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# The Let Down Effect: Satisfaction, Motivation, and Credibility Assessments of Political Infotainment

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## Abstract

Using experimental design, this study compares first-time voters' gratifications and uses of a traditional News<sup>1</sup> format with the increasingly popular fake news format. The data here found that while indeed young people may have initially assessed a greater level of gratification associated with the fake news genre, the group was significantly "let down" after exposure to such a program. Though first-time voters understand that traditional surveillance-type information-seeking activities are better associated with traditional News, they were ambivalent about approaching and avoiding both traditional News and fake news genres.

## Keywords

first-time voters, fake news, gratifications

Both popular press and scholarly research have charted the rise in use and importance of infotainment, which joins news and comedy. Current work on the so-called fake news programs like *The Daily Show (TDS)* and *The Colbert Report* focuses on who uses these shows, how they may supplement or supplant other more "serious" current events information seeking, and what effect they have on both citizens and, more specifically, voting and political beliefs.

It is not surprising that the uses and gratifications (UG) framework has provided some illumination into understanding why one seeks out fake news. Given that UG scholars have long argued that different media better serve some gratifications

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(McLeod & Becker, 1981), the academy sought to understand what gratifications become satisfied through fake news. The answers are never easy though, considering that individuals have been shown to use multiple media to satisfy a given need (Yuan, 2011) and that one medium has also been shown to gratify several needs simultaneously (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973).

These varied use patterns have important implications for infotainment media, which could serve either information or entertainment needs—or potentially both. Historically, News and entertainment have been walled off from one another, and although some have argued that such distinction represents an artificial social construct (Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001), many scholars believe that this distinction is breaking down (Bennett, 2008; Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001; Feldman & Young, 2008; Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, & Carlton, 2007; Kalb, 1998; Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2005; Patterson, 2000).

A healthy debate continues regarding the effect of political infotainment on viewers and whether the genre is beneficial or harmful in creating an informed citizenry (Baum, 2003, 2005; Browning, 2011; Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001; Feldman & Young, 2008; Landreville, Holbert, & LaMarre, 2010; McKain, 2005; Nabi, Moyer-Gusé, & Byrne, 2007; Patterson, 2000; Young & Tisinger, 2006). Although it is generally accepted that political information gain is important, few scholars have explored the antecedents that drive the usage choice of traditional information media—which supposedly enhance knowledge gain—and compared those to antecedents driving the usage choice of comedic infotainment programs such as *TDS*.

The current research explores the similarities and differences between antecedents—specifically credibility, satisfaction, and source-liking—for nightly national network News and *TDS*, which likely offer similar and vastly different gratifications simultaneously.

## The Uses and Gratifications Framework

Though at the time not yet named as such, the UG framework dates back to the 1940s (Diddi & LaRose, 2006; Katz, Blumler, et al., 1973; McLeod & Becker, 1981; McQuail, 1984; Ruggiero, 2000). Researchers had begun to study received gratifications from various media such as radio quiz shows and soap operas (Herzog, 1940, 1944) and later children's television (Maccoby, 1954; Riley & Riley, 1951). Laswell (1948) arguably made the first important step in solidifying UG theory, establishing three functions of media: surveillance of the environment, social response to the environment, and the transmission of cultural values.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the true demarcating point came with Katz's (1959) call for media researchers to pay "less attention to what media do to people and more to what people do with media" (p. 2). This point evolved into UG's central and lasting tenet of reconceptualizing audiences as active rather than passive in their media consumption patterns (Blumler, 1979; Galloway & Meek, 1981; Katz, Blumler, et al., 1973; Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973; Lin, 1993; McLeod & Becker, 1981; McQuail, 1984; Ruggiero, 2000).

The UG literature offers several different approaches to measuring the concept. Some scales assess simply the motivations toward a particular media source. Another

approach measures gratifications sought (GS) from a media source (gauged prior to exposure) and then gratifications obtained (GO) from that media source (gauged after exposure), which are then used to create a satisfaction score (GO-GS). In political communication literature, the political media gratifications scale (Perse, 1994) has been used to understand why one might use/approach a particular media source for political information as well as why one would avoid that media as a political source (Lariscy, Tinkham, & Sweetser, 2011; Sweetser, Lariscy, & Tinkham, 2012).

