-point Likert for this research. Responses to negatively worded items were recoded. To create the scale, a mean of participants' scores on each of the 15 items was calculated to create an overall need for cognition score. In this study, the 15-item scale was also highly reliable ($\alpha = .86$).

Average scores on the need for cognition scale ranged from 1.80 to 4.87 (M = 3.44, SD = .54). In order to employ need for cognition in later ANCOVAs, a separate variable was created on a mean split.

For the mean split, those scoring below 3.20 were classified as low in the need for cognition; scores between 3.27 and 3.60 were classified as medium, while those scoring 3.67 or higher were classified as high in the need for cognition. The mean split resulted in 141 (33%) participants low in the need for cognition participants, 152 participants in the medium classification (35%), and 131 participants high in the need for cognition (30%). The split was determined by the dividing the average score into respective thirds, relative to the scores generated.

In next Chapter, the results of the experiment and data analysis are explained.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

To test the hypotheses, survey data was analyzed to determine the effect of celebrity status on voting intention and likeability. Several forms of statistical analysis were implemented, including T-tests, ANOVAs and ANCOVAs. A detailed explanation of each analysis is provided in the sections that follow. In the next Chapter, a discussion of the results presented below as well as future implications and limitations will be thoroughly described.

4.1 Scales

As described earlier, this study created three scales to test the hypotheses: Need for Cognition, Political Involvement, and Likeability. All proved highly reliable using Cronbach's alpha.

4.2 Tests of Hypotheses

4.2.1 Celebrity Status as Peripheral Cue

To test whether celebrity status acts as a peripheral cue to voting intention, Hypothesis 1 was proposed, that young adults will report being more likely to vote for the celebrity candidate than the unknown candidate, regardless of article type.

A t-test was conducted comparing likelihood of voting for Dennis Quaid and Tim Eller, and results indicated a significant difference (M_{known} = 2.60, $M_{unknown}$ = 2.21, t = 5.538, p < .000). The hypothesis was supported. Participants were

significantly more likely to vote for the celebrity candidate regardless of whether details about the candidate's political platform were given or not.

Further exploring celebrity status as a peripheral cue, the researcher analyzed only participants exposed to the non-substantive new article, to determine whether participants would be more likely to vote for Dennis Quaid when little political platform information is given. This was proposed because ELM suggests that when there isn't enough information to use central route processing, the familiarity of a celebrity will act as a peripheral cue. The substantive and non-substantive articles help to clarify the theory's proposed assumption, in that the non-substantive articles are thought to elicit peripheral route processing while the substantives articles should elicit central route processing.

To test this hypothesis, a t-test was run using only those participants who were exposed to the non-substantive news article. Results supported the hypothesis, indicating a significant difference in how likely people were to vote for Dennis Quaid over Tim Eller ($M_{known} = 2.48$, $M_{unknown} = 2.20$, $t = 2.755$, $p < .006$). Participants were more likely to vote for the celebrity politician when the news article did not include substantive information on his political platform or his opponent's platform.

Assuming that participants have the option to use central route processing when substantive information is presented on the candidate and his platform, another test was conducted to determine if participants are more likely to vote for Dennis Quaid. This would again suggest peripheral route processing based on celebrity status, because both candidates' platforms were the same.

A t-test was conducted to test if celebrity status resulted in a significant difference in voting intention even when participants were presented with substantive information. The results of this t-test, which was run only on those who viewed the substantive article, revealed a significant difference that supported the hypothesis (M_{known} = 2.72, $M_{unknown}$ = 2.22, t = 5.263, p < .000). Participants were significantly more likely to vote for Dennis Quaid than Tim Eller; therefore, it is concluded that celebrity status is acting as a peripheral cue in the voting decision despite the presence of substantive information.

To fully investigate the differences between celebrity status, substance level of the article, and voting intention, an ANOVA was conducted with the dependent variable of intention to vote, and independent variables as the celebrity status and level of substance. When comparing the intention to vote for the candidate across all four conditions, the ANOVA revealed a significant difference among the groups (F= 12.456, p = < .000). Bonferroni post hoc tests showed significant differences in intention to vote for the candidate between participants who saw the celebrity candidate with the non-substantive article (M = 2.48) and the unknown candidate with the non-substantive article (M = 2.20) (p = <.026); between participants who saw the celebrity candidate with the substantive article (M = 2.72) and the unknown candidate with the non-substantive article (M = 2.20) (p = <.000); and, between participants who saw the celebrity candidate with the substantive article (M = 2.72) and the unknown candidate with the substantive article (M = 2.22) (p = <.000).

Table 4.1 ANOVA Results for Intention to Vote

Celebrity with substantive article	M = 2.72[a,b]
Celebrity with non-substantive article	M = 2.48[c]
Unknown with substantive article	M = 2.22[a]
Unknown with non-substantive article	M = 2.20[b, c]

a = p > .00

b = p > .00

c = p >.05

These results reveal that Hypothesis 1 was supported. Consistent with the earlier t-tests, the celebrity candidate was more likely than the unknown candidate to receive a favorable vote when little political platform information was presented in the article on either candidate, as well as when substantive information was provided for both candidates. When participants were presented with the substantive article on the celebrity candidate and the non-substantive article on the unknown candidate, they were more likely to vote for the celebrity candidate, which could be the result of celebrity status, substance level, or both. However, celebrity status did not affect participants when the unknown, substantive article condition was compared to the celebrity candidate, non-substantive article conditions. In other words, celebrity status is not more powerful when the unknown candidate has a substantive stance and the celebrity candidate has a non-substantive stance.

4.2.2 Celebrity Likeability

The effect of celebrity status on candidate likeability was also measured to test Hypothesis 2, that young adults will find the celebrity candidate more likeable than the unknown candidate.

A t-test was conducted to test for differences between the likeability of the candidates. Results indicated a significant difference (M_{known} = 3.55, $M_{unknown}$ = 3.37, t = 2.407, p < .017). The hypothesis was supported. The results indicate that participants believe Dennis Quaid is more likeable than the unknown candidate.

An ANOVA testing celebrity status and substance level of article on likeability revealed a significant result (F = 3.513; p = < .015). Bonferroni post hocs showed that participants who saw the celebrity candidate and the non-substantive news article (M = 3.71) liked the candidate significantly more than those who saw the unknown candidate with the substantive news article (M =3.50) (p = <.008). This result indicates that Dennis Quaid is liked more when non-substantive information in presented versus when substantive information is presented about the unknown candidate. No significant differences were found in any other possible combination: participants who viewed the celebrity candidate with the non-substantive article (M= 3.71) versus the celebrity candidate with the substantive article (M = 3.64) (p = .746) or versus unknown candidate with the non-substantive article (M = 3.68) (p = .515), or between the known candidate with the substantive article (M = 3.64) and the unknown candidate with the substantive article (M = 3.50) (p = .547).

Table 4.2 ANOVA Results for Likeability

Celebrity with substantive article	$M = 3.64$
Celebrity with non-substantive article	$M = 3.71^a$
Unknown with substantive article	$M = 3.50^a$
Unknown with non-substantive article	$M = 3.68$

a = p > .05

Main effects were found for celebrity status ($F = 5.831$; $p = <.016$, $eta^2 = .014$) and substance level ($F = 4.708$; $p = <.031$, $eta^2 = .011$). No interaction between the celebrity and substantive variables was found ($F = .000$; $p = .998$, $eta^2 = .000$).

4.2.3 Political Involvement

ELM suggests that personal relevance to an issue will increase motivation and ability to process a message centrally. Due to varying levels of political involvement among the electorate, the following hypotheses were developed. Hypothesis 4a theorizes that young adults with a high level of political involvement will report being more likely to vote for the candidate mentioned in the substantive article, regardless of celebrity status, suggesting central route processing due to personal relevance. Hypothesis 4b assumes the opposite, that young adults with a low level of political involvement will report being more likely to vote for the celebrity candidate, regardless of article type, as a result of peripheral processing.

To test political involvement as it relates to celebrity status, substantive information, and voting decisions, an ANCOVA was conducted with the mean split of

political involvement as the co-variable, celebrity status and level of substance as the independent variables, and intention to vote as the dependent variable. No significant results were found to support the hypotheses ($F = .297$, $p = .586$). Among participants high in political involvement, no differences were found. These participants were predicted to differ based on the substance of the article. Additionally, no differences emerged when testing the low level political involvement participants either. These participants were predicted to differ on their intention to vote based on celebrity status. Therefore, the hypotheses are not supported.

4.2.4 Need for Cognition

The study was designed to move beyond the basic question of whether celebrities running for political office have an inherent advantage over mainstream politicians, to examine on what types of people celebrity status has an impact. One variable, need for cognition, was expected to alter the chance that celebrity status would prevail. Two hypotheses were proposed to examine the effects that celebrity status may have on different types of participants. Hypothesis 3a assumes that young adults with a low need for cognition, in other words, those who prefer not to engage in central route processing, will report being more likely to vote for the celebrity candidate regardless of article type. Hypothesis 3b asserts that young adults with a high need for cognition will report being more likely to vote for the candidate mentioned in the substantive article, regardless of celebrity status, suggesting central route processing. In other words, it was expected that need for cognition would covary with both the celebrity status of the candidate and the substance of the news article, producing significant differences in

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their intention to vote. An ANCOVA was run using the dependent variable intention to vote, the independent variables celebrity status and level of substance, and the covariant need for cognition. The mean split variable of need for cognition was used in the covariant. No significant results were found ($F = .040$, $p = < .842$). No support was found for need for cognition as a covariant on voting behavior in this study. Therefore, the hypotheses are rejected.

A summation of the findings are presented in the next chapter, along with a discussion of the results, limitations of the study, practical application of the findings and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Seeking to go beyond conventional knowledge that physical attractiveness and recognition as a celebrity is advantageous to a political candidate, this research sought to determine whether celebrity status acts as a peripheral cue to voters, encouraging them to make superficial, rather than well-thought-out, voting decisions. Indeed, the results of this study found that celebrity status does serve as such a cue, in many cases making it more likely that a celebrity would be voted for and liked more, when compared to an otherwise-comparable candidate. Further applying ELM to celebrity status as a peripheral cue, the study examined what, if any, differences existed between participants who had a high versus low need for cognition as well as differing levels of political involvement. However, the findings do not show that level of need for cognition or the level of political involvement significantly increased the use of celebrity status as a cue. Given the current societal infatuation with celebrities, information overload in political messages and the growing number of celebrities campaigning for political office, this study provides a timely assessment of our current state of democracy.