## The Fit for Infotainment

Despite the potential for equal levels of engagement, UG scholars have historically treated information and entertainment media very differently. Surveillance gratifications have emerged as good predictors for news consumption, whereas entertainment gratifications have not, indicating that the news is seen primarily as an information medium (Diddi & LaRose, 2006; Vincent & Basil, 1997).

Scholars consistently find that news consumption patterns begin to form in college (Diddi & LaRose, 2006; Henke, 1985; Vincent & Basil, 1997). In recent years, young adults have been turning away from reading and watching traditional News media (Diddi & LaRose, 2006). Exactly why this trend occurs is unclear. Some have suggested that young people are becoming politically indifferent (Bennett, 2000). Others have argued that this demographic is simply dissatisfied with the News genre (Baym, 2005).

This trend toward abandoning traditional News content is not necessarily indicative of an uninformed generation. Patterson (2000) believes that young people are abandoning traditional News for soft news and comedic infotainment programs such as *TDS* and *The Colbert Report*. Interestingly, Pew (2007) reported that regular viewers of Comedy Central's fake news programs are more politically knowledgeable than viewers of network and cable television News. Indeed, Brewer and Marquardt (2007) have found evidence that infotainment may help shape public affairs knowledge, and Baym (2005), speaking specifically of *TDS*, argued that "the silly is interwoven with the serious, resulting in an innovative and potentially powerful form of public information" (p. 273). As such, the use of the political media gratifications scale is helpful in determining those levels of approach and avoidance of media as political information sources.

Although *TDS* is considered primarily an entertainment program with the potential to inform, a closer inspection of the show's content reveals a true and intriguing blurring of genres (Baym, 2005; Brewer & Marquardt, 2007). In a content analysis of *TDS*, Brewer and Marquardt (2007) found that more than half of the show's stories are overtly political. *The Daily Show* also features substantial coverage of world affairs and policy issues, relying on recycled traditional News clips to fill knowledge gaps and provide context.

Baym (2005) goes a step further, suggesting the following:

With its discourse of inquiry, *The Daily Show* thus may be better understood not as "fake" news, but as a new form of critical journalism, one which uses satire to achieve that which the mainstream press is no longer willing to pursue. (p. 268)

Baym (2005) views *TDS* host Jon Stewart as a subjective critic who ignores old journalistic standards but in the process engages with political information and provides greater context to news, generating deeper understanding.

The apparent ability of *TDS* to inform raises questions about whether the program constitutes News. Although the entertainment focus of *TDS* makes it hard to classify it as News, it does have a clear informative purpose and likely provides its audience with news (McKain, 2005).

## Credibility, Satisfaction, and Source-Liking

Because active use of entertainment media may lead to information processing, it stands to reason that, regardless of whether audiences approach infotainment programs like *TDS* seeking informational or entertainment gratifications, active audiences will likely engage with the message and make judgments about the source.

### *Credibility*

It is presumed that selecting an information source should depend on the receiver's evaluation of credibility, of either the source itself or the medium more generally (Kiouisis, 2001; Yuan, 2011). According to Johnson and Kaye (2009), "credibility is not a characteristic inherent in a source, but a judgment made by the users themselves" (p. 175). Because credibility, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder, several scholars have used self-reports to gauge perceptions of credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 2009, 2010; Johnson, Kaye, Bichard, & Wong, 2007).

Researchers have found that increased media use and reliance lead to increased perceptions of credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 2009, 2010; Johnson et al., 2007; Kiouisis, 2001; Yuan, 2011). Trust in media, a concept closely related to credibility, has also been found to correlate positively with media use frequency (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1982; Quanbeck & White, 2009).

However, there is an emerging body of evidence that media use frequency and credibility are not always positively linked (Kiouisis, 2001; Lin, 1993). Moody (2011) found that "people regularly use media they do not trust to find out about politics" (p. 43). In addition, in their study of college students' credibility assessments of online media, Metzger, Flanagin, and Zwarun (2003) concluded that convenient access to information is a more accurate predictor of media use than credibility.

These conflicting lines of reasoning lead to the following research question:

*Research Question 1:* Do first-time voters' credibility judgments of News and comedic infotainment correlate with higher reported usage of those media types?