To isolate if celebrity status acts as a peripheral cue, this research manipulated the depth of information present in a news article to determine whether voters took a

central or peripheral route to voting decisions. Overall, the findings suggest that celebrity status does in fact influence voting intention, regardless of the level of substance presented in news media, suggesting that voters are peripherally processing celebrity status. Not only is celebrity status effective as an archetype in branding, it is also of paramount importance in politics. Voters are not only challenged with information overload, they are challenged to wade through the seductive qualities of celebrityhood. The attractive qualities of a celebrity should not have more importance in our political system than actual issues, but our popular culture and young adults of today may be pushing our democracy toward glorification of celebrities in the entertainment world and in our political system.

The impact of celebrity status a peripheral cue does not apply only to Hollywood celebrities. In this day and age with reality television at its peak, everyone has the potential to become famous. A mere appearance on television is a rite of passage for any aspiring celebrity, whether it's in the acting world or another entertainment venue. Politicians have taken notice of the power of celebrity also, and have increasingly positioned themselves as celebrities, making appearances on late night television, MTV and celebrity gossip programs. Celebrities are aspiring to be politicians and politicians are aspiring to be celebrities.

In the study, there was another powerful finding for celebrity status as a peripheral cue. Though all results were highly significant, a slightly less significant result was found when analyzing only the participants that viewed non-substantive information about the candidate. This suggests that when non-substantive information

is presented in the news media for both the celebrity candidate and the mainstream candidate, the celebrity candidate is slightly less likely to secure votes. Therefore, peripheral route processing of celebrity status is slightly weaker when both candidates' political platforms lack substance.

This is an interesting finding due to its real-world implication. If two candidates are running for office, one a celebrity with a non-substantive stance and the other a non-celebrity, again with a non-substantive stance, there may be a greater possibility that voters will be less swayed by celebrity status as a peripheral cue.

This finding contradicts intuition. Although the celebrity still has a statistical advantage with regard to voting intention, he has a slight disadvantage when he and his opponent have non-substantive stances. To make sense of this finding, one could argue that celebrity status also has an ironic pitfall. Voters may be more suspicious of a celebrity running for office if he doesn't have a valid stance on the issues. This finding shows us that the electorate may doubt a celebrity's expertise as a politician when he and his opponent have the same unsubstantiated political platform. Not to take merit away from celebrity status as a cue, as this study confirms, but there may be a paradoxical disadvantage to celebrities in politics.

Another subtle difference was found in the ANOVA Post hoc analysis of celebrity status as a cue. The Post hoc results showed that celebrity status was a shortcut to voting intention, except in one instance. When comparing voting intention between participants who read the unknown candidate's substantive article against those who read the celebrity's non-substantive article, the unknown candidate was more successful

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in terms of the participant's intention to vote. Therefore, if a mainstream politician has a strong political platform and the celebrity candidate has a weak political message, the mainstream politician may be able to trump the celebrity with regard to votes. As interpreted through ELM, this means that celebrity status does not function as a cue when the mainstream politician has a substantive platform. This is a major finding, in that it confirms the hope that the electorate doesn't vote for a celebrity if his political platform does not equal or surpass that of the mainstream running mate.

Overall results confirm that celebrity status serves as a peripheral cue in voting decisions and celebrities almost always have the advantage. ELM tells us that when individuals process messages peripherally, the probable reason is lack of motivation and/or ability. In this study, we find that young adults use celebrity status as a peripheral cue. Therefore, the likely reason for this finding is young adult's lack of motivation to thoughtfully engage the content of the news article using the central route either because it not personally relevant or they lack the ability to understand the complexities of politics.

The context of these findings is central to the understanding of celebrity status' influence in politics. As long as the celebrity candidate has a substantive political platform, he/she has a greater probability to win an election when running against a mainstream politician. However, there are drawbacks to celebrity status too. Voters may be more influenced my political expertise when both candidates have an unsubstantiated platform – expertise may be more powerful in this case.

In addition to determining that celebrity status acts as peripheral cue to voting intention, is was also important for this study to measure celebrity status' influence on likeability. Because celebrities are made well known in the news media, the typical audience is more familiar with celebrities versus mainstream politicians and presumably will like celebrities more than politicians. Results show that celebrity status indeed influenced participants' likeability of the candidate. Dennis Quaid is liked more than the unknown candidate, Tim Eller; thus, celebrity status acts as a cue to likeability as well as intention to vote. However, post hoc results were not as conclusive as expected. Surprisingly, participants who read the non-substantive news article of the celebrity candidate and those who read the substantive news article of the unknown candidate liked Dennis Quaid significantly more.

Uses and Gratification Theory states that people tend to passively consume media, especially when they are seeking gratification in the form of entertainment. The result of this study shows that participants liked the celebrity more. People may simply like a celebrity when they are presented in the "appropriate" entertainment context of how people view celebrities. This helps illustrate the allure of celebrities in general. Participants like celebrities because they exemplify beauty, wealth and power, but when celebrities are shown in an unfamiliar context, such as the political arena, their appeal may decrease. Celebrities must be able to play the part of a knowledgeable and experienced diplomat, which does not typically suit them well.

Previously, we found that celebrity status functions as a peripheral cue to intention to vote regardless of substance level in the news media, but is less influential

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when the celebrity candidate has a non-substantive stance when compared to the unknown candidate with a substantive stance. Now we find that participants like the celebrity candidate more than they like the unknown candidate, when non-substantive information is presented for the celebrity candidate and substantive information is presented for the unknown candidate. This presents an odd paradox in celebrity politics. If central route processing were activated, then one would assume the participants would like the unknown candidate with the substantive article more. Instead, this study finds that participants are peripherally processing celebrity status because they disregard the substantive information and unknown candidate, and report liking the celebrity more. In sum, the findings show that Dennis Quaid is liked more overall, especially when his stance was non-substantive. But, when his political platform is non-substantive and the mainstream politician's is substantive, Quaid is slightly less likely to receive favorable votes.

Similar to the Norman (1976) study that compared source attractiveness and source expertise, finding that the attractive person was influential when his argument consisted of straight opinion and the expert source presented quality arguments, we find comparable results in this study. Dennis Quaid was able to persuade voters without a substantive stance. However, this study also found that Dennis Quaid was successful at attaining votes when he had a substantive political stance too.

This unexpected finding may be due to the participants' social desirability to hide that they are influenced by celebrity status: they admit to liking the celebrity more, but are more averse to admitting a desire to vote for a celebrity. However, on the

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surface, the results show that young adults can still like a celebrity more, but they most likely won't cast a vote in his favor just because they like him--his political platform must also be substantive.

It is also valuable to note that post hocs showed no other combination of celebrity status and level of substance as significantly different on likeability. Dennis Quaid was not liked more than the unknown candidate when the celebrity candidate's news article was substantive and the unknown candidate's news article was non-substantive, nor when participants were presented with the substantive or non-substantive news articles on both candidates. It is also interesting that main effects for likeability were found for celebrity status and substance level with no interaction. This indicates that celebrity status and substance level independently determined likeability, but did not influence likeability together.

To further the understanding of celebrity status as a peripheral cue, this study also incorporated need for cognition to determine whether personal disposition to enjoy thoughtful thinking altered the ability of celebrity status to function as a shortcut to voting intention. Unexpectedly, need for cognition did not play a role in affecting celebrity status as a peripheral cue in this study. This result is problematic given that ELM is based on the assumption that subjects high in the need for cognition will look to argument quality (substance level of the article) and those low in need for cognition will look to peripheral cues (celebrity status) such as source attractiveness and credibility.

Several explanations could be offered for the lack of differences found in need for cognition. First, because only one news article was presented in one media form –

print--participants' need for cognition may not have been challenged enough to reveal itself in the study. Future research is needed to clarify if need for cognition alters the effects of peripheral route processing when a multitude of news media stimuli are presented. For example, by adding another news article or a news broadcast clip, or referring to an actual political race, the participants may be slightly more engaged in the topic. In a typical election campaign, voters see a wide array of political messages in many media forms. Often times, a voter will also see the same political message several times over the course of several days or weeks. Adding several stimuli would also help explain how voters react under information overload and environmental distractions. Secondly, those high in the need for cognition may not have received enough information about the candidate's political platform to form a voting decision either way; therefore, they cautiously opted to be less likely to vote for the candidate regardless of celebrity status or the level of substance in the news article.

Future research should also investigate whether those high in the need for cognition who tend to centrally process messages have a stronger, more resilient and predictive attitudes about a candidate over time, as ELM would suggests, in order to expand our knowledge of whether celebrity status creates long-term effects. Moreover, evaluating the effects of the stimulus over an election period could further imitate real-world circumstances.

Political involvement was also tested to determine if celebrity status as a peripheral cue is ineffective when participants have a high level of political knowledge and personal involvement in politics. ELM stipulates that individuals who are

motivated and able to understand a message will process information centrally. If this were the case, celebrity status as a cue would not be effective for individuals with a high level of political involvement.   In contrast, participants with a low level of political involvement are predicted to process information peripherally, meaning that celebrity status should act as a cue in their voting decisions. Contrary to ELM, the results did not show a significant difference in the participant's level of political involvement on celebrity status.

A plausible explanation for why no differences were present comes from looking at the content of the news article's level of substance. Although highly involved in politics, there may be particular political issues that are of personal relevance to the individual that were not included in the new article. The news articles were written in a manner that excluded controversial political topics like religion and abortion. As mentioned earlier, Petty and Cacioppo (1979) found that increased involvement inherently increases motivation to process the message and could lead to either an increased or decreased persuasion, depending on the quality of the message content.   Thus, by decreasing bias based on hot topics in politics, the study also unintentionally decreased personal relevance, by making the article too generalized. It's possible that the quality of the message content affected the level of motivation as well and led to decreased persuasion. Again, it may have been beneficial use multiple and various media forms to increase the message quality.