In addition, Moody (2011) has pointed out several differences in expected gratifications from information and entertainment sources; these differences could in turn affect credibility judgments. Although scholars have often found primarily informative media to be viewed as more credible than entertainment media (Johnson et al., 2007; Metzger et al., 2003), others have made compelling cases for just the opposite.

Mulder (1980) argued that entertainment media may be perceived as more credible than information media because viewers are not socialized to search for credibility concerns while engaging with entertainment media. Skalski, Tamborini, Glazer, and Smith (2009) have also found that humor could positively affect credibility assessments: Humor increases positive affect and positive affect increases credibility.

However, comedic infotainment programs such as *TDS* blend aspects of entertainment and information, making credibility assessment difficult for users (Metzger et al., 2003). Given that information sources are perceived as credible and humor may positively skew credibility assessments, the following hypothesis is posited:

*Hypothesis 1:* Comedic infotainment programs such as *The Daily Show* will be rated as more credible by first-time voters than the News.

### *Satisfaction and Source-Liking*

Satisfaction with a given media type may also affect frequency of use. Relying on an expectancy value approach, Palmgreen and Rayburn (1985) argued that “the discrepancy between GS and GO may also be related to media satisfaction” (p. 335). Applying this model, Wenner (1983) found that high GO-GS difference correlates with high reported satisfaction.

Satisfaction is similar to concepts such as source-liking and preference, all of which are predictors of increased media usage (Galloway & Meek, 1981; Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979; Quanbeck & White, 2009; Wenner, 1983). Based on these UG and expectancy value approaches, the following hypothesis is posited:

*Hypothesis 2:* Increased satisfaction with a medium, as measured by reported GO-GS differences, will correlate with higher reported media use by first-time voters.

Given that research shows people turning away from particular sources as political information tools, this research then investigates the approach and avoidance of both traditional and fake news shows:

*Research Question 2:* How do motivations for traditional and fake news differ with regard to the active audience’s approach and avoidance of these media as political information sources?

Finally, given that credibility and satisfaction could both correlate with media use frequency, the nature of the relationship between these two phenomena merits investigation:

*Research Question 3:* Are first-time voters’ assessments of credibility and satisfaction linked to one another, and if so, how?

*Research Question 4:* Are political information source approach and avoidance motivations toward traditional and fake news programs linked to credibility and satisfaction, and if so, how?

**Table 1.** Gratifications Sought and Obtained From NBC News and *The Daily Show*.

	NBC News			TDS		
	GS	GO	Satisfaction	GS	GO	Satisfaction
Helps me relax	2.46	2.56	-1.50	2.93	2.85	-1.32
Helps me learn about people, places, & things	4.11	4.03	0.13	3.43	3.36	-0.50
Helps me keep up with current events	4.25	4.07	0.44	3.52	3.44	-0.35
Informs me about the arts	2.91	3.74	1.11	2.71	2.62	-0.08
Gives me things to talk about with others	3.76	3.65	0.33	3.43	3.55	0.29
Helps me forget about my problems	2.13	2.35	-0.75	2.60	2.56	-0.52
Helps me get away from things	2.20	2.43	-1.20	2.62	2.55	-0.89
Helps me pass the time	3.01	3.22	-0.57	3.21	3.32	-0.35
Watch when bored	2.81	2.93	-1.27	3.31	3.16	-0.83
Helps me feel less lonely	2.33	2.26	-0.73	2.65	2.40	-0.67
Entertains me	2.93	3.31	-1.22	3.51	3.58	-0.84
Overall index	33.02	32.77	-4.82	33.94	31.88	-5.75

Note. Each of the indices was found to be reliable: News GS ( $\alpha = .80$ ), News GO ( $\alpha = .87$ ), TDS GS ( $\alpha = .86$ ), and TDS GO ( $\alpha = .88$ ). GS and GO were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with a higher number indicating a greater gratification. The satisfaction score was computed by subtracting GS from GO (GO-GS). TDS = *The Daily Show*; GS = gratifications sought; GO = gratifications obtained.

## Methods

This study employed a pretest–posttest experimental design during the hot phase of the 2012 presidential election. The experiment was conducted on the campus of a large Southeastern university, using college students as ideal participants due to the breadth of data that suggests that young, voting-aged citizens are frequent viewers of fake news shows. The central concepts investigated here involve UG, credibility, and media use.

### Instrument

The Palmgreen and Rayburn (1979) media gratification items were employed here to determine GO and GS. This scale was then used to compute media satisfaction, measured by the difference between GO-GS reported by each participant. The scale includes two series of questions, each with 11 items measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The two series are summed separately to result in (1) an 11-item index to represent gratifications sought and (2) an 11-item gratifications obtained index. Based on the assumption of this research that gratifications for each News program will vary, the UG scale was used to assess GO-GS for television News (NEWS GO:  $M = 32.77$ ,  $SD = 9.84$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ ; NEWS GS:  $M = 33.02$ ,  $SD = 5.96$ ,  $\alpha = .80$ ) and TDS (TDS GO:  $M = 31.88$ ,  $SD = 10.05$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ; TDS GS:  $M = 33.94$ ,  $SD = 6.76$ ,  $\alpha = .86$ ). See Table 1 for mean scores on individual items.

The active audience's approach and avoidance toward NBC's *Nightly News* and TDS were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale with six items representing approach and five items representing avoidance (Lariscy et al., 2011; Perse, 1994; Sweetser et al., 2012). As was done with GS/GO, approach and avoidance were measured separately

**Table 2.** Political Media Gratifications Scale Approach and Avoidances Toward News Content.

	NBC News	TDS
Approach index	15.63	13.34
To keep up with the main issues of the day	3.19	2.49
To help me make up my mind how to vote	2.38	1.87
To use as ammunition in arguments with others	2.27	2.15
To judge who is likely to win an election	2.62	2.15
To enjoy the excitement of an election	2.52	2.49
To remind me of my candidate's strong points	2.65	2.28
Avoidance index	15.13	15.57
Because I am not much interested in politics	2.31	2.33
Because my mind is already made up	2.43	2.54
Because I prefer to relax when viewing TV	2.89	2.79
Because you can't trust the host	2.31	2.50
Because the host talks down to his viewers	1.65	1.91
Because the host talks over my head	1.90	1.86
Because the host hardly has anything to say	1.63	1.64

Note. The indices were found to be reliable: approach news ( $\alpha = .84$ ), avoidance news ( $\alpha = .77$ ), approach TDS ( $\alpha = .88$ ), and avoidance TDS ( $\alpha = .72$ ). Both approach and avoidance were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with a higher number indicating a greater level of the concept being measured. TDS = *The Daily Show*.

for each media source. Each series was summed into separate indices: television News (Approach  $M = 15.63$ ,  $SD = 4.33$ ,  $\alpha = .84$ ; Avoidance  $M = 15.13$ ,  $SD = 4.19$ ,  $\alpha = .77$ ) and TDS (Approach  $M = 13.34$ ,  $SD = 4.62$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ; Avoidance  $M = 15.57$ ,  $SD = 3.95$ ,  $\alpha = .72$ ). See Table 2 for mean scores on individual items.

Credibility was measured using Johnson and Kaye's (2009, 2010) four-item series that asks participants the degree to which they found the media source believable, accurate, fair, and in-depth. Credibility on a variety of traditional and nontraditional media sources was assessed. See Table 3 for a full listing of media sources.

Several demographic questions were asked of participants, such as age and gender. In addition, political demographics were asked such as political ideology, strength of affiliation, and vote intention.

### Stimuli

There were three manipulation cells and one control condition ( $n = 40$ ) used in this experiment. Participants were exposed to full-length, commercial-free episodes of either TDS ( $n = 39$ ), NBC's *Nightly News* ( $n = 34$ ), or both TDS and NBC's *Nightly News* ( $n = 37$ ) shown in random order. Real televised episodes of TDS and NBC's *Nightly News* were used as organic stimuli. The specific shows were selected because both were aired on the same date and contained coverage of similar topics. As much as possible

**Table 3.** News Source Credibility.

	Overall Index	Fairness	Accuracy	Depth	Believability
Online broadcast news	14.61	3.43	3.76	3.52	3.91
Online cable TV news	14.31	3.21	3.70	3.49	3.90
Online radio news	14.33	3.36	3.63	3.53	3.83
Online news magazines	14.61	3.46	3.71	3.67	3.76
Media/journalism blogs	10.84	2.57	2.61	2.97	2.68
Political blogs	10.22	2.27	2.43	3.00	2.52
Social network sites	8.08	2.18	1.94	1.99	2.00
YouTube	8.21	2.25	1.99	1.99	2.03
Broadcast TV news (traditional)	14.43	3.45	3.83	3.40	3.74
Cable TV news	14.10	3.22	3.66	3.40	3.81
Fake news shows	10.17	2.44	2.65	2.52	2.53
Radio news	13.73	3.34	3.54	3.30	3.55
Radio talk programs	11.56	2.75	2.91	3.05	2.87
News magazines	13.61	3.28	3.39	3.44	3.51