This explanation points to why high political involvement participants did not differ on intention to vote, but it does not explain why low political involvement

participants did not differ. For those who are not politically involved, one would assume that they also lack knowledge of the system and therefore are less likely to be motivated to seek more information; thus regardless of whether a lot or a little information is presented, they should still use peripheral cues to base decisions. Although this research confirms that celebrity status does play a role in intention to vote overall, it fails to establish whether involvement in politics is an influencing factor of celebrity status as a peripheral cue among young adults.

Additionally, recent studies have concluded that the young adult audience is not as apathetic to politics as they once were. According to Young Adult Strategies, research firms contracted by the Rock the Vote campaign, young adults make up roughly 21 percent of the U.S. electorate. Based on exit polls, they determined that 16 million young adults voted in the 2000 election. In the 2004, they calculated an increase to 20 million young adult (Boyanoski, 2007). This research suggests an increase in voting behavior among young adults. Based on the increase we would expect that young adults are more politically engage and therefore; according to ELM, more motivated and able to centrally process political messages. However, the results of this study did not conclude that political involvement played a role, so while young adults may be voting more, they're not necessarily critically analyzing political messages more so.

It could also be argued that a level of political involvement is inconsequential in celebrity politics. Due to heightened awareness of celebrities in American culture, the voter's level of political involvement may not be the overarching factor of importance.

However, their level of celebrity involvement or knowledge of celebrities may play a more significant role. For example, a young adult may be more apt to get involved with politics because of a celebrity and a heightened sense of connection with that celebrity generated through the mass media. Future research should investigate whether heightened knowledge of celebrities is a more powerful indicator to whether a celebrity acts as a peripheral cue to voting decisions.

In sum, the relationships predicted by the Elaboration Likelihood Model were supported in part. Throughout the analysis, celebrity status affected participants' intention to vote, thus acting as a peripheral cue. However, the data analysis showed no support for the hypotheses that participants low in the need for cognition and low in political involvement would look to celebrity status as a peripheral cue to base their intention to vote. Nor was it found that participants high in the need for cognition and high in political involvement would look to the substance of the news article to base voting decisions.

Furthermore, applying these research results to the general electorate, political involvement and need for cognition will inherently vary drastically. The fact that neither personal disposition variable significantly affected intention to vote could be viewed positively for campaigners. According to these findings, a candidate running against a celebrity candidate should be more concerned with the substance of their political platform rather than whether the voter is politically involved or has a tendency to thoughtfully engage a political message.

First and foremost, the study's findings suggest that celebrity status does indeed influence voting intention in a young adult audience, acting as a peripheral cue. The fact that exposure to a celebrity candidate had an effect on participants, even in a laboratory setting, suggests that celebrities can influence voting decisions in their favor. After all, if no effect had been found in a controlled setting, the power of the celebrity status to influence young adults in a real-world setting – where they are bombarded with political messages from many news mediums – would be suspect. Although the post hoc results were not uniform among all participants, the overall findings speak volumes for the current state of celebrity politics.

It is also important to note that celebrity status isn't always effective in politics (Street, 2004), as history has shown. For example, Shirley Temple, a legendary child star, unsuccessful ran as the Republican candidate for the U.S. congress. Sonny Bono lost his first run for the Senate in 1992 and Richard Petty, NASCAR celebrity, was defeated in 1996 for North Carolinas' Secretary of State.

Several limitations are evident in this study. First, an experimental design was selected for this study to support an exploration of relationships between variables. To control internal validity, participants were randomly assigned to the condition group. However, limits to external validity are present in this study. The participants in this study, young adults, are not representative of all U.S. voters. Also, given that participants were primarily enrolled in introductory classes and residents of the same city, they perhaps may not be representative of all young adults. Therefore, one should use caution in generalizing the findings in this study to other populations.

Furthermore, studies are needed to examine whether older and more diverse audiences react differently to the same stimulus. As a diverse American society, individual backgrounds, native culture, age demographics and political party affiliation may also produce similar or vastly different results in regard to celebrity status as a cue. In particular, expanding the research to an older audience may help indicate where the cultural shift of glorifying celebrities began.

Although the topic of this research focused primarily on American government, celebrity status as a peripheral cue is a global development with global implications (Street, 2004). Hollywood has extended its reach into foreign nations and entertainment celebrities in nations across the globe are affecting politics in their own societies. Further research, should also address the global impact of celebrity involvement in politics as it applies to other nations as well as similarities in celebrity status as a peripheral cue on American society versus the influence of native celebrities in foreign nations.

Another threat to external validity comes from the stimulus used in this experiment. While care was taken in selecting and conducting a manipulation check on the celebrity candidate photo, unknown candidate photos as well as the content in the news articles, many more ideal candidates and news articles could be used. For example, Dennis Quaid was selected based on the belief that he was known as a celebrity to the participants and likely to run for political office. However, there are many other celebrities that may be more relevant to a young adult audience. The manipulation of celebrity status should be challenged in future research before

generalizing these findings. Dennis Quaid was used as the celebrity in this study, but another celebrity may result in a different findings. Future research should test multiple celebrities from multiple disciplines, such as athletes, war heroes, news anchors, etc. that have fame just like Hollywood celebrities do.