Note. Each of the news source credibility indices was found to be reliable: online broadcast news ( $\alpha = .83$ ), online cable TV news ( $\alpha = .80$ ), online newspaper sites ( $\alpha = .80$ ), online radio news ( $\alpha = .82$ ), online news magazines ( $\alpha = .80$ ), media/journalism blogs ( $\alpha = .76$ ), political blogs ( $\alpha = .71$ ), social network sites ( $\alpha = .81$ ), YouTube ( $\alpha = .84$ ), broadcast TV news ( $\alpha = .83$ ), cable TV news ( $\alpha = .77$ ), fake news shows ( $\alpha = .76$ ), radio news ( $\alpha = .77$ ), radio talk programs ( $\alpha = .72$ ), and news magazines ( $\alpha = .82$ ). Credibility was measured on a 5-point scale, with a higher number indicating a greater level of credibility for that item.

given that these are two separate, organically created stimuli, this helped create an environment where participants were exposed to nearly the same content with the most visible variation being the genre/delivery of that content as either a traditional News show or a fake news show.

A manipulation check showed that those who had seen *TDS* identified it as entertainment, those who saw the *Nightly News* identified it as informational, and those who saw both programs identified them as both informational and entertainment,  $\chi^2(6) = 69.43$ ,  $p \leq .001$ . It is interesting that, though the *Nightly News* condition did not assess their stimulus as entertainment (2.9%) and did assess it correctly as informational (41.2%), a large number indicated that the traditional News was both informational and educational (52.9%). No one in the *TDS* condition assessed the episode as informational only (0%), most indicated that it was entertainment (54.1%), and some again also felt that it was a mixture of entertainment and informational (45.9%). In the condition where participants saw episodes of both shows, 97.1% correctly identified that they had seen programs that were a mixture of entertainment and information. This alone signals that the line between fake news and traditional News is even more blurred if elements of both (entertainment and information) are seen in each.

## Procedure

Participants were asked to attend the research session where all were sent to a single check-in location and then randomly assigned a condition (including controls, who

saw no stimuli) upon arrival. In each manipulation condition, participants first completed a pretest, which included GS measures. After exposure to the stimulus, the manipulation conditions then completed a posttest, measuring among other things GO, approach/avoidance, and credibility.

## Results

This study used experimental method as a means to understand the relationship between satisfaction with media (GO-GS), approach and avoidance of specific political information sources, and media source credibility. There were 150 participants across three conditions and a control cell. The majority of those in the manipulation cells had not seen the specific episodes that were employed as stimuli ( $TDS = 83.3\%$ , *Nightly News* = 91.1%). Consistent with campus demographics, the sample was predominately female ( $n = 129$ ; 86.0%). The political party identification self-reported by the participants was primarily Republican ( $n = 77$ ; 51.3%), followed by Democrat ( $n = 36$ ; 24%) and Independent ( $n = 30$ ; 20%); participants' self-indicated strength of political affiliation was neutral ( $M = 3.66$ ;  $SD = .99$  measured on a 5-point scale). The majority of the participants indicated that they intended to vote ( $n = 132$ ; 88%). This represents a population that is politically active, if only for the single behavior of voting. The average age of participants was 20.09 ( $SD = 1.03$ ), signaling that the researchers successfully targeted the young, first-time voter population sought for this study.

### *Gratifications, Satisfaction, Approach, and Avoidance*

There were two separate gratifications scales employed in this study. The traditional media gratifications scale (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979) was employed twice—first to measure gratifications sought and then again after exposure to the stimuli to measure gratifications obtained. These two separate indices (GS, GO) were then compared to create a satisfaction index (GO-GS). Overall, GS and GO separately were neutral for both news programs, as seen in Table 1.