The news article content ideally would have been an authentic replica of a newspaper clipping. However, due to the importance of manipulating the substance to match one another exactly with only changing the name of the candidate, using an actual article was not feasible. While the research reviewed the news articles as representative of a real-world news article, given the nature of the experiment, there is a noticeable difference. In a typical political campaign involving a celebrity candidate, news articles tend to pay special attention to the celebrity's Hollywood fame by mentioning past movies or sitcoms in which the celebrity appeared. It was not feasible to replicate this type of media coverage in this experiment, because it would bias the substantive and non-substantive stimulus. The two substantive versions of the news articles were exact replicas of each other so findings could show a relationship between the celebrity candidate and the unknown candidate. If the celebrity candidate's news article included a mention of Dennis Quaid's past movie success, and the unknown candidate's news article did not, the researcher would not be able to isolate the effect of substance. Although this unfair comparison in news coverage between celebrity and mainstream candidates is typical in the real world, the external validity of this experiment had to be compromised for internal validity.

Additionally, participants were not given the option to compare candidates. In a real-world election there are typically at least two candidates running for office, of which the voter must chose one. In this experiment, each participant only saw one candidate and had to make a voting decision without knowing whom else what running for office. To best replicate a real world political campaign, future research should devise a methodology whereby both the celebrity and mainstream candidates are viewed by the participant to determine if they would vote for a celebrity over a mainstream politician.

The experimental setting may also hinder real-world implications. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire and review a news articles in a large university classroom. This setting does not replicate how most voters are exposed to political messages, nor does is it similar to normal voting behavior in which a voter must actively pursue the appropriate voting venue and show up at the specified date and time.

Finally, further research should look at celebrity endorsements of candidates to determine if celebrity status acts as a cue to voting intention for endorsers. Although this research dealt specifically with celebrity's campaigning for political office, many would be curious to verify how celebrity endorsements of candidates benefit the candidate's campaign, shedding light on an age old political campaigning tacit to gain supporters and influence votes.

Despite these limitations, the study's validity aids the understanding of an important issue in politics that has not been thoroughly investigated. This research

suggests many future implications for the political system, news media and the sanctity of American government and society.

These findings have much to offer political campaign managers if managing a celebrity candidate or a mainstream politician that is running against a celebrity. When campaigning against a celebrity candidate, the best way to influence votes, according to this research, is to have a more substantial platform than the celebrity candidate. It is also important for campaigners to realize that just because a celebrity is liked more than a mainstream politician, the celebrity candidate must still present compelling and substantive arguments to win over the electorate. According to this research, varying levels of need for cognition and political involvement among the electorate are of little importance.

For news media institutions and journalists who argue for objectivity in their coverage of political campaigns, these findings support their view that biased coverage can influence readers unintentionally. For example, if a celebrity candidate receives more news coverage that is more or less substantive then his mainstream opponent, the news media may sway votes, according to these findings. Journalists are charged with the task of gathering facts and assisting voters to make informed decisions. This function goes to the heart of journalist's role as watchdogs. Though objective, all too often media institutions are swept up in glorifying celebrities to increase readership and advertising dollars. In some cases, the institutionalized system has diverted from the "who, what, where, when, and how" of traditional journalism to the personal backgrounds and scandals surrounding celebrities and civil servants. Journalists and

their editors should take note of their ability to subtly influence voters and avoid bias in their coverage of political campaigns, especially when celebrities are involved.

This study shows that celebrity status is powerful and can influence voting decisions, pointing to a cultural shift in politics that shifts the respect for traditional mainstream politicians to the celebrity politician. Dennis Quaid was more likely to be voted into office and more likeable in general than the unknown candidate. The bottom line is conventional politicians are disadvantaged when celebrities campaign for office due to societal glorification of celebrities.

The importance of studying and understanding celebrity politics comes down to its impact on the sanctity of American government. There are many issues and contexts in which to examine its impact, but the underlying issue is that Americans may have lost the capacity to judge what constitutes a leader worthy of government office, instead relying on celebrity status as a cue to voting decisions. West & Orman (2002), summarize the state of American democracy well.

> The American political system has changed into a celebrity regime where politicians are subject to Hollywood-style tabloid coverage and celebrities are treated as political actors. It is all part of the entertaining of America. No longer does the argument of whether pop culture influences political change or vice versa matter. Politics is pop culture. p. 42.

The implications of celebrity involvement in politics can be advantageous to American democracy on one hand, but on the other hand, the effects can be unsuccessful. On the one hand, celebrity candidates attract press attention to various issues and explain why the public should be concerned. This kind of media attention influences the nation's political agenda and often causes legislators to take issues

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seriously. On the other hand, there may be reason for concern that once voted into office, celebrity politicians might fail to gain influence in the governmental system due to their lack of experience in politics.

Due to this shift from the Hilltop to Hollywood, celebrities have led the way to a cultural change in politics. The qualities of leadership in a political candidate, such as experience, knowledge and negotiation skills have been de-emphasized to include those who are famous and media-savvy. This study shows that celebrity status affects both intention to vote and likeability.

This research sparks several implications and sheds some much needed light on the topic of celebrities in politics. Political campaigners, new media institutions and journalists as well as voters, particularly in a young adult audience, should be cautious of celebrities in politics. This study shows that celebrity status does in fact play a role in voting decisions, thus as a democratic society we should place less emphasis on fame and more importance on the issues.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

The purpose of this study is to assess your intention to vote for a political candidate based on the information given. It will take you approximately 15 minutes to complete. Please answer all questions completely and honestly.

1.) Are you (circle one): MALE or FEMALE

2.) In what year were you born _____

3.) On the scale below, which dot best describes your political views (circle one dot):

●------------------------- ● --------------------- ● ------------------------ ● -------------------
-------- ●
Liberal
        Conservative

5.) Are you __ registered to vote __ not registered to vote.

Please respond to the following statements: *Circle the corresponding number that best describes you.*

I like tasks that require little thought once I've learned them.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I prefer to think about small daily projects instead of long-term projects.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions and problems.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I don't like to have the responsibility of handling situations that require a lot of thinking.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

The idea of relying on thought to make my way to the top does not appeal to me.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I prefer complex problems to simple problems.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I think only as hard as I have to.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I prefer to just let things happen rather than trying to understand why they turned out that way.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

The notion of thinking abstractly is not appealing to me.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I would rather do something that requires little thought than something that challenges my thinking abilities.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Thinking is not my idea of fun.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I find satisfaction in deliberating hard and for long hours.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I try to anticipate and avoid situations where there is a likely chance that I will have to think in depth.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Simply knowing the answer rather than understanding the reasons for the answer to a problem is fine with me.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

For the following statements, circle the number that best describes how often you: *Circle the corresponding number that best describes you.*

Talk with my friends and family about politics.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Vote in an election in which I am an eligible voter.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Work for a campaign by doing things like distributing information or making phone calls.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Contribute money to a candidate's campaign.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Wear a button or put a bumper sticker on my car showing my support of a candidate.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Write a lawmaker to express my views on an issue.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Avoid watching television news about politics.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Watch political debates.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Read political stories in a newspaper or magazine.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Attend political rallies or events.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Pay no attention to political advertising on TV.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Please read this article and answer the questions below.

Dennis Quaid Announces He's Running for Mayor

Dennis Quaid announced yesterday his intention to run for mayor of Santa Monica in the upcoming election. In his announcement speech, Quaid mentioned how committed he was to working to help Santa Monica.

The community of Santa Monica knows Quaid best as an agreeable, charismatic guy, but his speech today may have convinced voters he's also the right guy for mayor. A lot of people have noticed that Quaid's character resembles that of the current mayor, Bob Dunbar, which is comforting to some voters.

Quaid's fate as Santa Monica Mayor has yet to be sealed. His supporters are among Santa Monica's elite, and locals are warming up to his approach.

Based on the article, what is your opinion of this candidate?

Unfriendly	1	2	3	4	5	Friendly
Unappealing	1	2	3	4	5	Appealing
Likeable	1	2	3	4	5	Unlikeable

If the election were right now, <u>how likely are you to vote for this candidate</u>, which statement best describes your voting decision (circle one)?

Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Somewhat Unlikely	Unlikely
1	2	3	4

The purpose of this study is to assess your intention to vote for a political candidate based on the information given. It will take you approximately 15 minutes to complete. Please answer all questions completely and honestly.

1.) Are you (circle one): MALE or FEMALE

2.) In what year were you born _____

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Liberal

       Conservative

5.) Are you __ registered to vote __ not registered to vote.

Please respond to the following statements: *Circle the corresponding number that best describes you.*

I like tasks that require little thought once I've learned them.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I prefer to think about small daily projects instead of long-term projects.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions and problems.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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I don't like to have the responsibility of handling situations that require a lot of thinking.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

The idea of relying on thought to make my way to the top does not appeal to me.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I prefer complex problems to simple problems.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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I think only as hard as I have to.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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I prefer to just let things happen rather than trying to understand why they turned out that way.

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The notion of thinking abstractly is not appealing to me.

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I would rather do something that requires little thought than something that challenges my thinking abilities.

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1	2	3	4	5

Thinking is not my idea of fun.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I find satisfaction in deliberating hard and for long hours.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I try to anticipate and avoid situations where there is a likely chance that I will have to think in depth.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Simply knowing the answer rather than understanding the reasons for the answer to a problem is fine with me.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

For the following statements, circle the number that best describes how often you: *Circle the corresponding number that best describes you.*

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Work for a campaign by doing things like distributing information or making phone calls.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Contribute money to a candidate's campaign.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Wear a button or put a bumper sticker on my car showing my support of a candidate.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Write a lawmaker to express my views on an issue.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Avoid watching television news about politics.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
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Watch political debates.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
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Read political stories in a newspaper or magazine.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
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Attend political rallies or events.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
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Pay no attention to political advertising on TV.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
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Please read this article and answer the questions below.

Dennis Quaid Proposes Plan to Restore Santa Monica

Dennis Quaid announced yesterday his intention to run for mayor of Santa Monica in the upcoming election. In his announcement speech, he pledged to aim at solving the city's budget problems and demanded an overhaul of worker compensation laws in the city to cut employers' costs and create more jobs.