*The Daily Show* rated higher in GS scores than broadcast News, however, there appeared to be a larger “let down” among this group than in the *Nightly News* condition, as the GO-GS satisfaction score for *TDS* showed a greater negative change. Though the *TDS* satisfaction score showed greater difference in GO-GS than the *Nightly News* satisfaction score ( $M_{\text{dif}} = 1.23$  with *TDS* having greater overall satisfaction), a paired-samples  $t$  test showed that the difference between the genres was not statistically significant,  $t(29) = 1.04$ ,  $p = ns$ .

To determine whether exposure to the News genre had an effect on satisfaction, a series of ANOVAs were conducted, showing that the differences between GS, GO, and satisfaction scores for each program were not statistically significant. As such, though there appeared to be a valley forming between the satisfaction garnered from each show, those differences appear to be due only to chance.

Focusing on the relationship between satisfaction and media use, Hypothesis 2 predicted a positive correlation. This was tested through a Pearson correlation examining

the relationship separately between the satisfaction scores and the dummy variable indicating whether one had watched *TDS*, NBC's *Nightly News*, CBS's broadcast News program, or ABC's broadcast News program. There were no statistically significant correlations. Next, a series of Pearson correlation tests were run to see if there was a relationship between (separately) the satisfaction scores and the amount of time (in minutes) one spends daily watching political information on television, seeking political information on the Internet, or talking about political information with others. There were no statistically significant results from this series of correlations. As such, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Though there were no significant findings regarding relationship and satisfaction, correlations were observed in media diet. Those who reported watching NBC's *Nightly News* last week also watched CBS's News ( $r = .37, p \leq .001$ ) and ABC's News ( $r = .51, p \leq .001$ ). There was also a correlation between watching NBC last week and the number of minutes spent daily tuned in to TV for political information ( $r = .42, p \leq .001$ ). Looking at *TDS*, there was a correlation observed between having watched it last week and tuning in to TV for political information ( $r = .42, p \leq .001$ ) and talking about politics with others ( $r = .25, p \leq .01$ ).

Next, the research asked how motivations for each of the news sources differed with regard to approaches and avoidances. Research Question 2 is briefly addressed in Table 2, which shows that this population neither approaches nor avoids either source. Again, as in the satisfaction score, there appeared to be a gap based on genre. A paired-samples *t* test showed that the only statistically significant differences were between *TDS* and the *Nightly News* on each approach index (approach  $M_{\text{dif}} = 2.34$ , with the *Nightly News* being higher),  $t(145) = 6.19, p \leq .001$ .

A series of ANOVAs examined whether there was a statistically significant difference in the approach and avoidance indices based on experimental condition. Only participants' approach to the broadcast News exhibited main effects across manipulation conditions,  $F(3, 145) = 3.15, p \leq .05$ . Interaction effects were assessed through a Bonferroni post-hoc analysis. Results indicate that the control group reported a higher approach index score (2.56 points) to seeking out broadcast News for political information than participants who had just seen episodes of both the *Nightly News* and *TDS* ( $p = .05$ ). As such, Research Question 2 is answered in that these young voters are ambivalent toward these two sources for political information; although they are not likely to seek them out, they are also not going out of their way to avoid them.

## Credibility

Credibility was measured for an array of traditional and nontraditional news sources by assessing fairness, accuracy, believability, and depth. Table 3 shows no clear winner with regard to credibility: None of the sources examined in this study were assessed by these first-time voters as being particularly credible, and the majority of the mean scores hovered around neutral on this 5-point scale. On the other hand, several online sources were deemed as being *not* credible, such as journalism/media blogs, social

network sites, and YouTube. Although Hypothesis 1 had predicted that fake news programs such as *TDS* would be rated as more credible by these young voters, this was not supported.

Looking at the relationship between credibility judgments of news shows and these young voters' use of these media sources, a series of Pearson correlation tests were run. For *TDS*, there was only a weak correlation observed between the dummy variable of having watched *TDS* last week and the assessment of credibility of fake news programs in general ( $r = .23, p \leq .01$ ). There were no other correlations observed with regard to the amount of minutes one spent daily with media and credibility. In answering Research Question 1, findings show that only *TDS* results in a product-genre credibility correlation.

### Linking Gratifications Measures and Credibility

The next series of queries investigated the connection between the various gratification variables (satisfaction, approach/avoidance) and credibility. It is first important to note that both satisfaction scores (*Nightly News* and *TDS*) had a strong positive correlation with one another,  $r = .69, p \leq .001$ . It should be noted, again, that the satisfaction scores as reported above indicated a slight let down effect among participants in that their GS were not met with the GO.

Satisfaction from *TDS* correlated negatively with the credibility of political-oriented websites ( $r = -.28, p \leq .05$ ) and positively with face-to-face discussions with others ( $r = .36, p \leq .005$ ). Satisfaction of the *Nightly News* showed a moderate correlations with the credibility of offline News magazines ( $r = .36, p \leq .005$ ), online News magazines, ( $r = .30, p \leq .05$ ), radio News ( $r = .33, p \leq .001$ ), radio talk programs ( $r = .29, p \leq .01$ ), media/journalism blogs ( $r = .42, p \leq .001$ ), political-oriented blogs ( $r = .31, p \leq .05$ ), and online radio sites ( $r = .29, p \leq .05$ ).

Moving next to linking credibility with approach and avoidance, a series of Pearson correlation tests were run. *TDS* and NBC's *Nightly News* were moderately correlated with one another in terms of approach to each ( $r = .49, p < .001$ ) and avoidance of each ( $r = .53, p < .001$ ). The *TDS* approach index correlated with the credibility of fake news ( $r = .24, p \leq .005$ ), online cable TV News sites ( $r = .20, p < .05$ ), and media/journalism blogs ( $r = .24, p \leq .005$ ). Approach of the *Nightly News* correlated with the credibility of online broadcast TV News sites ( $r = .24, p \leq .005$ ), online cable TV News sites ( $r = .24, p < .005$ ), online radio sites ( $r = .24, p \leq .005$ ), offline News magazines ( $r = .22, p < .01$ ), traditional broadcast TV News ( $r = .25, p \leq .01$ ), and traditional cable TV News ( $r = .27, p \leq .005$ ).

None of the credibility measures significantly correlated with avoidance of traditional broadcast TV News, and only weak correlations ( $r = .2$ ) between avoidance of *TDS* and credibility measures proved significant.

A series of linear regression tests were performed with each of the satisfaction scores as the dependent outcome variable. The independent variables were the source-matching approach and avoidance variables (e.g., *TDS* satisfaction model included *TDS* approach and *TDS* avoidance). News magazine credibility was also added; the

**Table 4.** Predicting *The Daily Show* Satisfaction Regression Table.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$		
Intercept	-16.18	7.97		-2.029	.047
Approach index	0.69	0.20	0.38	3.40	.001
Avoidance index	-0.48	0.25	-0.22	-1.92	.060
Online news magazine credibility	0.63	0.41	0.18	1.55	.126

Note.  $F(3, 61) = 6.36, p < .005 (R^2 = .24; R^2_{adj} = .20)$ .

**Table 5.** Predicting NBC *Nightly News* Satisfaction Regression Table.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$		
Intercept	-16.92	7.48		-2.26	.028
Approach index	0.45	0.26	.21	1.71	.094
Avoidance index	-0.61	0.27	-.27	-2.26	.028
Offline news magazine credibility	1.08	0.40	.33	2.74	.008

Note.  $F(3, 55) = 5.38, p < .005 (R^2 = .23; R^2_{adj} = .19)$ .

credibility measure for online News magazines improved the model for *TDS*, whereas the credibility measure for offline News magazines improved the model for NBC's *Nightly News*. All equations were reviewed for multicollinearity issues (see Tables 4 and 5).

The resulting models to predict satisfaction for *TDS* ( $R^2 = .24; R^2_{adj} = .20$ ) and NBC's *Nightly News* ( $R^2 = .23; R^2_{adj} = .19$ ) explain roughly one-fifth of the variation for each.

For *TDS*, the explanatory variable contributing the most to the satisfaction regression model—and also the variable with the highest significance level—is approach ( $\beta = .38, p = .001$ ). Interestingly, this same variable contributes least to the *Nightly News* satisfaction regression model and has the lowest level of significance ( $\beta = .21, p = .094$ ). In addition, for *TDS*, approach ( $\beta = .38$ ) contributes more strongly to the model than avoidance ( $\beta = -.22$ ), whereas the opposite is true for the *Nightly News* regression model ( $\beta_{\text{approach}} = .21; \beta_{\text{avoidance}} = -.27$ ).