Quaid said that creating more jobs is his priority. He referred to statistics that show many employers leaving Santa Monica to avoid high premiums for worker compensation insurance. "Restoring growth is the key to restoring our budget balance," he says.

Education reform in the Santa Monica school systems is also a top priority. Quaid has proposed a plan to increase per pupil funding for education and re-allocating funds to provide computer equipment in all public school classrooms. For most of the proposed state funding, Quaid plans to devote funds to help pay for local police and fire departments, as well as the Parks and Recreation services in Santa Monica.

Quaid's fate as Santa Monica Mayor has yet to be sealed. His supporters are among Santa Monica's elite, and locals are warming up to his progressive social and economic strategies.

Next week, Quaid will deliver a speech further detailing his platform.

Based on the article, what is your opinion of this candidate?

Unfriendly	1	2	3	4	5	Friendly
Unappealing	1	2	3	4	5	Appealing
Likeable	1	2	3	4	5	Unlikeable

If the election were right now, <u>how likely are you to vote for this candidate</u>, which statement best describes your voting decision (circle one)?

Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Somewhat Unlikely	Unlikely
1	2	3	4

The purpose of this study is to assess your intention to vote for a political candidate based on the information given. It will take you approximately 15 minutes to complete. Please answer all questions completely and honestly.

1.) Are you (circle one): MALE or FEMALE

2.) In what year were you born _____

3.) On the scale below, which dot best describes your political views (circle one dot):

●------------------------- ● --------------------- ● ------------------------ ● ------------------
-------- ●
Liberal
        Conservative

5.) Are you __ registered to vote __ not registered to vote.

Please respond to the following statements: *Circle the corresponding number that best describes you.*

I like tasks that require little thought once I've learned them.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I prefer to think about small daily projects instead of long-term projects.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions and problems.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I don't like to have the responsibility of handling situations that require a lot of thinking.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

The idea of relying on thought to make my way to the top does not appeal to me.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I prefer complex problems to simple problems.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I think only as hard as I have to.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I prefer to just let things happen rather than trying to understand why they turned out that way.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

The notion of thinking abstractly is not appealing to me.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I would rather do something that requires little thought than something that challenges my thinking abilities.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Thinking is not my idea of fun.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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I find satisfaction in deliberating hard and for long hours.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

I try to anticipate and avoid situations where there is a likely chance that I will have to think in depth.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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Simply knowing the answer rather than understanding the reasons for the answer to a problem is fine with me.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

For the following statements, circle the number that best describes how often you: *Circle the corresponding number that best describes you.*

Talk with my friends and family about politics.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Vote in an election in which I am an eligible voter.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
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Work for a campaign by doing things like distributing information or making phone calls.

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Contribute money to a candidate's campaign.

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Wear a button or put a bumper sticker on my car showing my support of a candidate.

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Please read this article and answer the questions below.

Tim Eller Announces He's Running for Mayor

Tim Eller announced yesterday his intention to run for mayor of Santa Monica in the upcoming election. In his announcement speech, Eller mentioned how committed he was to working to help Santa Monica. The community of Santa Monica knows Eller best as an agreeable, charismatic guy, but his speech today may have convinced voters he's also the right guy for mayor. A lot of people have noticed that Eller's character resembles that of the current mayor, Bob Dunbar, which is comforting to some voters.

Eller's fate as Santa Monica Mayor has yet to be sealed. His supporters are among Santa Monica's elite, and locals are warming up to his approach.

Based on the article, what is your opinion of this candidate?

Unfriendly	1	2	3	4	5	Friendly
Unappealing	1	2	3	4	5	Appealing
Likeable	1	2	3	4	5	Unlikeable

If the election were right now, <u>how likely are you to vote for this candidate</u>, which statement best describes your voting decision (circle one)?

Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Somewhat Unlikely	Unlikely
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The purpose of this study is to assess your intention to vote for a political candidate based on the information given. It will take you approximately 15 minutes to complete. Please answer all questions completely and honestly.

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Eller's fate as Santa Monica Mayor has yet to be sealed. His supporters are among Santa Monica's elite, and locals are warming up to his progressive social and economic strategies.

Next week, Eller will deliver a speech further detailing his platform.

Based on the article, what is your opinion of this candidate?

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Angela Beth Torrey received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Corporate Communication & Public Affairs from Southern Methodist University in 2004. In 2003, she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Southern Methodist University. She began a career as a Public Relations Specialist at a consumer products company upon graduation. She is currently the Director of Marketing Communication for the Retail Products Group, a division of NCH Corporation, responsible for coordinating the company's public relations, internal communication, consumer and trade advertising and website development.

Torrey's primary interest is in mass media and its role in influencing behavior either commercially or politically. As an avid consumer of media and politics, she began to notice a trend of celebrities entering politics and the seemingly unfair advantage they have in attaining media attention. This observation led to the topic of this thesis.

In 2005, Torrey began her Master of Art in Communication degree in hopes of advancing her knowledge in mass media and corporate communication. Throughout her course work, she expanded her understanding of the multi-faceted communication field, typically misunderstood by many in the business world, to help further the importance of the field as an art form as well as a science. Ultimately, Torrey expects to continue her studies in communication, academically and professionally.