## Discussion

This experiment investigated and furthered scholarly understanding of the motivations that drive first-time voters to the News and to political information more generally. Melding the traditional gratifications sought and gratifications obtained approach to

understanding the active user's political media gratifications and credibility assessments, this study adds to our understanding of how these variables relate to one another.

This study had both surprising and unsurprising findings. If one thing is learned from the data here about young, first-time voters, it is that although they may appear to slightly fit a stereotype on the surface, a deeper look tells a different story.

Perhaps few would be surprised by the findings that young voters had greater expectations (GS) for fake news. That said, these gratifications driving young people to rate *TDS* higher appeared to center on items encapsulating the escapism/diversion construct commonly reviewed in UG research (e.g., helps me relax, forget about problems, pass the time, etc.). When looking at the gratifications for more surveillance type activities (e.g., helps me learn about activities, keep up with current events, etc.), the traditional News genre GS ratings are higher. As such, the data here suggest that although in the aggregate it may appear that young people have higher expectations and greater gratifications for fake news as a political information source, such an assertion does not hold true upon closer inspection. It appears that more research must be done to truly understand the differences between the GS based on genre.

A perhaps surprising finding with regard to these data on the GS/GO scales involves the let down effect experienced by both sources, with the fake news genre having the largest gap between GS and GO. Though the differences were not statistically significant, the gaps were great, such that this deserves additional inquiry.

A silver-lining finding here with regard to the negative satisfaction experienced by *TDS* viewers is that one might say viewers were expecting to relax, assuming that it would be more entertaining than informational; instead, however, they were met with content that made them think more about current events. More research must be done to further understand if this is the case, but individual variable satisfaction scores suggest this to be so.

Looking at the *Nightly News*, it appears that these young voters were not expecting to learn as much from the News as they did as findings showed a positive change from GS to GO in the individual satisfaction scores. For instance, participants reported learning more about the arts than they had expected, as well as help in keeping up with current events and learning about people, places, and things, among other variables.

The political media gratifications scale measuring approach and avoidance of particular media as political information sources has seen a resurgence in political communication literature (Lariscy et al., 2011; Sweetser et al., 2012). The findings here, and the interplay of these specific constructs in predicting media satisfaction, provide support for more work to be done with these variables across different media sources. Here, it is not surprising that the traditional News genre was met with higher scores in approach than *TDS*. In addition, *TDS* had a higher rate of avoidance than the *Nightly News*. This shows that the active audience perhaps still subscribes to the traditional hierarchy of news quality.

However, the regression models paint a different picture of approach and avoidance. When predicting satisfaction, approach contributes more to the *TDS* regression

model than avoidance, but for the *Nightly News*, avoidance has the greater effect in predicting satisfaction.

Moreover, a closer inspection of the individual values for each approach and avoidance variable shows that the participants are nearly ambivalent (neutral to negative) in many cases. This is perhaps due to either experiences with this content in knowing that it will not fulfill their needs (let down effect with regard to satisfaction) or the lack of credibility ascribed to the news sources in the first place. Indeed, it is difficult here to tell which comes first—the let down in satisfaction, the ambivalence in approach and avoidance, or the low credibility—but it is clear based on the current findings that some of these variables are interrelated. Future research should further delve into unraveling that path that connects satisfaction, approach/avoidance, and credibility, among other variables.

In conclusion, this research provides support for additional research in an area that many scholars feel is already overexamined. Indeed, the research questions and hypotheses that informed this study from previous literature in some cases did not hold up when a deeper look at gratifications was applied through the approach and avoidance motivations. Furthermore, although popular sentiment may paint young voters as either unengaged in political news or even over-reliant on newer entertainment genres for delivering the news of the day, neither of these stereotyped pictures appears to hold true here. The data show that these young, first-time voters are not exactly what many had thought they were and they deserve much more investigation.

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### Notes

1. McKain (2005) makes a useful distinction between “the vehicle that delivers news as capital-N News and content as lowercase-n news” (p. 416) as a way to parse the differences between the genres of News and comedic infotainment. The authors employ this convention throughout.
2. Wright (1960) would later add entertainment as a fourth function.

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